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By

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B.A., University of Kentucky, 2003
M.A., University of Louisville, 2008

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A Dissertation Approved on

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ABSTRACT

PEDAGOGY: RECONSIDERATIONS AND REORIENTATIONS

John Vance

December 16, 2014

This dissertation is a critical intervention into the question of student agency. An interdisciplinary project that draws upon philosophy and linguistics, it reviews four major tendencies that have animated composition pedagogy over the last several decades—process theory, social-constructivism, procedural rhetoric, and trans-lingual pedagogies—and identifies some of the key tensions that both motivate and problematize these approaches. First, it examines the debate between Peter Elbow and David Bartholomae, and the interplay between teachers' authority and student agency. Second, it explores the imbrications between representation and materiality in social constructivism. Third, it uses Alain Badiou's *Being and Event* to analyze the tensions between (nominally) formulaic composition strategies and the elusiveness of *kairos.* Fourth, it investigates non-standard English dialects, Suresh Canagarajah's concept of "code meshing," and the competing conceptualizations of language as a static system, and as a dynamic, emergent process of sedimentation. Rather than attempting to resolve these tensions, my dissertation dramatizes them, painting a fuller, clearer picture of the contradictions that every classroom inhabits. In doing so, I do not privilege any single approach over the others. Instead, I call for a particular pedagogical disposition that can productively inform all of them: a resistance to closure, an openness to critical puzzlement, a negative capability that invites the rupture of rigid structures and schemas. With regard to composition studies more broadly, my dissertation dissects the key terms and

assumptions of the debates surrounding these pedagogical tendencies, forwarding a more

nuanced theoretical platform on which they can transpire. Ultimately, my dissertation

aims to inform pedagogical practice and curriculum development more generally, and

lead to an enriched understanding of how student agency can vitalize the classroom.

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INTRODUCTION

Many, if not most, of the key terms that circulate through a given academic field's scholarly conversation are ephemeral, emerging and fading in accordance with the fashions and trends *du jour*. Yet, each discipline also has key terms that remain cornerstones over long periods of time. Within rhetoric and composition studies, there is one term that, along with the field's two titular terms, has proven to be truly foundational: *pedagogy*. It is heard around the coffee-bearing folding tables in the hallways of the major conferences, spoken in nearly every graduate seminar, printed on every other page of our major journals. Indeed, the term is almost as fundamental to our professional discourse as grammatical conjunctions and definite articles. With its combination of real-world applicability and referential flexibility, it is impossible to conceive of contemporary rhetoric and composition existing without it.

Yet, perhaps just as age-old proverbs and cliched commonplaces become so universalized within our daily informal discourse that we no longer bother to interrogate their origins and meanings—does anyone really know what it means to "make no bones about" something?—the tensions inherent in competing deployments of the concept of pedagogy, as elemental as they are for our field, are often represented in fuzzy ways. Indeed, as with so many things in life, its greatest advantage is also its biggest downfall—the flexibility that renders it so useful in so many different contexts also threatens to render it near-useless. It can mean virtually whatever one wants it to mean. The only referential constant is that there is always a teacher and student involved. Given the inevitable chasm between the meaning we intend when we speak the word and our

co-interlocutor's interpretation of it, how can we possibly be using it with maximum productivity?

In this project, I plan to delineate the tensions, contradictions, and overlaps between competing concepts of pedagogy within, and/or in reference to, four dominant pedagogical tendencies (or approaches) that have animated composition scholarship over the last several decades: the process approach, the social-constructivist approach, the procedural rhetorical approach, and the translingual approach. The goal is not to forward a stable, concise definition of each tendency—a task that is as impossible as it is undesirable, given the myriad contexts in which it is used and the inevitability of (and practical need for) its definitional shifts across time and context. Rather, I will attempt to provide a clearer and fuller illustration of these competing approaches throughout the history of the discipline, in all their kinetic complexity. I will also examine the philosophical, epistemological, and ontological assumptions that underlie these approaches. Ultimately, this project will aim to map the fraught and generative theoretical domains within which the term is used—and, furthermore, to limn the limitations and uses of competing definitions of the term in order to provide a richer description of the theoretical landscape in which we currently find ourselves, in all its problems and possibilities.

Methodologically, this project will parallel books such Byron Hawk's *Counter-History of Composition,* which deconstructs the traditional view of rhetorical invention as a simple, dialectical interaction between a writer and a context, and supplants it with a complexity theory-informed representation of rhetors as situated within complex "affective ecologies" (224); and John Muckelbauer's *The Future of Invention,* which

relies on post-structuralist theory to demonstrate the difficulty of overcoming the Hegelian dialectic via writing. What these works, as well as my own project, have in common is that they are far more diagnostic than prescriptive, more of an unveiling of the mechanisms and tensions inherent in composition processes and pedagogy than an instruction manual on how to operate or obviate them. Furthermore, the tensions between the pedagogical approaches I examine and the theoretical and philosophical lenses through which I examine them mirrors the discordances intrinsic to the approaches; in other words, this project performatively portrays the same kinds of tensions that it intends to reveal. Ultimately, by applying theoretical frameworks exterior to mainstream composition studies to several dominant pedagogical approaches, I aim to reveal the dissonances and tensions immanent to those approaches, so as to reveal and trace the troubled contours of the ground on which the field now stands, and must proceed upon.

Of course, each approach is highly variegated internally. For this reason, it is important to emphasize that I cannot, and do not intend to, embark on a project akin to that of Jorge Luis Borges' cartographers, who draw a map so detailed and expansive that it blankets the entire earth. This project, then, will be necessarily reductive. The goal is to provide a richer account of the competing pedagogical perspectives, not a comprehensive one. A common thread links these perspectives: the representation of the classroom as a space where teachers and students engage in a dynamic relationship, in a transactional balance of powers and ideologies mediated through language. However, each approach posits dissimilar, if often overlapping, accounts as to what actually happens, and/or should happen, within these relationships. This project aims not only to theoretically describe each approach's account, but to destabilize these assumptions that underlie these

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approaches, and to demonstrate the ways in which the perspectives are subtly intertwined. Ultimately, through this de- or reconstructive move, I aim to paint a more elaborate and labyrinthine picture of the fissions, interactions, and contestations between and within the approaches, to cast a new light on the uncharted regions of the wilderness through which we must navigate.

Because these pedagogical tendencies are byzantine in their intricacy and nuance, this project will deploy the concept of student agency as a connective thread that weaves the chapters together. The question of the extent to which students can become "rhetorical agents" is a cardinal concern for every classroom. Virtually every pedagogical outcome hinges on this question, be it the ability for students to be effective academic writers in other college courses, their capacity to communicate effectively in their late capitalist careers, or their maturation into active participants in democratic civil discourse. In dissecting the core theoretical assumptions within these dominant pedagogical approaches, this project aims to rethink and inform pedagogical practice, and lead to an enriched understanding of the possibilities and limitations of how student agency can vitalize the classroom.

Cultural Studies (or Social Constructivist) Approach

James Berlin, one of several scholars that spearheaded the cultural studies approach to pedagogy in the 1980s, impugned the process approach on the grounds that it failed to recognize the asymmetrical power structures that condition social relations in the classroom. Placing the "question of ideology at the center of the teaching of writing" ("Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class" 735), Berlin developed a theory of pedagogy, rooted in a Marxist epistemological model, that aimed to empower

marginalized students via the critique of the false consciousness wrought by the late capitalist mode of production, via "dialectical interaction engaging the material, the social, and the individual writer, with language as the agency of mediation" (730).

The development of this approach coincided with a broader discursive turn within the humanities and social sciences—a turn that some contemporary theorists are beginning to challenge. In *A New Philosophy of Society,* Manuel Delanda draws on Gilles Deleuzes' assemblage theory in order to theorize a realist theory of social ontology that cuts across the chasm between concrete materialism and social constructivism. Delanda and Berlin share similarly Marxist assumptions about the mutually constitutive nature of language and materialism—but only to a point. Delanda is more skeptical regarding the extent to which discourse can reshape the concrete universe, arguing that the sort of social constructivism with which Berlin is (partially) aligned lapses into dubiously tidy and totalizing essentialism. For Delanda, the assemblages of the social and material world (including classrooms) are shaped largely by non-linguistic forces—agents, that is, who are not manipulable via discourse.

In terms of composition pedagogy, the tension between social constructivism and Delanda's critique highlights an inevitable obstacle in the classroom: gauging the extent to which marginalized students can actually be "liberated" via critical discourse. Whether or not one is aligned with the specifics of Berlin's Marxist method, few teachers would argue that teachers should not help students resist, through writing, the political forces that may oppress them. But the post-linguistic turn poses a troubling question: What forces are working to resist this form of resistance? Are these forces more obdurate than some scholars may assume? In this chapter, I plan to read Berlin's arguments in light of

Delanda's, and to locate the limits of Berlin's version of social constructivist resistance. The field of composition has long assumed, to varying extents, language's ability to mold reality in marginalized students' favor. This is forgivable to some degree; after all, words are the tools with which we work, and language does, in fact, play a role in political resistance, as the cultural and political influence of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s speeches attests. This chapter, however, will complicate this assumption, and offer a revised depiction of the politically charged milieu that our classrooms inhabit—one in which non-discursive forces restrict language's power to resist and empower.

Contemporary Classical and Procedural Rhetoric

This chapter will examine the rhetorical, epistemological, and ontological implications of contemporary renderings of classical rhetoric, particularly through the lens of invention methods. A recently-revived cornerstone of rhetorical theory is the concept of *kairos,* which Kinneavy provisionally defines as "the right or opportune time to do something, or right measure in doing something" (Kinneavy, 58). Scholars such as Fahnestock and Secor apply this concept to composition pedagogy, arguing that a writer's apprehension of *kairos* is paramount to persuasive efficacy. However, they also acknowledge the elusiveness of *kairotic* capture: "Because each rhetorical situation is unique, each occurs in a time and place that can't be wholly anticipated or replicated;" a rhetor, then, must perpetually grope in the dark, for an approach that may be effective in one rhetorical context may not be generalizable to others (Crowley and Hawhee, 44). I plan to further explicate and problematize this dilemma by reading it in light of Alain Badiou's *Being and Event.* For Badiou, an "event" is an abrupt intervention of "being," which is exterior to language, into the established, ontologically-constructable order of

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reality. In other words, the social order is ruptured by an "indiscernible" incident (e.g., as when the French Monarchy was riven by the French Revolution). According to Badiou, a subject can pledge "fidelity" to an event and integrate it into a reconfigured order of reality, but being itself remains eternally inarticulable: the subject can never gain direct access to being.

When read as an attempt to assimilate an event into the current order, then, the uses and limitations of *kairos* can be be more fully accounted for theoretically: a successful apprehension of *kairos* may be not be capable of transmitting representations of a reality exterior to language, but it can productively refigure the constructable universe of language—and do so in light of forces exterior to linguistic representation. Pedagogically speaking, this draws attention to a dimension of composition that remains under-acknowledged by procedural rhetoric proponents: the non-discursive forces that shape writing process. Contemporary scholars outside the discipline—e.g., philosophers like Badiou, as well as psychologists—have questioned the extent to which mental acts, and by extension writing processes, are actually grounded in the discursive procedures that scholars such as Fulkerson have assumed, and have suggested that cognition is at the mercy of forces that it cannot control or even comprehend. This chapter will examine these forces, and in so doing, will illustrate the rift between rational writing processes and the inarticulable dynamics of the "being" that conditions them.

Process Approach

In his 1995 conversation with David Bartholomae, Peter Elbow argues that the roles of "writer" and "academic" conflict. In contrast to Bartholomae, who maintains that teachers need to emphasize students' writing within conventional academic contexts in

order to gain literacy and empowerment with/against this dominant discourse, Elbow asserts that, while students' appropriation of the role of academic is critically important, the role of the writer should nonetheless be privileged. For him, this means the classroom should be a space in which students come to "experience themselves as writers" (78) via free inquiry through writing. Inevitably, such inquiry can result in naive self-absorption, but as Elbow notes, such pride (and even arrogance), along with a counterbalancing dose of caution, is a quality possessed by anyone—including academics—who is confident enough to construct identities as "writers worth listening to." Ultimately, in such a classroom, it is the students who take ownership of their writing, not the teacher to which they must write "up."

Jacques Rancière's *The Ignorant Schoolmaster,* published in 1987 and translated to English in 1992, offers an analysis that both enriches and complicates this debate. Rancière relates the story of Jacob Jacotot, an early 19th-century teacher who, after instructing a class of students who spoke a foreign language, found that they were able to comprehend and analyze difficult texts without any help from him. He later replicated this experiment, with similarly successful results, in courses on piano and painting (he was proficient in neither). The upshot of this, for Rancière, is that all intelligences should be presumed equal, and that academic achievement is rooted in students' will rather than a master explicator's expertise. This stands in sharp contrast to pedagogies informed by Bourdieu's theories, who, even as they espouse "liberatory" pedagogical practices, nonetheless construct students as somehow inferior, unable to apprehend the teacher's lofty and liberal social theories without their aid (for Rancière, this withholding of knowledge merely perpetuates the classroom's asymmetrical power relations).

Rancière casts the Bartholomae-Elbow debate in a new light, elucidating a tension that exists in every composition course: the balance of power between teachers and students. While Elbow's bottom-up, student-driven classroom parallels Jacotot's in some senses, most of Elbow's scholarship recognizes the practical reality of teacherly authority, albeit a reduced authority aimed at empowering students. Bartholomae's insistence on the primacy of the teacher-academic echoes Bourdieu's sociological theories, which Rancière criticizes, but as even Elbow acknowledges, the academy's institutional demands require a certain level of teacherly dominance in the classroom— and perhaps, given the brevity of a semester, even a certain amount of masterly explication for the sake of pedagogical expediency. By reading the problem of teacher vs. student authority in light of Rancière, I plan to problematize the political tensions that every classroom inhabits—not to provide easy answers to the conflict, but to dramatize the difficulty, if not impossibility, of circumventing it.

Translingual Approach

For the last several decades, the general trend in the composition classroom has been one of increased student diversity. Since the 1960s, the Civil Rights Movement and financial aid for the poor (e.g., Pell Grants) have enabled more minority and working class students to enroll in college. Globalization has also ushered in a transformation of student demographics in classrooms across the United States, with the proportion of international students increasing each year. While this diversity is healthy for the academy's intellectual ecology, it also presents challenges to the composition classroom. In response, a wealth of recent scholarship has grappled with the question of how we should attend to the increase of non-"standard" English dialects in the classroom.

This chapter focuses on one of the more dominant pedagogical models of today: code meshing. Code meshing involves the blending of multiple dialects within the same text; this practice aims to assert the validity of marginalized dialects and to reconstruct academic discourse as more inclusive and diverse, thereby investing disenfranchised students with a degree of rhetorical agency that they may not otherwise possess. Continuing this project's effort to illustrate the tensions within dominant pedagogical approaches, this chapter complicates the concept of code meshing, demonstrating, for instance, that the validity of code-meshed texts is contingent, in part, on non-linguistic factors, e.g., the perceived social and/or economic status of the authors that produce them. This chapter also argues that nominally unified codes (e.g., "African-American English Vernacular" (AAVE) and "Standard English Vernacular" (SEV) are already internally heterogeneous, and that the very notion of code meshing is, at its core, reductive. This is not to say, however, that reductiveness is necessarily undesirable. Indeed, as this chapter argues, there is no way to not to speak of language(s) in reductive terms; this tension stems from the inherent complexity of languages, i.e., their status as dynamic, fluctuating, emergent, and interactive processes of sedimentation. Furthermore, reductive conceptions of language can have much practical use, given the need for solidarity in many forms of politically resistance (e.g., the Civil Rights Movement represented African-Americans as a nominally unified front, even though there is much internal diversity within the African-American community). Ultimately, this chapter aims to illuminate the tensions between what languages are; the terms we use to demarcate their porous, fluxing borders; and the cultural, economic, and political forces that shape the production and reception of academic discourse.

As anyone who has ever taught knows, translating pedagogical theory into practice is an exacting task. But as this project hopes to demonstrate, the practical dimensions of "pedagogy"—what actually happens within its transactions, and what possibilities these transactions offer—is equally as difficult to define. As scholarship from outside the discipline, as well as some under-acknowledged tendencies at work within the field, suggests, some of the core assumptions that ground our research and praxis—e.g., the extent to which language has the power to shape material reality; the tensions and plays of power between teachers and students; and the capacity of writing to enact political resistance—are, while not baseless, harbor complicating and limiting tensions. This is not to say that these goals are unachievable, or should not be pursued. They should be. But before we attempt to pursue them, it is imperative that we temper our enthusiasm with a dose of apprehension. Therefore, after justifying its method of mashing and interanimating dissonant texts and assumptions as a way to unveil the tensions that both problematize and enrich the critical conversation, this project will conclude by reflecting generally on the obstacles that confront and confound us, by stepping back and taking stock of the troubled territory we inhabit and are charged with pushing forth across. Again, I do not claim to provide easy prescriptions to these problems. Rather, like an explorer who loses his bearings and retraces his steps to an earlier location so as to reconsider his trajectory, I hope to reorient our pedagogical approach(es), rendering our conversations about them in sharper relief, and therefore helping them move forward more productively.

CHAPTER 1: SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVIST APPROACH

The New Brutalist architecture of the University of Louisville's (UofL) Bingham Humanities Building is at once marvelous, forbidding, intriguing, and disorienting: Overhanging slabs of raw concrete loom and jut in puzzling, kinetic angles; crisscrossing hallways meet, part, and terminate in dead ends. Bingham is the home of several academic departments: English, Philosophy, and the Foreign Languages. On the third floor lie the administrative and faculty offices; the lower two floors are primarily classrooms, which often host first-year composition courses. In several spots in the third floor hallway, concrete parapets open into wide, square shafts that descend to the lower floors. The building is situated centrally on the main campus. During the school year, on weekday mornings and afternoons, it teems with students and staff. In the evenings, the sidewalks are more quiet, walked by non-traditional students, as well as traditional students who work the notorious third shift at UPS.

While UofL has developed into a Research 1 university replete with dormitories, its roots are as a commuter campus. This contradiction between its present and its past educational roles has rendered the school a site of intersection, harboring a panoply of students of different races, classes, and ethnicities—a panoply that mirrors the demographics of the city itself. Louisville has been called both the "Gateway to the South" and the "Gateway to the North," and as such, the community—and the student body—represents a diverse, and sometimes frictional, patchwork of identities: cosmopolitan and rural; wealthy and working class; progressive and conservative; white, black, and a host of other hues. The UofL also draws students from all over the world, whose cultures mingle and elbow with and against those of the natives.

It is in this building that I often teach first-year composition. The unique qualities of Louisville, the city and campus, generate both richness and tension: The metro council is well-represented by African-Americans, but Louisville also erupted in race riots in 1968, following the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., the resonances of which still ring today in the much-neglected West End of the city. As a teacher, my mission is to both capitalize on the advantages of and resist the disadvantages of this diversity and tension, to help disenfranchised students negotiate the formidable power structures that often serve to further marginalize them, and the manifold insights of decades of composition scholarship are crucial intellectual tools for doing this. Within composition studies scholarship, a particularly dominant approach for accomplishing this has, for the last 20 years or so, been social-constructivist pedagogy, which draws on post-structuralist and post-modern theories in order to nurture pedagogical contexts in which students acquire agency, resisting and reshaping their own subjectivities within/against broader structures of power and ideology.

In this chapter, I will examine some of the social-constructivist approaches that have prevailed over the last two decades. I aim to highlight both the uses and limitations of these approaches, and to paint a clearer picture of the possibilities for student empowerment they offer, as well as the practical obstacles they continue to face. More specifically, I will consider social-constructivist approaches in light of recent theories, such as Manuel De Landa's, that signal what could be called a "post-linguistic turn" in contemporary philosophy—that is, "post" the linguistically-grounded post-modern and post-structuralist theories that gave birth to social-constructivist pedagogy. My reading of this post-modernism is that it, explicitly and implicitly, overstates the extent to which a

composition student might acquire "rhetorical agency" in a social-constructivist-oriented classroom. Furthermore, I will interrogate the teacher-student power relations implied in some versions of social-constructivist pedagogy, suggesting that these relations entail a rather dubious notion of student agency, and that this dubiousness stems, in part, from privileging a discourse-based model of critical resistance over the diversity of students' local, embodied experiences. Language, rhetoric, and signifying practices in general certainly play significant roles in organizing the material and social dimensions of reality and society. They also play a role in our students' acquisition of rhetorical agency. My goal is not to reject social constructivism; it has had, and continues to have, deep and important implications for pedagogical practice. The question I plan to address is: Have we placed so much emphasis on rhetorical representation that we have understated the material facts of existence that lay beneath it? Is social-constructivist pedagogy an opportunity for students' rhetorical agency, or just another dreamful representation, unmoored from concrete reality? Or, put metaphorically: Is our project akin to throwing student essays at the Binghman Building's confounding, fortress-like walls, and hoping that this siege will cause them to tumble or shift?

For the sake of clarity and brevity, I will often conflate post-modern and post-structuralist theories into a single term, "post-modern theory" or "post-modernism," intended to denote the general effects of these traditions on composition studies. This simplification aside, however, these theories are hardly monolithic, having been articulated and rearticulated in manifold, and sometimes contradictory, ways over the last several decades. But several themes of particular interest to composition studies can be abstracted from this heterogeneity. Broadly speaking, post-modernist theory presents a

challenge to many of the most elemental assumptions underlying the Western intellectual tradition: the connections between words and things, the notion of the autonomous identity, and the viability of objective reason, just to name a prominent few. Objectivity—in the sciences, in philosophy, in criticism, in politics—had long been apotheosized, appropriately to an extent, as a sort of pure light that scorches away obfuscation and ignorance, a demystifying lens through which any perceptible phenomenon or concept can be understood. At risk of being reductive, post-modernism essentially—or anti-essentially, one could say—asked a question so basic, it might be judged as jejune if its impact on the intellectual foundations of the humanities had not been so calamitous and pullulating: What happens if we turn objective reason on itself— or, as Jacques Derrida puts it, foreground the "impossibility of a principle of grounding to ground itself" (9)? How can we objectively assert that objectivity is, indeed, objective? How can we ascertain the validity of the scientific method by using scientific method? The repercussions of this simple query were the opposite of simple. Like the act of facing two mirrors squarely to each other, post-modern language theory opened up a bottomless space where representations collapse infinitely into themselves, a space that the humanities and social sciences are still scrambling to claw their way out of, or around, or through—or at the very least, to learn to reside comfortably within.

That linguistic analyses spearheaded significant elements of the post-modern movement accounts for much of that movement's interest to composition scholars. Jacques Derrida, drawing on the structural linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure, coined the neologism *differánce,* which describes how meanings are produced through differential relationships between words. In keeping with Derrida's destabilization of

signification, *differánce* is a polyvalent word, irreducible to a single definition; it simultaneously means "to defer," "to differ," and "to disperse." But put roughly, Derrida's thesis is that a perpetual and uncontrollable "slippage" disrupts the connections between words and referents, and that meanings are thus generated through binary oppositions between words in a larger system of signification. There is no referential "presence" inherent in words, and we can only attempt to define words with *other words*, which themselves float upon a void, an absence. Meaning is thus perpetually deferred, scattered across differential networks of signifiers. From this local deconstruction of signification, Derrida deduces that the entire Western intellectual tradition relies on the dubious notion of "logocentrism," a "metaphysics of presence" that assumes a referential stability that simply does not exist. In "The Principle of Reason: The University in the Eyes of Its Pupils," Derrida explains this with the metaphor of the Cornell University campus, which is perched above a system of rivers, with bridges spanning the yawning voids beneath; in 1977, the university erected barriers to discourage students' suicidal leaps off the bridges. For Derrida, the Enlightenment's lofty rationalism is founded upon a similar "abyss," but the language-bridges we build across it, as well as the barriers we erect to prevent us from peering over the edge, prevents us from recognizing the void upon which our discourse is precariously built. This is not to say that all communication is impossible; after all, Derrida gets his point across. But the abyss of uncertainty lurks beneath all of it, and we need to confront this, as well as our own confrontation of it. As he puts it:

> The time for reflection is also the chance for turning back on the very conditions
> of reflection, in all the senses of that word, as if with the help of a new optical

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device one could finally see sight, could not only view the natural landscape, the

city, the bridge and the abyss, but could view viewing. (p. 19)

A key consequence of this irruption between words and reality is that knowledge,

and our perception of reality, are not retrieved from some stable and objectively-

accessible exterior, but are constructed. Michel Foucault, another eminent Continental

philosopher, examines this constructedness in terms of the power hierarchies that

condition the formation and maintenance of social institutions throughout history. In

books such as *Discipline and Punish* and *Madness and Civilization,* Foucault counters the

portrayal of history as a logical, coherent improvement of the human condition, arguing

instead that the social formations of the Age of Reason are more aptly characterized as

ideologically-driven regimes of social control. In other words, rationality is used not

simply as a means to arrive at cogent understandings of material and social reality and

thereby improve them, but as a method to normalize dominant worldviews and

marginalize alternative worldviews. Like Derrida, Foucault repudiates traditional

representations of the Enlightenment, characterizing discourse, as expressed through

social institutions, as arbitrary and fabricated—and going even farther in his efforts to

expose the deeper implications of this constructedness.

Also aligned with the post-modern disposition is Jean-Francois Lyotard, who

critiques the cultural influence of totalizing "metanarratives"—of history, of capitalism,

of socialism, of science, and of knowledge domains in general. For Lyotard, totalizing

truth claims obscure and silence counter-narratives, and therefore offer an incomplete—

though dangerously satisfying—account of reality. For Lyotard, a central metanarrative

of Western civilization involves the supposed triumph of reason over myth: scientific

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objectivity peels away the mythical (e.g., religious) shrouds over reality and accesses indisputable truths. To return to the simple question discussed earlier, Lyotard asks how science, with its inherent inability to objectively examine its own method, can possibly know with certainty that this narrative is correct (and even if it could do this, this examination would have to be examined in the same way, and so on, ad infinitum). This metanarrative is therefore suspect for Lyotard. For him, objective data derived from rational inquiry are, in effect, representational. Like Derrida and Foucault, then, Lyotard suggests that reality cannot be separated from and analyzed in isolation to discursive constructions.

Importantly, post-modern theory developed at, and out of, a time when the global political climate had veered sharply to the right. In the United States, the 1960s counter-cultural left was deflated by a seemingly unending war in Vietnam, as well as the election of Richard Nixon in 1970. France, home to many of the post-modern theorists themselves, witnessed the quashing of the 1968 May Revolution by forces loyal to Charles De Gaulle. Even more significantly, the oil crises and economic "stagflation" that gripped the U.S. in the 1970s caused much anxiety within the middle class, who were not only concerned about the perpetuation of their white-collar status, but with the literacy education that they perceived as being a key facilitator of that status. And when recessions strike, and the middle class worries about education, it's a pretty safe bet that they will soon fantasize about more traditional teaching practices that they associate with a better, bygone past (that *Newsweek* published "Why Johnny Can't Write"—a denunciation of writing education's perceived abandonment of the grammatical "basics"—during the economic stagflation of 1975 is probably not coincidental). With

regard to the field of composition studies—which was increasingly influenced by the innovative pedagogical practices of the likes of Peter Elbow and Donald Murray—this traditionalist tsunami was pedagogically troubling. With a widening rift between the affluent and working classes—a cause of deep worry for composition teachers in an era of open admissions—also came a call, enabled by the right's persuading of the general public that a literacy crisis was afoot in American education, for a "back-to-basics" approach to teaching. As Lester Faigley puts it, the

> middle class believed that American education had veered off course and that a 'golden age' of education had existed in the not-too-distant past. The list of villains proposed as causes for the literacy crisis…[included] too little grammar, too little homework, too much freedom, too little discipline, [and] too many electives. (62)

In this view, the pedagogical prescription included, for instance, an emphasis on grammar correction.

Progressive scholars such as Donald Murray and Peter Elbow bucked this rightward trend with the development of process pedagogy, which shifted emphasis from finished products—and the error-correcting red ink that was slathered upon them—to the recursive process of writing. But also around this time, the radical politics of Continental philosophy were crossing the Atlantic, and had begun to animate both the literary-critical and composition wings of English departments. In light of this, the process approach was viewed as an inadequate response for some of the more politically committed composition scholars. Superficially at least, early versions of process theory are comparatively reticent when it comes to questions of race, class, gender and ethnicity; the

strategies of brainstorming, drafting, and revising are commonly portrayed as more or less universal, color blind to the unique struggles of disenfranchised social groups. As Faigley puts it, this ostensible oversight led some critics to "accuse process advocates as accomplices in closing the doors of colleges to African-American, Hispanic, and other underrepresented minority groups" (68). This may be an unfair characterization for a couple of reasons. For one, Faigley adds that it "grossly overstates the power of writing teachers." Second, a close reading of Elbow and other process theorists reveals a heightened awareness of social inequities. But in light of the political pressures of the Reagan era, some scholars, including Berlin, viewed it as a rather tepid retort to the rise of the politician- and media-endorsed pedagogical conservatism that ruled the headlines at the time.

Berlin's scholarly project blended pedagogical pragmatism with an unabashedly leftist agenda, an agenda that grew increasingly fervent as his career advanced. One of his early major articles, "Contemporary Composition: The Major Pedagogical Theories," is concerned primarily with the assumed interactions between discourse and truth within the dominant pedagogical paradigms of the time. With regard to process theory, Berlin holds that its "truth is conceived as the result of a private vision that must be constantly consulted in writing," which for him is problematic in that it assumes (or, more accurately, he assumes that it assumes), that a stable core of foundational truth, an isolated fountain spewing Romantic genius, resides "within" all writers, and writing, and the truth it expresses, is a result of accessing this wellspring. But Berlin also lays the groundwork for a more politicized approach with what he calls "New Rhetoric," which

holds that textual meanings arise "out of the interaction of the writer, language, reality, and the audience. Truths are operative only within a given universe of discourse" (266).

