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THE HABERMAS/FOUCAULT DEBATE:
IMPLICATIONS FOR RHETORIC
AND COMPOSITION

A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
English Composition

by
Fiona Jane Harris-Ramsby
September 2007

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Fiona Jane Harris-Ramsby


September 2007

Approved by:


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ABSTRACT

Since the 1980's, "radical" compositionists concerned with the politicization of the writing classroom have made use of the work of Jürgen Habermas, whose theories of communication within an ideal speech situation--that is, the public sphere--have been taken up at different times in the field. Composition appropriated Habermasian theory, it appears, in order to provide a theoretical background for their discussions of consensus and intersubjectivity--particularly in collaborative learning--and their examination of the social motives that drive dominant discourses.

However, there are problems with Habermas. Indeed, his attempt to continue the Enlightenment project with his focus on Universal Pragmatics does not fit neatly into the landscape of postmodern composition studies. Consequently, this thesis looks at Habermasian notions of "emancipatory discourse" based on "universal structures" through the lens of Habermas's "debate" with postmodern philosopher Michel Foucault.

Why Foucault? In their efforts to make Habermas "work" for composition studies, composition scholars often make amendments to their discussions by incorporating what look

suspiciously like Foucauldian principles. This thesis thus sheds light on (1) the extent to which composition has fallen short in its efforts to examine Habermasian discourse in the public sphere/politicized classroom; and (2) whether, through a careful and explicit exploration of the Habermas/Foucault debate and the competing concepts of discourse contained therein, we might make use of those concepts in the politicized classroom to inform student writing in the public sphere.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

In *Moving Beyond Academic Discourse: Composition Studies and the Public Sphere* (2002), Christian Weisser reveals how,

radical theories in composition studies . . . have recently begun to conceive of *the public sphere* as . . . a useful metaphor for how we might envision writing classrooms. (xiii)

By employing the term "radical" in reference to composition studies, Weisser refers largely to composition's interest in how ideological beliefs and power shape social, cultural, and political attitudes. Weisser goes on to demonstrate how these "radical" compositionists are interested in writing instruction that has "real political and social ramifications" (57); as a result, the writing classroom becomes overtly politicized and can be viewed as a microcosm of the public sphere.

While discussing "radical composition's" interest in the public sphere, Weisser focuses much of his attention to the social/critical theorist Jürgen Habermas, whose theories of communication in an ideal speech situation--

within the public sphere--were taken up by compositionists in the 1980s and 1990s. Compositionists appropriated Habermasian theory, it appears, in order to provide a theoretical background for their discussions of consensus and intersubjectivity in collaborative learning, their interests in the public sphere, and their examination of the social motives that drive dominant discourses.

However, composition's focus on Habermas's continuation of the Enlightenment project which attempts to find universality in reasoned and consensual communication --thus presenting an idealized dialogic space--has proved troubling for some. Indeed, in her essay "Paralogy, Externalism, and Competence: Exploring Habermas through Thomas Kent," Jacqueline Rhodes writes "compositionists have grappled (and only sporadically) with [Habermas's] ideas without much success" (1). The problem, perhaps, stems from the complexity of Habermas's theories, or more importantly, from the fact that his attempt to continue the Enlightenment project with his focus on Universal Pragmatics does not fit neatly into the landscape of postmodern composition studies (Rhodes 5).

By introducing Habermasian theory into a principally postmodern discipline, compositionists' efforts seem

somewhat misguided; for, with his version of the Enlightenment project and its potential for universality in discourse, Habermas clearly proposes the continuation of modernity. Yet, compositionists' discussions of Habermas contradictorily hinge on the postmodern idea that discourse and knowledge are context-specific and inextricably fused with the dynamics of power. In the postmodern view, discourse is not objective or indicative of absolute "truths"; the nuances of discourse are by no means universal. Thus, composition's use of Habermas presents us with an interesting inconsistency for Habermas's modernist activity sets up criteria of rational discourse that are context-transcending (Ashenden and Owen 13). In short, this inconsistency presents us with a view of the dissimilarities between modern and postmodern theories of discourse.

Using Rhodes's assessment of composition's somewhat incongruous appropriation of Habermasian theory as a springboard, this thesis investigates the work of compositionists Patricia Roberts, John Trimbur, and Irene Ward, each of whom discuss Habermas's work in terms of the potential of his version of emancipatory discourse. In my investigation, I explore what I call composition's

"Habermasian dilemma"--the contradiction implied in extending Habermasian, and therefore modernist, approaches into a principally postmodern discipline--through the lens of his "debate" with postmodern philosopher Michel Foucault, who strongly critiqued Habermasian universalism.

Why Foucault? As I see it, in their efforts to make Habermas "work" for composition studies, scholars often make amendments to their discussions of Habermas by incorporating what look suspiciously like Foucauldian principles. Foucauldian theory, more often than not, complements composition's postmodern leanings for it is wholly concerned with the inextricable relationship between power, knowledge, and discourse.

What then, can the Habermas/Foucault debate offer politicized composition studies? Firstly, this thesis sheds light on the extent to which compositionists, perhaps unconsciously, amend their examination of Habermasian discourse with Foucauldian insight in the public sphere/politicized classroom. Accordingly, I suggest that a study of the Habermas/Foucault debate foregrounds the sort of contradictions I find in composition's use of Habermas; indeed, a study of the debate explicitly highlights many of the inconsistencies between modern and postmodern theories

of discourse which can be openly explored in a politicized classroom.

Secondly, bearing the politicized classroom in mind, I analyze, through a careful exploration of the Habermas/Foucault debate and their competing concepts of discourse, how their theories might be used in composition studies, as Bernd Stahl puts it, "to complement each other, despite their fundamental differences" (4329). Indeed, following Bent Flyvbjerg, I show that an explicitly stated, "comparative analysis of the central ideas of Habermas and Foucault as they pertain to democracy and civil society" (210) offers students the opportunity to examine differing methods of critique in a politicized classroom; certainly, these critiques foreground differing perspectives--and the role power plays--on the nature of "truth" and "reason" in knowledge and discourse. Students can then utilize these critiques to assess their own vantage point when addressing social issues of their own choosing.

Finally, I indicate that in order to find a point of complementarity between Habermas and Foucault, the idea of the idealized speech situation must ultimately be dropped. For it is my contention that despite Habermas's efforts to prescribe conditions for consensus, the dynamics of power

are ever-present. I should add that my attempt to partner Habermasian and Foucauldian theory differs from composition's previous use of Habermas because it points out that composition's amendments to Habermasian theory are distinctly Foucauldian, whereas the "Foucault-like" nature of my chosen compositionists' "amendments" is merely implied.

While their debate was never a formal, public one, Habermas and Foucault both addressed communication in terms of Enlightenment ideals and responded prolifically to each other's work. To illustrate the debate's importance, Scott Moore offers the following in his introduction to a recent graduate seminar; he states:

At stake is the very nature of Reason, the form and substance of Truth, the possibility of History, and the perpetuation of Modernity or the dawning of a new Postmodern Age. Perhaps the issues at stake are best articulated by Foucault himself. Responding to a critique by a disciple of Habermas, Foucault writes "I think that the central issue of philosophy and critical thought since the eighteenth century, has been, still is, and will, I hope, remain the question, what is

this Reason that we use? What are its historical effects? What are its limits, and what are its dangers?" (Par. 2-3)

Like Foucault, "reason" is Habermas's central concern; certainly, the driving force of his theory of communication rests on his notion of rationality, or rather, "intersubjective agreement" which is "rational, negotiated assent among autonomous, responsible individuals" (Grady and Wells 1). He looks at how rationality can be characterized in universal terms based on the validity claims of participants in what he terms an ideal speech situation. As Samantha Ashenden and David Owen posit in *Foucault Contra Habermas*, since the 1971 publication of *Knowledge and Human Interests*,

The main thrust of [Habermas's] work has been concerned with redeeming the possibility of an emancipatory form of knowledge through the project of universal pragmatics by rendering plausible his theory of communicative action and rationality. (3)

I intend to discuss the nature of Universal Pragmatics later in this chapter but, for now, I venture that both Foucault and Habermas are wholly engaged in the nature of

reason/rationality and its effects on emancipatory practices in civil democracy. Yet, as I will determine, both differ radically in their critiques. Habermasian notions of universal ideals in communication, which aim at rational consensus between equal and autonomous members of a speech situation, lie in stark contrast to what Flyvbjerg terms "Foucauldian power analytics" (210). For Foucault, discourses of reason are always laced with power because power is instrumental in the establishment of knowledge within discourse; specifically, power and knowledge are inextricable (Foss, Foss, and Trapp 351). Thus, as Ashenden and Owen point out, "the crux of Foucauldian criticism is skepticism towards the context transcending power of critical reflection, its moment of unconditionality" (13) because, for Foucault, reason is actually restricted to what those in power consider reasonable. Consequently, for Foucault, a universal approach to consensus is problematic. Flyvbjerg--channeling Foucault--states: "we should operate as if universals do not exist. [In fact], where universals are said to exist, [they] must be questioned" (222). Instead, Foucault posits that domination in public discourse must be impaired not by consensual procedures

which assume the absence of power but by examinations of the exercise of power and rhetoric.(216).

In what seems like a Foucauldian move, "radical compositionists," according to Weisser, have "attempted to more fully account for the relationship between power and discourse" (25). Yet, the compositionists Weisser considers have adopted Habermasian theory to inform their pedagogy, despite its lack of acknowledgement of the power dynamics inherent in discourses. At first glance, Habermasian theory seems appropriate to introduce into the field of radical composition since his ideas of communicative rationality recommend non-coercive consensual debate whereby participants attempt to overcome their personal subjectivities. In short, participants engage in intersubjective and rational debate. Habermas's theory thus informs a version of the composition classroom which (a) models itself on the Habermasian democratic process and (b) gives us an ideal by which to measure our own investigations into ideological/political processes. However, Foucault might suggest that when aiming for consensus through rationalized debate, one must first scrutinize what is "rational." One must ask whether the participants in a politicized classroom should be guided by

abstract systems of theoretical thinking or, perhaps, via examinations of resistance and struggle in real, social, and historically grounded contexts.

I suggest Foucault offers us an alternative conception of communication within the public sphere/politicized classroom based on his focus on what Flyvbjerg deems *realpolitik*, and his seemingly (although he denied affiliation) postmodern approach to a theory of discourse. For, as Flyvbjerg states,

Whereas Habermas approaches regulation [of dominance] from a universalistic theory of discourse, Foucault seeks out a genealogical understanding of actual power relations in specific contexts. (223)

It would seem, therefore, that Foucault's approach would intrigue radical compositionists' keen interest in the politicized classroom, especially with its postmodern perception of the classroom/public sphere as a "contested, historically textured, multilayered, and sometimes contradictory site" (Weisser xiii).

Consequently, with Weisser's (among others) recent interest in the politicization of the writing classroom in mind, I suggest the Habermas/Foucault debate has much to

offer composition studies. Indeed, as stated earlier, I intend to show how Foucault's approach might be used as a complement to Habermas in order to provide a theoretical background for practical applications in the politicized writing classroom. Certainly, a fully articulated description of the Habermas/Foucault debate offers students an inroad into modernist and postmodernist thought and, further, sets the stage for students to scrutinize the power relations inherent in the discourses that shape their lives.

Before I discuss the implications of this debate for radical composition, I attempt to describe the debate more fully, keeping in mind its importance to composition studies, and the work of the compositionists I single out in Chapter Two. I must stress, however, that the length and breadth of Foucauldian and Habermasian scholarship is so daunting that any approach to it I offer will be tainted by my own re-interpretation of the debate which earnestly searches for an application to radical composition studies. However, it seems, I am in good company. According to Foss, Foss, and Trapp in *Contemporary Perspectives on Rhetoric*, Habermas himself has concluded that words, spoken or published, "have an effect on readers and listeners at the

moment of their reception which the author cannot revoke or withdraw" (237).

