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Composition as a mode of being: Politics, ethics, and history in the writing classrooms of postmodernity

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COMPOSITION AS A MODE OF BEING:
POLITICS, ETHICS, AND HISTORY IN
THE WRITING CLASSROOMS OF POSTMODERNITY

BY

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DEDICATION

To my father who taught me how to be a man,
To my mother who taught me how to love,
To my brothers and sister who gave me a place to belong,
To my nieces and nephews who first allowed me to teach,
And, finally, to Steve because--well--his the beneficiary.

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THE WRITING CLASSROOMS OF POSTMODERNITY

by

Lance Michael Svehla
University of New Hampshire, September, 1997

Henry Louis Gates Jr. once commented that while he did not "deny the importance, on the level of theory, of the [postmodern] project," such a project did not help him when he was "trying to get a taxi on the corner of 125th and Lenox Avenue" (*Loose Canons* 37-38). The postmodern project lacked what Gates calls "practical performative force." The purpose of this dissertation is to establish postmodernity's practical perfomative force for the composition classroom. It addresses four central questions: What is postmodernity? What is its relationship to composition? Why should composition teachers and students care about this relationship? How might composition use postmodernity to create new classroom practices and deal with reoccurring classroom problems?

I believe that postmodern theory, if it can be refigured to match our current historical moment, offers composition two powerful discourses for creating practice and crossing disciplinary boundaries: an epistemological frame that allows for a plurality of diverse and even contradictory pedagogies in one classroom, and a theory of culture(s) that can help teachers negotiate the academic, political, and ethical challenges of today's classrooms. Postmodernity

is not. as Lester Faigley's work implies, an abstract theory or research method that composition teachers apply to composition but. as Louise Wetherbee Phelps argues. a cultural condition in which we live.

INTRODUCTION

DARKNESS MADE VISIBLE

The nineteenth and twentieth centuries have given us as much terror as we can take. We have paid a high enough price for the nostalgia of the whole and the one . . . . Let us wage war on totality. --Jean-Francois Lyotard *The Postmodern Condition*

The political challenge is to articulate universality in a way that is not a mere smokescreen for someone else's particularity. We must preserve the possibility of universal connection. That's the fundamental challenge. Let's dig deep enough within our heritage to make that connection to others . . . . The quest for knowledge without presuppositions, the quest for certainty, the quest for dogmatism and orthodoxy and rigidity is over.
--Cornell West "Diverse New World"

[W]hat I sense at the present moment is a shift in the critical mass toward commitment, vocation, social responsibility. For us as scholars, teachers, and students, this shift has meant a growing legitimacy (once again) for questions of ethics and politics, of agency and action, of intention and meaning. It has meant the insistent return of urgency, of a sense that our intellectual work matters--or at least that it should matter, must matter, in the arena of cultural production and social change.
--Susan Stanford Friedman "Post/Poststructuralist Feminist Criticism"

It has become almost a cliché amongst scholars, intellectuals, and pundits of the popular culture to write that we are living in a postmodern age. From MTV, to the United Nations, to the hallowed halls of academia, there is a sense that things are fragmented, devoid of overarching meaning, and ultimately beyond our ability to control; that our agency is an illusion and perhaps even culpable in our impotency. In the South a young mother drowns her children in a station wagon but blames it on a black carjacker; in Bosnia-Hertzogovina Muslims suffer genocide while Western diplomats negotiate with the engineers of ethnic cleansing; in L.A. cheering spectators wave signs reading "Go O.J. Go!" as Simpson's previously

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blood stained Bronco slowly flees down the freeway. Everywhere we turn the media betrays and portrays the crumbling metanarratives that once offered at least the hope of meaning, progress, and justice.

We watch--literally--as the once sacred programs and institutions of modernism fall apart. The rule of law fades under the light of courtroom cameras as Mark Furhman swears he never used the "n-word." The sanctity of family drowns in Susan Smith's TV generated tears as she begs the carjacker not to harm her children. The promise of Western civilization and the utopia of Marxism are mutually stripped of credibility as journalists uncover the mass graves of the former Yugoslavia. From Rodney King's beating, the L.A. riots, the burning of Malcolm X's widow, and the Menendez brother's trails for murder to the massacres in Rwanda, drug resistant viruses, massive deforestation, and overpopulation; the world, more than ever, seems "a darkling plain . . . where ignorant armies clash by night"--the "confused alarms of struggle and flight" (Arnold 649) made visible this time, however, not by a poet's pen but by the light of a CNN camera. The technology that was supposed to increase our ability to control the world has instead left us feeling overwhelmed.

And yet, what exactly all this fragmentation means and, more importantly, what we are supposed to feel and do about it is not clear. Indeed, there are almost as many views on the postmodern condition, as many opinions on the usefulness or futility of postmodern theory, as there are theorists. For Baudrillard and Derrida the inescapability of our condition becomes license to "play 'with the pieces' of the deconstructed universe" (Faigley 210), to

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embrace postmodernity as "neither optimistic nor pessimistic" but as "a game with the vestiges of what has been destroyed . . . . an attempt to rediscover a certain pleasure in the irony of things, in the game of things" (Baudrillard *Baudrillard* 95). We are either to endlessly deconstruct, defer, and pun with meaning and presence as Derrida would have us do or accept, as Baudrillard does, that pleasure in irony is more "sane" than a search for meaning in a world where simulacrums, where images of the real, are realer than real.

For other theorists like Foucault, whose language of power and confession belies any attempt to play with our condition, there is a hesitancy to theorize any large plan of action, any politics of consensuality, any universal form of agency for fear that "any global political theory of resistance . . . would inevitably reproduce what it set out to eliminate" (Faigley 44). While for theorists such as Fredric Jameson and Jean-Francois Lyotard, theorists who helped establish the postmodern critique, postmodernism represents either a challenge to be contained or a hope for a new kind of justice. For Jameson, belief in a postmodern condition and adherence to classical Marxism is not a contradiction but a kind of theorizing that sees postmodernism as a transitional stage from which we have not yet emerged.[1] Despite postmodernism's devastating critique of Marxist theory, Jameson is "convinced that this new postmodern global form of capitalism will now have a new class logic about it, but it has not yet completely emerged because labor has not yet reconstituted itself on a global scale" (Hall and Jameson 31). His attempt, therefore, to create an overall theory of differentation is "little more than the making of connections between various phenomena"

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(Jameson "Afterward" 376). Lyotard, on the other hand, sees postmodernism not as a transitional stage but as an "overarching" (and in that sense paradoxical) condition of heterogeneity in which certain notions of universal justice are still possible.[2] In *The Postmodern Condition*, Lyotard calls for a "multiplicity of finite meta-arguments" over "grand narratives" because the former are more receptive to heterogeneity and unassimilated otherness (65). Justice within these multiple "little narratives" is not based on truth or consensus but on an "invention . . . born of dissension" (xxv). Postmodernism becomes a frame for a unity of contradictions.

For still other theorists, postmodernism and its specific manifestation as poststructuralism[3] represent a questionable attempt to remove notions of agency, social justice, and identity just at the moment when marginalized groups have attained the power to use them. For example, Terry Eagleton initially rejected postmodernism as nothing more than another "bourgeois mystification."[4] Barbara Christian sees postmodernism as the "production of a theoretical elite at precisely the time 'when the literature of peoples of color, of black women, of Latin Americans, of Africans, began to move to 'the center'" ("The Race" 229). And Ann duCille's critique of the camouflaging effect of postcolonialism echoes the fear many theorists have about postmodernism. duCille believes that "False universals such as 'the postcolonial woman,' 'the postcolonial condition,' and even 'the postcolonial critic' camouflage the variety of neocolonial circumstances in which masses of people live, work, and theorize" ("Postcolonialism" 33). In a similar way, it could be argued that terms such as "the postmodern condition," "postmodern theory," and

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"the postmodern critic" camouflage the hunger, color, and gender inequalities that make it impossible or unpalatable for the marginalized to fully enter the postmodern discursive universe. In short, there is a required level of privilege necessary to play with the pieces of the deconstructed universe. Finally, for theorists like Jurgen Habermas postmodernism is not simply endlessly critical, paradoxical, or a mark of privilege but an abandonment of the goals of the Enlightenment: truth, rationality, and social justice. Fully understanding and appreciating the postmodern critique of modernity, Habermas, nevertheless, believes that it "is made at the expense of any beneficial concept of reason" (Faigley 41). However, rationality for Habermas is no longer the product of an inner logic or unified

subject but the potential of a "pragmatics of language use" (41). He maintains that a just society must be based on a comprehensive notion of rationality relocated in our "potential for communicative action" (41). In direct contrast to Lyotard, Habermas does not see the horrors of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as the result of the Enlightenment but as the result of leaving the Enlightenment an "incomplete project."[5]

Clearly, whatever one's feelings on the phenomenon of postmodernism, on its usefulness as a project for political change, or on the extent of the postmodern condition, the previous center provided by the modern project--"the domination of nature, the primacy of method, and the sovereignty of the individual" (Borgmann *Crossing* 5)--no longer holds, no longer persuades theoretically or pragmatically, no longer provides a common life.

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And yet, as Albert Borgmann argues, the postmodern theory that has arisen to describe our condition offers little comfort and even less direction: "the idiom we have favored since the beginning of the modern era fails to inspire conviction or yield insight; the language of those proclaiming a new epoch seems merely deconstructive or endlessly prefatory" (2). Borgmann believes, therefore, that the "language of postmodernism has crucial critical force. But much of it seems idle; very little of it gives us a helpful view of the postmodern divide or of what lies beyond it (3-4). In other words, the postmodern critique reveals previously unproblematized power relations, offers the grounds for critiquing those relations, but leaves no way to move beyond those insights. It has produced no theory of agency that might lead to political action and change. It cannot seem to "articulate" Patricia Bizzell's call for "a positive program legitimated by an authority that is nevertheless non-foundational" ("Beyond" 671). In essence, postmodernism seems like the great furnace in Milton's hell. It casts flames "on all sides round . . . / yet from those flames / No light, but rather darkness visible / Serv'd only to discover sights of woe, / Regions of sorrow, doleful shades, where peace / And rest can never dwell, hope never comes" (Milton qtd. in Masello 36).

Yet this cliché, the now casual, commercial, and controversial use of the term postmodernism, still marks a very real sense that something important has changed in the understanding of ourselves and the world--a change found not so much in our fear of fragmentation and incoherence but in our fear of powerlessness in the face of that fragmentation, in the relationship of our agency,

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individually and collectively, to that incoherence. From philosophers like Nietzsche, Rousseau, and Kierkegaard to artists like Camus, Arnold, Kafka, and Joyce, feelings of fragmentation have been identified before. Indeed, the ultimately fragmented state of nature and society is a fundamental conceit of high modernism. The difference between their state and the postmodern is their belief in the ability of the artist, the agent, the individual to resist, as a moral project, this fragmentation, to stand in opposition to it, to form within one's self a consciousness that derives its wholeness from its ability to critique. This lack of faith in or concern with the ability of the individual to resist, perhaps more than anything else, marks postmodern theory. As David Harvey argues, "postmodernism swims, even wallows, in the fragmentary and the chaotic currents of change as if that is all there is" (*The Condition* 44).

I would argue, however, that what has been abandoned or destroyed in theory may be found in our lived lives. While resistance or agency may no longer emanate from a distanced self and may no longer be leveled against easily discernible and monolithic power structures, it can still exist, individually and collectively, in the multiple and fractured things we do: write a book, protest clear cutting, raise a child. It is a theory of agency and resistance that has passed through the postmodern critique yet retains many of its insights. It is a theory that does not hold out hope for a unified self but examines actions to see how a multiple, fractured, and fluid self might be manifested effectively. Like Friedman I believe that we have moved beyond the hegemony of postmodern theory but not its formative influence. Friedman, as my

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epigraph implies, sees us as having moved into a post-poststructural period. Concerns for "ethics and politics, agency and action, intention and meaning" are once again legitimate, but now must be seen and performed in the presence of a feeling that poststructuralism is historically past yet still crucially, if differently, present. She writes:

> *After* suggests . . . that we are beyond poststructuralism, that *post*structuralism is *past*, still inevitably part of our present, but present different than it was before, present as a significant vestige of our immediate past, but fundamentally altered by its new context in the present. ("Post/Poststructuralism" 465-66).

This new context is one in which postmodernism must either help us to fulfill a desire for a new kind of self, resistance, ethics, and history or get out of the way.

We live in a moment when many of us want to reclaim important yet theoretically discredited ideas from modernism. But we want to reclaim them as vastly different practices. It is a time when "Agency involves action that is not separate from, but also not reducible to, language" (Friedman 472); when the self is not autonomous but still exists as dialogic and intersubjective; when resistance is not limited to the domain of subjectivity but must take other forms as the situation demands; when ethics is not seen as above ideology but somehow before it; and when, above all else, history is not seen as rationally progressive but still provides a sense of pattern, a sense of meaning rendered from experience, a sense of communicative possibility. For it is *ludic* postmodernism's abandonment of historical consciousness that cripples our ability to move beyond the postmodern divide. In surrendering history we surrender not only what we have been, what we are, and what we might be, but the struggle over who gets to decide those questions.

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It is historical consciousness that allows us to see our present condition, to alter that condition, and to place ideology itself within a larger frame.

Moreover, it is a moment, a time, when the implicit morality of postmodern theory is pushing to the fore. As Kate Sopher does, I find in much of postmodernism a covert desire to make the world and our students' lives better, but it is a desire that has been down-played due to postmodernism's initial role as critic of supposedly moral systems. She writes:

> Why, for example, lend ourselves to the politics of "difference" if not in virtue of its enlightenment--what is permits in the way of releasing subjects from the conflations of imperializing discourse and the constructed identities of binary oppositions? Why lend ourselves to the deconstruction of liberal-humanist rhetoric if not to expose the class or racial or gender identities it occludes? . . . Why call science into question if not in part because of the military and ecological catastrophes to which the blind pursuit of its instrumental rationality has delivered us? Why problematize the artistic canon and its modes of aesthetic discrimination if not to draw attention to the ways in which art can collude with the values of the establishment and serve to reinforce its power elites. (qtd. in Faigley 21)

Presently, therefore, I would argue that postmodernism need lead neither to an impasse nor a "wallowing" but, instead, could lead to new ethical ways of teaching and evaluating writing, new ways of relating to our students and colleagues, new ways of using the classroom to help interpenetrate divergent politics, new ways of sensing history that enable us to see that where we stand in the present is constituted by the past. In short, the historical moment offers us the possibility of using the moral potential of postmodernism to create composition studies as an ethical space in which multiple and new ways of being are enacted to solve immediate problems in specific situations.

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The purpose of this dissertation, therefore, is to help map this sense of a new post-postmodern identity, ethics, and *"experience* of history"--not by ignoring or embracing the postmodern critique but by engaging it (Friedman 469). In my first chapter I will examine the problems involved in trying to use postmodernism in such a way for the field of composition. Specifically, I will review the ways that theorists such as James Berlin, Lester Faigley, Maxine Hairston. Patricia Harkin, Susan Miller, Victor Vitanza, and others have constructed the relationship of composition to postmodernity--constructions that either enable or harm composition's ability to use postmodernism in the manner I hope for. In chapter two. I will show that the postmodern impasse of agency is more a problem of theory than an actual condition. The impasse is neither a barrier to writing resistance nor for using postmodernism to explain that resistance. The chapter focuses on the writing of a lower caste. Indian, woman immigrant who confronts both caste prejudice and sexism through the anonymity of the internet. Resistance and agency for Malathi are not matters of subject position but of refiguring object status through writing, personal history. and technology. Malathi will show us that the historical grounds for resistance, and thus the preeminent need for subjectivity to resist oppression, have changed or at least become more complex.

Chapter three is the first of two chapters that will focus on the issue of politics in the classroom. Having established the possibility of resistance, I begin to examine how composition tries to both deal with and encourage student resistance in the classroom by teaching the political. In this chapter I critique the critical democracy

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pedagogy advanced by such diverse theorists as James Berlin, Patricia Bizzell, Alan France, Karen Fitts, Charles Payne, James Laditka, C. H. Knoblauch, Ira Shor, John Clifford, and Donald Morton to name a few. Disturbed by the authoritarian approach that some critical pedagogues take yet dedicated to the idea of the classroom as a place for social progress, I use postmodernism to reject the false choice of either having to leave one's politics at the door or using one's authority to try and force ideological change. Having critiqued current pedagogy on the use of politics in the classroom, I use chapter four to offer a postmodern ethics of the political as a substitute. Borrowing from the works of Michel Foucault, Gerald Graff, Patricia Harkin, and Mikhail Bakhtin, I construct an ethics of the political based on experimentation, pragmatism, Bakhtinian answerability, and respect for the incommensurability of the other. Then, in the spirit of Foucault, I put this ethics to the test against examples of offensive student writing. It is my contention that offensive writing is often an act of legitimate resistance and should be treated as such.

Finally, in the last chapter I try to recapture a notion of history that acknowledges the postmodern critique of teleology yet sees history as having a pattern that, if traced, allows us to forge connections and resist inequities. I reject both the radical postmodernists who claim that we are living in a post-historical era and the Hegelian or Marxist historians who refuse to see that history is not marked by an inherent plan or progression. Specifically, I try to recapture a sense of history and community through the concept of intertextuality. I examine the strange echoes I hear between the

work of Michel Foucault and the work of Plato--echoes that make Plato relevant and Foucault useful to the projects of social progress. My belief is that while texts do not represent a space outside of cultures from which to judge practices, they do represent a shared, if conflicted, space among communities where standards of ethics, politics, and aesthetics can be debated and altered, a web of connections for dialogue.

In general, the project can be summed up in a quote from Henry Giroux:

> Rather than proclaiming the end of reason, postmodernism can be critically analyzed for how successfully it interrogates the limits of the project of modernist rationality and its universal claims to progress, happiness, and freedom. Instead of assuming that postmodernism has vacated the terrain of values, it seems more useful to address how it accounts for how values are constructed historically and relationally . . . . instead of claiming that postmodernism's critique of the essentialist subject denies a theory of subjectivity, it seems more productive to examine how its claims about the contingent character of identity, constructed in a multiplicity of social relations and discourse, redefines the notion of agency. ("Slacking Off" 350-51)

I believe composition, more than any other field, has the capacity to use postmodernism in the way Giroux recommends. Composition is, in some sense, both within and larger than postmodernism. It is a mode of being, a way of writing self, resistance, ethics, experience, and history into tangible, alterable, communal existence. It deals with learning, literacy, knowledge making, and critique. It is literacy as a material action in the world that has real effects on real bodies. After all, the putting together of parts preceded the postmodern condition and will outlive it (though composing too has passed through the altering of postmodernity). Still, this altering does not have to be restrictive or destructive. The altering caused by

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postmodernism should result in more not less--more ways of writing, more ways of creating practice and play, more ways of making connections, and more ways of negotiating the academic, cultural, political, and ethical challenges of today's classrooms. Acknowledging the failure of subject-centered rationality does not necessitate nihilism or relativism nor does it necessitate the destruction of all notions of truth or justice. Instead, it represents the need to enter a relationship of respectful listening when trying to forge a relationship, a politics, an ethics, or a history of self to other. The influence of postmodernity could be the celebration of the failure of the Enlightenment and of modernism to banish, destroy, or assimilate the incommensurability of the other.

Before I turn to the first chapter though, I feel compelled to make a small digression. A devoted liberal humanist, I have wrestled, painfully at times, with postmodernism's devastating critique of that tradition. In this struggle I have not been alone. For many the theories of postmodernity represent a persuasive body of knowledge but also a serious threat to hard won advances in human rights, academic freedom, the rule of law, and other "sacred" humanist principles. This dissertation represents my attempt to ally my own and others' fears concerning the worth of the postmodern project for the teaching of writing and the writing of social change. I still deeply believe in concepts such as truth, subjectivity, human rights, history, and the importance of the relationship of words to things and actions. I have merely come to believe that truth is negotiated within historical and institutional moments, that subjects who write are also written, that history is often written by the

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winners, and that discursive signs are unstable and institutionally specific.

More importantly, I have come to learn that I will not and cannot sacrifice a vision of a better world simply because it has become theoretically difficult to justify notions of progress, justice, and universal human rights. My response to the most radical postmodernists, trapped as they are in a world of discursive illusions, is that they do not understand that language does not determine the experience of the world but constitutes it; that other things, often more important things such as the body, rupture the ability of language to neatly package experience. As Elaine Scarry argues in *The Body in Pain*, "physical pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned" (4). It is these things which radical postmodernism often tries to "flick" away--the story of those who cannot argue using the technology of the present, the parts of experience that overwhelm language, the worth of good will in attempting to construct universal justice--that I will try to recover. I end my introduction, therefore, with a poem by Allen Ginsberg. I think that sometimes in our discussions of power, language, and politics we forget the responsibility, the necessity, of love. We forget that in our relationships with others the burden is not only political, economical, and pedagogical but emotional. We must, in some sense, love those whom we would teach, argue with, and live amongst. For in that love it is impossible to remove humanity and our responsibility to it.

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Song

The weight of the world
            is love.
Under the burden
            of solitude,
under the burden
            of dissatisfaction

            the weight
the weight we carry
            is love
Who can deny?
            In dreams
it touches
            the body,
in thought
            constructs
a miracle,
            in imagination
anguishes
            till born
in human--

looks out of the heart
            burning with purity--
for the burden of life
            is love,
but we carry the weight
            wearily
and so must rest
in the arms of love
            at last,
must rest in the arms of love.

No rest
            without love,
no sleep
            without dreams
of love--
            be mad or chill
obsessed with angels
            or machines,
the final wish
            is love
--cannot be bitter,
            cannot deny,
cannot withhold
            if denied:

the weight is too heavy
            --must give

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for no return
        as thought
is given
        in solitude
in all the excellence
        of its excess.

The warm bodies
        shine together
in the darkness,
        the hand moves
to the center
        of the flesh,
the skin trembles
        in happiness
and the soul comes
        joyful to the eye--

yes. yes,
        that's what
I wanted,
        I always wanted,
I always wanted,
        to return
to the body
        where I was born.

SanJose,1954

INTRODUCTION NOTES

1. See Bizzell's "Marxist Ideas in Composition Studies" pages 55-57 and 67-68 for a further discussion of how Jameson attempts to maintain both a classical Marxist hope for the future and a postmodern sensibility of the present.

2. Lyotard admits in *Just Gaming* that his "justice of multiplicity" (100) rests on the contradiction of a universal principle that language games are incommensurable and singular. In effect, he admits that his theory against meta-narratives rests on a meta-narrative. This contradiction, however, does not bother him because it is itself emblematic of the postmodern condition-- living with fragmentation and contradiction without feeling the need to assimilate it. He argues that postmodernism "refines our sensitivity to differences and reinforces our ability to tolerate the incommensurable. Its principle is not the expert's homology, but the inventor's paralogy" (*The Postmodern Condition* xxv).

3. Though composition often uses postmodernism synonymously for poststructuralism and postcolonialism, I recognize that there are key differences among these terms. Yet because of current parlance and the legitimacy of seeing postmodernism, in its broadest sense, as a critique of modernism in which both poststructuralism and postcolonialism participate, I feel comfortable in using the quotations of these authors to discuss the larger phenomenon of postmodernism. See Kwame Anthony Appiah's "Is the Post-in Postmodernism the Post-in Postcolonial?" for a discussion of differences between the two terms.

4. See James Berlin's *Rhetorics, Poetics, and Culture* page 64.

5. See Jurgen Habermas' "Modernity--An Incomplete Project."

CHAPTER I

STRANGE BEDFELLOWS?: COMPOSITION AND POSTMODERNITY

> Critics of postmodernism are fond of pointing out the disparities of usage in the term and that any concept of postmodernism is itself contradictory. Both caveats should be kept in mind. There is no way of working quickly through the contradictions described in discussions of postmodernity as a cultural condition. Indeed, the assertion that there is no satisfactory definition of postmodernism is a positive expression of postmodernism. When it can be defined, the provocativeness of postmodernism will have long since ended. -- Lester Faigley *Fragments of Rationality*

> The shepherd, qua shepherd, acts for the good of the sheep, to protect them from discomfiture and harm. But he may be identified with a project that is raising the sheep for market. --Kenneth Burke *Rhetoric*

If the larger culture's relationship to postmodernism is complex, then the specific cultural site of composition and its relationship to postmodernism is even more so. Indeed, composition's relationship to postmodernity may be more convoluted than any other discipline's relationship given our intimacy with that most postmodern nexus of language/writing/self. In response to this complexity composition has developed multiple ways of defining its relationship with postmodernity--each with distinct ramifications for how useful the theories of postmodernity can be for solving the dilemmas of our field. In general, composition seems to have defined five ways of using or relating to postmodernism: epistemological, cultural, utilitarian, radical, and adversarial.

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The first way of understanding postmodernism and its relationship to composition is encapsulated nicely by Lester Faigley. In *Fragments of Rationality* Faigley argues that "The disruptions of postmodern theory that have caused major upheavals in other disciplines in the humanities and interpretative social sciences have had far less effect on composition studies" (xi). Faigley explains this lack of upheaval by pointing to "the conservatism of composition studies in the face of postmodern theory" (xi). Composition as a discipline, according to Faigley, has been reluctant to surrender its modernist "belief in the writer as an autonomous self" (15). This reluctance has caused composition to lag far behind other fields in reaping the epistemological and pedagogical challenges of postmodern theory. Faigley is, therefore, "ambivalent about claims that we have entered an era of postmodernity" (21). Instead he believes that "while composition studies is concurrent with some characterizations of an era of postmodernity, it has by and large resisted the fragmentary and chaotic currents of postmodernity" (xi).

For Faigley, then, postmodernism is a theory that composition teachers and scholars must appropriate and apply to their research and teaching, even if they have lagged behind their colleagues in the social sciences and humanities in doing so. Postmodernism is seen as something outside composition, something that "coincides" with it, but that can only be fully incorporated into composition through a shift in composition's epistemological assumptions. If composition continues to refuse to surrender its belief in the writer as an autonomous self, then postmodernism will continue to have only a marginal effect on teaching, evaluation, and research. Much like

Stephen North's view of composition as a discipline marked by incompatible research communities due to different epistemological assumptions, Faigley's postmodernism represents another incompatible epistemology that must compete with already existing composition epistemologies.

But other theorists, most notably Louise Weatherbee Phelps, Patricia Harkin, John Schilb, and Susan Miller, contend that composition studies is always already postmodern, is already and has always been "fragmented" in the ways Faigley's metaphor suggests. For these theorists postmodernism is a cultural condition in which we live and not a theory that we apply. Phelps, for example, introduces her book *Composition as a Human Science* with the observation that "composition awakens in the initial moment of its disciplinary project to find itself already situated, prereflectively, within a specific cultural field of meaning--that of postmodern thought, with its characteristic preoccupations and world vision" (3). Harkin, alluding to Foucault, claims that composition studies is more properly understood as "post-disciplinary," a cultural practice rather than a discipline or even an interdisciplinary field of inquiry and teaching ("The Postdisciplinary" 126). And Schilb, while not going as far as Harkin, argues that "the field [of composition studies] currently comprises diverse topics and methods and has ties to numerous disciplines"("Cultural Studies" 176).[1] For Phelps et al, postmodernism is not a theory that composition teachers and scholars must appropriate but an intellectual movement in which they have always already participated (albeit with varying degrees of awareness) by virtue of composition's subject(s), so that composition is leading the

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way for postmodern inquiry and teaching in other academic disciplines.

Postmodernism is not "out there," not a theoretical abstraction to explain our condition; it is our condition. The reason why postmodernism has not resulted in acknowledged classroom practices, therefore, is not because we cling to a previous and incompatible epistemology, as Faigley contends, but because we need to make explicit a condition that we already implicitly live. The problem of turning theory into practice is not one of translation but of awareness. Thus, despite Faigley's ambivalence, composition's multiplicity of research methods and methodologies, epistemologies, and practitioners are themselves manifestations of postmodernity.

A third view, or in this case I should stress use, of postmodernism, began with theorists like Kenneth Bruffee, Karen LeFevre and Charles Bazerman and culminated in the work of theorists like Patricia Bizzell, John Trimbur, John Clifford, and James Berlin. These theorists employed and employ, to varying degrees, aspects of postmodern theory to critique previous composition epistemologies and rhetorics in order, ultimately, to advance more ideologically "enlightened" ones. In the late 70's and early 80's Bruffee, influenced by the work of Richard Rorty, Thomas Kuhn, and Clifford Geertz, developed a pedagogy of "collaborative learning" for viewing and teaching writing as socially negotiated knowledge. Rather than seeing writing as the individual act of an autonomous self, Bruffee attempts to locate writing and the self within Rorty's normal and abnormal discourses. He argues that "entities we normally call reality, knowledge, thought, facts, texts, selves, and so

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on are constructs generated by communities of like-minded peers" ("Social Construction" 774). Crucial to Bruffee's pedagogy of writing, therefore, are the ideas of community and collaboration as ways of forming consensus and writing critique.

Karen LeFevre, influenced by George Herbert Mead, continues this line of reasoning by arguing that invention itself is a social act, the "symbolic interactions of a group of people" (*Invention* 1). LeFevre believes that too many theorists, influenced by Plato, see invention "as the private act of an individual writer" (1). While LeFevre acknowledges the usefulness of this view for encouraging self expression and self-confidence in writers, she nonetheless maintaines that it sketches "an incomplete picture of what happens when writers invent, and it may unduly constrain the development of processes of invention" (1).[2] Teaching writing, according to LeFevre, is not merely a matter of allowing an innate self to speak or of developing mental models for problem-solving but of a communal negotiation of social spaces.[3] Hence, community and collaboration are once again of crucial importance.

These early social constructionist pedagogies would seem postmodern in that they down-play the romantic notion of the discrete individual and advance a "communitarian notion of the subject . . . [located] in terms of the shared discursive practices of a community" (Faigley 17). However, postmodernism "works to unravel existing categories rather than to reify them" (17). These social constructionists restrict their use of postmodernism to the discursive yet shared nature of language, knowledge, and writing. They explode the romantic and cognitive conceptions of individuality

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but replace it with an equally idealistic shared community, ignoring the more disruptive and power laden aspects of postmodern theory. In short, their theories of writing slight the more contested, conflicted, and competing aspects of the writing classroom. It is an ideal use of postmodernism that does not remain unchallenged for long.

The best critique of the early social constructionist ideas of community and writing is made by Joseph Harris. Influenced by the more disruptive elements of postmodernism, Harris argues that "recent theories have tended to invoke the idea of community in ways at once sweeping and vague: positing discursive utopias that direct and determine the writings of their members, yet failing to state the operating rules or boundaries of these communities" ("The Idea" 12). In essence, Harris believes that social construction theories conflate the idea of a linguistic speech community (speakers in close geographical location) with the idea of an interpretive community from literary theory (diverse readers linked by shared ideas concerning texts). As Lester Faigley further argues, this conflation results in "the uncritical use of community for suppressing the conflicts that exist within any social group." It is a "holistic and closed notion of community [that] encourages a simplified view of a discursive field, where the influences of the contradictory and multiple discourses that one encounters in everyday life are minimal." Further, the social constructionist "subject becomes a participant within a language game on a contained field of play. Postmodern theory, on the other hand, would situate the subject

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among many competing discourses that precede the subject" (226-27).

Into the space opened by this critique will walk the critical democracy pedagogy of such theorists as James Berlin, Patricia Bizzell, John Clifford, and John Trimbur. They will keep the ideas of community and subject but stress their ideological, competing, and even contradictory natures. Rather than trying to erase social differences, these theorists want "Representation of any kind . . . to be viewed as implicated in social and political relations" of power (Faigley 15). As John Clifford argues, "Our beliefs about rhetoric, finally, do not originate in an authentic, voiced consciousness; do not exist primarily in enlightened cognition; and are certainly not the cumulative result of consensual, transcendent scholarship, research, and intellectual will" ("The Subject" 51). However, the inescapability of power does not mean that critical democracy theorists see all ideologies and structures of power as equally just. Indeed, they see the classroom as a place to aggressively reform the social inequities caused by the larger culture's unjust structures and applications of power. What teachers must do in classrooms is "the intellectual work" they "know best: helping students to read and write and think in ways that both resist domination and exploitation and encourage self consciousness about who they are and can be in the social world" (Clifford 51).

Consequently, these theorists borrow ideas from Paul de Man, Michel Foucault, Louis Althusser, and others to advance a socio-ideological and rhetorical view of the individual, the act of writing, and the purpose of the writing classroom. It is a view, they feel,

previous rhetorics have ignored "For perhaps obvious political reasons" (Clifford 51). For example, Berlin argues that the "expressionist" rhetoric of theorists like Donald Murray and Peter Elbow "is inherently and debilitatingly divisive of political interest . . . . [and] easily co-opted by the very capitalist forces it opposes" ("Rhetoric" 491). Patricia Bizzell criticizes the "inner directed," cognitive rhetoric of Flower and Hayes as slighting the "outer directed" rhetoric of theorists who maintain that "thinking and language use can never occur free of a social context that conditions them" ("Cognition" 217). Difficulties in writing, Bizzell argues, should not be seen as signs of cognitive deficiencies but "as difficulties with joining an unfamiliar discourse community" (227).[4] She believes, in essence, that cognitive rhetoric, to the detriment of the students, dismisses the ideological *why* of how students must write. Hence, in her later work she argues that "We must help our students . . . to engage in a rhetorical process that can collectively generate . . . knowledge and beliefs to displace the repressive ideologies an unjust social order would prescribe" ("Beyond" 670). Finally, John Trimbur, influenced by Jurgen Habermas and Jean-Francois Lyotard, criticizes the social constructionist rhetoric of Bruffee as relying too heavily on consensus. For Trimbur collaborative learning can only effectively locate students within social structures by holding a rhetoric of consensus in dialectic tension with a rhetoric of dissensus. Only then can consensus "be a powerful instrument for students to generate differences, to identity the systems of authority that organize these differences, and to transform the relations of power that determine

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who may speak and what counts as a meaningful statement" ("Consensus" 603).[5]

These critical democracy theorists, then, use postmodernism to construct writing courses as places for open ideological conflict, critique of the dominant culture, and as potential sites for liberation from that unjust culture. Previous rhetorics are not criticized for being ineffectual at the teaching of writing but for not fulfilling the potential of the classroom as a place, in the spirit of Paulo Freire, for social reformation. They are, therefore, more postmodern in that they embrace the more disruptive aspects of postmodern theory and have a more ideological and discursive understanding of the subject, but they break with postmodernism by retaining an authoritative and rational pedagogy. Postmodernism is used as a way of turning the writing classroom into a site for reasoned, critical, participatory democracy.

Consequently, these critics will soon find their own use of postmodernism the subject of criticism by even more radical postmodern theorists. For theorists like Thomas Kent and Victor Vitanza, the very "notion of 'participation' itself becomes problematic in its implication that the subject can control its location and moves within a discourse" (Faigley 227). These theorists stress the more radical aspects of postmodernity--sheer heterogeneity, continual flux, anti-pedagogy, anti-rationality--that theorists like Berlin back away from. For example, in *Paralogic Rhetoric: A Theory of Communicative Interaction,* Thomas Kent, influenced by Donald Davidson, rejects expressivist, cognitivist, social constructionist, and critical democracy pedagogies on the grounds that they all construct

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the mind and external reality as separate entities by creating a gap in which interpretation stops and advocacy begins. Instead, Kent, like Rorty, believes that "interpretation goes all the way down" ("The Hope" 427). Interpretation does not stop. There is no space outside the flow of interpretation from which we can critique its rules of behavior or advocate new ones. Thus, any rules we find through interpretation are only authentic and applicable to the immediate situation. But the other theorists, according to Kent, do not see this inescapability. Instead, they create a Cartesian gap and then attempt to negotiate this gap through mediating structures such as universal forms or experiences, cognitive processes, the conventions of discursive communities, or enlightened ideologies. However, these mediating structures ultimately disable our mind's effort to make contact with other minds; we cannot bridge the gap because the structures themselves are in the way. Hence, these theorists condemn us, according to Kent, to live either in a state of unrelenting subjectivity and/or a mode of colonization of the other.

Indeed, Kent finds it hypocritical and authoritarian, as Vitanza does, to argue that all teaching and writing is ideological and then to privilege writing that defies the "unjust social order"--two determinations, the privileging and the unjust order, that themselves would have to be the product of ideology. Any critique of ideology is merely another interpretation based on a cultural situatedness that is also understood through interpretation. Therefore, any pedagogy that pretends to be more than that, more just or more ethical, is for Kent, as it was for Nietzsche, the imposition of the ideology of the powerful on the weak. Kent rejects these dualistic models in favor of

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seeing communication as a triangulated process in which people enter a conversation based not on shared discursive practices but on shared sensory impressions. We communicate by using the "data" of the sensory impression to try and guess what is in the mind of the other person. This guessing game does not ensure communication, but it offers the hope of communication. How well we communicate depends on how well we guess and how open we are to listening to the reactions provided by the other. Kent "jettisons" both language and discourse community, as these are currently understood, but keeps rhetoric as a practice, a form of play, that also interprets all the way down and so forces us to remain in the immediacy of the moment.

Kent's theory has radical implications for the teaching and evaluating of writing. Neither writing nor any other communication process can be taught because there are no rules to teach. The guessing game is paralogical rather than logical. Indeed, Kent's critique of other rhetorics is that they all try to follow some form of preexisting rules, be they transcendent, cognitive, discursive, or ideological, and so block out the hope of communication and impose the terror of abstraction. Further, evaluating writing becomes a minefield of potential oppression. Since we cannot apply preexisting rules, we must search for them dialogically with the student and the text. We must simply be as open and present to the immediate situation as we can be. We can only practice and play together and hope to communicate.

However, as radical as Kent's postmodern theory is for the teaching of composition, Victor Vitanza, influenced by Lyotard, is

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perhaps the most radical of all current theorists. As Faigley says. "Vitanza finds a great reluctance among composition theorists to acknowledge the radical questioning and deferral of a course of action in postmodern theory. He places nearly everyone in composition, ranging from Berlin to Flower, in the same leaky boat of modernism" (244 n. 8). In other words, Vitanza thinks we make the mistake of desiring and enacting closure based on reason. Thus. the problems of our classrooms are largely self-imposed through our refusal to give up reason--be it individual or social. For example, he writes that "Berlin is never suspicious enough; for he never simply 'drifts' far enough" ("Three" 142). Berlin still tries to use reason, albeit a social reason, to guide actions and determine outcomes. Vitanza sees Berlin as having merely shifted the site terror off the individual and onto the social and ideological. It is a move that Vitanza suspects as "both dangerously utopian and blindly ideological, it is, as Stanley Fish says, 'nothing more or less than a reinvention of foundationalism'" (143). Therefore, Vitanza rejects "'rational' thinking and acting, especially about language." He feels that it "only further remystifies and disempowers students and us all...Why? Because as Lyotard says, 'Reason and power are one and the same thing. You may disguise the one with dialectics . . . . but you will still have the other in all its crudeness: jails, taboos, public weal, selection, genocide'" (qtd. in Vitanza 142). Although Vitanza agrees with "Berlin and Company" in being "against founding a pedagogy on capitalism," he is "still unequivocally contra to these social-consensual theory-hopeful rationalists, who through social

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reengineering and instrumental reason . . . want to cure society and make the world into a great. good place" (143).[6]

Thus, these radical postmodern theorists would eliminate both the validity of rational pedagogy and the desire for social reformation--at least as these are usually conceived. They abandon what Vitanza calls "pedagogy hope": the belief that we can construct a pedagogy in theory that will not brutalize our students in practice (143). Instead, they want our classrooms to stress radical heterogeneity, sheer difference, and continuous play. They encourage us not to fall into the "traps" of skills. self-expression. cognitive processes, or social causes but to simply drift in the classroom as a means of "finding" new ways of writing tied to the immediacy of the situation and the irreducibile difference of students.

These theorists have. as I have written, the most radical view of composition's relationship to postmodernity, and this radicalism helps explain why, as Faigley argues, so many composition theorists are frustrated with postmodern theory. He writes:

> By divorcing the subject from prevailing notions of the individual. either the freely choosing individual of capitalism or the interpellated individual of Althusserian Marxism. postmodern theory understands subjectivity as heterogeneous and constantly in flux. The present frustration of those who have followed the course of theory . . . --those who have used notions of community as a critique of the autonomous individual, but then have had these notion of community unravel into complex sets of power relations--is where to locate agency in a postmodern subjectivity. (227)

For Vitanza the desire for rational agency, individual or communal. is itself part of the problem. It represents composition's inability to differ a course of action. Yet for many other compositionists. Vitanza's drifting sounds like his own form of hegemony. As

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Friedman says of the poststructuralists, Vitanza has "made taboo . . . terms . . . such as *self, author, work, experience, expression, meaning, authority, origin,* and *reference"* ("Post/Post structural" 473). This tainting of so many important terms helps to explain the resistance so many compositionists have towards radical postmodern theory. It seems to take away the very things that give us authority, purpose, and hope and so helps to explain why the final way composition constructs its relationship to postmodernity is adversarial.

Some have conceptualized the relationship of composition to postmodernism not as useful, problematic, or even frustrating but as dangerous and bogus, as the colonization of composition studies by literary theory. Maxine Hairston encapsulates this argument with the most feeling. In "Breaking Our Bonds and Reaffirming Our Connections," Hairston warns composition teachers about "politically active literary critics . . . 'full of passionate intensity'" (276). To Hairston these critics represent an "intimate enemy." The incorporation of their postmodern theory would turn the classroom from a student-centered, low risk, safe place for exploring writing "into a forum for debate on social issues" ("Required Writing" B1). It would harm composition's authority, according to Hairston, to decide for itself what students need in order to write and think critically-- critically being defined outside the domain of ideology. It would force us to share our classrooms with theorists who do not understand or appreciate writing process. Hairston, therefore, chastises compositionists who bring in "the magic names" of postmodern literary theory in order to "signal that they have not abandoned the faith" ("Breaking" 274). Instead, according to

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Hairston, they have abandoned their own discipline and surrendered their students' educations to the "academic elite." "If we are going to hold our own against them," Hairston writes, then we must "rally our forces against" their influence ("Breaking" 277). Ironically, like Vitanza, but for diametrically opposed reasons, Hairston also sees many of compositions' current problems as stemming from our own inability to trust ourselves and our students, and from having incorporated into composition studies something that does not belong.

