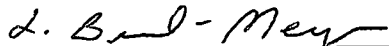


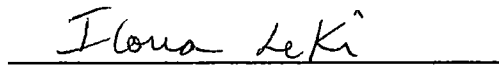
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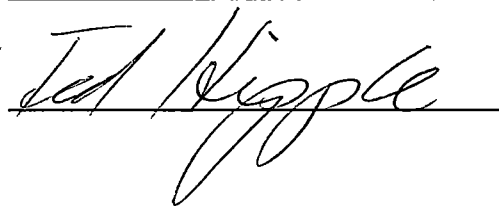
I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Jeffrey Walter Walkington entitled "Pedagogy and Power Relations in English Studies: Insights from Literary and Rhetorical Theory." I have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in English.


Linda Bense-Meyers, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation
and recommend its acceptance:







Accepted for the Council:


Associate Vice Chancellor and
Dean of The Graduate School

PEDAGOGY AND POWER RELATIONS IN ENGLISH STUDIES:
INSIGHTS FROM LITERARY AND RHETORICAL THEORY

A Dissertation
Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Jeffrey Walter Walkington
December 1999

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents

Mr. Lindell B. Walkington

and

Mrs. Beverly J. Doty

who have given me invaluable educational opportunities, love, and support,

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am thankful to my wife, Sarah, the smartest person I know, for without her love, help, and encouragement, I would have never have reached this moment. In addition, I am grateful to the following people and organizations for making this dream come true: my children, Ellen and John, for letting Daddy spend so much time away from them to finish; my grandparents, for sharing their enthusiasm; Cannon School, Webb School, the University of Tennessee Graduate School, and Mrs. Gene Ann Young Prosser, for helping me financially; Mr. Snyder and the Cannon faculty, for allowing me time and energy away from my important school duties; Dr. Allen Dunn, for teaching me critical theory (all descriptions of theorists in the dissertation are indebted to him); to Dr. Robert Scholes, for introducing me to serious discussions of pedagogy at the School of Criticism and Theory; and to Mrs. Mary Ferris, Mr. Dan Kuglich, and Dr. Martha Rainbolt, for initiating me into the ways of knowing in English.

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Finally, I need to thank once again my father, who roused me to action more than anyone, and my mother—my first and always best teacher, not only of reading and writing, but of how to be a good boy.

Abstract

In this dissertation, I examine, against a history of current literature and composition teaching, the question of teacher authority versus student freedom in four different sites: the writing conference, especially as it takes place in writing centers; the “open” class discussion, particularly the issue of whether it encourages dissent or defuses it; nonauthoritarian strategies such as teaching in a circle and all they signify about classroom hierarchies; and the use of networked computers in the reading and writing course, which has been both endorsed and excoriated by leaders in the discipline. Chapter two draws heavily on recent social constructionist theories of composition to interrogate tutoring practices, while chapter three employs critiques of Mikhail Bakhtin’s dialogism in questioning models of classroom conversation. Chapter three problematizes, through applications of Louis Althusser and Michel Foucault, what may be seen as utopian techniques rooted in Paulo Freire and his followers. Finally, chapter five unites the theorists of the preceding three chapters, and touches briefly upon Jacques Derrida, in the analysis of online class interactions. Each site reveals the paradox that English pedagogies that at first seem liberatory for both teachers and students often reveal themselves, under theoretical and empirical pressure, as conservative at best and oppressive at worst. In each chapter and an afterword, I propose a demystifying pedagogy for English studies that foregrounds asymmetrical power relations between teachers and students and allows instructors to proclaim their vision of social justice.

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Chapter One
Introduction: Teaching Authority
And the Orthodoxy of the Student-Centered Classroom

“English studies is in crisis. Indeed, virtually no feature of the discipline can be considered beyond dispute” (xi). So James Berlin opens *Rhetorics, Poetics, and Cultures: Refiguring College English Studies* (1996), just as Robert Scholes addresses “Toward a Curriculum in Textual Studies” (1990) to “those who are students now but hope someday to teach others under the aegis of this troubled discipline called ‘English’” (95). Over the last 15 years, forces such as economic transformations from an older industrialism to what has been called global post-Fordism, the rise of identity politics and the increasingly diverse demographics of college students, and French postmodernism’s broad-ranging critique of liberal humanism’s values of autonomous subjectivity and foundational truth have thrown into doubt the mission of the American university (Berlin, *Rhetorics, Poetics* 43, xi). More specifically, it has become commonplace for the leaders in English studies to lament the state of the profession. Berlin and Scholes focus on the unfortunate divide between teachers of literature and teachers of rhetoric, but others are distressed by the overwhelmingly rapid pace of change in other areas of the field.

One signal moment in the recognition of that turmoil was the Modern Language Association’s publication of *Redrawing the Boundaries: The Transformation of English and American Literary Studies* (1992), in which editors Stephen Greenblatt and Giles Gunn describe the metamorphoses occurring everywhere around them. Among the disruptions they note are the explosion of often abstruse literary theory in the midst of

sometimes resistant faculties trained for the most part in the narrow methods of the New Criticism; “deconstruction, cultural materialism, gender studies, new historicism” were four approaches Greenblatt and Gunn point to as not only displacing American formalism but radically altering earlier versions of Marxist, reader-response, psychological, and other critical theories. The editors of *Redrawing the Boundaries* note changes such as “the configuration of new areas of teaching and research, from medieval studies and postmodernist studies to African American literary studies and subaltern studies” and a questioning of how traditional realms of literary study have been perhaps arbitrarily shaped, such as courses divided into American literature before and after the Civil War. Over the last 15 years English studies experienced first the alteration of its canon of taught masterworks by the inclusion of works by writers marginalized by gender, race, and class, and then saw the cultural studies movement question the very idea of privileging literary texts at all. Cultural studies first entered the English department with its attention focused on film and other aesthetic forms and then turned to any cultural practice or “text” mediated by language (Berlin xix).

Additionally, chapters of *Redrawing the Boundaries* describe upheavals in the area of rhetoric and composition. Rhetoric, like literary studies, also experienced the impact of postmodernism, although rhetoricians, recognizing these ideas as similar to their own, were perhaps more comfortable with them than were literature teachers. As Berlin writes, “The influence of structuralist and poststructuralist theories in the humanities, social science, and even the sciences—what Jameson has called the linguistic turn—can be seen as an effort to recover the tools of rhetoric in discussing the material effects of language in the conduct of human affairs” (*Rhetorics, Poetics* xvii). In spite of

rhetoric's preparation for some changes in the theoretical underpinnings of English studies, the swiftness of these transformations could still be overwhelming. Donald McQuade discusses how over a fairly brief period, "composition instruction shifted from repetitive exercises that produced standardized essays with interchangeable parts" and emphasized correctness to models that valued self-expression to a paradigm that prized collaborative work and writing across the curriculum (496). In that same volume, Richard Marius sounds a pessimistic tone about the future of rhetoric and composition similar to that found among professors of literature in the 1980s and 1990s, although he blames those same literary colleagues for inequalities that keep writing teachers underpaid and underappreciated (467). Among other complaints about writing instruction at the end of the century, Marius finds the field slow to adapt to developments in theory and research, its teachers ill-trained in rhetoric, its emphasis wrongly placed on personal writing, and its new orthodoxy of writing as a process excessively restrictive (466-77).

Furthermore, English teachers have suffered having their internal disagreements about the status of literature and composition instruction aired in public—although some have welcomed the unusual attention. "Rarely has the ideological work of English in the political life of the nation been so openly discussed," writes Berlin in 1996. "Within the past few years, for example, both *Time* and *Newsweek* have covered department disagreements over the literary canon in long pieces on 'political correctness,' while public and commercial television networks have broadcast debates on the condition of literary studies for a national audience" (*Rhetorics, Poetics* xi). Two popular books appearing in 1987, Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher*

Education Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today's Students and E.D. Hirsch's *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know*, as well as high-profile pronouncements from Secretary of Education William Bennett and National Endowment of the Humanities Chair Lynne Cheney, attacked developments in English studies as threats to humanistic education and American democracy (Greenblatt and Gunn 1).