The remainder of this chapter provides a brief background on the ideas of Habermas and Foucault that constitute an overview of the "debate," focusing on the fundamental opposition between the two philosophers' ideas on language in public contexts. In Chapter Two, I investigate the past use of Habermasian theory within composition studies, including composition's attempts to rehabilitate Habermas through an unvoiced (or even unconscious) reliance on Foucault. Finally, Chapter Three explores what use composition might make of a fully articulated, deliberate use of the debate between Habermas and Foucault--including an attempt to reconcile them--in a politicized classroom.

Jürgen Habermas

When asked in a recent interview to pinpoint the dominant themes in his life's work, Habermas stated, "I suppose Democracy is at least one major issue in my work if I look back" (*Habermasian Reflections*). Having spent a childhood exposed to the horrors of the Nazi regime, Habermas explains democracy as "the obvious alternative to

the regime under which I had been living" (*Reflections*). Consequently, Habermas describes his ideas on democracy as the "thread running through my work at the beginning to what I am presently interested in" (*Reflections*).

Habermasian theories of democracy extend from a diverse array of philosophical, social, and political thought. Yet, to fully understand them, one must be familiar with the theories of those who have influenced his ideas. Becoming familiar with Habermas's reading list, however, is no mean feat. In the "The Technical, the Practical, and the Emancipatory: A Habermasian View of Composition Pedagogy," John Aber writes:

Part of the difficulty may lie in the breadth of Habermas's scholarship. His densely written books are stuffed with an encyclopedic range of references and allusions. Many of us who studied rhetoric and composition in graduate schools are simply not conversant with the nineteenth century German philosophical tradition that underpins Habermas's work. (124)

Habermas's influences do not only entail a vast knowledge of German philosophy. Besides the philosophies of Kant, (in particular), Schelling, and others, Habermasian theory

grounds itself in the intellectual theories of The Frankfurt School.

As one of the central surviving theorists to emerge from the Frankfurt Institute--known for its focus on social philosophy--Habermas draws much from Critical Theory. Critical Theory concerns itself with the idea, as Foss, Foss, and Trapp put it, that "society can be experienced as an arrangement of ideas that invite rational critique," (246), and expounds three fundamental tenets. Firstly, for emancipation from domination and ideology, society must move in a rational direction. We must remember, however, that as rationality is progressive, we must be aware of the contradictions inherent in it. That is, we must have the ability to see irrationality. For instance, societal participants must be aware of technical rationality which often comes at the expense of human concerns (246). Secondly, calling for "the marriage of theory and practice," Critical Theorists attempt to relate their theories to current social concerns. Events in contemporary society inform Critical Theory, as Critical Theory so too attempts to inform societal consciousness (247). Finally, Critical Theory strives to critique the belief systems that shape ideology (247). Critical Theory defines ideology as a

"system of irrational beliefs that maintain legitimacy despite the fact that it cannot be validated if subjected to rational discourse" (247). From examining briefly these three tenets we will later see how Critical Theory features largely in Habermas's theory of communication, which aims to keep a watchful eye on conditions of domination.

In addition to German philosophy and The Frankfurt School, Habermas is also influenced by Marxism. This is not surprising since, as Foss, Foss, and Trapp point out, Marxism "was central to the Frankfurt School at the time Habermas studied there" (237). However, Habermas offers a "'reconstruction of Marxism', by which he means 'taking a theory apart and putting it back together'" (237). Eung-Jun Min claims that this theoretical reconstruction strategy becomes manifest in Habermas's "reformulation of historical materialism" which features "greater emphasis on communication and culture" (1). Traditionally, historical materialism focuses on societal development and change via the analysis of its economic production. However, Min states that Habermas's reformulation is important because it "emphasizes social conditions affecting the legitimacy of various cultural forms," (1) in particular, in the way we communicate. Habermas's interest in human communication

is crucial because, as Nancy Love writes, "it is social interaction that is our distinctively human capacity" (49). Furthermore, underlying our ability to interact are certain intersubjective norms that facilitate our interactions (49). It is the recognition of rules and norms in human communication that was to become the basis for Habermas's communicative theory.

It should be no surprise, therefore, to discover that Habermas was also influenced largely by the Speech Act Theory of J. L. Austin and John Searle. In his 1965 article "What is a Speech Act?" Searle states that the production of the sentence under certain conditions constitutes an illocutionary act and these are necessarily rule governed. In his discussion of "Rules," Searle later states:

In recent years, there has been in the philosophy of language considerable discussion involving the notion of rules for the use of expressions . . . one disquieting feature of such discussions is that no such philosopher, to my knowledge at least, has ever anything like an adequate formulation of the rules for the use of even one expression. (255)

Following the work of Austin and Searle, it is clear that Habermas takes up this gauntlet. Furthermore, by laying out a complex theory of the rules that govern communicative acts, Habermas makes a case for the continuation of modernity.

Habermas's Modernism: Reason in the Public Sphere

In the article "Jürgen Habermas: Theologian of Talk," which discusses Habermas's relationship to modernity, Stephen Mitchell writes "The question is whether Justice exists and Reason can benefit society. It's postmodern to say no, but Jürgen Habermas disagrees" (par. 1). Min, echoing Mitchell, states:

Postmodernism is becoming the dominant and political form of our epoch with systematic excesses and provocations. But not everyone rejects the modernist project. Most famously, Habermas has called for the completion of the project of modernity, a project whose roots lie in the Enlightenment notion of rationality. (11)

In his re-imagining of Enlightenment rationality, Habermas claims to find the genesis of a theoretical approach which aims to smooth out the social imbalances in contemporary society (Foss, Foss, and Trapp 238). The Enlightenment's

significance to Habermas lies in his belief that "it gave birth to a particular conception of reason in the public sphere (238); he would thus salvage this version of reason to construct his own theory of communication. Simply put, the Enlightenment public sphere offered a place where individuals from the private realm could get together in the public realm (coffee houses, salons, and publishing houses) to form public opinion which was not subject to political, that is, monarchical, authority (239).

Habermas claims his idea of reasoned debate in the public sphere differs somewhat from the positivistic rationality of the Enlightenment; that is, the idea that the only valid knowledge is that which is "empirically testable," "value free," and "disinterested" (Grady and Wells 34). For Habermas, debate in the sphere rests on his version of what is rational:

We call someone rational not only if he is able to put forward an assertion and, when criticized, to provide grounds for it by pointing to the appropriate evidence, but also if he is following an established norm and is able, when criticized, to justify his action by explicating the situation in light of legitimate expectations.

We even call someone rational if he makes known a desire or an intention . . . and is then able to reassure critics in regard to the revealed experience by drawing practical consequences from it and behaving consistently thereafter. (qtd. in Ashenden and Owen 4)

Understanding Habermas's vision of rationality in the public sphere in twentieth and twenty-first century terms is crucial because, as Foss, Foss, and Trapp put it, his vision guarantees "every citizen the right of access to discussion in the public sphere by virtue of the abstract right of humanness" (239). In the public sphere, individual freedom is essential to the process of consensus. Habermas says:

The degree of legal equality should be achieved which will allow at the same time the greatest possible measure of individualism, and this means for individuals to shape their own lives . . . Freedom . . . can only be thought in connection with a network of interpersonal relationships, and this means in the context of the communicative structures of a community, which ensures that the freedom of some is not achieved

at the cost of the freedom of others. (qtd. in Foss, Foss, and Trap 233)

Thus, Habermas insists that reasoned communication within the public sphere does not allow for coercion or domination of others, thus, individual subjects reach consensus in the public sphere intersubjectively. Habermasian intersubjectivity is typified by participants engaging in communicative practices that emphasize "shared knowledge, mutual trust, and accord with one another" (Habermas qtd. in Roberts, par. 20).

While critics have labeled these ideas utopian, Habermas insists his notion of intersubjectivity has become unrealistic because of human dependence on material systems and structures (Foss, Foss, and Trapp 243). For example, because of what he terms "colonization," Habermas posits that humankind has less need to achieve consensus through communication because disputes can be resolved by adhering to sets of formal laws and regulations put in place by those in power (244). By relying on these structures, personal autonomy becomes subordinate to the rules and regulations which attempt to create efficient systems yet actually decrease the potential of consensus--through intersubjective agreement--in what Habermas calls "The

Lifeworld"; that is, the "immediate milieu of the social actor" (242).

Despite humankind's inability to divorce itself from systems that undermine the potential of consensual communication, Habermas insists that public debate is crucial for democracy. He further claims that the perfect conditions for equal, rational debate are possible in what he terms the ideal speech situation. The ideal speech situation rests on Habermas's assertion that "conditions of rational argumentation [can] operate critically as a regulative ideal immanent in all speech act offers," (Ashenden and Owen 5). Here Habermas makes his most controversial claim. He insists that despite our capacity to recognize the presuppositions of context-bound speech acts, "the validity of these presuppositions is not context bound" (5). Consequently, he claims "The transcendental moment of universal validity bursts every provinciality asunder" (qtd. in Ashenden and Owen 5). In the following section, I will explain what Habermas means by the validity of speech acts via what he terms "Universal Pragmatics."

The Ideal Speech Situation: Universal Pragmatics

Habermas attempts his continuation of modernity by looking at the way humans use language. As he reveals to

Mitchell, "in our everyday knowledge of how language is properly used, we find a common ground among all creatures with a human face" (par. 32). Following Austin and Searle's Speech Act Theory, Habermas claims to satisfy modernity's quest for universalism by finding common ground in language structures. Thus, emancipatory discourse might develop from Habermas's ideas of language being "properly used" (Mitchell, par. 32).

If, in Habermasian terms, the public sphere offers a place where one might achieve the ideal speech situation, then this situation must be a place where participants attempt communicative competence by following certain rules during an interaction; Habermas calls these rules "Universal Pragmatics." In *Addressing Postmodernity*, Barbara Biesecker addresses the implications of Universal Pragmatics. She states that following Speech Act Theory and taking an utterance or statement as the basic unit of speech for analysis (rather than the sentence), Habermas asserts that a set of relations become functional during an act of communication:

The first relation is between that which is stated and an extra linguistic reality of phenomena to which the statement refers; the

second is between that which is stated and the speakers own intentional experiences; and the third is between that which is stated and the intersubjectively established values and norms that constitute the shared lifeworld. (78)

In short, embedded within the framework of these relations is a specific goal-directed process aimed at mutual understanding. Indeed, within human communication, Habermas claims, in *Theory and Practice*, "the telos of reaching an understanding is already inherent" (17). Of course, communication is always open for distortion; for instance, a speaker might not always speak truthfully, s/he might not always be forthright, and so on. However, as Habermas reveals in *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, in a successful act of communication, competent communicators adhere to the above stated set of relations in the following ways:

1. by using the propositional sentence that will *fulfill* the presuppositions of both addressor and addressee.
2. by expressing intent in a way that it is *understood* by both addressor and addressee (according to the second relation).

3. by configuring the expression so it *conforms* to the discursive expectations of the addressor/addressee's shared identification.

(qtd. in Rhodes 4)

These rules of communicative competence constitute Habermas's validity claims. Validity claims are redeemable and indicate an interlocutor's ability to communicate in a specific way aimed at "a shared understanding of truth, rightness, and sincerity" (3).

In an act of communication, then, advancing these claims will assist the speaker in communicating in a way that, as Hugh H. Grady and Susan Wells put it, is "socially situated, open to reflection, and that refuses to value one form of discourse--scientific, persuasive, or expressive--at the expense of others" (36). In short, Habermas's vision of communicative competence, or rather his discourse ethics, posits conditions for discourse from which interlocutors can recognize universally valid norms. Most importantly, these conditions ensure that the interests of all participants are met (Cavalier and Ess, par. 16).