I do not share Hairston's view of literary theory as the enemy: I do not see the philosophers of postmodernity as belonging solely to literary studies in the first place. However, I do share her concern over what postmodern theory, as it has manifested itself in composition, is doing to the teaching of writing or, more specifically, to writing teachers. With the exception of the cultural position, the positions I have outlined do not, in my opinion, present postmodern theory as a very attractive body of work--especially for practitioners. Practitioners, according to Stephen North, are interested in practice, in what writing does, in techniques, in what he calls lore: "the accumulated body of traditions, practices, and beliefs in terms of which Practitioners understand how writing is done, learned and taught" (*The Making* 22). Some of these traditions include: workshops, journals, the valuing of voice and revision, exploration and discovery, authenticity and community, clarity, and getting the job done. Practitioners have a strong sense of community and of writing as a way to resist dehumanizing structures of power. All these characteristics add up to a pragmatic ethos that not only

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doesn't mind contradiction but thrives on it. "Literally anything." North writes, "can become part of lore," and "nothing can ever be dropped from it either" (24). Practitioners are not concerned, therefore, with hard and fast rules or with theoretical abstractions, and they dislike rigidity.

Some of these characteristics, obviously, would seem open to or, if Phelps is right, reflective of a postmodern sensibility, a sensibility that would run counter to much of the way postmodernism has been presented to practitioners. For example, critical democracy theorists offer practitioners an authoritarian postmodernism that discredits much of what they do in the classroom; radical theorists offer teachers a dense, jargony postmodernism that rejects many things--authorship, self expression, authentic voice, intention, meaning--that practitioners hold dear: adversarial theorists offer practitioners a postmodernism that they should fear and avoid; and theorists like Faigley present a postmodernism that, if the practitioners refuse to change, is supposedly foreign to their constitution. In short, the theorists I have outlined either use parts of postmodernism to advance authoritarian classroom practices, reject postmodernism outright and so leave practitioners defenseless to its critique and bereft of its potential, or wallow in a kind of postmodernism that does not recognize the current situation as one of trying to pick up rather than play with the pieces of the deconstructed universe. None of these views, in other words, make postmodernism seem a very credible or useful body of knowledge for teachers who want the classroom to be

student-centered, craft based, socially critical, and process oriented all at the same time.

Indeed, of all the positions I have outlined, only Phelps et al's comes close to presenting postmodernism in a way that acknowledges, at least implicitly, the importance of practioner knowledge. Presenting postmodernism as a cultural condition in which we have always already participated gives immediate legitimacy to practioner methods. After all, if we have always already been postmodern, then practioner knowledge as the first way of making knowledge in our field would reflect an intimacy with postmodernism rather than an incompatibility--an intimacy of practice that most of the acknowledged postmodern pedagogies lack. Therefore, Phelps et al's position forces the lettered class of composition to reevaluate the postmodern potential and complexity of what composition teachers have always already been doing in the classroom. Instead of dismissing practioner knowledge as naive, conservative, or devoid of political consciousness, Phelps' postmodernism forces us to reconsider practitioners as the field's first postmodern teachers.[7]

However, I think that we must now acknowledge that the cultural condition of which Phelps writes has changed in character. This historical moment suggests

> that after nearly two decades of the growing power of poststructuralist theory as the most authoritative and prestigious discourse of the profession, this developing hegemony is being called into question by a wide range of critics--from those who advocate a return to an ideal realm of canonical classics and fixed meaning: to those who attack intellectual elitism and exclusionary power relations endemic in the sheer difficulty of poststructuralist discourses: to those who insist that what Barbara Christian calls "the race for theory" involves a retreat from the insistent and growing

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> presence of women, people of color, and Third world people on the literary and critical scene; and to those writing *within* a poststructuralist framework who are increasingly critical of poststructuralism's tendency toward ahistoricism, indifference, and disengagement on the one hand and, on the other hand, to totalizing orthodoxies and master-disciple psychodynamics. (Friedman 466)

Therefore, we cannot merely claim that composition inhabits a postmodern condition. We must define what that condition is, the impact it has on practice, what we agree and disagree with in the condition, and how the condition changes and has changed-- especially for practitioners who have been locked out of most debates on what postmodernism is and what it is worth. In short, postmodernism as a theory of our cultural condition is too vague to win over and empower composition's practitioners. As Patricia Harkin argues, "we need to have models of knowledge production-- concrete accounts of proposed changes in institutional procedures that tell us what kind of knowledges teachers make, how they make it, and why it should count" ("The Postdisciplinary" 125). To assign practitioners to a vague condition of postmodernity only disempowers them further by removing them from the details and debates over that condition that gives it meaning and practical force. For example, for Friedman the postmodern condition, or in this case the more specific postmodern manifestation of poststructuralism, has itself become a hegemonic "orthodoxy" that we should regard with suspicion due to its lack of commitment to social causes, yet which has forever changed notions of self, agency, and community. I hardly think that a postmodern hegemony is the kind of postmodernism with which practitioners would like to be associated. But they may want to be associated with Friedman's post-postmodernism. We must now, therefore, neither reject or accept

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postmodernism but rather work to understand how it has constituted our view of writing, the benefits and limitations of that view. and how our historical moment has changed that constitutive effect. We must be willing to update the "specific cultural field of meaning" in light of the situations in which we now find ourselves.

If so updated, we could use postmodernism to create a frame that would be attractive to practitioners and helpful for solving or at least enriching our understanding of composition's most vexing problems: student resistance. the introduction of politics into the classroom, the recapturing of history. and perhaps most importantly. why composition practitioners resist a body of thought in which they may already be participants--at least when it comes to practice. For despite all the well known theorists in composition who have written volumes on the postmodern condition, little awareness of it. except perhaps as something hostile. has filtered down to the composition classroom, to the hallway discussions among teachers at conferences. or to the lives of our students. In this regard, I think Faigley's view of composition's relationship to postmodernism has some validity. Composition practitioners have, by and large, resisted the influence of postmodernism. However, they have resisted it not because of a modernist sensibility but because of the way postmodern theory was introduced into composition studies, the way postmodern theory is written, and the way postmodern theory problematizes the notion of agency. These "ways" have robbed composition of practioner input in discussions on postmodern theory. It is to these issues, therefore. I would now like to turn.

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The Arrogance of Postmodern Theory

Henry Louis Gates Jr. once commented that while he did not "deny the importance, on the level of theory, of the [postmodern] project," such a project did not help him when he was "trying to get a taxi on the corner of 125th and Lenox Avenue" (*Loose Canons* 37-38). The project lacked what Gates called "practical performative force." I believe Gates' observation echoes the current relationship of composition's practitioners to postmodernism. Postmodernism has not persuaded them nor have its advocates worked very hard to do so. Postmodernism has remained a largely elitist and theoretical pursuit by tenured professors at large institutions. It has captured the minds and works of many of our best theorists, but an awareness of its potential usefulness has not penetrated into the hearts of our classrooms, teachers, or students. One reason for this lack of penetration is the divisive and condescending way in which postmodern theory was introduced into composition studies.

As I've already written, in the early eighties the theories of Clifford Geertz, Thomas Kuhn, and Richard Rorty became widely influential in composition studies through the work of Bruffee, LeFevre, Bazerman, and others. These theorists used "postmodern" figures to help solidify the social turn of process theory, but, more importantly, they opened the way for more radical and critical applications of postmodern theory. One of the first and most influential of these applications was James Berlin's "Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class." In it Berlin criticizes Linda Flower's problem-solving rhetoric as "the rationalization of economic activity. The pursuit of self-evident and unquestioned goals in the composing

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process parallels the pursuit of self-evident and unquestioned profit-making goals in the market place."[8]   Then, as I've already discussed, Berlin criticizes Peter Elbow's and Donald Murray's "expressionist" pedagogy as "inherently and debilitating divisive of political protest . . . . [and] easily co-opted by the very capitalist forces it opposes. After all, this rhetoric can be used to reinforce the entrepreneurial virtues capitalism values most: individualism, private initiative, the confidence for risk taking, the right to be contentious with authority (especially the state)" (491).   As can be imagined, Berlin's article caused quite a lot of controversy but also quite a lot of anger. Besides attacking beloved composition figures and practices, he privileged his own work as somehow not paralleling the capitalist structure--a claim I find rather dubious.[9]   Further, his charge that expressionist and cognitivist rhetoric supported the fragmenting and dehumanizing forces of capitalism did not sit well with a number of composition practitioners/theorists.   For example, Maxine Hairston called his paralleling of expressionist and cognitive rhetoric with the forces of capitalism "a facile non-logical leap" ("Diversity" 25), and Donald Stewart countered charges against expressivism with charges that collaboration can lead to conformity and totalitarianism. Unchecked, Stewart argued, collaboration leads to "the police state, the group mentality to the point at which it eliminates 'non-social' types as the Jews in Nazi Germany" ("Collaborative" 74).[10]

Whether Berlin was right or wrong, and I happen to think his reading of Murray and Elbow is reductive,[11] his argument set the tone for how postmodern theory was to be used by many composition theorists.   Further, it marked the way in which

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postmodern theory was to be seen by many composition teachers--as an unnecessarily hostile caricature of beloved composition practitioners and practices, as representing the interests and authority of the tenure-line, intelligentsia of composition over the interests and authority of the "workers in the trenches," and, perhaps most damaging, as having little to do with how the process classroom is run, how process writing is taught, and how process teachers relate to students. In short, postmodernism was seen or felt as the final colonization of composition by a newmly minted class of Ph.D.'s. scholars, and researchers, a process that had begun with the displacement of practioner authority in the 1960's.[12]

And Berlin wasn't the only one to use postmodern theory in such a divisive way. Some of the harshest criticism of process teachers came within a few years span of Berlin's article. For example, in "The Silenced Dialogue" (1988), Lisa Delpit accuses child centered, low-risk, process-oriented instructors of sustaining both classism and racism by keeping the rules and conventions of writing instruction implicit--thereby mystifying and at the same time privileging the middle class situatedness which those rules and conventions represent. In *Textual Carnivals* (1991) Susan Miller argues that "teaching process for its own sake" promotes "as an article of faith that he or she [the student] is 'independent' and 'free' to choose within the controls the society establishes" (89). Miller believes that students are never so free, and to act as if they are places students in "an infantile and solipsistic relation to the results of writing" (100). Miller further accuses process teachers of making composition the replacement for literature studies as the dominant

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culture's mechanism of ideological reproduction. Process theory,
Miller believes, severs writing from the sites in which it is produced,
understood, and critiqued. She writes:

> It is tempting to infer that contemporary composition has gone
> literature one better in creating the sensitivity for its own sake that
> literary studies has required of students. It has, that is, removed a
> canon of ideologically joined works that instill ethnocentric,
> logocentric, or any other congruent set of values and has substituted
> for them an almost entirely formalistic and intransitive vision of
> writing. (97-98)

Once again process teachers are accused of masking preexisting
conditions of power and authority to the detriment of the students.

Regardless of the worth of these arguments, and I am
particularly persuaded by Delpit's, the way in which the arguments
were made seems unnecessary. For example, although LeFevre is
critical of teaching invention as the act of an autonomous individual,
she nevertheless recognizes the pragmatic reasons and good
intentions for doing so. Under the more hostile applications of
postmodern theory, this pragmatism becomes naivete and good will a
mask that suppresses the benefits of conflict--the possibility of social
transformation.[13] The more hostile and condescending stance of
later theorists also goes a long way in explaining that while

> composition studies coincides with the era of postmodernity, there is
> seemingly little in the short history of composition studies that
> suggests a postmodern view of heterogeneity and difference as
> liberating forces, and there are very few calls to celebrate the
> fragmentary and chaotic currents of change. (Faigley 14)

But I would argue that this lack of call to celebrate heterogeneity
resulted not solely from a modernist ethos but also from the way in
which these forces of heterogeneity were presented to or perceived
by practitioners as the hostile voice of the "reigning academic elite"[14]
(Christian "The Race" 227).

The Opaqueness of the Terministic Screen

Second, postmodern theory is often badly written.[15] It is difficult to read, filled with jargon and torpid--all qualities which practitioners abhor. For example, Baudrillard's claim that "quotidian reality in its entirety . . . incorporates the simulatory dimension of hyperrealism" (*Simulations* 147) is hardly the clear, open, and inviting prose of Donald Murray or Peter Elbow. While Murray, Elbow, and other early theorists write about issues and write about them in ways that resonate with instructors' classroom experiences and aesthetic values, postmodern theory, while it could also echo those experiences, is written in such a way that a true connection cannot be made to it without considerable institutional support. As a fellow instructor once said to me while we were trying to decipher an especially difficult portion of Derrida's *On Grammatology*, "postmodern writing represents everything I don't want my students' writing to be: long winded, jargony, dense, private, and convoluted." My colleague's reaction was not an example of anti-intellectualism but of professionalism. We don't teach writing like that, so we doubt that it could have anything useful to say about what we do. And yet, Dewey and Bakhtin are also very difficult to read, and they are accepted and even loved by many in our community. I think, therefore, that while resistance to postmodernism on the grounds of jargon is legitimate, it masks a larger fear caused by inequities of power.[16]

Most instructors do not have the institutional training, support, or time necessary to unpack the density of postmodern theory. Yet

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mastery of or, at least, familiarity with postmodern discourse is one of the markers of professionalism in our field. Therefore, the difficulty yet influence of postmodern theory highlights and furthers practioners' feelings of marginalization within the academy. Postmodern theory is seen by practitioners as a mechanism designed to exclude them from discussions on writing and decisions on pedagogy. It both mystifies our field's discourse and makes concrete practioners' positions as "outsiders." Its language does not open up topics for discussion but closes them down through discursive codes and rituals. Like Barbara Christian, practitioners see "the language it [poststructuralism] creates as one which mystifies rather than clarifies our condition, making it possible for a few people who know that particular language to control the critical scene" (229). Given the workload of our teachers, the way their knowledge and practices are treated by much of current theory, their innate respect for clear writing, and their learned suspicion of academics and academic discourse, it should be no surprise that practitioners resist postmodern theory. Resistance is a mechanism of survival.

The Crisis of Agency

Finally, although I will analyze the postmodern impasse of agency more fully in the next chapter, the idea of the impasse in general is extremely troubling to most composition teachers. As Donald Jones writes,

> In their critique of the autonomous individual of foundationalism, postmodernists have rejected the epistemological assumption that a knower directly perceives reality in thought then expresses these perceptions through language. Yet as these theorists have asserted the influence of language upon an individual's thinking, they have

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been unable to explain an individual's agency--the ability to create, assert, examine, and maintain/or modify a belief. (*Beyond* vii)

This explanation is required if writing teachers are going to take postmodernism seriously. After all, how do we teach writing, process, invention, revision, resistance, collaboration, voice, audience, and a host of other composition mainstays without a self with the agency to alter behavior and be held accountable for action? The self and its agency may be socially constructed, a site of often contradictory and even conflicting discourses, but it seems a necessary site if one is to write within our cultural structures. From our economy, to our popular culture, to the rewards granted by the academy, a strong sense of self and agency seems inescapable. Thus, the postmodern critique of agency seems antithetical to the conditions in which the teaching and doing of writing must exist.

Further, to embrace this critique would seem an act of professional suicide on the part of practitioners. The limited institutional authority they have rests mainly on their expertise as professional writers and teachers, as experts in the very areas of agency, intention, and authenticity that radical postmodernism proclaims dead. No wonder the death of the author is a proclamation the practitioners find incredulous and suspicious. As Barbara Christian argues, "Now I am being told. . .that authors are dead, irrelevant, mere vessels through which narratives ooze, that they do not work nor have they the faintest idea what they are doing; rather, they produce texts as disembodied as the angels" (229-30). While Christian's portrayal of the death of the author is extreme, it accurately represents how practitioners feel about postmodern theory--it is a threat to their identity and authority. Without a

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notion of a writer who makes meaning, be that writer's nature individual or social, they see no grounds upon which to base their authority in the classroom, their place in conference discussions, or their role in curricular decisions. To practitioners, the death of the author also .signals the death of the author as writing authority. Of course, I am not asking practitioners to embrace this critique. I am asking them to engage it to see if it can provide practical performative force for the classroom. Nevertheless, the notion of the impasse without the time and support to investigate, engage, and critique it is enough in itself to cause composition's practitioners to resist postmodern theory.

If we then add to these practioner doubts the doubts that minority theorists, feminist theorists, conservative theorists, Marxist theorist, and a host of others have about postmodern theory, then why bother to engage it at all? First, because as Jameson argues "for good or ill, we cannot not use it" (*Postmodernism* xxi). Postmodernism is where we currently find ourselves and so not understanding the theory robs us of an understanding of the present and ensures that those who do not understand it will not be able to defend themselves against those who do. Second, I also believe that postmodernism does have something to offer the teachers of writing. Namely, postmodernism has the ability, in its love of incommensurability, fluidity, and heterogeneity, to support the pragmatic, experimental, and creative practices that practitioners have been doing all along. Third, it can provide new insights and new directions on old problems. Specifically, it can be used to create a notion of resistance that relies on the powers and skills of personal

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narrative--skills composition's practitioners know well: an anti-dogmatism and love of incommensurability that critique the use of politics in the classroom in authoritarian or disrespectful ways; an experimental, pragmatic, and answerable ethics that maintains the possibility of our classrooms as places for social transformation; and finally, a view of history that makes it approachable by, relevant to, and dependent upon the personal and communal "texts" that *all* compositionists bring to the understanding and teaching of writing.

If the post postmodernism Friedman describes is to achieve the potential I believe it has for composition, then composition's teachers must see postmodernism as having practical performative force for the classroom and themselves as part of, perhaps experts in, that force. Why? Because the teachers in the classrooms are the heart of composition. They were there before we were a field, and they will still be there if composition as a distinct field disappears. The rift between theory and practice has never been greater in our field--which is ironic considering that much of the theory currently being advanced blurs distinctions between theory and practice. If postmodern theory is important, if it has something lasting to contribute to the teaching of writing, then it must bridge that gap by winning over the practitioners. Theories and theorists come and go, but the practitioners remain. If we, the lettered class of composition, want to add something permanent to the teaching of composition, then we must do it through the one constant in our ever changing field--the teacher in the classroom. To repeat Stephen North, "Literally anything can become part of lore," and "nothing can ever be dropped from it either" (24). Postmodernism, therefore, must

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enter that lore if it is to impact and remain part of composition teaching. We must dedicate ourselves to helping practitioners gain the institutional support necessary for making a connection to the postmodern condition--a condition of which they were the first members. I would now, therefore, like to begin helping to make that connection by turning to the question of resistance in the post-postmodern era.

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CHAPTER ONE NOTES

1.   Indeed, Schilb more than the others in this category sees the postmodern ethos of composition as more a potential than an actuality. He writes: "In describing ways composition might address cultural studies and postmodernism, I am underscoring the potential of the field rather than it present sense of mission.   We are far from realizing that potential, because of institutional and ideological factors embedded in composition's past" (177). Some of these institutional and ideological factors include composition's invention as a field designed "purely to train students in the mechanics of language," a "belief that it exists only to serve the 'real' disciplines, which are best served when composition focuses on students' 'basic skills,'" and, borrowing the idea from Richard Ohmann's *English in America*, "the habit of framing social issues in a problem-solution format that belies their complexity" (177, 178).

2.   I think this qualification is the most powerful moment in LeFevre's work. She does not discredit the Platonic view of invention.   She does not disparage the writing process model.   She argues that the Platonic conceptions of invention is incomplete, and that this incompleteness is harming process movement.   LeFevre believes that "a Platonic view alone is inadequate, chiefly because it promotes an oversimplified view of what an individual is and because it is not sufficiently comprehensive to account for what happens when writers invent" (23).   Moreover, she believes that it "leads us to favor individualistic approaches to research and to neglect studies of writers in social contexts," (23) that it "depicts inventions as a closed, one-way system." (24) that it "abstracts writers from society," (25) and that it "assumes and promotes the concept of the atomistic self as inventor" (26).

3.   It is not just the individual or the just the society that invents.   Invention is the interaction of a individual/social being with the larger society in a *distinctive* way.   The word distinctive stresses the creativity of social invention--an aspect that many social construction theories down play. LeFevre's social invention "neither denies an individual the possibility of creating something original nor frees her from personal responsibility for what she writes" (2).

4.   At this point in her career Bizzell's work echoes that of David Bartholomae whose poststructural doubting of individual authority runs throughout his work.   See especially, inventing the University," "A Study of Error," And "Facts, Artifact, and Counterfacts."

5.   I should note that Trimbur is also critical of the "post-process" and "post-cognitive" theory of theorists like James Berlin and Patricia Bizzell.   He sees them as having "walled out" too much of the complexity of writing process theories.   See Trimbur's "Taking the Social Turn: Teaching Writing Post-Process" pages 108-10.

6.   Though Vitanza does not give enough credence to the conflicted and rhetorical nature of Berlin's consensus, he is, I believe, correct in arguing that Berlin still sees consensus as possible and beneficial and that ideology can be correct.

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7.   See Donald Jones' *Beyond the Postmodern Impasse of Contemporary Composition* pages 75-80 for a discussion of how Donald Murray's and Peter Elbow's process pedagogies predate, predict, and reflect many of the themes of postmodernism.

8.   Berlin might have considered the more post-fordian cognitive theory of Mike Rose in *Writer's Block: The Cognitive Dimension.* In it, Rose criticizes the hierarchical and goal oriented cognitive rhetoric of Flower and Hayes in favor of a more opportunistic cognitive rhetoric.

9.   Capitalism also values competition, debate, team work, and innovation--all characteristics implied in Berlin's critical democracy pedagogy.

10.   See Mara Holt's "Toward a Democratic Rhetoric: Self and Society in Collaborative Theory and Practice" for a reply to Stewart.

11.   See Donald Jones pages 6-17.

12.   See Robert J. Connors' "Overwork/Underpay: Labor and the Status of Composition Teachers since 1880" and "Rhetoric in the Modern University: The Creation of an Underclass." Susan Miller's "The Feminization of Composition" and *Textual Carnivals: The Politics of Composition,* and Stephen M. North's *The Making of Knowledge in Composition: Portrait of an Emerging Field.*

13.   See Susan Jarratt's "Feminism and Composition: The Case for Conflict."

14.   Not all incorporations of postmodern thought into composition have been hostile, however.   For example, Edward White argued as early as 1984 that teachers would embrace "poststructuralism as if it were and old friend" (184). White believed this because "once we strip away the jargon," poststructuralism "has an almost eerily familiar sound"--the sound of writing as an ever spreading process to be endlessly revised (190).   I agree with White and can only conclude, therefore, that the jargon wasn't strip and the connection wasn't made to practioner knowledge for ideological reasons.   The neo-Marxist agenda that the critical pedagogues wanted to advance through postmodernism was more important than either the postmodernism or the goals, careers, and values of those who were teaching in the classroom.

15.   I must admit that I exclude Foucault from the charge of bad writing. Though Foucault can be difficult, he can also be quite eloquent and moving. Moreover, Foucault's density is often designed to protect him from erroneous interpretations, from being held accountable for the interpretations readers make of work.

16.   Of course, compositionists also have open ideological conflicts with postmodernism.   For example, in "Collaborative Learning and Composition: Boon or Bane," Donald Stewart criticizes Richard Rorty's "abnormal discourse" as in no way capable of explaining exceptional creativity.   He writes: "The person who has learned the conversation of mankind, we are told, learns how to challenge the status quo, to sniff out the stale and no longer viable.   How? This is a completely unsatisfactory explanation of Mozart's ability to transcend the influence of Haydn, of Beethoven's to transcend Mozart, of Brahm's to transcend Beethoven" (67).   Thus, Stewart not only privileges the unified

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individual's consciousness but the ideology and cultural tastes of "high" culture. It is this appeal to high culture that many theorists such as James Berlin find questionable at best and supportive of an oppressive status quo at worst.

CHAPTER II

CRYING THE TEARS OF MY ANCESTORS:
REFIGURING THE SUBJECT OF RESISTANCE

Resistance is Futile.   --the Borg.

Physical Pain has no voice, but when it at last finds a voice, it begins
to tell a story.
--Elaine Scarry *The Body in Pain*

In the end, all figures of otherness boil down to just one: that of the
Object.   In the end, all that is left is the inexorability of the Object,
the irredeemability of the Object.   --Jean Baudrillard *T h e*
Transparency of Evil

Look at the color of your skin--that is your uniform.   --white
supremacist Robert Shelton

The most famous catch phrase of "Star Trek: the Next
Generation"--the Borg's Ominous "Resistance is Futile"--supplies an
apt popular culture understanding of the postmodern impasse.   The
now common argument is that in the postmodern critique of
Enlightenment and Modernist conceptions of self, language, and
agency, the ability to resist has become difficult to explain (Berlin
"Poststructuralism" 18, *Rhetorics* 57-68; Faigley xii, 3, 226-7; Harvey
291-302; Howard 349; Jones 11-13; Miller 10-23; Smith 50;
Spellmeyer 724; Szkudlarek 42-57; Yagelski 203-05).   The argument,
roughly, goes like this: the self (or the subject as some prefer[1]) is an
effect rather than a cause of discourse.   To paraphrase Lester Faigley,
postmodernism "rejects the primacy of consciousness."   Instead of
seeing consciousness as prior to or distanced from language,
postmodernists see "consciousness as originating in language."   This
reversal of self and language necessitates that human action does not

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arise out of a unified and removed consciousness "but rather from a momentary identity," a temporary and shifting site of multiple and even conflicting discourses (9). Resistance, therefore, reflects the fragmentary condition of life rather than defies it; resistance participates in and multiplies this fragmentation rather than overcomes it, because resistance, due to the self's relationship to language, is itself an example and product of fracture rather than a cure for it.

This view of resistance's relationship to the fragmented world is very different from the modernist view. For while modernists such as Dostoevski, Rousseau, and Joyce also see the world as fragmented, they believe that the self's distance from the world enables it to critique the social conditions in which it is forced to live. The distance allowes for actions and thoughts not composed of or by those fragmentary conditions. Our subjectivity, therefore, could be our refuge and our salvation. As Faigley explains,

> the world [of modernist writers] is no less fragmented and transitory than in descriptions of the postmodern condition, but the individual is granted the possibility of being able to critique that social formation from a distanced viewpoint and to discover a potential course for human emancipation. (16)

The postmodern critique, however, removes that distance by changing the self's/subject's relationship to language, leading to an impasse from which agency and effective socio-political action are difficult to explain.

But I don't want to focus too much on this well worn argument. Instead, I would like to question the insurmountability and/or importance of this impasse as it relates to writing and understanding resistance. I would suggest that having a theory of subjectivity and

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language that adequately explains how it is possible that we resist is less important than empirical evidence that we do. Resistance is the ability to challenge, critique, support, modify, and change structures of belief and power in documentable ways, ways that make us happier with who we are and how we live. It is not only a potentiality to be justified through a discursively substantiated subjectivity. It is an empirically documentable action, a series of practices performable, understandable, and teachable by, against, and from a contextual, material, and historical object status--the worth a culture assigns to material and corporal traits. Specifically, resistance is a form of critique, but it also larger than that. Whereas the postmodern critique is often seen as futile in that it shows the conditions of oppression but offers no way to change those conditions, post postmodern resistance alters the constitutive effects of oppression by rewriting the cultural stereotypes that enable or justify that oppression. It refigures the worth of the object status that a person carries by rewriting its perceived value. In short, post postmodern resistance attempts to transform the derogatory images of being that the dominant culture produces and that the marginalized assimilate as part of their identity. Such resistance does not require a distanced and unified subjectivity but rather the study and performance of actions through historical consciousness.

As I wrote in the introduction, while resistance may no longer emanate from a distanced self and may no longer be leveled against easily discernible and monolithic power structures, it can still exist, individually and collectively, in the multiple and fractured things we do: write a book, protest clear cutting, raise a child. It is a theory of

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resistance that has passed through the postmodern critique yet retains many of its insights. It is a theory that does not hold out hope for a unified self but examines actions to see how a multiple, fractured, and fluid self might be effectively manifested. However, in my analysis of documents to find traces of this resistance, I will focus on object status rather than subjectivity--not because a postmodern subjectivity is invalid but because the role that object status plays in the creation of that subjectivity and in the creation of the ability to resist is often ignored. Subjectivity is our recognized status as human beings within the power structures of society. It is the recognition that we feel, think, desire, hurt, and are human. Object status is the value, manifested in material attributes, that subjectivity is assigned. In other words, subjectivity is the threshold of our recognition and rights within a society, while object status is our horizon--the culturally determined value of our material body that constitutes what a society allows us to do and be.

The question of the impasse, while important, can focus too heavily on the epistemological possibility of authentic subjectivity instead of on understanding the pragmatic, material, and psychological activity of rewriting cultural stereotypes as a means of resistance. To question whether this activity and its effects are really evidence of true resistance or merely a discursive delusion can be profitable if that question is oriented toward helping us achieve greater freedom (see Foucault's "The Ethics" 282-85), but such a question can also be a mystification that removes writing from the very sites in which its resistance actually occurs and its effects can be understood. It suppresses the primacy and validity of our lived

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experience underneath theories for sanctifying the possibility of that experience (ironically, reducing written resistance to the very unified and distanced self postmodernism is critiquing).

Consequently, I will argue in this chapter that we do not have to have a unified and distanced self or even a fractured and fluid postmodern subjectivity to write, examine, understand, and teach resistance.[2] Where once marginalized groups needed to fight merely to be recognized as human beings, now they must fight over the value their human status is assigned. There has been a historical shift in what is needed to resist. Currently, marginalized groups, at least in the democratic countries of the world, suffer as much or more from the material effects of being labeled inferior objects and from the psychological effects of internalizing that inferior status as from a denial of subjectivity. What needs to be resisted now is not the denial of subjectivity but the cultural system of representing and valuing that subjectivity. For example, the struggle of African Americans to resist racism is no longer over basic human rights, but what bell hooks calls "the psychic impact of white supremacy" (*Killing Rage* 119), the valuing of whiteness over color. Hooks reminds us that "racist white folks often treated lighter-skinned black folks better than their darker counterparts and that this pattern was mirrored in black social relations" (120). In other words, African Americans have internalized, to the detriment of their social relations and psychological health, the "racist stereotypes that had always insisted black was ugly, monstrous, undesirable" (120). For example, hooks tells of a black mother in an interracial marriage who "was shocked when her four-year-old girl expressed the desire

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that her mom be white like herself and her dad." The little girl "had already learned to negate the blackness in herself" (129). Hooks tells of other little black girls who the media have taught to "prefer white images over black ones . . . white dolls better than black ones" (125) and of black children "psychological wounded in families and/or public school systems because they were not the right color" (122). These children were not denied a subjectivity; they were not banned from attending the school or from drinking at certain water fountains. Instead, they faced a "color caste" system that assigned an inferior worth to the color of their skin, the texture of their hair, the sex of their bodies. As hooks writes, "To be born dark was to start life handicapped, with a serious disadvantage" (121).

To resist this internalized racism and white supremacy, hooks calls for "establishing a *politics of representation* which would both critique and integrate ideals of personal beauty and desirability informed by racist standards and put in place progressive standards, a system of valuation that would embrace a diversity of black looks" (119 my emphasis). This "politics of representation" or "system of valuation" is what I call the resistance of the object. It is the attempt to resist the material and psychological oppression inflicted by negative stereotypes. Having attained emancipation, the right to vote, the right to education, and all the other rights of a recognized humanity, the struggle for hooks is no longer for recognized subjectivity but over the worth that subjectivity is assigned--a worth embodied in our object status.

To prove this claim of object status resistance, I will examine the internet writings of a lower caste, female, Indian immigrant

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named Malathi Raghavan. Malathi's writings against upper caste bigotry will show that if we cannot resist as subjects, then we can resist as objects, or that if we can still resist as subjects, we can also resist as objects. Resistance, identity, and agency for Malathi are no longer matters of an authentic, unified, and distanced subjectivity or even of a postmodern multiplicity but of using writing to refigure a culturally constituted and discriminatory object status. Malathi uses writing to challenge the beliefs that dark brown skin, lower caste features, and female genitalia are signs of inferiority.

In making this argument, I am aware of the negative connotations being an object carries, the belief that objects cannot act but are acted upon. More importantly, I am sympathetic to the question many feminist, African-Americanist, and non-Western theorists ask, namely, why is subjectivity disappearing at the very moment so many groups that have been denied its benefits are attaining the power to occupy its space? However, my project and the critique of the "disappearance" of subjectivity are not mutually exclusive. I am not claiming that subjectivity does not exist, nor am I claiming that resistance through one's subjectivity is impossible. What I am questioning is the fetishization of the self by both modernist "theory hope"[3] and many postmodernist critiques. What I am questioning is the importance that subjectivity is given for resistance, and I wonder what other forms of resistance that importance subjugates. I am suspicious of why subjectivity is privileged as the only authentic site of resistance in our culture, especially when white corporate males have our culture's most privileged subjectivity.[4] More important than the question of the

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disappearance of subjectivity is the question of why subjectivity is irreplaceable. If modernist subjectivity dies, have we lost an irreplaceable form of resistance? Possibly, but who is this we, who does this we serve, and what other forms of resistance would the "death" of that we's subjectivity open up for those who have been defined as questionable subjects within its structure?

These questions do not preclude the work of groups to transform subjectivity or find new ways to conceive of it; they merely shift the focus of our attention. For if there is no innate self, no modernist notion of self, then what is subjectivity but the internalization of our object status--the internalization of our culturally determined worth? To refigure that status, therefore, would also transform subjectivity, would also be an act of resistance, a form of agency. I am simply putting forth a way of resistance that is not dependent on a modernist notion of self or a postmodernist critique of subject for its functioning. I am trying to break the hegemony of subjectivity and those it privileges by offering object status, especially for the marginalized, as an alternate and legitimate site of resistance. I am, in short, trying to place resistance with Friedman's post postmodern historical moment--a resistance that recognizes the deconstruction of the modernist self but maintains the need for some way to change the oppressive structures of society. As Malathi will teach us, resistance is not merely abstract or theoretical. It is not solely an epistemological question, nor the exclusive domain of the powerful and their discursive practices. Resistance is about blood and bones, scars and ruptures, stereotypes and taboos inflicted on docile bodies labeled inferior but that now

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refuse to remain either docile or inferior. It is about the pain caused from internalizing one's own features, ancestry, race, or gender as inferior. Resistance is not only a question of discourse but of a lived body manifested within a political representation. It is a matter of object status.

I would now, therefore, like to turn to an examination of the writing Malathi did on the internet, comment on that writing, and then give her a space to comment on my comments. I will end the chapter by exploring object based resistance through the work of Jean Baudrillard. Baudrillard's work is not necessarily the best or only theoretical lens through which to focus on resistance, but it stresses our status as objects more than other posmodern theories -- a status and a potential that, as I have argued, are neglected in most theories of resistance.

A Short Biography

I first met Malathi Raghavan while we were graduate students at the University of New Hampshire. She was the R.A. (resident assistant) on the floor of the graduate dorm in which I lived. Over the course of a few semesters, I got to know Malathi quite well. Besides my incessant questions on where the floor mop was, where the trash bags were, and why I couldn't have a dog, Malathi, despite her fluency in English, often wanted my opinion on what she was writing for the India Discussion Digest. The India Discussion Digest or IDD is an internet discussion group, an "OPEN and FREE forum for discussion of issues related to India and the Indian community" (Ramamurthy 1). These issues range from politics, to arts and

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entertainment, to immigration, to general interest. Though open to all, the IDD is dominated by well-educated, English using, upper-caste, middle-class Indians. And though stating that "No personal attacks and insults will be allowed on the Digest," and that "Attacks on a community, linguistic/religious/ethnic/gender/sexual-orientation groups or nationalities will not be permitted" (Ramamurthy 1), the writing on the IDD can be quite vicious. Malathi, a member of a lower caste, knew, therefore, that her writing was more than an expression of her ideas. It was a test and demonstration of her worth. Consequently, she spent hours, sometimes days, on her writing. She wrote draft after draft, did outside research, and agonized over how it would be received. Not surprisingly, considering the upper caste dominance of the IDD, it was not often received well. It was under these circumstances that I got to learn a little about Malathi and the Indian caste system.

Malathi was born in the south Indian city of Madras to a middle class but lower caste family. However, Malathi's home life was anything but typical for an Indian family--at least not publicly typical. She was the first child of a civil engineer named Raghavan and a homemaker-turned-cottage-industry owner named Manimegalai. Malathi's sister Manessa was born some nineteen years after her, making Malathi more of a second mother than a big sister. When Malathi was a child, her parents did not get along. Her father was some thirteen years older than her mother when he proposed (Manimegalai was only eighteen). Thinking that marriage would allow her to escape the restrictions placed on Indian women, especially in that era, Malathi's mother accepted the proposal. It was

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a mistake. Manimegalai soon found she had simply exchanged one prison for another. The house was filled with mental abuse, power struggles, and an unwanted child. So, Malathi's mother did the unthinkable in Indian society. With a thirteen year old daughter, no job, and no support from either her family or her society, she left her husband. The shame of this separation, once it was publicly known, severely scarred Malathi's sense of worth. She particularly remembers a day when her father came to her school and complained about his wife to her teachers. It was, in a word, humiliating. Eventually, Malathi's mother and father reconciled. She started a small cottage industry--a dress shop--as an outlet for her creativity, and he provided the financial support for that shop. But Malathi never forgot the stares, the unkind remarks, the feeling of being of less value than other children. It was an time that, in her own words, "opened my eyes to the terrible public and private injustices of India." The dowry burnings, the spousal abuse, the exploitation of children, and, most importantly, the hierarchy of caste were all made visible to her once veiled eyes. It was an awakening that she carried throughout the rest of education--the knowledge of what it feels like to "be an outsider within one's own culture."

Though Malathi was a Hindu, she attended Vidyodaya Girls Christian school for grades one through ten, and, though an ethnic Tamil, she attended Adarsh Vidyalaya Punjabi school for grades eleven and twelve. While in school, Malathi was a voracious reader. She read anything and everything she could get her hands on but was especially drawn to books on atheism, ecology, feminism, and Marxism. She even had a poem read at an international women's

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conference in the Philippines when she was seventeen. After finishing high school, Malathi scored extremely high on her college entrance exams and got into Anna University where she studied production engineering. But she soon grew bored with engineering and, against her parents wishes, decided to pursue her first love-- animals. Malathi applied for and received a scholarship from the Ministry of Higher Education to study veterinary medicine in the U.S.S.R. Having never been out of the country and speaking no Russian, Malathi traveled to Kiev where she not only earned her degree but became fluent in the Russian language. Indeed, Malathi is fluent in three languages (Tamil, Russian, and English) and has a reading or speaking ability in four more (Hindi, French, Spanish, and Ukrainian). During her time in Kiev, Malathi experienced the aftermath of Chernobyl, Gorbachev's Perestroika, the fall of the Berlin wall, and the coming to power of Yeltsin.

After finishing her degree, Malathi felt the "call of America" and decided to apply to Environmental Studies programs in the U.S. Once here she majored in Environmental Education at the University of New Hampshire. Having seen the horrors of Chernobyl first hand, she felt her veterinary training "was too technical, too removed from the environment." She needed some "context to round off" her "content in animal welfare." She excelled in the program--receiving scholarships, summer research funding, and a teaching assistantship. In September of 1996, she won an internship with the United Nation's Division of Sustainable Development. Currently, she is enrolled in the Academic Review program at Purdue's School of Veterinary Medicine. She hopes to pass the American Veterinary

Board Exam by early next year. Obviously, Malathi's education--both formal and informal--has been a rich mixture of intellectual, religious, ethnic, and cultural influences. Equally obvious, she is an incredibly accomplished, intelligent, and goal oriented young woman. Yet because of her lower caste status, Malathi is, in the eyes of some Indians, inherently inferior. Her apparent success can be explained away as either an aberration or as the result of preferential treatment.

Understanding the intricacies of the caste system could take a lifetime for a non-Indian. The system is thousands of years old and has a history so complex it could easily fill a library of books. It is a little like combining the issues of race, class, and gender and then justifying that creation through religious doctrine. I make no claim, therefore, to be an expert on the caste system. The little I know about the history and current status of the caste system I learned from Malathi, and she is quite forthright in admitting that her view is based on her experience. However, while Malathi's perspective is just that, a perspective, it is a legitimate perspective. After all, it is based on lived experience.

According to Malathi, the caste system has four major divisions: the Brahmin, the Kshatriya, The Vyaishyas, and the Sudra. Each caste has a place and a role in society with predetermined privileges and restrictions. The Brahmins are the highest caste. They, at least the males, were the culture's priests and intellectuals. While allowed education and religious authority, they were denied material wealth. The Kshatriya are the warrior caste. Though not as high as the Brahmins, the warriors were and are also considered upper caste

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people and have been and are treated as such. They were the rulers of India. If they were denied anything, it was only the higher religious status of the Brahmins. The Vyaishyas were the peasants, farmers, and merchants of India. Allowed to prosper monetarily, at least to a degree, they were denied education (this, of course, is no longer the case). Finally, the Sudra were the lowest caste. They were and are the sweepers, cleaners, laborers, and morticians of India. The Sudra, especially those who handled the dead, were often labeled as untouchable, the very bottom of the social and economic hierarchy. What they supposedly received from the system was an occupation, a skill, a trade that could be handed down from generation to generation, and a potential for rebirth into a higher caste if they did their work well.

Malathi and her family are mainly Vyaishyas. Her ancestors were farmers, weavers, petty landowners, and traders. These occupations were not simply something Malathi's ancestors did; they were something Malathi's ancestors were. Their "occupations" reflected their soul's closeness to god, how they would be seen and treated by others, and the limits of what they could hope to be. Acceptance of this status was the only path to spiritual, social, and psychological harmony. To reject one's caste was literally unthinkable. Without a caste status one had no place within Indian society.