Postmodern theory—with its insistence that meanings are not exterior to language, but contingent on and emergent from discursive context—heavily inflect Berlin's argument for New Rhetoric. And as Berlin's project progressed, he took a rather heterodox approach to Marx-influenced criticism, drawing on post-modern theory (e.g., in *Rhetoric, Poetics, and Cultures*) in an effort to develop what was, for him, a more truly liberatory and student-empowering pedagogy. For scholars like Berlin, a pedagogical approach that assumes the relative fixity of identity (rather pejoratively dubbed "Expressivism"), the tidiness of correspondence between word and thing ("Current-Traditionalism"), and/or the rigidity of racial, gender, class, and ethnic categories would seem incapable of challenging the cultural and linguistic structures that disempower and marginalize students. Post-modern theory, on the other hand, opens up sites of potential contestation, sites of great interest and promise to scholars such as Berlin, who see in them an opportunity to reconstruct asymmetrical socio-political relations through rhetoric. Postmodern theory decenters identity—we are not autonomous, unified subjects, but are instead positioned contingently within a patchwork of ideologies and institutions, all of which are reinforced by shared symbolic practices and potentially ruptured by counter-practices. Because identities, cultures, and ideologies are unstable, they are also malleable. And since they are constructed with language, language can be used to compose subject positions that are politically engaged, empowered, and ultimately liberated. For Berlin, the possibility for rhetorical agency—and by extension social, political, and economic agency—lies in part in an awareness of this malleability.

While, as Berlin notes, some post-modernists see liberation in anti-foundationalism as such—as a sort of playful free-for-all—social-constructivism is not, for him, a mere ludic game, a leisurely diversion for the educated bourgeoisie. Within this play of symbols, power expresses itself in Foucauldian social formations, arranging material reality in particular ways, some of which marginalize some students. So however much these signifying practices are based in representation, their effects are concrete, real. Oppressive ideologies, shaped by discourse, squelch students' social power and limit their agency; for Berlin, this is a crucial oversight of the process approach, which he saw as placing so much emphasis on the agency of "individual student writer and her pen" that it neglected the broader, more nefarious ideological structures that surreptitiously squelch her agency. For social constructivists, then, concrete reality can be grappled with via rhetoric—and, more specifically, via a writing classroom guided by a presumably false consciousness-free instructor who can help students learn to challenge the ideologies that impede them.

Before proceeding, however, it is important to acknowledge that Berlin's theoretical and pedagogical scope stretches beyond postmodern theories of language. Again, under Berlin's version of social-constructivist pedagogy, writing is not done for its own sake as a playful toying with a linguistic *bricolage*. Rather, writing is viewed in terms of its interaction with reality: students wield resistant rhetoric as a means to contest and reconstitute the material conditions of their existence. For Berlin, this method of this contestation lies squarely within a Marxian epistemological model: Through resistant writing, students unveil the "false consciousness… and the absence of democratic practices in all aspects of experience" wrought by late capitalism (733). And with this

critical agency comes student "empowerment" or "liberation," Berlin's definition of which is perhaps most clearly articulated in "Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class:"

> Self-autonomy and self-fulfillment are thus possible… through resisting those social influences that alienate and disempower, doing so, moreover, in and through social activity… The liberatory classroom begins this resistance process with a dialogue that inspires [a democratic social order in the classroom]… Teacher and student work together to shape the content of the liberatory classroom. (734)

Echoes of Paulo Freire, the influential synthesizer of Marxian and pedagogical theory, are evident here, as Berlin acknowledges. Later in this essay, then, I will also examine Berlin's postmodernist and (Freirean) Marxian tendencies in tandem, and attempt to identify some of the strengths and limitations of Berlin's use of postmodern language theory as a means for students' liberation/agency in contexts of materiality. I will also analyze the overlaps and schisms with and between Berlin's and Freire's models of politicized pedagogy. It is also important to note that the Continental philosophers discussed above also tend to be invested in questions of Marxian materialism. But as I will demonstrate later, Foucault's conception of the interaction between language and reality is quite different from Berlin's—and even, as I hope to show, lies in tension with Berlin's conception of it.

Berlin translates the implications of post-modern theory into a utopian vision of a democratic classroom, one that operates on dialectical examinations of difference. In a nod toward individual student agency that seems somewhat at odds with his critique of

process pedagogy, Berlin, in his *Rhetorics, Poetics, and Cultures,* states that in first-year composition courses, he

> explain[s] at the outset that the class will participate in disagreement and conflict in open, free, and democracy, [and] student are asked to draw up a set of rules to govern members in their relations to each other... [and compose] a statement of rights to protect minority positions. (104)

In other words, a liberatory classroom is achieved by having students, led by a ideologically self-conscious teacher, study how language mediates ideology, and then identify and critique the gaps, overlaps, fissures, and frictions that simmer within the classroom. For Berlin, if we can identify the rhetorical practices that shape our ideologies, our ideologies' imbrications and dissonances with/against other ideologies, and locate the political forces that that flex and fluctuate across these boundaries (as Foucault notes, balances of power are differentially mediated, emerging through shifting, local relations), we can help marginalized students empower themselves, help them create identities as citizen-rhetors, and help them become critically empowered agents.

While Berlin is an exceptionally prominent exemplar of this approach, numerous social-constructivists of the 1980s and 90s advocated similar critical pedagogies, such as Patricia Bizzell, who wants students to "know more of their own and others' cultural histories in order to be effective participants in a multicultural democracy" ("The Prospect of Rhetorical Agency," 41); Lester Faigley, who sees in Lyotard's concept of the *differend* a "an argument for locating ethics within a postmodern pedagogy" (236); and John Trimbur, whose notion of democratic consensus-building (or at least the striving for it) in the classroom "offers students utopian aspirations to transform the

conversation by freeing it from the prevailing constraints on its participants, the manipulations, deceptions, and plays of power" (476). And while composition studies has been anything but static since the advent of the social-constructivism, the approach continues to inflect the scholarly conversation, coloring, shaping, and underpinning an array of liberatory, cultural-critical pedagogies. One notable example of this tendency is the embrace of service learning as a transformative practice, as well as the idea of "code-meshing," a well-grounded and propitious strategy for helping ESL students acquire English, but one which, as I will show later, has nonetheless infused some scholarship with faulty liberatory social-constructivist assumptions.

The threads that interweave these practices lead to a definition of pedagogy that, above all, hinges on the primacy of language, on the assumption that rhetorical agents can use words to shape the world. Post-modern theory stands as a corrective to an earlier, less liberating era, when students were boxed into inflexible identities, teachers dispensed knowledge unilaterally like ATM machines, and society's distributions of power were as intransigent as steel beams supporting a corporate skyscraper. Once composition, as Berlin puts it, "placed the question of ideology at the center of the teaching of writing" ("Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class" 735), the signifying practices that, in their broadest scope, catapulted white males through four-year colleges and consigned African-American women to housing projects by the railroad tracks could, at last, be interrogated, challenged, contested, and altered. Students can therefore reconstitute and/or empower their own subjectivities, as well as the linguistically-comprised institutions they must negotiate and find success within.

Upward socio-economic mobility catalyzed by writing education may be one desired consequence of social-constructivist empowerment, but it is not merely about financial gains. "Liberation" can also be interpreted, for instance, as a validation of one's cultural or ethnic heritage, which is seen as positive in and of itself. To paraphrase Berlin, this empowerment emerges from a self-critical, dialectical interaction between the rhetor, the discourse community, and material conditions of existence. However, this empowerment will not always be achieved universally and without difficulty. Like a Platonic ideal, the notion of critical empowerment functions more like an asymptotic limit than a palpable destination, an impetus for an activism that, if not validated by its (in)ability to reach the promised land, is distinguished by its forward progress, or at least a striving for progress, however incremental. And undoubtedly, it can work: If nothing else, many students of marginal subject positions have landed tenure-track jobs by capitalizing on post-modern theory, and many more have surely found sorely-needed validations of their own ethnic histories. So there are some compelling reasons why the echoes of the linguistic turn are still, and should be, continuing down an indefinitely long and winding road.

Yet, when I swing open the ponderous metal doors of the Bingham Humanities Building and walk through its vexing hallways to teach first-year composition, I wonder about the limits of language as a sculptor of material existence. The African-American achievement gap, for instance, persists at colleges and universities across the nation (Spenner, et al.). First-generation college students, in my classroom and others, often struggle with the conventions of the academy, as well as with the tensions and frictions between academic discourse and the discourses of their home communities. It would be

glaringly unfair to blame these inequalities on first-year composition teachers. But given

that post-modern, social-constructivist theories have long permeated, if not dominated,

departments of humanities and social sciences, the question can be fairly asked: What are

the limitations of the social-constructivist pedagogical approach, and what out of what

tensions do these limitations develop? As suggested above, there are undoubtedly many

individual cases of students who have been empowered, in some sense or another, by the

illuminations of Judith Butler and Julia Kristeva. But given the fact that College

Republican organizations (and the white, wealthy, male status quo they tend to defend)

seem to be as thriving today as they have in the pre-post-modern past, one may be

forgiven for suspecting that many minds are not being changed by these pedagogies.

Furthermore, if a teacher asks her class what their goals in college are, chances are, "to

get a high-paying job" will be mentioned, to put it lightly, more than a few times. And

even if an occasional student states that his goal is to, say, further legitimize his ethnic

background within mainstream public or academic discourse, it is not at all clear that this

localized liberation would not have occurred even if his English class were informed by

Cleanth Brooks' literary theories. After all, Frederick Douglass empowered his subject

position long before a coterie of French philosophers started debating the nature of

postmodern subjectivity.

Just a few minutes south of UofL, just off an exit ramp on Interstate 65, the

conveyor belts at the sprawling UPS WorldPort hum 24-7. The United Parcel Service

pays its employees' college tuition, which is tremendously helpful for working class

students, but the common mandate that they must work the third shift draws attention to

the struggles they face compared to a wealthy student whose trust fund pays for his

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schooling. About an hour east of campus lies the city of Frankfort, the state capital, which features a largely white male population of perennial slashers of post-secondary education funding; UofL has had its state funding cut 11 times in the last 11 years. And in the mid-2000s, for the first time since UofL joined the state college system in 1970, student tuition bore a larger brunt of the school's budget than did state funding. Five hundred miles or so northeast of Frankfort lies our nation's capital, Washington, D.C., where a Republican-dominated House of Representatives now aggressively opposes any motions to increase federal education funding, or to provide assistance to near-bankrupt states that, due in part to their near-bankruptcy, perennially slash post-secondary education funding. These budget decisions take place in the rarefied marble hallways of state buildings. And like this dissertation, and like my students' essays, these budget decisions are constructed with language: textuality as means toward political agency. But the words that comprise the text of the U.S. national budget represent an exertion of power far more colossal than anything my words will likely ever know; and the material and social formations that separate my words' power potential from that of a Senators' are, in many ways, just as adamant as the raw concrete of the Bingham Building; perhaps a state legislator or university president could heave those slabs, but not me, nor my students.

The question, then, is this: In the wake of the linguistic turn within the humanities, and the degree of primacy to which it accords language, what are the tensions that we continue to inhabit, particularly within the context of the composition classroom? Composition teachers naturally place much emphasis on the potential for language to empower. After all, words are the tools of our work. They represent, mediate, and

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embody what we do; our experiences as scholars and teachers are steeped in linguistic representation. But it is instructive to reconsider this world of language, which we both inscribe and inhabit, in light of confounding forces of material existence. Social-constructivist theory is a very effective tool for literary scholars that need only critique literary representations, but when it comes to the challenge of improving real-word students' lives, what additional obstacles must it contend with? Social constructions are, at best, only half the battle; words and reality overlap, but to state the obvious, I can't change the channel by talking to the TV, or repair my softball teammates' battered limbs with an argument for the social-constructedness of hamstring injuries. Not of language itself, perhaps, but of its place within the larger ensemble of bodies, universities, classrooms, cities, states, nations, and all the wood, concrete, oil, grass, pigment, carbon, insects, etc. that interact—sometimes obediently, sometimes stubbornly—with those representations. I do not claim to know where the limits of language lie. It is nearly impossible to say, if only because we can only use that very (limited) language to say it. But it's important that we acknowledge the existence of that limit on a routine basis.

This metaphor relies on a reductive binary; as I have tried to emphasize, there are probably cases in which social-constructivist pedagogies yield measurably positive results in individual situations. The question is one of balances, of proportions, of spectral gradations between the purely material and purely symbolic. And I wish to suggest that our assumptions are skewed unrealistically towards the symbolic. To use yet another metaphor: The power of positive thinking (in words) has been shown to improve cancer prognoses. But there is a limit to its powers. No amount of signifying practices will stymie the malignant growth of stage-four pancreatic cancer. Similarly, a working class

African-American woman may improve her financial prospects by attending college and compellingly meshing her "home" vernacular with academic discourse. But the material conditions that confront her are formidable; this is perhaps why, as Lisa Delpit recounts, a teacher of a group of African-American veterans who encouraged the veterans to find their "own, unique voice" was met with intense opposition from the students, who demanded that they be "taught grammar, punctuation, and 'Standard English'" (161). They didn't want to resist the bogeyman of progressive pedagogical politics; they wanted to emulate him. I have never met these men, but I would not be shocked if some of them have spent their lives using their "own, special vernacular voice," only to be met with the disparagement or disdain of the ruling classes, which is precisely why they enrolled in the course in the first place. Someone, or something, out there suggested to them that "dialectal diversity" is not always viewed as a valuable, agency-investing asset in American society. They don't need a college professor to tell them that they don't fluently speak the language of the dominant socio-economic elite; they've been struggling with and lamenting this fact for years.

In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Foucault's analysis of state-mandated discipline, enforced through imprisonment in a panopticons, indirectly illustrates student rhetors' productive limitations. The codification of behavior in prisons, such as strictly regimented exercise routines (again, presumably inscribed in paper or, in contemporary times, electronic documents), make "possible the meticulous control of the operations of the body, which assure[s] the constant subjection of its forces and impos[es] on them a relation of docility-utility" (*Discipline and Punish,* 137). This is not to say that prisoners in the Panopticon were entirely powerless; because the central watchman could

observe the entire prison clandestinely, "there were bars, no more chains, no more heavy locks" (202). And indeed, along with the subjection of the body, soul, and subject itself comes resistance and the exertion of power; as in the case of military regimentation, "discipline increases the skills of each individual, coordinates these skills, accelerates movements," (202). However, this power can only be exercised in certain, circumscribed ways. A prisoner is not free to simply walk out of the Panopticon. One must be careful not to overstate the similarities between a Panopticon inmate and a disenfranchised minority student, but the plight of the typical American ghetto—a lack of social mobility, a dearth of material and economic resources, police harassment that routinely and disproportionately targets African-Americans and Hispanics—stands as an analogue of the Panopticon's walls. A marginalized student can resist them with an essay in a critical pedagogy course, but the walls will keep pushing back.

Foucault was also skeptical of Marxian resistance in general. For him, the events in Paris in 1968 called into question "the equation Marxism = the revolutionary process, an equation that constituted a kind of dogma" (qtd in Young, 12). His leeriness lies in what he sees as Marxism's totalizing portrayal of history as a simple, base vs. superstructure binary. As Michael Poster points out in "Foucault, the Present, and History," Marx tends to universalize working class suffering and separate labor from other, "superstructural… domains of practice," which has the effect of "totalizing the historical field [and introducing] a form of domination at the level of theory [that] works against the very interests of the emancipation it claims to promote" (112). I will not delve here into Berlin's pedagogy's relationship with Foucault's depiction of the pitfalls of Marxian resistance in late-1960s France. But Foucault's discontent—that Marxian

discourse is often too totalizing, blunt and insensitive to the more complex problematics of social and material reality—is, also, echoed by a key trend in contemporary Continental philosophy, the same intellectual tradition that sparked the linguistic turn in composition studies.

Representatives of this trend challenge the view that language use can be privileged over the concrete facts of existence (in the case of Marxism, this could be considered the reductiveness of Marxian theory/discourse in the face of reality). One scholar who is aligned with this perspective is Manuel DeLanda, whose *A New Philosophy of Society* seeks to develop a theory of interanimating material and social structures, or "assemblages," that contrast with essentializing, "Hegelian totalities" (5). For DeLanda, a shortcoming of some versions of "social realism—of which, as I will show shortly, social-constructivism is an example—is "an ontological commitment to the existence of essences" that "form a seamless whole" (5).

That social-constructivist pedagogies could be characterized as "essentializing totalities" may seem to be a dubious, if not outright fallacious, claim. After all, one of the most noteworthy features of post-structuralism is its relentless railing *against* essentializing totalities. And I want to emphasize that my appropriation of DeLanda's philosophy here is qualified and non-categorical. I aim to read his theories in light of some of the practical difficulties that composition studies currently inhabits, and to wring practical insights from the dissonances between each framework: to mash DeLanda's texts against Berlin's in an effort to illustrate the tensions at work in the classroom.

DeLanda critiques strains of social science that reject realism (16). Some social scientists, he contends, dismiss the notion that social entities "have an enduring and

mind-independent identity," which, for them, would lead logically to the conclusion that social entities have stable essences. Strict social-constructivist perspectives can be read as aligned with this position, in that as they reject the idea that material existence is isolatable from subjectivity: because concrete reality is inevitably filtered, distorted, and colored by the perceptual lenses through which it is observed, realist ontology naively ignores the ideological determinants of all social analyses. This blind spot is a cause of great concern for social-constructivism, since it threatens to legitimize "realist" representations of existence that are, in actuality, ideologically (and arbitrarily) biased. A scientific analogue of this line of thought can be found in biologist Richard Lewontin's and paleontologist Stephen Jay Gould's repudiations of biological determinism. Gould, for instance, refuted 19th century craniometric (skull-measuring) analyses of racial intelligence, which supposedly proved that the African-American race's "inferior" intelligence could be attributed to its comparatively pint-sized cranial capacities, which were described as hereditary. In *The Mismeasure of Man*, Gould's scrutiny of these studies, however, found that racial prejudice played a much greater role in producing the results than did objective—that is, realist—scientific work.[1]

In this view, then, any analysis of material existence must be qualified by the recognition that our perceptions of reality are skewed by our own ideologically and socially constructed predispositions. Neither an essentialist notion of material existence, nor general taxonomic categories that are detached from this existence (and which are therefore essentializing), are sufficient in social analysis. This realization, of course, is one of the (anti)foundational axioms of post-modern and post-structuralist theories, and

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[1] Oddly enough, just a couple days after writing this, I read in the NY Times that Gould's analysis is also guilty of confirmation bias, and perhaps even more so than the racist analysis. So I guess Gould proved his point even more than he meant to.

Berlin emphasizes the point consistently. But as DeLanda points out, such an attempt to escape ontological essentialism can lead to a different incarnation of the same nemesis: "social essentialism." Social essentialism occurs when anti-realist epistemologies reify the theoretical structures that they rely on to organize reality. With regard to social-constructivist approaches to composition, such structures are linguistic: If we assume, as some interpreters of Derrida and others might, that language does not provide transparent access to, or representation of, material existence, then we are "essentially" mired in a shifting, free-playing web of signifiers. And if this is the case, then we have just hypostasized language into a sort of essentialist representation. As DeLanda puts it:

> [General] categories do not refer to anything in the real world and to believe that they do (i.e., to reify them) leads directly to essentialism. Social constructivism is supposed to be an antidote to this, in the sense that by showing that general categories are mere stereotypes it blocks the move towards their reification. But by coupling the idea that perception is intrinsically linguistic with the ontological assumption that only the contents of experience really exist, this position leads directly to a form of *social essentialism.* (44)

So for DeLanda, the idea that reality can be described in terms of competing ideological biases is just as reductive as the notion that it can be described objectively, or purely abstractly. DeLanda's corrective to this is an elaboration on Deleuze's "assemblage theory," which contrasts with essentialist social ontologies insofar as it aims to avoid imposing reified, top-down symbolic schemas onto complex historical and material processes. Assemblages are comprised of historically-contingent ensembles of symbolic and organic (material) properties, which interact in different ways depending on the

historical processes that (re)configure them. Because these properties are emergent and can interact in manifold ways, the assemblages that arise from their interactions are unstable, and therefore non-essentialist. One way to describe the provisional systems that emerge from an assemblage's interacting parts is consider how the same genetic protein that creates a hand in a human can also create a paw in a ocelot: the phenotype depends on networks of relationships, and not on the essential functions of parts that synthesize essential wholes. DeLanda's reading of Deleuze thus aims to destabilize and de-totalize (in the Hegelian sense) social-constructivist ontology by embedding it within concrete, contingent organic processes.

While DeLanda's analysis is useful in describing the limitations of social-constructivism, it only takes us so far. Berlin, again, is careful (to an extent) to avoid reducing social-constructivism to reified word games, dissociated from the organic processes that DeLanda emphasizes. For instance, in his *Rhetoric, Poetics and Cultures,* Berlin cites Cornel West's rejection of a "postmodern epistemological skepticism sometimes found in Baudrillard, a proposal that argues for the complete abandonment of any concern for the non-discursive" (72). For West, African-Americans have a "strong sense" of the material facts of their blackness and socio-economic disenfranchisement—a rock-hard reality that "upper-middle class Americans" cannot know, and which their reduction of discourse to mere free-floating signifiers therefore fails to recognize. Berlin also, drawing on Freire, "acknowledges that the concrete material and social conditions of our experience shape and limit us" (98). In other words, he recognizes that the stubbornly materialist properties of race, class, gender, etc. are as real as the laptop keyboard I type this upon (a keyboard which many of the marginalized individuals of

which I am typing about cannot afford to buy). So Berlin, like DeLanda, sees that social-constructivist critical discourse cannot be wholly severed from material existence. In these passages at least, Berlin actually lays an inchoate foundation for DeLanda's critique.

But just because Berlin does not fit neatly into DeLanda's rather straw man-esque depiction of social-constructivism does not mean that DeLanda fails offer a useful critique here. While DeLanda's arguments are, to some extent, based on rigid binaries between social-constructivism and assemblage theory, my project here is not to reproduce or reinforce those binaries. The operative concept here is that of a spectrum: While Berlin may not be the relentless essentializer described by DeLanda, DeLanda's critique still holds to the extent that it describes tensions inherent in any critical pedagogy-oriented classroom.

A recurring tendency in Berlin is that, whenever he acknowledges the limitations of a liberation-through-language approach to pedagogy, he often follows that acknowledgement with a "However," with a "But still...". For instance, immediately following Freire's quoted skepticism, Berlin downplays that quote's significance: "[Freire] sees in the mediating power of language, however, the possibility for the change and transformation of these [concrete material and social] conditions" (98). Discourse, Berlin contends, can be used as a means of control and domination, defining individuals as "helpless ciphers," but it can also form "narratives that enable democratic participation in creating a more equitable distribution of the necessities, liberties, and pleasures of life"; on this last point, Berlin laments that critical pedagogy in the United States has "failed" with regard to this "moment of democratic politics" (98).

Political oppression and liberation, in other words, are enacted and reinforced by language, at least in part. The American Revolution was about more than musket balls; it was also about words, about a redefinition of a citizenry from "royal subjects" to "participants in a representative democracy." The "however" that follows Berlin's acknowledgement of the difficulties of political liberation can, however, be turned right back on itself: The American Revolution was about more than words; it was also very much about the Redcoats' musket balls, about obstinate material forces and properties that resist our rhetorical intentions. Berlin couches his explanation for critical pedagogy's "failure" in discourse-centric language—i.e., the privileging of a "white male subject" in "naïve and simplistic terms"—and undoubtedly, it would difficult to effect political change without effecting the right discursive change; integral to the feminist and Civil Rights movements was the rejection of labels like "weaker sex" and "the n-word." But as DeLanda's critique illustrates, and as Berlin recognizes elsewhere, discourse is only one element within a broader assemblage of forces with which we must contend.

Furthermore, revolution does not necessarily lead to liberation. One of Freire's pedagogy's central points of emphasis is that, for any revolutionary pedagogy (and for Freire, all revolutions are inherently pedagogical), there must be a full awareness of—and, presumably, a mechanism to deal with—the fact that, once "liberated," the oppressed simply transform into the oppressors:

> Even revolution, which transforms a concrete situation of oppression by establishing the process of liberation, must confront this phenomenon. Many of the oppressed who directly or indirectly participate in revolution intend -

conditioned by the myths of the old order - to make it their private revolution. The shadow of their former oppressor is still cast over them. (46)

One need not delve too deeply into the history books, or even read the news very religiously, to see the evidence of such inversions of power asymmetry. The political struggles of the Middle East for the last several decades instantiate this argument: relatively secular monarchies oppressing Islamic sects (pre-1979 Iran), who in turn stage a successful revolution and oppress the secular populations (Iran's 1979 revolution), who in turn challenged the established theocratic order (the squelched, but still volatile, Iranian protests of 2010-11). The upshot to this is that "liberation" can lead to undesirable situations. One wonders how Berlin would respond if a minority-dominated classroom democratically agreed to silence any student who begged to differ with such a student-driven classroom, or whether a social-constructivist teacher's insistence on democratic dialogue doesn't, in itself, represent yet another unilateral imposition of ideology upon a pluralistic group. It is worth adding, too, that the traces of Marxism—which, as mentioned earlier, Foucault reads as a kind of dogmatic blunt instrument—that tend to inflect social-constructivist theories add yet another layer of essentialism to the equation. Even if Marxism were the only non-oppressive political position, it's nonetheless true that the teacher would be assimilating students into this prescribed perspective. To what extent could we truly call this an empowerment of students' embodied responses and experiences?

Berlin notes, repeatedly, that post-modernism can easily deteriorate into useless relativism. And if this deterioration occurs, then one would have no more ground to stand on when arguing for multiculturalism than one would have when advocated white

supremacy. Berlin's idea, or ideal, of the classroom democratic dialogue—"dialogue" being a key concept for Freire as well—seems to be a response to this predicament. But this leads to the obvious question of how, exactly, democratic dialogue alone would sway student perspectives that run counter to ideals of postmodern, multiculturalist dialogue. Ultimately, this dilemma represents yet another limitation of social-constructivism's essentialist, language = liberatation assumption: language alone does not determine, shape, or entrench any ideology. Language may contribute to an ideology's reinforcement, but ideology is also beholden to many non-discursive factors, such as race, class and gender (the experience of being white/male/wealthy is fundamentally different than that of being black/female/poor, and ideology will be shaped accordingly). If dialogue alone were a sufficient liberal response to conservative culture, then one would think that the internet age, as polarizing as the blogosphere is, might have contributed to at least a modicum of mutual understanding. After all, a cyberspace voyager would seem to be much more likely to stumble upon and engage with an opposing viewpoint than is, say, a person who receives all of their news from a politically-slanted local newspaper. Yet as even a casual political observer knows, contemporary politics has not become any more civil in the internet age, or any more sympathetic to the Marxian tendencies that Berlin and others advocate.

Democratic discourse, then, faces numerous obstacles in unveiling the false consciousness that Berlin sees as pervading the composition classroom, and the tension between these forces arises, in part, from social-constructivist frameworks' tendencies toward linguistic essentialism. It is true, as noted earlier, that linguistic change is an integral component of social change, but it is only one component. Just as no amount of

well-composed first-year essays can move the concrete slabs in the Bingham Building, no amount of words, however well-directed the barrage, can alter the hard material facts of the classroom: the students and teachers themselves, their bodies and skin colors, the infinitely rich and complex diversity of their consciousnesses of their own personal experiences and histories. Words may change the way we talk about these facts—one of the seeds of revolution—but the facts will remain in tension with our words. In *A Counter-History of Composition,* Byron Hawk argues that an understanding of situated embodiment is essential to our understanding of the dynamic forces immanent to the classroom. As he states, "For [Berlin's] pedagogy to work, rationality has to overcome the historical and cultural position of the students and their irrational desires. But he does not take into account the fact that justice is also situational, and, yes, irrational" (80). For Hawk, local historical, experiential and biological-material factors, such as maleness (which is not only a discursive "subject position," but an inescapable physiological and psychological fact), can disrupt Berlin's pedagogy by rendering students resistant to teacher-led (or teacher-imposed) rational change. The stubborn facts of race, class, and gender across time and space are rooted in situated, material, bodily, and local contexts—contexts that are complex and unpredictable, and stand as a natural resistance to the efficacy of rhetoric—especially in such a short span of time (a semester or two) and with such young students. As a result, as Hawk recognizes, "teachers cannot predict the outcomes of their pedagogy any more than historiographers can predict history" (80).

Of course, *Rhetorics, Poetics, and Cultures* was first published in 1996, so it is unfair, to an extent, to lump all of the extensions, revisions, and permutations of social-constructivist pedagogy under a single Berlinian umbrella. But only to an extent. For the

same essential(izing) tendencies that can be found in Berlin also permeate contemporary incarnations of liberatory pedagogies. At this time, among the more talked about liberation-through-language pedagogies is the concept of "code-meshing." Developed by Suresh Canagarajah, code-meshing asks students who are not literate in the dominant conventions of English, especially academic English, to blend their "home" discourses with "standard" academic English in their writing.

Two interrelated trends can be identified within code-meshing research. On the one hand, as Canagarajah argues in "Multilingual Strategies of Negotiating English," a rigorous empirical analysis language second-language (or third-, or fourth-) acquisition, code-meshing provides a means to "explore how multilinguals' modes of negotiating English in conversational encounters may [help] explain the strategies they adopt in writing" (17). By studying code-meshing practices that are already operant in student writing, as opposed to conjuring a code-meshing pedagogy out of thin theoretical air, Canagarajah systematizes many of the same strategies that ESL students deploy instinctively in literacy acquisition, and aims to cultivate these skills in students. Canagarajah hastens to add that code-meshing is in its theoretical infancy, and creates as many questions as it does answers. But he also demonstrates that the strategy is integral to ESL learning, so the translation of this innate tendency into a general pedagogical model stands as a promising method for helping students become literate in academic discourse—and, by extension, acquire rhetorical and social agency within that discourse.

Code-meshing scholarship often hones its focus on notions of liberation along the lines of Berlin's. In these cases, the goal is not merely to help students learn English, as they see depoliticized pedagogy as a fantasy, which it is to a great extent. So in addition,

they also seek to contest the structures of discourse and power that enforce the dominance of "standard" English. If students are encouraged to blend marginalized and dominant mainstream discourses, the argument goes, they then have an opportunity to refigure each discourse in terms of the other, thereby destabilizing the asymmetrical power balance between them, at once demystifying the tacit status of "Standard English" (a problematic term in and of itself, given the heterogeneity and mutability of any "single" language) as superior, and validating the alternative discourse by virtue of its presence in an academic text. Canagarajah rushes up against this more radical perspective when he asserts that "autonomous literacy [must not remain] unchallenged" (45). But a more obvious example of this argument can be found in Vershawn Young's "Nah, We Straight," which discusses the issues of code-meshing more politically-charged terms. Young views code-meshing as a potential way to not only help students learn to write, but to combat racist monolingualism in society more broadly.