As Grady and Wells indicate, Habermas's ideal speech situation is not characteristic of human communication. Certainly, he recognizes that validity claims do not

necessarily constitute the normal characteristics of day to day communication (36). Indeed, we have all experienced such speech situations whereby the best interests of all the participants are not taken into account. However, Grady and Wells indicate Habermas's explicit instruction that validity claims "are logically necessary qualities of speech directed at understanding" (36). Thus, to further understanding and to enable rational consensus, validity claims implicit in communication must be redeemable. That is, validity claims must be "supportable by rational argumentation, open to questioning of assumption, addressed by speakers free from inequality, coercion, and domination" (36). Certainly, in an ideal speech situation, a participant's rationality can be challenged if it appears to be deceptive or forcefully imposing an opinion at the expense of silencing of others (36).

It is vital to remember for this project, as Maeve Cook states, that communicative competence "makes us aware that as speakers and hearers, there are certain things we must--as a matter of necessity--always already have presupposed if communication is to be successful" (3). For Habermas, these presuppositions can constitute "universal competencies" inherent in the day to day linguistic

practices of communicators engaged in the effort of mutual understanding (3). It is important to note that Habermas claims his project is context dependent; that is, "what is right and true in given communicative process is determined solely by the participants in that process" (Flyvbjerg 214). Nevertheless, he maintains that the universal structures implied by universal pragmatics do underlie his idea of rational communication, and with this theory, he projects the continuation of modernity. However, even by positing universal rules in a context dependent speech situation, Habermas neglects one very important factor: the issue of power. Consequently, as Flyvbjerg announces "Here we turn to the work of Michel Foucault" (219).

Michel Foucault

Unlike Habermas, Foucault seems extremely wary of a universalizing theory that transcends contextual boundaries. As I have indicated, Habermas insists upon a universalizing theory of discourse which holds up the yardstick against which we might measure ethical normative standards based on his notion of the ideal speech situation (and the inherent-ness of presuppositions in the advancing of validity claims.) Alternatively, Foucault indicates that

we need to study the contextual elements of language from a historical viewpoint in order to unearth the power relations in discourses. That is, we should scrutinize normative standards from a historical perspective because the projection of normative standards according to a universalizing theory can result in the privileging of one discourse over another.

Paul Rainbow highlights Foucault's suspicion of universal truths in his introduction to *The Foucault Reader*, claiming "He doesn't refute them; instead his consistent response is to historicize grand abstractions" (4). Therefore, Foucault rejects the notion of a transcendental "beyond"--that is, the assertion of an inherent moral ethic in human speech--because, for Foucault, this morality is a consequence of arbitrary, historical conditions and power struggles. As a result, he questions the ethical standards Habermas proposes, despite Habermas's efforts to sustain a theory of discourse that cannot be exploited (Flyvbjerg 215).

Foucault's critique--which rests on the notion that human values and beliefs emerge out of historical, social, and political "accidents" rather than a historical progression towards an ideal societal vision--takes what he

terms first an "archeological" approach (*The Birth of the Clinic* [1963], *The Order of things* [1966], *The Archeology of Knowledge* [1968]) and later, following Nietzsche, a "genealogical" approach (*Discipline and Punish* [1975]). According to Gary Cutting in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*,

The premise of the archaeological method is that systems of thought and knowledge (epistemes or discursive formations, in Foucault's terminology) are governed by rules, beyond those of grammar and logic, that operate beneath the consciousness of individual subjects and define a system of conceptual possibilities that determines the boundaries of thought in a given domain and period. (par. 11)

The force of archaeology's criticism lies in the comparison of different systems of thought during different historical periods. Foucault reveals the contingency of the "truths" of those systems. He claims these "truths" are random and accidental, not conveyers of preexisting meaning (Bizzell and Herzberg 1432). In fact, in "The Order of Discourse," Foucault remarks that "the tendency of Western philosophy has been the desire to locate truth in something other than

the discourse itself" (1432). He calls this the Will to Truth. Foucault points out the Will to Truth by showing that previous ages had systems of thought very different to others. He uses Greek history as an example:

There is no doubt that the division is historically constituted. For the Greek poets of the sixth century BC, the true discourse . . . the discourse which inspired respect and terror . . . the discourse which in prophesying the future not only announced what was going to happen but helped make it happen, carrying men's minds along with it and thus weaving it into the fabric of destiny. Yet already a century later the highest truth no longer resided in what discourse was or did . . . the true discourse is no longer precious and desirable, since it is no longer linked to the exercise of power. (1462)

The exercise of power, for Foucault, drives The Will to Truth; indeed, according to Foss, Foss, and Trapp, Foucault became interested in the effects of power on discourse when "he came to realize that the treatment of knowledge within discourse can not be separated from the operation of power" (351). However, the archeological method, while effective

in showing that notions of Truth are always dependent on a particular system of thought and therefore indicative of systems of power, says little about the transition process from one system to another, or rather, how systems of thought are generated. Consequently, Foucault, inspired by Nietzsche, employed the genealogical method which surfaces in *Discipline and Punish*.

On discovering Nietzsche, Foucault says "Nietzsche was a revelation to me. I felt there was something quite different from what I had been taught" (qtd. in Foss, Foss, and Trapp 341). Following Nietzsche,

Foucault intended the term "genealogy" to evoke Nietzsche's genealogy of morals, particularly with its suggestion of complex, mundane, inglorious origins—in no way part of any grand scheme of progressive history. The point of a genealogical analysis is to show that a given system of thought (itself uncovered in its essential structures by archaeology, which therefore remains part of Foucault's historiography) was the result of contingent turns of history, not the outcome of rationally inevitable trends. (Cutting, par. 13)

When asking how knowledge (and the power structures which support it) is made possible--or rather "How does it happen at a given period something could be said and something else has never been said" (Foss, Foss, and Trapp 347)--Foucault's genealogical method rejects the search for origins of thought which indicate ideal or glorious beginnings (much like Plato's return to the place of ideal forms). In "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," Foucault restates Nietzsche's assertion that "genealogy . . . rejects the meta-historical deployment of ideal significations and indefinite teleologies" (77). Why? Foucault answers:

Because it is an attempt to capture the exact essence of things in their purest possibilities, and their carefully protected identities . . . because this search assumes the existence of immobile forms that precede the external world of accident and succession. (78)

For Nietzsche, and Foucault, there are no ideal beginnings, for, via the referral to ideal beginnings, systems of thought are able to dictate who speaks and what can or cannot be said. Instead of the search for origins of thought as they progress through a glorious teleological

view of history, genealogy's task reveals a messy, fragmented view as it aims to identify,

the accidents, the minute deviations--or conversely the complete reversals--the errors, the false appraisals, and the faulty calculations that gave birth to all those things that continue to exist and have value for us; it is to discover that truth and being does not lie at the root of what we know and what we are, but the exteriority of accidents. (81)

In short, systems of thought are often contingent upon and/or are a result of historical mishaps and sites of conflict.

To recognize the contingency of systems of thought in history, Foucault suggests a re-realization of history by way of, what Nietzsche terms, Effective History. Effective History is a historical standpoint which rejects "the dull constancy of instinctual life" (Foucault 86)--instinctual in the sense that we have learned habits, values, and ideals rather than received them from some metaphysical source. Effective history should impose its genealogical gaze upon what Foucault terms, "the universe of rules" and record "the history of morals, ideals, and metaphysical

concepts, the history of the concept of liberty or the ascetic life" (Foucault 86). A historical sense which overthrows the universe of rules put in place by the millennial play of systems of domination can evade the metaphysical heights humankind habitually strives for and refuse what Foucault deems "the certainty of absolutes" (87). Consequently, an "effective" historical sense might reveal discourses that might have otherwise remained mute.

Foucault and Reason

Bearing in mind Foucault's reluctance to idealize the origins of systems of thought, we can now explore his scrutiny of reason. Firstly, we should recall Habermas's point of view that reason, or "what is rational," has particular characteristics; for instance, an assertion must adhere to "established norms" and when criticized, point to "appropriate evidence . . . in the light of legitimate expectations" (qtd. in Ashenden and Owen 4). I will compare this view--which has its "roots" in the Enlightenment's version of Reason--with that of Foucault's. Taking into consideration that Habermasian attempts to rescue modernity stem from a re-articulation of the Enlightenment, Foucault reminds us in "What is Enlightenment" that the Enlightenment should be scrutinized as an historical event

rather than a formula for how society "should" think. He reminds us that the Enlightenment emerged from a "complex historical process that is located at a certain point in the development of European societies" (43). Therefore, even Enlightenment Reason should not escape genealogy's scrutiny which, according to Foucault in "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," unsurprisingly unearths its messy beginnings:

Examining the history of reason, [the genealogist] learns that it was born in an altogether "reasonable" fashion--from chance; devotion to truth and the precision of scientific methods arose from the passion of scholars, their reciprocal hatred, their fanatical and unending discussions, and their spirit of competition--the personal conflicts that slowly forged the weapons of reason. (78)

If, therefore, Foucault's notion that Enlightenment reason emerges from passions, conflict, and competition, Habermas's attempts to hypothesize established norms (loosely based on a version of Enlightenment Reason), which themselves seem to suggest that they are beyond human "passions," and which ultimately seek to free societies

from coercion, might arouse Foucauldian suspicion. This is not to say Foucault rejects reason; according to Flyvbjerg, Foucault agrees that in politics one must "side with reason" ("Ideal Theory" 8). However, Flyvbjerg reiterates Foucault words of caution in *L' impossible Prison* "that to respect rationalism as an ideal should never constitute a blackmail to prevent an analysis of the rationalities really at work" (8). Foucault might, therefore, suggest Habermas's "reasonable" norms are products of a contingent notion of "truth" put in place by those in power.

Consequently, in contrast to Habermas's approach, genealogy cannot authenticate these norms into absolutes--that is, constitutional standards that anticipate and dictate human behaviour--but instead, as Foucault tells us in "Nietzsche, Genealogy, and History," it "seeks to reestablish the various systems of subjection" (83). That is, genealogy seeks to uncover what is left out while societal norms are constructed.

Yet, as David Couzens Hoy articulates in *Critical Theory*, genealogy does not look for any definitive definitions about what is rational and what is not. Hoy highlights Foucault's reluctance to be "for" or "against" a traditional conception of reason citing Foucault's

accusation that this point of view is "blackmail because it seems to make a 'rational critique of rationality' impossible" (146). He states:

In contrast to Habermas, Foucault does not think that to undertake a rational critique of rationality one must construct a theory of what rationality really is as the counterpoint to the conception that took itself as rational but that it is shown by critical investigation to be veiling deep irrationality. For Foucault, Reason is "self creating." (146)

Hoy points out that the bottom line is not to argue about what or what is not rational; instead, a genealogy attempts to show that "because forms of rationality have been made, they can be unmade . . . rationality is not an abstract theory but enmeshed in the background web of concrete practices" (148). In short, rationality is a human practice which is subject to the same errors, emotions, conflicts, and accidents that face all humans during their moment of historical difference.

Foucault and Contemporary Society

Ashenden and Owen highlight two problematics which articulate Foucault's critical approach, both archeologically and genealogically:

1. How do human beings govern themselves and others by the production of truth?
2. How can the growth of capabilities [in modern society] be disconnected from the intensification of power relations? (9)

Once again, Foucault does not aim to discover a unifying and universal theory of truth which might be applied to a politicized speech situation; instead, he wants to uncover the politics underlying what is "True" or what, as he states in "Truth and Power," "induces regular effects of power" (73). He continues:

Each society has its regime of truth, its general politics of truth: that is the types of discourses which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition

of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true. (73)

In a sense Foucault does recognize societal norms as legitimate but their authority is contingent on a particular society's recognition of truth. Thus, in addressing the first problematic, we might hazard a guess that societies govern themselves based on the contingent notion of what is valid and accepted within the political framework of that particular society.