In *Redrawing the Boundaries*, Greenblatt and Gunn thoughtfully summarize the responses of workers in English studies to the transformations of the 1980s and 1990s:

Many members of our profession . . . find themselves situated uncertainly between condemnation and celebration. Convinced neither that some rough beast is slouching toward Bethlehem to be born nor that we are witnessing again the rise of a phoenix, they find themselves vacillating uneasily between the belief that received opinions and procedures have for too long gone unchallenged and the view that much revisionist activity may be motivated more by modishness or political posturing than by critical insight. That English and American literary studies have undergone a series of transformations in the last several decades is obvious: what to make of them in one's own teaching and research is less clear. (Greenblatt and Gunn 1)

Fortunately for those who love the classroom, many of the most prominent names in English studies did ponder the "series of transformations in the last several decades" and considered "what to make of them in one's own teaching" (1); in other words, one of the most fruitful areas for advances in the discipline during and after the last 15 years'

disturbances has been in pedagogy. In his preface to *Changing Classroom Practices: Resources for Literary and Cultural Studies*, David B. Downing declares that “the almost sudden interest in pedagogy (especially for teachers of literature) after more than two decades of intense theoretical debate signals an important moment in the changing shape of humanities classrooms and curricula as we near the end of the century” (xiii).¹ This renewed attention to pedagogy, Downing points out, is due to the pressures that poststructuralist literary theory and social constructionist rhetoric have brought to bear upon English teacher’s conceptions of their classrooms not as value-neutral spaces but as sites of intense political contestation.

As English teachers have sought to apply these theoretical positions to actual teaching practices, they have problematized their own positions as the traditional authority figures in their classrooms. As expressed in Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner’s popularization of oppositional pedagogy, *Teaching as a Subversive Activity* (1969), the model “inquiry teacher” as conceived in the late 1960’s and ‘70s

- “rarely tells students what he thinks they ought to know,”
- “his basic mode of discourse with students is questioning,”
- “he encourages student-student interaction as opposed to student-teacher

¹ As evidence of what he calls the “pedagogical turn,” Downing looks to the last ten or so years’ proliferation of serious studies of teaching English, such as Patricia Harkin and John Schilb’s *Contending with Words: Composition and Rhetoric in a Postmodern Age*, Donald Morton and Masud Zavarzadeh’s *Theory/Pedagogy/Politics*, Maria-Regina Kecht’s *Pedagogy is Politics* (1991), Bruce Henricksen and Thais Morgan’s *Reorientations: Critical Theories and Pedagogies* (1990), Patricia Donahue and Ellen Quandahl’s *Reclaiming Pedagogy* (1989), Gerald Graff’s *Professing Literature* (1987), and Cary Nelson’s *Theory in the Classroom* (1986) (Downing, Harkin, and Sosnoski 3). Kathleen McCormick, in *The Culture of Reading and the Teaching of English*, adds Robert Scholes’ *Textual Power* (1985), William Cain’s *The Crisis in Criticism* (1984), Douglas Atkins and Michael Johnson’s *Writing and Reading Differently* (1985), Gerald Graff and Reginald Gibbons’ *Criticism in the University* (1985), and others to her similar list of essential recent works on teaching English (131-32).

interaction,”

- “he avoids acting as a mediator or judge of the quality of the ideas expressed,” and
- “his lessons develop from the responses of students and not from a previously determined ‘logical’ structure. . .” (34-36).

With the politics of pedagogy in mind, some teachers in the late 1990s mesh more recent theoretical developments with the older conception of the politically active teacher—one who subverts his or her own leadership in order to merely facilitate the workings of a student-centered classroom. Such is the solution of Jane Tompkins in her controversial but influential “Pedagogy of the Distressed,” in which she abandons the “banking model” of education attacked by Paulo Freire as an empty act of teachers’ depositing knowledge into the accounts of passive students and what she calls the “performance model” of the brilliant, directive actor who dazzles his or her students into submission (171). Instead, Tompkins, blending a 1990’s feminism and a 1960’s activism, nearly gives complete control—from giving lectures to assigning grades—to her students.

Like Tompkins, in “A Pedagogy of Counterauthority, or the Bully/Wimp Syndrome,” Gerald Graff admits that he has taken up various positions of “bully and wimp” throughout his career, but if Tompkins is typical of the many who have relinquished the rule of the teacher, Graff is representative of the teachers who now, through analysis of theory and praxis, reassert their authority. He writes of Tompkins,

Her remedy for excessive pedagogical self-assertion, in effect, is to efface herself, or at least to reduce her professional role in her class. . . . I would feel cheated were I to take the class Tompkins describes, and I believe students *should* feel cheated. . . . Certainly, had I read Tompkins' *Sensational Designs* before entering the course, I would want the class to be an extension of that book's stimulating ideas and would feel frustrated and disappointed were Tompkins to get herself out of the way. (179)

Graff continues by reading pedagogy through the perspective of one kind of social constructionism, that knowledge is not only made by consensus, but also that it is validated by the power of social hierarchies and institutions. Writing in 1994, he reviews the disruption of hierarchies that took place in the 1960s:

One more lesson that should have been learned from the 1960s but that progressive teachers still often resist is that however much we attempt to turn education into an egalitarian dialogue, the superior intellectual authority of the teacher is a given that cannot be sloughed off. That is, there is an *unavoidable inequality* built in the teacher-student relationship, if only because once teachers and students are regarded as intellectual equals there is no longer any reason for the teachers to teach the students. . . . I take it as a postulate that, in order to be meaningful, the distinction between teachers and students requires an assumption of hierarchy, an assumption that the teacher possesses some knowledge, competence, or skill that the student lacks. (184)

While many poststructuralists identify confusion about foundational truth as the root of today's authority crisis, commentators such as Bruce Pirie locate the difficulty in English teachers' still firm commitment to unhelpful notions of subjectivity, an Enlightenment-Romantic, humanist individualism that results from practitioners' delay in adopting "current thinking about the more complex nature of 'personhood'" (4). To Pirie, the student-centered classroom fails because of its participation in the cult of the individual and its imperative to teachers to play an irresponsibly diminished role in their own classrooms, where "intervention" and "authority" have become bad words (Aronowitz and Giroux 117).

Against this history of current literature and composition teaching in higher education, I examine the central question of teacher authority versus student freedom in four different sites: the writing conference, especially as it takes place in writing centers; the "open" class discussion, particularly the issue of whether it encourages dissent or defuses it; nonauthoritarian strategies such as teaching in a circle and all they signify about classroom hierarchies; and the use of networked computers in the reading and writing course, which has been both endorsed and excoriated by leaders in the discipline. Chapter two draws heavily on recent social constructionist theories of composition to interrogate tutoring practices, while chapter three employs critiques of Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogism in questioning models of classroom conversation. Chapter three problematizes, through applications of Louis Althusser and Michel Foucault, what may be seen as utopian techniques rooted in Paulo Freire and his followers. Finally, chapter five unites the theorists of the preceding three chapters, and touches briefly upon Jacques Derrida, in the analysis of online class interactions. Each site reveals the paradox that

English pedagogies that at first seem liberatory for both teachers and students often reveal themselves, under theoretical and empirical pressure, as conservative at best and oppressive at worst.

Pedagogy and power relations is a fitting area of analysis for English studies since that discipline, as much as any, retains the heritage of the liberal arts—a concept that has been valorized in the West but now weathers sustained critique. “Liberal education,” according to Wayne Booth in *The Vocation of a Teacher*, was originally called “liberal”

because it was supposed to liberate men to apply their minds, their critical thinking, to the most important decisions of their lives; how to act, who or what to love, what to call good or true or beautiful. We all know, of course, that much that traveled under the name of liberal education did not in fact liberate. . . . But these perversions do not destroy the value of the genuine article: in the great educational philosophers, from Plato and Aristotle through Newman and John Dewey to whoever is your favorite today, we discover a kind of perennial philosophy of liberating education. They all say that only in knowledge, only in the right kind of knowledge, can we liberate ourselves to make free choices. (Booth 177-78)

For Booth, liberal education can develop in all its participants four *R*’s that will stand them in good stead: the Recovery of historical truths, the Rejection of the false, the Renewal of the worthwhile in others’ meanings, and Revolutionizing the world by producing new truth (178). While not a panacea, liberal education, Booth tells a class of incoming University of Chicago freshmen, “could save *all* of you, and most certainly will save *some* of you—from the special forms of slavery that only these arts can remove”

(Booth 179). As do most twentieth century believers in liberal or progressive education, Booth draws upon that titan of pragmatism Dewey, who insists “that education has a social end. . . . The point of formal education is to give individuals a stake in the outcome, not only of their own lives, but of the affairs of the entire polity. Education is meant to equip individuals to become active members of the group, influencing it and being influenced by it” (Crowley, *Composition* 164).