The recognition of the practical uses of code-meshing in language acquisition is a welcome contribution to the conversation surrounding student agency and empowerment. Fluency in academic discourse is a gateway into virtually every field that requires English literacy—which is virtually every field, from academic disciplines to the private sector sciences to business administration and entrepreneurship. It is empowering on the most practical of levels, in that it acculturates students to the discursive conventions of high-status domains of study and work. In this sense, then, the work of Canagarajah and others is laudable and more than worthy of continued research. They are also, however, resisted by broader social, political, and racial forces. As I argue in "Code-Meshing Meshed Codes," there is little reason to believe—and many reasons not to—that a student

who deploys code-meshing in any rhetorical context outside of the composition classroom will convince her audience that the presence of, say, Black English Vernacular or Tamil dialects in tandem with "standard" English legitimizes the marginal discourse as a novel and commendable stylistic model. Lisa Delpit, in her article "*CCCC*'s Role in the Struggle for Language Rights," intersperses phrases like "[We] done come a long way, baby;" this is an effective rhetorical tactic for an established scholar like Delpit. If an African-American writing memos a telecommunications company used the same tactic, it probably wouldn't be so glowingly received. Similarly, such phrases may please a first-year composition instructor; in the composition classroom, language is free to resist discursive oppression in such subversive ways. But in many situations in the outside world, this form of resistance not only isn't an effective way of resisting, it may even backfire and make one's situation even more undesirable.

This is not to say that code-meshing is completely powerless to contest and reconfigure dominant discursive conventions. Indeed, each act of meshing *is* a contestation and reconfiguration of discourse, albeit on a microscopic scale. But each meshing is embedded in a complex ensemble of forces and properties that surround any human interaction—be it linguistic, material, biological, political, or whatever—that places limits on its efficacy. While few, if any, classrooms are completely steeped in the social-constructivist linguistic essentialism described by DeLanda, these forces are always in tension with the classroom's discourse. One need look no further than *Uncle Tom's Cabin* for evidence that rhetoric plays a role in swaying public perception. But the text of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was nested within a broader assemblage that precipitated its

potency; that Harriet Beecher Stowe was white, affluent, and highly-educated, and not a slave, highlights these extra-textual forces.

Code-meshing's method of critically resisting dominant discourse conventions, then, might go over well in a composition classroom, particularly a classroom where the teacher is aligned with such models of critical resistance. But outside of this sheltered domain, it, as well as the student agency it aims to facilitate, runs headlong into a minefield of resistance. The widely held belief that a stable English "standard" exists may be patently absurd, or at least overstated. But it also is protected, often vehemently, by many people in positions of power. And these people's worldviews are shaped by forces over which language has limited influence, material factors that may, to paraphrase Wittgenstein, be passed over in silence by language, but which are nonetheless present, concrete, adamantine.

Some might argue that this analysis places undue weight on the material benefits of critically resistant language: the careers, the positions of power, the financial fortunes to be gained with the ability to write an effective memo to a major corporation's departments of marketing and public relations. Money is not the only form of fortune: cultural identity is important, too. But this leads to yet another question: Even if a student feels edified and strengthened by the validation of their home discourse in a code-meshing composition classroom, we must also inform them of the limits of code-meshing's range of efficacy. We could reemphasize the point that domains outside the academic humanities are often racist, or classist, or sexist, or have reductionist views of dialectal difference. We can tell the student that despite the bullheadedness of the powers-that-be, despite their bigoted denial of the inherent beauty of cultural diversity in

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the service of a self-interested maintenance of an inequitable status quo, their cultural identity is real, wonderful, valuable, and worthy of applause. All of this may well be true, and there may well be some degree of perceived self-empowerment in the awareness of it. But the dismal prognosis of this recognition in so many contexts outside of the social-constructivist composition classroom, its rather sketchy survival prospects in the red-in-tooth-and-claw wilderness of the private sector (that teeth and claws are not made of words, but of carbon and calcium, is noteworthy here), draws attention to the limitations of liberatory social-constructivist approaches to writing pedgogy.

Language reigns in the classroom. Language is a central to how we construct our self-awareness. In such domains, it is somewhat safer, and even desirable in some cases, to essentialize language to some extent, simply because language is such an essential constituent of that particular domain. But outside that domain, the playing field shifts, and the goalposts are moved, if not discarded altogether. This is not to say that these demonstrable capacities of language should be ignored, or go unharnessed. It is to say, however, that any discussion of these capacities must be tempered by a recognition of their boundaries.

Any single explanatory paradigm is an inadequate descriptor of reality in its fullness. This is true on a micro-linguistic level: the word "tree," while a useful signifier colloquially, cannot account for the vast diversity of real-world trees (spruce, maple, etc.), and thus obscures large swaths of reality's intricacy. It is also true on a larger, more general level. The sort of classroom discourse encouraged by a liberatory, social-constructivist pedagogy is challenged by this complicating reality. A particular teacher's version of democratic dialogue, limited as it is by their own, inevitably narrow

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ideological scope, cannot possibly taxonomize and respond to the manifold manifestations of students' local experiences. This reveals another tension within social-constructivist pedagogy: Because the classroom definitions of "empowering" or "liberatory" are inevitably shaped, in large part, by the instructor, frictions can emerge when students' definitions of these concepts collide with the instructor's, e.g., if a politically conservative student rejects the more progressive ideology implied in Berlin's pedagogy. As Patricia Harkin points out in the latest edition of *Rhetoric, Poetics, and Cultures,* the analysis of race, class, and gender differences are not always successful when students are "products of a homogenous, rural, politically and religiously conservative culture;" it is hard for them to "see the racial and class based contradictions on which [Berlin's] pedagogy was based" (205). In such cases, even if a teacher is correct to emphasize these contradictions—and I think she would be—there is nonetheless something of a contradiction between the teacher's goal of "student empowerment" and the subtle (or not so subtle) desire to reshape a student's conservative ideology into something more progressive. If students are to become effective democratic participants, some conservative students might be suspicious of the implication that this participation should take the form of progressivism.

Neither Berlin nor any other social-constructivism-inclined scholars that I have encountered have asserted, explicitly anyway, that conservative viewpoints are not so much valid interventions into a classroom discussion as they are moral or intellectual shortcomings to be corrected. But given the goal of most social-constructivist pedagogy—a more tolerant, multicultural, minority-empowering classroom environment—the inevitable existence of such viewpoints (due, again, to the multifaceted

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and obdurate nature of material and bodily existence) would seem to problematize the ideal of a "democratic classroom." The classroom is never ideology free, and given the teacher's position of power, it will never be an ideologically relativistic free-for-all. And the average composition teacher, shaped as she or he is by personal histories—not only discursive, as in the books their teachers assign them, but material, as in the (frequent) bourgeois upbringings that allow for tuition payments and comparatively large childhood libraries—is likely to fall within the academy's liberal (at least compared to, say, rural Mississippi) orthodoxy, and read any student's divergence from this orthodoxy as a divergence from some kind of indisputable truth. Hawk, reading Berlin, recognizes this assumption of liberalization-through-conversation as a "desire to interpellate students into his own ideology" (79).

As the preceding parenthetical statement acknowledges, I, too, am largely in line with the 88% of English professors who describe themselves as "liberal" (Rothman, Lichter & Nevitte, 6). And I confess that my viscera contort unpleasantly whenever a student argues, say, that all government aid to the poor should be abolished and replaced by a privatized, church-run system of charitable giving. But I also realize that I am imprisoned within my own experiential history. If a student avers that unemployment insurance should be eradicated because it nurtures nothing other than learned dependency and indolence, I might be able to serve up a few empirical counter-statistics, e.g., that most recipients of said insurance express a desire for employment, and that it is perhaps the most effective form of economic stimulus in sluggish economic circumstances. I might also be able to tell a story or two about people I've known personally who benefited greatly from unemployment insurance, and then proceeded to land jobs. But

students in my classroom who are opposed to this view could also tell tales of people who manipulate the system (and they have told such tales), and they could also procure a few counter-statistics (they have done this, too).

Even when the social-constructivist pedagogical perspective is taken as a given, the task of empowering students—whatever that may mean—is difficult and perplexing. One reason for this is that this perspective, as frequently represented, is far from a given. On the contrary, it appears to fall far short of as a description of what a truly liberatory classroom might look like, and what its outcomes might be. The intersections between writing, teaching, rhetorical agency, and material reality are intractably complex. Progressive politics dominates composition departments, and I am a passionate, if perpetually baffled and self-conscious, advocate of this perspective. But we must also be wary of over-imagining the classroom as a space where teacher/sages, who have published award-winning articles on Herbert Marcuse's relevance to composition pedagogy, can lead a diverse class of students toward Truth and empowerment via a post-structuralist analysis of how language, ideology, and politics interact and constitute each other.

Furthermore, in practice, there are many avenues to rhetorical agency, and not all of them are progressive. Are William F. Buckley and the author of "Why Johnny Can't Write" rhetorical agents? If not, why not? If they were in our classrooms, would we not be suppressing their self-empowerment by steering them toward an alternate (i.e., our) political orientation? Of course, everyone's political consciousness develops from the reading and hearing of others' ideas, so there is no such thing as an entirely "innate" ideology. But where do we draw the line between nurturing ideological diversity—a

cornerstone of a liberal education—to establishing an ideological dictatorship by fiat? It is always hard to say, which is why we should always be careful and self-critical. To be sure, Berlin recognized the need for this sort of self-reflection throughout his career, as well as the need for students to be "regarded as subjects of their own experience, not empty receptacles to be filled with teacher-originated knowledge"; that they "challenge accepted wisdom" (145) He also emphasizes that there will be a "diversity of discoveries and disagreement" as students learn to participate in the classroom's micro-democratic society (145). Berlin's writing, then, does not essentialize the classroom's progressive discourse to absurd extremes. But with "diversity" comes difficulty, and the "accepted wisdom" being questioned may sometimes be the teacher's. Berlin focuses on the possibilities of democratic classroom; it is also important to focus on the limitations.

This series of interlocking puzzles is not an obstacle to be "solved," because it is unsolvable. It is clear that writing, teaching, concrete reality, students, teachers, politics, economics, race, gender, and countless other forces are involved in constructing the classroom in which my students and I sit and/or stand. But the nature of these interactions is often far from evident. I stand in a classroom: there it is, right there, right here, I'm in the middle of it all: the desks, the chairs, the walls, the malfunctioning air conditioner, the students, their various hoodies and jeans and blouses and dresses, their stories, my story, our history, the cold and sprawling and befuddling architecture that envelops us, the gray-matter machinery inside our skulls, processing it all. We can, and should, attempt to theorize this complexity, and glean as many insights as we can from that theorization. Words are an essential component of change and discovery, be the speaker an economically disenfranchised composition student who wants to be the first in his family

to graduate from college or a composition scholar trying to figure out how to best help him achieve this. But it is also important not to over-essentialize this essential component of change and draw excessively easy connections between the classroom we theorize and the classroom that actually exists—the raw, concrete classroom that is impossible to understand in its full richness and nuance.

Not long ago, during a conference with a student after a day of class that involved a lot of discussion of the 2012 presidential campaign, the student noted that there "didn't seem to be any conservatives in class that day." Before I could even respond, she added, "Well, actually, I'm pretty sure that guy that sits near me is conservative; he probably just felt uncomfortable speaking up." Whether or not the student was correct in her ideological assessment of her peer, there can be no doubt that this sort of thing happens in classrooms every day, in every university—and, as Harkin points out, in Berlin's classrooms. What goes on in the minds of these students? Do they feel like they're the "democratic agents" of our scholarly discourse, or do they feel marginalized, passed over in silence by the discourse of the class? The answers will vary, and they will be hard to know, but they are an inevitable classroom presence, standing in tension with the words that the instructor reads, speaks, and writes.

When I finally walk up the steps of the Bingham Humanities Building to defend this dissertation, I will see many students, faculty, and staff. Their bodies will be inscribed with thousands of histories, and their minds will be animated by untold millions of reflections upon these histories. The totality of it will be beyond my comprehension. And when the sound waves of their voiced words collide with the walls of exposed concrete, they will fade away as echoes through the hallways' mystifying angularity.

CHAPTER 2: PROCEDURAL APPROACH

At its inception, modern composition studies defined itself in contrast to an image: Somewhere in a hazy, indefinite past, class is about to resume. The students quietly await the arrival of their teacher. Rows of desks are arranged in a neat, stark square. The students are nervous. A few days ago, they had turned in their theme essays on Sophocles' *Antigone*—an exposition of that centuries-old play's plot, setting, characters, style, and the author's intended theme—and the teacher had made it jarringly clear that she was altogether disappointed with the student's progress thus far that semester. Their knowledge of the rules of verb agreement had been woefully inadequate; their comma placement was farcical; their paragraphs' topic sentences were flimsy, lacking lucidity. The themes are to be returned today, with corrections and set-in-stone grades, and the students know that if they don't demonstrate significant improvement, the teacher will be none too pleased. One student anxiously jiggles his knee. Another stares grimly at the wall clock. A third tries to stifle a cough.

The teacher strides in. Clearing her throat, she takes her seat at the heavy wooden desk at the helm of the classroom. She reaches into her leather satchel, pulls out a stack of papers, and slaps them on the desk with a splash. Her fingers drum rhythmically upon the desktop as her eyes scan the room, pausing briefly at times to direct a steely glare at certain students—most conspicuously at a boy named Thomas, at whom she aims a stern scowl for several tense seconds.

With her thumb and index finger, the teacher grasps one corner of the paper atop the stack, lifts it, and dangles it in front of the class, as if holding the tail of a diseased rat that had just met its demise in a snap trap. The students lean forward anxiously. Even

from the back of the room, they can see the lines and loops of red ink scrawled upon the paper, the meaning of which as yet unknown. *This,* the teacher intones, *is unacceptable. For homework this evening, you shall all reread chapter three of your grammar textbook, and diagram the sentences in your theme essays* **properly.** *You shall then rewrite your essays* **properly.** *This assignment will be due tomorrow—no exceptions, no excuses. We will also be diagramming sentences in class today.* She rises from the chair, eyeing the students coldly as she does. She grabs a piece of chalk, turns to the chalkboard, and begins writing a sentence. *Thomas, you shall diagram the first sentence. Now, step up to the chalkboard please.*

Such is the nightmarish image, reminiscent of Ralphie's classroom in *A Christmas Story,* that has come to be called "Current-Traditional" pedagogy. It is the harsh, old-fashioned, regressive, ideologically-unenlightened way. There are numerous turns of phrase that might be associated with this approach: "Drills and skills." "Unyielding teacherly authority." "Teaching writing as a product, rather than as a process." "Emphasis on cosmetic correctness." "De-emphasis of students' personal experience." "Gallons of spilt red ink." "The politically unconscious dark ages, before we were aware of such things as 'ethnocentrism' and 'marginalized subjectivities.'" But thankfully, the thinking goes, we have moved far beyond this. Peter Elbow and Donald Murray helped us understand that writing must be imagined—and practiced—as a fluid, inventive process, and that at the earliest stages of writing at least, correctness was less important that content. Mina Shaughnessy showed us that what we call "grammatical errors" can actually be a sign of positive growth. James Berlin unveiled the false consciousess that was so much more likely to suffocate and stymie students in the Current-Traditional

classrooms. Sure, the field has its share of problems and open questions, but at least, the thinking goes, we have moved beyond tightly-regimented drill-and-skill procedures that dominated the past.

Due to a dearth of contemporaneous research, it is difficult to know precisely what went on—and, to an extent, continues to go on—in current-traditional classrooms. Nevertheless, scholars have offered some educated guesses. Robert Connors, citing Kitzhaber, posits that current-traditional pedagogies "represent an unrealistic view of the writing process, a view that assumes writing is done by formula and in a social vacuum." (*Composition-Rhetoric,* 254). James Berlin traces the current-traditional tendency all the way back to George Campbell's *Philosophy of Rhetoric* (1776)*,* and its emphasis on cosmetic correctness, as well as its eradication of invention from the writing process (*Writing Instruction… 21-22).* And in *The Methodical Memory,* Sharon Crowley unleashes a litany of polemics against current-traditionalism, faulting the approach for grounding its rhetorical practice in universal principles of mind, nature, and language. While these reasonable minds can, and do, disagree on many points, a common vein connects them: current-traditional pedagogy is overly rigid and formulaic; myopic towards the emergent complexity of the writing process; and unconscious of the social, ideological, and political forces that shape the course of this process.

In many ways, modern composition scholarship was born as a corrective to current-traditionalism. However, while we are not without knowledge of current-traditional pedagogy, we cannot go back in time and drop in on a 19th century composition classroom, The field, then, is defined in contrast to an image of current-traditionalism that may be as much phantasm as fact, a ghostly Derridian "presence"

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floating over a void, in relation to which we assert our existence. Nonetheless, whatever it was, we seem to have left it in the dust long ago—and this, I submit, is probably a good thing. Yet, in some ways, the spectre of current-traditionalism continues to haunt us. At universities across the U.S., professors from a variety of fields complain about the inability of their students to compose even a simple email properly, and fret that they need more overt grammar instruction. "Literacy crises," often more perceived than real, have periodically agitated the public at large for decades (the earthquake of "Why Johnny Can't Write" still produces occasional aftershocks). And the recent uproar surrounding Richard Arum and Jospia Roksa's *Academically Adrift* (2011), which skewers higher education in the United States on the grounds that students aren't being highly educated, stands as but one prominent example of this pressure from without and within. Whenever this pressure arises, calls for "returning to the basics"—i.e., to approaches like current-traditional pedagogy—are inevitable.

Composition will not, and should not, embrace the kinds of practices associated with the above image of current-traditionalism. But in certain respects, it is returning to and revising some aspects of older, more "classical," more rigid and formulaic pedagogical approaches. In many ways, the popular *Writing Arguments* composition textbook bears little similarity to the above representation of current-traditionalism, but faint resemblances can be gleaned. It may not pontificate on the value of diagramming one's sentences as one writes, but it often appeals to what might be called a top-down procedural strategies: learn the basics of "rhetorical triangle," and then apply this knowledge to your writing; understand how each example sentence only partially integrates the concepts of "reasons, warrants, and conditions of rebuttal," and then

"create arguments to support the warrants in support of the partial arguments" (84). This is not overt grammar instruction, but it is functionally parallel: *Learn a system, and then apply it. Repeat until proficient.* On its surface, this appears to be much more current-traditional-like than, say, Peter Elbow's freewriting exercises in which writers forget every rule they've ever been taught, and plunge boldly forth into the unknown, the undiscovered, the uninvented.

In this chapter, I will analyze contemporary the procedural pedagogical tendency (or neo-classical rhetorical pedagogy, as it might be called), and consider the tensions that emerge in its application. In reality, what we label "procedural pedagogical approach" is, like any pedagogical approach, expansive and internally heterogeneous; to study every facet and variation of it would be a book-length project in itself. So here, I will focus on the concept of *kairos* as a teachable rhetorical strategy and, by extension, the rhetorical agency a writer would presumably acquire if she were to apply this strategy effectively.

Kairos, of course, has a long history as a rhetorical term. The concept was shaped and reshaped by numerous classical Greek thinkers working more or less independently, and, as such, it was marked by multiple, overlapping definitions. As Phillip Sipiora notes, one can identify "almost a dozen different meanings of *kairos* in Greek drama alone" (*Rhetoric and Kairos,* 18). The idea of *kairos* animates Aristotle's definition of rhetoric as "the faculty of observing, in any given case, the available means of persuasion" (*Rhetoric*, 6). It is embedded in Isocrates' description of educated people as "those who manage well the circumstances which they encounter day by day, and who possess a judgment that is accurate in meeting occasions as they arise and rarely miss the expedient

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course of action" (Sipiora,13). And for Gorgias, the sophist, the meaning-generating nature of *kairos*—that is, its potential for rhetorical and interpretive readjustment in accordance with varying circumstances—supplants the Platonic notion of "pure knowledge" in Gorgias' more relativistic worldview (McComiskey, 22-23). The meaning of the term, then, like the meanings of all terms, has never achieved a settled consensus. There is an intersection at which most of the definitional Venn diagrams converge: *kairos* can be said to denote, roughly, a rhetor's awareness of and responsiveness to a particular rhetorical context. It is this definition of *kairos* on which this chapter relies.

The chapter can be roughly divided into two parts. First, it will develop a deconstructive—or reconstructive--critique of procedural pedagogy, through the lens of *kairos.* More specifically, I will consider the rhetorical concepts of agency and *kairos* in light of Alain Badiou's *Being and Event,* a philosophical text that attempts to explore and define the ineffable material forces that influence our thoughts and words in ways beyond our control. Badiou's analysis highlights a problematic that lies at the core of procedural pedagogy and, as I later discuss, at the core of all pedagogies: the tension between rhetorical textbook's tidily teachable strategies, and the messiness and volatility of real-world rhetorical practice. The goal of this section is to paint a fuller, if more troubled, picture of composition practice, one which might be entitled "A Rhetor Implementing *Kairos*-Seizing Strategies." In other words, this chapter highlights the messy interaction of logical and relatively simple composition theories with the labyrinthine complexity of practice.

The other section will turn this complexification on its head, and consider the extent to which the categories of "procedural pedagogy" and "process pedagogy" are less

separable than is sometimes assumed. The aim here is not to dissolve the (indissolvable) tension, but to meditate on how this tension both plagues and motivates the discipline, and how it reveals itself as a paradox that the field of composition currently inhabits, has always inhabited, and will forever inhabit. In a sense, this chapter aims to resist today's academic climate of professional specialization and territorialization, of competing "schools of thought" that debate over which school might have slightly firmer grasp on truth. In illuminating the debate, in all its nuance, complexity and paradoxicality, this chapter essentially asks: What does it mean to assert that both sides of the debate are correct? And not only that, but what does it mean to assert that each side of the debate actually *is* the other side in important ways? What if process pedagogy has more in common with procedural pedagogy—and, indeed, current-traditional pedagogy—than we have previously thought? And if so, why is important for us to emphasize these overlaps?

James Kinneavy's 1994 article, "Kairos: A Neglected Concept in Classical Rhetoric," did much to re-popularize *kairos* within rhetoric and writing studies. For Kinneavy, *kairos* is defined as the "right or opportune time to do something, or right measure in doing something" (221). Put yet another way, *kairos* can be understood as a decisive and timely rhetorical intervention, made when the conditions of a situation are right for just such an intervention. For example, let us say that a first-year composition student has received a grade on his paper that he views as unfairly low. That student could, immediately upon receiving the grade, jump out of his seat and harangue the professor with a verbal tirade; this would be an example of poor *kairos,* as it is unlikely that the teacher would be persuaded by such a rhetorical move (indeed, she may even notify the campus mental health services). On the other hand, the student could quietly

return home, consider the teacher's commentary, and then, still disagreeing with her, compose a restrained and well-reasoned two-page response to her comments. The teacher may then be swayed to raise the grade, but even if she were not, the student's response would surely stand as a better example of *kairos* than would the series of shouted invectives.

For Kinneavy, and for the many composition scholars who heeded his call for a reintroduction of the concept, *kairos* had profound implications for classroom practice. If implemented, it meant that students needed to compose persuasive writing that was relevant to their careers or real-life interests, and that their audience needed to be real-- i.e., not their teacher. Kinneavy himself is unambiguous on this point: "Real publication of the students' papers, in any local or state or national medium, directed to real audiences for specific purposes, is ideal for any composition program" (237). In a first-year composition course that taught *kairos,* then, a student might write (and submit) a newspaper editorial decrying the defunding of Pell grants. Or, as the top-selling *Writing Arguments* textbook, which notes the importance of students' "understanding the real-world occasions for argument" suggests, a student might write a persuasive paper for another academic department (xxxii). Leaving aside for now the question of whether writing an essay solely for a teacher cannot also be considered *kairotic*—after all, persuading a composition teacher to give one a high grade for the course would seem to be an opportune intervention within a particular set of real-world conditions—*kairos* aimed to wrest writing away from the "artificial" bubble of the traditional classroom, and deploy it into a world of "real" discourse, where effective rhetoric has real effects.

Writing Arguments provides a series of tips aimed at helping students determine

how to seize the *kairotic* moment:

1.) As you analyze the argument from the perspective of *kairos,* consider the

following questions:

a.) What is the motivating occasion for this argument? That is, what causes this

writer to put pen to paper or fingers to the keyboard?

b.) What conversation is this writer joining?

c.) Who is the writer's intended audience and why?

d.) What is the writer's purpose? Toward what view or action is the writer trying

to persuade his or her audience?

e.) To what extent can the various features of the argument be explained by your

understanding of the *kairotic* moment? (118-19)

This list of questions constructs the student in a particular way: as a sort of

distanced, critical observer who approaches rhetorical situations formulaically. The

method is analogous to that of an offensive football coach who studies the opposing

team's formation on a given play, calls a time-out, and then considers his own team's

formation in light of the opposition's, perhaps redrawing his diagram of Xs and Os in

order to maximize the chances of his squad's offensive success. The list's objective tone

borders on positivist: "What conversation is this writer joining?" seems to imply that

there is only one conversation to identify, and that it is, moreover, readily identifiable. On

the other hand, the list alludes to a messier, more subjective dimension of *kairos*, hinted

at in the last question, with its qualifying words ("*to what extent* can the features... be

explained by *your* understanding"). The list may read like a simple instruction manual,

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but its neat linearity lies in tension with the messier and less predictable vicissitudes of the student's rhetorical situation.

Of course, some students will succeed more than others, and perhaps the ideal student who can determine the answers to all the questions is meant to be more of a capital 'I' "Ideal Student," an image of perfection that is unreachable in practice but which, when striven for, increases the effectiveness of one's writing. But the implication still stands: Students aim to be rhetors that exert calculated control over their rhetorical acts. And with this rhetorical power comes a power over reality not only in the sense that the student can access some partially hidden truth (e.g., the true purpose of a given author's text), but that they can intervene in the conversation at hand and shape the conversation itself, and by extension the world, with their words. This is capacity is implied in *Writing Arguments*, in that in contrast to some composition textbooks, many of its sample essays are not standard representatives of "academic discourse," but are examples of public discourse: op-ed pieces in newspapers; Al Gore's Nobel-prize acceptance speech in which he calls for a more vigorous and serious international response to climate change; a Jonathan Rauch essay on the benefits of biotech agriculture, originally published in the widely-read *Atlantic* magazine. Regardless of the extent to which these essays sway public opinion, there is no doubt that their intent is to sway it, in a very real way.

And rhetoric can certainly alter discourse in this way: Martin Luther King, Jr.'s rhetoric, for instance, galvanized a political movement that granted some long-withheld rights to millions of disenfranchised African-Americans. Or, more provincial to composition studies, Peter Elbow and Donald Murray's work enacted a broad shift in the

way language was taught in the academy and beyond. Here, however, I want to complicate this kind of rhetorical efficacy, through the lens of rhetorical agency. In another chapter, I argue that cultural studies pedagogy, while aimed at helping students develop into agents capable of giving voice—and increased political legitimization—to their subjectivities and the discourse communities they represent, is nonetheless limited in power, given that power in society is also determined by factors that lie beyond the reaches of language—e.g., the forces of skin color and financial capital. Here, I want to examine the forces that confound *kairotic* moments even as they make them possible--forces with which even wealthy white male writers must contend. Namely, I will use Alain Badiou's theory of the "event" as a way to highlight the inherent unpredictablity and volatility of *kairotic* situations, and the unintended consequences that accompany "rhetorical agency" as defined by a particularly dominant conceptualization of it. I will also aim to complicate and refine this conception of rhetorical agency.

Alain Badiou's *Being and Event,* first published in French in 1988 and translated to English in 2006, is a landmark philosophical opus. On the surface, both its method and its aims—using Zermelo-Frankael set theory as a way to redefine the role of contemporary philosophy vis a vis other fields of inquiry—may seem utterly divorced from concerns over *kairos* and/or composition studies. However, for all his philosophical innovations, Badiou is positioned, however awkwardly in some senses, within the Continental tradition that spawned the likes of Deleuze, Foucault, Althusser, and Lyotard—theorists whose work has had deep, if often implicit, implications for the humanities in general, including composition studies. Indeed, scholars such as James Berlin (2003) and Lester Faigley (1992) see post-modern Continental philosophy as a

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bedrock of social-constructionist critical pedagogy. And notions such as the post-modern "subject" and the idea of "competing historical narratives," still prevalent in the pages of the discipline's most widely-read journals, are generally used in tacit reference to these philosophers, even if the terms themselves have gained so much currency that explicit citation is often unnecessary. Badiou, however, moves this philosophical tradition in a much-needed new direction, revitalizing it by responding to some of the most common criticisms of postmodernism (e.g., the charge that its focus on language and representation precludes the possibility of both ontology and the subject; Badiou, in contrast, seeks to develop a sturdy foundation for the subject, and argues for existence what could be called a capital 'T' ontological Truth). But even as it bolsters Continental philosophy, it also complicates it, attempting to reconcile it by highlighting some of the problems and dilemmas that that tradition, and thinking beings in general, must inevitably confront. In this chapter, I am not interested in the specific mathematical formulas that Badiou produces to support his thesis; I am untrained in mathematics, so am unable to discern their validity, or lack thereof. Furthermore, I am not concerned with whether all the details of his arguments are "correct" or not. As Godel's "incompleteness theorem" proves, in terms of mathematics—I use it here as an intuitive metaphor—no system is capable of proving itself. My use of Badiou's work is simply to toss a wrench into the composition conversation, to view it through a fresh lens, to mash the systems together and see what knowledge is generated.

In *Being and Event*, Badiou aims for nothing less than the full-fledged renovation of ancient Greek ontology's "ruined temple" (23), and the revitalization of the philosophical quest for truth, which he sees as having grown enervated in recent decades.

"Truth has two illnesses," he proclaims in *Infinite Thought.* "In my opinion, it is suffering from linguistic relativism, that is, its entanglement in the problematic of the disparity of meanings; and it is also suffering from historical pessimism, including about itself" (39). In other words, as Badiou sees it, the insights of poststructuralism—undecidability, difference, inescapable representational bricolage, etc.—have cultivated an unhealthy cynicism towards the grand, age-old concept of truth. Badiou wishes to dispense with this cynicism and develop a philosophy that, while recognizing the insights of poststructuralism, also tackles the question of truth—with a capital "T." In doing so, Badiou also seeks to resolve some the tensions between Continental philosophy and analytic philosophy, its much more formalized and logical-positivist counterpart that dominates philosophy departments in the United States. The scope of Badiou's project, then, spans from Hellenic to the deconstructive, and stands as a Herculean attempt to upheave and rejuvenate Western thought. It also stands as a self-reflexive example of the very processes he describes; as he remarks in the translation's preface, the book "does not lend itself to immediate comprehension"—a fact that, I hope to show, is precisely the point.