Though the untouchable caste was officially outlawed, that caste and the larger caste system are still alive in the minds and hearts of many in India. The current status of caste oppression is similar to that of black oppression. Though slavery in the United

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States has been outlawed since Emancipation and discrimination since the Civil Rights Act, the fight against institutional racism and white supremacy continues. The lingering prejudice of the caste system, however, does not mean that all upper caste Indians are pro-caste or that current lower caste people live under the same conditions that their ancestors did. For example, Malathi maintains that she has never been denied a subjectivity. She has always been treated, at least legally, as a human being. Indeed, in many ways India has more honestly tried to deal with the atrocities of its past than the United States has. Before and after independence there were attempts to reform the caste system. For example, in the spirit of the democracy that swept the country after Independence and through the leadership of Gandhi, a series of caste reforms were enacted: the untouchable caste was outlawed, discrimination based on caste at temples, schools, and by the government was outlawed, and a system of reservations was set up. The reservation system was and is a government program in which those who come from a caste that has suffered discrimination are given preferential treatment for government jobs and school admissions. Each year a certain percentage of spaces are set aside in both the government and the schools for people from the backward castes, scheduled castes, and scheduled tribes (often abbreviated as BC, SC, and ST). For example, Malathi's ancestry "qualifies" her as a backward caste person in the state of Tamil Nadu. The stigma of this "qualification" represents the social marker of "inferiority" that Malathi has fought against her whole life. Malathi has never faced, as her ancestors did,

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the denial of her humanity. Instead, it is the value of her humanity that has been in question.

The system of reservations also partly helps explain the current diaspora of upper caste Indians in America. Many Brahmins consider the reservation system a form of reverse discrimination. To escape it, they have gone international, enrolling in schools and getting jobs in the U. S. and all over the world. Consequently, a large portion of the Indian population in the United States represents a very educated, economically successful, and politically powerful class of people. The upper caste domination of the IDD, therefore, is not all that surprising. The upper castes are, after all, the most literate and worldly members of India's caste system. The IDD is a place where that dispersed group can stay in contact with other Indians, Indian culture, and themselves.

This painfully brief description of the caste system does not come close to capturing its dizzying complexity. For example, each caste is itself divided into multiple mini-castes (not all Sudras are untouchables and not all Brahmins are at the top of the hierarchy). Moreover, there are millions of Indians whose religion--Islam, Buddhism, and Christianity--removes them from the caste system-- though millions of these same people still participate in it. However, I hope this brief description provides at least the basis for understanding the terms and issues under debate in the writing that I am now going to examine.

The following is the text of an exchange that took place between Malathi and two upper caste Indians on the IDD. The exchange is an argument over how Indians should view each other.

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the caste system, and the government's attempt to erase the harm caused by that system. It represents only a small fraction of the voluminous writing Malathi did and does on the IDD and other internet sites.[5] However, I believe it clearly shows how Malathi uses writing to refigure the value of her object status. In short, she writes not only to make an argument but to show that someone from her caste *can* make an argument. The very act of being able to write, in addition to its quality and content, refigures her value.

As much as possible, I have attempted to present each entrants writing exactly as it appeared on the IDD. Representation of the Other is always ethically problematic but especially so in this case. I am, after all, dealing with considerable ethnic, gender, and cultural divides. Consequently, errors in spelling, grammar, and punctuation have not be altered, bracketed comments always represent my clarification of terms, and e-mail addresses, except for Malathi's which is reprinted with her permission, have been eliminated to protect the privacy of the participants. I will present the participants' writing first and my commentary second. I will then follow this section with Malathi's comments and a general discussion.

A Fire Burning in My Heart

> Date: Fri, 22 Mar 96 11: 08: 51 EST
> From Raghu Gotur
> Subject: Satire on Reservations
>
> We all know (the 'forward' and 'reserved' nomenclatured citizens of India) that the reservations do not contribute in any way to the progress and development of the nation.
>
> Imagine the following scenario:

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A BC/SC/ST [backward caste, scheduled caste, scheduled tribe] minimum pass marks MBBS [a medical degree] graduate becoming a Neurosurgeon using a 'sophisticated' computerized medical tool designed and developed by a BC/SC/ST min. pass mark Computer Engineer working in a hospital constructed by a min pass mark BC/SC/ST Civil Engineer with a BC/SC/ST min. pass mark Nurse assisting the Surgeon! And the patient happens to be a forward class person who lost all the above said career positions with fairly high pass marks to min.pass mark BC/SC/STs (any other possible worse nightmare than this?)

Looks like we have a parallel 'reserved' govt. social system for a BC/SC/ST right from childhood to the highest position in the country.

How about this solution : Let a BC/SC/ST go to a school run and taught by BC/SC/ST teachers, work in a factory constructed by a BC/SC/ST, go to a BC/SC/ST doctor for treatment, eat food prepared and processed by a BC/SC/ST and so on. Under these circumstances, do you think any BC/SC/ST would survive to raise the question of reservations?

I am not sure if the following quote works as a good analogy: "Its like giving a typewriter to a chimp and hoping that someday it will type out a Shakespeare's quotation."

Raghu

A key word in this entry is nomenclature--a system of naming. I would argue that is exactly what is at stake in this entry--the question of who gets to decide who is what, who gets to be what, and on what basis. In the first few lines there are a number of things which strike me as important in determining who wins this struggle. First, I'm confused about the subject line: "Satire on Reservation." This entry is obviously not a satire and yet Gotur labels it as such. My feeling is that the satire he is referring to is the idea that the reservation system is a legitimate way of addressing the problems of India. He obviously does not think it is. Indeed, Gotur never asks who the reservation system might help. Second, the use of the pronoun "we" is interesting. "We" connotes a community, a

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plurality unified in an organic way (his use of the words "citizens" and "nation" strengthen this feeling of community). Yet even Gotur feels the tension of using such inclusive terms. Immediately after writing "we all know," he qualifies that "we" with a parenthetical digression: "the 'forward' and 'reserved' nomenclatured citizens of India." His use of quotation marks around the words "forward" and "reserved" denote a sense of these words being false in some sense. The "we" he writes of is both not yet achieved and already predetermined.

If we ignore the ugliness of Gotur's argument in the second paragraph, we might notice his interesting use of labels. First, there is the BC/SC/ST label repeated again and again. The backward classes, the scheduled classes, and the scheduled tribes, while actually representing separate people, are not worthy of distinction. This conflation can be seen in the very construction of the label BC/SC/ST. BC/SC/ST is one "word," one group of people, separated only by slashes. Any distinctions between them are not as important as what binds them together--inferiority and preferential government treatment. Set against this cultural marker--the BC/SC/ST label--are markers of high social standing: the Neurosurgeon, the Computer Engineer, the Civil Engineer, and the Nurse. Gotur believes that the BC/SC/ST cannot really occupy these social spaces. Lower caste people are only "min. pass" Neurosurgeons, Computer Engineers, Civil Engineers, Nurses, and Surgeons. Their inferior natures do not make them fit for these socially prestigious roles.

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By the third paragraph a pattern comes into focus as to the reason why BC/SC/ST cannot be true professionals. Allowed out of their spiritually preordained station, the BC/SC/ST, like a virus, (even the lettering reminds me of AIDS or HIV) will destroy the nation (the first paragraph), the forward castes (the second paragraph), and themselves (the third paragraph). Thus, to contain them is not oppression but patriotism, self defense, common sense, and or even compassion. The BC/SC/ST label is repeated so often in the third paragraph that it becomes almost a chant, each repetition driving home the cultural worth of the people this label manifests. Further, Gotur's use of the word "solution" within the context of the paragraph's musings on the survivability of the lower castes echoes frighteningly with the tragedy of Nazi Germany. The final "you" of the paragraph, the "you" he is asking the question of, represents the higher caste. The lower caste are not consulted as to the potential of their survivability.

The final passage of the entry speaks for itself. The reservation system defies the natural and spiritual order of the universe. The BC/SC/STs are not, by definition and design, capable of being Neurosurgeons, Engineers, and the like--except through the "nightmare" of the reservation system. It is, as Gotur writes, like giving a chimp a typewriter. If this natural order was recognized, if the false forward and backward labels were abandoned for the true nomenclature of caste, then the greater "we" Gotur writes of could be a reality. In fact, it should be stressed that Gotur is not denying the BC/SC/ST a subjectivity; he is defining the kind of social status they are capable of having, the worth of BC/SC/ST object status. Gotur

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does not argue that BC/SC/ST *are* chimps with typewriters; he argues that it is "*like* giving a typewriter to a chimp." The BC/SC/ST are human beings; they just aren't worth very much as human beings. The next entry appeared a little later that same day. It is also a "pro-caste" argument. Only this time it is in direct response to another netter who has mocked defenders of or apologists for the caste system.

<p style="text-align:center">* * *</p>

Date: Fri, 22 Mar 1996 12:55:13 -0500
From: "Sukanya Chakrabarti"
Subject: Misconceptions about caste system

This is in response to Sendil Nathan's letter about the 'garbage in philosophy" allegedly caused by Hindu customs. Nathan seems to identify the caste system as the ultimate culprit. What he, and many others have failed to realize is that the caste system was developed to prevent oppression and enhance social productivity. Consider the capitalist system, where a minority of the population has both social prestige and power--this essentially enables this small minority to dominate society. The caste system, on the other hand, is based on a system of checks and balances--certain castes are accorded social prestige, but denied wealth, while other castes are traditionally allowed wealth, and a smaller share of social prestige. To wit: the Brahmins were the most respected members of the caste system, but they lived in sheer poverty (this is supported by statistics) If they had been accorded both social prestige and power, they could have tyrannized society. Furthermore, the caste system encourages specialization, leading to great social productivity. Indians and Westerners should reevaluate the perpetuated stereotypes and negative images of the caste system--for this is by far the greatest evil--our ignorance.

The subject line of the entry is again interesting, but this time easier to understand. Those who criticize the caste system are ignorant of their history. The supposed oppression caused by casteism is "alleged," a "stereotype," a "negative image." Hence, the experience of caste oppression is actually the experience of one's own ignorance. Chakrabarti's use of the inclusive pronoun "our" at the end of the entry is interesting as well. Like in Gotur's entry, our

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connotates a greater unity. This time, though, the unity seems more a collective and inclusive responsibility than a natural order. Read closely, however, it becomes apparent that this community is maintained by ignorance and not by responsibility. What ties these people together is what they do not know, and what keeps Chakrabarti out of this community of ignorance or at its top is that she does know. Chakrabarti's "authentic knowledge" allows her to dismiss as illusion the suffering caused by casteism. Her will to truth enables her to make such specious arguments as "the caste system was developed to prevent oppression and enhance social productivity" and to embrace such half truths as "the caste system encourages specialization." Nowhere is the pain and suffering caused by this system of "checks and balances" acknowledged; no where is the fact that lower caste people never volunteered for their position admitted. Upon first reading the entry, I had half hoped it was some kind of Swiftian "Modest Proposal."

It is also interesting to see how Chakrabarti tries to bolster her argument with the trappings of stronger arguments: the very real exploitation of people in capitalist societies, the Western notion of checks and balances, the parenthetical aside to statistics that "prove" the poverty of the Brahmins. These are, of course, half truths, rationalizations, deflections, and logical fallacies, but they reveal the lengths to which defenders of the caste system will go to defend it-- for they are really defending themselves. Many in the upper castes can no longer see themselves, the lower castes, or the effects of casteism. They need someone to teach them how to read. Malathi

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Raghavan wrote the following two responses in an attempt to do just that.

<center>* * *</center>

Date: Wed, 27 Mar 1996 19:07:26 -0500 (EST)
From: Malathi Raghavan <mr@christa.unh.edu>
To: editor@INDNET.BGSU.EDU
Subject: The prevailing caste talk. . .(I)

I have been an "active " listener, consciously listening and not just waiting for my turn to talk. The recent comparison of the likes of me to chimps :-) by Raghu has prompted me to voice my thoughts. However, I have nothing against chimps. I think Jane Goodall has a much more rewarding and rich life than most of us do.

Sukanya's high regard for the caste system is scary. Can we justify social order and prosperity to those unique and troubled individuals who might have wished to choose their own way of life and not to take the burden thrust upon them in the name of conformity? Conform or be cast(e) out? I am not just talking about rebellions for the sake of rebelling. I am talking about fundamental rights to education, choice of livelihood, healthy living quarters, respect, gratitude for doing your dirty job for you etc. System levelled different communities by keeping checks & balances? I don't think so! You are only thinking about power and wealth. One community had power to make decisions, another controlled economy, yet another had social standing maybe. So maybe traders, courtiers, some warriors etc other than brahmins had it a little better. What about all the people responsible for behind-the-scenes' activities: subsistence farmers, weavers, dhobi [laundry people] families, sweepers, janitors, people who worked with leather, grave yard workers and so on. . . .

Also, you are comparing apples & oranges when you compare class system with caste system. A person from the lower end of the economic ladder can at least theoretically work their way out of it. However, since the caste is a "birthright" how does one even dream of shedding the stigma, or the privilege, as the case maybe? And don't you turn it around and tell me that I consider it a burden because of MY "inferiority complex"! (Can't remember netter's name) Personally, I consider myself priveleged because I am a third generation school goer and a second generation university degree holder. If I had been born a few centuries ago, or in a remote village today, I wouldn't have had the opportunity to arm myself with similar markers of "social standing". Boy, am I glad that I can atleast chalk out my own life, fight my own battles and owe it all to the fact that somewhere along the line someone in my ancestry changed for the better. Not yet perfect but we'll all get there someday.

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On a lighter tone. how many of us have heard the cliches "the nouveau riche", "breeding shows" etc? Bottom line being that "the nouveau riche may have made the money but fail to see the fine line that separates us from them". (hint hint) to be continued. . . . .

Ciao,
Malathi.

Malathi begins her response with a very interesting subject line. "The prevailing caste talk part. . .(I)" is a reference not only to the upper caste's dominance of the IDD but to their privileged position in Indian society. It also reveals the Brahmins attempt to make their view of caste ecumenical. The subject line is, in other words, a tweaking of the upper caste's discursive hegemony. This tweaking is important. The upper castes are rarely challenged on the IDD by anyone except other upper caste people. Malathi is letting them know that the space is not as safe[6] as they think. that she is not going to let what they write pass in silence.

She starts the actual response with an interesting description of what her participation or role on the IDD has been to this point. Malathi has been "an 'active' listener. consciously listening an not just waiting my turn to talk." Malathi knows that many lower caste men and women read the IDD but rarely contribute to it. The IDD is seen by them as hostile territory. She consciously attempts, therefore, to write not only for herself but for others. Her refiguring of listening from passive acquiescence to active resistance grants dignity to herself and those she embodies. She is letting the upper caste know that the lower caste are present and judging.

Her next line--the one which refers to being compared to a chimp--has three very important aspects. First, Malathi uses the

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phrase "likes of me." I find in this phrase a level of solidarity. Malathi conceives of herself as a we. This solidarity points to a very important aspect of resisting as an object--it is communal. Gotur never specifically refers to Malathi or anyone else in his analogy. What he refers to is an entire class or caste of people. Consequently, by using the phrase "likes of me," Malathi accepts this categorization but refigures its worth. Her resistance is a group effort inspired by a "we" consciousness. She is insulted not just as an individual but as a cast(e) of people stretching back into India's antiquity. I argued earlier that resistance as an object necessitates a historical perspective and strategy. I think here is some proof. Malathi is not refiguring a single, ahistorical subjectivity but a larger group marker that she and others have inherited and must live within. And if Malathi is successful in changing how she is viewed, then others, including those of the past, are successfully refigured as well.[7]

Second, Malathi softens the bite of her response with her use of the symbol :-). I believe this reflects her own fear of being labeled as shrill or unfeminine. Besides the barrier of caste, Malathi must deal with what Teresa de Lauretis calls "the technologies of gender," the ways in which gender functions in Indian society through movies, books, fashion, marriage ads, religion, and elsewhere to constitute "concrete individuals as men and women" (6). One of the biggest rules of female behavior in India is decorum or even passivity--especially toward elderly males. To defy this rule leaves one vulnerable to charges of being unfeminine, and that is a very bad thing for a woman to be in Indian society. For example, when Malathi found out that one of the people with whom she had been

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openly arguing was a 60 year old Brahmin male, she literally shook. It was only the relative anonymity of the internet that allowed her to withstand charges of being shrill, unfeminine, and masculine. Her use of the symbol :-) reflects her unease at being forceful--an unease, evidently, that Chakrabarti's upper caste status dilutes.

Third, she ends the first paragraph with a playful reference to Jane Goodall. This reference is more than just mere name dropping-- though it is that as well. Malathi wants people to know that she has read Jane Goodall, that she can read Jane Goodall, and that she can use Jane Goodall to advance an argument. She is very cleverly turning the tables on Gotur's chimp argument. She is not like a chimp; she is like the people who study them (perhaps a veiled reference to Gotur considering that Malathi first identifies herself as an active observer of Brahmin behavior on the IDD). Hence, Malathi's alienation by Gotur, referring to her people as chimps, provided Malathi with the agency to resist: "Raghu has prompted me to voice my thoughts." She is, in effect, raising the ante of knowledge required to enter this debate. After all, her use of Goodall's name assumes that the reader knows who Goodall is.

In the second paragraph Malathi consciously brings in those people left out of Chakrabarti's apology for the caste system. Those who were not allowed to "vote" on their place in the system or on the "gift" of greater specialization. Her contrasting of the pronoun "them" with the pronoun "you" is effective at highlighting the difference between those who have suffered and those who have benefited from this system of checks and balances. "Them" are noble and hardworking yet oppressed. "You" represents those who force others

to do their dirty work for them. These "dirty jobs" sound like Cornell West's "reality that one cannot not know."[8] Yet Chakrabarti is able to deny that reality--until Malathi reveals the denial. The upper caste believers in caste are self-deceived and maintain the "justice" of their system through self serving caricatures of those it destroys. The silence of the lower caste, silence that is often taken as assent or contentment, is, in reality, another sign of their oppression--"conform or be cast(e) out." In short, Malathi is teaching Brahmins how to read caste. She is refiguring the nomenclature by which Brahmins decide who is noble and who is inferior.

She continues this project in the next paragraph by revealing Chakrabarti's faulty logic: "you are comparing apples and oranges." She also puns on the word "birthright"--revealing it as the wonderful thing it is for the upper caste and the horrible curse it is for the lower caste. She then displays an understanding of her audience's situatedness by predicting and refuting a potential counterargument: "And don't you turn it around and tell me that I consider it a burden because of MY 'inferiority complex'!" Malathi knows that lower caste people who criticize the caste system are often dismissed as suffering an inferiority complex (and at least partial acknowledgement that lower caste people have internalized their culturally inferior status). She deflects this attack by listing her family's accomplishments, by arming herself with her own "markers of 'social standing.'" She is a third generation school goer and a second generation degree holder. She is not like a chimp with a type writer who got lucky. Her ancestry is not something that marks her as inferior but something of which she is proud. She rewrites the cultural interpretation of her

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ancestry, her birthright, and her people, cleansing them of the taint they carry within the caste system. Through these acts and through tieing her personal family history to a larger social history, Malathi once again displays an understanding of historical consciousness. The words "we'll get there some day" should be read in the broadest possible terms. They display an understanding of where Malathi comes from, where she is, and where she hopes to go. Finally, I would stress that Malathi's resistance of cultural stereotypes is based on object status and not subjectivity. She specifically states that she already has subjective agency--"Boy, am I glad that I can at least chalk out [an interesting reference to writing] my own life, fight my own battles"--what she is suffering from is an object status that configures her as inferior.

In the final paragraph Malathi will once again turn the tables on the upper caste by showing them how the lower caste sees them-- a perspective which the Brahmins are rarely subjected to. It is not the lower castes but the nouveau riche Brahmins of India who have forgotten or malformed Indian history. Obsessed with material goods, skin color, technology, and genetics, the lower castes cannot help but laugh at the Brahmins. Indeed, Malathi's pun, "on a lighter tone," tweaks the upper caste's obsession with skin color and caste status as it relates to marriage.[9] It is a deliciously funny little bit of writing. However, Malathi has not yet developed the confidence to write these critiques openly. She uses quotation marks, parenthesis, and phrases such as "hint hint" to soften the critique. She still feels uncomfortable about expressing her opinion among these worldly Brahmins. Indeed, Malathi ends with the word Ciao. This ending is

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not, I think, insignificant. It shows that this young, brown, lower caste woman is as cosmopolitan as the Brahmins. Two days later the second half of Malathi's response comes out.

* * *

Date: Fri, 29 Mar 1996 11:16:40 -0500 (EST)
From: Malathi Raghavan <mr@christa.unh.edu>
To: India-D Editor <editor@indnet.bgsu.edu>
Subject: Re: The prevailing caste talk...(II)

I am quoting here from the book "Philosophies of India" by Heinrich Zimmer, Bollinger Series/Princeton. Chapter "Caste and the Four Life Stages" p. 152-153.

..."One is not free to choose: one belongs to a species-a family, guild and craft, a group, a denomination. And since this circumstance not only determines to the last detail the regulations for one's public and private conduct, but also represents (according to this all-inclusive and pervasive, unyielding pattern of integration) the real ideal of one's present natural character, one's concern as a judging and acting entity must be only to meet every life problem in a manner benefitting the role one plays. Whereupon the two aspects of a temporal event-the subjective and the objective-will be joined exactly, and the individual eliminated as a third, intrusive factor"....

The reason I preferred to quote rather than recreate in my own words the gist of this passage is to convey the reserved, observer-narrator style of the author. I know I will never assume his abstract tone. My imagination runs wild. There is a fire burning in my heart. I ask myself"What if there is a trapped soul of my ancestor in there somewhere?" "What if she never let anyone hear her cries of anguish and fear and sadness?" "What if she consoled herself of her lowly status only by watching those weaker, sadder and lower than her?" Highly probable. My rebellion genes are a hand-me-down, aren't they?

....."The supreme virtue is to become assimilated-whole heartedly and without residue-to the timeless, immemorial, absolutely impersonal mask of the classic role into which one has been brought by birth (jati). The individual is thus compelled to become anonymous. And this is regarded, furthermore, as a process not of self-dissolution but of self-discovery"....

What if my own path of self-discovery takes me to another abode, one that the power structure thinks is premature. What if I had been that exception to Mazlow's principle and didn't wait to find the road of excess that (supposedly) leads to the palace of wisdom? What if my own humble path turned out to be shortest, surest, and swiftest way to that palace of wisdom?   --Adios folks, Malathi.

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I find this entry very moving. In fact, I still can't read it without becoming emotional. Malathi is meticulous, perhaps even a little neurotic, about not making mistakes that could be used against her. Notice, for example, that she not only quotes Zimmer but gives the name of the book, the name of the chapter, the name of the publisher, and the page number. Such formality is not the norm on the IDD, but she understands the stakes of the exchange. She understands that the question of her ability to quote and to quote honestly and correctly from reputable sources is not something she can take for granted. She is showing the upper caste that she is not afraid of them looking these quotations up; in fact, she is challenging them to do so. She also understands the ethos to be gained by quoting not only a source on caste but such an "objective" and respected source as Heinrich Zimmer. Malathi will use the Master's own tools against him--but she will not become like him. The upper caste cannot argue that Zimmer's summary is biased against caste. Indeed, it may be a little flattering. Thus, the citation not only helps her argument but shows that she is fair, well read, and well read in areas that many IDD members are not. Malathi is constantly aware that her credibility is under the microscope, and she uses this knowledge, her superior knowledge of books, and her fairness to try and refigure what the upper caste see, can see, and how they can see.

The next paragraph is has layers of complexity. Her building of credibility or ethos by admitting that she is not and cannot be distant in her view of caste; her attempt to persuade through the moving and beautiful passages on her ancestry; her refiguring of her ancestors from happy, accepting, "coolies" into tragic figures whose

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potential was stunted and spirit turned mean; her revealing of the insidious nature of casteism--that it maintains its hold on those lower in the hierarchy by providing them with someone even lower than they; her line about rebellious genes which mocks the upper caste obsession with "spiritual eugenics" all contribute to making the writing very persuasive and educative. Far from being a mark of her inferiority, Malathi's "genes" are a sign of her ancestors' denied potential and of her responsibility to fight the battles they could not. to topple the system that robbed them of themselves. Supposedly good or neutral terms such as "a species," "a family," "guild and craft," "integration," "real ideal," and "natural character" now all sound ridiculous, even evil, after Malathi teaches us to read them as those ruled by them read them. In fact, when we read the next citation, it loses its descriptive distance. "Virtue" becomes a will to power. The words "timeless," "immemorial," and "absolutely impersonal mask" are revealed for the historic, subjective, and oppressive privilegings they are.

Malathi uses her status as an alienated mirror of the upper castes to change what is reflected. She shows that Indians have been brought to their status in society not through a spiritually determined birth but through a carefully constructed power system of defined and definers. "The individual is" not "compelled to become anonymous," words that now seems horrific, but condemned or consecrated to live publicly an object status that punishes some and privileges others. Caste, in Malathi's writing, becomes, for the lower castes, not a process of self-discovery but a system of self-annihilation. Through her use of personal experience, pathos, and

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ethos Malathi has once again taught the Brahmins how to see Zimmer's "neutral" passage. They learn to read the passage not for what it says but for what it does--for the damage these supposedly neutral, beautiful, and timeless ideas do to those who had no say in constructing them. Malathi has become a teacher, and so her object status must change. She is not like a chimp with a typewriter. She is like a teacher with her students.

The most important part of Malathi's last paragraph, besides the reference to Mazlow [sic], is the audacious claim Malathi makes. She is beginning to grow in confidence as a writer. Malathi begins the paragraph with a series of questions designed to open up other possibilities for viewing these ideas. She then discredits the "road to excess" as costing too much for those not allowed to travel it, and the "supposed" place of wisdom as not seeming all that wise to those it brutalizes. Then she asks: "What if my own humble path turned out to be the shortest, surest, and swiftest way to the palace of wisdom?" There are three important qualities to this question: first, it is a question and so continues to build Malathi's credibility as learned yet nondomineering; second, as a question, it puts Malathi in the role of the teacher; third, and perhaps most important, Malathi does not ask whether her humble path is the shortest, surest, and swiftest way to wisdom for her but whether it is the fastest, surest, and swiftest way for everyone. There is no second "me" in the sentence. In effect, what Malathi is asking is: what if the way to knowledge, truth, justice, and wisdom is through a lower caste, brown-skinned, woman? If that is is true, then how will the upper caste attain salvation? They can see neither her nor themselves. Malathi has lost

her timidness. She has rewritten her cultural worth. The upper castes must come to Malathi, to the lower castes, to learn. After all, she has shown that she not only understands the "accepted" or traditional view of caste, but that she sees the flaws of that view. She understands and can see more than the upper caste can understand and see. Predictably, many upper caste Indians find this new relationship to the lower castes threatening.

* * *

Date: Sat, 30 Mar 1996 16:46:08 -0500
From: "Sukanya Chakrabarti"
Subject: Caste system: Guarding ourselves against the truth

It must be convenient to live in a shroud of ignorance. Such a life inevitably produces the kind of mentality that can allow one to make flippant remarks about the flying habits of ostriches in reference to a serious social issue, or grossly misinterpret a clear argument. But that is the toll that indoctrination has on an impressionable mind. The American media has become highly adept at the art of brainwashing; it specializes in propagating stereotypes that bolster the American image at the expense of the truth. The targets are usually ideas that threaten traditional ideas, i.e., in America, we are all equals, there ain't no class distinctions, and certainly not the kind of oppression that one experiences in other cultures--namely, the kind of oppression that is due to the caste system in India.

I have already put forward arguments that demonstrate that the caste system was designed to prevent the oppression that results when social prestige and power are concentrated in one sector of the population, as in the capitalist system. The gratuitous assertion was made that my remarks imply that I would support slavery. Slavery is immoral; the caste system was formulated to ensure that the moral rights and interests of the majority of the population would not be subordinated to the interests of the minority. (Consider corporate interests in the U.S. If you are unfamiliar with this line of criticism, read up on Noam Chompsky.) An analysis of the State of India today must necessarily be more complex--social institutions that were once powerful have been replaced by new influences. It is ludicrous that one could think that my arguments would imply that the American economy has flourished due to the influence of Christianity. My arguments were offered in the context on ancient India. If these remarks are taken out of context, one will obviously end with with laughable statements. There is no simplistic analysis of the present American economy--globalization and industrialization have widespread effects that cannot be easily understood.

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Finally. we must seriously consider such questions as: Can there ever be a classless society? Given the history of opppresion, shall we not try to find a solution that minimizes oppression? (for oppression exists in all forms of society) Shall we not try to create a system of checks and balances that accords power to one class, and balances this by depriving it of wealth? Are not social equality and social mobility mutually exclusive? (If we were all equals, why would we climb up the social ladder?) Ask yourself how much of what you have been told by the media is true. It will not be easy to find the truth--for it is well-guarded. The victors have the privilege of writing history. But we have a responsibility to know the truth of our culture.

In this entry Chakrabarti is responding to both Malathi and an entry by a non-upper caste, non-Hindu Indian named Sendil Nathan. Nathan accused Chakrabarti of willful ignorance inspired by religious dogmatism. Thus, Chakrabarti begins her response by writing of a "shroud of ignorance"--an allusion to Christianity-- and by disparaging the "kind of mentality" such a shroud produces. Those who knock the caste system are brainwashed, indoctrinated, and impressionable. They are traitors to their culture and traditions, lower caste dupes incapable of understanding the complexity of her argument, not really Indians but pawns of the American media. We've seen these argument From Chakrabarti before. Her first paragraph is merely an attempt to once again control cultural images.

In the second paragraph we again have dazzling mental gymnastics, a displacement of argument, and this time--perhaps in direct response to Malathi--the parenthetical name drop of Noam Chomsky. The fact that the name dropping is done as an aside is more interesting than the actual name dropped (although it is ironic that she relies on a American theorist to advance her argument given her charge that those who oppose her are brainwashed by the American media). The off handedness of the remark implies that

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this reference is just the merest fraction of what Chakrabarti knows. She includes it merely for the benefit of the less informed.

In the last paragraph Chakrabarti simply ignores Malathi's implicit argument that India is far from having achieved a Habermasian public square--which would be necessary for Chakrabarti's "we" to mean anything. Also, I think the last line--"we have a responsibility to know the truth of our culture"--corresponds interestingly with the subject line: "Guarding ourselves against the truth." I would argue that is exactly what Chakrabarti is doing. She never asks whose culture, whose truth is being guarded. She portrays others as ignorant to guard herself against the truth of lower caste oppression. It is a defense that Malathi will soon penetrate.

<div align="center">* * *</div>

Date: Tue, 2 Apr 1996 21:14:42 -0500 (EST)
From: Malathi Raghavan <mr@kepler.unh.edu>
To: India-D Editor <editor@INDNET.BGSU.EDU>
Subject: Noam Chomsky & Caste

Name-dropping can be effective when the name dropper understands the political beliefs of the name that she is dropping. Using Noam Chomsky's name to defend the caste system is like using Gandhi's name to defend bloodshed. If Chomsky, a dedicated "anarchist and libertarian-socialist" knew that his humanitarian arguments against American/colonialist/capitalist exploitation were being used to defend the caste system he'd probably throw up or at least cry out "the emperor" has no clothes". That someone should use Chomsky, a world-renowned human-rights defender, scholar, and champion of the oppressed to defend a backward, oppressive, disgusting concept such as caste is ironic in the least and tragically sad at worst.

Malathi

Date: Wed, 03 Apr 96 11:39:57 -0500
From: shl
To: mr@kepler.unh.edu

<div align="center">8 4</div>

Subject: Re: Noam Chomsky & Caste

Well said, indeed!

My favorite response by Malathi--sharp, eloquent, confident, carnivalesque. As I've already written, Malathi rarely got praise openly on the IDD. However, she did often receive private emails like this one following her Chomsky entry. These responses were usually from women and almost always from lower caste people. Reinforcing Malathi's awareness that she wrote not only for herself, but for those who felt they could not write openly on the IDD.

In her Chomsky entry, Malathi catches Chakrabarti as she says--without any clothes on (Chakrabarti's name means emperor). It is a carnivalesque moment in which the ruling class's superiority is destroyed by Bakhtinian laughter. Not only does Malathi also know Chomsky, she knows him better than Chakrabarti does. She can quote him correctly. Malathi is not a dupe of the American media. In fact, she understands its hegemonic impulse better than Chakrabarti. After all, she understands Chomsky's critique of that hegemony. Malathi has in this one entry shown the corrupt nature of upper caste knowledge and refigured her own cultural value. It was not Chakrabarti's corrupt use of knowledge which revealed her; it was Malathi's writing. If Malathi is like a chimp with a typewriter, then what does that make someone who is outsmarted by a chimp? If Malathi is like a chimp, then how can she understand Chomsky and the emperor does not? The last line of the entry especially refigures class status for the members of the IDD. If they do not want to look "backward, oppressive, disgusting," then they need the

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information Malathi has.   But to get that knowledge. they must change how they see her.

I would now like to turn over this chapter over to Malathi.   I do this because of the political and ethical issues involved in my attempt to represent her and the debate among the Indians.   As John Ernest argues,

> We cannot escape the labyrinth of cultural diversity and social practice to reach the common ground of clarity and understanding. nor should we want to try.   We can only acknowledge that it _is_ a labyrinth. that inevitably we all stand at different points within the labyrinth. and that the academy has developed a way of giving its section of the labyrinth the appearance of independence and order. Much as I might like to. I cannot build a bridge that will take me where my students live: I cannot understand them simply by learning more about their backgrounds.   But I can take what I learn to understand more fully where I live, and the terms of my life there.   The best way to build bridges between cultures, it seems to me. is not to start from the other shore. but to explore the geography and shifting sands of the shore upon which one stands--to examine and reveal the assumptions, beliefs, and limitations of the culture one knows best.   The acknowledgement of distance. joined with the desire to reach across that distance, is usually a more effective and respectful approach to human understanding than is the pretension of closeness and empathy.   ("100 Friends" 23)

In my reading of Malathi's writing I have tried to remember that I cannot ultimately know her. and that to pretend that I can is a form of appropriation.   My interpretation of her writing is the interpretation of a text and, as Ernest implies, of myself.   I would like, therefore, to give her a space where she can critique what I have written.   Malathi, after reading the chapter wrote the following response.

Malathi's Critique

Before I write anything, let me be clear about this: my immediate nuclear family and I do not face overt caste

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discrimination. My father considers himself an atheist, and my mother, in addition to being an agnostic, possesses a "westernized" mind with respect to culture and tastes. This "colonization" of her mind has had the salutary effect of breaking the hold caste prejudice has over many in my extended family. Also my mother, I believe, is fairer and prettier than most of her cousins--a very important trait for an Indian woman. Also, my immediate family speaks and understands English (while most of my extended family do not), and we are more middle class, economically, than my extended family. All these things contribute to making me *look* (and sometimes feel) more inherently confident than my cousins, and this confidence buys me relative immunity to the kinds of discrimination and ridicule they face everyday.

But this is not to say that there have been or are no effects of internalized casteism on *both* my nuclear and extended families. From birth we are taught through the Hindu religion, the images in our televisions, in our movies, and in our literature that fairer is more beautiful, that dark is beastial and low, that caste reflects the worth of the soul, and that acceptance of hierarchy is a virtue. Moreover, as a woman I face the added oppression of the gendered image: domesticity, meekness, purity. It is not that long ago that a wife, to prove her love for her husband, threw herself, *or was helped to*, onto his funeral pyre--a practice that is not unheard of today and that helps to justify the dowry burning that still continue. So to use Lance's terms: one of the object traits assigned to women in India seems to be that of kindling. My mother, sister, cousins, and I all suffer from this image of the female. However, the psychological and

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material effects of caste based prejudice--which I think Lance is right in looking at as internalized negative stereotypes--are much worse for the poor in Indian than for the wealthy--a fact Lance might have mentioned more. For as in all other things, no money makes matters worse.

As to what I wrote on the IDD, I am reading my own internet writings after a long time. and it amazes me how quickly my anger. emotions, and passions are once again aroused by reading Gotur's and Chakrabarti's writing. The way that they present the caste system. a very complicated and painful topic for many Indians, in such a simplistic, cold, "logical," "factual" manner infuriates me. Indeed, my own relationship to caste is very complicated. Though physically I look like a lower class person. I have, to my embarrassment, learned to mask that appearance by the way I dress, walk, talk, think, and dream. I have learned, as Lance writes, to internalize the inferiority that others assign my body and reexternalize that sense of inferiority through the cosmetic--or what I think Lance would call object traits. As an aside, I also have another mask that hides my caste status: my name. 'Malathi' is neutral to caste status. But 'Raghavan' is definitely an upper-caste name in the south. It is the name of Lord Rama, who is generally not the family-God of non-brahmins in the south. 'Raghavan' is actually my father's first name. In the Tamil culture, in order to meet the last name requirement put forth by the British, the first name of husband/father became the wife's or child's last name due to the absence of family names. The other option would have been to use the caste name--but every 'non-upper' caste individual knows better

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than to voluntarily expose their 'inferior' caste status. However. 'Raghavan' is not the name given my father by his parents. It is the name that he selected for himself after he completed his B.E. degree at around the age 20. His parents had actually given him the name 'Pichandi', which, when translated, means 'one who asks for charity': not a very flattering identity (usually names with such meanings are used only by the lower-castes). Therefore, I can quite understand that my father wanted to change his name. To uses Lance's ideas it seems that he wrote himself a new identity through the act of renaming himself. Why he chose the name 'Raghavan' is intriguing to me. but I can only speculate because this is a topic that cannot be touched in my home.

To return to the topic of my relationship to caste, I have often been. due to my outward cosmetics and middle class status, mistook as coming from "Brahmin stock" and, consciously, have never tried to set this straight--except for the moment I "declared" myself on the internet. Even then, wrapped in the anonymity of cyber space, it took everything I had to do it. I have many times endured the unpleasant experience of 'eavesdropping' on conversations, the likes of which would not have been meant for my ears if the conversationalists had known the truth about my caste status. I have, in other words, more often than not, been living a lie.

I think, therefore, that what Lance wrote is very true--if a little flattering of my arguments. Line by line his analysis of the writing revealed both motive and purpose. It amazes and frightens me about how transparent I must have been. I was resting the stereotypes that Indian society imposed on me. that caused me to

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want to live a lie. I wanted my writing to prove that I am relatively better read, a better writer, sharper, more logical, more critical than the brahmins--mainly because they do not believe it could be so. I was writing, as Lance says, not only to make an argument but to show that I *can* make arguments, arguments more persuasive than those put forth by the apologists for caste. I wanted to show them that I wasn't like a chimp with a typewriter, that my dark brown skin, my gender, and my ancestry weren't something I should be ashamed of but proud of. It is a sense of pride that is not easy to achieve or maintain. Every message, every image, every form of story in Indian society portrays, even stresses, the exact opposite. Brown skinned and lower caste women are to be beaten, worked into an early grave, set on fire, screwed in dirty hotel rooms because the fair skinned brahmin girls don't fool around before marriage and certainly not anywhere but in their own beautiful homes. Yeah right! All of these things make up the oppression of imagery that I was trying to fight against.

However, there is one thing that I wish to state: I am afraid that Lance gives me too much praise. I would like to think that my writing indeed is the reason that Chakrabarti remained silent from then on. But even I will not assume that she or anyone else who believes in the "genius of the caste system" underwent a radical change only because of my input. I am afraid that it is not so easy. Social leaders have been begging, cajoling, arguing, fighting for so many years calling for a change in the way we see the caste system, yet so many things remain undone. How can my insignificant writing on the internet, read by a "polished," "educated," and "self-righteous"

audience, be any more powerful than the work of major social reformers?

Still, I also know that there are a lot of non-upper caste people who are intimidated from voicing their reactions on the IDD. There is something in our culture that prevents lower class people from talking about their lower-caste origin. I know because I suffer from this myself, and I received a lot of their personal thank yous. Still, I felt very agitated that I didn't receive any open support on the digest itself. Where does one draw the confidence to resist as an object when all the signs of a society degrade that status? So, I wonder if I need to feel supported to continue writing. Of course, Lance does write that resistance as an object is inherently communal. I think that is a very good point. The other reason I think that the writing I did was important even if it didn't "shut up" or persuade the brahmins was for my own mental health. I write to purge myself of this 'sense of inferiority' that I have been carrying around inside myself. I feel so much more mature and 'cured' now that I have opened out to the world about my origins. I feel less tortured and rid of all my baggage. But, I wouldn't be so sure and confident about the "silencing effect" that all this had on the upper-caste netters. Still, I am sure that "resisting as an object"--as Lance calls it--did a great deal for my own and other lower caste peoples' sense of identity.

Response to a Response

At first, I was not going to respond to what Malathi wrote at all. I was going to give her as much space as possible, but I feel

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compelled to comment, if quickly, on what she wrote. There are a number of things that strike me as interesting in Malathi's critique. First, I think she's right--I did over estimate the effect that her writing had on the Brahmins [it's interesting to me that Malathi never capitalizes this word], probably because as a non-Indian I do not have the same intimacy with these issues. It seems to me, from my position in the labyrinth, that those supporting caste have little credibility. Yet, I would stress that Malathi did receive many private e-mails for what she wrote from other lower caste Indians, and that Chakrabarti did stop writing on the IDD. Further, Malathi writes not only to create space for her subjectivity or to turn herself from object to subject but to redefine the value and image of her object status--and the material and psychological effects this valuing mandates. She tries to teach members of the IDD, through her intelligence, pathos, ethos, logos, and autobiography to desire brownness, lower caste status, femininity as attributes that they need to have or at least understand in order to be just, fair, intelligent, beautiful. I think she did achieve some success in these areas. Perhaps, therefore, the effect of her refiguring of object status was greater than Malathi thinks.

Second, it strikes me how that even in her response to what I wrote Malathi felt it necessary to continue to refine her object status. She goes to great pains to make sure that I understand that she has not suffered the discrimination that other lower caste people have, and that she is not a typical lower caste person. She feels, in other words, a need to both embrace and distance herself from a lower caste status to ensure authenticity. It's not that Malathi is

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embarrassed by her lower caste status but by her ability to "pass" for an upper caste person. She knows that others are much worse off than she is. She feels some sense of having betrayed them when she "passed" as a Brahmin. Her fight, therefore, is to represent the lower caste people on the IDD, and herself through them, who have not yet developed the economic and social level necessary to write as she does. She wants to be their voice, but she recognizes the danger of appropriation.