But today the question of the freedom and authority relationship is particularly *urgent* for English studies for two reasons. First, English has not only maintained its ties to the liberal tradition of inquiring about the democratic impulse, but has largely inherited the entire burden that was once shared throughout the academy. The English department is the central place in which students learn how to decode and produce texts; where they learn how to analyze the play of ideology, language, and power in cultural practices; and where they learn, one hopes, to mount critique. While Sharon Crowley argues in *Composition in the University: Historical and Polemical Essays* that it is time for English, especially in the form of the universal freshman composition requirement, to forego these functions in the university,² Berlin holds, “English studies has a special role in the democratic educational mission. It is, after all, the only discipline required of all students in the schools. . .” (*Rhetorics, Poetics* 54). In addition, for James Crosswhite, the role of English studies in furthering the skills of democracy is even greater after

² Crowley’s arguments against the universal requirement are the following: “*The universal requirement exploits teachers of writing, particularly part-time teachers and graduate students*”; “*the universal requirement exploits students*”; “*the requirement has negative curricular effects*”; “*the requirement negatively affects classroom climate*”; “*the requirement has negative disciplinary and institutional effects*”; and “*the requirement has negative professional effects*” (*Composition in the University* 241–43).

poststructuralism's emphasis on the way language and power shape truth—what he here calls “post-Heideggerian thought”:

To put it briefly and simply, the processes of reasoning and argumentation that go on at the highest levels . . . are not radically different from the processes of reasoning and argumentation that go on in the composing activities of students in writing courses. In fact . . . college writing courses are the inheritors of the issues raised by the development of post-Heideggerian thought. Since such courses make up the entry to and in many ways the center of the college curriculum in the United States (in many colleges, they are the only required courses), the problems of knowledge, of reason, and of argument that arise in these courses are *the* central problems of higher education in this country. (14)

Secondly, in addition to the consideration that literature and composition courses may be the primary, if not the only, educational venues where some students investigate issues of democracy, the freedom and authority issue is compelling and immediate in English studies because the discipline is much less sanguine about the possibilities of democracy than it was 15 years earlier. Whereas Dewey, in the first half of the century, is confident about the empowering, liberating potential of education, and Booth claims in 1970 that the liberal arts save civilization from slavery, English studies today is at the center of academia's debate about whether human beings possess that reason and autonomy. After poststructuralism's critique of the unfettered subject and transhistorical truth, today's reading and writing courses must problematize the very availability of free choice, of the degree to which human agents make meaning themselves—or have

meaning, laden with ideology, thrust upon them. The work of English in the 1990s often focuses on the discussion of the degree to which knowledge is freely produced by all members of a democracy and to which knowledge is constrained by social forces. Perhaps more than anywhere else in the university today, students in literature and composition classes explore both democracy's promises, what it means to negotiate collective truth, and democracy's limits, what it means to combat and accommodate fierce social authority, whether voiced by their peers or by the teacher as representative of institutional power. As inheritor of the age-old battle of philosophy and rhetoric, English studies, through a carefully theorized pedagogy, can have a tremendous impact on how future citizens think of the relationship of truth and power, of commitment and tolerance, of oppression and resistance, in society at large.

Berlin sets the tone for Downing's *Changing Classroom Practices: Resources for Literary and Cultural Studies*, and captures the mood of much of the last 15 years' work on English pedagogy, in his foreword to that collection: "No set of institutional practices is declared immune from interrogation. All are to be investigated for their contradictions, concealments, and exclusions. And this inquiry extends to the classroom itself" (x). Certainly the pedagogies examined in the following chapters—the expressivist writing tutorial, the dialogic class discussion, techniques like teaching in a circle, and the networked conversation—are replete with "contradictions, concealments, and exclusions." While, as Berlin writes, "the traditional narrative for an experiment in pedagogy demands a happy ending, a moment of completion in which all conflicts are resolved in a celebration of difficulties successfully overcome," this analysis of four English teaching practices ends by casting doubt on their claims of empowering students

and generating resistance; they may, to the contrary, be seen as means of consolidating current power relations rather than challenging them. Whereas debunking these specific pedagogical strategies is a beneficial exercise if it only encourages teachers to problematize certain teaching techniques rather than accept them at face value, the process also sheds some light on larger difficulties in English studies. Analysis of these ostensibly liberating but ultimately constraining classroom practices perhaps reveals that the freedom-authority issue may be the heart of the crisis in the discipline today. Nonauthoritarian, or typically called "liberal," practices promise utopian relations for the English classroom but may fail because of their inattention to real and unjust power relations. This negligence of social and economic inequities may ultimately reinforce the status quo. However, those pedagogies that emphasize too greatly the forces that circumscribe human agency, traditionally called "conservative," might offer no hope of a better world. A third way out of this impasse may be what Sharon Crowley describes as the method of teachers who "desire that their students be alerted to the oppressive and debilitating means by which their culture defines them and their relations; they desire as well that students be empowered by their awareness of oppression to change the means by which it is maintained" (235). This position transforms, through combination, a pedagogy that ignores constraints on agency and one that overemphasizes them into teaching that neither ignores unjust power relations nor surrenders to them. As Crowley says, students recognizing their thoughts and actions are curtailed by power structures in the classroom and in the world, by an inescapable history, is a first step towards resisting hegemony.

Crowley terms this third alternative the “leftist” position, although left and right may be impossible to distinguish in this discourse. Strategies typically known as conservative, because they recognize social power, may be more easily associated with the left, such as traditional Marxism’s economic determinism. Tactics typically known as liberal may be reseen as conservative because of their reliance on politically suspect notions of universal truth and individualism. Perhaps a more apt term would be the Foucauldian or demystifying position, a view that an appropriate English pedagogy first lays bare, as much as possible, its interests and the interests of all those who participate in making meaning in the classroom. It is for such a demystifying teaching, as an essential move towards social justice, that I will argue.

Chapter Two

Expertise and Ideology in the Writing Conference:

Social Constructionism and Tutorial Authority

James Britton's notion that "the relationship of talk is central to the writing process" (29), found in his 1975 *The Development of Writing Abilities*, is an axiom of today's composition pedagogy. Research has demonstrated that in contrast to written comments, reasons such as the "heavy psychological value of individualization," the ease with which students assimilate oral comments, and the importance of student feedback all make conferencing central to any strong writing program (Carnicelli 105-07). Although a "conference after a paper has been graded is an autopsy" according to Thomas Carnicelli (103), talking about writing with a student in midprocess is invaluable, for it allows "the expression of tentative conclusions and opinions" (Britton 29). Since both student and tutor can try on many ideas and writing strategies in conference, "the language learner can take risks without fear of penalty" (Hawkins 66-67).

Due to the acknowledged benefits of conferencing, in the 1970s the writing center began to appear in institutions across the United States. Usually a space where students discuss their papers with advanced undergraduates or graduate teaching assistants in English, the writing center became higher education's primary site for talking about writing. Largely because of the success of writing centers, conferencing developed as an essential pedagogical technique throughout composition programs, whether the one-on-

one tutoring occurred between teacher and student or actually took place in a writing center.¹

However, although nearly all theorists and practitioners agree about the advantages of talk in the writing process, not everyone agrees about what should comprise this talk. Not only have theories describing the nature of writing differed throughout the last century, but also the explanations of tutoring, or talking about writing, have changed along with those paradigm shifts.

Current-traditional rhetoric, expressivism, and social constructionism

For any institution of higher education to have an effective practice of writing conferences, such a practice must be grounded in rhetorical theory. At least two theories have flourished in American education for most of the twentieth century, while a third seems to have established itself over the last 15 years. *Current-traditional rhetoric*, which has its roots in the last quarter of the 1800s but still lingers today, is “less a theory of rhetoric than a pedagogical system” (R. Gerald Nelms 356), conceived largely to render evaluation of writing less difficult. According to R. Gerald Nelms, current-traditional instruction is concerned with “the composed product rather than the composing process,” and places “an emphasis on grammatical and mechanical correctness” (356-57). In its epistemology, current-traditional writing instruction ignores invention and devalues content since discovery, knowing, occurs outside of the rhetorical process (Berlin, “Contemporary Composition” 52). In this model, talking about writing

¹ Throughout this chapter, I use *tutor* to mean anyone talking to students about writing, such as a classroom teacher in any discipline or a tutor in a writing center.

is mostly about remedial help, and the writing center tutor runs a kind of “fix-it shop” (North 22) for correctness of mechanics, punctuation, and usage. A tutor operating under current-traditional assumptions “would be concerned with isolating errors and formal weaknesses in a student’s text and providing information on how those problems could be corrected” (Murphy and Sherwood 2-3).²

However, since the 1980s and the publication of many notable books on writing centers,³ the current-traditional model of conferencing has come under serious attack for affording more attention to the text than to the writer; in particular, it neglects the writer’s clarity of thought and fluency of expression in a quest for an error-free paper. Others have criticized this model since it views the tutor as the operator of a storehouse of information that can be dispensed in a prescriptive way, such as handing a student with comma splices a packet of worksheets on this error (Lunsford 37).