To attend to the second problematic, Flyvbjerg ("Ideal Theory, Real Rationality: Habermas versus Foucault and Nietzsche") proposes that Foucault's critique suggests its own normative standards; however, his standards don't impose meaning on societies, rather, Foucauldian "norms" challenge "every abuse of power whoever the author, whoever the victims" (Flyvbjerg 9). Thus, a genealogical critique might facilitate the disconnection between growth of capabilities in modern society and the intensification of power relations. Consequently, any form of government, be it totalitarian or pluralistic, should be subject to "analysis and critique based on [its citizens] will not to be dominated [and] the ability to voice concerns in public" (9). However, according to Flyvbjerg, Foucauldian norms

cannot be given universal grounding because "they are based on a personal and historical context" (9). Such a grounding would be objectionable since it would give rise to "utopian/totalitarian implications that Foucault would warn against in any context, be it that of Marx, Rousseau or Habermas" (9). For Foucault, at no other time in history has more suffering been produced than by societies who propound "strong commitments to implementing utopian visions of the good" (9).

Conclusion

While the Habermas/Foucault debate on the characteristics and possibilities of discourse in civil society extends far beyond my discussion here, I hope I have forwarded an introductory overview which will offer a framework through which I can revisit composition's use of Habermas. To summarize this overview therefore, I turn to Bernd Stahl who states:

Briefly, Foucault stands for the investigation of power . . . on historical discourses whereas Habermas stands for a normative explication of the validity and acceptability of discourses. Foucault can be read as an attack on the

universalistic idea of rationality whereas
Habermas tries to uphold the power of reason and
the validity of norms despite the end of grand
narratives. (4331)

As for Habermas's criticism of Foucault, Flyvbjerg
clarifies that it rests on his complaint that Foucault
cannot give "an account of the normative foundations for
his thinking" (220). Furthermore, Habermas accuses Foucault
of being relativistic and crypto-normative (220). As for
Habermas, "he has not, so far, been able to demonstrate
that rational and universal grounding of his discourse
ethics is possible, he has only postulated such grounding"
(220). In short, Habermas hypothesizes rules which ensure
equal participation in democracy, but have yet to be
demonstrated; whereas Foucault, "shows restraint in matters
of commitments to ideas and systems of thought about what
is good for man" (222) based on his insistence that power
struggles dominate human history rather than the adherence
to abstract ideals.

So, what can the Habermas/Foucault debate offer
composition studies? It is my contention that it can inform
students in a politicized classroom about the limits of
universal theories of "reasonable" discourse and the power

dynamics inherent in those discourses; in view of this, I address this assertion in more detail in Chapter Three. Firstly, however, and bearing in mind the postmodern and politicized landscape within which composition is often situated, my next chapter will locate Habermasian theory in articles by Patricia Roberts, John Trimbur, and Irene Ward. In doing so, I will show how these compositionists, perhaps unconsciously due to the influence of postmodernism on composition studies, seem to amend Habermas's work by turning to a Foucauldian method of critique. For my purposes, scrutinizing these amendments serves to highlight the dissimilarities between Habermasian and Foucauldian theories of discourse which will, in turn, explicitly inform a politicized classroom that concerns itself with public writing.

CHAPTER TWO
HABERMASIAN APPROACHES IN
COMPOSITION STUDIES

According to Jacqueline Rhodes, Habermas's very "modern" attempt to continue the Enlightenment project, with his focus on Universal Pragmatics, "does not fit neatly into the landscape of postmodern composition studies" (5). Consequently, the compositionists who look to Habermas to inform their theories of writing try to make him "fit" into their work by weaving in postmodern and, as I will suggest, Foucauldian perspectives. The purpose of this chapter, therefore, is twofold: firstly, I will discuss the commanding influence of postmodernism in composition and identify postmodern (and Foucauldian) tendencies in the field by way of Dragon Milovanovic's investigation, "Dueling Paradigms: Modernist v. Postmodernist Thought." Secondly, I will discuss the work of three compositionists, Patricia Roberts, John Trimbur, and Irene Ward, each of whom use Habermasian theory to enrich their discussions of writing in the collaborative classroom, and, in Ward's case, to study the implications of envisioning the Internet as a democratic public sphere.

I will show that, in all three cases, these writers reveal their postmodern leanings when they amend their use of Habermas with Foucauldian perspectives. These perspectives emerge in compositionists' discussions of difference, dissensus, and the power relations inherent in discourses. This indicates composition's endeavor to ground itself in postmodern thought; hence, Habermas's modern leanings--which come across in his adherence to an ideal speech situation--seem somewhat contradictory in the light of composition's postmodern tendencies.

Postmodernism

Foucault and Postmodernism

In *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, Habermas dedicates two chapters to a critique of Foucault who, according to James Schmidt, "[has] followed Nietzsche in regarding Modernity as utterly beyond redemption" (315). While Foucault has rejected affiliation with "movements," he is, more often than not, labeled a postmodernist. For instance, in "Dueling Paradigms: Modernity v. Post Modernist Thought," Milovanovic claims:

Post modernist analysis had its roots in French thought, particularly during the late 1960s and

early 1970s. Here, with the continued disillusionment with conventional critical thought, a transition from Hegelian to Nietzschean thought took place. Deleuze, Guattari, Derrida, Lyotard, Baudrillard, and Foucault . . . were to emerge bearing the banner of postmodern thinking (par. 4).

Like Milovanovic, Gary Aylesworth also attests to Foucault's postmodern leanings, claiming that his "application of genealogy to formative moments in modernity's history" places him firmly "within the scope of postmodern discourse" (par. 24).

Firstly then, before I address Roberts, Trimbur, and Ward, I'd like to discuss the effects of postmodernism on composition and how we can locate Foucauldian principles within postmodern composition studies.

Postmodernism and the Writer

Composition has clearly assumed a postmodern perspective in the last two decades. In *The Bedford Bibliography: History of Rhetoric and Composition*, Nedra Reynolds, Bruce Herzberg, and Patricia Bizzell state that the,

powerful themes (in comp studies) of the 1980's [were] social construction, politics, literacy, and gender issues . . . [which] extended into the nineties to work that related composition to postmodern and cultural studies. (9)

Many books and articles have focused on postmodern trends which are intricately connected with social constructivist theories. For instance, in "Pomo Blues: Stories from First Year Composition," Lee Ann Carroll cites postmodernity's influence on such composition giants as Lester Faigley (*Fragments of Rationality: Post Modernity and the Subject of Composition*), Patricia Harkin and John Schilb (*Contending with Words: Composition in the Postmodern Age*), and Susan Miller (*Textual Carnivals*) (916). Faigley, according to Carroll, claims that composition has "come to accept a postmodern view of knowledge and discourse of all kinds as socially and politically constructed" (917). Accordingly, Carroll emphasizes Faigley's point of view and demonstrates the postmodern influence on writing studies in five key areas. These "five key postmodernist ideas"--which shape the production of writing--state:

- (1) "The stories we tell are the stories that are culturally available to us" (920).

- (2) "The conventions and details of many of the stories we tell are in a sense, already written and read by the culture" (922).
- (3) "The stories we can tell are constrained by the context in which we tell them, with much left out or suppressed" (923).
- (4) "Non-narrative forms are often closely related to suppressed personal narratives" (927).
- (5) "All texts are interested--none are inherently "Normal" or "Neutral" (928).

In citing these concepts, Carroll takes up the postmodern point of view that dispenses with traditional and modernist views of the lone writer. Furthermore, she indicates the non-neutral characteristics of discourse.

To clarify the postmodern position, Milovanovic explains that "modernist thought has privileged the idea of the individual as a person who is assumed to be conscious, whole, self-directing, reflective and unitary" (par. 24). However, as Carroll's concepts indicate, the writer as a self-constructing individual is no longer accepted by the postmodern paradigm. Milovanovic elaborates that the postmodern subject "is more determined than determining, is less unified . . . caught within the constraints of

competing discourses and their structuring properties" (par. 25). By "structuring properties," Milovanovic refers to the subject's socio-cultural experience. Thus, the writer can only write what is experientially available according to her/his socio-cultural history.

The most important aspect of Carroll's work, for my discussion here, is that in the postmodern paradigm, knowledge and discourse echo contingent and provisional versions of truth which, as we might surmise from above, are culturally bound. In short, cultural ideas are conditional on (to use a Foucauldian expression) a specific "discursive formation," that is, a system of thought. Thus, when Carroll states that the stories written by her students are already "culturally available to us," and "written and read by the culture," she indicates that they are informed by cultural practices that are, as Milovanovic reinforces, anything but neutral. He states that for postmodernists there are,

many discourses reflective of local sites of production, each in turn, existing with a potential for the embodiment of desire in signifiers and for the construction of realities.

(par. 34)

This "desire" relates to whose "realities" are constructed and maintained as the dominant norm. From a postmodern perspective, we can assume that these realities reflect dominant and powerful discourses; consequently, a postmodernist outlook indicates that we can expect, as Carroll iterates, that "much is suppressed" during the construction of these realities.

Thus, Carroll's fifth concept "all texts are interested--none are inherently 'Normal. . .'" indicates the postmodern, and Foucauldian, outlook that knowledge and power are inextricably interwoven. Knowledge and ideology are consequences of the dominant discourse which is, generally, perceived as the most relevant, and since, as Milovanovic states, "subjects must situate themselves in it, they are subject to its interpellative effects" (par. 42). In short, no text is value-free. Every text reproduces ideological "norms" in one way or another, and we can thus assume, as Foucault shows us, that these norms reflect the interests of those in power. In Carroll's case, this plays out as her students write for-those-in-authority (with all the power relations that implies); thus, students' production is informed by the demands of the academy.

Postmodernism and "Radical" Composition

James Berlin offers more examples of the substantial effects of postmodernism on composition studies. In "Post structuralism, Cultural Studies and the Composition Classroom: Postmodern Theory in Practice," he maintains,

It is clear to me that rhetoric and composition studies has arrived as a serious field of study because it has taken into account the best that has been thought about and said about its concerns from the past and present, and I have found that postmodern work in historical and contemporary rhetorical theory has done much to further this effort. (16)

As far as, what Weisser terms, "radical" composition is concerned, the importance of postmodernism lies in the fact that it has informed "one of the most distinguishing features of the radical compositionist's approach [which is] its emphasis on ideology" (Weisser 27).

Milovanovic tackles the issue of how ideology surfaces in systems of thought in his discussions of "society and social structure" (3). For modernists, the search for over-encompassing theories of society typifies modernist thought--such as Habermas's theory of communicative action,

which we might assume to be a foundational, or rather, constitutional approach to societal theory. Contrarily, as Milovanovic states, postmodernism dictates "that the search for an overall, all-encompassing totalizing theory [of society] is an illusory exercise" (par. 13). Milovanovic further claims that for postmodernism, "no possibility exists for precisely specifying initial conditions" of a stable order in society (par. 13). That is, postmodernism rejects foundationalist ideological principles. This view corresponds with Foucault's assertion that there are no "ideal" beginnings in societal structure, for, when individuals or governments refer to ideal beginnings, systems of thought dictate who speaks and what can or cannot be said. Following this, we might assume that the voices that are heard reflect dominant ideologies.

Postmodernism thus views the emergence of ideological paradigms as the result of conflict rather than adherence to ideals. As noted in Chapter One, this notion corresponds to Foucauldian theory. To illustrate this concept of ideology further, Weisser cites Berlin's discussion of discourse and the ideological burdens it carries in *Rhetoric and Ideology*; Weisser states,

Radical compositionists see discourse as deeply implicated with dominant ideology, and they see ideology as transmitted through language practices that are always at the center of conflicts and contest. (27)

In "Post structuralism . . ." Berlin elaborates, stating that the postmodern subject "is considered a construction of varying signifying practices, the uses of language, of a given historical moment" (18). These "signifying practices" are discourses that identify us and tell us "how we should behave in terms of such categories as gender, race, class, ethnicity and the like" (18). To emphasize, Berlin cites (among others) Foucault's "discursive formations." These formations amount to, "elaborate systems of signifying systems [which] form power/knowledge formations that govern action during successive stages in history" (19). We can assume, therefore, that these power/knowledge formations shape discourses which uphold the signifying practices of dominant discourse.