Badiou begins by outlining a problem whose roots can be traced all the way back to Parmenides, a 5th century BCE Greek thinker: "What *presents* itself is essentially multiple; *what* presents itself is essentially one" (23). Here, Badiou is referring to an ontological quandary that has baffled philosophers for millenia: Being, or the real, appears to have a plural quality; after all, as any sentient organism knows intuitively if not abstractly, there appears to be a variety different objects and phenomena in the world. This perception, however, must be squared with the notion that all these multiples must

somehow add up into a singular whole, the "one," to be described ontologically. In other words, it is evident that the real, as presented to us, appears as a multiplicity, yet it seems patently wrongheaded—multiple dimensions in the universe notwithstanding—to speak in terms of "the reals," rather than of "the real." Another way to conceptualize it is to consider that while the tangible universe is heterogeneous, it could presumably be boiled down to its constituent, atomistic parts: perhaps, as modern theoretical physics suggests, tiny strings of energy that take on different properties by vibrating at various frequencies, a sort of subatomic symphony out of which the entire universe emerges. When all these strings are taken in sum, what do we name the sum they constitute?

Ontology, thus, is essentially the study of the presentation of multiplicity *vis-a-vis* the elusive "one." In light of this, Badiou sees mathematics as the ideal epistemic approach with which to wrestle with Parmenides' conundrum. If the universe is presented as multiples, mathematics can present[2] this universe by distilling it into pure quantity; this is what leads Badiou to his provocative assertion, "Mathematics is ontology." In particular, it is one axiomatic system within the field of mathematics, Zermelo-Fraenkel set theory, that Badiou sees as providing the theoretical tools required to ontologically present the one. And within this, there is one theorem of particular interest to Badiou: Russell's Paradox (originally discovered by Ernst Zermelo, but first published by Bertrand Russell). The paradox is commonly described as the impossibility of a "list of lists that do not contain themselves." Somewhat more concretely, say that you have three separate grocery lists—one for baking supplies, one frozen dinners, and one for

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[2] For Badiou, set theory ontology, unlike language, is non-representational: it does not "signify" an exterior concrete world. However, it embodies, or functionally mirrors, the concrete world's multiplicity. As the translator points out, set theory "does not posit being outside itself but detains it within its inscriptions; it unfolds being performatively" (xxiv).

produce—none of which contain references to themselves (e.g., the baking supplies list contains flour and vegetable oil, but does not contain the term "baking goods"). Now say that you want to compile these lists into a meta-list (or meta-set), based on the fact that all of these lists share non-self-referentiality. This set is the "list of lists that do not contain themselves." Thus arises the paradoxical juncture: The meta-set is such a list *in itself*, insofar as it does not list itself as being among the multiples. But if it included itself on the list, it would no longer meet its own requirements, because then it would become a "list of lists that *does* contain itself." This is an important assertion, because historically ontology has generally sought to depict being, or truth, as a kind of unified fullness. This tendency spanned centuries and animates a host of philosophical precepts, from Plato's theory of forms to Hegel's theory of a dialectical triplicity leading to an Absolute Spirit at the end of history (*Phenomenology of Spirit*). But the paradox means that such unity is mathematically impossible: there is simply no way to assemble the multiples into a grand overarching set.

Badiou deduces from this paradox that, in fact, the "one is not." The ontological multiples that philosophers have been struggling with for centuries are purely and *only* multiple. If one tried to compile them all into a single set, a single "being," the paradox would stymie their efforts, because there is no set that can include all sets. In other words, it is mathematically impossible to create an overarching set that can encompass all other sets (and the multiples contained within); therefore, there is no way to reveal, even in theory, the grand cosmic unity that ontology has traditionally pursued. From this, Badiou draws a conclusion that, for him, reconciles the classical ontological pursuit of pure truth with the postmodern contention that absolute, universal truth is inaccessible (or, as

Richard Rorty puts it, "no God's-eye point of view, no skyhook provided by some contemporary or yet-to-be-developed science, is going to free us from the contingency of having been acculturated as we were" [13]).

Put roughly, Badiou asserts that being can, in fact, be presented as sets of multiples, coherent and comprehensible. However, since Russell's Paradox demonstrates that such a set can never be complete within itself, there must always be hidden "multiples" that lie outside of the set we perceive, ready to wreak havoc on the self-contained system to which we have grown accustomed. According to Badiou, these hidden multiples, which he refers to as "indiscernible," are where the "real" is located. An absolute truth, a being, exists after all.

This is not to say, however, that truth itself is much more readily perceptible than it had appeared during Derrida's heyday. Badiou goes on to outline the concept of a "truth event," the site of which he defines as "an entirely abnormal multiple; that is, a multiple such that none of its elements are presented in the situation" (175). An event is a cataclysmic moment, a sort of ontological ground zero, where an indiscernible multiple is "forced" into a preexisting set, or "state of the situation" (104), ripping the situation's coherence asunder. So when an indiscernible element insinuates itself into a situation—an inevitability for Badiou, given Russell's Paradox—the set must reconfigure itself in light of this new element in order to maintain its internal consistency. As a concrete example, say that someone has a plate full of apples. One could say that "redness" is the basis for this set (or situation) of apples. But if an orange is added to the plate, "redness" can no longer function as the common denominator. One must therefore rename the basis for this set—e.g., "fruit"—in order to maintain its meaning. And one could then add, say,

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an onion to the plate, which would shift the set to "food that grows from the ground"; and then perhaps a baseball, which would shift it to "round objects;" and so on. An event, then, is that which inserts itself into a given situation, confusing matters, causing us to scramble to re-comprehend that situation.

Of course, an event need not—and for Badiou, in fact could not—be as mundane as a plate full of spherical edibles. Badiou divides the ontologically-constructable universe into four domains, or "truth procedures:" love, politics, science, and art. Any time something unexpected, undetectable, and confounding occurs within one of these domains, something which forces society to reassess and reshape that domain, said occurrence can be described as an "evental site." Badiou's standards for what counts as an event are rather lofty; he lists as examples "the appearance, with Aeschylus, of theatrical tragedy; the irruption, with Galileo, of mathematical physics; an amorous encounter which changes a whole life; the French revolution of 1792" (46). So within art history, Picasso's inauguration of Cubism and Shakespeare's plays were major events; within science, the discovery of pennicillin; within love, the moment when a person realizes that their beau is, indeed, the one they want to marry and cherish forever (though if they later decide to divorce them, that moment could perhaps also stand as an event).[3] More concretely, consider the French Revolution. This transformative moment of political upheaval marked the end of the French monarchy and the inception of a secular democratic republic. Its shockwaves reverberated throughout Europe, portending the demise of monarchies elsewhere. And while it had something of a precedent in the American Revolution, it was, by and large, indiscernible: it was abrupt, calamitous, and

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[3] It should be noted that for Badiou, natural events do not count as events; only events that introduce something new and transformative to the realm of human affairs achieve the status of event.

no one really saw it coming. This unwelcome (for the monarchy, anyway) intrusion of being into the established order ruptured the surrounding situation. But Badiou sees opportunity—and even ethics itself—emerging from these ruptures. When the order is fractured, we have an opportunity to, as he terms it, pledge "fidelity" to the disruption, to act upon it ethically. We do this in spite of our inability to fully comprehend the truth's nature and magnitude; after all, as Badiou puts it, "[truth]... is indiscernible in the language of the situation" (396). Truth may drastically alter the ways in which we use language to describe the world, but it remains inaccessible: we can only "perceive" in terms of language's reordering. Pledging fidelity to an event and responding to it ethically is thus is a way of attending to truth, or performing a "truth procedure." We can never really know what hit us, but by identifying the site of impact and analyzing it, we can forge a kind of mediated connection with truth.

In this case of the French Revolution, the people of France pledged their fidelity by beheading the king and queen and developing the concept of universal human rights. Before the revolution, a bicameral legislature was not part of the discernible French situation, but after the revolution, it was, and the situation then changed to accommodate this indiscernible. Of course, even after a post-evental reconfiguration, future events will still occur, destabilizing situations further and demanding new truth procedures. And again, we will never see them coming—if we could, they would not be events. But the evental process will continue forever. Our world will be continually wracked by forces beyond our awareness, and we will continually struggle to keep the ship afloat via innumerable innovations and strategies.

But what does this have to do with *kairos,* and with teaching writing? On one level, it can function simply as a description of occurrences in writing and in classrooms, insofar as it can function as a description of anything that occurs in existence. Any perceived "event," from the Virginia Tech massacre to an unusual experience that a writer has while working on a memoir, could stand as a rough or metaphorical example. And we can pledge "fidelity" to these events by passing stricter gun control laws, or by revising the memoir so as to accommodate the life-changing experience. On this level, it would seem that *Being and Event* has little to offer scholars outside of philosophy, other than a dinner conversation topic that can make one appear well-read and intellectual. On another level, however, it complicates some of the notions of *kairos* and rhetorical agency that presently dominate composition scholarship.

Unsurprisingly, there are multiple and competing theories of what constitutes an "agent," or "student agent." But for many scholars, as Cheryl Geisler points out, "concern with the question of rhetorical agency arises from the postmodern critique of the autonomous agent." Postmodern and poststructuralist theory deconstructed the idea of humans having a single, stable identity, and replaced this notion of identity with a configuration of multiple (and often frictional) ideologies and and cultural perspectives aligning in a provisional "subject formation," which is itself always subject to flux and realignment. Along with this redefinition comes a heightened emphasis on the external forces that shape an "individual." For instance, the structural Marxist Louis Althusser, argues that a subject is produced by an "interpellation" of a person into a broader, preexisting ideological framework. For the question of agency, the implications of this are immense. An "agent" cannot be conceived as an autonomous individual who

challenges an exterior world, because a subject and the exterior world are interwoven and mutually constitutive (there is no separate "other" to engage with in the traditional sense). Furthermore, since the subject is constructed by forces beyond its full comprehension and control, the very notion of agent as a "person who acts in an intentional manner" is problematized, because intentionality is muddled by the complex forces that an actor confronts and is shaped by. One cannot even fully know oneself, much less the world and what one is attempting to do within it.

Within composition scholarship, the postmodernist challenge to agency and subjectivity is addressed in Lester Faigley's *Fragments of Rationality*. Here, Faigley recognizes the difficulty that confronts a postmodern subject grasping for agency and autonomy:

> Postmodern theory… would situate the subject among many competing discourses that precede the subject. The notion of 'participation' itself becomes problematic in its implication that the subject can control its location and moves within a discourse… [Postmodern] theory understands subjectivity as heterogeneous and constantly in flux. The present frustration of those… who have used notions of community as a critique of the autonomous individual, but then have had these notions of community unravel into complex sets of power relations—is where to locate agency in a postmodern subjectivity. (226-27)

Faigley contributes to the project of solving this problem by using Lyotard's concept of the *differend* as a bedrock for a postmodern ethics. Lyotard takes a constructionist approach to the problem of ethics, rejecting the idea that ethics can be located outside of preexisting discourse. Indeed, as Faigley points out, Lyotard's book on this topic, *The*

Differend, is cross-referenced in a way that makes the text infinitely self-referential and circular. The effect of this is that there can be no "complete" reading of the text (236). *The Differend* folds in on itself, creating a labyrinth of language from which there is no exit. For Lyotard, language itself is a kind of moebus strip: even if there is a being exterior to language, it is not accessible to us.

Lyotard locates ethics in the act of linking phrases that "put into play a conflict between genres of discourse" (in Faigley, 237). There may not be an ethics external to the discursive bricolage, but it is possible to forge novel connections within it, and the responsibility we have towards the connections we make is, for Lyotard, a site of ethical action. And for Faigley, this connection-making serves as a way for composition students to become ethical rhetorical agents. Faigley recognizes some of the limitations of this framework, e.g., some marginalized groups may not be "able to participate in the in democratic pluralism when they lack access to organizational and informational resources" (238). He also acknowledges that his postulation is incomplete. While Lyotard usefully theorizes subjectivity at the "microlevel" of local phrase-linkages, it does not fully resolve the problems of agency in the postmodern subject; as Faigley puts it, in the end Lyotard "does not offer more than a call to justice" (239). But more recent composition scholarship aims—much like Badiou—to move beyond postmodern agentive dilemma, and towards a theory of the subject that clarifies what it means to speak of rhetorical agency and, by extension, of *kairos.*

In "Rhetorical Agency as Emergent and Enacted," Marilyn Cooper contends out that, Faigley's tentative proposal notwithstanding, post-modern and post-structual theories of the subject tend to

deny that a subject can 'have' agency. The new subjects are assumed to be so

fragmented that they are incapable of coherent intentions or actions, and agency is

merely a position into which they are interpellated, a role they can perform or a

node they can occupy temporarily. (423).

This assumed ephemerality of agency results from the idea of the decentered

subject: if the subject is conceived as little more than a fluctuating nexus of competing

ideological and social constructions, then, to paraphrase Gertrude Stein, there isn't any

"'them' there." Even if Lyotard's *differend* opens up the possibility for a kind of agency,

this does not necessarily mean that coherently identifiable agents are creating the effects

of agency. For if the postmodern subject is determined largely by intersections of various

others, then what appears to be "individual agency" would be better described as

"multiple others converging temporarily on a locus, and generating first-year composition

essays when they do so." In other words, we end up with agency—or the effects of

agency—without an actual agent. This is a problem for composition pedagogy: if our

students cannot "possess" agency, then they cannot possess rhetorical efficacy either.

For Cooper, the only way to formulate a viable theory of agency is to bring about

"the death of not only the modernist subject but of the whole notion of the subject" (432).

Key to the eradication of the subject-object binary is Humberto Maturana and Francisco

Varela's notion of autopoiesis. Autopoiesis is a biological concept that describes living

systems as "structurally coupled" with their environments, i.e., situated within dynamic

dialectical processes in which an organism and its environment constitute and

reconstitute each other mutually. Understood through this lens, agents are neither

autonomous nor interpellated into the other; rather, the agent and the other "continually

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restructure themselves as the structure of each unit responds in its own way to perturbations from the other" (427). It is in this autopoietic process that Cooper locates agency.

The upshot of this is that everyone is already an agent. Agency is everywhere and inescapable. On the surface, it may seem as if agency's ubiquity renders it a useless concept. After all, if we all already have it, then why should we worry about helping students "acquire" it? The answer is that while agency may be universal, effective harnessing of that agency is not. After all, while all students may already be agents, it is obvious to anyone who has taught a semester of first-year composition that some students appear to be more agentive—that is, rhetorically effective—than others. For Cooper, the difference lies in the extent to which one possesses "openness to other possibilities, to other opinions, to the voices of others" (441). If rhetoric can be characterized as deliberation between multiple agents, with each agent aiming to change this or that agent's mind regarding this or that issue, then this kind of openness is essential to the very existence of rhetoric. One cannot be persuaded if they refuse to be open to alternative views, and if persuasion is impossible, then rhetoric is futile. Indeed, the root cause of much-lamented congressional dysfunction and gridlock in the United States can be understood as a lack of openness between members of Congress—and this implies a failure of agency itself. (It should perhaps be noted that this lack of openness is not uniformly spread across Capitol Hill. Cooper identifies Barack Obama as an exemplar of openness, and attributes much of his rhetorical prowess to this openness. On the other hand, when Richard Mourdock, the 2012 Indiana Republican candidate for Senate, asserted that "bipartisanship ought to consist of Democrats coming to the Republican

point of view," it became apparent that not everyone in Congress is taking their agentive responsibilities seriously.)

Badiou's *Being and Event* also attempts to resolve the problem of the decentered postmodern subject, and Badiou's solution to the problem has the corollary effect of casting rhetorical agency in a new light. For Badiou, the subject arises when an event occurs, fidelity is pledged to the indiscernible, and a truth procedure is initiated. As he writes: "the definition of the subject: that which decides an undecidable from the standpoint of an indiscernible" (407). In other words, the subject is formed, transiently, at the interstice of a preexisting situation and the truth that punches through it. In the context of Badiou, the tightly interwoven—and in some ways coterminous—relationship between knowledge, truth, and truth-procedure leads to a reframing of the concept of agency: a "rhetorical agent" can be understood as a person who identifies an event and responds to it with fidelity and ethical action.

It must again be acknowledged that Badiou does not view event, and the subjectivities that can emerge from them, as common occurrences. As he puts it in *Une Soirée Philosophique,* "the subject is rare" (24-25). This is because, for Badiou, the event itself is rare: although he does not offer many concrete examples, the supposition seems to be that only in extraordinary circumstances—Aeschylus' tragedies, or Leonardo da Vinci's painting of the "Last Supper"—will a true "indiscernible" surge into and shatter ontologically constructible reality. He implies that a true event is nothing less than a catastrophic schism in the existing order of human knowledge, one that dramatically reroutes the course of history. If we operate under this assumption, then my earlier examples of events—e.g., lovers getting divorced—are utterly wrongheaded. So does this

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mean that, if Badiou's theory is used as a model for rhetorical agency, we must concede that the chance of acquiring agency is lower than winning the lottery and being struck by lightning—both on the same day?

In a word, no. One way to tackle the problem is to argue that, despite the monumental influence of *Being and Event* on Continental philosophers since its French publication in 1988, the frequency with which "events," however defined, occur remains a matter of vigorous debate. As Patrick O'Connor notes, Derrida, who developed his own theory of the event, depicted a "much more radical and frequent usurpation" of the established order (151). As I have pointed out, Continental philosophy, for all its sweeping explanatory power, is not exactly susceptible to either empirical confirmation and/or falsification; there is no way to "prove," in an objective sense, whether Derrida or Badiou forwards the most "true" theory regarding the frequency of events. And, as I have also mentioned, it is because of this unfalsifiability that I view Continental philosophy not as a means of evaluating the efficacy of real-life classroom practices, but as a kind of heuristic that enables us to consider real-life practices in different, unconventional terms—terms that can help us perceive gaps and mishaps in our thinking. Reading one system in light of a competing system often teaches us new things about both systems, as well as things that lie outside them both. Given this, one could just say, "I prefer Derrida's theory to Badiou's, and since Badiou has not explicitly debunked Derrida's theory, I'm going to run with it." However, there is another approach that I find more attractive.

Badiou's theory of the event seems to hinge on the punching-through of an indiscernible into knowledge as a *totality*. In other words, an event is something that

absolutely *no one* could have foreseen. However, no individual consciousness, nor any community of individuals, is privy to the totality of human knowledge; it possesses but a minute sliver of it. For this reason, it is quite possible to—at risk of bending and stretching Badiou's theory beyond his approved limits—consider that even if an instance occurs that would not qualify as an "event" for Badiou, due to it already having been subsumed into human knowledge-as-totality, could nonetheless be virtually indistinguishable from an event to a community of people who are utterly unaware of the instance's subsumption. Indeed, Badiou calls indiscernibles indiscernible for a reason: even if our known world is being torn asunder, we still cannot know with certainty whether or not we are confronting a true evental caesura. Yet we are responsible for pledging fidelity to these ruptures anyway, because if we didn't, we'd never pledge fidelity to anything, be it an event or not. Agency is enacted through this blind struggle, this grasping in the dark in search for novel possibilities and new spheres of knowledge. We cannot control the frequency or nature of events, but we can control our vigilance and openness towards them and, through rhetorical action, try to suture the rips and tears in the existing order. Whether or not we grapple with events on a daily basis is immaterial. It is the grappling—in and of itself—that counts.

In terms of rhetoric and first-year composition, Badiou's theory of the event leads to a refinement of the definitions of and relationships between *kairos* and rhetorical agency. Badiou's sparsely-occurring events—overthrowing a long-ruling monarchy and establishing a constitutional republic, or ushering in a new artistic paradigm—are clearly *kairotic* under any definition of the term. But if seizing a *kairotic* moment is understood to be the process by which we seek out and respond to what we perceive as "events," or

to other ruptures that, even if they are not true events, nonetheless stand as an opportunity to expand the realm of knowledge—then the term's umbrella widens to encompass many more potential rhetorical situations. Generally speaking, first-year composition students must contend with an untold array of anxieties and uncertainties. They must confront any number of "academic discourse's" many incarnations, most of which will be alien to them; struggle to appropriate the "independent adult" identity in spite of the vestigial remnants of adolescence that shadow them; venture off into an unexplored territory known only as *hic sunt dracones,* and then compose a five-page essay that effectively analyzes this territory, to be turned in before class next Monday. Read in this way, most any first-year composition assignment can be viewed as a kind of *kairotic* moment. Our students—particularly, but not exclusively, the traditional fresh-out-of-high-school 19-year-olds—will be continually and heavily pummeled with "indiscernibles," with the real, with truths that they have not yet confronted but must confront, whether they like it or not. And first-year composition is one of the arenas of this barrage, this struggle—and it's often a uniquely important one, in that many courses allow or encourage students to engage with these events through process-oriented writing. Every time a student is asked to charge forth into this *terra incognita* and tango with unknown dragons, their personal "situations" are disrupted, on however small a scale, and they must find a way to not only repair the damage, but do so in a way that actually edifies their situations. Unless all the students simply recycle old pro/con papers on abortion rights that they wrote in 10th grade, this process plays out in every classroom to some extent.

Admittedly, this is a truism in many ways. That first-year composition students struggle with uncertainty is not news to anyone who has been a first-year student. But in

light of a particular dominant conception of *kairos*—that is is scarce, and extraordinarily difficult to grasp—a different picture emerges: *kairos* is everywhere, in every classroom, all the time. First-year composition is a veritable cornucopia of Badiouian micro-events (though, of course, the students may perceive them as quite macro, indeed). This complements Cooper's suggestion that, rather than placing agency, carrot-on-a-stick-like, atop the proverbial Everest, we should toss the notion of agency as a acquired empowerment out the window, and emphasize instead "responsibility" and "openness." Or, as Badiou might put it, a vigilance toward the evental "others" that can both shatter, reshape, and strengthen our worldviews.

But however ubiquitous *kairos* may be, ubiquity does not equate with tractability. *Being and Event* may have attempted to reconcile the one with the multitude, but the resultant ontology is far from a seamless—or even intelligible—whole. That indiscernibility is so central to Badiou's evental universe is telling: *kairos* may be commonplace, but the truth procedures by which it materializes are fraught, uncertain, arising from volatile void that roils behind the veil of the constructible order. One can respond to a *kairotic* event, and even develop a formulaic procedure for doing so, as the *Writing Arguments* textbook does. Indeed, as any experienced writer knows, it is always good to form a plan before intervening in potentially *kairotic* rhetorical situations, and even Badiou's terminology—truth "procedures"—point toward the formulaic nature of composition. But our procedures will always be tainted with errancy and purblindness. It is out of this dynamic--and often conflicting--interplay between our deliberate rhetorical posturing and the vicissitudes of the indiscernible that *kairos* and agency emerge.

The chaos and conflict that so often arise when well-laid plans (e.g., a formula for *kairos*-grasping) collide with concrete reality are elucidated in Lucy Suchman's landmark critique of artificial intelligence research, *Plans and Situated Actions.* Though published in 1987—which may be viewed as a veritable paleolithic era when to comes to research in computer and machine technology—Suchman's contentions remain remarkably relevant today. She argues that the dominant paradigm of her time regarding AI—that intelligence involves the analysis of a problem, then a devising of a plan, and, finally the execution of the plan—is, while not precisely incorrect, a deeply insufficient and simplistic description of human cognition. Citing Boden's example of this process:

> If one intends to buy bread, for instance, the knowledge of which bakers are open and which are shut on that day of the week will enter into the generation of one's plan of action in a definite way; one's knowledge of local topography (and perhaps of map-reading) will guide one's locomotion to the selected shop; one's knowledge of linguistic grammar and of the reciprocal roles of shopkeeper and customer will be needed to generate that part of the action-plan concerned with speaking to the baker, and one's financial competence will guide and monitor the exchange of coins over the shop counter. (Boden, qtd. in Suchman, 44)

Indeed, such planning and execution is an important, integral aspect of human problem-solving ability, as is well-known to any rhetor who has analyzed her audience prior to putting words to the page. But people are not exactly automatons, either. We do not approach the world as if our craniums were packed with cogs and wheels that whirr into action every time we make a trip to the refrigerator; we do not consciously map out a comprehensive blueprint for rising up from the sofa, navigating down the hallway,

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opening the fridge door, retrieving the pitcher of iced tea, etc. Or, perhaps more accurately, we *do* do that to some extent, but not in the same way that an anthropomorphic robot with circuit boards for brains and software programs for thoughts would do it. In fact, we perform this task, and countless other tasks, much more adroitly than any currently conceivable robot ever could. This is largely because, unlike any robot that exists today, we can rip our well-laid plans to shreds at any time if they happen go awry, and then plan anew, improvise.

This limitation of current AI technology, Suchman notes, is reflected in her recounting of a 1960s project to build a robot that can "navigate autonomously through a series of rooms" (29). The robot could achieve this feat by observing the room, plotting a path through the obstacles contained therein, and then following the path. As long as the environment remained undisturbed after the robot had charted its course, it was successful. But if the obstacles were moved around, the robot was hopeless—after the blueprint had been devised, it could no longer observe the room, so it just bumbled about, bumping into objects, lost in the proverbial dark. The robot's plan, in filtering out as "noise" crucial information about its environment, was simply too inflexible. But a human on her way to the fridge would simply recognize that that, for instance, her husband was standing in hallway and blocking her path; so rather than knocking into him, she would merely walk around him, or ask him to move, "please." For Suchman, the upshot of this distinction is that plans are best understood not as rigid dictators of actions, but as *resources* that can usefully *inform* our action, as long as we so happen to find them useful in a given situation.

Regarding rhetoric and composition theory more specifically, Thomas Kent provides a theoretical vocabulary that helps ground the processes described by Badiou, Cooper, and Suchman in terms of localized communicative interaction—a useful framework when it comes to composition theory. In *Paralogic Rhetoric,* Kent develops a framework that echoes Badiou's, but grounded in a different, more socio-linguistically oriented foundation. Extending the work of Analytic philosopher Donald Davidson into rhetoric and composition studies, Kent concludes that reading and writing involves the "interpretation of another language's code," an interpretation we come to through what he calls "hermeneutic guessing." The term "guessing"—rather than, say, "ascertaining"— stems from Kent's rejection of the idea that language practices can be described in terms of "conventions" or "discourse communities." On this point, Kent follows in the footsteps of Davidson and, to an extent, Derrida. This rejection does not equate with the assertion that conventions don't exist at all; they do. But conventions are not the *foundation* of communication, as many frameworks (like social-constructivism) often assume. For Kent, because every communicative situation is different and no two interlocutors possess the same knowledge, there is no viable way to systematize all the local human interactions that occur. Rhetoric, therefore is *paralogic,* i.e., it cannot be codified. So hermeneutic guessing is bound up with the fact that because language cannot be systematized, our rhetorical choices, or guessing strategies—or fidelity pledges—are likewise impossible to codify. A writer can never know with absolute certainty whether or not her communicative guesswork will be effective, just as a reader can never know whether he will accurately guess the writer's intentions. Conventions, such as they are,

may help improve the precision of hermeneutic guessing, but they are hardly axiomatic. And it is through this dialogic guesswork that beliefs and knowledge are produced.

Kent's analysis of language's resistance to systematization further troubles procedural pedagogy's highly systematic approach to rhetoric. This is not to say that there is no substance to the contention that, for instance, effective rhetoric is often marked by the adroit blending of *ethos*, *logos,* and *pathos*, or that a successful seizure of *kairos* presents an argument in what appears to be an audience-sensitive and temporally prescient way. And there is no doubt that effective rhetors grapple with these concerns, even if only on a subconscious level (as tends to be the case in my own writing). Kent's analysis does, however, infuse these procedural strategies with a high degree of uncertainty.

As a hypothetical example, consider the classic case of the graduate student who wishes to publish his first article. He has read many articles similar to his own, and knows that it is important to have strong *ethos* when trying to nab that coveted initial publication. He attempts to achieve through what on the surface seems to be the safest and most obvious and route: In the first paragraph of the article, he cites other scholars who are addressing the same topic. "I'd better cite a lot of people here," he thinks, "otherwise, the editors will immediately mark me as some grad student who doesn't know his stuff yet." So he loads up the introduction with references; indeed, he includes nearly as many citations of the words of others as he does his own. Finally, he submits the article to the journal with cautious optimism, woefully oblivious of the fact that an over-cited introduction is often interpreted by journal editors as a rhetorical misfire particularly prevalent among grad students trying to publish their first article. Indeed, it is

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noteworthy that many of the cornerstone articles on rhetoric and composition—such as those included in the *Cross-Talk in Comp Theory* anthology—are marked by an unusual *scarcity* of introductory citations, relative to what most graduate students produce in their seminars (I have not conducted any empirical research on the matter, but I would not be surprised if the essays in *Cross-Talk* had substantially fewer citations, on average, than the total population of articles, for reasons I shall come to in a moment). A fair number of them even begin with personal anecdotes. Yet, to make matters even more confusing for our poor graduate student, the authors of the classic composition articles are often able to get away with personal anecdotes only because they have acquired the necessary ethos in the first place, by virtue of having already become established scholars. So our grad student is placed in the perplexing position of having to find some way to sprinkle his citations lightly enough to appear confident and professionally "arrived," yet not so lightly that he appears hubristic and glib. So much for for "rhetoric and composition discourse" being an easily systematizable, non-paralogic entity. And the strategies for projecting *ethos* found in *Writing Arguments* appear here to be just as likely to enfeeble his article as to invigorate it.

Read rather bluntly, all this implies that a rhetorical "blueprint" for apprehending *kairos* is akin to a software program that governs a robot's artificial frontal lobe. It may sound like a good plan; indeed, it may actually be a good plan. But when the messy work of executing that plan begins, the obstacles—or indiscernibles, or misfired guesses—that confront the rhetor may not remain as fixed and intelligible as we would like. Take, for example, a person who, on May 1, 2011, decides to publish a newspaper editorial in response to a recent article about the United States' inability to catch Osama bin Laden.