Third, and perhaps most importantly, in Malathi's original entries and in her response to my interpretation, I was struck by the way personal narrative, family experience, was used to resist political oppression. I think this is the way to tie what Malathi did and my notions about resistance through object status to the writing classroom. Through our student's personal narratives they have the power to refigure oppressive stereotypes--for themselves and, at least potential, for those who impose them. The students can use personal narrative, puns, ethos, logos, pathos, cited authority, and a host of other techniques that Malathi uses to change the value of their object status. Here is the students' means to resist in the post postmodern world, especially marginalized students. To use words, rhetoric, writing to compose the fragmented discourses of their being, into an object that seduces, teaches, and transforms the greater community. The post postmodern student would not seek the existential agency of the subject but the existential agency of the resisting object. This is not to say that personal narrative is not without risk when tied to the political, but that personal narrative has always already been tied to the politic, to the politics of

representation. Finally, I am struck with how what Malathi wrote echoes with the work of Jean Baudrillard. Baudrillard believes that we are objects every bit as much as we are subjects, and that this object status has profound implications for how we interact with each other. Therefore, I would like to end this chapter with an examination of his theory--a theory that inspired my initial interest in object status as a site of resistance.

The Supremacy of the Object or "Mirror Mirror on the Wall"

Jean Baudrillard, with his disdain for historical consciousness, political agency, and social progress, might seem a strange lens through which to interpret acts of resistance. Indeed, many important theorists in composition, rhetoric, and elsewhere have criticized Baudrillard's work as nihilistic, dangerously skeptical, socially crippling, and oblivious to anything non-discursive. For example, Lester Faigley, while admiring the irony and challenge of Baudrillard's insights, believes that "At a time when widespread misery has become part of the daily landscape even in affluent centers of the West, few committed to activism will find his [Baudrillard's] nihilistic answer--'to play with the pieces' of what's left--acceptable (211). James Berlin, who also enjoys Baudrillard's uncompromising attacks on hypocrisy, nevertheless maintains that Baudrillard's work represents the kind of extreme epistemological skepticism that leads to a "passive acquiescence to things as they are" (*Rhetoric* 57). Douglas Kellner, one of Baudrillard's harshest critics, warns that Baudrillard "has fantasized himself into a repetitive metaphysical orbit with no apparent exit, and that, unless

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a dramatic reversal appears, his work will become ever more bizarre, trivial, reactionary and pataphysical" (*Jean Baudrillard* 217). Finally, Cornel West, whose work is representative of the pragmatism that is becoming more influential in composition, argues that

> Baudrillard seems to be articulating a sense of what it is to be a French, middle-class intellectual, or perhaps what it is to be middle class generally . . . . [but] there is a reality *that one cannot not know.* The ragged edges of the Real, of *Necessity*, not being able to eat, not having shelter, not having health care, all this is something one cannot not know. The black condition acknowledges that. (277)

To West's criticism I might add the potential imperialistic impulse in Baudrillard's work. When he writes that "It is the Object that is exciting, because the Object is my vanishing point," and that "The Other is what allows me not to repeat myself for ever," he risks endorsing, even through his irony, the colonization or consumption of the other for one's own identity ("The Object" 173, 174).[10]

For these critics and others, Baudrillard's work leaves little or no room for the impact of the non-discursive on our lives--especially the lives of the oppressed and the poor. Even Baudrillard's simulacra or images are ultimately a form of discursive practice and understanding. His lucid postmodernism, they feel, denies the possibility of a self and community capable of effective democratic politics--at least as these are traditionally understood. The hungry, the homeless, those without health care cannot simply float from one signifying orgy to another. There is too high a price to pay for not paying attention to the reality of hunger, cold, and physical threat. Thus for these critics, Baudrillard's work reflects the situatedness of the privileged and is, therefore, useful to a limited and exclusive segment of society.[11] While agreeing with these critiques to some

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extent, I wonder if perhaps they are missing a powerful strategy for resisting social inequities, especially for the marginalized, within Baudrillard's work--a strategy he himself neglects due to his love of irony, skepticism, and strategic caricature.

In *Fatal Strategies* Baudrillard argues that "We have always lived off the splendor of the subject and the poverty of the object. It is the subject that makes history, it's the subject that totalizes the world . . . . In our philosophy of desire, the subject retains absolute privilege, since it is the subject that desires" (111). In other words, as long as the necessity of the subject reigns, then the violence of history, the privileging of the powerful, the subordination of the weak remains justified and justifiable by desire. "But," Baudrillard continues, "everything is inverted if one passes on to the thought of seduction. There, it's no longer the subject which desires, it's the object which seduces. Everything comes from the object and everything returns to it" (111). I find a powerful potential for resistance and a plan for human emancipation, especially for the marginalized, within this idea of the seducing object, a power and plan enabled not by their distance from the fragmentation of the world but by their situated alienation within it.

Again and again in Baudrillard's work, he reminds us that "we are objects as much as subjects" (124). We are not only entities which think, desire, measure, judge, and feel; we are entities which are thought about, desired, measured, judged, and felt. And Baudrillard believes that "what we all want as objects . . . is not to be hallucinated and exalted as a subject . . . , but rather to be taken profoundly as object" (124). We want to be seen and, more

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importantly, treated as beautiful, intelligent, valuable, cherished, important, and necessary. We want to be treated profoundly as objects because, as Baudrillard's quotes imply, there are material and psychological punishments for not being treated so and revolutionary possibilities if we are. Since object status is not limited to the non-human in Baudrillard's work, and since the marginalized carry a more explicit object status than those with privileged subjectivities,[12] the marginalized could possess this power of inversion as well. If the marginalized can recognize the condition and potentiality of their object status, then, potentially, everything must also come from them and to them. Included in this everything would be a culture's structures of representation, limitation, and identity. "Can the subaltern speak?" Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak asks--wondering, in effect, if the marginalized can be heard by the privileged within structures of discourse determined by relations of power. My answer would be yes but perhaps more as seducing objects than as desiring subjects. As the latter, at least within the dominant structures of society, they are always counterfeit, suspect, predetermined, or, most condescendingly of all, tolerated. As the former they have access to and are a power themselves. Our object status has a cultural cash value, if you will, which privileges some and marginalizes others.

Consequently, our object status marks the clearest and most social manifestation of the narratives of limitation and definition which bring us into cultural and political being. These narratives construct us as black, brown, white, male, female, straight, gay, bisexual, etc. These definitions are evaluative and are tied to other

fluid, numerous, and evaluative definitions that combine and dissolve to constitute our identities. In Malathi's case the markers of social status include color, gender, and ancestry. By identifying and showing how and why these narratives came into being. understanding how they construct the understanding and valuing of people. Malathi offeres the marginalized a chance to refigure these narratives and, through that refiguring, themselves.

Why do the marginalized especially possess the agency or power to do this narrative "remapping"? Because of their status as alienated objects within the culture. Baudrillard explains that "The Object's power and sovereignty derive from the fact that it is estranged from itself" ("The Object" 172). The object, unlike the subject, does not "live off the illusion of its own desire: it gets along quite well without it" (Faigley 213). But

> for us [the privileged subjectivities of Western culture] the exact
> opposite is true. Civilization's first gesture is to hold up a mirror to
> the Object, but the Object is only seemingly reflected therein; in fact
> it is the Object itself which is the mirror, and it is here that the
> subject is taken in by the illusion of himself. (Baudrillard "The
> Object" 173).

The idea that the object, and by extension the marginalized person as object, is used as a "mirror" in which the subject sees himself or herself opens up a path of resistance. If the marginalized can understand their role as mirror, how their object status came into being, and the dependency of the subject on that mirror to maintain its illusions, then they can influence what the privileged see, can see. and want to see. For example, if a white male looks into the mirror of blackness and sees back at least that he is white, that he is not simply the norm, then blackness has refigured how the white male

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must view his existence and being. As bell hooks argues. "As fantastic as it may seem, racist white people find it easy to imagine that black people cannot see them if within their desire they do not want to be seen by the dark Other" (*Killing Rage* 35). By seeking to gain control of what the mirror of subjectification reflects, the marginalized have a chance to refigure the norms of society that keep them oppressed. Further, if the mirror can reflect the beauty, the uniqueness, the incommensurability of blackness, then the hierarchy on which white supremacy is founded becomes questionable as the only or best way of being. The object becomes what Baudrillard calls a strange attractor: "The Object is what theory can be for reality: not a reflection but a challenge and a strange attractor" ("The Object" 173). In short, the object offers and could control, through awareness and action, the possibility of new forms of subjectivity. Hence, the marginalized, because of their alienation, have a perspective on society that the privileged, because of their place at the top of society, cannot get anywhere else. And the privileged subject needs this perspective because he or she "know[s] the subject too well; the subject knows himself [herself] too well" ("The Object" 173).

Resistance, under an extended Baudrillardian lens, does not require, therefore, a unified and distanced perspective, a place outside of the flow of codes, to function. Instead, it requires an understanding of alienated position *within* the flow of codes and the means to restructure that flow--a means that comes from the alienation itself and an understanding that comes from the empirical examination of the "documents" that create, sustain, and resist that

alienation. Resistance becomes a form of educative practice. The marginalized become teachers instead of docile bodies, literally and figuratively using the power provided by their alienated object status to resist how they and others are seen, defined, and consumed as objects. They seek to control not only the means of their own object status's production and consumption but the means of producing the privileged subject's identity, becoming an object which seduces rather than a subject which desires.

This metamorphosis from subject to object is different than fighting to have one's subjectivity recognized--to be tolerated, if you will. Such a fight, even if successful, leaves the one who is granted the recognition in a subjugated position and the one who grants the recognition in a dominant position. "While I think your homosexuality is disgusting, I will tolerate it as long as you remain within predetermined bounds of behavior." As the homosexual community so insightfully argues: "tolerance equals death." Supposed "angry, white males" are not angry because they must grant subjectivity and tolerance to others, nor are they threatened by others' calls for subjectivity and tolerance. As long as subjectivity reigns and "angry, white males" have control of the institutions which grant it and dispense tolerance, they are still in the dominant position.[13]

The angry white males are angry because others have begun to question the value of the white, male, corporate object status. Perhaps, rich, white, straight, males are not the only or best standard by which things should be judged. Perhaps the qualities of other communities are more seductive, more beneficial, more sexually

attractive. kinder to the environment. kinder to other cultures. After all, William Bennetts' belief that America is losing the cultural war is not based on a fear of having to tolerate "deviants," but on the fear that "deviants" are demanding to be seen and are being seen as legitimate, perhaps even better, alternatives to traditional norms. The angry white males sense the shift in cultural power contained in images of beauty, intelligence. justice, and strength that do not reflect back, and so reaffirm. their own faces. The mirror has changed what it reflects. While still in control of the culture's dominant economic and social mechanisms, they have at least begun to feel what it is like to have an object status that is not desired by all cultural institutions--institutions that have attained the power to make that undesirability felt. This is why the arguments of such theorists as Dinesh D'Souza are so attractive to the conservative right. As an Asian immigrant, D'Souza's work puts a new face on old arguments that help keep minorities within frames that the white power structure finds more comfortable. For example, D'Souza does not argue that African Americans are genetically inferior in the area of intelligence and so responsible for their own oppression (although he spends page after page giving "careful" and "thoughtful" consideration to such arguments), but because *past* oppression has forced them to create an inferior culture. He writes:

> I argue that the main problem faced by blacks is neither deficient IQ [notice D'Souza doesn't say that blacks don't have inferior IQs only that such inferiority isn't their main problem], as suggested in the *The Bell Curve*, nor racial discrimination, as alleged by Jesse Jackson and other Civil rights activists. Rather, the book [his book] contends that African Americans have developed a culture that was an adaptation to historical oppression but is, in several important respect. dysfunctional today. (*The End* xiii)

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Under this argument. whites do not have to examine their own practices nor their role in the history of oppression in this country because 1) oppression is in the past, and because 2) it's the "blacks" own fault.[14] Hence, calls for tolerance or for a common humanity can be tolerated because they ultimately legitimate the preexisting social order. As bell hooks explains, white supremacists "have a deep emotional investment in the myth of 'sameness,' even as their actions reflect the primacy of whiteness as a sign for informing who they are and how they think" (*Killing Rage* 35).

However, refiguring object status disrupts that order to its very core. It works to intervene in and alter those racist stereotypes that keep the other under the control of the white image. Suddenly. the marginalized do not seek tolerance or even acceptance but appreciation. Black becomes beautiful, positive, generative and not merely the opposite or lack of white. Homosexuality becomes something not to be tolerated but to be celebrated. When the marginalized look into the eyes of the privileged, they do not want to see condescending tolerance but empowering desire--a desire, if the marginalized person understands his or her situatedness, that does not control the object but the one gazing. This seductive power constructs the marginalized student as a "pearl of great price." Of course, this refiguring power also represents the threat of the marginalized, the challenge of which Baudrillard wrote.

Importantly, this seductive power is different from that which is assigned to the traditional image of the seductive woman, a woman whose power over men is so great that she must remained masked. veiled. or kept out of sight. In that situation the woman does not

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control her object status but is controlled by it. The male has assigned the attributes that are desirable and uses them to control the female. Within Baudrillard's frame, or at least my construction of it. it is the woman who seizes control of the mirror of reflection. It is the woman who decides what the desirable traits are and through the refiguring power of her rhetoric, her argumentation, uses them to refigure the desire of the subject. Like Madonna in a MTV video, sexuality is used to confront, control, and retrain the male's gaze. And while the capitalist overtones of object resistance may seem distasteful, and while having a student whose "sense of self is set out exclusively in how she believes she is perceived by others" (Faigley 216) may seem the most profound cynicism or inauthenticity, I am not arguing that the student's sense of self is or should be set out exclusively by how others see him or her. I am arguing that understanding one's object status opens up paths of resistance that are not immobilized in the postmodern impasse.

Granted, this resistance is not easy to do. Though *what* the narratives are that constitute object status is always known, if sometimes only implicitly, the arbitrary and ideological *why* of how narratives are is often invisible. For example, the supposed perversity of homosexuality or the supposed end of racism in America are presented as "facts" and so beyond argument rather than ideological constructs to be debated. If these explanations do need to be argued for, then the proof of their validity is presented as common sense, patriotism, legal precedent, or economic necessity. However, if the ideology, the vested interest, the bias of these supposedly self-evident facts can be exposed through the refiguring

mirror of an aware object, then the invisibility becomes visible. If the marginalized person as object does not remain passive, docile, and cooperative but instead embraces what Baudrillard calls its inexorability and irredeemability, then resistance is possible. And while Baudrillard is right in that we cannot trace the historical, material, and contextual conditions of these narratives in a progressive or rational way; that we cannot escape the constitutive an arbitrary role of language; Foucault is right in that there is still a pattern. We can trace the genealogy of how these narratives came to be even if that genealogy is not rational or progressive. If the pattern can be traced and the inconsistency, irrationality, and chance which created it can be revealed, then it looses the power to seem natural, logical, common sensical, or preordained.

Thus, Baudrillard's work forces us to consider our being as more than our subjectivity, to see subjectivity as only one way of being in the world. Subjectivity for Baudrillard is at best uninteresting, at worst a Western instrument for imposing terror upon the world, and in either case ineffectual as a site of resistance. And despite the disdain, the suspicion, and the potential cynicism of using object status as a site for resistance, Malathi Raghavan's writing shows that resisting from a sense of how one is seen by others does not have to be inauthentic but can be moving, powerful, and effective. Of course, resistance can also be dangerous, especially within the classroom. How are we to deal with students who wish to resist our power and authority in the classroom? Conversely, if we want our classrooms to be places for social progresses, then how can we encourage our students to see their place within the dominant

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social order and to resist that order? Should the political be allowed into the classroom or is the question itself politically naive? It is to these questions I would now like to turn.

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CHAPTER TWO NOTES

1. Postmodernists use the word subject instead of self because the former stresses consciousness originating in language rather than preceding it. See Sean Burke's *The Death and Return of the Author* page 106 for a discussion of the problems inherent in the postmodernist's use of the word subject.

2. See Paul Smith 39; Susan Jarratt 70; Stuart Hall 12-38; Teresa Ebert 887-889; and Donald Jones 46-69 for attempts to refigure subjectivity, postmodern and otherwise, in ways that get around the impasse.

3. "Theory hope" is Stanley Fish's anti-foundationalist argument against trying to create a metatheory that can resolve the inherent contradiction between theory and practice. Fish writes that "practice has nothing to do with theory, at least in the sense of being enabled and justified by theory. That leaves me and you only a few worn and familiar bromides: practice makes perfect. you learn to write by writing, you must build on what you already know; but anti-foundationalism tells us that these bromides are enough. tells us that as situated beings our practice can make perfect, and that we already know what we think" (*Doing* 355). Trying to impose a theory to "justify" practice only ensures that we will blind ourselves to the complexity of the situation and subjugate those things that do not fit into or under the theory.

4. ˙Indeed. I wonder why subjectivity is the only site from which legitimate resistance can originate. I wonder whether subjectivity, as it existed in modernist theory and exists in much postmodern critique. is a Western white. male, corporate construct. I find it more than a little ironic that the ability to explain resistance and agency has disappeared because those who have always had it no longer believe in it; that there is a crises of subjectivity because the dominance of the white. male, theoretical view has been exploded--often by other white males. But what of the marginalized groups that have, can, and do resist with and without this concept of subjectivity? Why is the idea of these groups being able to resist outside of the frame of subjectivity not taken, by evidence of the crisis, seriously? I agree with Teresa de Lauretis. She is reluctant to apply any critical category to women "Because women have been a colonized population for so long, I fear that any critical category we may find applicable today is likely to be derived from or imbued with male ideologies . . . . I am not suggesting that we ought to clean the slate of history and start anew, because I am enough of a historical materialist and semiotican that I cannot conceive of a totally new world rising out of, and in no way connected with, the past or the present . . . . What I am suggesting is that theory is dialectically built on, checked against, modified by, transformed along with, practice--that is to say, with what women do, invent, perform, produce concretely and not 'for all time' but within specific historical and cultural conditions" ("Gramsci" 84).

5. See Sawnet (South Asian Women's Network) and Sasialit (South Asian Literature).

6. By defining the IDD as a safe place I do not mean to suggest that it is not a place of confrontation and disagreement. It is. But it is also a place, perhaps due to its relative anonymity. in which the upper caste feels empowered to

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write on certain issues and in certain ways that they would never discuss in open society.

7.   I hope to show in the Baudrillard section of the chapter, that while Baudrillard has little interest in historical perspective, object status can provide the sense of "historical depth" or "historical consciousness" that Frederic Jameson believes is so lacking in the postmodern condition ("Regarding" 4).

8.   See the Baudrillard section of this chapter.

9.   Indians often run marriage ads stressing the fairness of their complexion in order to attract a mate.

10.   To be fair to Baudrillard, I should mention that he often writes of the colonization or consumption of other.   In "The Melodrama of Difference" Baudrillard argues that "We are engaged in an orgy of discovery, exploration, and 'invention' of the Other. . . . Otherness, like everything else, has fallen under the law of the market, the law of supply and demand.   It has become a rare item--hence its immensely high value on the psychological stock exchange, on the structural stock exchange" (124).   However, Baudrillard is not criticizing this orgy so much as describing it.   Still, there is a kind of ironic disdain rather than an ironic detachment in sentences such as "Our sources of otherness are indeed running out; we have exhausted the Other as raw material" (125).

11.   Baudrillard is not unaware of this criticism.   He simply rejects its credibility.   In *America* Baudrillard argues that the poor do not figure into his explanation of America because the poor do not exist in America.   He writes: Reagan has never had the faintest inkling of the poor and their existence, nor the slightest contact with them.   He knows only the self-evidence of wealth . . . . The have-nots will be condemned to oblivion, to abandonment, to disappearance pure and simple.   This is "must exist" logic: "poor people must exit."   The ultimatum issued in the name of wealth and efficiency wipes them off the map.   And rightly so, since they show such bad taste as to deviate from the general consensus" (111).   Again, while this passage does not quite count as a criticism of how the poor are treated, its ironic insights could be used by those who would level such criticisms.

12.   By arguing that the marginalized have a more explicit object status than the privileged, I do not meant to suggest that the privileged do not also have an objectivity.   But the privileged do not often have to be aware of how they are figured as objects.   Their privileged status protects them from the pain of internalizing "unattractive" attributes.   In essence, the powerful have turned their objective traits into a subjective status which, if unchallenged, can isolate them from the view of others.

13.   By claiming this I am not denying other important institutions for reaffirming identity--the black church, the National Organization of Women, student organizations, etc.   But these institutions do not tolerate their members so much as embrace them.   When I speak of institutions of tolerance and identity, I am speaking of the governmental, legal, and social institutions still dominated by white, corporate, males.

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14.   For example. D'Souza argues that "drugs and black-on-black crime kill more blacks in a year than all the lynchings in U.S. history. Racism is hardly the most serious problem facing African Americans in the United States today. Their main challenge is a civilizational breakdown that stretches across class lines but is especially concentrated in the black underclass" (*The End* 527).

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CHAPTER III

POLITICS IN THE WRITING CLASSROOMS OF POSTMODERNITY

> Truly speaking, it is not instruction, but provocation, that I can receive from another soul. --Ralph Waldo Emerson "an address delivered before the Senior class in Divinity College, Cambridge, Sunday evening, 15 July, 1838"

> [N]o book is genuinely free from political bias. The opinion that art should have nothing to do with politics is itself a political attitude. --George Orwell "Why I Write," *Collected Essays* vol. 1

Louise Wetherbee Phelps begins *Composition as a Human Science* with the provocative claim "that composition awoke in the initial moment of its disciplinary project to find itself already situated, prereflectively, within a specific cultural field of meaning-- that of postmodern thought, with its characteristic preoccupations and world vision" (3). By this claim she means that composition, as a field of meaningful practices, is embedded within and indebted to the larger "sociocultural matrix" of postmodernity. It draws identity and purpose through an interdependent, correlative, and transactional relationship with the postmodern condition, a condition "marked by themes of loss, illusion, instability, marginality, decentering, and finitude" (5). If, as I have suggested, we add to Phelps' argument Friedman's argument that the current nature of this condition has changed so that we once again desire notions of agency and advocacy along with the instability, then we are in what I have called a post postmodern condition.

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If my appropriation and extension of Phelps' argument is valid, then this post postmodern situatedness should be reflected in our pedagogy on the role of politics in the writing classroom. In other words, we would, on one hand, be preoccupied with indeterminacy, juxtaposition, openendedness, fracture, and rupture; reflect an inherent distrust of the notions of progress, universal explanation, and hegemony; embrace a politics of play that eats away at its own and others' author/ity; and, generally, favor questions over answers, displacements over resolutions, multiple finite narratives over grand narratives. On the other hand, we would also seek to demarginalize marginalized voices, marginalize dominant voices, present the unpresented, and reclaim postmodernized concepts of self, agency, history, and advocacy. In short, we would try to make explicit what Lyotard calls the "justice of multiplicity and the multiplicity of justice" within a historical moment that maintains the need for values (*Just Gaming* 100).

And sometimes our political pedagogy does reflect this almost schizophrenic attempt to both critique the current social condition and refuse to participate in the authoritarian practices which constitute it. For example, while I have distanced myself from Victor Vitanza's work because it is too radical for our current historical moment, his attempt to embrace radical postmodernism *and* maintain Lyotard's vision of just society is laudatory. Vitanza's "Postmodern" or "Anti-body Rhetoric" of critical subversions "is . . . not concerned either with attempting to resolve rhetorical, interpretive differences or with even accounting for them. Instead, it identifies, detonates, and exploits the difference" ("Critical" 42).

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For Vitanza, the "struggle against author/ity" is not to either deny the political dimension of pedagogy or to move students to a critical and supposedly ethically superior or liberated social consciousness, but "to enhance our abilities to tolerate the incommensurabilities that make up what cultural critics are calling 'post-modern knowledge' (49).

This state of tolerance, this ability to drift is not, however, mere nihilism, an example of the dubious philosophy that anything goes. The goal of this play of contradictory voices is "to bring into realization what has been *displaced*--and that is the Sophistic idea of *Kairos*" which Vitanza defines as *"many competing, contradictory voices"* (60).[1] Vitanza's teacher seeks not the progress of a particular political agenda (a mask for the violence, subjugation, and privilege necessary to "make the world a better place"), but the paralogy--the rupture, paradox, and discontinuity--of multiplicity. The students' different political situatedness is not seen as a problem but as a resource to be employed against the rise of a hegemonic discourse. The contradictive and multi-voiced classroom is a political end in itself and not a means to new world order.

Stephen M. Fishman and Lucille Parkinson McCarthy also offer what I would call a post postmodern or, at least, an non-foundational perspective on politics and pedagogy in the classroom. They present Dewey's pragmatism "as an effective alternative to radical or confrontational pedagogy . . . . for teachers who find certain kinds of conflict unattractive but who seek student critique and change" ("Teaching" 344).[2] Importantly, this critique and change is not in the service of a previously determined political end but in the

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development of an intelligence capable of dealing with the "unstable, uncannily unstable" condition of the world (Dewey *Experience and Nature* qtd. in Fishman 346). Dewey, they believe, "would oppose teachers who have static pedagogic ends, for example, particular political positions which they want students to adopt before leaving their classrooms. For Dewey, such educational objectives put too much emphasis on a relatively minor product of the educative experience" (347). Dewey's educational goals focus instead "on the development of certain habits and dispositions rather than on the acquisition of a fixed body of knowledge or belief" (346).

These habits and dispositions for dealing with the unstable conditions of the world echo, using Vitanza's terministic screen, Lyotard's idea of invention as paralogy. Both act as a means for tolerating the instability of the world. Dewey's "flexibility or 'intelligence'--the ability to respond to novel situations, access . . . cultural resources, reshape . . . plans, and take positive residue from . . . experiences" (346-47)--could be used as the means for dealing with and acting within Vitanza's state of Kairos. Thus, like Vitanza, Fishman and McCarthy question the ethics and pedagogical effectiveness of confronting students to achieve a predetermined political end. Such predetermined ends can never be responsive enough to the ever changing experience of the world. A pedagogy inspired to realize those ends could never develop the intelligence or flexibility necessary to act and act ethically within such a condition-- except perhaps to act through the violent imposition of theory.

However, unlike Vitanza, Fishman and McCarthy do not privilege dissonance as an end in itself. They call not only for

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dissonance but cooperation: "For although Dewey recognizes the importance of dissonance, he stresses that conflict must always occur within the context of appreciation for cooperative inquiry and the virtues which sustain it"[3] (344). In other words, Fishman and McCarthy seek to create not simply a "'negative liberty,' the don't-tread-on-me-sorts of individual protections . . . . [but also a] 'positive liberty' . . . which encourages students to step out of their private realms, find common projects, and, in conjunction with classmates, make their unique contributions to such projects" (347-48). Incommensurability is not ignored by Fishman and McCarthy but neither are chances for organic collaboration. And while Vitanza would also oppose an individualist inspired liberty, he would be suspicious of the social orientation of Dewey's pragmatism.

Finally, Judith Goleman's Foucaudian and Bakhtinian inspired *Working Theory* also reflects the attempt to foster a critical and political consciousness while maintaining an appreciation for indeterminacy. Goleman argues for a "counterhegemonic writing project" (106) in which both the teacher *and* student work "the writing that has been working them" (107 my emphasis). The stress Goleman places on the situatedness of the teacher's politics and on the student and teacher as colleagues separates her work from many other radical pedagogues. Goleman argues that in order for students of composition to work the theories "that are working them . . . , they would *join* their teachers in redefining what intellectual inquiry involves and why" (6 my emphasis).

Students' subject positions are not the problem, that which must be reterritorialized. The authoritative discourses which help to

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construct those subjectivities are. The teacher does not present his or her own subjectivity as a superior consciousness so much as engage student subjectivity and be engaged by it. "The teacher," Goleman explains, "is not a master of situation, but a student of it" (9). The teacher is within the drama for change and not the source of that drama. The teacher *and* the student become Foucault's specific intellectual trying to open up spaces in which language can be reterritorialized from authoritative to internally persuasive.

Goleman's project is not, however, naively or dangerously utopian. The teacher does not pretend to give up his or her authority or pretend to "leave his or her politics at the door." Goleman stresses that "Students who learn from us 'how to write' would learn that we cannot offer them technical procedures or interesting processes alone, but in conjunction with the worldviews, subject positions and regimes of truth that they are a part of" (6). But, this learning 'how to write' is a *joint* project instead of an adversarial confrontation. Agency for Goleman's teacher and student comes from an Althusserian "critical effectivity" achieved not through a universal theory of writing but through "a theory of the contextual" (4). In other words, the ability to act is reclaimed through a critical understanding of the effects of specific actions in specific situations. There is an postmodern indeterminacy, however, as to the specificity of what these effects will be. Critical effectivity "cannot be learned all at once and once and for all. Rather, this knowledge is specific in its effects and thus must be learned over and over in it effects" (7). Therefore, Goleman's pedagogy is ultimately a neo-pragmatic process. And while this pedagogy places perhaps too much hope in

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the contextual for Vitanza's taste, Goleman, like Fishman. McCarthy, and Vitanza, sees education and critique as an ongoing and indeterminate processes rather than as means to predetermined political ends.

All of these theorists share what I would call a post postmodern ethos on the role of politics in the classroom.[4] They each advance writing projects which are counter hegemonic not only in that they oppose the dominant discourse, a claim many radical pedagogues could make, but in that they are themselves counterhegemonic in their practices. Unfortunately, the question of politics and pedagogy in our field is often presented instead as a false dilemma, a "choice" between two positions that, as Richard Levin argues, seem "to eliminate the possibility of any discursive space outside the two warring poles" ("Silence"173). The first position is most eloquently and passionately put forth by Maxine Hairston in her now infamous CCC's article: "Diversity, Ideology, and Teaching Writing." In it, Hairston argues that the emphasis on politics in the classroom is dangerous and ill advised. We, as composition teachers, are neither qualified nor justified to deal with questions of politics in the classroom. She writes:

> I see a new model emerging for freshman writing programs, a model that disturbs me greatly. It's a model that puts dogma before diversity, politics before craft, ideology before critical thinking, and the social goals of the teacher before the educational needs of the student. It's a regressive model that undermines the progress we've made in teaching writing, one that threatens to silence student voices and jeopardize the process-oriented, low risk, student centered classroom we've worked so hard to establish as the norm. It's a model that doesn't take freshman English seriously in its own right but conceives of it as a tool, something to be used. The new model envisions required writing courses as vehicles for social reform rather than student-centered workshops designed to build students' confidence and competence as writers. It is a vision that

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echoes that old patronizing rationalization we've heard so many times before: students don't have anything to write about so we have to give them topics. Those topics used to be literary; now they're political. (180)

And in a "Comment and Response" section of *College English*, Hairston characterizes the articles written by radical pedagogues as "dominated by name dropping, unreadable, fashionably radical articles that I feel have little to do with the concerns of most college English teachers," and the radical theorists themselves as "low-risk Marxists who write very badly, are politically naive, and seem more concerned about converting their students from capitalism than in helping them to enjoy writing and reading" (694-95). For Hairston, we are very definitely to "leave our politics at the door." Writing, she believes, can and should be taught "for its own sake, as a primary intellectual activity that is at the heart of a college education" ("Diversity" 179).

The critique of Hairston's position is well known, and I will spend only a little time reviewing it. The critique is probably best and most charitably made by Patricia Sullivan and Donna Qualley in their book *Pedagogy in the Age of Politics*. In it, Sullivan and Qualley argue that Hairston not only "endorses an agenda," picks a political side, if you will, by "taking a stand against any curricular change that would insert the local and particular interests of culturally situated subjects . . . . but that this stance is premised on an elisive reading of composition's history" (x-xi). Composition has never had the apolitical past Hairston imagines.[5]

To reveal the politics inherent in Hairston's article, Sullivan and Qualley point out that in Hairston's argument overtly political terms such as "dogma," "politics," "ideology," and "the social goals of the

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teacher" are pitted against supposedly apolitical terms such as "diversity," "craft," "critical thinking," and "the educational needs of the students." This pairing reflects less a flaw or slyness in Hairston's argument and more a nostalgia for "a prepoliticized time in composition's history when it was possible for us to teach writing untainted by the social values and institutional conditions in which our practices and theories are forged" (x). Or as John Trimbur argues in response to Hairston's scathing critique of him and other critical pedagogues, "the intellectual context of composition studies has changed over the past five or ten years as teachers, theorists, researchers, and program administrators have found useful some of the ideas and insights contained in contemporary critical theory . . . . the 'mainstream' Maxine refers to isn't quite there anymore" ("John Trimbur" 700). If it ever was. Indeed, I think the most disappointing aspect of Hairston's argument is her refusal to argue for the politics of her pedagogy--a student-centered, low-risk, personal narrative based, craft oriented, ideologically indeterminate classroom. Instead, she makes the dubious move, at least for our generation, of presenting her pedagogy as above politics.

The second position we are often offered for explaining the role of politics in the classroom is what has come to be known as the critical democracy or oppositional pedagogy. This pedagogy is associated with such diverse theorists as Alan France, Karen Fitts, Charles Paine, Laditka, C. H. Knoblauch, Patricia Bizzell, James Berlin, Ira Shor, Susan Miller, John Trimbur, Donald Morton, and Mas'ud Zavarzadeh to name but a few. They argue that it is impossible for us to leave our politics at the door, and that trying to do so is itself a

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political move that masks the teacher's inevitable political agenda (making it more insidious and difficult for the student to openly oppose) and privileges the status quo (patriarchal, classist, racist). As Karen Fitts and Alan France put it, "we do not believe that writing can be separated from politics, that there are neutral topics that students can write about . . . . [the] insistence that students write about 'their own ideas' merely confirms the ideology of privatization" ("Advocacy" 14). Instead, these theorists, in the name of professional ethics and teaching for social reform, replace Hairston's "safe and cooperative classroom" with classrooms that favor directly challenging student subjectivities deemed sexists, classist, racist and/or homophobic (Bauer 389. Berlin 103, hooks 42, Jarratt 105-106, Morton 79, Pratt 39, Sciachitano 300, Weiler 144-145). Consequently, many oppositional theorists call not only for openly political classrooms but aggressively partisan ones.

In "Relativism, Radical Pedagogy, and the Ideology of Paralysis," Charles Paine argues that

> equality and democracy are not transcendent values that inevitably emerge when one learns to seek the truth through critical thinking. Rather, if those are the desired values, the teacher must recognize that he or she must influence (perhaps manipulate is the more accurate word) students' values through charisma or power--he or she must accept the role as manipulator. Therefore it is of course reasonable to try to inculcate into our students the conviction that the dominant order is oppressive. (563-64)

In "Beyond Anti-Foundationalism to Rhetorical Authority: Problems in Defining Cultural Literacy," Patricia Bizzell believes

> that we must be forthright in avowing the ideologies that motivate our teaching and research. For instance, James Berlin might stop trying to be value-neutral and anti-authoritarian in the classroom . . . . Instead, he might openly state that this course aims to promote values of sexual equality and left-oriented labor relations and that this course will challenge students' values insofar as they conflict

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with these aims. Berlin and his colleagues might openly exert their authority as teachers to persuade students to agree with their values instead of pretending that they are merely investigating the nature of sexism and capitalism and leaving the students to draw their own conclusions. (670)

And in "Creating Space for Difference in the Composition Class," Karen Hayes argues that by focusing on "diversity and dispute" instead of "politeness and common ground" teachers empower marginalized students to speak (300). In all these examples being critical is not an end in itself but a means to a particular and predetermined political end.

The criticism of critical pedagogy, besides that done by Hairston, has just begun. Mainly because it is relatively new, and its practioners have traditionally assumed the role of critic in the field. Before I turn to my criticism, however, I would like to strongly state that I regard the new studies in race, class, gender, ethnicity, and sexuality as having revitalized composition studies, as having brought to the forefront crucial pedagogical issues which were too often glossed over or ignored altogether. The current ruptures in theory and practice are not the result of "tenured radicals" (13) as Roger Kimball has argued but of shifts in the educational needs and social demographics of students. I agree with Gerald Graff that "As the democratization of culture has brought heretofore excluded groups into the educational citadel, with them have come the social conflicts that their exclusion once kept safely distant" (*Beyond* 8). Indeed, I think Hairston does not see that the impetus for critically based classrooms often comes as much from students as from teachers.

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I have problems with *both* Hairston's position and the oppositional or critical democracy position: Hairston's because her pedagogy seems unreflective of her own political privileging, and critical pedagogy's because it seems hegemonic and dictatorial. I haven't gone to all the trouble to oppose hegemonic discourses only to impose a new one--ideologically different to be sure but still functionally and structurally authoritarian. Indeed, when teachers try to "exert their authority" on me persuasion has ended and coercion has begun. When teachers become my Socratic adversaries instead of my Elbowian advocates, my ability to "agree with their values" has been irreparably damaged.

Nevertheless, I too want my students to do more than play with the pieces of the deconstructed universe. I too hope that my classroom is a site for progressive social change. I too hope to improve the lives of my students in material ways. And I too believe that politics can greatly enhance a writing classroom. Indeed, it has been my experience that students enjoy writing about politics given the support, respect, and constructive challenge that such investigation requires. For example, one student wrote the following in a mid-semester evaluation of a first year writing course I was teaching:

> I think my favorite part of the class so far has been the discussions
> on political issues from our reader.[6] I like how we're able to come
> at things like affirmative action and sexual harassment from
> multiple sides. For example, one of the articles we read was from
> Rush [Limbaugh] but others were totally against him. That way
> everybody's position is respected, but they still have their views
> challenged. Like me for instance. I'm a hard line conservative. I
> was always totally opposed to the idea of affirmative action, but some
> of the things we read and some of the things other people said and

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you said in class really made me think. I'm not really sure where I stand anymore.

I do not, therefore, undertake this critique of the use of the political in the classroom lightly. I do it because I believe critical democracy pedagogy may ultimately be damaging the very causes it is seeking to aid and that I hold dear.

I would like to find a discursive place somewhere between the two options that we have been presented, a rupture where students' political situatedness is respected but can be challenged; where we keep the safe, student-centered, low-risk classrooms Hairston champions but invigorate them with explorations of the political; where the irreducibility of student difference is celebrated but the pain that privileged subjectivity causes is critiqued. The purpose of this chapter, therefore, is to more fully develop a critique of critical pedagogy. For critical democracy pedagogy is anything but that--it is not critical enough of its own assumptions, it is not based on democratic practices, and it is not effective as a pedagogy for change.

A Critical View of Critical Democracy Pedagogy

First, the argument that "everything is political"--the rallying cry for most critical pedagogy--conflates the term political with all other evaluative terms. While declaring that everything is political works well in revealing supposedly objective positions for the privileged subjectivities they inherently are, it does not help us decide the next and perhaps more important question: whose politics should be privileged and why? If, as Laditka argues, "there simply is no value free pedagogy" ("Semiology" 363), then which

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values do we privilege and how does the idea that everything is political help us in making that decision? How is something political? How is politics different from religious, ethical, or moral frames? Is it? If everything is political, then does that mean all political views are equally valid? If not, on what non-political basis is this question decided? It seems that making everything political displaces the more important question and task of deciding which politics should be allowed in the writing classroom and in what ways.

Further, there is another unanswered question in using the argument that everything is political to justify an oppositional pedagogy. The goal of an "adversarial relation to the student," according to Morton and Zavarzadeh, is that such a relationship (if I can call it that) "helps reveal the student to himself by showing him how his ideas and positions are effects of larger discourses (of class, race, and gender, for example), rather than simple, natural manifestations of his consciousness or mind" ("Theory" 11-12). If we ignore the potentially condescending nature of such a statement (do Morton and Zavarzadeh reveal their own positions as effects of larger discourses?), we still have the question of why the revelation that ideas are the effects of discourse should cause a student to change his or her ideas or give up a privileged position. Perhaps the student is happy being in a privileged cultural position--irrespective of how he or she got there. What is politically intelligent about giving up advantage? Why shouldn't the student get defensive about having his or her subject position attacked when all subject positions are equally the product of discourse? In short, why should knowledge lead to a specific action?

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Thus, it seems that this kind of conflation could lead to the devaluing of intellectual engagement and the glorification of dogmatism. "Well," many students could argue, "it's just my opinion and all opinions are equal in that all are political." James Vopat feared that Ken Macrorie's work could lead to "the sensational rush over the considered response" ("*Uptaught* Rethrought" 42). I fear that critical pedagogy will lead to the uncritical privileging of political views in the name of all things being political. Bruffee's Rortian inspired definition of knowledge as "socially justified belief" ("Social Construction" 774) could become a rationalization for dogmatism and brutality.

For example, many students in my first year writing course agreed with Ward Churchill's overall argument in "Crimes against Humanity"[7] but decided not to change their opinion on using Native American tribal names to name sports teams. One student found Churchill's essay "extremely thoughtful" but maintained that "referencing a group of people as "Redskins." is simply factual "because the Native American/Indians [have] red color pigmentation in their skin as Asian people have a yellow pigmentation." Another student argued that while "Churchill makes some great points in his article . . . . It leaves me in a very neutral position . . . On one hand I can see how the Indians feel but on the other hand I don't understand why they're making such a big deal about it." Another student wrote that while using Native American names "causes many controversies . . . I feel that these franchises are not trying to . . . mock or degrade these Indian tribes. They are merely names. In fact, I feel as though the Indians should be proud of their tribes and

respect that these teams are using the names to promote their clubs." Finally, another student wrote that "Before reading the article by Ward Churchill, I thought the controversy on the names of sports teams in professional and college sports was absurd. I still feel this way because it is meant to be in good spirit not degrading to the Indians."

The changing of privileged beliefs requires more than confrontation. It requires a sustained pedagogical relationship. Adversarial pedagogies have left out the importance of persuasion, and their condescending attitude has destroyed the basis on which persuasion rests--respect. As Jay and Graff argue, "critique can succeed only by resorting to persuasion, and persuasion has no chance unless it is willing to respect the resistance of those not yet converted" ("A Critique" 208). While I was not able to persuade all of my students as to validity of Churchill's argument, the sustained respect and engagement I gave each student did have some effect. One of the above students wrote in the revision of her original response on Churchill that he showed her

> just how much these names offended and hurt people . . . . Churchill makes one wonder why it is that people are treated in such a cruel manner, and how we . . . can just back and let it happen. Although I suppose the media is part of the reason why people find this so funny. It's almost like propaganda to 'sell a product' at the expense of other people . . . . I know that I now will try to be more considerate of what I say and do.

While I'm not Pollyanna enough to believe that this student's change in attitude had nothing to do with trying to please me, I must stress that I never tried to force her to change her opinion. Like with the other students, I merely stated my opinion and suggested further reading she might do on the subject.