From an idealist perspective, it would appear that since the subjects within a discursive regime share the recognition of "signifying practices," Berlin's ideas could coincide with Habermas's insofar as participants in the

"lifeworld" recognize established shared values and norms. These shared practices could possibly further Habermasian ideals of mutual understanding and co-operation within societal structures. However, as Berlin reveals in "Poststructuralism . . ." we are all composed of "various competing discourses, conflicted and contradictory scripts, that make our consciousness anything but unified, coherent and autonomous" (18). Consequently, the competing discourses that make up our shared "lifeworlds," possibly share fewer values and norms than Habermas envisages, even if equal participation in a discourse community is context dependent; the writing classroom is one example. Thus, overcoming the obstacles put in place by the power relations inherent in competing discourses can obstruct consensual procedures.

Indeed, as Rhodes points out, the nature of discourse is variable. For instance, she furthers Grady and Well's notion that discourse communities "each [have their] own set of questions--of truth and value, [and] of social roles and sincerity" (5-6). Both Berlin and Rhodes, therefore, appear to reiterate the postmodern point of view put forward by Milovanovic in his discussion of "discourse" which highlights the multiplicity of voices, "dialectics of

struggle" and "languages of possibility" within a given society. He claims that unlike modernism, postmodernism does not assume a neutral discourse and the "signified is multiaccentual, the site of diverse struggles" (par. 34). Consequently, postmodernists "identify the violence of language," and "linguistic repression and alienation are the results of historically situated hegemonic discourses" (par. 35). It is thus that the variability of discourse and the contradictory and conflicted subject pose challenges to the attainment of Habermas's utopian, idealized, and intersubjective speech situation as it attempts to address social change. As Berlin states,

The signifying practices of different groups . . . compete in forwarding different agendas for the ways people are to regard their historical positions and their modes of responding to them and these signifying practices are always a scene of battle. (22)

While Habermasian theory attempts to account for and transcend these battles with a universalizing theory of communication, I take up Rhodes's position that postmodernist composition studies' attempt to "fully use Habermas [while] at the same time . . . we resist the

impulse to universalize ourselves or our ways to knowledge" (6) is problematic.

In "Ideological Critique in Rhetoric and Composition," Gary Olson's point of view is similar to Berlin's and thus demonstrates the effects of postmodernism on composition pedagogy. He claims,

significantly, the kind of pedagogy that Berlin and many of us envision is thoroughly rhetorical: it is deeply concerned with context, audience, and how signifying practices are employed to further ideological interests. (85)

(We might recall that Foucault labels this furthering of ideological interests, "The Will to Truth"). It is also important to note here that Olson confirms composition's political involvement; indeed, themes of "ideology," "hegemony" and "power"--which are all implicated in Foucault's work--dominate much of the language surrounding current composition theory.

Meanwhile, one can locate the aforementioned terms--as well as radical composition's preoccupation with ideology--in the postmodern realm via Milovanovic's explication of "Social Change." As far as the capacity for social change is concerned in modernism, an alternative vision of the

social is usually tied to the initial logic of the major premise of the status quo (par. 66). Thus, the oppositionist campaigning for social change, often "inadvertently recreates the dominant repressive order" (par. 66). On the other hand, postmodernist thought pertaining to "social change," "focuses more on nonlinear conceptions of historical change"; consequently, "much room must be made for the contributions of contingency, irony, the spontaneous, and the marginal" (par. 67). Thus, for Milovanovic, key concepts for social change from a postmodern stance include: premises of action based on tolerability, multiplicities of resistance to power, genealogy, dialectics of struggle, dialogism, affirmative action, and language of possibility (par. 65).

After reviewing Milovanovic's postmodern characteristics regarding social change, we can see how radical composition's interests overlap with a postmodern and Foucauldian sensibility; particularly, in how postmodernism approaches issues of diversity, tolerance for the incommensurable, antifoundationalism, and constitutive theory (par. 8). Furthermore, composition indicates its alignment with postmodernism with its attention to

multiplicities of resistance to power, and dialectics of struggle (par. 65).

My intention in this discussion is to situate the Habermas/Foucault debate within the boundaries of contemporary composition studies which, in turn, largely positions itself against a postmodern landscape. In the latter part of this chapter therefore, I visit the work of Patricia Roberts, John Trimbur, and Irene Ward to see (a) how they have made use of Habermasian theories of communicative action in the Public Sphere and that (b), when elucidating these theories, they unconsciously fall back on Foucauldian principles which address postmodern perspectives of problems of ideology, conflict, variability, and most importantly, the power relations inherent in discourse.

Habermasian Theory in Composition Studies

Before exploring composition's use of Habermas, I should briefly recap the "debate." As Samantha Ashenden and David Owen posit,

Habermas' objection to Foucault's account [of rational critique] is that it identifies being context dependent with being context bound,

whereas he sees his own activity as deploying criteria of rationality which are context transcending. (13)

Challenging Habermas, Foucault's critique exhibits skepticism toward Habermas's critical reflection with its claims to transcendence and universal principles (13). This skepticism rests on Foucault's concern that Habermas's modernist insistence on proposing "the form of critical reflection," as opposed to "elaborating a form of critical reflection" (1), "tends to freeze certain juridical ways of thought and action" (13-14). In short, by positing his rules for the ideal speech situation, Habermas imposes standards on democratic consensus which, for Foucault, must be subjected to genealogical scrutiny. We must not forget that both Habermas and Foucault are interested in inclusionary emancipatory processes, but as Flyvebjerg suggests,

We [might] ask whether such empowerment is best understood and acted, in terms of [modernist] consensus or whether [a postmodern examination of] conflict is a more suitable frame of reference. ("Habermas and Foucault: Thinkers for Civil Society" 211)

Bearing this question in mind, we can now look to how composition has made use of Habermasian theory.

Patricia Roberts

As discussed before, Rhodes critiques composition's recent use of Habermasian theory, noting the difficulty compositionists have encountered with Habermas's writing style, translation, and most importantly, with his articulation of ideology (2). These ideological difficulties have earned him criticism, besides Foucault's, as Foss, Foss, and Trapp note:

Many critics fault Habermas's tendency toward utopianism, which down plays the particulars of political life in favor of abstract and generalized notions of rationality and emancipation. For example, they criticize Habermas for his notion of the ideal speech situation--the foundation of his notion of rationality. The very idea of the ideal is problematic for many scholars because it suggests a perfection not possible in language. (252)

I propose this idea of perfection based on abstract notions of Enlightenment-wrought rationality has proved problematic for compositionists. For example, in her 1991 "Habermas's

Varieties of Communicative Actions: Controversy without Combat," Patricia Roberts discusses Habermas's notion of intersubjective agreement; which (as discussed in the last chapter) is the sort of interaction aimed at reaching "intersubjective mutuality of reciprocal understanding, shared knowledge, mutual trust, and accord with one another'" (Habermas qtd. in Roberts, par. 20). Placing her student writers in this intersubjective realm, Roberts imagines a version of the ideal speech situation in order to (a) address issues surrounding persuasive writing, (b) "orient classes heavily towards class discussion" in order to establish audience (par. 35), and (c) determine productive ways of collaboration (par. 39).

However, after drawing from Habermasian theory to envision a communicatively competent classroom aimed at consensus, Roberts notes abruptly that "there are problems with Habermas" (par. 41). She writes "The argument is that trying to orient students towards consensus will orient them towards compromise" (par. 41). Using the example of a female student in a class full of male students, Roberts highlights the difficulty the female student has in convincing male students that "certain apparently harmless practices (such as whistling on the street) are actually

destructive" (par. 42). Roberts concludes that the female student is likely to encounter problems reaching her audience through rational argument because these destructive language practices are so embedded in their culture.

In this scenario, it appears Roberts anticipates the postmodern position which "identifies the violence of language" and "[the] linguistic repression and alienation [which] are the results of historically situated hegemonic discourses" (Milovanovic, par. 35). Consequently, Roberts's student might abandon her argument, that is, her justification for alienation in a mostly male environment. However, Roberts asserts that this version of the outcome of this scenario rests on a misunderstanding of Habermasian consensus, for the goal of her class is to "identify difference" within the Habermasian arena of "reciprocal understanding, shared knowledge and mutual trust" (Habermas, qtd. in Roberts, par 43).

Yet, by applying Habermasian theory to a gender issue, Roberts unconsciously stumbles upon what Flyvbjerg deems a considerable gap in Habermas's work. He maintains that gender politics are possibly better addressed via Foucauldian analysis than Habermasian discourse ethics

(225) because "the very idea of the ideal [that Habermasian discourse ethics imply] is problematic . . . because it suggests a perfection not possible in language" (Foss, Foss, and Trapp 252). The imperfections of language, I suggest, are especially apparent in gender issues. To illustrate Flyvbjerg asserts, "historically, the very idea of civil society contains a gender bias and this bias must be rooted out" (225). He continues, "Progress has been slow in developing the theory of communicative rationality in ways that would be sensitive to gender and race" (225).

Meanwhile, "Habermas has acknowledged that his analysis does not include gender, ethnicity, class, popular culture" (Flyvbjerg 225) because these differences, within the public sphere--or for our purposes, the writing classroom--can be overcome by rational debate (226). That is, Habermas believes if we can communicate competently by way of rational discourse, we can overcome problems of difference in areas such as gender and ethnicity. For many feminists, however, Habermas's approach is ineffective in combating problems associated with gender because of the deeply rooted nature of gender inequality in civil society. Indeed, Keane tells us that domination and inequality are deeply rooted in the concept of civil society, pointing out

that our notion of what civil society is rests on the idea of the white "civilized European male" (qtd. in Flyvbjerg 211). Following this, Keane demonstrates that, historically, women have been deemed subordinate. Civil society has also transferred its methods of subjugation to other groups such as those of differing ethnicity or sexual orientation (211).

In contrast to Habermas's approach, Flyvbjerg elaborates that, via genealogical analysis, Foucault attends to the postmodern issue of identity politics (including gender issues) and its connections to diversity and difference which "is crucial for understanding civil society and for acting in it" (225). As a result, feminists have found Foucauldian theory more sympathetic to their cause and "have been skeptical about Habermas's confidence in abstract rationality" (225). As we can see, then, in her discussion of this particular gender issue, Roberts highlights postmodern concerns with marginality and lack of access rather than modernist ideas that focus on the "search for over encompassing theories of society and social development" (Milovanovic, par. 10) such as Habermas's ideal speech situation.

Even if they have been made aware of Habermasian conditions for the ideal speech situation, one wonders how far an instructor might get in attempting to persuade a room full of socially conditioned men to rethink their position on, what Roberts calls, the "inner reality" of women (par. 43). Can Habermas's conditions for consensus be amended by developing Foucauldian strategies? Flyvbjerg suggests "Elaborating genealogies, for instance, of gender and race leads to an understanding of how relations of domination between men and women, and between different people, can be changed" (225). Furthermore, in actuality, non-discursive means to promote change have historically been more effective: "Feminists . . . get their issues on the public agenda not primarily by rational consensus but through the power struggles and conflicts characteristic of activism and social change" (226). Consequently, from my perspective, by urging her students "to identify differences," on feminist issues, Roberts actually sets the stage more appropriately for a Foucauldian approach to this subject via a study of conflict and realpolitik, rather than for a Habermasian attempt at rational argument. However, as I will discuss in Chapter Three, both Habermas's and Foucault's approach might be utilized in the

politicized classroom in order to compare how their methods of critique set the stage for debate in the socio-political realm. In the meantime, I turn to John Trimbur's "Consensus and Difference in Collaborative Learning" in order to explore his use of Habermasian theory and his subsequent (yet unvoiced) reliance on Foucault.