They might memorize *Writing Arguments'* formula, but any number of pitfalls could gape open: They may find that they don't fully understand the political discourse they are entering into, and that they don't have enough time to study it before their editorial is rendered a belated response to the article in question. Or, even if they do manage to compose something they perceive as effective, they can never be sure how an opposing view might respond—especially considering the fact that, if the editorial were published the next day, it would only be a matter of hours before Barack Obama announced that bin Laden had been killed. A critic of more procedural approaches to composition may even be tempted to think that, in light of so many potential "events" that threaten to vitiate the editorial's efficacy, the "instruction manual" approach to writing should be eschewed in favor of some other, more flexible rhetorical strategy: perhaps something like Elbow's "declaration of independence... from care, control, planning, order, steering, trying to get it right, trying to get it good," only in the absence of which he found that he could ultimate compose "decent stuff" (xvii).

But this would not be a debate-stopper. In fact, it would only be the beginning a debate that might turn out to be unresolvable. Here, a proponent of more procedural approaches, citing Suchman, might retort by pointing out that humans are not automatons, and that even if a given rhetorical "blueprint" is inefficient, it is nonetheless a useful resource that can inform our actions. A writer can acknowledge the limitations of their initial plan, and then resort to an alternative plan in *Writing Arguments* (there is no shortage of plans in that book), or even return to the original plan, reconsidering it in light of the new information that had been collected. If this were the case, then it would appear that, in many ways, *both parties were correct*. Preferred pedagogical approaches

notwithstanding, it is this paradoxical tension—i.e., a tension between contrary but equally correct *doxas* or beliefs—in its entirety that best describes the combination of systematism and dynamism within every act of rhetoric and writing.

Indeed, this tension can be found at the heart of Badiou's project. Despite his preoccupation with rupture, fluidity, and the general bedlam of material reality, Badiou grounds his theories in mathematics: a systematic philosophical springboard if there ever was one. The set theory with which he is concerned may lend itself to ambiguity more than some other subsets of mathematics, but he aims for maximum formal rigor, out of which the turbulence of "events" emerges. This tension can also be found in even the most ostensibly process-oriented (e.g., non-procedural) pedagogical approaches; as I show in another chapter, even Peter Elbow's *Writing Without Teachers* contains a certain amount of instruction manual-like rhetorical blueprints. It seems that no matter how radical or "bottom-up" a pedagogy is, no matter how unaligned it appears to be with *Writing Arguments,* a procedural component will invariably be present somewhere in the framework. Take, for instance, Gregory Ulmer's *Heuretics.* This is about as avant-garde as pedagogical approach could possibly be, aiming, first and foremost, to subvert and deconstruct theoretical paradigms in general, replacing them with original counter-paradigms of a writer's own design. But it achieves this objective through an "antimethod" (12) that is, in a certain sense, about as formulaic as a method could possibly be: the CATTt, an acronym for contrast, analogy, theory, target, and tail/tale (or invention). The CATTt is a sort of interactive algorithm, a virtual machine into which a writer "inputs" a particular framework (modernism, in his example), deconstructs it as it passes through the CATTt's stages, and then receives an inventional "output"

(postmodernism). Ulmer insists that the CATTt is not an algorithm, because it requires the writer's active participation (12). But while his argument is mostly persuasive, one could still be forgiven for mistaking it for an algorithm. And in any case, there is no doubt that for all its subversiveness and interactivity, the CATTt still demands an allegiance to its formula, an unwavering adherence to its prescribed, if open-ended, blueprint; at the same time, however, this allegiance leads to independence, to conceptual revolutions. In this sense, the CATTt and the *kairos* formula in *Writing Arguments* have a lot in common: the formula may be rigid, but its improvisational application to real-world rhetorical exigencies is anything but.

So when it comes to the distinctions between procedural approaches and alternative pedagogical approaches, it seems clear that there is no purity to the disparity: as discussed earlier, *Writing Arguments* is chock full of opportunities for student's imaginative, spontaneous interaction with the textbook; and Peter Elbow offers multiple writing "procedures," even though rhetorically, they come across more like "flexible, friendly advice." So while there are certainly substantive differences between Elbow and, say, Fulkerson, these differences are akin to those between total darkness and total light—both a scientific impossibility, because the former will always be contaminated by stray electrons from the latter; and not enough of the latter exists to completely fill all the spaces in which the former lurks. In practice, each approach implicitly advocates a least a sliver of the other's assumptions. And indeed, as much as composition teachers tend to view current-traditional pedagogy with the sort of disdain often reserved for the pre-women's suffrage era, there is no escaping the fact that, as Berlin and others have spent their careers pointing out, the teacher will always be at the "helm" of the classroom to a

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significant extent, regardless of whether she arranges the desks in a circle and nurtures democratic class discussion. She will always be frustrated with students' egregious grammatical *faux pas* and will make some effort to correct them, even if she eschews the red ink in favor of a more tenderhearted blue. She will always assign final grades, even if she permits repeated revisions; and in her flawed humanity, the grading will never be perfectly just, no matter how many peer-reviewed articles she reads about empowering marginalized discourse communities. Also, it might be worth noting that sentence-combining has been making something of a comeback recently.

Here is another truism: The composition classroom, like every other arena of human affairs, is mind-bogglingly messy, self-contradictory, troublesome, and overwhelming. It has consistently confounded our individual and collective intelligence; this is why scholarship continues to point out, usually correctly, the oversights and shortcomings of other scholarship. This is also why it is so endlessly interesting: these tensions are here to stay, forever. It's a Rubik's Cube with no solution, but one that our innate problem-solving faculties cannot resist toying with. One might argue that to highlight this affinity between procedural and alternative approaches is akin to boldly proclaiming that there will always be a slight gap between reality and humanity's perception of it: a truth so familiar that it doesn't require a chapter-length dissection. But I would submit that it is a truth so elemental that it can't be discussed enough, and that sometimes, in our struggle for professional status and tenure, in our institutionally-enforced fealty to specialization and territorialization, in our efforts to find chinks in the armor of existing scholarship and make a critical intervention, we forget just how perplexed we are by even the most basic problems of the field. We're in a maze, and

there is no exit. This is worth keeping in mind—as if we could prevent it from occupying our minds—as we fret over syllabuses and textbook options; as we pace back and forth across our living rooms trying to decide whether a particular student essay deserves a B- or a C+; as we, to paraphrase the historian Arnold Toynbee, try one damned thing after another, never getting it exactly right, but never abandoning our efforts to make these things work just a little bit better. And perhaps, in light of all this puzzlement, there is at least one thing we can know is true: that though events both large and small will to tear our assumptions asunder, we can choose to watch out for them, to pledge our fidelity to them, to remain responsibly open to them, even when—or especially when—they appear so alien that they seem like an alternate reality.

CHAPTER 3: PROCESS APPROACH

"In 1818, Joseph Jacotot, a lecturer in French literature at the University of Louvain, had an intellectual adventure." So begins Jacques Rancière's *The Ignorant Schoolmaster,* a 1991 analysis of the power dynamics between teachers and students. The year 1991 was a time of vigorous debate over this very topic within composition studies. In the preceding years, Peter Elbow had been fine-tuning his theory of the "teacherless" classroom, forwarding his philosophy of education in *Embracing Contraries* (1987); David Bartholomae, on the other hand, had published the *Ways of Reading* textbook— still a common fixture in contemporary composition courses—in 1987. This was also the time when Elbow and Bartholomae, in 1989 and 1991, began conversing about their competing pedagogical approaches—and began a conversation that would famously culminate in a very public debate within the pages of *College Composition and Communication* in 1995. However, despite the conceptual connections (and frictions) between Elbow, Bartholomae, and Rancière, the latter was never discussed—or even name-dropped—in either *College English* or *CCC*. Nevertheless, Rancière's account of a peculiar, 200-year-old pedagogical experiment is no less relevant now than it was then, and illuminates this core debate, which has always shaped and continues to shape the discipline: the complex, transactional relationships between knowledge, students, and teachers.

Jacotot was a teacher of, among other things, mathematics, ancient languages, and law. He had obtained a position at the Ecole Polytechnique. But when the House of Bourbon reclaimed power in France in 1814, he was forced in exile in the Netherlands. Fortunately, the king of the Netherlands was generous, and Jacotot secured a

professorship in Louvain at half pay. The trouble was that only few students at the

university at which he was assigned to teach were familiar with the French language, and

Jacotot knew no Flemish. He was a teacher who, like many teachers at the time, viewed

himself as a sort of "master explicator" who verbally transfers his authoritative

knowledge to the less-educated students. The presupposition here, as Rancière puts it, is

that an "oral explication is usually necessary to explicate the written explication," and

that, therefore, "the reasonings are clearer, are better imprinted on the mind of the

student, when they are conveyed in the speech of the master" (5). Under this assumption,

if the languages of a teacher and his students are mutually incomprehensible, then

developing an effective pedagogy would seem to be a Herculean, if not downright

impossible, task.

Nevertheless, Jacotot did what most any teacher in his predicament would do: the

best he could under the circumstances. Jacotot learned of a bilingual edition of Fenelon's

Telemaque, a didactic novel popular at the time among Enlightenment thinkers, that

ventured to fill in some of the "gaps" in Homer's *Odyssey.* He assigned the book to his

class and, through an interpreter, instructed them to study the French text with the aid of

the Flemish translation. The results of the experiment-by-necessity vastly exceeded

Jacotot's expectation of "horrendous barbarisms" (6). Not only were the students, without

any help from a master explicator, able to decipher the French text, they managed to

identify the key themes and concepts as adroitly "as many French could have done" (6).

Jacotot couldn't have known it at the time, but his experiment foreshadowed two

debates that have been broiling ever since the teaching of college writing gained a critical

self-awareness and concretized into a full-fledged academic field. The process movement

that began in the late 1960s and early 1970s revolutionized writing pedagogy by emphasizing the process of writing—brainstorming, drafting, revising, etc.—rather the finished product. One of the effects of this paradigm shift was to partially reduce the authority of the teacher and his sometimes-tyrannical red pen, and shift the balance of power towards the students who, rather than regurgitating teacher-mandated "themes," instead relied on a few basic precepts involving the writing process and actively explored themselves and their worlds through writing. Crucially, this placed the students' writing at the core of the classroom, along with the experiences, ideas and perceptions documented therein. In this chapter, I will read process pedagogy in light of Rancière in order to more fully explicate and complicate the mechanics and dynamics of classroom practices that aim to place students in the driver's seat, or at least give them partial control over the steering wheel.

The process approach, it should be noted, cannot be isolated from the debates that emerged from its frictive relationship with competing pedagogical approaches. These debates revolved (and still revolve) around a fundamental question: What is the most effective—and, for many scholars, politically progressive—way to constellate the relations between students, teachers, and knowledge? Should learning be situated within a more egalitarian and/or dialectical relationship between a teacher and her students? Is there a need for a strong teacher authority in any classroom? Is such an authority avoidable in the first place? To what extent should student writing be essayistic—in both the noun (a text written in the "essay" genre) and verb (to "essay" is to strive, attempt, explore) senses? To what extent should more formalized "academic writing" stand as the centerpiece of the course? Like any long-running debate, this one has taken on a variety

of shapes and forms, but the 1995 conversation between David Bartholomae and process

theory trailblazer Peter Elbow provides an unusually lucid example of it, and one that, if

read from a certain angle, is of utmost relevance to Jacotot's (and Rancière's)

recognitions. Stating their cases in the pages of *CCC*, Elbow and Bartholomae differ over

the extent to which the roles of "writer" and "academic" conflict. Put roughly,

Bartholomae maintains that teachers need to emphasize students' writing within

academic discourse conventions in order to gain literacy and empowerment with/against

this dominant discourse. Elbow, on the other hand, contends that while students'

appropriation of the role of "academic" is critically important, the role of the writer

should nonetheless be privileged. For him, this means that the classroom should be a

space in which students come to "experience themselves as writers" (78) via free inquiry

through writing. Inevitably, such inquiry can result in naive self-absorption. But as Elbow

points out, such pride (and even arrogance), along with a counterbalancing dose of

caution, is inherent to anyone—including academics—who are confident enough to see

themselves "writers worth listening to." Student writing is not only about words on a

page; it's also about self-perception, identity (re)construction, the affirmation of "I am a

writer." Ultimately, in such a classroom, it is the students who take ownership of their

writing—not the teacher to whom they must write "up."

Rancière casts the Bartholomae-Elbow debate—and the tendency toward process

pedagogy more broadly—in a new light, highlighting tensions that exist in every

composition classroom: the complex processes by which students learn and become

"agents," and the balance of power between teachers and students. The overlaps between

and fissures across this pedagogical triad are numerous, and often subtle. Elbow's

bottom-up, student-driven classroom parallels Jacotot's in some senses, but it is not congruent with it; more so than Rancière, Elbow's scholarship recognizes the practical ineluctability of teacherly authority, albeit a reduced authority aimed at empowering students. Along similar lines, while the teacher's power is pared down in Elbow's classroom, even he acknowledges—along with Barthomolae, although to a lesser extent—that the academy's institutional demands may require a certain level of teacherly dominance in the classroom; indeed, power relations are inevitable in institutions. And given the brevity of a semester, a certain amount of masterly explication may be necessary for the sake of pedagogical expediency. Bartholomae, too, plants a foot (or a toe, at least) in Elbow's territory when he affirms that students should "of course" have an opportunity to write what Bartholomae calls "sentimental realism;" however, he also feels he doesn't need to teach it in his courses (71). The categories, in other words, are not always clearly demarcated.

I will not argue here for a universal implementation of Rancière's "universal teaching" method (which would, if anything, transform my doctorate in Rhetoric and Composition into a useless scrap of embossed parchment). But by reading process theory, as well as the problem of teacher versus student authority, in light of Rancière, this chapter will aim to portray the political tensions that every classroom inhabits—not to provide easy answers or resolutions, but to dramatize the difficulty, if not impossibility, of circumventing them. Most teachers like to think that their classrooms are "student-centered," and Rancière pushes the concept of the student-centered classroom to its logical extreme. What does this say about our teaching, and the ideals that inform it? And, just as importantly, what does it mean for student agency?

"The only slogan that had any value," Rancière writes of Jacotot's radical pedagogy, "was equality of intelligence" (56). *All intelligences are equal.* Such a sweeping declaration may to raise the eyebrows of even the staunchest political progressives, this one included. Despite the fact that we are committed to the just and equal treatment of all students, is it not evident that some students perform better than others under the same circumstances? Of course, socio-economic background plays a role in student performance. It is difficult to stay attentive in class if your skin color brands you as inferior in the eyes of your teacher, or if you parents are too poor to serve you breakfast before school (a first grade teacher I know relates frequent anecdotes suggesting that low blood sugar levels in six-year-olds are a major contributor to "deficient" accountability test scores). But what about the two upper-middle-class brothers, who are treated lovingly and equally by their parents, but nonetheless end up on opposite ends of the academic success spectrum—one at Harvard, say, and the other in an "alternative" school for troubled teens? What about differences in brain wiring and chemistry? It is impossible to fully disentangle culture and intelligence, but surely there are biological factors that would undermine any myth of equal intelligence among all humans.

But for Rancière, these are the wrong questions to ask. For one, the difficulty in answering those questions, given our limited scientific knowledge about the human brain, the complexity of socio-economic factors' impact on cognitive function, and the bias inherent in culturally constructed assessments of "intelligence," renders any attempt to incorporate them into pedagogical practice dubious. It's as if speculative questions about brain wiring or breakfast availability among first graders are somehow, in a topsy-turvy

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display of mental acrobatics, reified into questionable answers: This student comes from a poor family and is a few grade levels behind his peers, so he must need more explicit top-down grammar (or math, or science) instruction; this student has wealthy parents, yet still struggles in class, so there must be something wrong with her brain chemistry (but not, of course, innate ability)—let's prescribe her some Ritalin.

Undoubtedly, such student plights are, in many cases, real. But for Rancière, the pedagogical approaches that so often address them are even more troubled (and troubling) than the students themselves. And the trouble for Rancière lies in part, in the fact that some students are labeled, explicitly or implicitly "inferior" to others, even if this inferiority is mitigated or offset by, for instance, inequitable economic forces far beyond that student's control—forces eloquently described by Mike Rose throughout his career, from his own childhood experiences as a (mis)labeled "remedial student" to his account of the oft-unrecognized intellectual acumen of waitresses, plumbers, and hairdressers. Other scholars who have investigated the interactions and confusions between culture and cognition include Mina Shaughnessy (who described basic writers as "natives" who need to become members of a social community) and James Paul Gee (who noted that students who struggle with basic reading and writing might also be masterful players of Pokemon—a game that is actually far more complex than the reading and writing with which they struggle—and questioned the utility of direct instruction for literacy skills in light of students' natural acquisition of such skills through daily immersion). Rancière is also troubled by the fact that the teachers themselves, by virtue of playing the role of the Keeper of Knowledge—"This poor student is not performing well in math, so I shall pull him aside and *explain* the theorems to him more

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clearly"—are complicit in this assumption of intellectual asymmetry in the classroom. Even if a teacher assumes that all the students are of equal intelligence, it is still quite possible for him to not believe that *everyone* in the classroom is of equal intelligence or ability: the teacher still occupies the lofty position of master explicator.

The preceding paragraph will, and should, raise a variety of red flags in the minds of many composition teachers: "But in my classroom, my students and I construct the class discussion collaboratively, democratically and dialogically." Or: "I don't assume that my students are less intelligent than me; on the contrary, some of them appear to me far more intelligent than I was at that age [I have certainly noted this in some cases]. But it is an indisputable fact that they are less *experienced* than I am, in the ways of both writing and the world, and one of my jobs as a teacher is to share this experience with them." These protestations may well be valid, but they also don't get at the heart of Rancière's contention. A key aspect of universal teaching is that it is concerned not only with the acquisition of knowledge and skills, but also with the socially contextual dimension of literacy—the power relationships between students, teachers, and institutions. To be sure, scholars have grappled with the politics of race, class, and gender in the composition classroom, but in practice, students are still assessed in terms of the writing skills they appear to have acquired by the end of the semester. What would a classroom look like if we graded students on how diligently they have searched for knowledge in the absence of teacherly explication—if we "graded them on effort," one could say? To this end, it is important to momentarily return to and clarify Jacotot's (and Rancière's) subversive pronouncement.

For Rancière we simply don't know enough about intelligence to assert, conclusively, that all intelligences are *not* equal. His supposition that they are equal is purely pragmatic: "our problem isn't *proving* that all intelligence is equal. It's seeing what can be done under that supposition. And for this, it's enough for us that the opinion be possible--that is, that no opposing truth be proved" (46, italics mine). But what use might we have in assuming that all intelligences are equal? ForRancière, the advantages of this supposition manifest in an intricate relationship between empowering pedagogy and liberatory politics. First and foremost, this assumption dispels with what Rancière considers to be the oppressive authority of the Master Explicator. But how is a teacher simply explaining the content of a book to students anything other than innocuous, or even helpful? "The pedagogical myth," Rancière writes, "divides the world in two. More precisely, it divides intelligence into two. It says that there is an inferior intelligence and a superior one"—the superior being the teacher, of course, and the inferior being the student (7). The sticking point for Rancière is that while the teacher, by functioning as a gatekeeper to knowledge and the power it brings, reveals (or explicates) knowledge to students, his higher hierarchical position remains inviolable no matter how much the student learns: "The book is never whole, the lesson is never finished. The master always keeps a piece of learning—that is, a piece of the student's ignorance—up his sleeve" (21). And whether or not the teacher is a good teacher—or even teaches correct knowledge—is irrelevant. The hierarchies inherent to the institution permit them to exert their authority in this way.

There are problems with Rancière's critique of explication; teacher-student relationships are, in practice, generally more nuanced than his account would suggest.

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For one, Rancière's portrayal of knowledge exchange echoes Paulo Freire's "banking method" of education, with knowledge being cleanly transferred from the teacher to the student, as if the information were being "downloaded" by the student neatly and mechanistically. However, this depiction contradicts Rancière's own description of language. As he puts it, any spoken word—and this must presumably include any word spoken by a Master Explicator—may be "sent off with the intention of carrying just one thought"; however the word becomes "a center of a sphere of ideas radiating out in all directions, such that the speaker has actually said an infinity of things beyond what he wanted to say" (63). In other words, words are multivalent and subject to interpretation. Under this assumption, a student of a Master Explicator would seem to not be so stultified.

But the usefulness of universal teaching to contemporary composition theory doesn't lie so much in its critique of the mainstream 19th century pedagogy it defines itself against. Its usefulness lies within itself. In universal teaching, the teacher can teach what she does not know; she must simply keep "verifying that [the student] is always searching" for answers in the texts (33). "What do you see?" the ignorant master asks her pupil. "What do you make of it?" (23). The teacher's "ignorance" opens a space in which the student's thoughts can freely flourish. The text being studied is what keeps the playing field level: "The materiality of the book keeps two minds at an equal distance, whereas explication is the annihilation of one mind by another" (32). The student, then, is given (almost) complete autonomy. Still, though, the teacher's presence remains, even if only as a motivating force, so not even Jacotot's classroom is entirely "teacherless." Is a purely student-centered classroom even possible? It would appear that it is not.

Aside from Jacotot's, the theoretical frameworks with which Rancière grapples

are, for the most part, those developed by prominent Hellenic philosophers (Plato,

Socrates, etc.). But as Kristin Ross, translator of *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* into

English, points out, Rancière's polemics have another, more contemporary, target, if only

tacitly: Pierre Bourdieu, the influential sociologist whose magnum opus, *Distinction: A*

Social Critique on the Judgment of Taste, has achieved canonical status in the humanities

in general, including composition studies. Put roughly, *Distinction* theorizes how

arbitrary taste-markers construct, embody and reinforce unjust socio-economic

hierarchies: An upper-class person who listens to the "Well-Tempered Clavier," for

instance, dominates, via taste distinctions, a person who prefers more lowbrow musical

selections (Bourdieu cites "The Blue Danube," but the latest pop-country or gangster-rap

smash hit could also stand as an example). Bourdieu's thesis sparked a flurry of

extensions, elaborations and applications and remains one of the most-cited texts in

cultural studies, particularly by politically engaged scholars who aim to use his theories

to move toward a more equitable society. If we can understand the mechanics of how

power is expressed through cultural signifiers, the assumption seems to be, we can

dismantle the oppressive machine, emancipating the disenfranchised as we do.

Among the more obvious counter to Rancière's arguments is that even if we

accept that masterly explication stultifies students, explication remains a necessary aspect

of teaching. Virtually anyone who has ever been a student could provide an anecdote of a

teacher whose overt clarification of a given issue or concept proved invaluably helpful.

The importance of explication seems even more paramount when the time constraints of

pedagogical situations are taken into account; if students need to become proficient in a

given skill before, say, the end of a semester, but one of them just can't seem to grasp it, then the committed teacher may well opt for the short cut, pulling that student aside and pronouncing, "I am here to show you how it is done." But citing Jacotot's successes—which caused quite a stir of excitement in Europe at the time, inspiring small legions of imitators—Rancière holds fast to the assumption that all intelligences are equal, and that all intelligences can therefore learn with a high degree of autonomy. Jacotot, he notes, repeated his initial experiment with a painting class (Jacotot had no expertise in the art of painting). By Jacotot's own account (if he is to be believed), it was a rousing success. The details of this success story point to two key components of the pedagogy: 1.) the role of the teacher, and 2.) the nature of pedagogical efficacy under Rancière's framework.

What is an ignorant schoolmaster, or "universal teacher" (as Rancière refers to it), supposed to do, if masterly explication is impossible or off-limits? The answer: to ensure that students are tackling the material with persistence and gusto: "[The universal teacher] will not verify what the student has found; he will verify that he has searched" (31). A composition teacher, then, may assign a difficult text (e.g., a bilingual essay by Gloria Anzaldua), but rather than explaining the meaning of the text to the student, she will simply verify that the student is making a serious attempt at wresting, or constructing, meaning from it. In answer to those who may point out that 18-year-old college freshmen are generally unequipped to engage effectively with such a difficult text, Rancière more or less concedes that the results of such an exercise may not be breathtakingly brilliant on the surface. As he admits in his discussion of Jacotot's

painting pupils, "Undoubtedly, there is a great distance from this to making masterpieces" (66). But for Rancière, this distracts from the larger, more important point:

> But it's not a matter of making great painters; it's a matter of making the emancipated: people capable of saying, 'me too, I am a painter,' a statement that contains nothing in the way of pride, only the reasonable feeling of power that belongs to any reasonable being. (67)

So for Rancière an emancipatory pedagogy isn't just about knowledge or skill acquisition; it's about *how* that knowledge is acquired. For if a student "gets used to learning through the eyes of others," he will forget how to learn through his own, and his stultification, and oppression, will only become more deeply entrenched (51). It is also about the emotional dimension of knowledge acquisition, the feelings of empowerment a student experiences when they proclaim their status as painter or writer. As Marilyn Cooper points out, following Bakhtin, emotion is a crucial and foundational aspect of agency, because "every concrete act of understanding is active: it assimilates the word to be understood into its own conceptual system filled with specific objects and emotional expressions" (Bakhtin, qtd. in Cooper, 438). Universal teaching aims to situate students' inquiry within their embodied experience—and with the social practices embedded within that experience.

Despite the subject-object relationship between students and teachers in Rancière's text, which sometimes suggests that the teachers liberate the students, it is important to (re)emphasize that for Rancière, the teachers, too, must become liberated; emancipation is, and can only be, a two-way street. Universal teaching aims to achieve this by placing students and teachers on an equal footing, working as a "community of

[ignorant, yet intelligent] equals" (21), whose social relations are tied to the text being studied. In "teaching" the book, the teacher simply allows the text to exist as itself, without any explication, and then invites the students to forge their own connections with and to the text. There is no suggestion that the text contains stable, accessible "hidden meanings" that only the teacher can fully unpack. For Rancière, nothing will do other than the total obliteration of the traditional teacher-student relationship, which leaves a level playing field from which new structures are built communally, from the ground up. In an echo of Freire: "Overturning the existing order would be just as irrational as the order itself" (88).

Of course, Rancière is a Continental philosopher, not a scholar of Rhetoric and Composition. But composition scholars have grappled with the matter for decades; a particularly notable example is Elbow's *Writing Without Teachers,* which was published nearly 20 years before *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*. But grappling with a topic, and even debating it at length, is not the same as resolving it. And I would submit that the unflinching radicalism of Rancière's approach illuminates these problems in soberingly sharp relief, reigniting and dramatizing them, raising questions about what we mean when we speak of our classrooms as being "student centered." In the remainder of this chapter, I will reread the perennial and ongoing debate over process theory—the processes it advocates, its still-disputed political stance (or, as some would argue, lack thereof)—in light of Rancière. Composition scholarship may have spilt barrels of ink since Donald Murray proclaimed that we should teach writing as a process, but in some ways, the shockwaves that that proclamation unleashed ripple just as strongly today. So

while Rancière's arguments may not strike us composition scholars as wholly original, they do, as I hope to show, rekindle one of our field's originary concerns.

The following passage was published over two centuries after Jacotot taught:

[In] proposing the teacherless writing class I am trying to deny something--something that is often assumed: *the necessary connection between learning and teaching.* The teacherless writing classroom is a place where there is learning but no teaching. It is possible to learn something and not be taught. It is possible to be a student and not have a teacher... I think that teachers learn to be more *useful* when it is clearer that they are not *necessary.* (Elbow, ix-x, italics in original)

Peter Elbow's *Writing Without Teachers* was not a normal writing textbook when it was published in 1973, and is unusual even today. It does not contain detailed instructions on the proper use of the semicolon. It does not provide examples of streamlined five-point essays. It discusses audience, but rather than taxonomizing the concept into abstract terms like "real," "imagined" and "invoked," it forwards images of friends reading each other's writing. And while he discusses, often in concrete terms, the idea of freewriting as a method to discover writing subjects, there is an absence of words like *stasis* or *topoi,* in either the classical or postmodern senses. In fact, the word "invention" does not appear in the book at all.

Elbow's aim was to provide a framework for a "teacherless" writing classroom; indeed, he even states that he "particularly want[s] the book to help students not enrolled n a writing class and people out of school altogether" (viii). The word *help* is indicative of Elbow's assumed role as a sort of non-teacher, at least in the conventional sense: The book does not exactly *instruct, tutor, lecture,* or *enlighten.* To borrow from Rancière's

lexicon, while the book does offer eminently flexible and polyvalent tips, hints and tricks, it keeps overt *explication* to the barest minimum. Theory abounds, but only in the most contingent, least rigid of senses: theory is not an inviolable framework, but a mutable cognitive catalyst, shifting in light of changing (or newly perceived) facts. Elbow does not hide any secrets up his sleeve; there is no *Writing Without Teachers Vol. II: For the Advanced Writer.* On the contrary, the gist of Elbow's book is that *no one keeps, or can keep, secrets from student writers.* Secrets emerge from the gaps in the freewriting that the student identifies, from the fruitful and readily pursuable tangents that lie just beyond the body of a first draft. The exploratory writer creates, and unveils, his own secrets.

It is true that the book contains the occasional declarative proclamation; indeed the first chapter begins with one. But they sometimes seem designed to efface, at least partially, Elbow's authority as a teacher: "The most effective way I know to improve your writing is to do freewriting exercises regularly" (3). This sentence, while assertive in tone, is packed with subtle signals suggesting that in the end, it is the reader of this book, and not Elbow, who will determine that reader's best writing practices. "The most effective way I know" implies two important points: First, the "most" implies that there is more than one way, even more than one effective way, to improve one's writing, and second, the "I know" suggests that regular freewriting is simply the most effective that *Elbow knows works for him, personally.* There is no reason to think (and the rest of the book implicitly supports this) that this injunction cannot be improved upon, revised, or customized for individual writers. The "I know" also highlights a key stylistic aspect of the book. In many places, it verges on (and sometimes is) a personal narrative piece. Rather than constructing himself as a lecturer on a lofty lectern, pontificating on

unimpeachable writing practices, Elbow comes across like an old friend, a guy sitting across the table at the bar or coffee shop, discussing his experiences in the friendliest of terms and leaving these experiences open to interpretation. So even when Elbow's rhetoric appears to be dogmatic (e.g., "Avoid anything more than one feeling, perception or thought. Simply write as much as possible" [61]), it is nonetheless filtered through this more general ethos of openness and elasticity. Its interaction with the reader is not entirely top-down, like an instruction manual for a universal remote control. The burden is on the student to figure out how to use the book, how to write with it and away from it.