A response to current-traditional rhetoric, *expressivism* began to dominate writing instruction in the 1970s and still prevails on many college campuses today. Expressivism has been explained in the following way:

In this paradigm, writing is viewed as a means of self-discovery. By exploring language as a mode of self-expression, students come to know themselves and develop an “authentic voice” in their writing.

Expressivists tend to value the individual writer as a solitary creator who

² The history of current-traditional, expressivist, and social constructionist rhetorics is described in greater detail in *Rhetoric and Reality: Writing Instruction in American Colleges, 1900-1985* by James Berlin.

³ For instance, *Tutoring Writing: A Sourcebook for Writing Labs*, edited by Muriel Harris; *Teaching One-to-One: The Writing Conference*, by Harris; and *Writing in the Center: Teaching in a Writing Center* by Irene L. Clark.

communicates his ideas through personal explorations of language, experience, and individual identity. (Murphy and Sherwood 3)

Several theorists have noticed the similarity of talking about writing under expressivist assumptions and the type of psychological counseling advocated by Carl Rogers, a type of nondirective listening in which a therapist reflects exactly what a client has said without judgment or advice (Irene L. Clark, *Writing in the Center* 16). In practice, an expressivist writing tutor facilitates the student's development of personal voice by using open, Socratic questioning, or *heuristics*, as a way of drawing out the ideas and language the student holds inside (Murphy and Sherwood 3). Under a "hands-off" or "minimalist" approach (Mohr 176; Brooks), the tutor not only "repeatedly turns the responsibility back to the student" (Muriel Harris, "Multiservice Writing Lab" 13), but attempts to cede all authority to him or her as well.⁴ Benefits of this type of conference, according to Muriel Harris, are that they avoid the problem of a tutor who will "begin talking and simply not stop, to go on and on lecturing to a passive, captive, or grateful listener, to assume control of the situation, to think for the student, and even, unwittingly, to give the answers the student should have been searching out" ("Roles a Tutor Plays" 63).

Expressivism was accepted in higher education as liberatory for both tutor and student; however, in the late 1980s and the 1990s, this way of talking about writing has undergone a rigorous critique. First, some composition theorists have wondered whether

⁴ Michael Pemberton's "Writing Center Ethics: Three Laws of Tutorics" serves as an example of the rigidity of the rules of nondirective tutoring, which insists upon the symbolic value that the student holds the pen in his or her direction of the discussion.

a tutor ever genuinely passes authority completely to a student or if the heuristic method only disguises—and ultimately reinforces—the control of the tutor.

Secondly, Andrea Lunsford has attacked expressivist tutoring because it is “informed by a deep-seated belief in individual genius” (37). Expressivist tutoring rests on humanist notions of the subject, “that the writer is an autonomous agent who has the power to generate a piece of writing from him/herself with the right prompts or cues and that ‘inspiration’ arises from this central self” (Joyner 81). In “The Writing Center Conference and the Textuality of Power,” Michael A. Joyner traces this Platonic epistemology to the *Meno* and *Phaedrus* (81), explained by Karen LeFevre as “the act of an atomistic individual who recollects or uncovers ideas from within, all the time remaining apart from a material and social world” (8). Instead of the current-traditional tutor’s doling out of truths from an information storehouse, the expressivist tutor’s role is to encourage the student to withdraw into a type of poet’s garret (Lunsford 38). In short, expressivist theory has come under attack from poststructuralists because it holds to foundational truth; expressivism underemphasizes that writing—and indeed, knowing—are social activities.

Perhaps the most energetic school of thought in composition studies today—it has, in fact, been called “the default theory of the nineties” (Sullivan 950)—*social constructionism* seeks to recover the social dimension neglected by expressivism. Social constructionists “maintain that knowledge, rather than being ‘found’ uniquely through self-discovery, is ‘made’ by agreement, or consensus” (Murphy and Sherwood 4). In other words, what we can know and what we can communicate are made possible—and

circumscribed by—the reaches of what Stanley Fish calls “interpretive communities,” or groups of people linked together in webs of discourse (14).

Social constructionism, in addition to its dependence on poststructuralist epistemology, that “knowledge is a constructed, sociolinguistic entity and that learning is an interdependent social process” (Bruffee, *Collaborative Learning* 202), relies on a related postmodern conception of the subject: Building upon the work of Marx, Freud, Lacan, Derrida, feminist theorists, and others, poststructuralists reject the autonomous, conscious, Cartesian *I* for the notion of the self as a constructed effect of language that is always already ideological (Faigley, 8-9; Belsey 59).⁵ These twin assumptions about the making of knowledge and subjectivity exert tremendous pressure on expressivist tutoring, raising questions such as Joyner’s in his article:

Does “minimal-input” tutoring [as drawn from expressivism] allow students to place their texts in a larger process of deliberation, to partake in the play of intertextuality, or does it offer them a narrow and fettered conception of the text as a self-generated, autonomous piece of work which has its genesis in the central, individual consciousness of a determined self that functions outside the dominant ideology of the scene of writing? (81)

In practice, talking to students about writing under social constructionism manifests itself in two forms. This diversity in applications of the term social

⁵ In *Rhetorics, Poetics, and Cultures*, Berlin distinguishes a simpler social constructionism that grew out of turn-of-the-century pragmatism with *social-epistemic rhetoric*, which Berlin describes as social constructionism supplemented by poststructuralism’s “critique of signifying practices in their relation to subject formation within the framework of economic, social, and political conditions” (77).

constructionism has been interrogated as “scholars and educators are now discovering it to be both overdetermined and underspecified for their purposes” (Sullivan 950). One method is an emphasis on peer group discussions of student compositions “to downplay the role of the tutor as an authority figure or the single source of knowledge” (Murphy and Sherwood 4). Instead of a storehouse or a garret, the site of tutoring becomes a parlor with many diverse voices (Lunsford 40). The tutor’s voice is not privileged, but just one of many (Murphy and Sherwood 4), as social constructionism places “control, power, and authority not in the tutor or staff, not in the individual student, but in the negotiating group” (Lunsford 40).

However, recent theorists question Kenneth Bruffee’s assumption that “knowledgeable peers”—fellow students—possess enough proficiency in the discourse at hand to be of help to the student writer (Sullivan 951). “Advocates tend to view social constructionism,” writes Murphy, “as a liberatory philosophy in emphasizing the decentralization of power within education—moving power away from the control of any one individual—teacher/student/tutor—and giving it to the group” (32-33). Yet students often find its emphasis on egalitarian collaboration disempowering. A student frustrated by the aimlessness of peer response encounters the same difficulty that Carnicelli and others have identified in expressivist tutoring, when students may face a confusing barrage of questions about their work or endure a tutor who will neither offer explicit direction nor take an evaluative stand (115-17). The objection these students have to peer review and expressivist methods is that they see them as obstacles to accessing expertise.

Social constructionism, expertise, and the power of the tutor

Although one implication of social constructionism has been realized as an emphasis on peer response, a contradictory, and ultimately more useful, version of theory reasserts the expertise and authority of the tutor. Since social constructionists hold that what we can know and what we can communicate are based on agreement among human beings in interpretive communities, some of these theorists believe that the tutor's responsibility lies in introducing his or her students to academic discourse, to direct them in how thought and language are created in institutions. In spite of the resistance of Peter Elbow, among others, to a dominance of academic writing in some freshman English courses ("Reflections"), and misgivings about pseudo-academic "Engfish," Ken Macrorie's term for students' "falsely authoritative papers about subjects that quickly become too much for them" (Marius 476), Carnicelli believes we have to lead students to adopt "the common criteria of good writing shared by the teacher, the English profession, and with certain wide variations, educated people in general" (116). Although Carnicelli wrote these words in 1980, during the consolidation of expressivism, his ideas stand in sharp contrast to those of expressive theorists who saw their duty as freeing students' individual voices from the oppression of the academy (Bizzell, "Composing Processes" 53).

Social constructionists, writes Patricia Bizzell, believe that instead of trying to empower students by upholding their individual voices, introducing students to academic writing has become the primary goal of composition teaching. The very students who had difficulties with academic writing and whom expressivists urged to develop an

individual voice are the ones social constructionists hope to initiate into the discourses of the various disciplines (Bizzell, "Composing Processes" 60).

In their article "A Critique of Pure Tutoring," Linda K. Shamoon and Deborah H. Burns deliver not only the most devastating attack on expressivist tutoring in recent memory, but also furnish composition theorists with a powerful argument for reestablishing the tutor's demonstration of expertise in writing conferences. From their experiences with writing across the curriculum programs, Shamoon and Burns show that many disciplines other than English use directive tutoring profitably in writing instruction. Calling for a philosophy of talking about writing nearly opposite that now entrenched in freshman English courses and the university writing center, Shamoon and Burns propose as a model the master class in music education. In a master class, a music expert models for a group of students studying the same specialty and then guides and evaluates their individual performances of the piece at hand (140). Such a tutorial would be contrary to expressivist thought because it is unashamedly "hierarchical: there is an open admission that some individuals have more knowledge and skill than others, and that the knowledge and skills are being 'handed down'" (141). Conferencing in accordance with this model demystifies the unequal power relations that exist between teacher and student.