John Trimbur

In his 2005, *The Function of Theory in Composition Studies*, Raul Sanchez, following Victor Vitanza, expresses concern about compositionists who, through their theories of "hope," are attempting to follow Habermas's formula for critical rationalism and provide a concept of universal and legitimate knowledge based on Habermasian procedures for ideal consensus (23). Sanchez accuses these compositionists of partaking in a foundationalist "game of knowledge" which is projected through a "nostalgia for universals and a belief in ideal speech acts" (23). Sanchez's point of view is worth mentioning because his stance confronts the anti-Foucauldian belief in ideals and is perhaps more sympathetic to composition's postmodern position than that of the compositionists he accuses. The "belief in ideals" that Sanchez is wary of, however, comes across somewhat in John Trimbur's "Consensus and Difference in Collaborative

Learning;" indeed, Trimbur makes much use of Habermasian theory. However, even though Trimbur's article ultimately points out his, seemingly postmodern, concern that collaborative learning and consensus might squash traditionally muted voices while participants in a speech situation remain loyal to social and hierarchical standards, his use of Habermasian idealism seems at odds with his purpose in the essay.

Trimbur makes much of Habermas's position that participants in a conversation are not so much motivated by rational consensus but by what Habermas terms "success orientation" (610). He talks at length about uneven power structures in conversation and appeals to compositionists to "look at collaborative learning not merely as a process of consensus making but, more importantly, as a process of identifying differences and locating these differences in relation to each other" (610). Indeed, he demands that as we attempt to reach consensus, we should take into account a rhetoric of dissensus; that is, the "network of competing and contradictory interests" that "pervade writing situations" (610). As an example of how students might undertake such an endeavor, Trimbur questions literary evaluations of what constitutes "good" literature and the

criteria which dictates that some texts are "excluded and devalued" (613). He asks why some texts such as Shakespeare and Hemingway qualify as literary, while others--Stephen King, for example--do not (613). In posing these questions to his students, Trimbur requests that they "investigate collectively these implicit hierarchies in terms of the relations of power that organize them" (613).

In examining these literary hierarchies of power, Trimbur asks his student to engage in what Milovanovic might deem a postmodern exercise. Specifically, I posit that by suggesting his students "begin to critically examine the prevailing representation of literature and the institutional base on which it rests" (613), Trimbur seems to imply that his students paddle about in the postmodern point of view that (once again) "linguistic repression and alienation are the results of historically situated hegemonic discourses" (Milovanovic, par. 35). In doing so, Trimbur displays an unconscious reliance on Foucauldian thought by asking his students to unearth the differences that cause the segregation and resulting canonical hierarchies of certain types of reading. In short (and at the risk of sounding repetitive), Trimbur requests that his students engage in genealogical activity. Certainly, via

his use of "dissensus," he seems to advocate the Foucauldian approach which attempts to search out the unfortunate victims of discursive power struggles or rather "[how it happens that] at a given period something could be said and something else has never been said" (Foss, Foss, and Trapp 347).

Following Flyvbjerg, we might indeed recall that one of the fundamental differences between Habermasian and Foucauldian thought lies in how they attend to the problem of power. As mentioned in my first chapter, Flyvbjerg says that in view of the regulations of dominance, Habermas approaches the issue of dominance "from a universalistic theory of discourse, [while] Foucault seeks out a genealogical understanding of power relations in specific contexts" (223). In short, Flyvbjerg accuses Habermas of not paying enough attention to power relationships in discourse. Consequently, Trimbur seems to be echoing Foucault when, later in his article, he states:

Unlike Habermas . . . I do not believe removing relations of domination and systematic distortion, whether ideological or neurotic, from the conversation is likely to establish the

conditions in which consensus will express a
rational will and permit what all can want. (615)

Once again, Habermas does not attend to the problem of power because he believes rational discourse can overcome relations of dominance. Foucault, on the other hand, "sees the examination of resistance and struggle [as] the most solid basis for the practice of freedom" (Flyvbjerg 223). As we might assume from the excerpt above, Trimbur appears to be endorsing Foucault, thus confirming his position in the postmodern realm. The postmodern view, however, is ultimately at odds with the Habermasian approach he employs.

As I stated earlier, Trimbur makes use of Habermas's position that rational consensus is hindered by participants' orientation towards success within a speech situation. Simply put, this means that rational discussion takes a back seat to those who insist on proving a point of view. To reduce success orientation in consensual debate--while proposing that his students study the power relations embedded in literary discourses--Trimbur suggests that Habermas's ideal speech situation be posed as a "deferred and utopian" (614) idea of consensus. More specifically, it should be used as a critical measure from which students

can imagine consensus--and thus be relieved of the pressure to attain it--as "a necessary fiction of reciprocity and mutual recognition, the dream of conversation as perfect dialogue" (612). Simply put, Trimbur states that the ideal speech situation can never be achieved. Rather like Plato's place of ideal forms, Habermasian consensus (symmetrical, non-coercive rationality) for Trimbur, is never attainable but always something to strive for.

From a postmodern perspective, Trimbur's displaced view of consensus as an unreachable ideal seems somewhat problematic. For it echoes the foundationalism Sanchez speaks of at the beginning of this section, with its nostalgia for ideals. On the one hand, Trimbur calls for a postmodern examination of the rhetoric of dissensus which essentially asks students to dissect knowledge production. Yet, on the other, he asks his students to imagine a "utopian representation of consensus [which] offers students a powerful critical instrument to interrogate the conversation" (612); this imagined utopia implies the "real" possibility of an "ideal" knowledge, however unreachable. Thus, Trimbur sends a mixed message for he appears caught between two paradigms. His latter request seems to advance the modernist stance that it is possible

to imagine an over-arching theory of discourse/knowledge; in this case, the ideal speech situation. Yet, as we might again recall from Milovanovic, a postmodernist point of view assumes "that the search for an overall, all-encompassing totalizing theory is an illusory exercise" (par. 13). This corresponds with the Foucauldian point of view that the quest for ideals is potentially dangerous. For, recalling Flyvbjerg's comments from Chapter One, we should be wary of ideals "given the historical experience that few things have produced more suffering among humans than strong commitments to implementing utopian visions of good" (222).

The contradiction in Trimbur's article, it seems, places us firmly within the territory of the Habermas/Foucault "debate." On the one hand, Trimbur's suggestion that students imagine a transcendent version of the ideal speech situation offers them a critical measure from which they can examine the possibility of dominance in the process of consensus. Yet, from a Foucauldian point of view, Trimbur has resorted to imagining the unimaginable. For, as he hovers above abstract ground positing fictive ideals, he implies there is a definitive approach to critical reflection. For Foucault, posing fictive ideals is

a dangerous practice, and he might ask Trimbur what constitutes the perfect and ideal speech situation; that is, how might it manifest itself (even if it is unattainable) according to what discursive formation?

Consequently, Trimbur's contradiction--in his utopian driven, yet, postmodern writing classroom--seems to bring us back to Flyvbjerg's question concerning civil democracy, which we can thus extend to a politicized writing classroom; that is, should we analyze ideological dominance and hegemonic practices via practical examinations of conflict in historical contexts (or what Trimbur terms "dissensus"), or, should we address societal/political change by recommending Habermasian criteria that establishes standards (however utopian) for democratic debate? I will explore this question in depth in Chapter Three by focusing on the usefulness of a comparative analysis of the Habermas/Foucault debate in the politicized classroom; in particular, I find, in order to locate a point of complementarity between the two philosophers, the idea of Habermas's ideal speech situation should, perhaps, be dropped. For now, however, I turn to my third compositionist, Irene Ward, who also makes use of Habermasian theories of participation in the public sphere.

Irene Ward

In "How Democratic can we Get: The Internet, the Public Sphere, and Public Discourse," Ward looks to how Habermas's theory of the public sphere can be used "as a lens through which to query the claims that the Internet and its discursive practices will serve as a transformative tool that will benefit democratic politics" (366).

Democratic debate in the Internet version of Habermas's public sphere would, of course, follow his guidelines for rational democratic practice:

It would have to offer a public space or arena for people to debate issues in order to influence civil society and the state: moreover, the public discourse formed in response to such debate will have been "legitimized" by the scrutiny and challenge of other citizens and stakeholders in the debate. (367)

If we recall from my first chapter, debate in the public sphere guarantees "every citizen the right of access to discussion in the public sphere by virtue of the abstract right of humanness" (Foss, Foss, and Trapp 239). Thus, "legitimized" public discourse ensures that no one is

excluded, and rational debate, which strives for communicative competence, is the medium for conversation.

However, within the first few paragraphs of her discussion, Ward succumbs to the Foucauldian problem of historical difference. She writes,

Although the internet and the bourgeois public sphere do seem similar in many ways and seem to point to the Internet's potential to function as a form of public sphere, other factors such as . . . differing historical circumstances also seem to undercut that potential. (366)

As far as our current "historical" position is concerned, circumstances look initially promising in terms of access to the cyber sphere. For, the Internet offers anonymity to all that want to publish on it (369). For example, Ward points out that the identity of writers on the net is "obscured and often hidden" (369) as they hide behind pseudonyms and/or establish "false markers of age, gender, ethnicity, and so on" (369). However, while this serves to level the playing field on the net as far as social hierarchies are concerned, it does little to relieve the social/ethnic/gender-related tensions that occur in face to face situations. Furthermore, as Ward points out, this

anonymity "can also lead to a great deal of mistrust online" (370).

Like Roberts and Trimbur before her, Ward focuses on problems of "difference" in her discussion of communication in the public sphere. As I have established previously, these differences, which are recognized as set against a particular historical landscape and dictated by those in power, look suspiciously like Foucauldian concerns. As Ward's article indicates, while Habermas sets the stage for public debate, he glosses over "difference" by asserting that that the "proper" use of rationality can be used to overcome systems of domination. Yet, in his discussion of Ward's use of Habermas, Christian Weisser points out that "Habermas fails to acknowledge that . . . equality [in the public sphere] has historically been limited to white, male, propertied, citizens" (50). It is quite possible to conclude, therefore, that for Habermas, the "proper use of rationality" is made manifest according to the standards of this group.

What, we should ask, constitutes "equality" for a particular group of people in any given circumstance? As far as the Internet is concerned, for Ward, if and when the Internet becomes commodified, democratic practice within it

might be limited only to those who can afford the technology. She states:

Needless to say, the same social and economic forces and institutions--race, class, and gender --that allow for unequal access to education in this country will operate to make the issue of access a severe limitation to the ultimate democratic potential of the internet. (375)

Unfortunately, the fate of inclusion within this particular public sphere lies in participants' attempts to "desist from strategic action" (Flyvbjerg 213). Yet historically, as Ward indicates, the drive for economic success tends to encourage strategic action within the public sphere.

Conclusion

In each of my responses to composition's use of Habermas, I am drawn back to Flyvbjerg's questions regarding the Habermas/Foucault debate and its implications for ideological and emancipatory change in civil society. That is, do we face head on the problems of exclusion, difference, diversity and the politics of identity? (211). Or, do we look to ethical consensus to set universal standards for emancipatory behaviour? So far, it seems

composition's point of view addresses the former as it tries to amend Habermasian theories with those of Foucault. However, composition's use of Habermas and its subsequent, yet unvoiced, reliance on Foucault brings me to the conclusion that, following Flyvbjerg, a comparison of "the discourse ethics of Habermas with the power analytics and ethics of Foucault" (210) would provide a useful framework from which to understand and bring about social change. Indeed, a fully articulated look at the debate--that is, a comparison of the two methods of critique--might inform the politicized writing class about how "truth" is determined, and how reason is awarded "reasonable" status.

Following this, Chapter Three will see what use composition might make of the Habermas/Foucault debate within politicized writing studies. In addition, it will explore the possibility of reconciliation between the two philosophers which might offer us new ways to imagine our classrooms as "public spheres." Finally, I will look to Peter Rule's explanation of "dialogic space" in the South African "Tuition Project" and to Patricia Bizzell's discussion of rational debate in medieval Spain to gain a sense of how the Habermas/Foucault debate offers us a

framework from which we can identify "rationalities" at work within particular historical circumstances.