That the student, not Elbow, has so much control over the steering wheel here helps explain why *Writing Without Teachers* is marked by what might be called a pedagogy of calculated chaos. One section is titled "Chaos and Disorientation," and is largely written in the personal narrative form described above; Elbow even, as he does at various points of the book, provides concrete examples of his own freewriting investigations, and all the confusion and conceptual anarchy that mark such investigations. "If the main advice people need to help make their writing grow is to start writing and keep writing," he writes, "their main experience in trying to follow this advice is the feeling of chaos and disorientation" (30). First, it is worth noting the use of the word "advice" rather than, say, "directive"; the vague (read: polyvalent) nature of the advice itself; and the invocation of "experience." Once again, Elbow represents himself as a real person speaking *with* a real reader, not as an unassailable authority speaking unilaterally *to* a reader—and once again parallels Jacotot's pedagogy in his emphasis on embodied emotional and social experience. Second, and more to the point at hand, Elbow's discussion of how randomness and chaos often precedes coherence in writing

(an experience that any reader of this chapter will be all too familiar with) draws attention, once again, to the fact that the burden of learning to write effectively lies with the student. All that really needs to be done is to write a lot, think about it a lot, and then write a lot more. Writers need to blaze their own paths through the wilderness of their free-written words, to become agents of their own essaying. Though confusion is inevitable, eventually—if the writer is persistent—the stew of competing ideas will coalesce and sharpen into focus.

So, although Elbow offers advice aplenty, this advice tends to be remarkably *simple* and unmystifying. For Elbow, there is no magical, abstruse writing formula that requires exceptional intelligence or effort in order to learn, no trove of complex secrets that can only be fully understood and elucidated by an ultra-masterful writer. Indeed, one of the most important aims of the book is to work against the idea that if a student cannot write well, it must mean that expert writers have some special, esoteric "trick" that enables them to do so, and that the novice writer must lack knowledge of this trick.

In terms of Rancière, Elbow may not be a strict "universal teacher." He offers a sort of avuncular advice, and offers it in the readers' home language, assuming they are speakers of English. But as I noted above, his advice, especially when read in light of the autobiographical and experiential style of the book, is not dogmatically "explicative." His discussion of disorientation and chaos, for example, suggests that there are aspects of the writing process that no teacher can explain for the student; the student must learn, and discover, on her own terms. His pedagogy, then, tends toward the Jacotot-ian end of the spectrum. To borrow Rancière's terms, the teacher cannot perform the "search" for the student; all she can (and must) do is "verify" that the student is searching, that they write

and keep writing. And in a way, the "classroom" of *Writing Without Teachers* is even more radically teacherless than Jacotot's, insofar as Elbow does not grade the reader's writing, does not hover over his shoulder to verify that he is, indeed, writing with consistency and tenacity.

Furthermore, unlike a mainstream education system that, as Elbow saw it, "made people who were smart think they were stupid" (xiv). Elbow more or less assumes, as the title of his later collection of essays, *Everyone Can Write,* indicates, that *all intelligences are equally capable of producing good writing*. Elbow's teacherless classroom may be messy and slow at times, as the students are charged with forging their own way through their writing, with little teacherly instruction. But the classroom's power is derived from this very messiness. As Elbow puts it in his discussion of students reading their own own work:

> One of the genuinely valuable aspects of the reading you get from the teacherless class is that in a sense it is inferior: it will have 'mistakes,' the reader will miss some meanings that a teacher would get. The most obvious example is that these readers give you better evidence of what is unclear in their writing. (128)

On the surface, this would seem to mean that students are skillful readers of their own work, simply because they produced it. But between the lines, there is an even more important point: The students are in control. They have power over their own writing. They are constructed as critical, capable, agents. And with this power comes confidence. Like Jacotot's painting students, who could exclaim, "I am a painter!", Elbow's students can self-assuredly declare: "I am a writer!" In this sense, then, Rancière highlights one of the most salient aspects of Elbow's classroom: It rejects, or at least seeks to minimize,

student stultification, emphasizing a kind of agency that does not merely entail an acquisition of skills or knowledge, but places great emphasis on students' perceptions of themselves—or experiences as themselves—as agents, as creators, as authors. Elbow notes that some critics of his pedagogy disparage it as "anti-intellectual" (147). But for Elbow, and by extension Rancière, this is precisely the point. When the hyper-intellectual, pedantic professor (and the cultural capital he wields) is removed from the equation, what is left? A student who, in the absence of a stultifying master, believes that she can write—and then proceeds to do just that.

Needless to say, however, Elbow's pedagogy was not, and is not, without its detractors. Among the more conspicuous critiques of Elbow's version of the process approach lies in the 1995 debate between Elbow and David Bartholomae, which occurred in the pages of *College Composition and Communication.* The debate's sticking point involves the amount of autonomous control that first-year composition students are granted over their own writing; or conversely, the extent to which teachers should work to situate student writing within/against dominant institutional conventions, as expressed through academic discourse ("a discourse" which, by Bartholomae's own account, "is a single thing only in convenient arguments" [62]). Elbowcontends that there is a "conflict between the role of writer and that of academic" (72). He laments this conflict, wishing that students (and, indeed, professors) could "inhabit both roles comfortably," but the tension exists nonetheless.

Elbow frames his argument in terms of the competing roles between writer and reader, in a kind of poststructuralist power struggle. Writers, on the one hand, want "to have readers actually interested in what was on their mind, what they intended to say,

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reading for intention" (75); readers, on the other hand, want to wrest the meanings they choose from the text, to assert control over the message received. This struggle is ineluctable. But Elbow maintains that teachers—not only the readers and evaluators of student writing, but ambassadors and embodiments of the academy's broader structures of power—should back off a bit, should withhold judgement (at least "till they revise" [78]), should allow students to take ownership of their writing and, once again echoing Jacotot's painting students, allow them to feel that *they are writers.* For Elbow, an excessive assertion of power on the part of the teachers stifles this sense of agency—a sense agency that all writers, including academics, have and must have in order to forward bold and compelling arguments. As Elbow puts it:

> We see this contest between readers and writers played out poignantly in the case of student texts. The academic is reader and grader and always gets to decide what the student text means. No wonder students withdraw ownership and commitment. I can reinforce my point by looking at what happens when the tables are turned and academics produce text for a student audience—that is, lecturing extensively in class. Here the academic also turns the ownership rules upside down and declares that in this case the writer-lecturer gets to decide what the text means. (76)

If this logic is taken to its extreme limits, then the teacher basically represents himself as a kind of well-intentioned totalitarian, taking absolute control over the meanings of student texts. Of course, few composition teachers would abstain from praising their students' writing and encouraging them to continue, but the essential gesture of textual domination is present any time a teacher grades a paper, and this

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domination, while a necessary component of teaching (if only due to institutional demands), nonetheless implies that the students are beholden to a teacher-master, a possessor of a hidden knowledge or expertise that can only be revealed through the suggestive flick of an ink pen. Elbow'simage of students withdrawing "ownership and commitment," then, can be read as the kind of shrinking away from authority and responsibility that Rancière's notion of stultification denotes. The implication is that students are, for the time being at least, incapable of composing compelling, convincing texts without the aid of a teacher.

So for Elbow, "the main thing that helps writers is to be understood; pointing out misunderstandings is only the second need" (77). This would seem to align his approach somewhat with Rancière's, insofar as the students are placed in a position of power and autonomy, capable of investigating the world through language on their own. Yet, there is a peculiar tension within Elbow's pedagogy, especially when his intervention in his debate with Elbow is read in light of *Writing Without Teachers.* And this tension can be located in the preceding quote: writers are to "be understood," but there is a still a need for "pointing out misunderstandings." This authoritative pointer-outer of misunderstandings—i.e., the teacher—is conspicuously absent from *Writing Without Teachers.* In that book, Elbow spends about a page discussing the uses of talking to other people about a written text, but there, the playing field appears far more level: "I write a paper; it's not very good; I discuss it with someone... Until I could see my words refracted through his consciousness, I *couldn't* say it [in a more effective way]" (49). In this account, there is no suggestion that the person with which the writer engages in a productive conversation is in any way smarter, or more of a writing "expert." The

discussion is politically and intellectually horizontal, as if equal minds are gaining insights through mutually constitutive, democratic, and dialectic dialogue. This parallels Rancière's classroom, where equal intelligences study the same text on equal footing, without the need for a master explicator. So why, in his conversation with Bartholomae, does Elbow imply that the classroom really does need a teacher after all, a person knowledgeable enough to identify "misunderstandings," on a more or less dogmatic basis?

This question could perhaps be answered via a thorough elaboration on one of Elbow's self-admitted worries. Elbow remarks that he values his students' writing of autobiographical essays, because they, as embedded as they are in domains of experiential knowledge familiar to the student, allow students to gain a sense of agency and power in their writing. But he also confesses some misgivings, fearing that if he encourages autobiographical essay, the students' writing risks devolving into self-absorbed navel-gazing and naivete, and may create or reinforce a student's self-perception as "a central speaker at the center of the universe" who doesn't need to fulfill the standard academic requirement of situating their writing in light of the writing of others (80). Bartholomae, to say the least, shares this concern.

"There is no writing that is writing without teachers," Bartholomae declares. And while he notes that he would universalize this statement to all writing contexts, for the sake of the essay, he says only that "there is no writing done in the academy that is not academic writing" (63). The parallelism of these two constructions is informative: Bartholomae specifizes [*Note: yes, that's really a word]* writing in general to writing "in the academy," and teachers in general to *academic writing*. Teachers, then, are on some

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level equivalent to, interchangeable with, or (at least) inextricable from the larger discursive domain that is academic writing. This conflation is central to Bartholomae's argument. If, as he argues, "academic writing is the real work of the academy," then students' acquisition of literacy in academic discourse should be the classroom's foremost concern. So if, as is likely the case, the teacher is the only person in the classroom who possesses a strong command of that discourse's conventions, then the teacher has a responsibility to function as a sort of benevolent gatekeeper to this discourse, explicating and demystifying it for students, proactively helping them to negotiate its arcane list of rules, regulations and practices. More broadly, the underlying assumption here is that power is something that is granted by an authority or institution; this stands in tension with Elbow's assumption that agency emerges from perceptions and embodied experiences of an individual.

For Bartholomae, the notion of a "teacherless" classroom is a myth. And not only that, a pernicious myth, one that, in trying to hide the teacher, "hide[s] the traces of power, tradition and authority present at the scene of writing" (63). This argument echoes a long and ongoing tradition in composition theory, a tradition inaugurated by scholars like Berlin and Bizzell, who, a decade before the Elbow-Bartholomae debate, demonstrated that no pedagogy is innocent, that no teacher is ideologically pure, and that these political contaminates of supposedly utopian, student-"empowering" classrooms need to be actively and transparently critiqued. To pretend that the teacher, and the discourse community she represents, can truly "relinquish her authority" not only ignores the fact that the moment a teacher walks into a classroom on the first day of the semester, her authority is thoroughly and permanently recognized by her students; it also turns a

blind eye to the very real authority that academic discourse is granted by institutions, which ultimately works to the students' detriment if they don't become literate in it. After all, few professors outside of composition will value the personal narrative form in their courses. If we don't prepare students for such courses, Bartholomae asks-—that is, if we don't teach them academic discourse conventions—then what are we preparing them for?

Bartholomae connects Elbow's pedagogy to a "desire for an open space, free from the past (65)." But for him, no such space exists. Political asymmetries permeate every classroom, and however intimidating academic discourse may be to a first-generation, working class college student, pretending that it is not, finally, the real (writing) work of the academy won't make it disappear. Furthermore, there are no grounds for assuming that the genre of personal writing "is more real than the other... in assuming that one is real writing and the other is only a kind of game academics play" (68). This seems particularly true in light of post-structuralist theory, which deconstructs notions of the unitary subject and the tidy determinacy of language. Of course, one can imagine a classroom that, while still aiming for a student's ability to say, "I am a writer!", does not lapse into what Bartholomae refers to as "sentimental realism" (69). And indeed, with today's more internationalized student demographics, we are seeing more and more students who, given their cultural conditioning, are deeply uncomfortable with "personal writing" as it is traditionally and narrowly defined. But one could still encourage students to write in whatever form that makes them feel like writers, be it a personal essay or a more disinterested analysis of phenomena with which the student is familiar, first-hand or not. Even so, however, Bartholomae's critique seems to hold steady: How are we

teaching responsibly if we are not teaching students the rules our own language, the language of the academy?

Despite its power, however, even this critique has limitations. For one, it could easily be reversed and maintain a comparable power: How are we teaching responsibly if we are not teaching students how to perceive themselves as agents, how to declare themselves writers in an Elbowian sense? Are not both aims equally laudable? Furthermore, the aim of "preparing" students to write in accordance with academic discourse conventions has its own set of obstacles. "Academic discourse" is not a monolithic entity; a biology professor might favor conventions that differ from a sociology professor, and preferences may vary between a mathematical sociology professor and a feminist sociology professor—or even between two feminist sociology professors. How does Bartholomae's pedagogy account for this? What does his pedagogy look like?

His influential *Facts, Artifacts, and Counterfacts,* co-written with Anthony Petrosky and published in 1986, outlines a pedagogy that seeks to take on the responsibility of teaching students academic discourse. And unsurprisingly, it is a markedly different book from Elbow's. To begin with, it hinges on a definition of "empowerment" that is decidedly dissimilar from Elbow's, even though aspects of it may seem congruent on the surface: "A course in reading and writing whose goal is to empower students," they write in the introduction, "must begin with silence, a silence students must fill. And it must provide a method to enable students to see what they have said--to see and characterize the acts of reading and writing represented by their discourse" (7). They flesh out this objective by creating a 16-week course, during which

students are presented with comparatively difficult academic texts, composed in a discourse with which the students have only a "hesitant and tenuous relationship" (8). Over the course of the semester, through a project of reading texts in light of each other, reconsidering (and re-reconsidering) their interpretations of these texts through writing, and composing original interventions into the critical conversation that these texts represent, students gradually come to appropriate, more comfortably, the identity of "academic"—and, along with it, "a way of seeing themselves at work within the institutional structures that make their work possible" (40). For Bartholomae and Petrosky, who view Elbow's pedagogy as a kind of protective shelter against the "real work" of the academy, this approach encourages students to do the same kind of work that, say, professional composition scholars do—and in doing so, they imply that this is how agency is acquired.

But do professional composition scholars do the same kind of work that, say, biology and sociology professors do? To some extent, yes: they all work with and against an established knowledge domain. But at the same time, conventions will vary; the kinds of texts assigned in Bartholomae's course bear little stylistic resemblance to a laboratory report. Indeed, the methodological connections between the work of biology and the work of Bartholomae's (and Elbow's) version of composition studies are general enough that Rancière can be inserted into the connective web as well: They are all involved with, as Rancière puts it in describing universal teaching, "observing, comparing, and combining," with "learning, repeating, imitating, translating, taking apart, putting back together" (68).

Furthermore, does the course really begin "with silence, a silence students must fill?" On the one hand, it certainly does: Students are required to wring their own meanings from the texts, and compose their own essays in response to these interpretations. But on the other hand, there is nothing "silent" about the assignments; the teacher's expertise and authority looms over each assignment, instating directives both subtle and not-so-subtle. For instance, here is an excerpt for a writing assignment in response to *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings:*

> Here's how we want you to write...We're not interested in summary, because we have read the book, too... Tell us... what stands out for you. Then, tell us what things in your own life you can associate with what has stood out for you. These associations may be ideas of yours, feelings, experiences, memories of other books, of other courses, or things people have said to you. You want to move from recording what stands out for you as significant to a way of accounting for *why* these passages or sections are significant. It's very important that you write...for an hour of straight, uninterrupted writing. (54).

Several aspects of this passage are eye-catching. For one, it is noteworthy that, despite the apparent pedagogical gulf between Bartholomae and Elbow in their 1995 debate, two aspects of this assignment are rather heavily informed by the theories forwarded in *Writing Without Teachers:* Its advocacy of a vigorous, freewriting-esque process ("an hour... of writing"), and its suggestion that students connect the texts being read to their personal experiences. Bartholomae might reply that his version of experiential writing is different from Elbow's, since rather than having them write in what he sees as Romantic, solipsistic isolation, he asks them to—like an academic—

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consider their pre-existing ideas and the unfamiliar texts relationally and dialectically. But Elbow might retort by arguing that, when read closely (and even not-that-closely), it becomes clear that *Writing Without Teachers* promotes no such navel-gazing. In fact, the above assignment, which Bartholomae would argue represents a particular kind of "academic" thinking, dovetails near-perfectly with Elbow's definition of the "cooking" stage of the writing process:

> one piece of material (or process) being transformed by interacting with another: one piece of material being seen through the lens of another, being dragged through the guts of another, being reoriented or reorganized in terms of the other, being mapped onto the other. (49)

One might also ask whether the "Romantic autobiographer" is even a possibility, given that even if one attempts to write as hermetically as one can, then each writing project will be shaped by the realizations wrought by the project preceding it. An actual hermit, living and writing in the woods, might write from summer to autumn to winter to spring only to find that, when he sees the summer the next year, it appears very different from how it did before, in light of, say, his winter writing. In this sense, then, if one is writing consistently, then it is virtually impossible to *not* follow an academic-like procedure. The only difference would be textual content of the procedure, be it a series of *College English* articles or the blooming, wilting, and re-blooming of a daylily. And style, of course, would depend simply on this content, for one can hardly write about an academic article without appropriating some of its stylistic features (terminology, etc.).

A person aligned with Bartholomae may then reply that Bartholomae's assigned texts are more rigorous, difficult and "academic" than Elbow's, and therefore prepare

students more sufficiently for the "real work of the academy." Perhaps, perhaps not, but it is immaterial: Elbow's pedagogy, especially when read in light of Bartholomae's "counter"-pedagogy, is fully compatible with rigorous academic texts (or any other kind of text, for that matter). For that matter, Jacotot's pedagogy is compatible with them, too, and even overlaps with them, for like Bartholomae's pedagogy, Jacotot encourages the analysis of difficult academic texts through "learning, repeating, imitating, translating, taking apart, putting back together"—which, in turn, sounds a lot like Elbow's concept of "cooking." What, then, are the core tensions that animate and separate these approaches? And what do they mean for student agency? I will conclude this chapter by suggesting that the light cast by Rancière's radical approach, along with Marilyn Cooper's recent scholarship, illuminates these tensions.

As noted earlier, a key component of Jacotot's universal teaching is the student's ability to proclaim, "I am a painter" (or "I am a writer"). This parallels Elbow's aims, but its emphasis on the embodied perception of oneself as an agent also parallels Marilyn Cooper's theory of agency as forwarded in "Rhetorical Agency as Emergent and Enacted." Emotions, she argues, prepare us for actions (430), and moreover, "individual agency emerges ineluctably from embodied processes." (443). That agency is "ineluctable" is crucial for her analysis, because for her, agency is everywhere, all the time. Nevertheless, an agent can be an agent without realizing it—and this is the sticking point. Bartholomae, in stressing the importance of students learning the conventions of academic discourse, places a strong emphasis on teachers, institutions, and the customs and conventions associated with them. This is certainly not to say that he is not concerned with students, but it does suggest that he views agency as something taught, or granted, to

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the students by the teachers—and that it has always been this way, and must be this way, because we would be doing students a disservice if we failed to "prepare" them for the "next step." Elbow, on the other hand, locates agency in the student, and if he doesn't go as far as Cooper in saying that it's ineluctable, he does suggest that it is already in everyone, and that it just needs to be unleashed—hence, he wrote a book titled *Everyone Can Write.*

> Rancière, like Cooper and Elbow, locates agency in the student.
>
> Know yourself no longer means, in the Platonic manner, know where your good lies. It means come back to yourself, to what you know to be unmistakably in you… Stumbling is nothing; the wrong is in diverging from, leaving one's path, no longer paying attention to what one says, forgetting what one is. So follow *your* path. (58)

That is not necessarily the path that Bartholomae gestures towards, which is lined with the discourse conventions of professors and academic institutions. And the *emotional* experience of perceiving this agency in oneself is paramount for Rancière. Emotion is so important, in fact, that Rancière compares a student in a universal classroom to a poet:

> He communicates as a poet as a being who believes his thought communicable, his emotions sharable. That is why speech and the conception of all works as discourse are, according to universal teaching's logic, a prerequisite to any learning. The artisan must speak about his works in order to be emancipated; the student must speak about the art he wants to learn. Speaking about human works is the way to know human art. (65)

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In universal teaching, then, the student shares her emotions with the teacher through language. Moreover, this is a *prerequisite* to acquisition of agency and intellectual empowerment. As discussed earlier, there are so many overlaps and compatibilities between Elbow's version of process theory and Bartholomae's pedagogy that they don't look all that different from each other when one peels away the rhetoric and gets to the core of the matter. But this tension between the emotional experiences of students, their perceptions of themselves as empowered creators of knowledge, as "poets," and the demands of institutions and the professors that inhabit them stands as a key tension between Elbow and Bartholomae. For all their disputation of the role of academic discourse in the classroom, that is not the central question of the debate, not least because, both pedagogical approaches are compatible with academic discourse acquisition. The question is, what does it mean for a student to be "empowered?" What does it mean for a student to be an "agent?"

Universal teaching was, and still is, a radical pedagogical approach, and one that is not likely to be implemented in many first-year writing classrooms. But just as, say, Karl Marx's radical reflections on capitalism and communism can help us understand the foundation of what the more moderate Democratic Party is striving for, the extremity of Jacotot's approach helps reveals the core of process theory and the tensions that it inhabits. In *Everyone Can Write,* Elbow recalls his experiences in a university "system:"

> In a genuine sense it was 'my system'—but it seems as though the way my system functions (except perhaps for deeply secure people) is to make it feel as though it isn't my system unless I give up on part of what is central to me and go along with it. Perhaps this is how structures of power and elitism function. (25).

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In response to this anxiety about giving up on part of what is central to him, Jacotot might say, *"*Follow *your* path.*"* He might also bemoan the stultifying effects of these structures of power, and accuse Bartholomae of reinforcing them. This would not dissolve the tensions between Elbow and Bartholomae—as the latter correctly emphasizes, the institutions exist whether we like it or not, and we must find a way to please them if we are to succeed within them. But Jacotot's advice would still be valuable, and worth considering as we navigate the varied and conflicting demands of the composition classroom and the students in it.

CHAPTER 4: TRANS-LINGUAL APPROACH

Globalization sparked by a post-Fordist world economy has done much to invigorate the intellectual ecologies at colleges and universities across the United States. The emergence of alternative cultural, and ethnic perspectives serves to fruitfully complement and complicate the ethnocentrism that has historically dominated the academy. It has also given rise to new fields in the humanities, particularly within English departments: post-colonial criticism, diasporism, and Latino and Trans-Pacific literatures, just to name a few. However, unprecedented diversity also presents us with unprecedented challenges. This is particularly true when it comes to first-year composition. A Chinese student who arrives in the U.S. to study mathematics may be able communicate with his department's faculty via calculus, but even the most elegant equations cannot attend to other rhetorical exigencies that accompany any field of study, e.g., research reports, literature reviews, and responses to to professors' emails. That composition courses are expected to help international students navigate this linguistic and rhetorical *terra incognita*—an expectation all the more amplified by the fact that first-year composition is required for most students at most universities—means that our image of "composition student" must move beyond the traditional English-as-a-first-language-speaking demographic. Given that an increasing proportion of our students may be unfamiliar with dominant English grammar conventions—much less conventions of style, structure, citation, authorial ethos, etc.—how are we to productively and democratically balance the political, cultural, and linguistic tensions that will inevitably come into play in the classroom?

A proliferation of recent research seeks to provide, or at least move toward, answers to this question. But as is the case with any unsettled and ongoing conversation, the answers bring forth still more questions. And unlike the concerns of the other chapters of this project—the debates over process theory, social-constructivist pedagogy, and procedural pedagogy—the translingual problematic is a relatively recent development, so the historical distance from which to view it is far narrower. The story of the multilingual classroom is still unfolding, and still growing in breadth of import; it is "breaking news." Methodologically, however, this chapter is aligned with the others: it will seek to identify the tensions and contradictions inherent in the multilingual classroom, to flesh out and define the key terms and concepts that animate this debate in order to provide a more nuanced platform on which it may transpire. The multilingual classroom is a territory we are only beginning to explore; this chapter aims to calibrate the compass, and orient inquiry in a productive direction.

To this end, I will analyze the state of the conversation surrounding the influence of globalization and international Englishes in/on the composition classroom. Following Lu and Horner, I will scrutinize the attitudes and concepts we bring with us when we teach in a translingual classroom (and all classrooms, as Lu and Horner note, are translingual to the extent that every student—and every person—employs different discourses in different social circumstances), and consider how these attitudes might play out in practice, particularly with regard to student agency and empowerment. As Lu and Horner put it, "The translingual approach encourages reading with patience, respect for perceived differences within and across languages, and an attitude of deliberative inquiry" (304). This chapter elaborates on what this approach may entail and demand.

Translingual pedagogy is relatively new, and has therefore not influenced the history of composition scholarship to the same extent as process theory, procedural rhetoric, and social-constructivism. However, its recent arrival is auspicious, given the increasing internationalism of classrooms in the United States and elsewhere; it seems reasonable to assume that translingual theory will continue to inform composition scholarship for the foreseeable future. This chapter is methodologically aligned with the rest of the dissertation: By mixing and mashing competing theoretical frameworks, I aim to uncover the core tensions that constitute and motivate them, and provide an enriched portrayal of the contemporary classroom scene.

It is important to emphasize that alternative, "non-standard" Englishes are not reducible to mere different systems of signification, because they are imbricated with the broader political and economic forces of fast capitalism, e.g., the "English Only" movement, and the economic opportunities and exploitations enabled by international free trade agreements. Globalization, which Eva Lam describes as

> an umbrella term for what is taking place around the world in association with global integration of economies, rapid media and information flow facilitated by new communication technologies, international migration of labor, the rise of international and trans-regional organizations, and resultant cultural transformations challenging traditional social structures (214)

has presented the composition classroom with increasingly widespread and urgent problems. And in response to these problems, a wealth of progressive, promising and rigorous scholarship has emerged in recent years.

Yet, as with any highly complex problematic, responding to it can be akin to contending with a Whack-A-Mole machine: One problem gets pounded down, but a new one (or the same, ever-persistent one) just pops up in its place, and the new problem was perhaps created by our response to the initial one, via the unseen levers and cogs—the plays of power, language, ideology, and culture—that lie beneath the visible surface. The goal of this paper will not be the whacking of a particular, vexing mole, but to cast a few more rays of light on the hidden mechanisms of language, ideology, power, and culture that make these moles so troublesome in the first place. In "The Discourse on Language," Michel Foucault posits that, while the distinction between true and false is neither modifiable nor institutional, the "will to truth"—that is, the means by which we reveal truth—is, and functions as, an exclusionary force. We are invested with the "possibility of speaking of experience, in it, to designate and name it, to judge it and, finally, to know it in the form of truth"; thus, to name or label a language serves at once to delineate it and proscribe any alternative ways of understanding it. With respect to our understanding of how issues of class, power, culture and ideology permeate language, we are met with competing wills to truth—a "battle 'for truth,' or at least 'around truth'" (Foucault, 344)—that struggle to reveal themselves and mask their counterparts. And the truth in question is not merely academic: language, as Bourdieu points out, is imbricated with class and power; it is not a coincidence that even the most fervent celebrators of "non-standard" dialects in the classroom tend to be highly fluent in "standard" English. This chapter will investigate the tensions that pervade this struggle with respect to translingual pedagogy.

The multilingual classroom confronts us with a thicket of contradictions and complications. I do not claim possession of a pedagogical machete with which to hack through the entanglement. In fact, I strongly suspect that no such machete even exists. So instead, this chapter aims to shine a light on the thicket's perplexing convolutions, thus offering a fuller, more nuanced portrayal of the linguistic and ideological forces with which we, and our students, grope and grapple. And I will call for a pedagogical disposition that, recognizing the nonexistence of a tension-resolving machete, attempts not to reconcile, but to *inhabit* the linguistic struggle that animates and constitutes every classroom and every conversation in which we so frequently and inevitably find ourselves.

The debate over the (in)validation of non-standard English dialects and vernaculars in the classroom can be traced as far back as the NCTE's landmark 1974 resolution, "Students' Right to their Own Language" (SRTOL). The resolution affirmed students' "right to their own patterns and varieties of language —the dialects of their nurture or whatever dialects in which they find their own identity and style" (1). Needless to say, the "dialects" identified here are not those of the affluent middle and upper-middle class students that, then and now, comprise most of the pupils in most American classrooms; the affirmation of the "right to [one's] patterns and varieties of language" is not intended to legitimize a wealthy white male student's wanton disregard for the rules of semicolon placement. Rather, the dialects in question here are those of perennially marginalized communities—African-Americans, Latinos, Southern whites, and virtually every community that tends toward impoverishment—who, following the shifts in culture, and public and university policy in the wake of the civil rights movement, began

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enrolling in college in large numbers. Having often been excluded, or at least discouraged, from the academy for generations, some members of these communities were less literate in the dominant discursive paradigms that the academy both represents and reinforces. This posed a serious dilemma for teachers and institutions. If a student is an African-American great-grandson of former slaves, having grown up in rural poverty (and discrimination) with little access to books and quality education, is it fair to to flunk him out of freshman composition just because he struggles to grasp the rules banning double negatives, excessively personal style, and nonlinear digressions from the structure of the 3.5 essay?

Thus arose a prototypically post-modern problem to contend with: the complex relationships between language, culture, ideology, economic disenfranchisement, and skin color. Language, SRTOL suggests, is not merely an abstract system of grammatical rules and regulations, occurring in a vacuum, divorced from and floating loftily above political and material forces. The literacy struggles within the African-American community do not result from some inherent laziness or incapability in the students. Instead, those struggles are a result of widespread and systematic discrimination on the part of more dominant social groups (i.e., whites, especially affluent white males). In some cases, this discrimination can even be viewed as a deliberate attempt to bar marginalized groups from the gateway to literacy: as both a plantation owner who deems a slave's possession of a book a capital crime and a 1950s South Carolina school board that places black students in rotting, overpopulated schoolhouses with overworked (and perhaps underqualified) teachers know, preventing a population from educating themselves is an effective way to keep them "out of trouble," as it were. How could we

not take this into account in our teaching and still refer to ourselves as ethical, empathetic beings?