This version of social constructionism, which stresses how knowledge is made in hierarchical institutions, calls into question not only expressivism but also applications of social constructionism that encourage peer collaboration. Some critiques of peer response maintain that it is too closely modeled on cooperation in the workplace, while others argue that it does not truly prepare students for a stratified world of work that

values authority over collaboration. Taking this latter view, Howard Ryan, in “The Whys of Teaching Composition: Social Visions,” argues that peer collaboration is not liberatory but that it instead privileges acquiescence to the existing social order through the offer of a false sense of egalitarianism:

The collaborative better world is one in which people have learned to get along, where we either accept our differences or strive to work them out through cooperative and peaceful means. Oppressive gender, race, or class structures need not lead to divisive political battles in the collaborative better world: cooperative conflict resolution is the key. . . . Social harmonist ideologies are traditional means of elite social control and are used to stifle dissent or to direct dissent into safe channels that leave elite power intact. Members of exploited groups are invited to trust or to accept a false sense of peership with their exploiters. . . . Students encouraged to see academe and the workplace beyond as “communities of knowledgeable peers” where “status equals” engage in agreed-upon discourses (Bruffee, “Conversation of Mankind” 642) may be ill prepared for their present and future struggles within hierarchical institutions. Perhaps, rather than teach a value of blanket cooperativeness, our classrooms could ask critical questions about collaboration. (14-15)

Writing centers and writing classrooms should exist for more than inculcating social skills of cooperation in students (Murphy 32); far better, Ryan believes, they should help students understand the asymmetrical power relations that undergird academia and the

workplace, where expertise and status determine what counts as knowledge and discourse.

Social constructionism, audience, and the rhetorical stance

Perhaps an answer to the failures of peer collaboration is a refiguring of audience; in other words, writing programs and writing centers might provide experiences in which students share their work not merely with “status equals” or tutors who refuse to assert their authority, but with writers knowledgeable about the discourses students hope to enter. In his famous essay, “The Rhetorical Stance,” Wayne Booth writes,

The common ingredient that I find in all of the writing I admire . . . is something that I shall reluctantly call the rhetorical stance, a stance which depends on discovering and maintaining in any writing situation a proper balance among the three elements that are at work in any communicative effort; the available arguments about the subject itself, the interests and peculiarities of the audience, and the voice, the implied character, of the speaker. (153)

What Booth eloquently describes in his essay is commonly known as the communication triangle—the relationship of sender, receiver, and message—that has been a part of rhetorical theory at least since Aristotle's identification of *ethos* (sender), *pathos* (receiver), and *logos* (message) as the constituent parts of any rhetorical act (Lunsford and Glenn 321-22). Booth's 1963 article is often cited as an essential modern document about the importance of audience. Social constructionists look past Booth across the centuries to Aristotle in recovering that element of the communication triangle nearly lost

under expressivism; Bizzell, for example, credits the resurgence of classical rhetoric in composition studies with social constructionism's renewed interest in audience:

Classical rhetoric assumes that the function of writing is not to express oneself but to effect change in the human community in which one lives. Hence, the ability to suit one's style to the particular audience, rather than addressing all in one "personal" register, becomes art, not hypocrisy. Classical rhetoric invites discussion of the social and political uses of writing in ways that personal-style pedagogy, for all its political agenda, never could. ("Composing Processes" 60-61)

Teachers of English composition might instill the importance of audience, encourage their students to take the rhetorical stance, if those students are to achieve the effectiveness of the types of writing upheld by Booth and Bizzell. Perhaps one place to begin is by transforming writing conferences, which now conform to the expressivist (or the extreme egalitarian-collaborative strain of social constructionism) orthodoxy of being "Socratic, private, a-disciplinary, and nonhierarchical or democratic" (Shamoon and Burns 137), into more directive tutorials based on social constructionist principles that recognize expertise and take power relations seriously.

A long-standing obstacle in writing pedagogy has been that the majority of tutors available to students have been either English teachers or perhaps generalists in a writing center. Although any English teacher can identify faults of correctness, as in the current-traditional paradigm, and any generalist can ask students open questions to elicit the personal voice, as in the expressivist paradigm, such techniques do not necessarily produce very sophisticated or committed writing. When English teachers never expect

their students to write for, or be tutored by, a person who stands as a capable practitioner of a specific branch of academic discourse, it is little wonder that these students often fail at such writing tasks. But when tutors present themselves as experts in their disciplines, willing to take the responsibility of leading students into a discourse community, students' perceptions of audience are sharpened. When the expert tutor acquaints the student with the expectations of the particular audience of a particular rhetorical situation, writing improves, which is one of the pioneering insights of Mina Shaughnessy's work with basic writers. As Bizzell writes, Shaughnessy found that "the pedagogy [basic writers] need is not one that excoriates academic discourse, but rather one that mediates their introduction to it while remaining respectful of the language-using practices they bring to school" ("Composing Processes" 62). Although expressivists fear socially disadvantaged students surrender power by sacrificing a personal voice to hegemonic academic discourse, a sharing of expertise through social constructionism allows them to insert themselves in empowering ways of knowing and writing. In *The Culture of Reading and the Teaching of English*, Kathleen McCormick tells of attending a literacy conference where she encountered this very notion:

Unlike most of the college teachers, [those who worked for literacy in the larger community] used these [social constructionist] practices to help individuals enter the social order, not to critique or take action against it—a goal that before the conference, I, not unlike a number of educators on the left, might have too easily trivialized as simply being complicit with the dominant.

One of the questions that the conference organizers had suggested we raise in our discussion groups involved the conflict between notions of literacy as “empowerment” and literacy as a means to greater worker productivity. We quickly discovered that these definitions did not seem dichotomous for people involved in community and workplace literacy initiatives . . . where, for example, helping a single mother become sufficiently skilled to get off welfare would *both* empower the woman *and* make her a more productive worker. There seems to be a general sense among the academic left that personal empowerment can only come by working against the system, but those working in the community and the workplace demonstrated only too clearly that this is not necessarily the case: people laid off from factory work who need retraining feel empowered when they gain the skills to get another job to support their families. (94-95)

Modeling, imitation, and tutors across the curriculum

How would talking about writing change, in practice, if colleges and universities accepted this different set of theoretical principles? First, tutors would employ a collection of techniques that seem new after a few decades of expressivist methods, but that are really as old as rhetoric instruction itself: modeling and imitation. When a tutor models for a student, he or she takes a much more active role, showing the student how scholars in his or her discipline go about invention, drafting, and editing. (One might note here that English teachers who insist upon teaching the personal narrative or the

descriptive paper in their composition courses are failing to model the type of writing upon which their own discipline rewards them. See chapter five for a brief discussion of the politics of the autobiographical essay.) Operating not as Rogerian therapist but as academic authority, the tutor might direct the student's research at the beginning of a project, suggest appropriate patterns of arrangement in the middle, and make revisions in the student's drafts near the end. This last method—giving the tutor a pencil and allowing him or her to edit a student's paper—breaks one of the most repeated, and silliest, rules of expressivist tutoring still in force in many classrooms and writing centers today. The social constructionist tutor seeks “to explain academic writing conventions,” in some ways recovering a current-traditional emphasis on correctness, but more importantly “to demystify the kinds of thinking they make possible” (Bizzell, “Composing Processes” 64). In other words, the tutor will instruct the student in the epistemological possibilities of that discipline, as a introductory biology student, for example, might be tutored in how one knows in life sciences. In such a social constructionist paradigm, not only are conceptions of audience strengthened, but so are those of message, or logos, as students are acquainted with the arguments available to them in various content areas. Diverse writing tasks in diverse disciplines necessitate diverse conferencing methods if the tutor is to respect the uniqueness of the rhetorical situation the student faces; a social constructionist would therefore discredit Stephen North's belief in general strategies when he writes that “the kind of writing does not substantially change the approach” of talking about a student's work (33).

Just as Muriel Harris, often considered a leader in applying expressivist techniques to the writing conference, has supported the value of modeling (“Modeling”),

so Irene L. Clark, another theorist often placed in the expressivist camp, has championed the classical practice of imitation in a manner of rhetoric instruction used by Cicero and Quintilian ("Collaboration and Ethics" 93). Since "intellectual socialization may be accomplished not only by interacting with people, but also by encountering the writing of others" (Bizzell, "Composing Processes" 65), the imitation of models would be greatly useful—for example, having a student in an English literature survey course read and imitate the academic essays in the Norton Critical Edition of *Jane Eyre*. Undergraduates should experience undiluted examples of authentic academic and "real-world" writing in every course.