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Second, some critical pedagogues take the belief that one cannot "leave one's politics at the door" as license to impose their political views on students. They lack respect for opposing ideologies and cultural perspectives. For example, David Bleich argues that "Religious views collaborate with the ideology of individualism and with sexism to censor the full capacity of what people can say and write" ("Literacy" 167). Morton and Zavarzadeh argue that teachers should treat student resistance as "another example of false consciousness to be demystified" ("Theory" 208). In quotes already discussed, Paine justifies manipulation, Bizzell the exertion of power. Hayes an adversarial relationship to deal with political views resistant to hers. Is the only legitimate role for resistance? Do teachers demystify their own authority? Their own consciousness? Might student resistant instead be a form a Bakhtin's Carnival--a moment when all that is seen as high and holy, all that is seen as above the student is brought down through mockery to a level where the student can--as Bakhtin puts it--finger it? Student resistance is often not taken seriously by many critical theorists except as a problem to be overcome. Student resistance, if too strongly against the teacher's ideology, is not seen as a legitimate political act. The teacher's political stance is authentic the student's stance is not.

For while Berlin stresses that "The lessons of postmodern difference remind us . . . that the individual must never be sacrificed to any group-enforced norm . . . . [and that] the worth of the individual must never be compromised" (*Rhetorics* 101-102), and while France and Fitts say they "are committed to open democratic forum, free expression of conflicting arguments, and an empathetic

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classroom ("Advocacy" 14), and while Freire stresses that education must "start with the conviction that it cannot present its own program but must search for this program dialogically with the people" (*The Pedagogy* 118), and while Ira Shor advocates a "critical literacy" that "invites teachers and students to problematize all subjects of study" ("Educating" 24), Shor, Berlin, France, Fitts and other Freirean inspired teachers seem rather selective in the subjects that they problematize and the students who are problems. For example, all of the students and subjects that need to be problematized or which cause Berlin problems in *Rhetoric, Poetics, and Culture* reflect only one political position: conservative.

Berlin describes a group of male students who "When pressed to active dialogue . . . may deny the *obvious* social and political conflicts they enact and witness daily. For example, the majority of male students I have encountered at Purdue have in our first discussions assured me that race and gender inequalities no longer exists in the United States and do not merit further discussions . . . . Any inequalities that do remain, they insist, are only apparent injustices, since they are the result of inherent and thus unavoidable features of human nature (women are weaker and more emotional than men, for example) or are the product of individual failure . . . . It is at this moment of *denial* that the role of the teacher as problem poser is crucial, providing methods for questioning that locate the points of conflict and contradiction" (102 my emphasis). Again, if we ignore for a moment Berlin's somewhat condescending portrayal of these students' opposing arguments, his text contains a rather gaping contradiction. Berlin opposes the banking model of education in

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favor of teacher as problem poser, yet his language betrays his belief in an obviously correct pre-existing body of knowledge that he has and his students, suffering under their mystified consciousness, deny.[8]

When Berlin states that "the questions the teacher poses are designed to reveal the contradictions and conflicts inscribed in the very language of the students' thought and utterances" (102-03), he must recognize that not only are the meaning and location of these contradictions and conflicts and the way they are inscribed opened to vast ideological disagreement, but that the very idea that there are contradictions and conflicts and that the teacher is justified and qualified in naming them are themselves ideological premises to be argued. As Jay and Graff point out, "terms like 'cultural diversity' and 'empowerment' should denote a set of problems to be explored and debated, not a new truth which teachers and students must uncritically accept," and, further, that "the definition of categories such as the disenfranchised and the dominant, oppressed and the oppressor, should be a product of the pedagogical process, not its unquestioned premise" ("A Critique" 207). Even the social inequities Berlin mentions are not obvious but the recognition of a situated experience that must be explored dialogically with students-- students who are not seen as in denial but in different situated frames. If not, then Berlin's critical agency is really only the moment when students with different ideologies agree with him. Despite his protestations to the contrary, Berlin's pedagogy must ultimately take the correct knowledge from his head and place it in the heads of his students.

Somehow all political positions are the result of situated perspectives, yet the students' perspective, if different enough from the teacher's, is seen as lacking, resistant, uncritical, or naive. Students are once again conceived of as neophytes. No longer developmentally or cognitively inferior, now students have lower levels of consciousness or are pawns of the capitalists state. As Jay and Graff argue, "Students who are not persuaded by radical politics cannot, by definition, be expressing an authentic desire. It cannot be their true selves speaking but only the internalized voice of the oppressor" (203). Conversely, the teacher's perspective, which is every bit as much a product of discourse as the students', becomes inexplicably privileged in critical pedagogy--a privileging which is often rationalized in the name of honesty or inescapable authority. For example, Fitts and France are particularly sensitive to the charge that they privilege their own subject positions. They write:

> We risk presenting ourselves as privileged subjects, somehow standing outside culture. How did our understanding of sexual difference seemingly escape the dominant culture that we oppose? The short answer is--we suppose--that our own subjectivity results from the accidental confluence of social forces on our lives, which subverted to some degree the dominant gender patterns and demanded more egalitarian ones. Thus, the internal contradictions of our personal histories have situated us at the critical margin. And it is from this critical margin that we engage our students. ("Advocacy" 17)

Notice that France and Fitts do not actually explain why their position is more enlightened, only how it is that they might have come by that enlightenment. Fitts and France begin with the assumption that their subject position is inherently more equalitarian than those who disagree with them. Their position is privileged because it is superior, and their position is superior

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because it is privileged. Such circular logic, especially when it is used to justify an adversarial relationship with students, frightens me. It can lead to a dogmatism before which any denial of the legitimacy of the teacher's interpretive frame is itself evidence of that frame's legitimacy. There is no space in which the incommensurability of the student and the fallibility of the teacher can be recognized and even celebrated. Such circular logic blinds its users not only to their own situatedness but to that of their students--preventing the teacher from seriously listening to student objections.

In general, Berlin's seemingly common sense argument that "the success of the kind of classroom he wants depends on the teachers knowing their students" (*Rhetorics* 104) could be interpreted as license to define students in terms of lack, to attempt to remake them, to, in a very Foucaudian sense, force students to confess (in both a religious and legal sense) the truth of the teacher's political discourse. In the case of theorists like Berlin, the confession is not of a gross political agenda, clearly Berlin, Bizzell, Shor, and others oppose that; it is the confession of more subtle and unproblematized political premises located in the moment when student resistance is seen as denial instead of difference. When Mary Louise Pratt writes that

> All the students in the class had the experience. . .of having their cultures discussed and objectified in ways that horrified them: all the students experienced face-to-face the ignorance and incomprehension, and occasionally the hostility of others . . . . Along with the rage, incomprehension, and pain, there were exhilarating moments of wonder and revelation, mutual understanding, and new wisdom--the joys of the contact zone. ("Arts" 39)

I cannot help but hear the words of Foucault from the first volume of *History of Sexuality*--words that express the horrors of of the contact zone. He writes:

> The confession is a ritual of discourse in which the speaking subject is also the subject of the statement: it is also a ritual that unfolds within a power relationship, for one does not confess without the presence (or virtual presence) of a partner who is not simply the interlocutor but the authority who requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console, and reconcile; a ritual in which the truth is corroborated by the obstacles and resistances it has had to surmount in order to be formulated; and finally, a ritual in which the expression alone, independently of its external consequences, produces intrinsic modifications in the person who articulates it: it exonerates, redeems, and purifies him; it unburdens him of his wrongs, liberates him, and promises him salvation. (61-62)

Placing this frame over the language that many critical theorists use produces, for me at least, a very frightening echo. Through a Foucaudian terministic screen, teachers become the authoritative interlocuters demanding a confession as to the racism, sexism, and inadequacy of the students' subject positions. Students become the subjects who are exonerated, redeemed, purified, unburdened, and, perhaps most chillingly, *liberated* through confrontation and forgiveness with the teacher's truth. Foucault's words concerning "a ritual in which truth is corroborated by the obstacles and resistance it has had to surmount in order to be formulated" seems to speak directly to the critical theorists' justification of confrontation in the name of the rhetorical invention it creates.

Students are being and student being is being "'put into discourse,'" "a technology of power," a "will to know" over which they do not have the same control as the teacher. Critical pedagogy, to paraphrase Foucault's ideas on sexuality, "compels everyone to transform their" identity "into a perpetual discourse, to the manifold

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mechanisms which, in the areas of economy, pedagogy, medicine, and justice, incite, extract, distribute, and institutionalize" (33) the discourse of subjectivity.[9] Of course, Foucaudians would argue that the subject is always an effect of discourse anyway. But this insight should be taken as a warning not a celebration. The more one's being is subjected to discourse, especially discourses in which one has less power, the more trapped in the games of power one becomes. To paraphrase Foucault's ideas on sexuality once again, student subjectivity is "driven out of hiding and constrained to lead a discursive existence" (32). Students are made knowable subjects: they are subjected to discourses of truth grounded in the teacher's superior power position. And while some would rightly argue that the privatization of student identities may support--at least implicitly--the exploitation of others, who is the teacher to decide which student subjectivity is exploitative and which is not? Do we really want to grant such power to a teacher? To claim that teachers unavoidably have such power anyway is to concede that there are no ethical differences in the ways in which power is used--a proposition the critical theorists decry.

I suppose one could read Foucault's work as supporting the effectiveness of confrontation in the classroom--a place where the teacher is unalterably the "authority who requires the confession"-- but such a reading takes Foucault's work as a license to abuse power instead of as a critique of those who hide their power behind notions of truth, objectivity, and scientism. It reads Foucault not as someone who problematizes the ethical use of power but as someone who gives joyful accent to repressive strategies. Further, such a reading

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would run counter to the expressed desire of critical democracy pedagogy—to liberate students through critique.

Instead, a Foucaudian inspired teacher would focus on the *process* of political change, change as a semester long project rather than the product of an overwhelming confession. Change is not something we impose; it is something we strive to create and such creation requires openness to each unique classroom rather than adherence to a politics that can be applied to any classroom. Change is something that we test and try to learn from, something that involves the transformation not only of the students but of the teacher as well. Otherwise, the pedagogy of critical theorists becomes, if not in letter than in spirit, like the curriculum Mike Rose describes in *Lives on the Boundary* —"a curriculum that isn't designed to liberate . . . but to occupy" (28).[10]

Third, the power relationship of the teacher to the student is not theorized enough in some critical pedagogy. The "evangelical" tone that many critical theorists take sounds too close to proselytization. As Graff argues "There are those who justify turning their courses into conscious raising sessions on the grounds that all teaching is inevitably political anyway. This authoritarian behavior is indeed disturbing, and it has been making enemies out of potential friends of the reform movement" (*Beyond* 25). Yet, France's and Fritts' objective is to "awaken" their students to class consciousness. Mary Louise Pratt writes of the "exhilarating moments of *wonder* and *revelation*" ("Arts" 39 my emphasis) in her class. Dale Bauer argues that "The feminist agenda offers a goal toward our student's *conversions* to emancipatory critical action" ("The Other" 389 my

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emphasis). Would we allow such practices in the classroom if they actually were used in the service of religious conversion?

We must always remember that as teachers we have two votes in a classroom, that we are representatives of powerful institutions (sometimes governmental institutions). The classroom is not a free space, a Habermasian public square where equals come to debate claims. Students are often frightened, intimidated, or feel attacked by our authority. Indeed, Hairston warns us "That novice writers can virtually freeze in the writing classroom when they see it as an extremely high-risk situation" ("Diversity" 189). Listen to this famous passage from Bartholomae and Petrosky's *Facts, Artifacts and Counterfacts*. But as you read, consider the weight of intimidation that would be added to this project if the teacher assumed an adversarial relationship with the student:

> In the course, and in this book, we are presenting reading and writing as a struggle within and against the languages of academic life. A classroom performance represents a moment in which, by speaking or writing, a student must enter a closed community, with its secrets, codes and rituals. And this is, we argue, an historical as well as a conceptual drama. The student has to appropriate or be appropriated by a specialized discourse, and he has to do this as though he were easily and comfortably one with his audience, as though he were a member of the academy. And, of course, he is not. He has to invent himself as a reader and he has to invent an act of reading by assembling a language to make a reader and a reading possible, finding some compromise between idiosyncrasy, a personal history, and the requirements of convention, the history of an institution. (8)

The struggle Bartholomae and Petrosky urge students to undertake (and which I support) is already intimidating. Adding an adversarial relationship to the performance would, as Hairston claims, freeze the students' ability to write. I am not arguing that the teacher can or should relinquish his or her authority, or that the teacher should be

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afraid of his or her authority. I am arguing that the teacher should use that authority to become the student's advocate instead of his or her adversary.

Of course, advocacy itself can be dangerous, especially when those who one is advocating for are from different racial, ethnic, gender, and class backgrounds. If not constantly open to revision and listening, advocacy can become appropriation. We can come to believe that we are the students, that we can know them, that we can unproblematically represent them through a common humanity or a supposedly shared culture. As John Ernest argues concerning the attempt of teachers to "recognize the authority of the various cultures represented by our students," such attempts "too often . . . conceptualize, essentialize, and thereby appropriate the cultural background of their students while sustaining, however unintentionally, the mystical authority of academic modes of understanding" ("100 Friends" 13). Instead, we must advocate by beginning with ourselves. We must examine who we are as teachers, what we want, and how these often conflicting identities and desires threaten, harm, or help our students negotiate their own conflicting desires and multiple identities within the academy. In short, advocacy is a process that begins with self critique rather than student evaluation. The evaluation must inevitably come but only after the self examination and only if that evaluation is opened ended rather than closed.

I know first hand the pain advocacy can cause for both the student and the teacher. I once taught a sophomore level introduction to critical analysis course in which I had a bright,

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intelligent. and talented writer. Indeed, Erin came into my class with tremendous ability, and it was because of this that I decided to push her. Firmly grounded in a Bartholomae mode at the time, I decided that what she needed as a writer was to challenge herself, to push her abilities beyond where she thought they could go. Consequently. I held back on her grades, asked for multiple rewrites, pushed her to push herself. And it worked. By the final paper, Erin made a tremendous jump in her writing ability--but there was a cost. Among my evaluations for the semester was the following:

1.   What have you learned by taking this course?

"That my writing sucks. I learned how to rack my brain to support everything, every point that I made in an essay. I learned a lot more about literature obviously. I think that this class has made me a better writer, but it was an ego blow. I've never had less than an 'A' on an English paper until this class. Welcome to college. right."

2.   Which features of this course, or of this particular section of the course, do you think are effective? What changes might be made to improve it?

"The reading assignments were good. conversation--discussion was beneficial & enjoyable. Conferences helped a lot."

3.   What are the particular strengths and weaknesses of this instructor's teaching? Please elaborate.

"Lance gave way too many pointers and when I got done w/a conference, my brain hurt. That's a good thing. Lance was a good Prof., but he'd never ever ever ever give me an A. I thought I deserved A's, and it frustrated me to no end when I was unsuccessful. I thought he graded too hard & should have measured more on improvement and effort."

I knew it was Erin's evaluation from the hand writing, the attitude. and the major. I think the first line. "That my writing sucks," and the line that I would "never ever ever ever give me an A" struck the

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deepest cord. Both were false. Erin was a very good writer, and she got an A on her final paper (although she did not know that when she wrote the evaluation). Her writing was filled with voice, insight, and academic rigor, but she was cruising in the course. So I pushed her, and it worked. Her writing improved. She learned how to "support everything, every point that I made in an essay," and that she could be "a better writer" than she was. Overall, I think it is positive evaluation.

But somehow I missed her need to hear me say that she was a good writer. My agenda on the needs of my student blinded me to the other needs of my student, and her confidence as a writer suffered. In my advocacy of Erin I had appropriated who she was and what she needed. I hadn't examined myself closely enough. Why was I so adamant on Bartholomae's approach? Was I convinced that the personal writing of first year English wasn't good enough for critical analysis? I'm not sure, but I shudder to think what would have happened if I had pushed an adversarial relationship with Erin? Would I have shut her down completely, turned her off to writing forever? Is it right for a male instructor to *push* a female student? Her writing got better but at the price of her identity.

Luckily, my relationship with Erin was still a good one. I called her and asked to meet. We talked about her work and the evaluation. She assured me everything was fine, that she enjoyed the class, that I was a good teacher. But, I wasn't actually all that concerned with how she saw me. I was concerned with what my view of her had done to her confidence as a writer. Sure enough, after a few minutes, she said something that I will never forget: "I

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just wanted to feel like you were on my side once in awhile Lance." I thought it was obvious that I was, but in my appropriation of what that support should be I missed part of what it should have been. How much more do critical theorists miss in their adversarial pedagogies? They see their students as racist, sexist, classist, and homophobic. While I'm sure this view is partially true, does it also allow them to see their students as human beings, as intimidated by writing, as needing encouragement as well as critique? As John Clifford argues, "students want to become writers . . . . because they are convinced they have something to say, and more importantly, somebody to say it to. They want an audience they can trust, one that encourages them" ("The Subject" 46). In their rush to make the classroom a place where the inequities of the world can be transformed, do critical theorists participate in the very brutality they abhor?

Fourth, I am sympathetic to or at least influenced by Baudrillard's argument that there is no space outside of the flow of culture from which to critique it. As Lester Faigley argues, "Baudrillard rejects the idea that we can somehow get outside the flow of codes, simulations, and images to discover any space for social critique" (213). While this interpretation of Baudrillard is a little simplistic, after all Baudrillard is ultimately rejecting the distinction between inside and outside, Baudrillard's theory does call into question the central claim of critical democracy pedagogy, that students can liberate themselves though a critique of how mass culture is produced, circulated, and consumed. If Baudrillard is right, then Henry Giroux's "language of possibility" (*Postmodernism* 52)

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becomes an impossibility, and Fitts' and France's attempt to "facilitate political demystification and social change" (*Left Margin* xi) becomes an exercise in a "will to truth." And while Zavarzadeh has argued that there is an "unsurpassable objectivity which is not open to rhetorical interpretation and constitutes the decided foundation of critique" and that "is the outside" that Marx called the "working day," I, as a rhetorician, question that any position is not open to rhetorical interpretation ("The Stupidity" 98). Moreover, Zavarzadeh ignores or chooses to deny the constitutive role of language in creating our conscious awareness and understanding of that working day.

As I wrote in the first chapter, Berlin, Morton, and other critical theorists haven't rejected the hegemonic terror of reason but merely shifted its locus of control, its foundational justification outward to the "social situation, context, paradigms, communities, or local nomoi as loci of deliberation or judgement"[11] (Vitanza, "Three" 143). The "social-epistemic rhetoric" of Berlin and the "hidden curriculum" of Giroux are still based too deeply on the "game of knowledge"--no longer a game of individualist consumerism but now of socialist rationalism. Vitanza sees this shift in the location of reason as potentially "both dangerously utopian and blindly ideological" (143), and so do I.

Further, Baudrillard's work makes me suspicious of the claim that "The teacher can best facilitate the production of knowledge by adapting a confrontational stance toward the student" (Strickland 293). Strickland believes, like most critical theorists, that the teacher's confrontational stance forces the student to invent

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rhetorical strategies to deal with that confrontation. If Baudrillard is right, then the student's supposed resistance and eventual acceptance of the teacher's political view may be more an example of the student playing the capitalist game than of a true conversion.

Even if I grant that confrontation can create social critique, I'm still not sure it creates the intelligence to act on that critique. We might listen more closely to Dewey when he warns that "unless the activity lays hold on the emotions and desires, unless it offers an outlet for energy that means something to the individual himself, his mind will turn in aversion from it, even though externally he keeps at it" (*How We Think* 218). Dewey believes that the role of the teacher in taping into this energy should be as a "guide and director: he [the teacher] steers the boat, but the energy that propels it must come from those who are learning" (36), and I agree.

Fifth, I agree with Gregory Jay and Gerald Graff that much of critical pedagogy is based on an unexamined contradiction. In Jay and Graff's reading of Paulo Freire's influential *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* , they worry "that efforts by teachers to empower students often end up reinforcing the inequalities of the classroom," and that teachers "who directly promote progressive political doctrine . . . merely invert the traditional practice of handing knowledge down to passive students" ("A Critique" 202). For example, while "Freire does attack the Leninist model of education in which revolutionary leaders impose their teleological blueprint on students, merely inverting rather than breaking with the 'banking' model of education,"[12] (202) Jay and Graff point out that "the goal of teaching for Freire is still to move the student toward 'a critical

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perception of the world' and that this perception implies a correct method of approaching reality" (203). Such an implication throws into doubt Freire's claim that liberation education "starts with the conviction that it cannot present its own program but must search for this program dialogically with the people" (118). While Freire argues that he is merely giving the will of the people back to them in amplified form, he "clearly presumes he knows in advance what the 'authentic will of the people' is or should be" (203). Hence, how dialogic can Freire's program be?

More troubling, what does Freire do with those who go through the Freirean dialogue and reject his view of reality? As Jay and Graff ask,

> Suppose a student ends up deciding that he or she is *not* oppressed or not oppressed in the way or for the reasons Freire supposes? What if, after a Freirean dialogue, the student embraces capitalism or decides that, for him or her, authentic liberation means joining a corporation and making a lot of money? Freire can only account for such decisions as the result of the student having been brainwashed by the dominant culture. (203)

It is, in short, "a pedagogical premise" that begins by "condescending to students" (203). Thus, critical democracy pedagogy does not break with the banking model of education; it simply supplies a new ideology to be "deposited." The roles which the student and teacher must play and the proper outcome of that interaction are predetermined.

Finally, I'm convinced that critical pedagogy may do more harm than good to the political and social causes that they are attempting to support. Besides risking alienating students or forcing them to play a game, critical pedagogy institutionalizes a form of practice that could turn on them. Theorists like Freire, France, Berlin,

and Miller seem to assume that only critical pedagogy people will adopt their method of instruction, or that even to use the method requires a similar ideology. For example, when Knoblauch argues that we "denounce the world . . . and above all oppression and whatever arguments have been called upon to validate it" (181), I guess he assumes that what institutions, practices, laws, and systems are oppressive, in what ways, and how they are to be denounced are obvious. But what if a teacher decided to denounce affirmative action, gay rights, or feminism?

Read again the passages I quoted from Paine, Bizzell, Morton and others but imagine that the person who would use these methods is a racists or a homophobe hoping to advance his or her political agenda. Do we really want to institutionalize a confrontational pedagogy considering the many people on the far right who might disagree with its radical message but agree with its methods? Critical pedagogues would do well to remember that they are a minority community--probably within the academy and certainly within the larger society. They must be careful what practices they institute for fear that those practices could be wrested from their ideological control. If the critical theorists are not careful, they will create a precedent, a power structure, that will not be dependent on their particular ideology to function. Foucault has pointed out that changing the world is more complicated than merely changing the ideologies which operate its machinery. As James Miller, paraphrasing Foucault, argues, "To seize and exercise a dictatorial kind of power might simply reproduce old patterns of subjectification under a new name" (*The Passion* 234). Revolutions

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that change only the ideology of a power structure and not the structure itself change only who gets killed (which can often be important but loses the moral high ground).

Thus, it seems to me that much of critical pedagogy lacks the indeterminacy, the celebration of paradox, and the ability to live with incommensurability that I value so much in postmodern theory. Instead, the critical theorists seem to have aligned themselves with what de Man has criticized as the philosophical attempt to suppress the creative aspect of language through the "grammatization of rhetoric" (*Allegories*, 15)--only now it isn't a grammar which limits creativity but a methodology of restraint employed in the name of establishing an equal ground for freedom. I'm not suggesting that politics can and should be left at the classroom door. I am suggesting that there is a difference between recognizing the situatedness and political dimension of all pedagogy, finding that troublesome and challenging, and using that as an excuse to privilege the teacher's ideology.

Whether postmodernism can ultimately provide both a love for indeterminacy and a progressive pedagogy is questionable. Indeed, a progressive postmodern pedagogy is an oxymoron--but, then again, postmodernism does not shy away from oxymorons. Further, if we argue for the post postmodernism of Friedman, then the possibility of joining postmodernism to projects for social transformation increases. Yet there are serious questions as to whether such a postmodern project is possible. Do we need a self for a politics of difference? Can we live with the paradox of universalizing difference? Does postmodern politics deny us the possibility of self

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and community--elements that are crucial to any viable political theory? I don't know. But I agree with Phelps and Friedman that these questions must be answered within the sociocultural matrix that composition finds itself embedded, and that there is a discursive authenticity in the attempt. The question for our field in the post postmodern age is not whether our classrooms are political but in what way. It is, in the end, a question of ethics--an ethics of the political.

CHAPTER THREE NOTES

1. See Kennedy's *The Art of Persuasion* page 67 and Kinneavy's "Translating Theory into Practice in Teaching Composition: A Historical View and a Contemporary View" pages 71-72 in Connors, Ede, and Lunsford's *Essays on Classical Rhetoric and Modern Discourse* for a more detailed discussion of Kairos.

2. See Emig, Newkirk, Jones for a further exploration of Dewey's tacit tradition as an alternative to radical pedagogy.

3. See Dewey's *How We Think: A Restatement of the Relation of Reflective Thinking to the Educative Process* pages 270-271.

4. For other theorists who also try, to varying degrees, to construct a postmodern politics for the classroom see: Faigley, LaDuc, Jay and Graff, and Harkin.

5. See Susan Miller's *Textual Carnivals: The Politics of Composition* for the best overview of this political past.

6. See *Left Right and Center: Voices from Across the Political Spectrum*. Eds. Robert Atwan and Jon Roberts. New York: Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press.

7. See *Left Right and Center: Voices from Across the Political Spectrum* pages 425-34. In the essay Churchill tries to point out the injustice, cruelty, and disrespect of using Native American tribal names to name U. S. sports teams-- especially since the U. S. commited a holocaust against Native Americans.

8. Berlin specifically opposes the banking model of education, "the model of teacher as giver of knowledge and student as passive receiver"(*Rhetorics* 102). Indeed, he blames that model for making students unwilling to participate in discussions on the differences among students organized around issues of class, race, age, and gender.

9. I am changing the subject of Foucault's writing from sexuality to identity in this passage. However, I believe Foucault's writings on sexuality could also apply to subjectivity or identity. The actual passage reads as follows: Sex was driven out of hiding and constrained to lead a discursive existence. From the
singular imperialism that compels everyone to transform their sexuality into a perpetual discourse, to the manifold mechanisms which, in the areas of economy, pedagogy, medicine, and justice, incite, extract, distribute, and institutionalize the sexual discourse, an immense verbosity is what our civilization has required and organized" (*The History* 33).

10. Of course, Rose was writing of a curriculum that did not challenge--but the effect is the same.

11. Vitanza does see this shift--while inadequate--as an improvement over the Cartesian justification of reason. However, he still labels Berlin's reason as a will to power. Social-epestemic rhetoric, Vitanza believes, is too tied to the

games of rationality and knowledge and the "dominant (political) modes of representation" ("Three" 143).

12. Though Freire is usually the theorist most quoted for this type of idea, Dewey has expressed similar ideas. See "The Child and the Curriculum" page 209, *Democracy and Education* pages 4-30, and "The Need for a Philosophy of Education" page 10.

CHAPTER IV

A POSTMODERN ETHICS FOR THE POLITICAL CLASSROOM

> I would more or less agree with the idea that in fact what interests
> me is much more morals than politics or, in any case, politics as an
> ethics. --Michel Foucault "Politics and Ethics: An Interview"

In "Teaching the Political Conflicts: A Rhetorical Schema,"
Donald Lazere argues that "little basis has been established within
the discipline of composition delineating either a theoretical
framework or ethical guidelines for dealing with political
controversies in writing courses" (194). Consequently, his essay
offers a rhetorical frame as a "model for incorporating critical
thinking about politics in writing courses" (194). As I do, Lazere
favors courses that "broaden the ideological scope of students' critical
thinking, reading, and writing capacities," yet he fears "that such
courses can all too easily be turned into an indoctrination to the
instructor's particular ideology" (195). The goal of Lazere's rhetorical
frame, therefore, is to "empower" students "to make their own
autonomous judgements on opposing ideological positions in general
and on specific issues" (195).

While endorsing Lazere's project,[1] I find that his rhetorical
frame leaves the more important job of constructing "ethical
guidelines for dealing with political controversies in the writing
classroom" undone.[2] Lazere's frame provides a technical basis for
how to include politics in a writing classroom but not the basis on
which to decide *what* politics and behaviors *should* be allowed in the

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writing classroom. For example, when Lazere writes that, "Part of my theoretical intention here is to indicate ways in which partisan political positions . . . can be introduced within a rhetorical schema that is acceptable to teachers and students of any reasoned political persuasion," (195) he leaves out or leaves implicit just what constitutes a *reasoned political persuasion.* What criteria distinguish a reasonable political persuasion from an unreasonable one? What behaviors in the name of those persuasions do we allow in the classroom? Does the partisan politics of Klan ideology get equal space with Queer Theory? Where and on what basis do we draw the line?

The answer to such questions requires something more than a rhetorical schema. It requires an ethical one. After all, something can be rhetorically effective yet morally objectionable. Hitler's propaganda ministry was very effective, but few of us would consider it moral. To use politics in the classroom requires an ethics of the political, a system of moral principles or values that governs the conduct of the members of our profession in the arena of politics. I do not claim that this ethics somehow escapes ideology. Nor do I present it as the utopian opposition to ideology.[3] Instead, I accept "Althusser's notion of ideology as an interpretation that constitutes reality" (Bizzell, "Marxist" 55), but I maintain that to constitute reality is not to determine it. There is an indeterminacy, a looseness, in the word "constitutes" that should be filled by an ethics of experimentation, practice, an awareness of effect, and dialectic to prevent the calcification of ideologies. There is often a gap between how our ideologies say the world works and our experiences of how it does. As Patricia Bizzell argues, "if we were utterly convinced of

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the inevitability of ideology, we would not feel uneasy about seeing the world through ideological interpretations . . . any more than we feel embarrassed about needing to eat or drink" ("Marxist" 55). And while Bizzell overstates her argument (we often do feel embarrassed about the need to eat), many of us still desire a truth, beauty, or morality that is above ideology. We do feel the need to test our ideologies in practice, and "reality" is constantly surprising us. There is an experience of the world that exceeds the ability of our ideologies to contain it.

Thus, ethics is the reminder of our experience of our ideologies' limitation. It is the reminder of what is left over from what was prior to ideology--the echo of our first need to respond to the world rather than to understand it. Jeffery T. Nealon, using the theory of Emmanuel Levinas, explains ethics as "the primacy of an experience of sociality or otherness that comes before any philosophical understanding or reification of our respective subject positions" ("The Ethics" 131-32). I would argue that this experience of overflow, this urge to test ideologies, this need to respond to other *is* itself the possibility of the ethical. It allows our ideologies to resist calcification, to remain open and changeable. Ethics, therefore, is not above ideology so much as envelopes it, precedes it, informs it, or puts it to the test. In short, I am arguing for an ethics of the pragmatic, the experimental, the answerable. I do privilege this ethics of practice over an ideology of interpretation but through argument and not because it has superior access to reality. Without this ethics we have no way of controlling what politics and behaviors are allowed in the classroom save raw applications of power.

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The following is my attempt to construct a postmodern ethics for the introduction, operation, exclusion, and critique of politics in the writing classroom.[4] It is different from the political in terms of its scope. The political is the encrusted beliefs one has on specific issues. The ethical is the larger methodology of value constraints in which many specific and even contradictory politics can exist. The political represents the cultural structures we support and that support us. It provides the foundation for self interested action, action that is often different from what we say, on cultural issues. It is through the political that we protect the self, but it is through the ethical that we make the self vulnerable. In constructing this ethics I will first examine and synthesize potentially useful ideas from four influential theorists of postmodernity: Michel Foucault, Gerald Graff, Patricia Harkin, and Mikhail Bakhtin. I will then put this ethics to the test against examples of "offensive" student writing, writing that challenges deeply held beliefs.

I place the word offensive in quotation marks because it must perform multiple functions in this chapter--not simply because I desire it to but because in the postmodern era all such evaluative terms are political and situated. From a postmodern perspective what is offensive is every bit as ideological as what is true, beautiful, and good. Offensive is used in different ways by different people for different reasons. To the right offensive becomes synonymous with over sensitivity, with political correctness gone wild. To the left offensive denotes an attack with words, an assault upon those in weaker positions of power. To the center offensive can mean anything from bad judgement to bad taste to low morals. Offensive

is a word wrapped in situatedness and intent--both of which are often only partly conscious. How are the words and intentions framed and by whom? What is the intent of the person using the offensive words--harm, mockery, destruction, resistance? How is that intention perceived by those the words target--a bad joke, an assault, a reflection of lower consciousness? A lesbian will perceive an attack on gay rights differently than a straight male and a straight male will aim an offensive remark differently depending on his target. Thus, offensive is always relational. As Laura Kipnis argues concerning the counter-hegemonic and class based degradation of women's bodies in *Hustler*,

> The sense of both pleasure and danger that violation of pollution taboos can invoke is clearly dependent on the existence of symbolic codes, codes that are for the most part only semi-conscious. Defilement can't be an isolated event, it can only engage our interest or provoke our anxiety to the extent that our ideas about such things are systematically ordered, and that this ordering matters deeply--in our culture, in our subjectivity. As Freud (1963) notes, 'Only jokes that have a purpose run the risk of meeting with people who do not want to listen to them.' ("(Male)" 379)

In essence, offensive words have an addressivity built into them. They represent a Bakhtinian dialogism in which the offensive words mean, are understood, "as a part of a greater whole--there is a constant interaction between meanings, all of which have the potential of conditioning others" (Holquist, "Glossary" 426). Being offensive and being perceived as offensive are determinations based on one's situatedness within structures of class, gender, and race. Offensive writing is enacted as, within, and against structures of morals and tastes that constitute the meaning and intention of that writing, where one stands on that meaning and intention, and that reveal one's own place within the structures of society.

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My schema, therefore, is not the only possible ethics or an ethics for all time. It too reflects my own situatedness in relation to offensive terms. Rather, it is designed to begin a discussion among those of us who are uncomfortable with oppositional pedagogy but still see a place for the political in the writing classroom, a place which requires ethical conduct. Of course, as Lazere argues, "any effort to construct such a schema is itself bound to be captive, in some measure, to the partisan biases it sets out to analyze" (196). My ethical guidelines will be no different. However, like Lazere I believe that "the only possible way to transcend these biases is refinement through dialectical exchanges with those of differing ideologies" (196).

Four Alternatives to Oppositional Pedagogy: First, Michel Foucault and the Freedom of the Ethical

The idea of positively associating Michel Foucault with questions of ethics might, at first, seem rather strange. After all, Foucault is more often associated with the central figures credited with creating a body of work--postmodernism--before which "no principled position can stand"[5] (Faigley xii). The strangeness of the idea, however, results from focusing too heavily on Foucault's early work, where he is described by Paul Rabinow as "a philosopher or historian of power" (Foucault, "Politics" 375). In these works, where Foucault uses empirical evidence to reveal the oppressive consequences of humanism's attempt to reform hospitals, asylums, and the penal system, the argument that Foucault is in favor of ethics does seem rather naive. It is in Foucault's later works, when he becomes what Rabinow calls a philosopher or historian "of the self or

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subject," that the argument for ethics becomes not only credible but central (375). Indeed, in "The Subject and Power" Foucault states that "the goal of" his "work during the last twenty years has not been to analyze the phenomena of power, nor to elaborate the foundations of such analysis." Instead, jis "objective . . . has been to create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects" (208). It is in this attempt to create a history of the modes of subjectification that Foucault becomes concerned with questions of the ethical.6 Consequently, there are three crucial idea on ethics that we can take from Foucault's later works: that "Freedom is the ontological condition of ethics" ("The Ethics" 284), that "ethics is a practice" ("Politics" 377), and that individuals who live under systems of constraint must "at least have the possibility of altering them" ("Sexual Choice" 148).

In "The Ethics of the Concern for the Self as a Practice of Freedom," Foucault argues that "Freedom is the ontological condition of ethics. But ethics is the considered form that freedom takes when it is informed by reflection" (284). In other words, ethics comes into being as freedom, or freedom is "a reality that is already ethical in itself" (284). However, to maintain freedom requires understanding what is necessary for its continued existence, and that is ethical or responsible behavior. Freedom does not mean that we can choose whatever we want nor does freedom exist in the absence of constraints. On the contrary, ethical freedom exists, precisely, as a system of constraints that enables choice.[7] The ethical results from how a system of constraints is structured and operates.

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How, therefore, should a system of constraints be structured? Defining ethics as a tangible domain of choices amongst constraints necessitates that we structure "ethics as a practice" rather than as a theory. To be ethical we must act. "The 'best' theories," Foucault believes, "do not constitute a very effective protection against disastrous political choices; certain great themes such as 'humanism' can be used to any end whatever" ("Political" 374). Consequently, we must structure ethics instead as a conscious form of practice or experimentation. "[W]hat is ethics," Foucault asks, "if not the . . . conscious . . . practice of freedom?" ("The Ethics" 284). For Foucault ethics is the freedom to test ideas, to see how they play out, to modify them as the situation changes, to open one's self and one's theory to critique. Hence, the theory that everything is political does not justify one's behavior. Instead, it is the exact opposite: theory is made ethical by practice, by "a demanding, prudent, 'experimental' attitude. . .[in which] at every moment, step by step, one must confront what one is thinking and saying with what one is doing, with what one is" ("Politics" 374). The *application* of ideas, for example the material-feminist ideology of many oppositional pedagogies, implies a finishedness, a correctness, a rightness to the idea. Foucault, on the other hand, insists "on all this 'practice,' . . . not . . . in order to 'apply' ideas, but in order to put them to the test and modify them" (374). Ethics is not, in other words, a encrusted attitude one holds, an abstraction that removes one from the world, or even a political outlook one applies. Ethics is the ability to open oneself to possibility.

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The questions Foucault is "trying to ask are not determined by a preestablished political outlook and do not tend toward the realization of some definite political project" (375). Instead, Foucault is trying "to *open up* problems that are as *concrete* and *general* as possible, problems that approach politics from behind (376). The political is too limited as a frame for understanding systems of domination and for constructing practices of freedom. The political cannot explain the existence of its subject without reference to it, and so it cannot adequately provide the genealogical history necessary to trace the constitution of knowledges. Without this genealogy it is impossible to locate the gaps in knowledges in which different ways of being are possible.

Finally and logically, therefore, Foucault believes that a system of restraints is ethical when those who are ruled by it have some means of modifying it. He writes:

> the important question . . . is not whether a culture without restraints is possible or even desirable but whether the system of constraints in which a society functions leaves individuals the liberty to transform the system. Obviously, constraints of any kind are going to be intolerable to certain segments of society. The necrophiliac finds it intolerable that graves are not accessible to him. But a system of constraint becomes truly intolerable when the individuals who are affected by it don't have the means of modifying it. This can happen when such a system becomes intangible as a result of its being considered a moral or religious imperative, or a necessary consequence of medical science . . . . restrictions have to be within the reach of those affected by them so that they at least have the possibility of altering them. ("Sexual Choice, Sexual Act" 147-48)

Thus, those who argue that it is unethical for the teacher to keep his or her politics secret in the classroom because that makes it harder for students to confront those politics would be correct from a Foucaudian point of view. For a system of constraints to be ethical,

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the student must at least have the possibility of modifying the self that that system produces and the system itself. And to modify these the student must first be able to see the system's structures. But they are wrong in making those politics oppositional. In that move they are *applying* a theory, assuming its correctness, rather than testing it to study its effects. Consequently, instead of their classrooms leading to possibilities of greater freedom, they risk becoming places of further political domination. Oppositional pedagogy does not offer a means for the student to change the classroom's systems of constraint--only the skill to survive them.

Of course, one objection that composition theorists could raise to Foucault's ethics is whether it is ever truly possible for students to modify a classroom's systems of constraint. The classroom, they might argue, can never be a democracy and, therefore, attempts to portray it as such merely mystify both authority and power inequities (See Jarratt's "Feminism and Composition" 106-13). However, there is a difference between a classroom having to be a democracy and a classroom where choice is possible--just as there is a difference between being suspicious of the possibility of consensuality and supporting nonconsensuality. For while Foucault *is* suspicious of systems of constraint based on consensus, seeing the consensus as a mask for political domination and repression, he nevertheless maintains that the idea of consensus is pragmatically useful as "a critical idea to maintain at all times" ("Politics" 379). As Foucault argues, "perhaps one must not be for consensuality, but one must be against nonconsensuality" ("Politics" 379).

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So, what can we take from Foucault for the construction of our ethics? We can take the crucial ideas of ethics as a state of freedom, as an opened ended practice designed to test theories rather than apply predetermined political outlooks, as fluid, tangible, and responsive to the situation, as dependent on empiricism and experimentation, as non-coercion, and, most importantly, as a system of constraints in which those who are ruled by it have a means of altering it. In short, Foucault's ethics forces us to situate our theory in practice, in who we are, and in what we are doing. Teachers who try to pressure their students into accepting a predetermined political outlook do not provide the means to alter structures of domination but merely enact new ones, constructing the classroom not as a place to experiment but to regurgitate. Foucault teaches us that to ethically use politics in the classroom depends not on being honestly confrontational but honestly vulnerable, making ourselves, our theories, and our authority open to critique.

Gerald Graff's Ethics of Teaching the Conflicts

In many ways Gerald Graff's desire "to teach the conflicts themselves . . . as a new kind of organizing principle to give the curriculum the clarity and focus that almost all sides now agree it lacks" (*Beyond* 12) seems the perfect model for furthering an ethics of the political. Graff clearly criticizes "those who justify turning their courses into consciousness raising sessions on the grounds that all teaching is inevitably political anyway," yet he maintains that there is a "crucial distinction between *expressing* a political view in class and *imposing* it forcibly on students and colleagues" (25, 149).[8]

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Further, Graff's solution to make the "disagreements themselves . . . the point of connection" (119) seems especially friendly to composition teachers in that it stresses the importance of students having access to the process as well as the product of their professors' intellectual debates. Graff writes:

> students typically experience a great clash of values, philosophies, and pedagogical methods among their various professors, but they are denied a view of the interactions and interrelations that give each subject meaning. They are exposed to the results of their professors' conflicts but not to the process of discussion and debate they need to see in order to become something more than passive spectators to their education. (12)

Graff's stressing of process and active learning not only echoes much of composition pedagogy, it shifts the brunt of the conflict off the students and onto the professors--people better able to defend themselves. This shift, while not removing a productive tension, may do a great deal to lessen the fears of theorists like Maxine Hairston who believe that students can freeze when the stakes of performance are too high (189).