CHAPTER THREE
THE HABERMAS/FOUCAULT DEBATE IN
THE WRITING CLASSROOM

In this chapter, I will discuss further the term "radical composition" and what it entails in the current composition climate. Taken together, the Habermasian and Foucauldian theories I discuss offer radical composition valuable insights into methods of critique based on Bernd Stahl's assumption that "both aim to be critical in order to improve human circumstances" (4434). Considering radical composition's preoccupation with the ideologies embedded in discourses, and public writing's desire to initiate social change in some form or another, the Habermas/Foucault debate might subsequently inform a politicized classroom. That is, an articulation of the debate can provide a specific theoretical background from which to examine public writing while presenting to students the views that characterize modern (and Habermasian) thought, as well as those that constitute postmodern (and Foucauldian) thought. Following this, an elucidation of the debate offers students the critical stimulus to examine social issues without subjecting them to an instructor's political

stance; indeed, overtly politicizing the classroom has been a controversial issue in recent composition history. Consequently, students in a politicized writing space, informed by the Habermas/Foucault debate, might make up their own minds on social issues.

In order to demonstrate how the Habermas/Foucault debate might inform students' critical inquiry into the historical, cultural, and political influences on discourses, I will turn to Peter Rule's explanation of the "Tuition Project" in South Africa. A close look at this project reveals how "the playing field" for rational debate and learning is fraught with ideological struggle. Ideological struggle and its influence on rationality are also revealed in Patricia Bizzell's examination of the 1263 disputation at Barcelona in medieval Spain. Although this particular debate occurred centuries ago, Bizzell's assessment offers us a Foucauldian-like cautionary tale as to the nature of rationality in specific historical contexts.

The Habermas/Foucault Debate in Radical Composition

Set within the postmodern paradigm, radical composition concerns itself with ways in which language perpetuates dominant ideology-as we have seen from the compositionists under discussion. In *Moving beyond Academic Discourses* . . . Weisser claims that "radical theories in composition studies . . . have recently begun to conceive of *the public sphere* as . . . a useful metaphor for how we might envision writing classrooms" (xiii). Thus, with its interest in how ideology is perpetuated, radical composition emphasizes that students recognize "that public discourse is not merely the 'clear' articulation of facts" (Weisser 113). Instead, it asks students to "be much more critical in their interpretation of public discourse" (Weisser 113). Accordingly, the writing-classroom-as-public-sphere can encourage "student writing to have real political and social ramifications" (57).

Weisser specifies how Habermas's theory of the public sphere, with its focus on emancipatory discourses in the form of the ideal speech situation, has sparked interest in the field of radical composition. Yet, as Weisser, Roberts et al, and numerous other critics have stated, Habermas's

theories are problematic. Interestingly, (as I have shown), the problems compositionists foresee in Habermas's work are indeed those that Foucault addresses in the debate: Habermas's approaches to "difference", power, and ideology. As Weisser states, (and as I explored in Chapter Two,) "Habermas . . . fails to fully recognize the degree to which ideology shapes public discourse, and [his] investigations are less thorough as a result" (96). As Habermasian discourse theory fails to account fully for the problems of power and ideology in the public sphere, Foucault's power analytics can be viewed as a logical amendment to the gaps postmodern compositionists stumble upon in Habermasian scholarship. A Foucauldian scrutiny of ideology might thus enhance Habermasian approaches to discourse in the public sphere considering "ideology is one of the most central aspects of current composition theory" (Weisser 96).

The Problem of Politics in the Classroom

Introducing the Habermas/Foucault debate into a politicized writing classroom might overcome some of the controversy surrounding radical composition. Despite Weisser's enthusiastic endorsement of radical composition, the idea of the writing classroom as a politicized public

space has been a subject for debate for a number of years; in particular, Linda Brodkey's 1990 imbroglio at UT Austin comes to mind.

As Karen Welch relates in "Social Issues in First Year College Writing," in 1989, Brodkey was on the English committee that designed a writing course asking students to critically address issues of difference in anti-discrimination lawsuits (par. 5). Yet, as Welch continues, "other department faculty and some administrators strongly resisted this proposed course as one that they felt constituted a liberal political agenda" (par. 5). The controversy at UT Texas soon garnered national attention, sparking a controversy in composition and the media "that continues today about the expediency of including social and political issues in first-year college writing courses" (par. 5). Certainly, some compositionists feel that political issues have no business in the writing classroom.

More recently, the contentious firing of two teaching assistants from the University of California, San Diego's, "Dimensions of Culture" writing sequence demonstrates that politicizing the writing classroom is still a controversial issue. According to Elizabeth Redden, this program was originally designed to "challenge hegemonic assumptions

about race, class, gender, and sexuality" (par. 3). Yet, the sequence became a source of controversy because the TA's felt the courses involved had succumbed to "a form of uncritical patriotic education" (par.3). On the other hand, the course administrator claimed the program was leaning towards "political indoctrination" (par.4).

The UCSD incident highlights a typical criticism of the politicized, and radical, composition classroom. In their comprehensive bibliography of radical composition, Bill Thelin and Theresa Grettano cite Maxine Hairston's 1992 critique, "Diversity, Ideology, and Teaching Writing" (2). Hairston argues against what she sees as a "problematic trend" (2) in composition: the teaching of politically complex issues to reveal the ideological processes embedded in discourses. The dilemma lies in the potential indoctrination of students to an instructor's political stance; for Hairston, this is particularly worrying as writing instructors are not generally specialists in the field of political theory. Hairston further argues that as an instructor is a figure of authority, his/her political perspective can "stifle or silence students' voices through intimidation" (2).

Stanley Fish issues further protest against politicized teaching in the writing classroom. Thelin and Grettano restate Fish's opinion in his 2003, "Save the World on Your Own Time." Responding to student protests against New School University president's opinion of US policy in Iraq, Fish insists that universities should remain neutral in politics (2). By taking a stance on political issues, Fish claims universities "damage academic virtue, which he defines as teaching, research and publishing about . . . academic matters" (2). For Fish, political indoctrination is not the business of the university.

Instructors who attempt to impose political beliefs on their students contradict and counter the critical usefulness of radical composition. It is my belief, however, that Fish et al are mistaken in downplaying its importance. Since radical composition concerns itself with how language practices perpetuate and maintain ideology, it offers students the chance to sharpen their critical awareness of the world around them. Radical compositionists need not indoctrinate students into a specific political realm but help them develop an awareness of the diversity

of social, cultural, and political worldviews and the power structures embedded in them.

I suggest, therefore, that a study of the Habermas/Foucault debate might facilitate this process. As I indicated at the beginning of this thesis and this chapter, following Flyvebjerg, a "comparative analysis of the central ideas of Habermas and Foucault as they pertain to the question of democracy and civil society" (210) could present students with the occasion to explore differing methods of critique in a politicized classroom. Rather than focusing on a particular political issue, students might be able to estimate the usefulness of Habermasian and/or Foucauldian theories of discourse and how they relate to issues in the public sphere. Perhaps, they might then relate these ideas to social issues of their own choosing in order to understand and bring about democratic social change.

Can Habermas and Foucault be Reconciled?

If the Habermas/Foucault debate offers the politicized writing classroom an alternative (and perhaps philosophical approach) to the study of ideology and its effects on text and discourse, we might then ask if the two philosophers can be reconciled.

In his article, "Whose Discourse? A Comparison of Habermas and Foucault," Stahl compares the discourse theories of both and argues that the "the most important correspondence between Habermas and Foucault can thus be said to be their critical approach, their hope to use their work to improve the social world" (4334). However, beyond their critical intentions pertaining to social change, Stahl points to one view that asserts Habermasian and Foucauldian theory are so fundamentally different, the best we might hope for is to "chose a position and avoid the mistake of mixing up the two" (4334). In the composition classroom, this choice might be left entirely up to the students once they have established a knowledge of both Habermasian and Foucauldian methods of critique. For instance, perhaps a Habermasian approach to engagement in the public sphere based on his ideas of communicative competence and the establishment of rules for debate might appease participants' sense of fairness and inclusion. Certainly, the right to participate in the public sphere by virtue of one's humanness seems the very epitome of democracy.

However, other students might feel that the playing field for debate and discussion of social issues in the

public sphere is not quite level enough to apply Habermas's rules for engagement. They could base this evaluation on long perpetuated ideological imbalances in issues such as race, gender, sexual orientation and so on. These students could adopt a Foucauldian approach in their investigations into social issues by conducting their own genealogical explorations into how certain ideological values and beliefs are perpetuated. They could, for instance, explore why some issues are taboo in the public sphere and why others are considered palatable for public discussion by following Foucauldian interest in how "the past concerns how we have become in the present" (Ashenden and Owen 13). Certainly, our notions of what is considered appropriate for public attention are still, as Weisser states, "ambiguous" (109).

Weisser, rightly, makes much of the often un-level nature of a public sphere's playing field based on ideas of what are considered "public" social issues and what are deemed "private" (109). To illustrate, Weisser, citing Nancy Fraser, elaborates:

The issue of domestic violence was, until quite recently, considered to be a private matter between what was assumed to be a fairly small

number of heterosexual couples. Feminists were in the minority in thinking that "domestic violence against women was a matter of common concern and thus a legitimate topic of public discourse." (qtd. in Weisser 109)

Following Fraser, Weisser asserts that the "the labeling of some interests as 'public' and others as 'private' is an ideological mystification" (109) determined by those in power who "get to decide what is a public issue and what is not" (109). As I have shown, the matter of power and who wields has largely been a Foucauldian concern.

Weisser points out that notions of what is "private" and what is deemed appropriate for discussion or debate in the public sphere might stifle students who choose to express their ideas about issues that are not considered palatable by "large segments of the population" (108). For instance, students might not, in the current ideological climate, feel comfortable discussing issues concerning "sexual orientation, spousal and acquaintance abuse, and other matters of domestic or personal life" (109). Yet, Weisser insists that teachers in a classroom that focuses on public writing have a "responsibility to enable students to discover and write about all of the issues that affect

their lives" (109). Encouraging students to scrutinize dominant ideologies would facilitate this process of enablement. However, as stated earlier, encouraging critical awareness in a politicized classroom need not be reduced to an exercise in political indoctrination. The possibility of indoctrination would be avoided by encouraging students to decide for themselves exactly what social or political issues they wish to write about.

Despite his point that one might take either a Habermasian or Foucauldian approach to democratic practices--with the attitude that the two approaches are incommensurable--Stahl posits that their emancipatory intentions are actually enough to consider ways in which their ideas can be viewed as complementary (4334). Subsequently, he suggests that Foucault's approach--namely, a genealogical one--might amend Habermasian discourse ethics. In short, Habermasian and Foucauldian theory can be used together.

If we recall Habermas's insistence on equal participation in the sphere and the criticism his ideas have generated, we might remember that utopian-like consensus by way of an ideal speech situation is improbable due to power dynamics in discourse. Stahl thus suggests

that Foucauldian intervention might be useful because "it sharpens awareness of the non-discursive elements of discourse" (4334). Stahl asserts that via a "genealogy of discourses and [the] power constellations that shape them," (4334) participants in the public sphere can gain insight into "understanding and contextualizing validity claims" (4334). Keeping in mind my above discussion of what is deemed public concern in the public sphere and what is considered private, Stahl suggests that a Foucauldian approach to discourse in the public sphere can "expose hidden validity claims that have been taken for granted but that may not be tenable when seen in broad daylight" (4334).

By following Stahl's suggestion that we use genealogy to rout out difference, conflict, and hidden ideological agendas, we can assume that Foucault's approach foreshadows that of Roberts, Trimbur, and Ward--particularly, as far as Trimbur's rhetoric of dissensus is concerned. Unlike Trimbur, however, we can avoid being stuck between dueling modern and postmodern paradigms if we make a substantial amendment to Habermas's vision of consensus in the public sphere.