Another assumption of SRTOL is the fundamental arbitrariness and functional equivalence of all language systems. The African-American community has, and has always had, a rich culture, a cornucopia of symbolic conventions that serve as both a communicative conduit and a bedrock for cultural identification. They, like the French and Chinese, seem to get along just fine with the language they have. Who are we to tell them that their way of speaking and/or writing is somehow invalid, uncivilized, uncouth, incorrect? This position—and its detractorswas famously dramatized in 1996, when the Oakland, California school board passed a resolution proclaiming "ebonics" a separate langage from English ("ebonics" is a somewhat pop cultural term for African-American vernacular, henceforth referred to as AAVE), and even went as far as to train teachers in the language, using pay raises as an incentive.

The Oakland school board imbroglio highlights an unusual aspect of this academic debate: unlike most academic debates, the public at large paid attention to it. And not only were their ears perked, their tongues were at the ready, prepared to intervene in the discussion with forceful, and sometimes vociferous, counterarguments. The furor surrounding "Why Johnny Can't Read," a 1975 *Newsweek* cover story that provoked hysterical reactions from the public about a perceived literacy crisis in the U.S., is a notable example of this. More recently, we have Richard Arum and Josipa Roksa's *Academically Adrift* (2011) a scathing critique of what they see as a lack of learning (and teaching) on college campuses. Their book is not concerned with first-year composition or translingual pedagogy, per se. Indeed, given the passion that composition teachers

generally have for teaching, one could reasonably infer that Arum and Roksa might see composition studies as part of the solution to the problem. But the book has ignited a minor firestorm of criticism of higher education generally. And more pertinent to the translingual classroom, their statistics regarding African-American students are bleak (Teresa Reed, in a *CCC* review, called them "disturbing.") So it stands to reason that a galvanized public, particularly the right-wing public, might aim their crosshairs directly at pedagogies that promote anything other than "Standard English" literacy. These people might not understand much about the realities of composition teaching, but they are the constituents of powerful politicians that control public funding of higher education. The point here isn't that Arum and Roksa's findings are particularly relevant to translingual pedagogy—especially considering that their findings may be invalid to begin with. The point is that public controversy surrounding college teaching methods has reached fever pitch at a time when teaching is more difficult than ever, and that the translingual classroom lies at the epicenter of this difficulty. And while the translingual classroom is a site of tensions between competing cultural, ethnic, and linguistic identifications, it is not merely an academic squabble about identity politics. Friction between economic classes undergirds and drives the entire discussion; cultural identity is by no means irrelevant here, but cultural capital, as Pierre Bourdieu points out, is never wholly separable from economic capital. The issue of class is made all the more significant in this globalized, economically lethargic era in which the middle class feels especially anxious about the maintenance of its status, and the working classes—facing an age where social mobility in the United States has fallen significantly lower than that in Europe—feel especially

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dispirited about their diminished prospects for moving up the socio-economic ladder. It is across this fraught milieu that this chapter treads.

The terms of the current debate over translingual pedagogy owe much to Lisa Delpit's examinations of language difference. In *The Skin That We Speak*, Delpit relates an anecdote about her daughter, Maya, who had of course been raised by a college professor and therefore spoke "Standard English." Maya had recently transferred from a mostly-white private school to a school that was 98% African-American. One day, she came home and spoke words and phrases associated with African-American English Vernacular (AAVE). Delpit suggested that Maya avoid such language in the future, lest she be judged negatively by, say, a job interviewer. Maya's response: "You don't have to worry about me... 'cause I know how to code switch!" (39).

Delpit came to believe that code-switching offered a method of helping students to negotiate academia's asymmetrical linguistic terrain, a way to, at once, celebrate students' home discourses and teach them the "codes needed to participate fully in American life"—i.e., Standard English Vernacular and related dialects (296). In this pedagogy, students are called upon to "compare various pieces written in different styles, discuss the impacts of different styles on the message... [and] practice different writing different forms to different audiences based on rules appropriate for each audience" (295). These codes are represented to students as both arbitrarily established and "politically charged" (295). Therefore, "Standard English" (henceforth Standard English Vernacular, or SEV) is to be considered simply one discourse among many structurally equivalent discourses, e.g., AAVE. Standard English Vernacular's "validity" and apical position in the hierarchy was not achieved through some inherent morphological

superiority, but by the socio-economic dominance of the (largely) white middle-class demographic that employs and authorizes it. So for Delpit, an AAVE-speaking student's dialect should be valued and celebrated as a valid vehicle of communication. At the same time, however, an AAVE-speaking student's lingual repertoire requires supplementation by SEV, one of the primary "codes of power" (42) needed for civic and economic participation. The goal of Delpit's pedagogy is to help students acquire literacy in both dialects, and learn when and where to deploy them (and not).

This sort of contextually-dependent discourse-hopping is called "code switching," and it has for nearly two decades remained a common response to the pedagogical dilemmas posed by SRTOL. Textbooks and teaching guides continue to champion it, notably Rebecca Wheeler's NCTE-published *Code Switching: Teaching Standard English in Urban Classrooms*. It has also, however, found itself the recipient of an increasing number of pointed critiques from composition scholars. In "Your Average Nigga," Vershawn Young agrees that it is critical for linguistically marginalized students to gain access to the codes of power that constitute and circulate within academic discourse(s). However, he objects to Delpit's means to that end:

> [Delpit] proposes a pedagogy of "linguistic performance" where teachers are supposed teach students to be bidialectical or to code switch, to use BEV at home and in black communities and WEV in school…. It's unclear why Delpit believes this pedagogy is a way of "taking the focus [and stigma] off the child's speech" and writing when telling them to imitate a white newscaster is to tell them that their language and identities are not welcome in school. (704-5)

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In other words, code switching fails to subvert, and even serves to maintain, the inequitable linguistic hierarchy and the socio-economic power structures that determine that that hierarchy. So for Young, code-switching "is a function of—in fact, a contribution to—the continuing racialization of our society" (708). A code-switching pedagogy can valorize AAVE as a grammatically cohesive and community-cohering discourse all it wants, but the implicit message remains: You can, and indeed should, speak AAVE at home, but keep it out of the classroom because the SEV-wielding arbiters of rhetorical propriety will perceive it as invalid, incorrect, and "too black."

In his analysis of how power imbalances shape what is revealed through language and what is obscured, Foucault remarks upon the speech of the "madman." For Foucault, the madman's words, being in tension with the dominant will to truth (i.e., rationality), "did not strictly exist." Whatever the madman said was taken as "noise," so he was "credited with words only in a symbolic sense"; thus the label of "madness" was imposed upon the madman by the dominant discourse (341-42). While disenfranchised students are certainly not madmen, there is an extent to which their voices are similarly damaged and squelched by the language and concepts that inform code-switching pedagogies. Keith Gilyard points out that code switching not only presents a politically lopsided schematization of dominant and marginalized discourses, but transfers this asymmetry into individual students' identity complexes with psychologically perturbing results. Gilyard calls this "enforced educational schizophrenia" (163) because, as Young notes, "black students are forced to see themselves embodying two different racial, linguistic, and cultural identities" (705). The upshot of this is that code-switching preserves the very injustices that it seeks to ameliorate: 1). non-SEV dialects' "invalid" cultural status,

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and 2.) the racist and racializing perception, from both within and without, of these dialects' subject positions as marginal and "inferior."

However, recent scholarship has aimed to revise and remedy this perceived problem of well-intended self-sabotage. In his 2006 article "The Place of World Englishes in Composition," Suresh Canagarajah develops a framework that strives to avoid code-switching's reductive and damaging dualisms. Linking "monolingual ideologies and linguistic hierarchies" (587), he posits the model of "code-meshing," which allows students to "accommodate more than one code within the bounds of the same text" (598). Young also aligns himself with this position, suggesting that we encourage students to "combine dialects, styles and registers," and allow "black students to mix a black English style with an academic register" (713). Canagarajah also notes, citing linguist Ronald Wardhaugh, that code-meshing is an inherently more "natural" rhetorical mode, since students almost always already demonstrate command over multiple varieties of their languages; in other words, utterances are already the product of meshed codes (p. 713). Code-meshing's corrective is to temper the cognitive dissonance caused by vacillating between multiple discourses depending on rhetorical context. It also constructs marginalized students as accommodable of a variety of dialects at once, SEV included, thus opening the possibility for moving beyond "either you're in or you're out" perceptions of student-academy relations and towards a more negotiable linguistic space in which mutually constitutive discourses intersect and interact. This is meant to help students position themselves within/against academic discourse in ways that do not necessarily exclude their home dialect. And Young's article is aptly self-reflexive on this level: he incorporates rhetorical strategies associated with AAVE, such as the personal

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narrative, into his writing, thus essentially validating these tropes as "academic" by virtue of their placement in a top-tier composition studies journal. Geneva Smitherman also performs the African-American discourse/identity in "CCCC's Role in the Struggle for Language Rights," in which she integrates AAVE idioms into her writing: "The NCTE done come a long way, baby!" (372).

Similar attempts to locate sites of linguistic resistance via emphasis on the complex relations between language, culture, identity and politics have flourished over the last several years. For instance, in "Metaphors Matter," Min-Zhan Lu introduces the term "transcultural literacy." While it is a more general and theoretical concept than code-meshing, it is "compatible" with the practice, and provides a useful metaphor for discussing the kinds of "transactional," "transformative," and hegemony-resistant rhetorics that code-meshing exemplifies (712-3). As she writes, transcultural literacy and the pedagogies to which it refers "center attention on the tension between the specificity of particular instances of learning and writing and the continual structuration of linguistic, cultural, social processes." That "structuration" invokes the verb form of "structure"—"to structurate," or "to structure"—is important here. In opposition to static and monolithic representations of social constructions (e.g., English-Only), writing is seen as a site at which the dynamic tensions between competing, interwoven, and politically-charged structures (linguistic, cultural, social) can be negotiated, *re*structured. The individual writer is a participatory agent in this perpetual (re)construction of wider social realities. Thus, in its critical commingling of conflicting dialects and discourses, transcultural literacy and code-meshing lie at the nexus of the global and the local, where competing languages and the ideologies they express are engaged in a mutually-

reconstitutive, dialogic struggle within an individual text. In this sense, the code-meshing writer is the initiator and mediator of this dialogue between discordant discourses—and from this nexus, she has the power to reshape their relations and the power asymmetries that condition them. (Canagarajah's description of multilinguals' strategy of "shuttling between languages" and communities also captures this dialogic, transactional feature of code-meshing.)

Yet, while code-meshing may appear to offer a method by which students can approach academic writing without invalidating their home dialects, it is not entirely clear to me how it de-racializes discursive politics. After all, just because two rhetorical modes inhabit the same sentence or essay does not necessarily mean that they now occupy equal positions in the linguistic hierarchy. A student may mix street talk with scholarly prose, but the text still may be viewed by most audiences as less a seamless integration and reconciliation of the dual discourses than a haphazard, "schizophrenic," internally frictional, and error-fraught mishmash. A code-meshed text's achievement of the "academically valid" status is thus predicated on reception and context, rather than features inherent in the text, and this achievement may often require a Gilyard-esque degree of cultural capital that many marginalized students lack. In other words, the acceptance of code-meshing as valid may depend less on the rhetorical deftness of the author's mixing and more on the perceived status and preexisting power of the author herself: Marginal discourses are permissible and praiseworthy, but only if the author is viewed as having sufficient social accreditation and a proficient command of the dominant discourse as well (e.g., like Young's command). This is the blind spot of code-meshing's nominally inclusive notion of "academic validity;" to return to Foucault again,

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a valid code-meshed text is valid not simply because its words are well-formed, but because it is infused with the author's institutionally-legitimized power, which flexes in ways that the cultural capital-rich author may be "incapable of recognizing" (343). Young and Smitherman's code-mixing success may be akin to an anecdote related by Pierre Bourdieu, about a Bearnais town that was visited by the mayor of a more cosmopolitan—and "proper" French-speaking—city. The mayor addressed the town in the town's own provincial (read: marginal) patois, and the "audience was moved by this thoughtful gesture" (68). But the seeming kindness of this dialectal choice veils a deeper, more troubling political asymmetry. As Bourdieu writes, the mayor

> can create this condescension effect only because… he possesses all the titles (he is a qualified professor) which guarantees his rightful participation in the 'superiority' of the 'superior language… What is praised as 'good quality Bearnais,' coming from the mouth of a legitimate speaker of the legitimate language, would be totally devoid of value… coming from the mouth of a peasant. (68)

Ironically, then, code-meshing—a rhetorical strategy intended to help marginalized students engage with the dominant discourse—may only be greeted with positive reception if the mesher is perceived as already "fluent" in the dominant discourse. In such a case, code-meshing's "neutralization" of the power relations that permeate linguistic (and racial) difference is illusory. The cruel hierarchy remains unswayed. The author, regardless of his racial or discursive self-identification, is simply viewed as *also* a speaker of the "standard" discourse, and with this qualification is

licensed to speak whatever language he wants with minimal risk of being perceived as "inferior."

Code-meshing runs into even deeper complications on a purely linguistic level. Young notes that code-meshing is a natural way of speaking, but he doesn't emphasize the fact that all languages are naturally comprised of multiple dialects, often arranged in tensional and politically-charged configurations. A plethora of scholarship in recent decades has challenged notions of linguistic sovereignty, from analyses of AAVE that identify its hybridic roots in English, Caribbean, and West African syntactical patterns (Williams, 1975) to Mattielo's study of the pervasiveness of slang--e.g., non-standard dialectal idioms—in SEV (2005) to Pratt's linking of the cultural construction of "unitary" languages to fantasies of coherent nationhood. A student code-meshing AAVE and SEV, then, is inevitably meshing far more codes than that. And close inspection may reveal complex codical interrelations that reveal their multilingual roots: Is the personal narrative form that Young invokes as an AAVE mode really a monolithically AAVE mode? Or is it an SEV form that has been poached by and recontextualized with some African-American communities? Or does it echo a distinctly African-American (or African) narrative style that has been imported into English? And if it is the product of such dialectal interplay, then to what extent are the forms separable in the first place? And, moreover, is language even the most salient factor at play here, or is it culture, class, gender, race, or an ensemble of all of the above? The richness is evident even without destabilizing the codes themselves, a project that would undoubtedly pinpoint the gross reductiveness of the categories in question. After all, English grammar has Germanic roots, and over the centuries it has appropriated and integrated countless terms

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and conventions from languages and dialects from all over the world, including dialects within itself. And these sub-dialects are, in themselves, porous and in perpetual flux. So while a code-meshing pedagogy may intermingle SEV and marginalized English discourses, it does not fully subvert the rigid demarcations that stratify, ratify and racialize the hierarchy itself. Young clearly has a sense of these borderlines' spuriousness when he remarks that he "sometimes couldn't tell the difference between WEV and its nonstandard vernacular, just as I sometimes can't distinguish BEV from anything else" (708).

There are, however, some political and practical reasons for leaving them intact. After all, the fact of Standard English's heterogeneity clearly does not automatically undermine SEV's (or WEV's, or whatever) vast "linguistic utopia" (Pratt) and the power structures that fund and legitimize it. And in its hypostatization, the false "standard" enjoys true sociopolitical clout. It becomes a fabrication with the power to truly oppress, a delusion commanding a flesh-and-blood army of bullheaded believers. African American Vernacular English may be just as internally logical and valid as SEV, but that fact may provide little comfort to an African-American student who has been told throughout his life that he writes and speaks "incorrectly," and that he is thus "stupid"—a circumstance analogous to cases of racial discrimination, where a person of mixed-race ancestry may be categorized as simply and purely "black." So there is a compelling argument for framing controversy as a (dubious) SEV-BEV binary: because it has real effects, it really is an issue that needs to be confronted.

And just as these imagined linguistic communities have the centripetal power to unite and oppress, they also have the power to unite and *resist*—see SRTOL's injunction,

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for instance, or the Black Arts poetry movement of the 1970s. Or, to draw an analogy with other forms of cultural constructedness: the Civil Rights Movement, the ongoing project that, while still far from complete, has made strides in raising the cultural status of African-Americans—a racial category that, as the field of genetics has long established, has no basis in biological reality. When engaged in a war with an unjust fabrication, it may be that a just counter-fabrication can serve as a pragmatic and effective weapon.

Taken in sum, the pedagogical problems and possibilities presented by this efflorescence of translingual research echoes an age-old dilemma that has haunted the Western academy since David Hume first identified it in the 18th century (the original meaning of which I bend slightly here): How do we go from the *is*--a richer description of the way languages work and interact--to the *ought*--a pedagogical prescription that helps students contend with the often-oppressive political dynamo of SEV and its imaginers? As Werner Heisenberg, the theoretical physicist, showed in his study of subatomic particles, the more accurately you measure a subatomic particle's position, the less you can know about its momentum (and vice versa). A roughly analogous dynamic is at play here. The more one focuses on linguistic resistance—which is most readily conceivable in terms of comparatively reductive dichotomies (SEV vs. AAVE, for example, or perhaps some slightly more complicated set of relations—the more oversimplistic one's assumptions about the language forms become. And, of course, if one focuses squarely on the complexity of language and language learning, it becomes virtually impossible to visualize what "resistance" might look like in light of this complexity.

This tension is rooted in two components of language and linguistic practice that are, paradoxically, both inextricable and mutually exclusive: the linguistic component,

and the ideological component. With regard to the former, linguist M.A.K. Halliday's influential work shifted linguists' assumptions about language away from static, systemic conceptualizations, and towards more dynamic, "functional" conceptualizations. For Halliday, language should not be "interpreted as a system of forms, to which meanings are attached" (F40). In other words, we should not theoretically crystallize linguistic forms, and then study the ways in which meanings circulate through these forms. Instead, with his theory of "functional grammar," Halliday advises that we move in the opposite direction: language should be interpreted not a system of forms through which meanings flow, but as a "system of meanings, accompanied by forms through which meanings can be realized... This puts the forms of language in a different perspective: as a means to an end, rather than an end in themselves" (F40). In other words, languages are dynamic, open systems whose forms (to the extent that they are "formal" at all) are contingent on a vast array of local, emergent, "bottom-up," functional language practices. Framed as such, notions such as "Standard English" or "African-American English Vernacular" become meaningless in many ways, hinging on a conception of language as a static system, imposed from the top-down. (On its surface, Halliday's position may appear to echo the post-structuralist critique of Ferdinand de Saussure's structural linguistics, which greatly informed literary criticism. There are key differences, however, and like most scholars in the field of linguistics, Halliday worked independently of the post-structuralist movement that influenced literary criticism).

Read in this light, composition scholarship concerning linguistic politics may appear to be a house without a foundation, an edifice doomed to collapse, because it rests on the assumption that languages are stable enough to assign labels to. However, with

regard to the other component of language practice—the ideological component—this scholarship is on much sturdier ground. In 1979, linguist Michael Silverstein, who is generally aligned with Halliday's views on the dynamics of language, defines language ideology as "a set of beliefs about language articulated by users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structure or use" (qtd. in Joseph, 203). This idea—which was later appropriated by Mary Louise Pratt (1987), who in turn was appropriated by composition scholars like Lu and Horner—is able to describe the formal conceptions of language that dominate not only American politics, e.g., the "English-Only" movement. It also describes much composition scholarship, including this very chapter. For despite frequent acknowledgements that language cannot be reduced to reified systems (which I am arguing right now), scholarship continues to describe them in precisely those terms (as when I frequently refer to SEV and AAVE throughout this chapter).

This is the troublesome tension that inhabits composition studies. There is a recognition that language is grounded in complex, emergent practices; yet, at the same time, there is tendency to ignore functional practices to some extent, so as to enable analyses of languages' more rigid ideological underpinnings. One way to account for this tension is to recognize that while composition may aim to incorporate theories and realities of globalization within itself, the disruptions that come along with globalization are just as relevant—and no less perplexing—to composition as they are to any other knowledge domain, be it an academic department or a major corporation that has just gone multinational. In order to assimilate the influx of non-standard English dialects (not to mention non-English languages) into our classrooms—and, by extension, into our

discourse—composition must import knowledge from disciplines that have traditionally been exterior to it, e.g., sub-disciplines of linguistics that deal with the distinctions and similarities between the forms and functions of various languages. This process creates ruptures, tensions, and contradictions within the field. Of course, composition has always occupied a site of disciplinary intersection (linguistics, education, sociology, etc.), and its explanatory power and motivational energy has generally been enhanced by this hybridization, this generative mongrelization. Just as a rogue chemist experiments by mixing substances, creating useful and provocative solutions and explosions, composition has thrived in its diverse spontaneity. But along with this spirited clashing and mashing of disparate knowledge domains comes a unique set of problems—problems that hound any academic field, but which may be particularly evident within composition.

Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* is interested primarily in prisons and penal systems, but an analogy can be drawn between those systems and composition's importation of other specialized academic fields: "Disciplinary power," he writes, "manifests its potency, essentially, by arranging objects, the examination is, as it were, is a ceremony of this objectification." Replace "examination" with "journal article" or "dissertation chapter," and the power and limitations of composition studies (and also Foucault's argument) are laid bare. The SRTOL resolution notwithstanding, composition as a discipline has not, until recent years, recognized the full magnitude with which non-standard Englishes have altered the landscape of the classroom. Scholars such as David Bartholomae and James Paul Gee have done much to sharpen and enrich our conceptions of competing discourses (and "Discourses"). They recognize that English is not a static, monolithic system, but a matrix of conflicting and overlapping discourses. However,

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these sub-discourses tend to be described as atomistic, constituent parts of a larger whole—as if "English" is comprised of internally consistent building blocks, which, while interacting in complex and politically-charged relations, nonetheless retain their structural integrity. Of course, one could argue (and some have) that these building blocks are *not* homogeneous within themselves, but in fact are constructed by still-smaller building blocks; indeed, one could subdivide this as far as one wants, splitting the linguistic hairs into infinitely more microscopic slivers. But as Zeno's famous paradox teaches us, one could divide these discourses forever and still not circumvent the problem of the discursive monolith: a unit can always be divided in half yet again, no matter how small it has become.

In terms of Foucault, this "objectification," this reduction of languages, dialects and discourses to systems, micro-systems, nano-systems and nano-nano-systems (and so on), is one of the ways in which composition studies arranges its object of study, its subject matter. And to a great extent, this is perfectly excusable and understandable, because without some sort of objectifying arrangement, the object of analysis unravels into meaningless, unintelligible noise. But at various points in time and space—e.g., the site at which the global meets the local in the composition classroom—the arrangement must be reconfigured in light of new insights and information. Foucault's analysis of institutional power structures is, even by his own account, totalizing. This downplays the fact that in spite of their hyper-ordered structuration, prisons remain a site of destabilizing contention. Aside from the obvious possibility of riots, prisoners capitalize on an array of resources to help them resist the reduction of their bodies to inert objects, often by forming under-the-radar social communities (e.g., innocuous networks of friendships, or

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gangs). So while prisons may sometimes appear to be seamless, Rolex watch-esque systems on the surface, the reality is more chaotic, more complicated.

I do not wish draw too close of an analogy between composition studies research and the penal system, but a rough comparison can be made for the sake of clearer conceptualization. In its politically energized and generally well-intended effort describe languages in terms of totalizing systems, composition studies, by virtue of its will to truth—its power to name and arrange language(s)—tends to entrench itself into objectifying schemas that obscure fundamental language processes, as well as deep cultural and political forces that flow along with these processes. This is not to say that real-world languages practices lack a centripetal force, a drive toward unification. In terms of ideological reinforcement, they absolutely do. This is also not to say that composition studies are unusual in this respect; indeed, one could say the same thing about any knowledge domain. But if the implications of globalization are to be fully attended to, the non-systemic dimensions of language cannot be overlooked or downplayed.

To be sure, scholars have recognized this tension. In "Language Difference in Writing: Toward a Translingual Approach," Bruce Horner, Min-Zhan Lu, Jacqueline Royster, and John Trimbur challenge the assumption that "each codified set of language practices is appropriate only to a specific, discrete, assigned social sphere"—e.g., "academic writing" or AAVE—and call for an approach that recognizes the fluid nature of language practices (306). Furthermore, Suresh Canagarajah's recent work emphasizes the innumerable local practices out of which ostensible language "systems" emerge. Within this context, locality is even more specified than, say, one French *patios*'

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relationship with a neighboring *patois*. This activity is situated at the level of

conversation itself: syllable to syllable, word to word, phrase to phrase. Furthermore,

each interaction is contingent on the specific (and also contingent) positions of each

speaker within the broader, overlapping patchwork of norms and conventions that

comprise their discourse "community" (and which are in themselves unstable). As a

hypothetical example, an English speaker from East Nigeria may rely on a slightly

different set of linguistic "resources" (as Canagarajah calls them) than a speaker from

West Nigeria. But even within these East/West discourse communities, there will be still

more variation, because discursive practices can vary from town to town, ethnic group to

ethnic group, even from family to family and individual to individual. It is in light of this

complexity that the "functional dynamics," as Halliday puts it, become so crucial to any

attempt at comprehensive analysis. Yet even this is not enough, for the tension between

language as a dynamic function and language as a relatively static ideological system

would remain far from resolved.

Alastair Pennycook, in *Language as a Local Practice*, clarifies this contradictory

issue. Pennycook posits that

> the idea that languages are systems of communication used by people [should be]
>
> challenged in favor of a view of language as a local practice whereby languages
>
> are a product of the deeply social and cultural activities in which people engage.
>
> (1)

Pennycook works with a more nuanced definition of "locality" here, one that is

not merely, say, "the opposite of global"; indeed, he contends that all practices, however

global-seeming, are at root local (128). For him, locality is a kind of situatedness:

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language emerges from human activities and interactions that occur within physical and symbolic spaces, and these activities and interactions both emerge from and constitute these spaces. Over time, these local practices accrete in a process of "sedimentation." For Pennycook, what we call a discrete "language system" is better understood as a kind of sedimentation build-up, formed from the bottom-up. And while these accretions are somewhat stable, they are also, like a beach created from billions of sand grains, prone to erosion and change (just beach's composition depends on "local" grains, a language's composition depends on local practices, rather than the other way around.)

The image of language as a sediment deposit cuts to the core of the translingual conundrum. On the one hand, language has a monolithic quality to it; if we could freeze time, we would see a snapshot of a language's current configuration, the accumulated product of the countless local practices that add up to a tenuous whole. On the other hand, because time has a stubborn way of refusing to freeze, that snapshot would grow obsolete by the time the film is developed (so to speak), since the sediment will have shifted and rearranged. In terms of translingual pedagogy, this fluctuation is made all the more confounding by the globalized Zeitgeist in which we all now live, by the ineluctably increasing proportion of students that speak different versions of English than we are accustomed to. Barring, perhaps, a few uncontacted Amazonian tribes, all the world's languages are constantly eroding and reconstituting each other in innumerable loci of human interaction (though of course, the same process affects even the most isolated communities internally.)

Thus are the confounding dynamics of language and communication. But there is even more to it than that, for the translingual classroom becomes even more complicated

in light of questions of power and authority. For the remainder of this chapter, I will consider the class tensions that permeate the translingual classroom. Finally, I will argue that while it is impossible to fully transcend these tensions, they comprise much of the substance of the classroom itself, and that our pedagogies should therefore aim to inhabit these tensions critically, transparently and self-referentially.

Lu and Horner, et. al. identify two pedagogical approaches that they see as counter-productive in the translingual classroom. First, and most obviously, teachers should not align themselves with the English-Only movement and seek to "eradicate difference in the name of achieving correctness" (306). But we should also eschew the more progressive and tolerant—but ultimately specious—assumption that different language and dialects are discrete entities that are used in discrete social spheres (e.g., "home," "street" and "classroom"). While well-intended, this assumption is not only faulty in its conception of languages as separate monoliths, but also "overlooks the role that readers' responses play in granting, or refusing to grant, recognition to particular language practices as appropriate to a particular sphere" (306). Instead, the authors argue, language(s) should be conceived as a fluctuating and interactive process(es), and as such, students' writing proficiency should not be judged according to their "ability to produce an abstracted set of conventional forms. Rather, it will be shown by the range of practices they can draw on; their ability to use these creatively; and their ability to produce meaning out of a wide range of practices in their reading" (308).

If this goal is just and worthwhile—and I think it is—then the challenge for composition studies is to develop and implement such a pedagogy. But pedagogies are no more easily codified than languages. In my *JAC* article, I argue that language is far more

complex than even practices like code-meshing assume, and suggest that rather than asking students to mesh pre-existing codes, we should allow them to "invent" their own codes. This, I suggested, would more fully account for language's complexity. Individual students could align themselves with unique, localized codes of their own determination, which would also invest them with a certain degree of agency, since students could critique and complicate the dominant discourses that would otherwise define their discoursal identities from the top-down. The idea is that since codes are constructed anyway, we should allow students to become participatory agents in the construction process.

This, however, leads to still more questions; many of them revolving around the ineluctable tensions intrinsic to any relationship between students, teachers and institutions. For one, code-inventing would not necessarily avoid the problem of rigid reification and the fraught politics thereof. Students might invent a new discursive identity for themselves, but they may merely reproduce the very sort of inequitable power relations we want them to avoid (and it doesn't seem like too much of a stretch to predict that some students would pigeonhole themselves rather reductively). Perhaps one reason why the English-Only mentality persists is that some people, even some of those those are opposed to it, internalize the Manichean schema on which it relies. With due apologies to W.E.B. DuBois for altering the meaning of the term, this could be described as assuming a linguistic "double-consciousness" when no such dichotomy exists. Someone who speaks and values AAVE may nonetheless accept that the rigid AAVE-SEV schism exists, as if they really were discrete entities.

The obvious response to this is that a teacher could just teach students how to demolish this dichotomy, this "abstracted set of conventional forms." But embedded within this is yet another political pitfall, one that Lisa Delpit identified over two decades ago. In "The Silenced Dialogue," Delpit conveys the frustration that African-American students (and teachers) often feel when dealing with liberal white teachers with the best of intentions.

> When you're talking to White people they still want it to be their way," laments one teacher, an African-American woman. "You can try to talk to them and give them examples, but they're so headstrong, they think they know what's best for *everybody*, for *everybody's* children. (280)

This lament, which arose from a pedagogical disagreement between the black teacher and a white teacher, illustrates Delpit's broader point. The white teacher, it can be assumed, subscribed to a child-centered approach to teaching that emphasized students' autonomy—in other words, an approach that is fully aligned with code-meshing (or code-inventing) in that it values students' home discourses and encourages them to express this marginalized discourse in the classroom. But Delpit and the black teacher have a different view. Delpit contends that AAVE should be celebrated and spoken when the situation calls for it. But she also recognizes something that, according to her, many African-Americans feel but far fewer whites are aware of: Some African-Americans simply do not want the classroom to be an imagined multicultural utopia, a Kumbaya-esque celebration of diversity and difference. Rather, they want to "ensure that the school provides their children with discourse patterns, interactional styles, and spoken and

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written language codes that will allow them success in the larger society" (285). They want their children to learn SEV.