Graff's are indeed important to the furthering of an ethics of the political for the writing classroom, but there is another aspect of Graff's theory that is equally important for ethics though not as often stressed. It is the crucial role that respect plays in making it possible to teach the conflicts, for there to be "a positive role for cultural conflict," for difference rather than consensus to be the "basis for coherence" (10, 58). Graff argues early on in *Beyond the Culture Wars* that "The first step in dealing productively with today's conflicts is to recognize their legitimacy" (5). In other words, the conflicts being debated are real. There are legitimate, intelligent, and moral people on different sides of the issues. When a teacher does

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not respect the conflict as authentic, he or she presents only one side of the debate or, at best, a caricature of it. But Graff's organizing principle necessitates that no one teacher's (or student's) politics be presented as the only "correct," "enlightened," or "true" position on a subject. Each position represents only one of many possibly legitimate positions, the ethical principle involved being that a legitimate position is willing to "create a common ground of discussion" and not that it must form or submit to an overarching consensus (194). We must "respect" others' "objections as arguments needing to be addressed rather than as mere mystifications" (169). The necessity for this respect only increases when one's goal is not simply to include politics in the classroom but to endorse a politics. As Jay and Graff argue, "persuasion has no chance unless it is willing to respect the resistance of those not yet converted" ("A Critique" 208).

If an argument (or arguer) is not willing to grant this respect, if it is authoritarian, dismissive, hostile, or monologic, then, within Graff's frame, it loses the "right" to participate in the debate. Using the political in the classroom requires the humbleness, the courage, and the perspective to "risk entering a debate that . . . [one] would not necessarily be guaranteed to win" (Graff 169). Thus, rather than dismissing our colleagues or students as naive, ill informed, or bigoted, we should try to respect the legitimacy of their political situatedness--even ones with which we strongly disagree. Conversely, we should expect like treatment in return. This reciprocal respect does not mean that all positions are equal, or that we must give up our passionately held beliefs; it merely means that

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our colleagues' and students' subject positions should not be reduced to examples of false consciousness. Instead, they should be treated as examples of a different consciousness, a different situatedness, that we sometimes agree with, sometimes object to, but always try, to the best of our ability, to respect—at least in terms of their ultimate incommensurability. If we give this respect to our colleagues and students, then, according to Graff, we have the right to demand it in return.

Teaching the conflicts, constraints based on common ground and not consensus, access to the process of debate and not merely the product, acknowledging the legitimacy of difference, building a coherence out of reciprocal respect for that difference, respect as the beginning of persuasion, and an awareness of the limitations of our own situatedness are all crucial ideas that we can take from Graff's work to further an ethics of the political. However, there is also a limitation to Graff's solution. Besides its utopian nature, Graff's solution misses the visceral way in which many of us hold our political beliefs. Lynn Worsham argues in "Emotion and Pedagogic Violence," that "the discourse of emotion is our primary education" (122), yet the idea of "teaching the conflicts" assumes a level of emotional distance or privileges a measure of intellectual disinterestedness that many effective teachers do not have, would not endorse, and, most importantly, do not feel.

A refusal to participate in Graff's conflict centered classroom is not necessarily an example of dogmatism or entrenchment. Instead, it could be a form of self defense, a refusal to be seriously involved in a classroom where painfully, perhaps threateningly, different

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ideological arguments are given equal space (in terms of time, resources, assessments, and lesson plans) with ones that a person holds dear. And while Graff is not asking us to deny our feelings, our passions, or our beliefs to participate in the debate, he is asking us to admit that the other side is at least worthy of debate. Thus, Graff's solution reveals a situatedness that allows him to intellectualize or make hypothetical the horror of patriarchy, the pain of discrimination, the limitations of class.[9]

This gap in Graff's solution is somewhat ironic given that he critiques John Searle's argument to, when possible, "leave our politics at the classroom door" as ignoring "the fact that 'political commitments' are often expressed in the very choice of what to include or not include in a course" (147). As Graff reminds a conservative sociologist with whom he had been corresponding, "the mere act of teaching Marxism at all" conveys the "'view' that Marxism is a respectable body of thought or at least merits study" (146). In a similar vein, Graff's solution to the culture war asks passionately committed feminists, Marxists, and multiculturalists to convey the view that extreme conservative ideology on race, class, and gender is a "respectable body of thought or at at least merits study". and vice versa. Graff proudly states "that what gives the integration experiments" he has outlined "a hope of succeeding where their predecessors failed is that they do not set themselves against the dynamics of modern academic professionalism and American democracy but take these dynamics for granted as opportunities to be seized" (195). This "failure" to set himself against

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those structures of power is exactly the problem some theorists would have with Graff's solution.

However, let me make it clear that I am not one of these people. I find Graff's solution brilliantly pragmatic and ultimately ethical in its willingness to test ideologies in debate. But I am trying to show how the visceral way in which political beliefs are often held makes this ethics difficult to achieve. The playing field in which this debate will occur is not a level one. Different people will bring different histories, often painful histories, to that debate. True, we can and should make the inequality of the playing field and the pain of history part of the debate itself, but in order for Graff's solution to work it requires more than the opportunity and ability to argue. It requires an ethics of care for those, especially from marginalized positions, with whom we argue. It is not the same thing to ask a conservative, white male to share the ideological space of a classroom with a feminist, African-American female as it is to ask the feminist, African-American female to share the ideological space of a classroom with a conservative, white male. The feminist has much more to lose both professionally and psychologically. The ethics of our classrooms, therefore, must acknowledge this preexisting condition. Perhaps it could, at times, allow special considerations in terms of time, resources, and right of refusal to those from marginalized groups. This is, of course, an open question, and I do not intend this chapter to answer that question. However, I do intend the chapter to at least raise it. In any case, teaching the conflict is a reasonable solution, but we must work an ethics of care into that reasonableness.

Patricia Harkin and the Ethical Potential of Lore

The work of Patricia Harkin can help us untangle one of the most pressing problems for constructing an ethics of the political: how do we prevent these principles from themselves becoming authoritarian, arbitrary, and unresponsive to the changing dynamics of our classrooms? Foucault and Graff have already supplied part of the answer. The ethics must be experimental, pragmatic, modifiable. and tangible. It must enable choice, be formed by a coherence of difference rather than consensus, and be based on a respect not only for that difference but for the emotional depth with which many beliefs are held. But is such an ethics possible or is it hopelessly and dangerously utopian? Can a discipline, specifically composition, embrace an ethics that is pragmatic, experimental, conflicted. diverse, fluid, and playful? Yes according to Patricia Harkin, because composition is not a discipline but a post discipline, and as a post discipline it thrives on contradiction, pragmatism, and experimentation.

A discipline, according to Harkin's reading of Stephen Toulmin, is,

> a traditional procedure for raising and answering questions in a regulated way. It is precisely the regularity of its procedures of inquiry that produces the facts. A discipline, therefore, is a function of its lexicon (the way it defines its terms), its representation techniques (or traditional ways of sharing that knowledge through lab reports, articles, books, conferences, presentations, maps, charts, diagrams, etc.), and its application procedures. (Harkin, "The Postdisciplinary" 130)

Composition, on the other hand, does not function, at least for its practioners. in a disciplinary way. Its lexicon, representation

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techniques, and application procedures are based on what Stephen North calls lore. North defines lore as "the accumulated body of traditions, practices, and beliefs in terms of which Practioners understand how writing is done, learned and taught" (*The Making* 22). Far from being regulated, lore's traditions, practices, and beliefs are unapologetically contradictory; "its procedures derive from disparate and unarticulated assumptions about writing" (Harkin 126). Further, Lore's making knowledge is "driven . . . by a pragmatic logic: It is concerned with what has worked, is working, or might work in teaching, doing, or learning writing. Hence, its structure is primarily experiential" (North 23). Finally, lore is "anti-essentialist" in that it eclectically forages among theories to test their effectiveness in the classroom. It deals "with situations in which single causes cannot be stipulated, in which causes cannot be discriminated from effects" (Harkin 134). Thus, these "irregular, ad hoc procedures of lore" could be seen "as post disciplinary in their willingness to use, but refusal to be constrained by, existing institutional rules of knowledge production" (Harkin 130-31).

If Harkin is right, and I believe she is, then composition's post disciplinary ethos would prevent it from using an ethics in an authoritarian way. Indeed, just as composition embraces a way of making knowledge that is experimental, pragmatic, anti-essentialist, and contradictory, it could easily embrace an ethics that contains many of the same qualities. Harkin believes that composition's post disciplinarity allows it "to avoid the unfortunate aspects of disciplinarity, particularly its tendency to simplify to the point of occulting its ideological implications and making us think that its

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narrowness is normal" (134). In a similar way, this post disciplinarity would allow composition to avoid using ethics as a narrow, abstract, and unchanging set of laws to be imposed from "on high," especially if this post disciplinarity was itself part of the ethics. Harkin's objective for lore could be our objective for ethics: the objective of trying "not to achieve a totalizing" ethics "but rather to see where" ideologies "intersect, where they contradict, where they form constellations, and, perhaps what is most important, where they form lacunae"[10] (136). To paraphrase Harkin's ideas on lore, composition's post disciplinarity can allow it to embrace an ethics that will help us to "see ways of construing relations of relatedness to which our ideology has made us blind" (135).

Mikhail Bakhtin's Carnival: Offensive Writing as a Political Act in Need of an Ethical Response

Finally, the work of Mikhail Bakhtin is important for the construction of a postmodern ethics. So far my ethics has centered mostly around the behavior of composition teachers. But what about the behavior of composition students? How should we deal with students whose behavior is authoritarian, disrespectful, monologic, dismissive, or threatening? How should we see and deal with their writing? I think the of work Bakhtin can supply some answers.

We might see offensive student writing as a hybrid form of Bakhtin's carnival. For Bakhtin the carnival was a time of "temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions" (*Rabelais* 10). During the carnival all that was placed above or beyond the physical body, all

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that was officially sanctioned as "high, spiritual, ideal, abstract" was "degraded" or parodied into the lowest common denominator, the obscene, the material (19-20). "The lower stratum of the body, the life of the belly and the reproductive organs" (21) were particularly important to this degradation because so much of humanity's commonality lies within its biological functioning. Degradation, by constitution, relates "to acts of defecation and copulation, conception, pregnancy, and birth" (21). Its power

> is predicated on its opposition from *and to* high discourses, themselves prophylactic against the debasements of the low (the lower classes, vernacular discourses, low culture, shit...) . . . . The very highness of high culture is structured through the obsessive banishment of the low, and through the labor of suppressing the grotesque body (which is, in fact, simply the material body, gross as that can be) in favor of what Bakhtin refers to as 'the classical body' . . . --a refined, orifice-less, laminated surface" (Kipnis, "(Male)" 376).

The weapons of the carnival were a "gay, triumphant and at the same time mocking, deriding laughter" (Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 12), an abusive, insulting "marketplace language" (16), and a "carnivalesque speech" liberated "from norms of etiquette and decency imposed at other times" (10). Laughter is the most important weapon of the carnival because it draws the object

> into a zone of crude contact where one can finger it familiarly on all sides, turn it upside down, inside out, peer at it from above and below, break open its external shell, look at its center, doubt it, take it apart, dismember it, lay it bare and expose it, examine it freely and experiment with it. (Bakhtin, *Dialogic* 23)

In short, carnival is the resistance of the oppressed through crude jokes, degrading portrayals, and mocking caricatures. It is often violent and obscene, but it is also transformative and generative. The carnival is like a great compost heap in which everything that is

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seen as above is degraded into its "organic" communality and from that mass the possibility of new patterns of existence grow.

I would argue that for many students we--English teachers--represent the high, the holy, and the official, especially those of us who hope to inspire a political consciousness about issues of race, class, and gender. I would further argue that, rightly or wrongly, many of our students feel oppressed or threatened by this attempt to broaden consciousness. For example, a student wrote the following in a column for the University of New Hampshire's student newspaper. It represents his take on the campus' Diversity Support Coalition:

> When I was a little boy, my mother would try to force me to eat my peas at dinner time. She always failed because I was a stubborn little turd who never saw the value of eating her stupid peas simply because *she* said it was good for me . . . . Now I'm in college and multicultural special interest groups are trying to spoon feed me cultural diversity like a gross baby formula that they claim is essential to my growth as a well-rounded human being. Well, I'm gonna have to spit-up in their laps because I still don't see the value of swallowing what *they* consider to be good for me.

The student feels pressured and infantilized by the coalition. As he writes, the coalition is trying to "spoon feed" him "cultural diversity." He resents this treatment. He sees it as authoritarian, imposed on him from above, coercive, so he degrades it.

Thus, offensive writing, while sometimes a sign of immaturity, bad taste, or poor judgment, could also been seen as a political attempt to resist our authority, to mock us, to realign the relationship's power structure, to bring us down to a level were we can be poked at. It can be a political weapon aimed at that which is seen as oppressive. This is, of course, a rather unsettling thought. As Kipnis argues, "There is discomfort at the intended violation--at

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being assailed 'with the part of the body or the procedure in question' (380). For Kipnis there is a "further discomfort at being addresses as a subject of repression--as a subject with a history--and the rejection of porn can be seen as a defense erected against representations which mean to unsettle her in her subjectivity" (380). But I would add that there is a discomfort in being associated with repressive structures of power as well. English teachers usually do not wish to see themselves in the role of the authoritarian figure (neither do they want their authority so challenged), but I believe students often do see us so. Whether or not the Diversity Support Coalition was acting in an authoritarian way, this young man feels that it was, and he resists that pressure with carnivalesque writing.

Of course, I am stretching Bakhtin's theory somewhat to call this student's writing carnivalesque. Though not apparent in this example, O'Neill's other writing is particularly misogynist, racist, homophobic, and xenophobic (I will examine his writing more closely in a later section). Bakhtin, on the other hand, stipulates that the carnival, while mocking, degrading, and even abusive, is a celebration that embraces all people, that degradation is "not only a destructive, negative aspect, but also a regenerating one" (*Rabelais* 21), that the bodily element "is deeply positive . . . . not . . . a private, egotistic form, severed from the other spheres of life" (19). It could reasonably be argued, therefore, that much offensive writing lacks the utopian sensibility of carnival. And yet, the writing of Rabelais often depicts extremely violent and degrading acts against women as humorous, and Bakhtin sees him as one of the greatest of carnivalesque writers. Indeed, Bakhtin is ominously silent on the

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plight of women. He does not recognize that his carnival--as he conceptualizes it--cannot be fully used by women, and, in fact, that it uses women's bodies to achieve its ends. Given this and other blind spots in Bakhtin's theory of the carnival, it is difficult to determine when mocking, degrading, and abusive writing has gone too far. When has offensive writing stopped being an attempt to mock that which is seen as oppressive, an attempt to transform hierarchical power relations, and started being an attempt to use the power of the carnival as a weapon of oppression, an attempt to maintain inequities of power?

Further, Bakhtin does not see the potential strategic use of carnival like power and techniques by specific groups against specific structures of authority (instead of the mass of humanity using it against easily identifiable and monolithic power structures). Writing at a time and place and about times and places where official structures of power and authority were concentrated in theocracies, aristocracies, or state dictatorships and influenced by the sparse class categories of Marxism, Bakhtin could not imagine an official power structure dispersed by democracy, capitalism, and technology nor a populace stratified not only by economic class but by gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, sexuality, and ideology.

Consequently, neither the structures of American power, the dynamics of our classrooms, nor the constitutions of the oppressed are categorically unified enough for Bakhtin's original concept of the carnival to be applied in a "pure" or unproblematized form. Categories still exist in very material ways, but they also overlap, intersect, explode--resulting in people who occupy multiple positions

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of privilege and oppression at the same time. For example, one may be born into a privileged class but an oppressed race, an oppressed class but a privileged gender, an oppressed gender but a privileged race. It is a condition that Patricia Bizzell, inspired by Fredric Jameson, calls a "change in the history of totalities." She writes:

> This vision of change may help us understand why we have difficulty defining the social order in modern America and securely delineating the boundaries of the working, middle, and upper classes. A college-educated high school teacher may make considerably less money than a plumber who is a high school dropout; and both may be considerably less comfortable with left-oriented political ideas than the psychologist with a graduate degree and an incoming totaling more than theirs combined. ("Marxist" 60)

In single, identifiable, monolithic structures of oppression it is easy to tell who is the oppressor and who is the oppressed. But in post fordian, multi-identity, heterogeneous, and technological America, who uses the power of the carnival and against whom is determined not by easily definable categories of oppressed and oppressor but by much more complicated, layered, and specifically situated political interests.

It is easy to see the mocking, deriding, degrading laughter of the carnival as universal, joyful, and uniting when it is directed at the church, the state, the patriarchy, or the aristocracy (especially if we are not members of those groups). It is not so easy when we *are* members of the group being mocked, especially when that group, in certain areas of society, might not have all that much power. Yet, who is deemed "worthy" to be in the carnival and who must suffer its attacks is, at least partially, an ideological question. Ironically, the "clean" use of the carnival was possible only when meta-narratives and their supporting power structures made it so. In the age of

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finite narratives, fractured power structures, and shifting identities, the carnival is more complex, less utopian, and used by more people than we--teachers of a progressive bent--would like. English teachers may have to recognize that, under certain political lenses, they are the "oppressive" class which an "oppressed" group is resisting, resisting in ways they don't like, and against things they hold dear. Today, disturbingly, almost any group can use the leveling power of the carnival but leave its universal good will and easily identifiable categories of oppressed and oppressor behind.

If this fractured and political take on offensive writing is how we should view it, then how should teachers deal with it? How do teachers connect with students who see their writing as resisting our "PC fascism," when we see it as supporting, albeit at times unconsciously, larger oppressive structures? If what makes offensive writing offensive is ideological, then can we create an ethics broad enough to encompass those different ideologies yet tangible enough to put them to the test? I believe so. I think the answer to these questions is once again ethical, an ethics of answerability.

In *Art and Answerability*, Bakhtin has a concept that he calls an excess of seeing or knowing. This is the idea that others can see parts of our spatial and temporal being that we cannot. Bakhtin argues that

> When I contemplate a whole human being who is situated outside and over against me, our concrete, actually experienced horizons do not coincide. For at each given moment, regardless of the position and the proximity to me of this other human being whom I am contemplating, I shall always see and know something that he, from his place outside and over against me, cannot see himself: parts of his body that are inaccessible to his own gaze (his head, his face and its expression), the world behind his back, and a whole series of objects and relations, which in any of our mutual relations are

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> accessible to me but not to him. As we gaze at each other, two different worlds are reflected in the pupils of our eyes. (22-23)

The other can sees parts of myself I cannot and can, therefore, extend my understanding of myself and vice versa. Each person's unique spatial and temporal position in the world gives him or her an irreplaceable perspective. The self has a structural need for the excess of seeing this unique perspective can provide (Nealon 140). The other's excess of seeing gives the self the potential for growth, change, and new ways of being. New ways of understanding ourselves are literally reflected in the eyes of another.

The mutual dependency of self and other for an excess of seeing ensures what Bakhtin calls the obligation of answerability, the responsibility of response. I and the other must

> empathize or project myself into this other human being, see his world axiology from within as *he* sees this world; I must put myself in his place and then, after returning to my own place, 'fill in his horizon through that excess of seeing which opens out from this, my own, place outside him. I must enframe him, create a consummating environment for him out of this excess of my own seeing, knowing, desiring, and feeling. (*Art* 25)

The spatial, temporal, biological, psychological, and social parts of the self cannot be interconnected without the extended view provided by the other. This interconnectedness depends upon our realization of an ethics to respond. "[W]hat," Bakhtin asks, "guarantees the inner connection of the constituent elements of a person? Only the unity of answerability" (1). We cannot turn away from the other without turning away from the potential of ourselves. We must be answerable to each other because it is in the ethics of response that the self comes into being and has the potential for change.

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This ethics of response does not mean that I can become the other. Both physically and subjectively I cannot see the world *exactly* as the other sees it and any attempt to do so would be imperialistic.[11] But as Nealon argues, the Bakhtinian "self is never merely an appropriation machine, but always open--responding or answering--to the other" (133). Answerability represents a dialogic, intersubjective understanding of ethics. It is, as Zygmunt Bauman writes in *Postmodern Ethics*, "an ethics that recastes the Other as the crucial character in the process through which the moral self comes into its own" (84). This moral self is the obligation to response. "What the self is answerable to," Anne Dyson explains, "is the social environment; what the self is answerable for is the authorship of its responses" (229). In short, the self, in Bakhtinian terms, exists in relation to others; "the self is an act of grace, a gift of the other" (Dyson 230).

If a student is willing to present his or her discourse in a dialogic of answerability, even if ideologically offensive, then we must respond in kind. For even, perhaps especially, offensive writing can give us a view of ourselves as teachers that we cannot get anywhere else, a view that can be used to critique, modify, and extend who we are, what we do, and why we do it. And we can offer the same gift of self, growth, and change to our students. In the spirit of this ethics, then, I would now like to put it to the test. In the following pages then, I will present the writing of two students that I find extremely offensive. The difference between them is one writer's willingness to be answerable.

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Testing the Ethics

Sitting in my office late one afternoon grading papers and listening to the student produced sewage run through the pipes crisscrossing my ceiling, a quiet yet determined knock sounded at my door. It was Kerry Reilly, a fellow instructor in the writing program. She was upset. It seems a student had given her a very misogynistic paper, and she was torn about what to do with it. She had already been to see the director of first year composition. The director had first determined what the context of the writing was. Was this the first example of such writing or was it part of a larger pattern? Had Kerry attempted to engage the student over a period of time? Did Kerry feel threatened? In short, the director had emphasized the importance of the process of engagement for dealing with offensive writing. Then the director told Kerry that she would support whatever she needed to do--but Kerry wasn't certain what that was. This wasn't, in fact, the first time that "Doug" had given Kerry problems. He wasn't hostile but he was subtly inappropriate and threatening, challenging Kerry's right to authority in small ways. For instance, he commented on her new haircut in a one-on-one conference (he liked her hair better long), asked about her dating habits, wondered out loud how old she was. He also subtly challenged the worth of Kerry's assignments. In a reflection essay on how he felt his work was going, he wrote the following:

> Surely, you would rather I tell you about the wedding plans and how the horses will fit in. Or maybe I should relate how my brother wants to meet me in North Carolina at the end of the week. Maybe how I intend to retrieve the vessel into which I poured every spare ounce of love and energy for three years. All of this seems much more exciting and alive right now than reflecting on some "choice" past essays. Never the less, the direction I must go has been chosen

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for me and you will have to wait weeks or even months to find out about weddings and horses, brothers I haven't spoken to in years, and who or what was that vessel exactly.

The challenge is small but there nonetheless. Doug doesn't want to waste his time on Kerry's meaningless assignments. He would rather spend his time writing about things that should interest them both. Nevertheless, Kerry had "chosen" (forced would be a more honest word for how Doug feels) the direction in which Doug must go, and Doug didn't like to be forced.

Doug was a large, muscular man, a few years older than most first-year students. He had been in the military before coming to college. With his military hair cut. imposing presence, and opinionated manner, he was intimidating to Kerry. Among his expressed opinions were that homosexuals are abnormal, that a man should be proud of his homophobia, and that feminists are sexually frustrated. Kerry feared what an outright confrontation might produce. And yet, there was an honesty about Doug, a willingness to enter into debate, to see debate as necessary that caused Kerry not to want to, in her words, "banish him from the class." For example, in another self evaluation of his work, he wrote:

I think that my contribution to discussion in class and in workshops is a necessary evil. Although, a couple of times I thought that if the mob had a leader I might be lynched. Particularly when the class was discussing Adrienne Rich, five more minutes and I think they would have gotten a rope. Stirring up the class and taking the road less traveled was not and is not my goal. I just seem to end up on that road anyway often carving my own road alone, although I do believe my roads are justifiable. In conferences I would have to say that I am usually not holding up my half of the conversation. I think that maybe this gives you the wrong impression of how I am taking what you are saying. It's not that I do not agree, or am not willing to change, but I fear this is often how I come across . . . . If you will bare [sic] with me I think we are headed in the right direction now.

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The incorrect use of the word "bare" in the last time is ironically appropriate. It is symptomatic of the situation. Doug is not only asking Kerry to bear with him but to bare herself to him as he will to her. He is asking Kerry as a female instructor to enter into a relationship that may be threatening to her. Yet, he is willing to make this relationship answerable. He realizes that others dislike his opinions, but he maintains that his opinions are "justifiable." In other words, he understands that opinions are just that, and, therefore, that they must be argued for. His actions are driven by more than simple rebellion. He doesn't stir up the class to cause trouble, but to remain authentic to his individualist ideology. He is aware, to some degree, of his own subjective biases.

Further, his self mockery about being lynched displays at least some measure of perspective on the subjective, socially constructed nature of perception. He understands that what he finds legitimate others find offensive. Indeed, in the same evaluation he writes that "in responding to an essay we have preconceived notions, usually rooted in our own path, that fill in some of the blanks." The *we* in this quote is important. It shows at least some connection to the class and a perspective on interpretation being "rooted" in individual or cultural experience. This "we" also echoes with the final "we" of the evaluation. He tells Kerry that he knows that he is not "holding up" his "half of the conversation" in conference, but that "if you will bare with me I think we are headed in the right direction now." This "we" shows that Doug does see himself in a relationship of mutual obligation or answerability with Kerry, one that he feels he is

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currently not respecting, and that is an important insight for dealing with him.

Kerry also felt that Doug was an important, if disruptive, part of the class's community. One young woman wrote in her class evaluation to Kerry that,

> My favorite part of the class is when we have the open discussions. I get to learn about other people's outlook on the story. It helps me to think about other ways that I can look at something. ["Doug"] drives me nuts because he contradicts everything everyone says, but I also liked to put myself in his shoes and look at things in the way he does (to some extent).

Thus, Doug does seem to provide an important Bakhtinian excess of seeing for the class. He opens up new ways for the class members to see the subject and themselves. He also seems to be an integral part of initiating the debates that allow Kerry to "teach the conflicts." Yet, the writing Kerry hands me to read makes me wonder exactly what the effect and worth of that opening up is. The paper, or at least parts of it, reads as follows:

Jim the Binge and I

> Jim and I started out the evening without planning to binge. We went down to the worst part of town, where I knew the owner of this run down hole in the wall bar/strip joint. Her name was Kimberly, she was pregnant, she was bisexual, and she was more than just a little less than impressed with the shape and weight of her body at the time. I hesitate to describe her feelings towards me as a crush as she is all of thirty two years old, but that would seem to be the most accurate way to describe them . . . . I'd taken her out a couple of times, I wasn't trying to get anywhere with her but I was getting there none the less. So Jim and I headed out for the night and the first landing was at Kim's bar. Jim and I shot a few games of stick and drank a few beers when another younger lady who I was good friends with and who new Kim very well pulled me aside to have a few words. I can't recall the exact wording but it went something to the effect of "If you don't have protection with you, you should slip out and go get some. I think Kim's going to ask you to spend the night with her." Knowing how close the two of them were that was more than a suggestion. Meanwhile I still haven't figured out what if anything I feel for this girl. I consult Jim, who is the greater womanizer, and his advice of course is to take what I can get and if I

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don't feel anything for her run like hell when I'm done. He also suggests that I give him a lift up to the Fantasy Club so that in the event I stay with Kim he can catch a ride home and in the event I don't I can join him . . . . Thirty minutes or so of contemplation later I am back at Kim's no further along than I was to start out with. A couple of hours and three or four beers later I am still undecided but leaning towards the realistic side of the house, that is to say, I don't have any real feelings for Kim at all, and I know her just a little too well to steal the candy and run. Being the honorable individual in an honorable mood, when asked to adjourn to her place, I told the truth and I felt like shit. Both because I had hurt her feelings and once again I was going home alone. Next stop the Fantasy Club.

I dropped in on Jim intending to polish off another beer and offer him a ride to the "Big House" if he wanted it. Leave it to Jim to give good advice, "Let's kill some Pain, Jessica, come here you sweethart. My friend and I need a couple of shots and a fresh pitcher." So much for going home. Jim is a connesier of strip joints, his second ex-wife was a stripper, and there is no place he would rather spend his time or his money and we just got paid. My tolerance is high right now so it's going to cost us a bit to get trashed. However drinking is not the only attraction and both Jim and I are tipping the girls rather heavily when compared with our normal tipping styles. Usually we make them work alot harder for a dollar and we never tip more than a dollar at a time, to easy to run out of money that way and ruin the evening. We both know we will be going home alone this evening however Jim is still trying to turn his luck around. One of the girls is selling "shooters" usually a mixed drink of only hard alcohol served in a test tube in the size of a double. Depending on how good you are, that is to say how good looking, how smooth your style, how much money she thinks she can milk you for and so on will define the finer points of how you will receive your drink. On this particular night Jim is ranking well up the scale when he calls her over. She get's down on her knees and kneeling between Jim's legs, with some extra show and flourish deep throats Jims test tube. While Jim is looking down at her she pulls his mouth to hers and kisses him while standing up. Jim being seated in a chair the effect is to empty the tube when she is once again standing above him. And to Jim's credit he did better than I and did not spill a drop. Of course some of the other patrons have observed this display and are now calling the young lady to their tables.

It was shortly after this display that Jim looked at me and in a completely somber voice said, "Isn't it amazing, that is that money has such power." That was when he pulled old George out of his pocket to be forever associated with this moment. He spoke as a gentleman making a completely scientific observation. "You see this doller, it has real power, with this doller, one doller now, I have the power to make that girl over there, the one thats crawling all over that guy like a hot rock, come over here and crawl all over me. And this single doller gives me the power to do that with any girl in the room." This is no news flash for me, but at that moment for some reason the thought just clicked. It really is amazing the power that money holds over people and truth be told there are few who for the right price would not do nearly anything that you asked of them.

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> Now make no mistake these particular youngladys were not selling themselves short, on a good night these girls will walk away at over a hundred dollers an hour. Thats alot of power.

The essay is strikes me as very misogynistic. He writes happily of "girls," women reduced to vessels, of taking "the candy" and running, and of a multiple of other horrid things. Further, the context of this particular classroom is important. Would Doug have written this essay to me or another male instructor? I don't think so. His challenge to Kerry's authority is deeply rooted in Kerry being a female in a position of power over him. The sexual content of the essay is a way to let Kerry know that Doug has the power to make her feel uncomfortable, to assert the male privilege that he has in other areas of life. If ever there was an essay that could cause a visceral reaction, it is this one. Can we find a way to respect or at least understand Doug's subjectivity? Can Kerry? Can we make a connection? Do we want to? Still, there are ways into this essay, ways that can be found in what has been written, ways to begin a critique that are internally persuasive rather than simply confrontational (a strategy that would not work with Doug anyway).

For example, there is a certain morality or code of ethics in this and other essays. In this essay, Doug writes that he does not sleep with Kim because he doesn't "have any real feelings for Kim," and he "knows her just a little to well to steal the candy and run." Though it is wrapped in a crude misogyny, there is ethics at play here. Sexuality is not merely a physical act, and he does not want to use someone he knows. He feels some sense of obligation to people with whom he has a relationship. He decides, against Jim's advice, not to treat Kim as disposable. It would be a dishonorable action, and he, in

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his own words, is an "honorable individual." While hardly the high water mark of moral behavior, it does give us a place to start that is internally persuasive to Doug, that recognizes his subjectivity and is based on a morality he wrote rather than one we imposed. It allows us to begin a discussion in which we can historicize why Doug has the attitudes about women that he does. We could ask him why he is able to humanize Kim but could participate in the dehumanization of the "girls" at the strip bar? How can he justify "stealing the candy" with them so to speak but not with Kim? Is it only because he knows her? How logical or reasonable a basis is that for an honor code? And logic or reasonableness is of great importance to Doug. His essays and conversations are peppered with remarks as to the unreasonableness or ill-logic of others. By turning his own ill-logic against him, we, once again, have an opening for critique that could be internally persuasive, respectful of difference, and based on evidence derived from the student's own writing.

In other papers, Doug also betrays a sense of morality we could use to make a connection and form a critique. For example, In an essay called "Of Morality, Honesty, and Things that Cannot be Forgiven," Doug writes that

> My buddy Jim believes that if a married woman is out on the town looking, her husband is not taking care of business at home and she is therefore fair game . . . . I have found myself hard pressed to consider the wives fair game morally . . . . I do not believe in divorce . . . . It used to be alot easier for me to say [that], way back when, before my first relationship with a married woman . . . . Truth be told, of all the shameful things I have done in my life I put the . . . [affair] right at the top. Biblically speaking there is only one thing that is grounds for divorce and that is adultery. The woman whom I am seeing now is in the pursuit of divorce, and she is justified biblically. Yet she is still technically married and that has been the thorn in my side and the inspiration behind some extensive

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research into the subject.   Combined with some serious soul searching as of late.

The religious imagery of this passage is important.   Religion obviously forms the grounds for a rather extensive code of moral behavior.   Doug finds adultery biblically wrong.   Therefore, to have committed it is a "thorn in" his "side."   This pain forces him into serious contemplation, "serious soul searching," of his actions.   Could we not use this sense of religious morality, this willingness for self examination, to critique Doug's behavior at the strip bar in a way that be internally persuasive to him? Is it moral for him to treat the woman in the bar the way he does? It would not be difficult to find examples of religious based essays condemning the sexual exploitation of women, to give these essays to Doug, and ask him to respond.   Is it possible that such an assignment might provide an excess of seeing that would rupture Doug's ethical blind spots? I believe so.   Later in same essay Doug writes that he accepts "full responsibility for the weaknesses of my own flesh and mind. Sadly. they have so often been my downfall. . . .Having searched my soul and passed judgement on what I found, I set about to correct that which was not." I would argue that Doug has a strong sense of what is right and what is wrong, that he can be made to feel guilt, and that this guilt or response causes him to attempt to change his behavior.

Doug ends his essay on morality with an important question: "where do you draw the line and what are you willing to forgive?" This question reflects the openness and responsibility that are required for entrance into ethical debate.   Doug is concerned, deeply I think. with moral behavior.   Indeed, in a conversation with me, he stressed how he always stops to help women in need of car repairs

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while other so called "sensitive" people drive right past.[12] His behavior at the strip bar, therefore, represents a contradiction in his ethics that a teacher could rightfully ask him to explain. Perhaps trying to explain that contradiction could help change where Doug currently draws the line on what he is willing to accept.

There is another potential path for critique in the last paragraph of the "Jim the Binge and I" essay. Indeed, part of me wants to argue that the first part of the story is designed to highlight the immorality of the last paragraph; that the narrator of the story comes to an insight or cannot be trusted and, therefore, cannot be assigned to Doug. But I'm afraid I'm not that optimistic. Instead, I think we will have to settle for the connections to Marxist, Foucaudian, and feminist criticism that we can make in the final paragraph. We can point out the interconnection of money, power, and the exploitation of women in the paragraph. Jim's speech on this nexus is ripe for dialogue. Of course, Jim's argument and its impact on Doug are hardly Marxist, Foucaudian, or feminist in character. For though Doug sees the connection among money, power, and sexual servitude, he feels no necessity to critique it. He writes that the connection between money and power "is no news flash for me, but at that moment for some reason the thought just clicked." This click shows at least the beginnings of an insight that might make further Marxist, Foucauldian, or feminist critiques of that connection also click. Then again, it might not, but it is a place to begin, to put pressure, to make a connection. In any event, it is a strategy that has a much greater chance of working with this student than oppositional pedagogy does.

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Doug was quite aware and proud of his military background, and he was convinced that the "left wing liberals" of the English department would not and could not understand it or him. In an essay called "A Momentary Expansion of Time," Doug writes that "My platoon was just about as tight as they come, and this may not really mean anything to you, or more precisely you don't know what I mean." And in a personal note to Kerry, Doug argued, concerning his service in the Gulf War, that "I don't think anyone who has never had such an experience can truly understand." Doug's military background is every bit as much a culture to him, a unique and separate way of understanding the world, as racial, ethnic, or religious cultures are to someone else, and he was upset that people in the English department did not, could not, and would not "respect it." According to Doug, strip joints, affairs, competition, confrontation, violence, and strong opinions were the way of military life. They constituted what was important to him, his personal experiences, what he wanted to write about, the way he rendered meaning from experience. He didn't expect the English department to validate his experience, but he was angry, nonetheless, that it didn't. However, he was also grateful that Kerry, while setting firm boundaries for his behavior, had not tried to shut him down, to make him write what he called "pet the puppy papers." I believe oppositional pedagogy would have gotten just that from him--no critique, no self reflection, no growth, only "the playing of the game." True, Doug would not have been intimidated by an oppositional pedagogy. He would have pushed back, but eventually he would have, as he told me, "gone along to get along."

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Kerry, on the other hand, was able to make at least some kind of connection with Doug, cause some kind of self reflection in him, and, so achieve a measure of answerability. While in an early personal note to Kerry Doug claimed to be "a person mostly devoid of feelings," in another essay he confided what it was like to be in the military: "When you get back to base and the demons come to visit you at night in your rack you cry your tears and deal with the ghosts, but in the field you shut your emotions off." I think it is an insight into and for this man that came only from Kerry's ethical engagement of his offensive writing.

But what do we do with a student with whom we cannot make a connection, when the visceral reaction to the student's writing overwhelms our desire and ability to form a relationship, when the empirical evidence before us shows that the student does not want a relationship of answerability? The writing of Bryan O'Neill raises just those questions. I include his writing, therefore, to show that any ethical system must have limits, ways of saying no to certain behaviors or ideologies. As open, fluid, experimental, answerable, and respectful as my ethics tries to be, those very principles also necessitate a standard of both inclusion *and* exclusion. Still, I believe some kind of controlled engagement with writing that we would condemn as unethical can give us a better perspective on who we are, what we believe, and how the effect of what we do is perceived by certain others. For example, while the writings of Adolf Hitler would occupy no ethical space in my classroom, they could occupy a kind of negative space, a means for starting debates or historicizing arguments. Perhaps we can use writing that we cannot engage

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ethically to, at least, inform our ethics, to make them concrete and lived. I will first present O'Neill's writing and then comment on how we might understand it and its impact.

The 666th Level of Evil

The 1993-1994 and 1994-1995 school years were a highly conflicted, painful, divisive, yet unifying time at the University of New Hampshire, a time when four important events occurred. The first of these was the suspension of Professor Don Silva on charges of sexual harassment of students in his basic writing course (eventually the matter was settled in court but not before the University was forced into the media spotlight). The second was a "stinger rush" at Zeta Chi (ZX) fraternity. The members of ZX held a party in which it was alleged that alcohol had been served to minors, and that the brothers had hired strippers to perform oral sex while party members threw money. The third incident was a SHARPP [Sexual Harassment and Rape Prevention Program] sponsored "Mock Rape Trail." The trail was a dramatization of a date rape in which both sides of the incident presented their views on what happened. Football players who had been required to attend the presentation made lewd and derogatory comments throughout. They were subsequently sentenced to attended presentations on rape culture sensitivity.

Finally, and thankfully positively, Jared Sexton was elected the first African American student body president in the University's history. Mr. Sexton was not only a vocal supporter of diversity on campus, he was instrumental in encouraging the creation of many

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University supported student organizations. Among these were the: BSU (Black Student Union), AASO (African American Student Organization), Alliance (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgendered, and Their Allies), ARC (Against Rape Culture), ADELA (The Latin American Student Organization), Hillel (The Jewish Student Organization), DSC (Diversity Support Coalition), WRC (Women's Resource Center) CED (Coalition to End Discrimination), ASO (The Asian Student Organization), Queer Campus, and People for People-- not to mention a series of events and programs such as Sexual Awareness Week, Blues Jeans IF You're Gay Day, Take Back the Night, and Safe Zones. These groups made demands on both the University's resources and culture. The school newspaper was flooded with demands for more diversity, sensitivity, and resistance, letters against these very demands, and letters either for or against Silva and Zeta Chi. In short, it was a traumatic and dynamic time for the UNH community.

Into this emotionally and politically charged situation walked Bryan O'Neill and his student newspaper column: "Hi Mom! I'm in Jail: A Rating Scale of All Things Evil from 1 to 666." In it O'Neill listed and ranked a series of people, places, and things on a scale of evil from 1 to 666. O'Neill's column led to a storm of controversy that culminated in calls for his removal from the paper and article length letters from students and professors either condemning or supporting him (or at least his right to free speech). The following is a sketch of his writing and the controversy it caused from September 1994 to May of 1995.