Secondly, the types of tutors available to students would change in the tutor-as-expert version of the social constructionist paradigm. With the goal of having students guided by authorities, the practice of using peer tutors, as do college writing centers, would have to be either discontinued or transformed. One way to transform this pedagogy is to use a peer tutor who specializes in working with students in one class or, at most, one discipline. He or she would attend, for example, the world civilization course along with the students he or she tutors. By immersing themselves in the content and discourse of specific courses, such tutors would gain rhetorical authority, able to offer conferencing techniques beyond general and expressivist strategies. In addition, all teachers would be urged to meet with students writing in their disciplines rather than relying on English teachers for all conferencing, as often happens in writing centers staffed by the English department or happens informally when students seek out English teachers for help with writing tasks assigned to them in other fields. Unless an English teacher has an opportunity to become truly proficient in the discourse of another

discipline, as sometimes occurs when, for example, an instructor is employed full time by the law or business school, perhaps English teachers should confine themselves to the type of discourse in which most are truly expert, the rhetoric of writing about literature.⁶ Confining themselves to the writing they know best will strengthen the tutor's authority.

Finally, academic institutions might give up the claim to objectivity they impose upon writing tutors. Teachers and writing center personnel have for the most part been trained to strive to be "objective" in their discussions of student work; for instance, some writing centers allow tutors to discuss "form" in the papers they encounter but not "content." Studies of writing center staffs in higher education, such as Stacey Freed's "Subjectivity in the Tutorial Session: How Far Can We Go?", show that tutors try to respect the individual's ownership of his or her ideas and avoid overstepping boundaries like intervention in "subject matter" (40-43). Yet social constructionism holds that any claim to objectivity, to subjectivity and language outside of ideology, is spurious. Joyner writes of surpassing the limits of objectivity:

I agree that we should, indeed, "overstep the boundaries" . . . in every tutorial, for, in fact, this seeming overstepping is not really a breaking of boundaries at all. If we deal with the text as a text in the poststructuralist understanding of it as a play of ambiguous signifiers, it is not possible to be objective—to see only the surface of the text (as if the "writing" and the "content" were in some way separate). This is not the way a text

⁶ In "Look Back and Say 'So What': The Limits of the Generalist Tutor," Jean Kiedaisch and Sue Dinitz note that in their experience, sometimes "good tutoring strategies alone were not enough" (72), that sometimes their students needed experts in specific disciplines who could go beyond general strategies.

functions, it is not the way reading (which is another text) works, and it is misleading if we attempt to convince students that their texts exist as autonomous creations. (82)

Beyond acknowledging that any tutor's discussions of a student's work are always already imbricated in ideology, the relationship between tutor and student might be reconceived as oppositional as well as supportive. Here the expressivist metaphors of tutor as "coach," "facilitator," or "explorer" may fail us again (DeLawter 101), for although tutors might serve as mentors to guide the learner's development in academic discourse, their interactions must be "radicalized (textualized) and politicized based on an understanding of writing as a struggle for power" (Joyner 82).

Some institutions may not be able to adopt for all situations a more contentious version of social constructionist tutoring since students differ greatly in maturity level, cognitive development, and writing skill. Shamoan and Burns admit that their master class model "is not immune to abuse" (141), and writing centers should be vigilant that directive tutoring not degenerate into the bullying of fragile egos; abandoning the pretense of objectivity does not necessitate aggressive proselytizing (Joyner 87).

Still, the tutor's insertion into the writing process can never be viewed as apolitical or value neutral, and institutions—especially at the level of higher education—might allow students to discover, in the writing conference, the ideological battle of making and remaking texts. Joyner states,

However, Kiedaisch and Dinitz are troubled by the practical difficulties of trying to match expert tutors with students in a drop-in writing center.

All texts partake of a multi-dimensional struggle: the struggle of the writer to write; the struggle of the reader to read the writing and, thereby, write the writing; the struggle of the text to locate itself in the larger discourse of which it is a part; the struggle of meaning to announce itself by means of a sign system that is at once ambiguous and playful; and, finally, the struggle for power in the face of the dominant ideology into which the text thrusts itself. In the writing center conference, overbearing and vague notions of the objective should not result in a discussion of student writing which brackets off these struggles, which are inherent in the nature of writing and of the text; rather, students should be made aware of these struggles and of the ideology which underlies even the most innocent seeming text. (82-83)

While in the 1970s and early 1980s colleges and universities began to draw less heavily from current-traditional rhetoric in determining the shape of the writing conference, it was in large part replaced by an expressivist paradigm that theorists now see as equally entrenched and even oppressive. That is not to say that nondirective tutoring, which uses open questioning to draw out the personal voice, is not without any benefit, but to say that those expressivist techniques are not appropriate for all ages, all disciplines, and all rhetorical situations. In talking to students about writing at the turn of the twenty-first century, English teachers might embrace the insights of social constructionism, which, by way of poststructuralist epistemology and ontology, can demystify academic discourse and the power relations that undergird it, introducing students to the ways of knowing and writing upheld by specific interpretive communities.

Chapter Three
Reconsidering Bakhtinian Dialogism:
Teaching Authority and Classroom Discourse

In the 1970s and '80s, two pedagogical trends entered the mainstream of English studies as means to deconstruct the traditional lecture model of college teaching; *collaborative learning* and *reader response* criticism were introduced to make discussion in the English class more lively and democratic, liberatory and empowering for students. At its most extreme, collaborative learning encourages the idea that students learn from each other while the teacher is a facilitator, maintaining only the barest of structures to aid class discussion (although some instructors do claim collaborative learning requires more arrangement, or at least more preparation, than does a teacher-centered class). According to David W. Johnson and Roger T. Johnson, "the idea is simple" behind *cooperative learning* (used interchangeably with collaborative learning): "Cooperative learning is the instructional use of small groups so that students work together to maximize their own and each other's learning" (278).¹ Others associate the term not only with small group work but with a wide variety of literacy pedagogies, such as "reader response, peer critiques, . . . joint writing projects, and peer tutoring in writing centers and classrooms" (Trimbur 87). In English studies, the concept is often connected with Kenneth Bruffee, whose influential "Collaborative Learning and the 'Conversation of Mankind'" energized the strategy's adherents with its 1984 appearance; historians

¹ Johnson and Johnson's "Classroom Instruction and Cooperative Learning" is a useful overview of cooperative learning across the disciplines, as is Robert E. Slavin's "Cooperative Learning." For more specific applications in English studies, see John Trimbur's "Collaborative Learning and Teaching Writing" and Andrea Lunsford and Lisa Ede's *Singular Texts/Plural Authors: Perspectives on Collaborative Writing*.

often trace this pedagogy farther back, especially to John Dewey's theories of "new" or "progressive" education in the first half of this century (Trimbur "Collaborative Learning" 91). Collaborative learning, then, is a widespread pedagogical phenomenon that touches all disciplines in higher education. Although seen by many teachers as synonymous with social constructionism, collaborative strategies, according to Bruce Horner, differ from truly social pedagogies in that they avoid conflict and remain indebted to the expressivist drive for self-discovery, to a privileged notion of consensus, and to a practical concern for making progress in peer editing sessions (514).

Although it has been in the air for almost three quarters of a century, reader response theory, or *reception aesthetic*, did not become a conventional pedagogy until the demise of New Critical orthodoxy in the 1970s and early 1980s. Welcomed as a radical description of reading practices in those decades, reader response quickly became adopted as the idea that "anything goes" in a discussion of literature, probably in reaction to the overly analytical, pseudo-scientific New Criticism, which came under poststructuralist fire for, among other reasons, its claim to objective, apolitical interpretation. As English departments still struggle with the New Critical legacy, the reception aesthetic often embraced by college teachers is the strain that is most markedly subjective.