Homi Bhabha has noted how the politically progressive desire for "tolerance," a desire to defy, transcend, or elide racial, cultural, or linguistic inequity, can sometimes result in images of the sort of happy, let's-all-join-in-a-song-of-Kumbaya drum circle mentioned above—or, as Sneja Gunew calls it, a "fokloric spectacle" that tends to homogenize—and, in effect, de-politicize— cultural diversity (112). Difference without divisive belligerence is an ideal worth aspiring to, but Delpit is under no illusion that we've even come close to achieving it. It may be true that all languages are arbitrary and internally logical, and no language is intrinsically superior to any other. But as Delpit recognizes, not everyone in the world feels that way. Namely, members of the "culture of power" (i.e., middle class, SEV-speaking whites) often frown upon AAVE speakers, seeing them as less intelligent and/or illiterate in the "right" way to speak and write. So as Delpit sees it, AAVE should be valued, but writing pedagogy should be firmly directive in steering students toward SEV fluency. As she puts it:

> I prefer to be honest with my students. Tell them that their language and cultural style is unique and wonderful but that there is also a power game being played, and if they want to be in on that game then there are games that they too must play. (292)

While Delpit spoke of AAVE speakers, her analysis can be extrapolated to Indian English speakers, Southern English speakers, Nigerian English speakers, and speakers of any other marginalized discourse. This highlights the fact that there are two competing definitions of agency and empowerment regarding linguistic difference. One view

emphasizes the *integration* of marginal languages into/within the culture of power; the other view also validates marginal languages, but maintains their *separation* from the culture of power. Admittedly, this dichotomy is simplistic in a number of ways. For one, languages are already somewhat integrated, and can never be fully separated (though the tension between the perspectives still exists). I would also speculate that many teachers are, like me, aligned with both views simultaneously. I don't want my students to be judged negatively by a job interviewer, so I'll therefore do whatever I can to help them gain fluency in SEV. But at the same time, I see much value in fighting to transform inequitable language "hierarchies" into more egalitarian language "differences." But it's a difficult and uncomfortable juggling act. Each goal can only be prioritized at the expense of the other, so one feels a bit like an English-speaking parent who wants to teach his toddler Spanish: Every time he chooses a language to speak, an opportunity for the toddler to practice the other language vanishes. So the hard-to-answer question is: which definition of agency should be foregrounded under a given set of circumstances? Who gets to decide? And how do we decide?

It is important to stress here that for many scholars, allowing AAVE in the composition classroom and aiming for students' fluency in SEV are not mutually exclusive practices. As discussed earlier, Canagarajah contends that, since code-meshing is already integral to how people use and learn languages, code-meshing practices will help, not hinder, SEV literacy. But this does not, in itself, dissolve or resolve the tension. Code-meshing is a relatively new concept, so there is no expert consensus regarding the most effective method (or methods) one could use to apply it to the first-year composition classroom—if, that is, it really is more effective than Delpit's skills-oriented pedagogy,

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which is debatable. And even if we did perform an "expert assessment" on these practices and tried to evaluate their efficacy, we would once more be positioning ourselves as Foucault's name-designators, as excluders of alternative possibilities. This naming is inevitable and necessary, for it is difficult to teach without assessing one's practices. But it is also a necessity with which we should be wary of growing too comfortable with, lest we overlook the fluctuating complexity of language and its relationship with power, culture, race, and economic status.

Indeed, when it comes to competing "standard" and "non-standard" dialects and discourses, language functions as a veil over deeper plays of cultural and economic power, a sublimation of red-in-tooth class competition into syntax, grammar, style, and diction. In describing the petite bourgeoisie's "anxious quest for authorities" (331), their relentless pursuit of markers of (high) culture that reflect and reinforce a class status feared to be tenuous, Bourdieu identifies the connection between "certified" cultural products ("classics and prize-winners") and linguistic correctness (331). The disagreements between Delpit and celebrators of alternative discourses in the classroom may be nominally language-based, but they stem in large part from this kind of class anxiety: a desire for a validation of who one already is—e.g., a working class AAVE speaker—lying in uneasy tension with an aspiration to appropriate a *habitus* of utmost "class" and distinction, e.g., an upper-middle class *bon vivant* with "cultured" tastes and impeccable grammar.

When we speak of setting writing "standards," this is the struggle that is ultimately at stake. Horner, et al. argue that we should judge students' writing in accordance with "the range of practices they can draw on; their ability to use these

creatively; and their ability to produce meaning out of a wide range of practices in their

reading" (308). Furthermore, the authors respond to the question of whether there are any

standards in the translingual classroom by saying that yes, of course there are standards,

but we also "need to recognize the historicity and variability of standards, which change

over time, vary across genres, disciplines, and cultures, and are always subject to

negotiation (and hence, change)" (311). It is undoubtedly true that standards are non-

universal and in a constant state of fluctuation, and we should certainly consider this

when evaluating student writing. I would also agree that the ability to draw on a broad

range of practices creatively is a laudable and useful skill. But the importance of a

person's awareness of the non-universality of standards may sometimes seem dwarfed by

that person's desire for a higher class, even if the attainment of that class requires

conformity to arbitrary—and even unjust—language standards. For Delpit, this is why a

progressive translingual pedagogy is at great risk of overemphasizing the "variability of

standards" at the expense of that persistently dominant standard, SEV—and, by

extension, the cozy class status that attends it. Lu and Horner, et al. argue that fluency in

a particular language is not required for most professions, and that the ability to work

across differences is more important (312). There is much truth in the assertion,

particularly in light of the increasingly globalized and multilingual world. But Delpit's

point still stands: SEV fluency is of utmost importance in the eyes of culture at large, and

functions as both a marker of and gateway into the middle class. If it weren't, the

English-Only movement would not exist, and we would hear a lot more AAVE speakers

in the lobby before a pricey-ticketed performance of *The Well-Tempered Clavier.* This is

certainly not to say that Horner, et. al are "wrong;" on the contrary, they are absolutely

correct. The trouble is that Delpit is also correct, and that we must dwell within this dilemma no matter how we choose to teach composition in a multilingual classroom.

This is not the only tension that emerges when current scholarship on translingual pedagogy is read in light of Delpit's decades-old articles. And some of these tensions are particularly noteworthy for a white male teacher such as myself, who grew up in a suburban neighborhood where the only non-SEV speakers in sight were, as far as I could tell, the men who mowed the lawns. In "The Silenced Dialogue," Delpit points out that "those with power are frequently least aware of—or at least willing to acknowledge—its existence. Those with less power are often the most aware of its existence" (5). This is a pivotal insight that adds yet another layer of difficulty to the question of what "agency" means in the translingual classroom, because virtually all first-year composition teachers are aligned with the culture of power to some extent or another. The academy's stated pursuit of diversity notwithstanding, most composition teachers are white, middle class SEV-speakers, and many non-white teachers also come from middle class backgrounds where SEV fluency is the norm. Furthermore, if a foreign-born teacher's second (or third, or fourth) language is English, or if she grew up in poor inner-city environment, that teacher may have a deeper understanding of marginalized students' struggles, but she still represents the academy's institutional authority, and is presumably fluent in SEV, too.

Delpit submits that in light of this political asymmetry, teachers should employ "a very special kind of listening," one where we "put our beliefs on hold [and] cease to exist for a moment" in an attempt to critique the ways in which our ideology blinds us and causes us to be oblivious perpetrators of pedagogical injustice. (297). The notion that the culture of power's ambassadors are not "listening to," or not "hearing," the voices of

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those who do not represent the dominant race or discourse has emerged in a number of

forms over the years, and has shaped composition scholarship in a number of ways. But

what we should do, pedagogically, after our ears are perked remains open to dispute. In

"When the First Voice You Hear is Not Your Own," Jacqueline Royster also argues that

the African-American community's voice has too often been drowned out of the debate—

and ostracized from the "cultured" class. But there are key differences between Royster

and Delpit's pedagogical models. Namely, Delpit argues that SEV should be placed at the

center of the classroom, while Royster—who coauthored the Lu and Horner, et al. article

discussed earlier—seems somewhat more aligned with the position that marginalized

discourses can take an active and constructive role in the classroom. In a way, it's

somewhat imprudent to compare what Delpit's wrote during the 1980s to what Royster

wrote in 1996 and 2011; after all, perspectives evolve over time, and while Delpit has not

publicly addressed the topic of code-meshing, it is entirely possible that she might have

revised her earlier views and decided that non-standard discourses should be used in the

classroom after all. But even if she were to realign herself, the questions she originally

raised would not disappear. On the contrary, they would loom as large as ever.

To understand why, consider once again "code-inventing," the model I

provisionally proposed in *JAC*. To recapitulate, I argued earlier that code-inventing may

invest disenfranchised students with a certain type of agency, in that their code achieves a

level of validation in the composition classroom. This student empowerment hinges on a

particular definition of agency, which stands in uneasy tension with an alternative

definition of agency that, as I see it, is equally valid and important. But regardless of

which kind of agency we decide to emphasize most in the translingual classroom, the

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teaching will not be easy. The composition classroom teems with clashing and interweaving plays of power, race, language, and ideology, and the fuller our awareness of the classroom's complexity becomes, the more perplexing and pitfall-pocked it appears.

"[White people think they know] what's best for *everybody*, for *everybody's* children" (Delpit, 208). As a white teacher who has suggested that code-inventing might be a good way to address the translingual classroom, this statement gives me pause. A code-inventing classroom, at least as I have described it, does not focus primarily on SEV fluency (though SEV fluency is not incompatible with it). Rather, it focuses on the processes and politics of language construction and deconstruction, and aims to help students understand how they, too, play a role in this process. This, as I see it, is a valuable lesson. But is this what all students want—and need—out of a composition course? If an inner-city African-American student who speaks AAVE with brilliance and flair has only a tenuous grasp on the formal conventions of the 3.5 essay, how useful is it for her to learn that SEV is arbitrary and ideological, and that there are rhetorically-effective ways for her to blend her invented "home" discourse with SEV? If a Chinese engineering student wants only to study the conventions of SEV, is code-inventing the best pedagogy for him? I do think that code-commingling has inherent value, but then again, I'm also a white male with SEV fluency. What if a minority student disagrees with me, and just wants me to teach her grammar rules all day, so that she can begin to appropriate the same *habitus* that I inhabit? The teacher quoted by Delpit seems to disagree with me, and she surely took a composition course or two in college. Who am I to presume that I know what's best for them? And is this presumption not merely the

imposition of my own version of progressivist ideology onto my students, which is pretty much the opposite of student empowerment?

Of course, as James Berlin spent much of his career emphasizing, it is wishful thinking—indeed, an outright fantasy—to presume that we can avoid steering students toward our own ideology to some extent. Even if we held back as much as we could, and allowed students' ideologies to blossom and tussle in whatever way they chose, our ideology would still dominate. In such a case, our dominant ideology would simply be supposition that students' ideologies should blossom and tussle in whatever way they choose. The only way to avoid entangling your ideology in the classroom is to not teach at all, and that's not an attractive option. Furthermore, ideological difference is not simply a relativistic free-for-all. Some ideological assumptions are simply more valid than others. An ideology aligned with the English-Only movement is, I would submit, inconsistent with the facts of language, because it confuses ideology with language structure, and falsely assumes that the possibility for a homogeneous "standard" exists. As teachers, we have an ethical duty to dispel bigoted views, especially when they're rooted in delusional assumptions about reality. Truth is truth, and if we know a truth about language that a student does not, we must share this knowledge. For this reason, if a teacher tells a white male English-Only advocate that his views are at odds with linguistic reality, I do not consider it to be an imposition of the teacher's ideology onto the student. Rather, the teacher is communicating a truth to the student, whether or not the student chooses to accept that truth. If a student asserts that the world is flat, we cannot accept that as "just another perspective."

But in many cases, it is not at all clear whether the facts are aligned with a particular perspective. Is Delpit wrong in her assertion that we do students a disservice by telling them that the classroom is no place for AAVE (and presumably other non-SEV dialects)? Are Lu and Horner wrong for asserting that there is a place for that in the classroom? I feel deeply uncomfortable about saying that either view is wrong. I am also rather uncomfortable about asserting that they're both correct and grappling with this contradiction. But the latter, I would argue, is a discomfort that I must embrace. The translingual classroom is a puzzling space. Therefore, puzzlement—a kind of *critical puzzlement*—must be an integral feature of our pedagogical temperament. I will conclude this chapter by reflecting on how we might work, and teach, productively with(in) this everlasting disorientation.

Considering that languages, to the limited extent to which they are isolatable entities, blend and transmute as quickly as we can assign a name to them, at once solid forms and mixing liquids; considering that an attempt to map the translingual "meshings" within any utterance is akin to the project of Borges' cartographers, a bottomless layering of overlapping patterns; and considering that, if part of translingual pedagogy's goal is to somehow strengthen our students' agency without inadvertently squelching it in the act of helping them, I am sometimes tempted to put a spin on an old adage: *teacher plans, language laughs*. Formulating a prescription is like trying to catch a puff of smoke in a net: you might trap a few particles momentarily, but their motion is so turbulent and so reactant to your own motion that they will have escaped and gone elsewhere before you can say "code-switch." But we must, and will, keep swinging the net. What else are we to do? I will readily admit that I don't know of any way to catch the smoke; I don't even

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know that it should be caught. But I would submit that, even if we are a long ways off (maybe even an infinite ways off) from addressing all of the contradictions that constitute our increasingly multilingual classrooms, there are nonetheless some methods of addressing them that are better than others. We may not always know what to do, but we can approach the issues in a way that reflects and embodies their inherent difficulty.

This means moving towards a flexible, open-ended, and transparent pedagogical disposition in the translingual classroom, a disposition that is as fluctuating and unpredictable as language itself. In other words, a pedagogy should be more than discussions and dissections of particular dialects of discourses. Rather, our teaching should mirror the *processes* by which languages change, cohere, compete, and dissolve. The lesson to students shouldn't be simply that discourse community X oppresses discourse community Y (though that topic will, and should, arise). The lesson should be that the lesson itself embodies the struggle, enacts it as it played out and portrayed by its participants. Again, this is not to say that we shouldn't dissuade a white male student from becoming an English-only advocate—far from it. I oppose English-Only movement, and I will not pretend to adhere to a relativistic view of language that sees the English-Only and translingual perspectives as equally valid. To invoke a cliche, we may be entitled to our own opinions, but not our own facts, and as I see it, the English-only position is at odds with the facts. But if and when the tension arises, we should do more than state our disagreement with English-Only; we should also discuss how this disagreement illustrates the very linguistic, political, racial, and cultural struggles that is the topic of discussion.

"This is an excellent example of what we've been talking about," we could say to the student. "You're pushing for one view of language, and I'm pushing for the other. You say that America should adopt English as its official language; I'm saying that that's a bad idea, one rooted in inaccurate assumptions about language. We are just one teacher and one student, so the struggle will not be resolved in this exchange. It is happening everywhere, all the time. And this is how it's happening. This conversation is the struggle embodied." By doing this, we can assert our position on multilingualism and explain why it best reflects linguistic reality, while at the same time pointing out that the core of the lesson is the fact of the collision of positions in itself, and the competing assumptions and representations that are the dynamics and process of that collusion. One could also discuss these processes during a lesson on SEV conventions, and consider how they lead to the necessity of teaching those conventions.

This kind of dispositional and methodological open-endedness would also be well served by actively complicating the binaries that inevitably shape translingual scholarship. It is clear, for instance, that however productively the idea of code-meshing complicates our understanding of language practice, the concept relies on overly-simple categories, if only because all linguistic categories are overly simple. Even Canagarajah, who is extremely cognizant of language's complexity, still uses monolithic terms like "Sri Lankan English." I use even more simplistic terms in this very chapter. Considering this, it seems to me that the out-of-vogue idea of code-*switching,* however limited in its descriptive powers, might be worth discussing with students in a serious, non-dismissive way. Why? Because language is inherently contradictory: an assemblage of countless local practices that add into provisional norms, which add up to tentative conventions,

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which add up to shifting dialects, which add up to entire languages that are really just a sprawling amalgamation of local practices, but which we still sometimes refer to as singular entities because we have to simplify things if we are to speak of language at all. That's the whole point of language in the first place: to simplify the world, rendering it more comprehensible. Looking at it this way, the idea of "switching," becomes a useful explanatory tool in our toolbox, among many other tools.

An illustration: if I'm speaking to my grandmother, I'll adopt a different code than I would if I were speaking to my son, or a student, or an old college friend I run into at a tavern. Similarly, a student that speaks AAVE at home likely deploys, or aims to deploy, something more like SEV in his composition classroom. To call these codes wholly separate entities would be a fallacy, for they intermingle with each other. So one could argue, correctly, that this isn't really "switching," because all codes are already meshed. But at the same time, the codes we mesh are meshed within themselves—and presumably, the codes within the codes are meshed as well, and so on, ad infinitum. There is simply no way to speak of this phenomenon in a non-reductive way. At some point, we have to arbitrarily pick a linguistic tendency and call it a "code." And the tendency we choose will (or should) depend on our needs at that particular moment. If I speak to a student and then go home and talk to my wife, I'm not truly "switching," but there is also a very real sense in which I am communicating within two distinct spatial and discursive environments. If, as Wallace Stevens' famous poem suggests, there are 13 ways of looking at a blackbird, then there are 13,000 (or more) ways of looking at a language. "Switching" from SEV to AAVE is just one of them, and however simplistic it is, it's a useful conceptual shortcut that helps us describe reality provisionally.

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Looking at it this way, code-switching, like code-meshing, has uses as well as limitations. It is valuable in the same way as that speciously monolithic term, "English"—a label that we all know is misleading, but which is also a useful way to cognitively map reality. If every translingual pedagogy scholar tried to fully describe the complexity of the English language (or the AAVE dialect, or whatever) whenever they invoked it, they wouldn't get much else done, because they'd write hundreds of definitional pages and still not be able to fully explain what "English" is (or, more accurately, what all those "Englishes" are). Language is also sediment, and sediment is also language. Just as a code-switch is really a code-mesh, a code-mesh is also a code-switch, depending on one's perspective at a particular moment. If we discuss and debate these contradictions with students, we can help them can gain a stronger critical awareness of the choices they make when they frame and define language(s). And a debate that has animated the field of composition ("to switch or to mesh?") will be dramatized in the classroom itself--a good lesson, perhaps, on the subject of "critical conversations" and how they work.

What are we doing when we speak of a language? How do we speak of it? Why do we speak of it in this way or that way? I, for one, am not sure. There is no magic machete that can tame the jungle of contradictions within the translingual classroom— i.e., within every classroom. I hope I am wrong about this, and maybe I am; maybe someday, someone much smarter than myself will forge such a powerful weapon. But until then, we need to find a way to dwell within this jungle in a way that respects and reflects its vegetative density. Composition scholars are making great strides by developing a more nuanced understanding of how linguistic difference animates the

classroom, and our understanding grows more sophisticated—or well-tempered—with each new Canagarajah article. But we still have long way to go. Languages are hard to describe theoretically, and grappling with the political tensions associated with language(s) in the classroom just as hard, or harder. But this difficulty should be inhabited, not resisted. And to the extent that we oversimplify—and we will all oversimplify—we should place this simplification, and processes of politics thereof, at the center of our pedagogies. The poet John Keats defined his famous term, *negative capability*, as "when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason." I will diverge from Keats in saying that we should always reach after fact and reason, at least when it comes to the translingual classroom. But we should also embrace the classroom's mysteries and doubts. If we don't, we risk reaching for false certainties.

CONCLUSION

Social Constructivist Approach

The facts of material existence *vis-a-vis* linguistic representation continue to

trouble not only the classroom, but culture in general. For one, with income inequality

having ballooned since dawn of the Reagan era, the balance of power between the

enfranchised and disenfranchised has never been greater. This has only deepened the

plight of those whose marginalized existence—the existence that social-constructivist

resistance intends to improve—prevents them from acquiring agency (including the kind

of linguistic agency described by social-constructivism, because access to ever-more-

expensive college courses grows increasingly elusive). Furthermore, not only is it

difficult for even progressive people to understand the struggles of the disenfranchised—

it is impossible to truly "step outside" one's material existence (be it race, class, gender,

or whatever) and gain the full perspective of another's—there are forces at work that

actively strive to disregard these struggles (e.g., right-wing politicians). Even if language

can reshape reality to some extent—and, as I hope to have shown, it is important to

emphasize that this is only to an extent—not everyone who wields words does so in a

progressive fashion (e.g., when Paul Ryan blames the plight of the poor squarely on those

who work most to help them, on the so-called "hammock" that leads to laziness and

lethargy). In sum, the problems that arise from representation's impact (or lack thereof)

on material existence are ongoing and widespread.

Needless to say, the field of rhetoric and composition is troubled by these

problems, too. As noted above, no one can fully escape their material existence-

conditioned subjectivities, and despite progressive English departments' attempts to

promote diversity, many graduate students, professors, and instructors come from middle class (or higher) backgrounds (and they're also still often white, heterosexual, etc.). Even the most impassioned and progressive among them are limited in their abilities to understand the struggles of their marginalized students. And to the extent that they can understand, and can use this understanding to nurture a progressive classroom that invites students to challenge and reshape their identities—and realities—for the better, words are nonetheless limited in their ability to meaningfully do so, as this chapter hopes to have shown.

The complexity of these non-discursive factors poses problems as well, and makes it much more difficult for the first-year composition classroom to grapple with them. For one, the world is changing fast for the disenfranchised. From the increased acceptance of gay marriage, to the recent legal challenges to affirmative action, to the reduced funding of some social welfare programs, the rules keep changing, and they are hard for anyone to keep up with. Moreover, the diverse plights of the marginalized make it difficult for teachers to help out. Students come from an array of backgrounds, so while it may be tempting to treat them as a homogeneous lot—and they are homogeneous to the extent that they are all first-year composition students in the same classroom—doing so ignores the complexity of their struggles. And this raises another question for the social-constructivist classroom: Are we to help students empower themselves individually, as a group, or both? The answer to this, as Berlin might say, would be to develop a democratic classroom in which students, through dialogue, achieve mutual understanding and empowerment. But this raises yet another question: What do we do with students who are not on board with such a classroom—students from deeply conservative

backgrounds, for instance? Is it not undemocratic to impose our ideologies upon them? As the chapter notes, Byron Hawk has asked this question, too.

Procedural Approach

It is inevitable to gravitate toward "best-laid plans" in the first-year composition classroom. With ever-increasing class sizes, ever-increasing diversity and—concomitantly—ever-decreasing time, instructors want to find a simple, universal way to approach teaching. And as this chapter hopes to have shown, all pedagogies—even those that aim to be as non-procedural as possible—will involve some degree of planning, even if those plans may be changed. Nevertheless, we should welcome the prospect of events both large and small in the classroom.

The implications for a Badiouian reading of *kairos* in the classroom are significant. For one, as Kinneavy contends, *kairos* is involved with real-world goings-on and controversies; this makes the stakes higher, and therefore makes possible more agency and empowerment for writers (although of course, writing solely for a teacher is technically real-world writing, too). Second, it opens the door for empowerment via personal writing.

As stated in the chapter, Badiou reserves event status for only the most momentous of occasions. But first-year composition students encounter what may be seen as "mini-events" routinely—and this provides an opening for them to restructure their identities through writing. If they maintain, to borrow Marilyn Cooper's term, an openness to possibilities, they can identify events and "pledge fidelity" to them—even if they are small.

Process Approach

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The idea of a teacherless classroom may make many of us uncomfortable; after all, if the classroom were teacherless, we'd all be out of our jobs. But the idea of a classroom as staunchly teacherless as Jacotot's or Elbow's can spark a useful conversation about how power exercises itself in the classroom, and about what the role of the teacher should be.

The Elbowian/Jacototian model's goal is to give students increased control of the classroom's proverbial steering wheel, thereby giving them more agency and empowerment. Also, crucially, it places students' perceptions and personal experiences at the center of the inquiry process. This is important, not only because it provides them with a sense of agency, but also because it allows them to get a sense of what we academics do as scholars when we explore our own experiences *vis-a-vis* academic discourse.

The teacherless classroom, however, inevitably creates tensions involving questions of power. One the one hand, there are institutional pressures, not the least of which is the requirement that the teacher grade the essays—and grading, of course, places much power in the hands of the teacher. (These institutional pressures are difficult to deal with. To an extent, there's only so much one can do about them other than just live with them, whether one likes it or not. This is not to say, however, that we should give up completely on resisting them; a student essay may not be able subvert the dominant institutional paradigm, but it can still contest it if the teacher encourages such contestation, and invites the student to position themselves against the academy in an empowering way.) And on the other hand, there are aspects of the teacher-student relationship that shift the balance of power towards the teacher. For instance, even if

Rancière/Jacotot are correct that a schoolmaster can be ignorant and still be successful, there are things like the wisdom that comes naturally with the teacher being older (in most cases) than the students.

Translingual Approach

Needless to say, the structure and function of language, and how it plays out in culture, is highly complicated. It is a fluid, dynamic process of sedimentation that resists restrictive labels. Yet, at the same time, labels are assigned to it—labels that are often fraught with ideological (and, as in the case of the English-only movement, sometimes oppressive) underpinnings. This complexity brings both stubborn problems and promising opportunities to the composition classroom.

On the one hand, marginalized students may have difficulty grappling with the linguistic and political obstacles that confront them. But on the other hand, as we have seen, language is in a constant state of flux—and in a constant state of modification, contingent on the countless micro-interactions that occur everywhere, all the time, in and out of the classroom. And if language is being continually reshaped, that opens a door for students to participate in this reshaping, to manipulate codes in ways that empower them.

Traditionally, teachers are the gatekeepers of "correctness." However, if students are able to manipulate—or even invent—codes in ways that destabilize and interrogate dominant notions of what constitutes correctness, then the students are, in a very real sense, reconstructing the "gate" itself. This challenges not only "standard" notions of correctness, but the teachers—and institutions—that enforce those standards. This is a challenge that teachers should invite, so as to further empower and validate students and their writing *vis-a-vis* the academy.

This repositioning of the teacher in relation to students is echoed in the other chapters. For instance, in the process chapter, Rancière's radically teacherless classroom, when considered in light of Elbow's somewhat more moderately teacherless classroom, does much to destabilize the classroom's balances of power, placing students in front of the steering wheel when it comes to their learning and writing. In the procedural chapter, the idea of events—ruptures in the known order of things that invite restructurings of said order—open up the possibility for student empowerment, because the event in question could involve a fracturing of the traditional student-teacher relationship, thereby allowing both the teacher and her students to reconsider the classroom's balance of power; indeed, the teacher could use her perceived authority to initiate a class-wide "pledge of fidelity" to such an event. And the chapter on social-constructivist pedagogy—despite its often-gloomy outlook with regard to the possibility of a first-year composition student acquiring agency through English 101 essays—identifies a topic of discussion for a composition classroom, i.e., the difficulty in establishing a truly liberatory classroom. After all, even if there are many obstacles that confront the progressive, student-centered classroom, the first step toward surmounting them is identifying them—which that chapter attempts to do, at least in part. In sum, there are numerous ways in which teachers—and their students—can interrogate power asymmetries, and this project aims to forward them in a way that highlights their real-world potential.

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Education

2013   University of Louisville   PhD, Rhetoric & Composition

                    Dissertation: "Pedagogy: Reconsiderations and
                    Reorientations"

                    Committee: Bronwyn Williams (Chair), Stephen Schneider,
                    Aaron Jaffe, Alan Golding, and Marilyn Cooper

2008   University of Louisville   MA, English

2003   University of Kentucky   BA
                    English

Teaching Experience

08/2006 – Current   University of Louisville
                    Graduate Teaching Fellow
                    Introduction to College Writing
                    Intermediate College Writing
                    Advanced Composition for Freshmen
                    Writing About Literature
                    Introduction to Creative Writing
                    Writing Center Consultant

Academic Publications

"Code-Meshing Meshed Codes: Some Complications and Possibilities. Journal of
Advanced Composition 29 (2009), 281-84.

Under Review
                    "Event, Kairos, Procedure: Alain Badiou and Rhetorical
                    Agency." Under review at Journal of Advanced
                    Composition.

Presentations	"Discerning the Indiscernible: Rereading Kairos Through Alain Badiou's Being and Event. Rhetoric Society of America Conference. Philadelphia, PA. May 2012.
Conference on Rhetoric	"Code-Meshing Meshed Codes." Thomas R. Watson and Composition. Louisville, KY. October 2010.
Rhetoric Society of America Conference	"By My Speech I Wish to Determine the Truth: Gorgias' Affirmative Impulse." Minneapolis, MN. May 2010.
Kentucky Philological Association Conference	"The Rhetoric of Noise in the 20th Century." Owensboro, KY. March 2009.
Thomas R. Watson Conference in Rhetoric and Composition	"World of Warcraft, YouTube, Identity." October, 2008.
Kentucky Philological Association Conference	"Fishing for Reference with All the Wrong Baits: Problems of Signification in Percival Everett's Erasure." Pine Mountain, KY. March 2007.
Louisville Conference on Literature and Culture Since 1900.	"Patterns of Consciousness in The Sound and the Fury." Louisville, KY. 2007.

Awards/Honors

University of Louisville Graduate Fellowship (2008-2012)
The Anne Braden Institute for Social Justice Research Paper Award (2010)
University of Louisville Creative Writing Scholarship (2010)
Kentucky Metroversity Writing Competition. First prize in graduate fiction category (2010)
Phi Beta Kappa, University of Kentucky (2003)
University of Kentucky Farquhar Award for Poetry. First prize. (2003)

Administrative Experience

08/2009 – 05/2010   Axton Graduate Assistant
Coordinated the Axton Festival, Calvino Prize, and Axton Series of visiting authors for the University of Louisville. Organized public events such as readings and master class

workshops for visiting writers. Handled all publicity for the program and coordinated the daily administration of the program with the Director of Creative Writing.

Additional Writing/Editing Experience

04/2009 – 01/2010   Freelance Writer
Published several essays in the Speed Art Museum
Magazine. Louisville, KY

08/2003 – 12/2003   Staff Member
Limestone literary journal. University of Kentucky.
Lexington, KY

08/2003 – 12/2003   Intern
Wind Magazine. Lexington, KY