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O'Neill's first contributions to *The New Hampshire* (*TNH*) were in the form of cartoons:
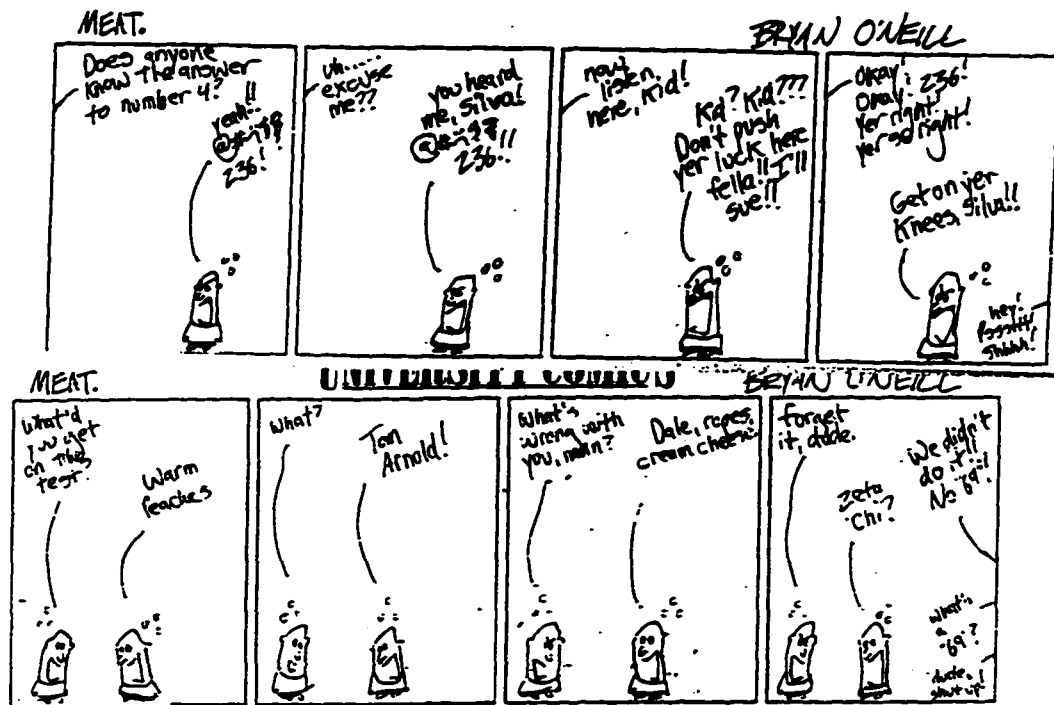
Though the cartoons dealt specifically with the Silva and Zeta Chi controversies, they caused surprisingly little stir. After the cartoons, however, the first of O'Neill's columns appeared. The following is a sample of his first entries:

> **Diversity**: Some people seem to think that the best way to diversify our fair campus is to enhance the enrollment of minorities. True. But I think the whole process would go much faster if we just killed off a whole bunch of white guys. Sure, it may sound extreme, but then again, I'm pretty hard-pressed to think of any gender or race related issues on this campus that haven't already been beaten like a stinky mashed potato. (345)

> **Smith Hall**: Oh goody! Let's make one really nice dorm where we shove all the diverse foreign students and make them feel at home! Oh yeah! Let's even leave a few spaces open for a few white students so that they can experience many different cultures in the confines of their own room. Pbbbttt! Why don't we just shove Satan in there so that we can make the place completely evil. (665)

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The ZX trail: Give me a break. If the university decided that they were going to nail every whore that walked through the doors of a fraternity part...ahhh...never mind. (98)

Special interests groups: Well. now. We must be a very diverse campus because we've finally got at least one student committee per nationality, race, and sexual orientation on our fair campus. I'm so happy I could @#$%&* die. Ha. I'm just kidding, of course. I really think it all sucks. I'm a white heterosexual male, and I'm feeling sort of left out. There's no group out there for me. I was thinking of starting up a little group for lonesome little white guys like myself. and calling it "Pale Sausages." but it just never quite got off the ground. Then again, I don't really believe that this campus needs a school recognized organization for honkies. Nothing in that group could ever represent what I truly think anyway--that is, assuming that all other white guys don't spend their time thinking about quicker ways to get high off of paint fumes. (666)

Sexual Harassment: There's already been way too much written about this stupid subject in the forum pages of this stupid paper, so I'm not going to bother writing anything even semi-intelligent about it. Instead I'll write this: Seeing as how it's almost impossible to prove anything in a court of law regarding sexual harassment, why not save everyone a little time and heartache by...oh...lighting yourself on fire! Hell. why not? It's a quick and easy way to get everyone's attention, and you won't be around long enough for the public to get apathetic towards your case! Maybe, if you're real lucky, you'll even die before they get your body to Health Services-- the place where the real pain always begins. (666)

These first entries are typical of the content and style of O'Neill's writing.[13] They are crude, juvenile, misogynist, racist, and violent, but they are not without an effective use of mocking humor. The humor expresses a feeling a being "left out" and then a denial of that feeling-- "Nothing in that group could ever represent what I truly think anyway." It ties references to the body to references of "the social" (Kipnis 376)--groups designed to give support to the marginalized in society are equated to a group of "lonesome little white guys" called "Pale Sausages." O'Neill's reduction of these support groups to his crotch effectively communicates his opinion of them--they aren't worth piss. Nevertheless, these entries are tame

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compared to what they will become. Even at this early stage, however, O'Neill is obviously trying to be provocative. He wants a response, a reaction, but he doesn't get it. Because of this lack of response, he decides to end the column:

> **UNH:** The whole friggin' campus. Each and everyone of you suck. You might think I'm kidding, but I'm not. I've been trying to get my ass kicked for the entire semester, but no one has even stepped forward--not even a cheesy letter to the forum pages . . . . you politically correct liberal Nazis are still sitting, listening to your Counting Crows crap, and bitching about everything under the sun. Well, you know what? Screw you all. I'm ending this dung-heap of a column for two reasons: 1) it doesn't serve any purpose if I can't get killed or laid. 2) I'm trying to take over the Arts pages. That's right. The whole damn thing. 'Nuff said. (666est)

O'Neill's departure will not last long however. After he ends the column, he finally gets the response his is craving. A female student sends the following letter to *TNH* editor:

> This is my reaction to Bryan O'Neill's decision to end his "dung-heap of a column." Do with it what you will, but at least make sure he sees it . . . . Evil is supposed to persist forever. Does Satan exist because he wants to get beat up or laid? Is he going to give up his eternal position as "Dark Lord" and all of its benefits to write for the Arts pages? I don't think so. Perhaps he knows the true key to evil-brainwashing. A few measly weeks of suggestive comments and a numerical rating scale aren't going to suffice. If most of the students at our fair UNH are human (which I can be wrong in assuming), then each one of us has a dark vein of evil inside. Most of us have been taught to suppress this vein for the "good of humanity." It is columns like yours that we read in private, ingesting the inequity like nutrient deficient beggars; feeding the deep vein of evil. The vein expands, the blood pumps with increasing intensity, and we crave more evil to satisfy this new hunger . . . but what's this? He's quitting!? Oh well, that ought to help everyone go back to their ignorant, monochromatic, boring p.c. lives. We can't do anything about the evil that persists around us unless we can see it. The real "good for humanity" exists in finding, pointing out, and dealing with the evil around us. You tried to point it out, giving us our first taste of blood, and then you left us starving for more. The quest for evil needs a competent guide to succeed, and I almost thought you were it. Thanks for nothing, quitter. You suck.

For O'Neill this was manna from heaven. He now has the purpose, the "mandate," and the target he wants--become the leader

for those who are fed up with calls for diversity, gender equality, and racial justice. A few issues later O'Neill does come back to be that leader. Before his writing had been merely offensive, now it will be offensive with a mission. As Kipnis says of *Hustler*, O'Neill's mission is "to disturb and unsettled" his "readers, both psyhco-sexually and socio-sexually" (375). Almost all of his entries now deal with issues of race, class, gender, or sexual orientation. He writes:

Author's note: Yeah, alright. So I'm too lame to dump the column like I said I was going to. So what? This isn't the first time I've gone back on something I've said--not without sex being involved. Besides, who really cares if I continue writing this piece of trash? We're all going to die of boredom in about a week or two anyway.

"Race, Culture, and Power" minor: That's a good start, but why stop there? I'm sure we could probably toss in a "Women and Sexual Paranoia" major somewhere. Hell, with a little extra encouragement from the student body, we might even be able to squeeze in an "All Men Suck" minor into the program. Yes. That would all be very nice. We could also get some key speakers from the Gestapo to help out any students who wished to further their educational interests outside of the classroom. (134)

Roger Brown: I don't understand why feminists would want to file a sexual harassment charge against a German language professor [Roger Brown was another professor accused of sexual harassment]. How are they going to be able to read their Nazi literature without his help? Jeez. Talk about shooting yourself in the foot. Oh, but, then again most of the self-proclaimed feminists on this campus probably don't need to be educated to make irrational, paranoid decisions about ending a teacher's career anyway. (2)

National Coming Out Day: This is always the most upsetting holiday of the year for me. It never fails. I constantly go out of my way to buy nothing but the best presents for my friends, and I always get stuck with crap. I mean...really. How many bad leather suits and hand-cuffs can a guy deal with before he starts to feel like a complete slut? If this keeps up I'm just going have to resort back to the old edible boxer shorts until someone finally gets the point. (345)

I think O'Neill's last entry on "National Coming Out Day" is especially revealing. It has the carnival's degradation of the body, but also the vein of fear that motivates O'Neill's writing. National coming out day

is an attempt to bring gays into the larger culture. to remove the stigma of perversion that keeps gays "in the closet." O'Neill's portrayal of homosexuality reasserts the perversion of gays, keeps gays in an image controllable by the larger community, lets the gay community know that it cannot come out into "normal" society.

O'Neill's increased exaggeration, misogyny, xenophobia, homophobia, and liberal use of the term Nazi do not go unnoticed or unchallenged. Indeed, at the end of another column, O'Neill addresses the growing pressure on *TNH* editorial staff to pull his column from the paper:

> **Hi Mom, I'm in Jail:** Apparently, some people have actually complained about this stupid column. That's very nice. I'm glad that those people are brave enough to come forth and voice their opinions in such a bold manner. [Most of the complaints to this point had been in the form of personal messages to the editors.] Hell, I admire them so much that I'd like to present my little friends with a simple five-step process that will guarantee that I am never printed in this rag again: 1.) Write a lame letter to the TNH editor. Make sure to include lots of harsh derogatory generalizations about my heinous criminal record and all the obscene party-tricks that I can do with my dirty underwear. 2.) Giggle like a schoolgirl when you see your letter in the newspaper, show it to all your friends, and then send a copy to my apartment—but only after you've rubbed it on the men's bathroom floor at Nick's. 3.) Organize a boycott in front of the MUB to shut off all access to the TNH offices. If you don't get many people, steal one of the bulldozers out front and plow the building down . . . . 4.) Spread rumors that I bombed the SHARPP [Sexual Harassment And Rape Prevention Program] office and beat up Jared Sexton during the get-away. 5.) Call the police after I've slaughtered all of your friends. There. Simple enough. And celebrate when the column is finally pulled, have some nice Canadian Pork Pie with your lame friends at Philbrook. (0)

O'Neill's open acknowledgment of the controversy he is causing signals the beginning of a deluge of student letters, for and against him, to the editor of *TNH.* One student, in a letter entitled "Thank God for Evil," thanks "God Bryan O'Neill is alive! His column . . . is the only thing worth reading in *The New Hampshire.*" Another student,

in a letter entitled "Hi Mom, I'm a Nazi," believes that "O'Neill . . . should stop calling people whom he knows nothing of Nazis. In fact, he should take a history lesson and learn what Nazis and Nazism is. If Bryan O'Neill thinks that women who feel obligated to protect themselves from Neanderthal men who seek to continue holding down and degrading females are Nazis, he is mistaken." A similar letter, entitled "UNH loser," argues that "O'Neill's attitude stinks and his philosophy of life is damaging . . . . if he had his way with the world would have people sell tickets to abortions." Finally, one letter, entitled "O'Neill exercises free speech," champions O'Neill as "one of the few people on this campus that has the ability to think for himself . . . . he is one of the few students that has the balls to stand up against the pathetic political correctness movement."

These letters represent only a sample of the responses O'Neill's column began to generate. Typically the letters either praised O'Neill for standing up to the "PC Nazis," condemned him as writer of filth and hate, or claimed that they didn't like him but defended his write to free speech. Eventually, the controversy grew to such a level that the University's student body president, Jared Sexton, dedicated his weekly column to it. Sexton writes:

> My first impulse was to simply dismiss his [O'Neill's] writing as crude, absurd, and virtually inconsequential . . . . However, upon second and third readings I felt that his messages, despite their incoherences, illustrate something important about our student body and the whole University. For some reason, or great number of reasons, Bryan O'Neill felt it necessary to ridicule every part of this campus that he can possibly think (momentarily) about . . . . One theme is blatantly misogynists and centers around his misunderstanding and subsequent hatred of women in general and the feminist movement in particular . . . . Another motif . . . is the continual denial of racial injustice in our society. He attempts to belittle the efforts of individuals and organizations that seek to express their cultural-racial heritage and break down barriers and

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discrimination . . . . I am most outraged by his brazen racism and advocacy for sexist thinking and practice . . . . I find it hard to believe that our campus newspaper alotted a space of such malicious commentary. I am not suggesting that *TNH* be biased or discriminatory of opinions. I am simply urging them to use discretion in selecting the manner of writing they print each week. Finally, I would invite the readers of *TNH* to respond to Bryan O'Neill's column.

Sexton's mistake was to misread the intention of O'Neill's column. O'Neill isn't interested in debate--only reaction. And the readers of *TNH* do respond, though perhaps not all as Sexton intended. Though Sexton makes clear that he is calling for editorial responsibility and not censorship, he, those who support him, and the editors of *TNH* are accused of fascism over the course of the next several months. One especially impassioned student writes in about "freedom of the press":

the editors of *TNH* should stick to their guns, wherever they might be pointed. The Constitution gives them, and them alone, sole editorial control of what is printed and what isn't. No one can force them to either print or not print material. Not the town of Durham. Not the University of New Hampshire. Not the Dean. Not campus political hopefuls. No one. Popular or not, offensive or not, thoughtless or not, it can be printed . . . . Regardless of what O'Neill's intentions are, regardless of how offensive he is, regardless of how sensitive and delicate the groups he attacks are, he must be printed. UNH wants him.

Another student argues, in a letter entitled "Fascism in *TNH*," that "Jared is not the only fascist on campus, as the editors of *TNH* hold true to form. These wonderful individuals, who 'fight' for student rights, are, at the same time, destroying our constitutional right for free speech." A few weeks later, in a letter entitled "Leave O'Neill Alone," another student asks if the paper had "ever heard of censorship? . . . . Well maybe where you're from they believe in censoring. I guess I'm from a more liberal state where they believe in the Constitution. You know that little piece of paper that

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guarantees us the freedom of speech?" And finally, in a letter entitled "Dear thought Police," a student thanks the editors for cleaning up the world for him: "To think that you are able to censor out all that is bad, so by the time any information reaches my virgin ears, it is clean--much like the world itself." These letters signal a change in the responses to O'Neill. They are becoming more thoughtful, more intricate, about larger social issues than just whether an individual finds O'Neill offensive. In short, the argument really isn't over O'Neill anymore but over what the UNH community values and should value.

O'Neill himself does not take Sexton's criticism lightly. His next column both attacks Sexton and causes more controversy than any other he will write.

Author's note: Well. Jared Sexton didn't seem to like my other column, but maybe he'll get a rise in his pants for this one. I sure hope so. Feel the love, Jared. Feel the love.

"Higher Learning" (movie): I went and saw this with Jared Sexton. I thought it was a good movie but that it tried to accomplish a little too much. Jared told me that he couldn't concentrate on the movie because he was still pissed at me, for ordering white bread at Subway. Silly Jared. Always getting mad at the wrong white guys. He even tried to blame me when the condom broke. (puke green) [O'Neill decided to rate these "evils" on a color scale. He will often make such alterations].

Murkland Courtyard: So many people, so few bullets. (sigh) I can never decide if I want to start my killing spree with the two jerks in the coffee tent, or the bazillion stinkin' alterna-hippies who sit around analyzing Fugazi lyrics. Donald Silva tells me that I should shoot all the femi-nazis first, but I have to say that I'm not really comfortable with that idea. It might give people the impression that I hate women. That would be terrible. I love those militant UNH gestapo chicks sometimes, even when they're still breathing. (banana red)

Alliance: Someone creates a special interest group for people with alternative sexual orientations, yet, they never invite me and my necrophiliac friends into any of their parties. That's sort of like opening up a deli and not serving sausage because the manager is

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afraid that his vegetarian girlfriend will beat him up.   Uh...er, something.   (Black Francis)

Letters to the Editor: For all you losers who agree with Mr. Jared Sexton about how much I suck, but are too lazy to write a letter to the newspaper, here's a form letter that you can just sign your name to and stuff in a mailbox: "Hey, Mr. Editor Guy: I'm, like, a stupid hippie who's been going to this school for a long time, and I got me something to say about this O'Neill character that you've been publishing.

These entries by O'Neill clearly reflect important dimensions of the carnival.   They are tied to the functions of the material body: defecation, copulation, blood, snot, etc.   They use violence and degradation to pull down those parts of the student(s') body(ies) and the University structure that place themselves, O'Neill feels, above him or beyond him, to pull down "sanctified" bodies to a place where he can finger them, poke at them, split them open.   As with the depictions of the body in *Hustler*, O'Neill's body is an "unromanticized body."   It is "not a surface or a suntan: [it is] insistently material, defiantly vulgar, corporeal" (Kipnis 375).   O'Neill writes of necrophilia, condoms, killing sprees, alternative sexual orientations. His body, like *Hustler's*, is a "gaseous, fluid-emitting, *embarrassing* body, one continually defying the strictures of bourgeois manners and mores and instead governed by its lower intestinal tract--a body threatening to erupt at any moment" (Kipnis 375).   And while I am hard pressed to read O'Neill as a champion of the working class, his erupting body is one that appeals to the UNH masses--or at least large parts of the masses.

Despite the disturbing quality of this column, especially its portrayal of violence against women, many students wrote in to support O'Neill, many of them women.   One young woman writes that "Bryan O'Neill is an angry, insulting, degrading, sexist, sarcastic,

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politically incorrect, intolerant, blasphemous, lewd, atheistic, pro-nothing, disgusting, neurotic, nauseating, hopeless bastard. God, I love him." Another young woman encourages O'Neill to remain unrepentant "after he poked fun at just about everyone in last week's *TNH*. I'm sure there were plenty of people who felt uncomfortable and threatened, but isn't that O'Neill's whole point? . . . . The killing spree in Murkland Courtyard is a riot--not scary or threatening as some are bound to imagine it." These student responses give credence to Kipnis' argument that expecting all women to react the same to pornography ignores differences among women based on class, race, and experience. Just as it is a "social fact that not all women *do* experience male pornography in the same way" (Kipnis 380) not all women experienced O'Neill's writing in the same way. Indeed, another young woman writes a long, thoughtful, critical response on O'Neill. She argues that those who cry free speech and free thought in the defense of O'Neill have reduced these rights "to mere technical entities. . .divorced from the responsibility associated with them." She defends Jared Sexton as merely suggesting "that there be a bridge between language and thought." She objects to the loose use of the word fascism in regard to either Sexton's or O'Neill's columns: "I don't believe that such a historically significant term should ever be applied so freely to any public disagreement or everyday issue." She also defends "PC" as simply "being sensitive to the people around you and accepting that we live in a multicultural society." Finally, she argues that

> Bryan O'Neill does have the freedom of both the press and of speech, but we have to stop pretending that the issue at hand has anything to do with dialogue alone. Because O'Neill's column appears in such a

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public forum as a university newspaper, he cannot utilize his rights, without taking on the responsibility not to abuse them. A responsibility, which he clearly does not adhere to, and one which, through the publication of his recent column, *The New Hampshire* refuses to hold him to.

The responses are becoming even more thoughtful, eloquent, and rhetorical in their attempt to persuade. The last young woman even gives a rough definition of Bakhtin's notion of answerability. Some of these letters must have taken the writers hours to compose. It is a mark of how serious this supposed "dung-heap of a column" has become, but, of course, it's not about the column anymore. It's about issues of free speech, racism, censorship, women's rights, and civic responsibility. O'Neill's writing has become the catalyst or focal point for a Graffian debate on some of our campuses most pressing problems.

For example, student organizations begin to protest O'Neill, women's groups condemn his column in their speeches, Take Back the Night rally's cite his work as a prime example of misogynist literature. It is a pressure that O'Neill begins to feel.

Author's note: Theres a strong possibility that the Nazi powers that be are going to successfully have my column banned like the plague--their supreme logic being that you boys and girls are too fragile to handle controversial material. That's too bad. I love talking dirty to little children.

Multiculturalism debate: Would've been cooler if somebody puked. (pubic hair)

Take Back the Night: Hell, it almost seemed to be a privilege to have my name brought up in Jane Stapleton's [head of SHARPP] speech regarding "misogynists literature." Thanks Jane. It's good to know that people are willing to make me the poster child of the hyper-paranoid delusion of male evil. I'll be interested to see them take the garbage agenda a step further and explain why you have to distinguish yourself as being a "feminist" rather than just a "woman"--do you find something so inherently wrong with being a woman that you have to label yourself? Tell you what, if you can

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think of a really clever answer, I'll start leaving the toilet seat down for ya.   (tampon commercials)

Dimond Library: It's pretty easy to target me as being a woman-hater because I have a dangling lump of skin and cartilage lodged in-between my legs.   It's also pretty easy to target me as being a racist because I'm a dumb whitey who wears flannels and drinks Meister-Brau voluntarily.   But it's definitely easiest for me to target all the stinkin' hippies from the top of the library when I'm blowing their filthy heads all over the pavement.   (toe cheese)

Author's post-note: In case anybody's noticed, there's been quite a change in tone for this article over the past few weeks.   And it hasn't been a good one.   The new *TNH* editing staff is much more concerned with averting controversy than confronting it, so they've told me to "tone down" to get printed.   This, of course, makes me sell out to the same system that I've been trying to butcher for the past year.   But that's OK.   I figure in a couple of weeks I'll be sitting down at the Licker Store with all the stinkin' hippies, gathering the support of all my feminist friends over having my penis surgically removed.   That's when we'll all sit back and laugh at the fact that I ever thought something was wrong with UNH.

The tone of O'Neill's columns have indeed changed but in more ways than he admits.   While the material body is still present in lines like "lump of skin and cartilage lodged in-between my legs," "penis surgically removed," "toe cheese," "tampon commercials," and "pubic hair," the column spends more time defending O'Neill than in attacking others.   O'Neill is on the defensive.   Those who he has targeted have begun to fight back.   The entire drama draws to a head when a professor in the Communication department writes a full page editorial against O'Neill.   The article is eloquent and powerful.   I quote from it at length:

As I sit down to write, the official death count in Oklahoma City stands momentarily at 78, with 150 other victims still buried in the rubble that was once the Alfred Murrah Federal Building . . . . terrorism, like recent anti-abortion murders, is not 'random' at all but is politically motivated and fueled by enormous, irrational rage . . . . if the editors are concerned about the heinous consequences of hatred, and I take them at their word, I ask them to reconsider the wisdom of their decision to provide a regular forum on the campus for a columnist to vent his own contempt for selected groups and individuals and to muse about embarking on murderous shooting

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sprees against them. Those of us who have expressed concern about the publication of fantasies of slaughter have been told by various individuals that we do not apprehend their inherent humor, that we have failed to understand them as attempt at satire, and that we object because we do not agree with this individual's point of view. I plead guilty on all counts . . . . Beyond the obvious fact that newspapers are not bound to publish any and every opinion, speech that promotes harm or results in harm has always faced restriction (threats to kill people, bomb threats, or Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes's famous reference to 'yelling' "fire" in a crowded theater' are salient examples) . . . . Given that *The New Hampshire* column in which these musings of murder appeared also contained ridicule leveled against women engineering students, I had considered writing in about the politically-motivated massacre of 14 women engineering students at the University of Montreal in 1989. To me, this 'coincidence' rendered the columnist's fantasies of a shooting spree even more disturbing . . . . I confess that I did not relish the prospect of becoming a potential target for the contempt which had been rained on others who had spoken out . . . . I readily concede that words and deeds are often not equivalent . . . . Nonetheless, as the manufactured carnage in Oklahoma City, recent anti-abortion murders, and the horrors of the Holocaust all reveal, acts of bloody terrorism rarely, if ever, occur in some wordless vacuum. Rather, such acts are frequently the logical consequences of potent rhetorical framing and argument. Some partial truth exists, after all, in claims by defense attorneys for the murderer of Dr. Gunn in Wichita and for New Hampshire's own John Salvi similarly charged with two anti-abortion murders that extreme anti-abortion rhetoric contributed to their acts . . . . Yet when voices at UNH express outrage over the reduction of groups or individuals on campus to "turds," "vomit," "scum," and worse, or when we object to the editor's choice to publish ponderings over beating women or musings over whom to start killing first on campus given that there are "so many people, and so few bullets," we are told by the editors of *The New Hampshire* and the columnist they have defended that we are overreacting, have misordered our priorities, and are suffering from "PC paranoia." Try telling that to the families of the dead in Montreal, Brookline, Pensacola, Wichita, and now, Oklahoma City.

The fact that this letter resulted from O'Neill's columns gives great credence to Graff's belief in the pedagogical benefit of teaching the conflicts. The professor's connection of rhetoric to violence, her weaving of the personal and the political, her use of logos, ethos, and pathos are all an education in themselves. Students' are exposed not just to the professor's ideas but her beliefs. I would like to report that the professor's letter changed O'Neill's attitude. However, the

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essay had little effect on him. His last column for the paper is a thinly veiled response to the professor's editorial.

> **Mock Rape Trail:** Let's get real, people. We've already had our fun with starting a nationwide panic over one bomb, why do we need to set off another one? Is the UNH femi-nazi agenda so downtrodden by the fact that they have no potentially exploitable rape victim traumas in the news this year that they have to take the time to create a false rape scenario altogether? Gee. That sounds smart. Let's create sexual paranoia out of absolutely nothing at all. Pbbbbbtttt. That really just sounds to me like somebody in some lame Women Studies class who can't get laid. The worst part of this particular sex-bomb, however, is that if it blows up their aren't gonna [be] pieces of dead children anymore because the femi-nazis are secretly distributing heroin to all the Oyster River kids. C'mon, baby. Don't do me like that. (luv 4 taco)
>
> **Women's Rugby Team:** Nice puke! Oh. Whoops. That's a rugby chick. Help me scrape her off the tar so we can eat her. (69)

O'Neill, like Kipnis' reading of Larry Flynt, "is a man apparently both determined and destined to play out the content of his obsessions as psychodrama on our public stage" (384). His goal is to pull everyone into the muck with him. Why? Probably because discourses that challenge his view of how the world works had gained power at the University of New Hampshire. Student organizations were flourishing, a black student was elected student body president, football players were held accountable to the institution they represent. The culture O'Neill represents, a culture that wants to deny inequalities of race, class, and gender, is suddenly under attack on multiple fronts. O'Neill becomes the release value for the pressure built up in those who see this change in cultural power as threatening.

Importantly, this eruption occurs outside of the classroom. Inside the classroom there is no intermediate barrier of a column. Inside the classroom O'Neill would face direct rebuttal for what he

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has written. For example, whereas Doug was in a relationship of answerability with Kerry that developed overtime, O'Neill is immune to the one on one conference. While Doug had the restraint of a particular reader, O'Neill has the target of multiple, faceless groups. The classroom demands a level of (response)ibility that the student column does not. The classroom, in other words, does not allow for the sovereignty of position his column does.

So what should we make of all of this writing, this heteroglossia of competing voices? First, I believe that any teacher would be justified in not allowing O'Neill to write this way in his or her classroom. O'Neill does not meet the ethical standard for being treated in a open, respectful, dialogic, experimental manner. He is interested in neither being answerable to the people who disagree with him nor in making his arguments in ways that show any respect for the opposing side. He dismisses any critique of him as PC paranoia, femi-Nazi hatred, or hippie freak stupidity. Second, his writing represents a very real danger to minorities, women, and homosexuals. As the professor of communication wrote, "acts of bloody terrorism rarely, if ever, occur in some wordless vacuum." To grant O'Neill's writing equal treatment in a classroom, to sanction it with the power of the University, is dangerous and unethical.

Still, I think there is an ethical and educative role that O'Neill's writing can serve in the classroom. O'Neill's writing does have a kind of hybrid carnivalesque power to it. It is able, through mockery, to show how those of use who care about issues of race, class, and gender and the issues themselves are seen by large segments of the student population. In fact, what struck me most about the letters to

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the editor was how many students felt that O'Neill was a champion of the oppressed, of those whom PC fascism was silencing. Students wrote of O'Neill's courage, perseverance, and, most revealing, balls. O'Neill was so popular, in fact, that there was a movement to draft him for student body president. To which O'Neill responded:

> Let's face it, folks, there was no way for me to realistically compete in this year's election. No matter how amazing my ideas would have been or how well I could have presented them, the PC paranoia that's been built up on this campus has hit a level that has completely transfered our attention away from intelligent academic discourse into condescending rhetorical nothingness. Now, when I say this, I am openly condemning the bland, empty and self-serving spiels that accuse us day in and day out of being close-minded and culturally ignorant. Why, you may ask? Because I'm a dumb whitey who lives by Natural Light and *Penthouse Forum* letters.

Though O'Neill wraps the response in his typical crude humor, I think it speaks to a real feeling of anger among many students. Whether this feeling is the result of conservative rhetoric on the dangers of political correctness, actual authoritarian teachers, the demands of marginalized groups for more power, or a combination of all three, the ideas masked by the label of politically correct are failing to be internally persuasive to many students. Instead of experiencing calls for diversity, justice, and sensitivity as "tightly interwoven with 'one's own word'" (Bakhtin *The Dialogic* 345), these students experience it as a form of authoritative discourse, as discourse that "demands that we acknowledge it, that we make it our own." These students perceive the argument for diversity, gender equality, and racial justice as condescendingly having "its authority already fused to it" (342).

Further, the amount of discussion and debate that resulted from O'Neill's writing was tremendous. By the time he was done,

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professors and students had debated issues of crucial importance: the relationship of rhetoric to action, thought to language, rights to responsibilities, and the role of a free press. In short, the students were given access to the process and not merely the product of participatory democracy. When the editors of *The New Hampshire* discredited the amount of letters and complaints they received about O'Neill as a "truly amazing" waste of time and effort that could have been directed at "the real issues of today," they missed the point entirely. The controversy over O'Neill had done just that.

But should we allow this kind of writing in the classroom? I would argue that we should not--at least not in its first form, not as an equal member of a classroom community. But perhaps, as I have argued, we could use O'Neill's writing as a kind of negative ethics. as a kind of pedagogical tool. We could bring his column into our classrooms to open up the debates on racism, sexism, homophobia, and classism that are so often kept silent, sterile, or authoritarian. The writing does have great pedagogical potential for the politically oriented writing classroom. However, to tap into that potential would require an ethics of the political. There is a real danger in O'Neill's writing as there is a real danger in the rhetoric of any group that encourages or humorizes violence against others--namely, that others might put words to action. We must, therefore, proceed with caution. Moreover, to use ethics in the way I suggest requires the revival of historical consciousness. Without this consciousness the reasons why O'Neill was both effective and offensive have no explanation and provide no way to come at the issue from any intellectual distance. And yet, the most devastating aspect of radical

postmodernism is its destruction of history. The necessity of reclaiming a notion of history, therefore, is to what I would now like to turn.

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CHAPTER FOUR NOTES

1. Even though I agree with most of Lazere's argument, I find it necessary to distance myself from his belief that "the major emphasis in theory, courses, and textbooks has been on basic writing and the generation and exposition of one's own ideas, to the neglect of more advanced levels of writing that involve critical thinking in evaluating other's ideas (particularly in the public discourse of politics and mass media)--i.e., semantics, logic and argumentative rhetoric, and their application to writing critical, argumentative, and research papers and other writing from sources" (194). I do not believe that emphasizing basic writing or the exposition of one's own ideas resulted in the neglect of other ways of writing. Far from "imposing crippling restrictions on our field" (194) this emphasis represents the most prolific, diverse, and radical pedagogy we have so far produce. The scholars of this emphasis have thrown away more innovations for the classroom than the proponents of "advance writing" have thought of implementing. I also have a problem with argumentation being the "more advanced level of writing." Why is autobiography and narrative so respected everywhere but first year English?

2. Of course, constructing ethical guidelines is beyond the scope of Lazere's project.

3. See Bizzell's "Marxist Ideas in Composition Studies" page 67 footnote 1 for a discussion of Fredric Jameson's attempt to escape the ethical binary opposition discussed by Nietzsche.

4. It is postmodern both in terms of the figures I draw upon to create it and the content of what is created. My ethics is not grounded in a universal human nature, an unchanging set of physical or ideal laws, or a distanced and unified subjectivity. Like the postmodernists, I do not "reduce the other to categories of the self" (Nealon 129). Instead, my ethics attempts to embrace a dialogic intersubjectivity that recognizes the incommensurability of the other. For like the postmodernists, I believe that "Any ethical system that understands the other as simply 'like the self' will be unable to respond adequately to the other's uniqueness and singularity; indeed, such a reduction amounts to a kind of subjective colonialism, where all the other's desires are reduced to the desires of the 'home country,' the self" (Nealon 129).

5. Like the term postmodernism itself, Foucault is often hard to place. However, just as compositionist often use postmodernism synonymously for poststructuralism and postcolonialism, Foucault is often defined by all three areas when he really doesn't fit neatly into any of them. I prefer to think of Foucault as a philosopher of postmodernity. His work, in other words, is part of the larger rupture of modernism's central tenets of self, language, and their relationship, but the term postmodernism is too limiting to encompass the scope of that work. Yet because of current parlance and the legitimacy of seeing postmodernism, in its broadest sense, as the critique of modernism, I will label Foucault with the term. See Hubert L. Dreyfus' and Paul Rabinow's *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* for a discussion of the uniqueness of Foucault's work.

6. Beside the works I cite, see "On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress" and "Technologies of the Self."

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7.   However, this freedom to choose does not result from a pre-existing self, from liberating an innate self from systems of oppression, but from constructing the conditions in which choice is possible and sustainable. Foucault has "always been somewhat suspicious of the notion of liberation, because if it is not treated with precautions and within certain limits, one runs the risk of falling back on the idea that there exists a human nature or base that, as a consequence of certain historical, economic, and social processes, has been concealed, alienated, or imprisoned in and by mechanisms of repression.   According to this hypothesis, all that is required is to break these repressive deadlocks and man will be reconciled with himself, rediscover his nature or regain contact with his origin, and reestablish a full and positive relationship with himself.   I think this idea should not be accepted without scrutiny.   I am not trying to say that liberation as such . . . does not exist . . . . But we know very well . . . that this practice of liberation is not in itself sufficient to define practices of freedom that will still be needed if this people, this society, and these individuals are to be able to define admissible and acceptable forms of existence or political society" ("The Ethics" 283).

8.   Indeed, Graff points out that "there is something truly astonishing about the degree of exaggeration, patent falsehood, and plain hysteria attained by the more prominent" accounts of supposed PC fascism (3).   See pages 16-25, 34-36, and note 5 on page 197 in *Beyond the Culture Wars* for a discussion and list of sources that exaggerate the "PC crises."   For example, see Michael Kingsley's "P.C. B.S." in the May 20, 1991 *New Republic* for a rebuttal to the PC hysteria whipped up by conservative pundits.   In the article Kingsley notes, in his wry style, that "many anti-PC diatribes are just lists of things the writer finds objectionable and would like--in the spirit of toleration and free inquiry--to expunge from the college curricula" (8).

9.   This statement is meant in no way to imply that Graff is insensitive to these issues.   Indeed, his work shows a strong commitment to rectifying inequalities in race, class, and gender.   It is merely meant to show that whatever the depth of Graff's feelings, he is, at least on an intellectual and pedagogical level, able to distance himself from them

10.   Harkin's original texts reads as follows: "The objective is not to achieve a totalizing metatheory but rather to see where theories intersect, where they contradiction, where they form constellations, and, perhaps what is most important, where they form lacunae" (136).

11.   See Nealon pages 135-42 for the argument that there is still an imperialistic element in Bakhtin's work, an element that Nealon counters with Levinas

12.   I interviewed Doug in preparation for writing this chapter and received his permission to use his writing and information from the interview for this chapter.   Indeed, Doug was very willing to talk with me.   He felt that his experiences and his culture were not given adequate space or respect in our English department.

13. I am, of course, selecting the most offensive of O'Neill's writing. Not all of his work focused on issues of race, class, and gender; however, it was to these entries that praise or scorn was directed.

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CHAPTER V

FOUCAULT AND THE *PHAEDRUS* :
THE ANXIETY OF INFLUENCE AND THE INESCAPABILITY OF HISTORY

In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye . . . . this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal *must* put on immortality." -- The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians

We are far from having exhausted the significance of the few symbols we use. We can come to use them yet with a terrible simplicity. --Ralph Waldo Emerson "The Poet"

While history may be marked by no inherent plan or progression, it is the product of complex interactions of disparate groups, social institutions, ideologies, technological conditions, and modes of production. To abandon the attempt to make sense of these forces in the unfolding of history is to risk being victimized by them. --James Berlin *Rhetorics, Poetics, and Cultures*

In "Slacking Off: Border Youth and Postmodern Education," Henry Giroux welcomes us "to the backlash against postmodernism" (349). He explains the backlash as a kind of "deep-seated anti-intellectualism" (348). He argues that "while conservatives . . . see in postmodernism the worst expression of the radical legacy of the 1960s, an increasing number of radical critics view postmodernism as the cause of a wide range of theoretical excesses and political injustices" (349). It seems that from both the left and the right there has arisen "a kind of reductionism that is both disturbing and irresponsible in its refusal to engage postmodernism in any kind of dialogical, theoretical debate" (350).[1]

While I agree with Giroux's explanation for the backlash, I believe it needs to be expanded. The current backlash against

postmodernism stems not only from an anti-intellectualism that refuses to engage it but from the often hostile and fearful ways it *is* engaged. For many theorists postmodernism is a radical and dangerous break with the progressive forces of history. For example, in his article "Consequences" Stanley Fish quotes a critique of postmodernism by Israel Scheffler. Scheffler argues that to accept the postmodern world view--as encapsulated by Thomas Kuhn--is to accept that

> Independent and public controls are no more, communication has failed, the common universe of things is a delusion, reality is itself made . . . rather than discovered . . . . In place of a community of rational men following objective procedures in the pursuit of truth, we have a set of isolated monads, within each of which belief forms without systematic constraints. (qtd. in Fish 113)

While those of us more sympathetic to postmodernism might cringe at Scheffler's unproblematized use of terms like "community of rational men," "objective procedures," and the "pursuit of truth" and even laugh at his caricature of what might replace that community of rational men, the passion of Scheffler's feelings, the nostalgia for a world where objective, disinterested investigation is unchallenged points to how frightening the postmodern world view can be if it is based solely on the destruction of the previous one.

For Scheffler, postmodernism not only leads to an impasse but shatters the sacred program of the Enlightenment and its corresponding notions of truth, progress, methodology, and rationality. As Lester Faigley has argued, generalizing from the work of Jane Flax, for many people postmodernism means that "there is nothing outside contingent discourses to which a discourse of values can be grounded--no eternal truths, no universal human experience,

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no universal human rights, no overriding narrative of human progress" (*Fragments* 8).

And, to be fair, the idea of postmodernism as a radical break with history is one that many of its proponents relish. For example, Baudrillard has consistently maintained that history is no longer able to provide us with meaning. He writes:

> Postmodernity is neither optimistic nor pessimistic. It is a game with the vestiges of what has been destroyed. This is why we are 'post':-- history has stopped, one is in a kind of post-history which is without meaning. One would not be able to find any meaning in it . . . . We can no longer be said to progress . . . . But it is not at all unfortunate. I have the impression with postmodernism that there is an attempt to rediscover a certain pleasure in the irony of things, in the game of things. Right now one can tumble into total hopelessness--all the definitions, everything, it's all been done . . . . postmodernity is the attempt . . . to reach a point where one can live with what is left. It is more a survival among the remnants than anything else. (Laughter.) (*Baudrillard* 95)

Not only is there no historical meaning in Baudrillard's postmodern world, there is no plan of positive action to resist this state. Instead, we must learn to play with the pieces of our hopelessness. Given such a nihilistic tone, it is not surprising that so many theorists, be they from the left or the right, find this notion of postmodernism frightening.[2]

For theorists like Stanley Fish, however, both the extreme nature of Baudrillard's theory and the hostile and fearful view of postmodernity which it inspires rests on the same erroneous belief. It is the belief that in postmodernism all constraints on human action are no more, that one can play with the pieces of the deconstructed universe in any way one wishes. Fish argues instead that antifoundationalism or postmodernism is not

> an argument for unbridled subjectivity, for the absence of constraints on the individual . . . it is an argument for the situated

subject, for the individual who is always constrained by the local or community standards and criteria of which his judgement is an extension. ("Consequences" 113)

It is the community, Fish believes, that supplies the "systematic constraints," the controls needed for values and methodology.

However, while Fish's argument works well in refuting those, like Scheffler, who fear that postmodernism removes all constraints, it does not remove either the fear written of by Faigley or the radicalism expressed by Baudrillard. In fact, it is exactly the idea that the individual is "always [and only] constrained by the local or community standards" that Faigley says so many people fear. They fear that "there is nothing outside contingent discourses to which a discourse of values can be grounded." The constraints of the local community do not tell us whether this community's way of doing something is more or less ethical than another community's way-- except, of course, from within the community. Further, Baudrillard's argument does not "demonstrate the contextual source of convictions" (Fish 114) but maintains that there no longer is a contextual source for convictions. As Faigley points out,

Baudrillard's critique is far more extreme than merely arguing that students are situated within their culture and that any conclusions they reach will be circumscribed by that culture. Baudrillard rejects the idea that we can somehow get outside the flow of codes, simulations, and images to discover any space for social critique. (213)

For Baudrillard, context no longer provides us with meaningful constraints. We are bombarded with so many images, codes, and signs from the media that the object has become free-floating-- "everything comes from the object and everything returns to it" (Baudrillard *Fatal Strategies* 111). The result of this bombardment

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is that the "model is truer than true" and no longer needs either to refer to a model maker or the social material of which it was made (8).

To answer both Baudrillard *and* those who fear values grounded only in the narrowness of the local, therefore, we must conceive of history in a way that both acknowledges the postmodern critique yet provides a larger system of restraints for deciding values and methods than just the local community. Moreover, it must be a conception that reclaims a form of agency, a plan of positive action. a means of resistance within this history. I believe this conception of history can be formed from the concepts of intertextuality and the anxiety of influence.

Joseph Harris has criticized the concept of intertextuality as "little more than a metaphor, a shorthand label for a hermetic weave of texts and citations" ("The Idea" 15) when it comes to explaining the idea of a literate community. For Harris, intertextuality replaces "the sense of community as an active lived experience . . . [with] a shadowy network of citations" (14). When combined with the concept of the anxiety of influence and applied to the idea of history, however, intertextuality provides us with the means for shared meaning and agency within a postmodern frame, a means for setting postmodernism in productive, dialogical, and critical tension with the goals of the Enlightenment and traditional liberal humanism.

James Porter explains intertextuality as the belief that "Not infrequently, and perhaps ever and always, texts refer to other texts and in fact rely on them for their meaning. All texts are interdependent: We understand a text only insofar as we

understand its precursors" ("Intertexuality" 34). This interdependent and historical intelligibility creates a web of meaning which ties one community to another through shared texts, and it eliminates both the validity of absolute relativism and the tyranny of objectivism. We cannot make *any* interpretation of a text nor can we make an interpretation free from our situatedness. We can only make interpretations that the web of texts prefiguratively constitutes. However, given the fact that an intertexual situatedness is by definition located in multiple communities, our situatedness and our interpretations are not restricted to a single, determined monologic community. There are almost a limitless number of ways in which communities manifest themselves within the multiple, overlapping, fractured, and fluid identities of the individual. Thus, interpretation becomes a matter of drawing on a multi-communal intersubjectivity, and agency comes from our ability to "encounter and learn new codes, to intertwine codes in new ways, and to expand our semiotic potential" (Porter 41). Agency becomes what Bakhtin would call the ability to reaccentuate texts. For as Peter Mortensen reminds us, "Texts do not exist . . . in the absence of people to make them--and neither does intertextuality" ("Analyzing" 118). The anxiety of being dominated by master tropes forces us to read or misread texts in ways that make room for our own interpretations.