If the basis of reader response is that the meaning of a text is created by the process of reading, one could array various reception theorists on a continuum: On one end, meaning is nearly completely determined by the text, although the text poses a few gaps that a reader bridges in his or her reading experience, and on the other is an almost completely indeterminate text, which provides only the rare signpost as the reader

develops meaning by him- or herself. In the first tendency, Wolfgang Iser and Stanley Fish, sometimes termed *stylistic* or *transactional* reader response theorists, emphasize the ways texts orchestrate the reading experience. Texts are replete with signals to develop an implied reader's or an interpretive community's expectations and establish codes that create roles for their readers to inhabit. However, subjective reader response critics, the second persuasion, are concerned with the unique reactions of specific individuals rather than with implied readers or interpretive communities. Norman Holland and David Bleich, representative of the subjective school, believe that readers create meaning in highly personal ways. The meaning that any individual reader finds in a text will be different from the meanings others find, for a text is merely an occasion for one to produce his or her "identity theme," a Rorschach blot that will spur idiosyncratic viewpoints.² The more relativistic reader response has been dominant in English pedagogies, as evidenced by the publication of large and influential collections of articles supporting this inclination, such as *Literature in the Classroom: Readers, Texts, and Contexts* (1988), edited by Ben Nelms, and *Literature Instruction: A Focus on Student Response* (1992), edited by Judith Langer. Particularly influential have been the theories of Louise Rosenblatt, whose idea of *evocation* is sometimes used by undergraduate teachers as the ground for increased personal response and collaborative work in literature classrooms. For instance, Patrick Dias, in "Literary Reading and Classroom Constraint," proposes that Rosenblatt's evocation would manifest itself as "deeply felt personal engagements, the recalling of personal experience," that should be fostered

² For discussions on the varieties of reader response theory, see William Ray's *Literary Meaning from Phenomenology to Deconstruction*, David Bleich's *Readers and Feelings: An Introduction to Subjective Criticism*, and Richard Beach's *A Teacher's Introduction to Reader-Response Theories*.

through small group work instead of in the intimidating “large-group format with the teacher up front” (Dias 137).

In the 1990s, pedagogues have used the theories of Mikhail Bakhtin as a more theoretically sophisticated supplement to collaborative learning and subjective reader response, with the same goal of bolstering the practice of a more unfettered class discussion. These teachers argue that a class discussion with minimal instructor intervention, one in which “everyone has his or her say,” makes up the liberating battle of discourses Bakhtin said defeated tyranny. Whether conscious of it or not, when teachers encourage the kind of open, democratic, free-flowing discussions many hope for in their classrooms, they are using a Bakhtinian model: They believe that no monological, authoritarian discourse (like that of the teacher) can become established in the face of the battling discourses of student dialogism.

Bakhtinian dialogism

Although Bakhtin’s ideas can be applied to any cultural practice, like pedagogical strategies, Bakhtin focused on analyzing works of literature, and literary critics have used him primarily to examine discourse in fiction.³ These critics find it helpful to explain Bakhtinian principles by placing side by side Bakhtin’s 1941 “Epic and Novel” (collected in *The Dialogic Imagination*) with early Marxist critic Georg Lukacs’ conceptions of the two genres discussed in his 1920 *The Theory of the Novel*.⁴ To simplify these two

³ While dialogism is most commonly associated today with Bakhtin, the concept has existed as long as rhetorical theory. For example, one could view disparate moments such as Athenian democracy, Hugh Blair’s negotiation of taste, and Chaim Perelman’s *New Rhetoric* of negotiating values for social cooperation as having dialogical impulses.

⁴ Although many articles have focused on the differences between Lukacs and Bakhtin, two recent critics have tried to bring the theorists together, arguing that Lukacs and Bakhtin hold many of the same

theorists is to say that Bakhtin sees the epic as evidence of an oppressive system which the novel resists, while Lukacs sees the epic as a harmony which the novel seeks to recover. In *The Theory of the Novel*, Lukacs is hopeful that the novel's project is utopian and unifying, since for him "the novel as a form is the attempt in modern times to recapture something of the quality of epic narration as a reconciliation between matter and spirit, between life and essence" (Jameson, *Marxism and Form* 172). In contrast, Bakhtin rejoices at the fragmentation he finds in the novel in opposition to epic monologism. In "Epic and Novel," as well as in other places throughout his work, Bakhtin draws sharp distinctions between the two forms. According to Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist, epic and novel for Bakhtin "are not merely two different genres with their own formal characteristics but also two diametrically opposed expressions of reality" (274).

For Bakhtin, the epic is characterized by a monological, authoritarian discourse about the world, a unified *weltanschauung*, while the novel is characterized by *heteroglossia*, a diversity of conflicting discourses, which Bakhtin calls at various times *dialogism*, *polyphony*, *carnivalization*, and other terms:

The novel can be defined as a diversity of social speech types (sometimes even diversity of languages) and a diversity of individual voices, artistically organized. The internal stratification of any single national language into social dialects, characteristic group behavior, professional jargons, generic languages, languages of generations and age groups, tendentious languages, languages of the authorities, of various circles and

ideas about the two genres but evaluate these traits differently. See Michel Aucoutrier, "The Theory of the

of passing fashions, languages that serve the sociopolitical purposes of the day, even of the hour (each day has its own slogan, its own vocabulary, its own emphases)—this internal stratification present in every language at any given moment of its historical existence is the indispensable prerequisite for the novel as a genre. (*The Dialogic Imagination* 263).

Bakhtin views the novel as consisting of layers of language—from literature and other fields of learning, from the professions and trades, from regional dialects and personal idiolects—that interact with each other, or, as he writes, “become dialogized, permeated with laughter, irony, humor, elements of self-parody” to produce “an indeterminacy, a certain semantic openendedness, a living contact with unfinished, still-evolving contemporary reality” (*The Dialogic Imagination* 7). As many critics remark, Bakhtin praises the novel (and by implication, a similarly dialogic society) because of its *unfinalizability*, that because of its many interacting ways of expression, no one perspective can dominate (Emerson and Morson 44). In praise of Dostoevsky, whom he believes allowed his characters to speak in their own voices instead of subordinating them, as does Tolstoy, to an overbearing author’s point of view, Bakhtin declares, “*Nothing conclusive has yet taken place in the world, the ultimate word of the world and about the world has not yet been spoken, the world is open and free, everything is still in the future and will always be in the future*” (*Problems* 166).

Among readers of Bakhtin some discrepancy exists about whether the theorist is merely descriptive or if he is normative in his discussions of heteroglossia. Many readers of Bakhtin do hold that he believes dialogism is a positive force in the novel and in the

world; Carolyn Porter, for instance, writes that "Bakhtin regards the novel's displacement of the epic as a boon for both literature and life" (6). In his introduction to *The Dialogic Imagination*, Michael Holquist contrasts Bakhtin's "affirming," "happy" vision of heteroglossia with Lukacs' despairing view of the fragmentation of nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature into Naturalism's false objectivity and Modernism's false subjectivity, which he only finds remedied in the more unified discourse of the Realist novel (xxxii). Bakhtin's main reason for promoting heteroglossia is that in his view it participates in freedom, that it signals the liberation of diverse expression in the face of authoritarian discourse. Eva Corredor, in "Lukacs and Bakhtin: A Dialogue of Fiction," writes, "Contrary to Lukacs, Bakhtin indeed affirms the intrinsically human quality in man's breaking away from epic closure. Bakhtin's hero, we could say, is Prometheus, who signifies his authenticity by revolting against the tyranny of the divine" (104).

Behind Bakhtin's conception of the carnival is a utopian vision, one that looks both backwards and forwards. The medieval carnival, Bakhtin finds, mocked the hegemonic, "all that was stable, unchanging, perennial: the existing hierarchy, the existing religious, political, and moral values, norms, and prohibitions" (*Rabelais* 9). Whereas official feasts signaled the "triumph of a truth . . . that was put forward as eternal and indisputable," carnival upholds the "joyous relativity" of all values (*Rabelais* 9; Emerson and Morson 55). In his "Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel" (1937-38, collected in *The Dialogic Imagination*) and *Rabelais and His World* (1965), Bakhtin reveals that his view of the novel as a young, positive, affirmative, "laughing" genre is based on a Rabelaisian ideal. In these essays he implies that a folk dialogism, as

existed in the institution of carnival, can help humanity recover a kind of peasant utopia—ironically, the type of harmonious primitive society that Lukacs associates with the epic world. This heteroglossia of the volk would parody and subvert authoritarian institutions the way Rabelaisian dialogism undermined the hegemony of the aristocracy and the Catholic Church of sixteenth-century France. But Bakhtin's utopia lies in the future as well as the past: "In laughter as celebrated by Renaissance folk culture in the carnival, namely as an inversion and parody of high culture, Bakhtin sees the possibility of a 'complete withdrawal from the present order,'" writes Renate Lachmann in "Bakhtin and Carnival: Culture as Counter-Culture," (118). The "present order" to which Bakhtin refers is, of course, based on repressive Stalinist dogma, but Bakhtin looks forward to an approaching utopia brought about by heteroglossia, a time when centrifugal discourses would break the unbearable centripetal monologism of the intolerant Stalinist state.⁵ Lachmann adds, "In other words, in the carnivalesque game of inverting official values he sees the anticipation of another, utopian world in which anti-hierarchism, relativity of values, questioning of authority, openness, joyous anarchy, and the ridiculing of all dogmas hold sway, a world in which syncretism and a myriad of differing perspectives are permitted" (118).