If we take into consideration Trimbur's suggestion that his students imagine a Habermasian and utopian arena of perfect consensus, we might then look to Michael Calvin McGee and John R. Lyne who in fact reject Habermas's ideal speech situation. They claim that this way of thinking invites the "nightmare" world of Plato, whereby speech "can be depersonalized" (397). They maintain the anti-Habermasian position that "Habermas . . . envisions a kind of rhetoric that has never existed and in probability cannot exist" (397). This "kind of rhetoric" could only occur if "the ideal speech situation were skillfully fabricated" (397) and "some standard [were] set, against which the shortcoming of a real rhetorical interaction could be assessed" (397). In short, debate would be contrived and thus potentially standardized in ways that could merely serve to reenact the status quo. McGee and Lyne utterly reject this approach, arguing that in such "an airy and bloodless world . . . arguments without attitude would achieve nothing" (397). With their attitude, McGee and Lyne echo Foucault's position that grand abstractions (such as the ideal speech situation) must be scrutinized. How then might Foucault and Habermas be reconciled if we

continue to imagine Habermas's notion of universal speech structures which anticipates emancipatory ideals?

In response to this question, John Brocklesby and Stephen Cummings cite Flood and Jackson's argument that if Habermas and Foucault are ultimately to be compatible, "the Habermasian idea that 'truth' comes about from the force of a better argument emanating from debate in a 'true' speech situation is dropped" (752). In short, envisioning the ideal speech situation as perfect consensus is completely discarded. Along with Plato's world of ideal forms, Habermas's ideal speech situation is rejected as a response to "the Foucauldian idea that no position can ever be absolutely right, nor can we ever remove the distortions in peoples' perceptions bought about through power relations" (752).

While some might think that the rejection of ideals leaves us with no means by which to measure ethical behaviour, Brocklesby and Cummings instead claim that a combination of Habermasian and Foucauldian theory actually furthers emancipatory thinking. Like Stahl, they maintain that, for Habermas and Foucault, emancipation is on "both their 'agendas'" (753). Amending Habermas with Foucauldian thought, however, ultimately "provides the tools, maps, and

courage for people in *local* situations to emancipate their thinking" (753). According to Brocklesby and Cummings, this enables an awareness of power and the restrictions ideology places on the introduction of radical, or innovative, ideas into the public sphere. In the politicized writing classroom, therefore, and buoyed by Foucauldian thought, students might feel freer to put forward ideas that challenge the status quo, and thus enjoy the freedom to invent in ways that stimulate the growth of new ideas.

The Habermas/Foucault Debate:
A Lens to Realpolitik

The Tuition Project

What are the implications of the Habermas/Foucault debate (and what we can learn from it) in a real world situation? We can get an idea of how the debate offers us a lens through which we might take a look at real world situations by way of Rule's account of "The Tuition Project" in South Africa.

In "Dialogic Spaces: Adult Education Projects and Social Engagement," Rule addresses the nature of a discourse community in a specific public sphere--in this case, a dialogic space set against a backdrop of extreme

violence: the 1976 Soweto uprising in South Africa (232). In this space, Rule evokes Habermas's ideal speech situation but claims--in a similar manner to Roberts et al --that whereas Habermas's use of dialogue/communication "implies a utopian state of being," he "[prefers] to see it as a process that involves tension and growth; an unfolding of selves within particular contexts" (326).

Rule demonstrates his experience of a public sphere set against the backdrop of political turmoil in his description of "The Tuition Project." The Tuition Project, established during the Soweto Uprising, was designed to educate disadvantaged young adults. Rule writes, "the students were often politicized and at the forefront of the struggle against apartheid education" (327). Indeed, apartheid suppressed all forms of dialogue, not only between blacks and whites, but between employers and employees, rich and poor (329). The Tuition Project, however,

created an environment in which black and white people could relate to each other in new ways-- teachers and learners within a learning space.

This encounter challenged the ways . . . in which they typically thought about each other.

Responses from Tuition Project students in this regard suggest that not only racial attitudes, but those associated with class underwent transformation. (328)

In order for the Project to function, participants had to agree to conditions to ensure the dialogic space was maintained. The conditions were articulated in Habermasian tones; they included:

A basis of trust (there can be no dialogue without trust); an attitude of openness towards learning from one another; a physical space where participants could meet in relative safety; a project ethos that encourages participants to express themselves; and a commitment to solving problems through meeting, discussion, reflection and consensus rather than coercion. (330)

Importantly, however, Rule points out that as well as forging a safe realm, free from coercion, participants in the Tuition project studied the power relations inherent within their particular political context. The project engaged different discourses, consisting of educators and committee members--both black and white--and students and parents from "different regions, social backgrounds, and

political orientations" (Rule 331). As a result of these varied discourses, and the troubled setting of the project, tensions ran extremely high as participants jostled to be heard and power hierarchies were disrupted. Thus, because of "educational disruption, political repression, popular resistance, family breakdown, [and] violence in many forms, the dialogue was often one of conflict and contestation" (Rule 331).

To complicate matters further, the internal struggles within the Tuition Project were juxtaposed against dialogues, characteristic of political chaos, taking place outside the project:

The noise from anti-dialogic forms of interaction . . . orders, demands, racist insults, propaganda, stones, bullets, burning tyres, interrogation and torture--impinged on the project dialogue. (331)

Typically, these discourses further exacerbated the tensions inside the project. So, although Habermasian rules of engagement attempted to determine the arena for dialogue, "the dialogue was not without conflict, struggle, or pain" and adverse power relationships--"informed by apartheid stereotypes of white and black" (328)--were ever

present (330). In an effort to address these conflicts, Tuition Project educators conducted Foucauldian-like examinations of power and struggle so as to explicitly reveal the vast social differences within the Tuition Project's public sphere. To facilitate social awareness, these were "articulated and elaborated within the process of dialogue" (330).

What Rule's project reveals is that the undeniable facets of competing subjectivities in a politically charged situation make envisioning the ideal speech situation almost impossible. For, as Foucault might point out, it is impossible to remove ourselves from the power struggles that take place within specific historical contexts. In addition, in a politically unstable environment, one person's idea of rational debate might be very different from another's. The best we might hope for then is to engage in a dialogue committed to exposing and examining abuses of power-perhaps by way of Foucauldian genealogy-rather than one committed to adhering to ideals.

Patricia Bizzell's Cautionary Tale

Like Rule, Bizzell tackles an instance in history where the public sphere was a site of conflicting and competing discourses. Her retelling of the 1263 Barcelona

debate between Jewish sage Nahmanides and Christian convert Friar Paul Christian extends a cautionary tale to composition teachers who present public debate as if "occurs on a rhetorically level playing field" (12). Like Rule's project, Bizzell shows us some discursive spaces are never quite as level as we might imagine, and she rejects the outcome of debates as "emerging from [a] kind of idealized debate situation" (13). She also reveals that what constitutes "rationality" within a specific historical terrain is sometimes not rational at all--at least not in Habermasian terms. She thus follows Foucault's advice that rationality, at any point in history, must be subjected to genealogical scrutiny. This is implied in her in-depth study of the political and cultural landscape surrounding the 1263 debate.

Bizzell writes "from the very early days of Christianity, the new faith defined itself against Judaism" (15) and in the twelfth century "there was a new urgency to either persuade Jews to convert or drive them out" (16). Why? Because a renewed interest in classical thought intrigued Europe as new knowledge flooded in by way of the crusades and contact with Muslim culture (16) and "under [this] influence, thinkers elevated reason as the supreme

natural attribute" (16). Consequently, religious beliefs were constantly under scrutiny. As the dominant faith, therefore, Christianity became "hyper-sensitive" (18) to the rational analysis of their faith; thus, rationality had to be "Christianized" (18). The target of Christian rational persuasion was the Jews for they had been raising, for some time, the same questions "about Christian rationality that were now being raised by Christian thinkers' examination of Christian beliefs" (16). As the group in power, Christians needed to defend their faith against Jewish scrutiny of the Bible; they needed to prove, by "rational" means, that their version of the Bible was the "right" one for "there was a new desire for uniformity in the faith community" (16). Bizzell cites several examples of Christian "rationality" during this period. For instance, to justify the miracle of Mary's virgin conception, Christian thinkers explained "that Mary remained virginal just as a glass is not broken when the sun shines through it" (17).

Christians called for a public debate with Jewish leaders because rather than use death threats against the Jews to make them convert, the new interest in classical reason prompted Christian eagerness to "*persuade them*"

(19 emphasis in original). The debate was "ardently supported" (20) by the Christian King of Spain, James of Aragon; however, as we might suspect, there were several conditions stipulated as to how the debate would proceed. As Bizzell states, "the debate was not an open intellectual engagement between two equal opponents operating under the same rules" (20); certainly, Jewish participation in such an event was decidedly dangerous and any hope of "winning" was out of the question (15). The rules were thus negotiated that "the Dominicans who caused the disputation to happen also determined what questions would be addressed" (20) and the Christian interlocutor, Friar Paul, "always spoke first and posed questions to Nahmanides whose responses were restricted to answering those questions only" (21).

Briefly, therefore, the Christians set out to, prove from Jewish sources that the Messiah had already come, that he was both human and divine, and that he had suffered and died to save humankind from sin: none of these points is connected specifically with Jesus in rabbinic literature, but Paul believed that if he could

prove all three, Nahmanides would have to admit that only Jesus fulfilled them all. (21)

As we can see, as a result of Christian ideas of what constituted rationality, the odds were stacked against Nahmanides from the start. Yet, as Bizzell points out in her lengthy description of the details of the debate--too vast in its scope to relate here--Nahmanides argued his case admirably; he was later awarded a cash prize and the admiration of the King. However, he did little to improve the Jewish lot; for the Christians failed to abandon their "new missionizing" rhetoric based on their version of rationality, but rather "continued to refine and employ it" (27).

My point here is not to expound upon the details of the 1263 Disputation, but to emphasize that Bizzell's purpose, like my own, stresses that interpretations of what is "rational" appear to change throughout the ages. Accordingly, Bizzell asks "in what sense does the Barcelona disputation provide composition instructors with a cautionary tale?" (28). Answering in Foucauldian tones, she states "[it] can be considered a cautionary tale about the limits of rationality" (28). Bizzell's essay is thus a cautionary tale about what constitutes "truth;" whose

truths are being adhered to and whose are being muted. It provides us with a solid example of how reason and rationality, even in Habermasian tones, must be scrutinized from a Foucauldian perspective to ensure that muted truths get a fair hearing on what is not always a level playing field.

A Final Thought

In a politicized composition classroom--specifically, one that concerns itself with writing, debate, and democratic practice in the public sphere--a study of the Habermas/Foucault debate can reveal that participants will always have ideological hurdles to overcome, even when the best intentions attempt to ensure equal participation for all. As Flyvbjerg states, in matters of public and civil society, the Habermas/Foucault debate indicates the tension "between the normative and the real, between what should be done and what is actually done" (210). Habermas's discourse ethics might seem like the solution to oppressive practices in our current discursive formation, but as Foucault shows us, power dynamics are inescapable and ever-present. Thus, as Habermasian theory takes a constitutional route, (that is, it lays down conditions for ideal participation in the

public sphere), it should still be scrutinized because "inequality and domination has been built into the concept of civil society from the start" (211).

As we have seen from Bizzell in particular, (although neither Rule or Bizzell refer explicitly to the Habermas/Foucault debate), discourse in the public sphere that aims to be rational and reflect the "truth" can be distorted by historical/contextual forces. These forces provoke the problems associated with the placement of conflicting discourses in the public sphere, which, in turn, demonstrates Weisser's (and Foucault's) point of view that the playing field for debate is perhaps never quite level enough to envision Habermas's ideal speech situation. We might then, taking Brocklesby and Cummings's advice, leave Habermas's perfect concept of the ideal speech situation to gather dust in Plato's realm of ideal forms.

Without upholding the ideal speech situation as the ideal "truth", we could, however, utilize Habermas's rules for engagement in the public sphere (that is, the freedom to express one's opinion in a place of safety and, at least, attempted trust) to emphasize the need for a non-coercive environment. Then, when power struggles--or those "private" issues that remain muted by hegemonic practice--

crop up, we might engage in explicitly-stated Foucauldian, genealogical activity to determine the roots of the struggle, or "private-ness" of the issue, perhaps finding that these roots are themselves the products of conflict.

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