Viewing history as a series of inescapable yet malleable textual influences does not necessitate a return to history as linear, progressive, or universal. It is not a return to history as "the story of disembodied ideas freely floating in an intellectual ether" (Berlin, "Revisionary" 50). Neither, however, is it the surrendering of history

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to a game in which we can play with the broken pieces of the universe in any way we want. Intertextuality sees history as "a plurality of micro-narratives, limited and localized accounts that attempt to explore features of experience that the grand narratives typically exclude" (Berlin, "Postmodernism" 172), yet it maintains that these localized and limited accounts are connected--not in a "Great Chain of Being" ("Towards" 16) as Susan Jarratt might object-- but in a great web of overlapping texts.

This web, while neither an actual space outside the flow of codes nor a "neutral space from which to record a historical thing-in-itself," (Berlin, "Revisionary" 56) provides at least the lines for a continual dialogue on human values not grounded solely in one community. It creates a shared, if conflicted, space out of multiple knowledges, values, and histories that do not belong to any one community. Therefore, while the web is not outside contingent discourses, its sum is greater than its parts. History becomes not so much a progression from the past as an ability to make a meaning in the present using materials that are owned, interpreted, and fought over by multiple communities.

Baudrillard is wrong: history is neither as overdetermined nor as easily escaped as he thinks. History, the intertextual anxiety of influence, lives in and makes breathe the words we write, the arguments we make, the arguments we are able to make. Despite Baudrillard's argument that the intelligibility of the object escapes context, his own argument is understandable only through a lens of historical influence. Baudrillard is made intelligible through his connection to and our understanding of the works of Marx, Freud,

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Saussure, Heidegger, Nietzsche, and others. To paraphrase Foucault, those writers initiated the discursive practices that made Baudrillard's texts possible, and those initiators' texts were, in turn, made possible by previous initiators of texts like Plato.

To accept Baudrillard's argument is to accept the dubious notion that history no longer provides context or meaning within an argument that depends on a continual reference to and critique of history for its own intelligibility. If there truly were a complete break with history, a collapse of history's ability to provide meaning, then we could never come to that historical realization. To notice that history has disappeared is possible only from a historical perspective. To argue that history is no longer capable of providing meaning is only possible by having the historical perspective that it once did.

Postmodernism is not a radical break with but a radical critique of what history is and how it is used. As Giroux argues, and I have agreed,

> Rather than proclaiming the end of reason, postmodernism can be critically analyzed for how successfully it interrogates the limits of the project of modernist rationality and its universal claims to progress, happiness, and freedom. Instead of assuming that postmodernism has vacated the terrain of values, it seems more useful to address how it accounts for how values are constructed historically and relationally . . . . instead of claiming that postmodernism's critique of the essentialist subject denies a theory of subjectivity, it seems more productive to examine how its claims about the contingent character of identity, constructed in a multiplicity of social relations and discourse, redefines the notion of agency. ("Slacking Off" 350-51)

Within the intertextual frame, postmodernism does not destroy human rights, democracy, and science--it problematizes them. As Fish has argued, "The fact that we now have a new explanation of

how we got our beliefs—the fact, in short, that we now have a new belief—does not free us from our other beliefs or cause us to doubt them" ("Consequence" 114). Instead, it requires us to use our intelligence to hold contradictory ideas and values in our head at the same time, to play them off each other in an anxiety of influence. The benefit of holding contradicting ideas in dialogical, dialectical, and critical tension is that one value or view cannot hold supremacy in our minds without the voice of another chewing away at it. Postmodern history, like a postmodern ethics, encourages a lack of dogma, continual interpretation, and openness.

I am aware, of course, that the most radical postmodernists and anti-foundationalists will object to my notion of intertextual history as unresponsive to the power inequities inherent in any system of relations. Texts, they might argue, do not influence each other through the free-flow of egalitarian play but through strategically biased structures of power. Intertextuality not only actively privileges certain texts (usually those from privileged community members) but, through conscious and unconscious hostility or indifference, marginalizes still other texts (usually those from already marginalized groups). Moreover, they might point out that many groups did not and do not have equal or any access to the means of producing texts, that intertextuality privileges literacy over orality, ignores class exploitation, and reinforces gender inequalities. Indeed, it could be argued that the examination of Plato and Foucault that I will soon turn to once again preserves the dead white male canon.

I have two responses. First, this objection ignores the role of anxiety based agency to refigure the intertextual story. As Mortensen has pointed out, the intertexual community is not a call for consensus, "But in so far as communities . . . contain conflict, the outcome of negotiation can be the subversion of convention, a move that challenges authority" ("Analyzing" 120). Scholars like Jarratt, Quandahl, Miller, Crowley, Berlin, and Bizzell, each driven by the desire to change social conditions, have shown that the meaning of texts is as much created as it is received. Accordingly, they have woven disruptive texts into the intertext in an attempt to refigure its content and reception They have sought out the voices of the unrepresented, refigured accepted interpretations of the marginalized, and challenged the dominance of the master tropes. They have, in short, written ruptures, discontinuities, and revisions into the inherited structure of the intertext in hopes of presenting new ways of knowing. For these scholars, writing within the intertext is not a capitulation to the status quo but an act of micro-level resistance.

Second, like Terry Rassmussen, "I'm weary of anti-foundationalists crying foul everytime someone approaches anything that slightly resembles an attempt to establish a foundation or, for that matter, a promising persuasion" ("Antifoundationalism" 157). As Berlin so eloquently reinforced in *Rhetorics, Poetics, and Cultures*, there is a price to pay if we simply give up on our attempt to make meaning out of history and history meaningful. For example, if we do not reclaim history in the way I argue, then much of the nuance and wonder of the influences that breathe life into texts, connect

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communities to shared values, and complicate those communities' views on those values will be ignored. In my comparison of Foucault and Plato, I will try to show some of the often ignored echoes that exist between these two thinkers and that complicate our understanding and use of them. I do this not to reinforce the cannon but to bring one of the twentieth century's most controversial, creative, and frightening thinkers into productive tension with one of antiquity's most dominant figures. I want to subvert how Foucault and Plato are viewed by reflecting Foucault in the mirror of Plato's thought, thereby changing both the mirror and its reflection. For I maintain that Foucault is in many ways a product of Plato, a seed planted by Socrates, and a good example of the intertexual anxiety of history for which I am arguing.

Foucault and the *Phaedrus*

It seems a peculiar comparison at first: the ancient philosopher who "established" the security of the unchanging transcendental forms with the contemporary theorist who "took" all forms of transcendental security away. As Bruce Herzberg has pointed out, Foucault located and lamented the loss of discourse as an event "in the defeat of the Sophists by the model of philosophy associated with Plato" ("Michel" 70).[3] And as Sheldon Wolin has written, Foucault identified Platonic philosophy as one "of the most horrendous examples of totalizing" theory in human history ("On the Theory" 199). It would seem that if ever two thinkers were at opposite ends of the intellectual and political spectrum, it is Plato and Foucault.

Nevertheless, while granting their deep and important differences, there is also a strange symmetry between the mind of Plato and the mind of Michel Foucault,[4] a similar penetrating gaze which convicts all that falls beneath it, a shared passion to reveal how blind, conditioned, and ultimately complicit we are in our own suffering. In the *Republic*, the *Gorgias*, and the *Phaedrus* Plato bans corruptive poets, condemns false rhetoric, and belittles the importance of writing. In *Madness and Civilization*, *The Birth of the Clinic*, and *Discipline and Punish* Foucault argues that efforts to reform the fields of psychology, medicine, and corrections actually transformed systems of oppression into new and more subtle technologies of control.

In effect, both men are cultural terrorists: Plato with his realities surpassing and categorizing all human works and humans themselves; Foucault with his power emanating from everywhere, infecting everyone and every "good" action they do and know. Indeed, I argue that Michel Foucault is a Platonic philosopher without the guiding and constitutive light of the forms, a moralist without morals. His work purposefully and inescapably echoes Plato's in interest and personality if not always in theory and conclusion.[5]

The purpose of this comparison is to examine the often disregarded echoes between these two thinkers, to examine the ways and degrees to which they complement and complicate each other. It is an attempt, borrowing Susan Jarratt's project for the rhetorical historian, to "see the sophist in Plato, Augustine, and Bacon; the hidden Platonist in Nietzsche" ("Toward" 16). For despite Jarratt's

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call, little work has been done to make such a comparison between Plato and Foucault.

Richard Marback has rethought "Plato's legacy" by examining "how the reconstruction and exegesis of Plato's writings" ("Rethinking" 31) constitutes the way we see Plato, his works, and his influence, but he limits the scope of this refiguring to figures like Plotinus, Proclus, and St. Augustine--thinkers already securely situated within the Platonic legacy. Ellen Quandhal has used Foucault's concept of the "author-function" to question the "ways in which Plato has been appropriated and summarized" ("What" 347), but she does not use the concept to connect Foucault to Plato. Instead, she uses Foucaudian thought to recast Plato as "a writer whose text acknowledges, both theoretically and by example, the power of contextualized and contingent elements in rhetoric" (347). In other words, Marback and Quandhal try to open a space in which Plato's works can be seen as sympathetic to sophistry.

While supporting both Quandhal's and Marback's projects, I am concerned with expanding the question of who is seen as having appropriated or been appropriated by Plato's legacy, with making explicit the connection between Plato and Foucault that Quandhal's work makes implicitly. I undertake this project because Foucault's work, and postmodernism in general, is often feared as a dangerous and radical break with history. It should not be. Foucault's work is not an aberration that dropped fully formed out of a radical break with history but an "apostate's" critique of that history. It is fully understandable and useful only when seen as a continuation of, albeit mostly through critique and confrontation, Western thought.

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In making explicit the connections between Foucault and such texts as the *Phaedrus* and the *Gorgias,* I hope to make visible the connections to history that make Foucault's work intelligible and Plato's work relevant. Instead of dismissing Foucault as too far outside of the Western tradition to be taken seriously, or demonizing him as too dangerous to the West's projects of democracy and human rights to be useful, we should recognize him as part of that historical tradition and set him in dialectical, dialogical, and critical tension with it.

Specifically, Foucault's relationship to Plato might be viewed, using Harold Bloom's terminology, as one of an "anxiety of influence" (5). While Bloom's concept is or can be used ahistorically, it still provides a useful frame for understanding the relationship between Plato and Foucault. Foucault reads and misreads Plato's theory "so as to clear imaginative space" (5) for his own. Yet in doing so, he inexorably ties himself to Platonic philosophy. Plato becomes the initiator "of discursive practices" which "produced not only" his "own work, but the possibility and the rules of formation" of Foucault's ("What" 189).[6] He becomes Foucault's intertextual bogey man; the figure Foucault must at once invert *and* support if he is to be "free" of him: invert because if Foucault's theory is to ascend, then the interpretation of important shared interests must be wrested from Platonic domination; support because while Foucault can criticize Plato's conclusions on those shared interests, he cannot criticize the validity of the interests without invalidating his own. In short, I am arguing that we should look at Foucault as the sort of man Diogenes was looking for--"a Socrates gone mad."

The Inversion of Similarity

That Foucault saw himself and his work as part of the Western tradition, especially its classical Greek roots, is evident in the kinship he felt for Diogenes.[7] In *The Passion of Michel Foucault*, biographer James Miller argues that Foucault saw himself as Diogenes "masturbating in the market place" (363). According to Miller, Foucault interpreted this gesture as an approach to philosophy "as a field of limit-experience, pushing thought to its breaking point . . . . Putting truth to the test" in a completely public and bodily way (363). That Foucault felt a kinship with Diogenes is important not only because it ties Foucault to one of Plato's contemporaries, but because it encapsulates Foucault's relationship to Plato succinctly. The Oracle at Delphi instructed Diogenes to "change the value of the currency." This change in the value of the currency is exactly what Foucault attempts to do to Plato. He inverts the value, the interpretation of Platonic subjects, while maintaining their use as currency.

For example, in one of the most famous passages from Plato's *Phaedrus*, Socrates[8] tells Phaedrus that the soul is "entombed in this which we carry about us and call the body, in which we are imprisoned like an oyster in its shell" (126). For Plato the perfection of the soul is trapped within the weakness of the flesh. The body is a prison of appetites which dims the soul's memory of heaven. In *Discipline & Punish* Foucault argues the exact opposite:

> A 'soul' inhabits him and brings him to existence, which is itself a
> factor in the mastery that power exercises over the body. The soul is

the effect and instrument of a political anatomy; the soul is the prison of the body. (30)

In this passage Foucault inverts Plato's prison, changes the value assigned both the body and the soul but maintains the binary as rhetorically useful currency. It is not the appetites of the flesh that cause humans to suffer but "the interrogation of man's interiors" (Coles *Self* 54). It is the socially constructed and politically useful concept of the soul, the "illusion of the theologians" (Foucault, *Discipline* 30) which subjects the body to a variety of disciplines and technologies of truth.

This inversion of Platonic thought reveals both Foucault's opposition to Plato and his resulting place within the Platonic tradition as a kind of dialectic adversary.[9] Plato "started" the discourse, set the terms of the debate and their relationship; Foucault continues the discourse, accepts the importance and validity of using its terms, but then changes their meaning and relationship. Foucault's terms, therefore, can be fully understood only in relation to Plato's, only in an intertextual play of an anxiety of influence.

Foucault commits a similar inversion of Platonic thought in his treatment of madness. In the *Phaedrus* Socrates argues that madness, "when it is sent as a gift of the gods," is not an evil but "in reality the greatest of blessings" (122). Madness gives humans a special kind of knowledge, a special kind of insight, which the purely rational, sensory bound mind cannot achieve. For example, it is while Socrates is under the influence of a "madness . . . . given by the gods" (123) that he is able to communicate a figure of the soul's form to Phaedrus. In *Madness and Civilization* Foucault also argues that madness offers humanity a special kind of knowledge, a special kind

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of insight.   However, Foucault's madness is more of a blasphemous temptation than a divine gift:

> The gryllos [statues with grotesques faces set in their bellies] no longer recalls man, by its satiric form, to his spiritual vocation forgotten in the folly of desire.   It is madness become Temptation; all it embodies of the impossible, the fantastic, the inhuman, all that suggests the unnatural, the writhing of an insane presence on the earth's surface.   (20)

Here again Foucault inverts Platonic thought by changing the value assigned its subject--while simultaneously agreeing with its most basic assumption.   Plato is right.   Madness can represent an escape from prevailing normalcy, a liberation from the limitations of sanity, thought, and discourse.   Only now madness no longer recalls humans to divine wisdom but shields them from its oppression.   Madness becomes a state of "unthought" or "limit-experience", to borrow Heideggerian terminology, away from both rationality and the tyranny of the soul.

Also once again, Plato's theorizing initiates a discursive practice within, through, and by which Foucault must produce his.   Foucault wrote *Madness and Civilization* in an attempt to understand how madness became a subject of rational discourse, how madmen became knowable subjects.   During the Age of Reason, he argues, the West stopped viewing madness as a sign of divine touch or as "la Folie" and started viewing it as a subject which could be known, measured, and treated.   This change in view, however, also empowered a desire for a kind of madness which escaped the rational discourse on madness.   Ironically, it was Plato, according to Simon During, who started both this discourse and the resulting desire to escape it.

During argues that in Plato's division of madness into the secular and the divine, "Plato is already telling Foucault's story of madness's secularization; its split between insanity and la Folie" (*Foucault* 194). In other words, it was Plato who made madness a subject that could be discussed. It was Plato who began the historical process by which madness became divisible and knowable, and, therefore, which led to the desire to escape it. Foucault is drawn to, indebted to, and, to some degree, controlled by Plato as the initiator of the historical discourse that he is investigating. He cannot describe the existence of madness, validate the importance of studying it, or invert Plato's definition of it without drawing historical connections to Plato.

Not all of the similarities between Plato and Foucault, however, are inversions of shared interests. Some similarities come from actual shared ideas on those interests, a nuance of similarity that is lost if Foucault and Plato are not held in historical tension. For example, both men have similar understandings of the price of power and the danger of writing.

Strange Bedfellows

In Plato's *Gorgias* Socrates warns Callicles that he is "ill-advised" if he believes that one can "have great power in this state without conforming to its government either for better or worse" (103), and that this conformity is not merely cosmetic. Callicles "must be no mere imitator, but essentially like them" (103). Plato's use of the word *essentially* is important.[10] To be recognized as part of a power structure's ethos, to gain access and wield its power, one

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must actually *be* or *become* part of that ethos. It is a transformation which, Plato believes, can taint the soul. The person who tries "to be like his unjust ruler, and have great influence with him" finds "himself possessed of the greatest evil, that of having his soul depraved and maimed as a result of his imitation of his master and the power he has got" (102). Much like Hairston's view of the corrupting influence of literary theory, Plato warns against following those who do understanding the nature of moral behavior. Thus, for both Hairston and Plato seeking power risks one's virtue.

While Foucault denies the existence of an innate virtue that can be maimed, he offers a similar theory of power in *The Discourse on Language:*

> Disciplines constitute a system of control in the production of discourse, fixing its limits through the action of an identity taking the form of a permanent reactivation of rules . . . . none may enter into discourse on a specific subject unless he has satisfied certain conditions or if he is not, from the outset, qualified to do so. (224-25)

Like Plato, Foucault believes that to enter and employ a system of power one has to be or become enough like it to be recognized by it. One must assume or be assumed by a sanctioned identity, embody a form of rules in order to enter a discipline's discourse, in order to speak and be heard within a structure of power.[11]

Also like Plato, Foucault believes there is a potential danger in this transformation. We must confess the truth of the disciplines we enter:

> We are subjugated to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth . . . we are forced to produce the truth of power that our society demands . . . . we *must* speak the truth; we are constrained or condemned to confess or to discover the truth. (*Power/Knowledge* 93)

Power demands the confession of its truth as the price for exercising it. Disciplines need the subjugation of subjects in order to function-- like Callicles' unjust ruler needs true subjects or subjugated beings to rule. And while Foucault does not believe in a soul that can be tainted, he does believe in a political identity that can be co-opted, and that this co-optation is every bit as "profound" as Plato's tainted soul.

For example, Foucault's use of the word *confess* echoes Plato's use of the word *soul*--not in metaphysics but in ethos. Foucault draws on religious vocabulary to create the "textual image" that this confession is "forced out" from "within" a subject by an external power.[12] Moreover, his use of violent and restrictive language belies the idea that this transformation is any more cosmetic than Plato's. While Callicles' soul is "possessed," "depraved," and "maimed," Foucault's being is "subjugated," "forced," "constrained," and "condemned" by the demands of power. In short, Foucault's language purposefully takes on the tone of damnation in order to strike the same profundity of horror in Western readers as Plato's maimed soul does.

Power's demand for transformation and the corresponding danger of co-optation, either the corrupting of the soul or the production of a subjugated identity, is why, for both theorists, so few "revolutions" actually change a discipline's power structure. People believe, as Callicles does, that they can use power, attain power, enter into a power structure without it using, attaining, and entering into them. Like the oppositional pedagogues, too many revolutionaries believe that once the palace is seized, once the reigns

of power are in ideologically correct hands, then the structure will automatically change. For both Plato and Foucault resistance to state, economic, or cultural power structures is much more complex, and our actions are much more complicit in maintaining that power.

Power structures presuppose and feed off resistance to maintain, rearrange, and even expand themselves. Resistance which does not change the structure of power only reproduces that which it is fighting. As Victor Vitanza has argued "the overthrow of a political position . . . *is only a capitulation to eventual recapitulation* . . . . Revolutions-against-fascism only end up being new (political, critical, cultural, historiographical) fascisms" ("'Notes'" 107). This complicity in maintaining what you are resisting results from the fact that power is exercised rather than possessed. We do not own power so much as it owns us; we are transformed by it rather than it being transformed by us:

> Power is not exercised simply as an obligation or a prohibition on those who 'do not have it'; it invest them, is transmitted by them and through them; it exerts pressure upon them, just as they themselves, in their struggle against it, resist the grip it has on them. This means that these relations go right down into the depths of society. (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 27)

Power structures create an identity and a purpose for resisters and, in doing so, exert control over them. If the system did not exist, then neither would the resisters. Moreover, if the resisters are able to get inside a system of power and seize control of its operation, then they too will pay the price of transformation and confession. And, like Callicles, they too will discover that this transformation is not merely cosmetic but constitutive, that in changing to acquire power they have changed in being.

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Consequently, Foucault believed, according to James Miller, that the nature of power demanded that "resistance" begin at the level of the "micro-politic," at the level of what Victor Vitanza has called "individual cells . . . of critical authority" ("'Notes'" 109). Miller writes:

> To change the world required changing our selves, our bodies, our souls, and all of our old ways of 'knowing,' in addition to changing the economy and society. To 'seize' and exercise a dictatorial kind of power might thus simply reproduce the old patterns of subjectification under a new name. (*The Passion* 234)

Changing the ideology of a power structure does not necessarily change all of its functions. For example, many socialists societies still treat homosexuals, women, drug addicts, illegal immigrants, and minorities harshly. A power structure's main purpose is to promulgate itself, not to adhere to any specific ideological content.[13] What has to change is the restrictive yet productive practices that constitute thought and being. What must be changed is not only what is known and how it is known but what can be known and how knowing can be. Since these practices go down to the very depths of society, they must be resisted at that micro-level. This laser like focus is why attempts to change student ideology must focus on individual classrooms rather than on applying a predetermined political outlook. The predetermined outlook is too gross an understanding of operations of power. It risks turning itself into another oppressive structure in the name of liberation.

The death of Socrates provides a good example of a Foucaudian understanding of power and a corresponding enactment of resistance at the micro or individual level. The Socrates of Plato's *The Apology* refuses to both escape as Crito pleads and to defend himself in the

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way of "clever" rhetoricians. He does not assume, in other words, that he can use rhetoric in a manner he opposes without it using him; he does not assume that he can change himself in order to survive without corrupting himself. He refuses, in effect, to resist in ways that sanction the power structure's ways of knowing and make him complicit in maintaining and validating those ways.

Instead, Socrates presents his being, his way of knowing, as an alternative and superior way of existing in the world. He becomes a seducing object trying to persuade others to want to be like him. Nietzsche, Foucault's great teacher, makes this point in *The Birth of Tragedy:*

> From this point onward Socrates conceives it his duty to correct existence, and with an air of irreverence and superiority, as the precursor of an altogether different culture, art, and morality, he enters single-handed into a world, to touch whose very hem would give us the greatest happiness. (253)

Socrates' seeming act of submission in drinking the hemlock is actually an act of micro-level resistance. It creates a new way of being by transforming death into a different way of understanding the value of life. Indeed, Foucault believes that Socrates, in freely embracing death, establishes "'the roots of what we could call the "critical" tradition in the West'" (qtd. in Miller 462 n.15).[14] Foucault believes that Plato's Socrates establishes the way in which power structures can be resisted.

Of course, for Plato knowledge of the realities allows one to avoid the risk of co-optation. With knowledge of the realities in place, one does not seek a corrupt state's power. One may not be able to avoid the state's wrath in refusing to be co-opted (as Socrates could not), but one's innate self does not have to be tainted if that

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self is understood. The revolution of the self's ways of knowing would begin and end with remembering innate being and transcendent knowledge. Revolution for Foucault, however, would begin with the recognition of how oppressive the idea of an innate state of being is, by creating ways of being not already overpopulated with the language and power relations of others. And while Foucault is not very optimistic about our ability to create these "uncontaminated" ways of being, he draws inspiration from the being of Plato's Socrates. For while rejecting the specifics of Socrates' way of knowing, a way all too well known in our time, Foucault is drawn to it as an example, in its time, of an achieved alternative state of being, as a form of critical resistance. In any event, both Foucault and Plato believe that a price must be paid in order to enter and wield structures of power, that this price is often the transformation of being into a more subjugated entity, and that revolution begins at the micro-level.

The Tyranny of Writing

Jasper Neel has argued that Plato saw writing as "an innocuous pastime" at best and "a dangerous distraction" ("Dichotomy" 306) at worst. He has further argued that Foucault represents a modern sophist's view of writing as an "unfinished and unfinishable process" that "permeates every aspect of whatever would like to present itself as outside of and prior to writing" (308). While not disagreeing with Neel, I maintain that there is also a similarity between the two in that each man fears writing.

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Plato fears that writing weakens both the memory and the dialectic. Writing, he believes, subjugates the mind to the conventions and traditions of the transitory and external. In the *Phaedrus* Socrates warns that writing "will produce forgetfulness in the minds of those who learn to use it, because they will not practice their memory" (140). Worse, it causes humans to put "their trust" in "external characters which are no part of themselves" instead of in the memory inside of them (140). Lost in this lack of practice and outward placement of trust is the liberating knowledge of the eternal forms lying dormant within memory.

Plato also fears that writing weakens the power of the dialectic. The exchange of ideas between persons (interlocuters) with a telos of truth has power because it allows us to perfect syllogism in order to examine statements about the world. Writing, Plato believes, does not allow for this kind of continual examination:

> Writing, Phaedrus, has this strange quality, and is very like painting; for the creatures of painting stand like living beings, but if one asks them a question, they preserve a solemn silence. And so it is with written words . . . if you question them, wishing to know their sayings, they always say only one and the same thing. (*Phaedrus* 140-41)

Within the dialectic one can continually question, requestion, and re-re-question the other person. Answers can be nuanced and pushed to their limits. Whereas writing, Plato would argue, is a dead thing. The written word is always bound to culture, to the past, to the fixed, never changing text. The person can question it, but it makes no reply but what is already stated. Worse, writing, like painting, is twice removed from the ideal forms, a copy of a copy. The traces of the forms within it are even weaker than in the objects of nature. It

is harder, therefore, to see the truth of the forms within the object of writing. Writing is limited as a tool that can point beyond itself to the forms. One can only focus on its materiality and not through it.[15]

That Foucault fears writing is evident in his actions before his death. Before he died, Foucault "hurriedly destroyed hundreds of pages of notebooks, letters, and manuscripts" (James Miller 357). And "In his will, he prohibited the posthumous publication of anything he might have missed" (357). Foucault fears writing, however, not because it threatens transcendent knowledge but because it simultaneously threatens and fixes identity. In his often quoted essay "What is an Author?", Foucault defines an "'author' as a function of discourse" (180). Instead of there being an innate or eternal role for the author, the author's relation to the text changes historically. The author-function is socially constructed. In our era "Writing is now linked to sacrifice and to the sacrifice of life itself: it is the voluntary obliteration of the self . . . . Where a work had the duty of creating immortality, it now attains the right to kill, to become the murderer of its author" (Foucault 180). Whereas for Plato the true rhetorician "destroys the very medium in which he works" (Leff, "The Form" 22), for Foucault the very medium destroys the author in which it works. The author becomes "a victim of his own writing" (Foucault, "What" 180). Writing is now an act of suicide.

Foucault, however, sees this self annihilation as double-edged. On one hand, violence to the self is threatening. While Foucault claims that this writing is a "voluntary obliteration," his use of the words "attains the right to kill" belies the idea that this violence is

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under the writer's control, an extension of his or her will. One is not granted a right in Western thought--as Foucault well knows--rights are "naturally" the property of free human beings. That writing has attained the *right* to kill, therefore, suggests it is a separately existing entity not morally under the control of the writer. In fact, it is the writing which has the moral authority, the agency to control the writer. The word right denotes both moral correctness and a politically conservative ethos.

On the other hand, Foucault sees writing as a way to disappear, to erase himself, and he seeks such a disappearance: "I am no doubt not the only one who writes in order to have no face. Do not ask who I am and do not ask me to remain the same: leave it to our bureaucrats and our police to see that our papers are in order. At least spare us their morality when we write" (*Archeology* 17). And, in his famous opening to *The Archaeology of Knowledge & The Discourse on Language*, Foucault dreams of a total lack of identification within any discursive form:

> I would really like to have slipped imperceptibly into this lecture, as into all others I shall be delivering, perhaps over the years ahead. I would have preferred to be enveloped in words, borne way beyond all possible beginnings. At the moment of speaking, I would like to have perceived a nameless voice, long preceding me, leaving me merely to enmesh myself in it, taking up its cadence, and to lodge myself, when no one was looking, in its interstices as if it had paused an instant, in suspense, to beckon to me. (215)

Foucault desires a kind of anonymous oblivion out of which he can write or speak without being subjected to the rules of a discursive practice, but the words betray him and reveal that he does not believe this possible.

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In the passage quoted from page seventeen of *The Archeology of Knowledge*, Foucault is responding to an inquisitor who suddenly appears in his text and subjects him to a series of questions: "'Aren't you sure of what you're saying? Are you going to change yet again, shift your position according to the questions that are put to you, and say that objections are not really directed at the place from which you are speaking?" (17). In a sense Foucault seems to mimic the dialectic here. He confronts his fear of the "bureaucrats" and "police" by giving them presence in the form of interlocuters. However, his attempt to banish these "bureaucrats" and "police" who want to make sure his "papers are in order," also succeeds in revealing his fear of their presence. In the very act of trying to disappear, Foucault can already feel an audience whose interpretation of his writing might fix an identity onto him with which he is not comfortable. Much like Plato he feels the need to defend himself against erroneous or injurious interpretations, to attempt to control how the reader can read his work. Rather than see interpretive communities as shared and congenial as Bruffee does, Foucault and Plato both see them more as the conflicted and dangerous places that Berlin, Bizzell, and other critical theorists do. However, rather than trying to shape those interpretive communities in hopes of encouraging social transformation, Foucault and Plato try to create written documents that will protect them from an interpretive communities conceptualizing power.

In the second passage quoted, Foucault's use of the words "would really like to have" and "would have preferred" denote a wish that cannot be fulfilled. If he had the choice not to begin, then he

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would not begin. But he does not believe he has such a choice. Indeed, since his wish for no beginnings comes at the beginning of his text, it must be read ironically. Moreover, his use of the words "slipped imperceptibly" implies the existence of a panopticon-like presence watching over his beginnings and use of language, a presence he "would really like to have" avoided but cannot. He must begin, and no voice is nameless. Writing, speaking, all discourse demands a public naming in Western culture. Just as systems of power force one to confess the systems' truth, so writing and speaking force the writer and the speaker to confess their truths.

Writing is a perilous game for Foucault. Unlike Hairston, Foucault cannot see writing as ever being low-risk. Personal narrative does not lower the stakes of writing--it raises them by allowing the interpretive community to have even more authority in constructing who the writer is through what he or she has written. Writing is always a perilous exercise in self presentation. It offers a certain anonymity through self annihilation, but it also threatens to subjugate through the interpretations and judgments of others. It simultaneously allows one to escape and threatens to bring one into public existence. Foucault is produced as knowable through what he has written. Worse, he is produced as knowable through our interpretations of what he has written. Worse still, he is produced as responsible for our interpretations of what he has written, for the positions to which we assign him with respect to certain political or social causes. Foucault, after all, was very aware of what the Nazis did to Nietzsche's work and the Stalinists to Marx's.

I believe each man's fear of writing is traceable to this deeper fear of being identified with suspect, dangerous, fixed, or revealing interpretations. It is as if both men, understanding the damage that people and power structures can do by "corrupting" writing, tried to remove the possibility of being held responsible for how others interpret their writing. In the *Phaedrus* we have the irony of Plato disdaining writing in writing and then through the mouthpiece of Socrates. And while Jasper Neel has correctly pointed out the shrewdness of making such an argument in writing,[16] Plato's displacement of authorship also reveals his genuine apprehension of this new form of communication. Plato writes:

> And every word, when once it is written, is bandied about, alike among those who understand it and those who have no interest in it, and it knows not to whom to speak or not to speak; when ill-treated or unjustly reviled it always needs its father to help it; for it has no power to protect or help itself. (*Phaedrus* 141)

Plato discredits writing and plays games with authorship because he fears the interpretive presence of the reader.

Similarly, Foucault's writing, while often eloquent and poetic, is also at times so unintelligible that certainty of interpretation is impossible. He admits in *The Archeology of Knowledge* that he uses writing to create "with a rather shaky hand--a labyrinth into which I can venture, in which I can move my discourse, opening up underground passages, forcing it to go far from itself, finding overhangs that reduce and deform its itinerary" (17). Foucault purposely makes his writing difficult, "deforms its itinerary", to reduce the possibility of readers assigning one meaning to it and to him.

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In fact, James Miller speculates that Foucault enjoyed these kind of games with writing. On his death bed, Foucault may have purposely confided life long secrets to his friend Herve Guibert because he knew the young novelist would fictionalize the accounts.[17] This way Foucault could expect "that his confession would be made public--and know as well that the artist would reveal the truth only after it had been veiled in 'fiction'" (James Miller 372). Thus, while there are vast differences between Plato's concept of writing and Foucault's,[18] there are also similarities in their fear of it. Both men fear how others will interpret their writing. Both men fear what kinds of identities these interpretations will construct for them. And both men play games with writing, try to hide within it, to lessen the damage of interpretation.

These are the echoes I hear between Plato and Foucault, but they are echoes that can be fully heard only if the two are held in historical tension, in a kind of historical intertextuality. History provides a method for negotiating their texts that is more powerful than simply drifting from one text and another, but only if we grant that historical consciousness is still possible. If Foucault's work is viewed instead as simply part of a larger postmodern break with history, then such a comparison as I have made makes little sense.

A Lover of Wisdom, A Seeker of Truth

I would like to end this chapter with a story James Miller tells about Foucault and a young artist named Philip Horvitz.[19] It seems that while Foucault was teaching at Berkeley, Horvitz went to hear a lecture Foucault was delivering. After the lecture Horvitz decided to

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go to Foucault's open office hour and ask him a question.   Not well

versed in Foucaudian jargon, Horvitz asked Foucault the following

questions:

> Does the artist have an identity, or is he a powerless 'type.' who in
> the last fifty years has become more powerless than ever. due to the
> manipulation of technical media like television? Can the artist
> transcend 'The Structure?' Or is he doomed to commoditization,
> puppetizatio? (qtd. in James Miller 352)

Foucault could not answer the young man and told him to return the

next day.   The next day, however, Foucault still could not answer the

question and so asked to meet Horvitz for coffee that Friday.

Foucault's answer on Friday, according to Horvitz, was the following:

> Freedom can be found. he said--but always in context.   Power puts
> into play a dynamic of constant struggle.   There is no escaping it.
> But there is freedom in knowing the game is yours to play.   Don't
> look to authorities: the truth is in your self.   Don't be scared.   Trust
> your self.   Don't be afraid of living.   And don't be afraid of dying.
> Have courage.   Do what you feel you must: desire. create, transcend--
> you can win the game.   (qtd. in James Miller 353)

The great destroyer of subjectivity telling us to "trust in ourselves?

The man who took all forms of transcendental security away telling

us to "transcend"? The theorist obsessed with revealing the unseen

ways in which knowledge binds us telling us there is "freedom in

knowing the game is yours to play"? Yes--because Foucault's work

was not an attempt to destroy Western thought, human rights, and

democracy but to revitalize those domains through critique.   It is a

savage critique to be sure, but one, nonetheless, that ties Foucault

inexorably to the Western tradition, one that makes him useful to the

project of making our classrooms more socially just and our teaching

more self-conscious.

Perhaps the most telling moment in Foucault's life. when it

comes to understanding his relationship to that Western tradition,

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came on his death bed. As he lay dying, according to Miller. Foucault confessed to Herve Guibert that he did not see himself as a historian, an intellectual, or a revolutionary but as "a *philosopher* --a lover of wisdom, a seeker of truth" (358). These are not words one expects to hear from Michel Foucault. They sound strange coming from his mouth. Indeed, they sound more like words that would come from the mouth of Plato, but they are Foucault's words. Of course, they are also Plato's. The seeds that Socrates planted have grown in strange places.

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CHAPTER FIVE NOTES

1. Giroux is quick to distinguish between this relatively new backlash and the more serious critiques by theorists like Jurgen Habermas, Perry Anderson, David Harvey, and Terry Eagleton. He also points out that "one can find a great deal of theoretical material that refuses to dismiss postmodern discourse so easily" (364 n.5).

2. For a different view of postmodernism and its relationship to history and meaning see Lyotard's *Just Gaming* in which he tries to uphold both the heterogeneity of language games and a "justice of multiplicity"; Habermas' "Modernity versus Postmodernity" and "Modernity--An Incomplete Project" in which he views modernity as an incomplete project that postmodernism can help to complete; and Stuart Hall's and Frederic Jameson's "Clinging to the Wreckage: A Conversation" in which Jameson believes both in the existence of a postmodern capitalism and that a new class logic will emerge to confront it.

3. See Foucault's "The Order of Discourse."

4. By using the word mind I do not intend to imply that somehow I have access to the authors' intentions. Instead. I mean the personality, the shared interest, the similar feeling that my reading of each author's text evokes.

5. For example, see Foucault's *History of Sexuality* vol 2 pages 230-246 for his reading of the concept of homo-erotic love in the *Phaedrus* and the *Symposium*.

6. Foucault, of course, wrote this line in reference to Marx and Freud. I am expanding the concept by applying it to Plato.

7. See James Miller's *The Passion of Michel Foucault* pages 359-375 for a more in-depth discussion of Foucault's relationship to and last lectures on Socrates. Diogenes. the Stoics, and especially the Cynics.

8. All references to the Socrates found in this essay assume that he is a mouthpiece for Plato's ideas.

9. See Roger Moss's "The Rhetoric that Dare Not Speak Its Name" for an examination of how Oscar Wilde inverts the *Phaedrus* in his work.

10. Here and in other places in this chapter I am forced to rely on translations of Plato's and Foucault's work. There is, therefore, an inevitable slippage involved when I do close readings of individual words. However, I would maintain that my readings are of good translations and that they reflect the "spirit" of each passage if not always the nuance of the words in the original texts.

11. David Bartholomae, influenced by Foucault's post-structuralist thought, eloquently encapsulates this view of power for composition. According to Bartholomae. "the student must, by writing, become like us . . . . He must become someone he is not. He must know what we know, talk like we talk; he

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must locate himself convincingly in a language that is not his own . . . . The struggle of the student writer is not the struggle to bring out that which is within; it is the struggle to carry out those ritual activities that grant one entrance into a closed society ("Writing Assignments" 300).

12. Foucault, of course, rejects such a Descartian split between outer and inner being as itself oppressive. Yet his point is that restriction is productive. Power restricts the ways in which a thing can be known or a person can be; however, since there is no innate state of being to maim or stunt, this restriction builds an identity rather than deforms one. Repression is productive. The danger to the individual is that he or she might suffer under and be complicit in making a marginalized identity within a structure. See Foucault's *History of Sexuality* volume I pages 10-12 for his evaluation of the "'repressive hypothesis'" and the role of repression in producing identity.

13. See Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* pages 257-292 for his belief that the political issues of the penal system are not ideological but mechanical. Specifically, he argues that "if there is an overall political issue around the prison, it is not . . . whether it is to be corrective or not; whether the judges, the psychiatrists or the sociologists are to exercise more power in it than the administrators or the supervisors; it is not even whether we should have prison or something other than prison. At present, the problem lies rather in the steep rise in the use of these mechanisms of normalization and the wide-ranging powers which, through the proliferation of new disciplines, they bring with them" (306).

14. Foucault felt that it was only in the moment of death that true individuality was possible: "It is in death . . . that the individual becomes at one with himself, escaping from monotonous lives and their leveling effect; in the slow, half-subterranean, but already visibly approach of death, the dull, common life at last becomes an individuality; a black border isolates it, and gives it the style of its truth" (--as quoted in Miller 20). Consequently, he was interested in suicide as a moment of transcendence and agency. See Ludwig Binswanger's "The Case of Ellen" and Foucault's introduction to Binswanger's "Dream and Existence" to examine the beginnings of Foucault's interest in suicide as an act of agency. See also Miller's chapter "The Heart Laid Bare" pages 66-93.

15. In fact, Carol Poster argues that "Plato considers his philosophical doctrine unwrittable." See "Plato's Unwritten Doctrines: A Hermeneutic Problem in Rhetorical Historiography."

16. See Jasper Neel's *Plato, Derrida, and Writing.*

17. It seems that on his death bed Foucault revealed three incredibly private secrets about his life. The outline of them is that: 1) when Foucault was a boy his father, a stern man and brilliant surgeon, forced Foucault to watch the amputation of a man's leg in order to toughen him up; 2) that Foucault may have been haunted by the story of a woman known as 'the Sequestered of Poitiers'. She went mad and was kept locked up in a room for some twenty-five years with little food. When found she was covered with excrement, lice, maggots, and rats; and 3) that during World War II Foucault was threatened by the sudden appearance of a small group of Jewish students at his school. Foucault supposedly cursed them for challenging his position as the smartest boy in the class. Later they were taken away to camps. These secrets, if true,

subject Foucault to the kind of Freudian analysis which he, an intensely private man, feared all his life. What Miller finds interesting is that Guibert writes of these secrets in a fictionalized account. Therefore, we have no way of knowing the "truth" of Guibert's accounts and no way of knowing the truth of Foucault's secrets. See pages 363-374 for a more detailed account of these events and the controversy surrounding them.

18. For example, despite Plato's disdain for writing he does believe it can be used correctly. According to David White, Plato believed that "the writer must know the truth about the subject matter treated," and more importantly, the "writer's knowledge of truth entails knowledge of the method for arriving at truth" (8). Foucault might agree with this statement, but truth would be exactly the cultural practices produced by a situated discourse of knowledge that Plato wants to avoid. Moreover, John Johnston argues that Foucault sees "writing as a transitive intervention, a means by which the hardly visible coercive powers of discourse are confronted, wrestled with, even subverted, thereby revealing the ultimate inadequacy of discursive knowledges, categories, and their rules of formation" (800-1). Thus, while writing is to be feared, Johnston believes Foucault also sees it as politically useful. While I believe he is correct, I tend to think he is not problematizing how complicit the writer is in producing the inadequacy of discursive knowledges.

19. See James Miller pages 351-53 for a fuller account of this event.

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