It is easy to see how Bakhtin's notion that a carnival of voices can undermine oppression would appeal to nonauthoritarian pedagogues, who uphold classroom heteroglossia as a way to engender freedom. However, serious critiques of Bakhtin have appeared in recent years. For instance, some readers discover that as it appears in certain

⁵ Both Renate Lachmann's "Bakhtin and Carnival: Culture as Counter-Culture" and Michael Holquist's "Bakhtin and Rabelais: Theory and Praxis" discuss the dialogical relationship between Bakhtin's writings and Stalinism.

novels, unchecked dialogism may not liberate but instead leads to directionless obfuscations and ultimate reinstallation of dominant power structures.⁶ Various attacks on Bakhtin, discussed in the section “Critiquing Bakhtin” below, demonstrate a need for English teachers to question the embrace of dialogism as liberatory, to problematize that model that so many uphold as a goal for the classroom, and to develop pedagogies that recover the importance of the committed, monological teacher’s voice.

The Orthodoxy of the Dialogic Classroom

One does not have to look far to see that Bakhtinian dialogism undergirds pedagogies throughout English studies.⁷ From the daily evidence of instructors who praise their students for the quantity of their comments, evaluation instruments that reward these teachers for their talkative students, countless articles in *College English*,

⁶ An example of such a reading might be applied to Herman Melville’s *Billy Budd*, which may yield a view of dialogism, associated with the fortification of social authority, that is suspect. That is, Melville rejects in the novel the heteroglossia found in the speech of John Claggart, Captain Vere, and his own narrator as a tool that advances only hucksterism and double-dealing, not human freedom and the improvement of society. For Bakhtin, heteroglossia subverts dogma and authority, liberated discourse humbles tyrants and brings about an improved society of more direct and humane relationships, yet in *Billy Budd* the Bakhtinian paradigm is inverted: Billy Budd, associated with monologue, is oppressed, while Claggart, Vere, and Melville’s narrator, associated with dialogue, use the play of discourse as a tool to assert authority through fraud. In this work, characters Bakhtin would associate with the novel form’s heteroglossia are guilty of the worse kind of self-interested cozenage, while a character from the epic past seems to represent the promise of a better world. Instead, Melville’s final work indicts a world that separates spheres of action into conflicting, compartmentalized discourses. What Melville might describe in the character of Budd is a monologism that is not that demonized by Bakhtin, but at least the possibility of a guilelessness that has its own integrity. For revisions of Bakhtin by way of American literature studies and feminist criticism, see Dale M. Bauer’s *Feminist Dialogics: A Theory of a Failed Community* and Bauer and Susan J. McKinstry’s collection *Feminism, Bakhtin, and the Dialogic*. Morson and Emerson’s *Rethinking Bakhtin: Extensions and Challenges* presents other reconsiderations of the uses of Bakhtin’s theories.

⁷ Perhaps one of the best descriptions of the practices of the dialogic English classroom is Ira Shor’s “Critical Dialogue versus Teacher-Talk: Classroom Discourse and Social Inequality” in *Empowering Education*.

and position papers developed by the National Council of Teachers of English, the heteroglossic classroom is a dominant, nearly unquestioned, paradigm.⁸

A 1987 report, *The English Coalition Conference: Democracy through Language*, published by an assembly of English professional organizations across all grade levels from kindergarten through graduate school, stands as evidence of this pedagogy's ubiquity. This diverse body certainly agrees with Bakhtinian assumptions as they take "encouraging students to articulate their own points of view, and encouraging them to respect different perspectives" as a foundation of their main theme, the importance of democracy in English studies (Lloyd-Jones and Lunsford xx):

Citizens of a democracy must be able to appreciate diversity even as they advocate their own beliefs about what is good and true. Teaching students how and why different ways of reading can find different meanings in the same text can provide important experience in understanding and appreciating opposing perspectives. Learning about the many different kinds of writing and ways of thinking which are the subject matter of the language arts curriculum can expand the capacity of students to imagine and value worlds other than their own. The ability to communicate their views in oral and written form and to listen with comprehension to the views of others is also indispensable to citizens in a democratic society, and enhancing this ability is a major aim of language arts education.

(Lloyd-Jones and Lunsford xx)

⁸ Although some of the documents cited below focus on English in secondary education, many of the same pedagogical emphases and strategies have appeared in higher education as well; some of the

A second example, a 1982 document called "The Essentials of Education," published by NCTE in conjunction with professional associations from a variety of disciplines, reveals in general the renewed emphasis of rhetorical theory in English studies and the prevalence of the Bakhtinian model. One of the aims of studying language, according to this paper, is that students should "learn to speak clearly and expressively about their ideas and concerns" and "to participate productively and harmoniously in both small and large groups." A "responsibility of teachers of English" is "encouraging [students] to exchange ideas, listen perceptively, and discuss vigorously."

A third paper, the "Position on the Teaching of English: Assumptions and Practices," written by an NCTE group in 1988-89, states

Teachers and students are a community of learners. Learning is a collaborative effort. Teachers are learners—from self and others. Learners are teachers of self and others. Through genuine interaction, teacher-learners grow and change. . . . Learners are aware of the uniqueness of each other's backgrounds, and value this uniqueness. Learners have diverse backgrounds, which reflect a mosaic of cultural heritages. They bring to their classrooms their different language proficiencies, their learning styles, and their own authority and expertise. The community of learners appreciates these diversities of cultural heritage and socioeconomic background, validating and challenging learners' representations of the world. Every language, culture, and

NCTE papers generally address the needs of all English teachers, including those on the undergraduate and

experience is a resource in the classroom. . . . Teachers and learners assume many roles, often shared, often overlapping, always interdependent and interactive. They respect each other in these roles. Teachers have a repertoire of roles with reflective, authentic stances: mediator, facilitator, and participant. . . . Students develop as active learners by participating in planned activities, thinking and questioning, creating, exploring, experimenting, and making choices and decisions. . . . The classroom is a place where knowledge is socially constructed through interaction among teachers, students, and materials. Knowledge is not neutral but political, enabling the knower to make choices among conflicting sources. . . . In the English/language arts curriculum, students . . . collaborate in writing many whole texts . . . [and] experience the interaction of reading, speaking, listening, and writing as reasoning and communicating acts.

As the NCTE position papers disclose, the demands on English pedagogy to accommodate a combination of (1) an expressivism that privileges reader response literary techniques and self-expression in writing, and (2) a social constructionism that values peer interaction in creating literacy and the inclusion of divergent voices in the service of multiculturalism and negotiated agreement, certainly makes for noisy Bakhtinian classrooms.

The impulse for heteroglossia in English studies has been constant across several decades of shifting pedagogical trends. In the 1960s and 70s, the loose confederation of

nonauthoritarian teachers influenced by Paulo Freire urged increased student participation in and leadership of class discussions, as Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner propose in their popular 1969 treatise *Teaching as a Subversive Activity*. (Freirean pedagogy is discussed in more detail in chapter four.) The “inquiry teacher” Postman and Weingartner advocate produces an extreme version of classroom polyphony, for he (or she)

does not accept a single statement as an answer to a question. In fact, he has a persisting aversion to anyone, any syllabus, any text, that offers The Right Answer . . . because he knows how often The Right Answer serves only to terminate further thought. He knows the power of pluralizing. He does not ask for the reason, but for the reasons. Not for the cause, but for the causes. Never the meaning, the meanings. (34)

In addition, Postman and Weingartner’s ideal instructor “*encourages student-student interaction as opposed to student-teacher interaction. And generally he avoids acting as a mediator or judge of the quality of the ideas expressed. . .*” (34-35).

The expressivist paradigm of the late 1970s and early 1980s also supported a Bakhtinian model. In a piece in which he describes the ultimate failures of his pedagogical experiments, philosophy teacher Stephen Fishman narrates his encounter with pressures to make the classroom more open, in accordance with expressivist—and, one might add, Bakhtinian—ideals:

In a 1983 Writing Across the Curriculum workshop I learned about expressivist pedagogy, and, feeling liberated, I radically altered my teaching. Impressed by the call to become another learner in my class, to

share my drafts as well as my answers to my own student assignments, I began a ten-year journey toward surrendering masterly authority in my classroom. . . . Over the past ten years, as I moved more and more into the expressivist camp, I emphasized the liberal aspect of expressivism. I tried hard to be a co-learner in my classroom, to soften the intimidating quality of canonic texts, and to emphasize student and teacher self-discovery. (Fishman and McCarthy 64-65)

As late as the 1995 *Language of Interpretation: Patterns of Discourse in Discussions of Literature*, some expressivists champion “new roles [that] require a very deliberate effort on the part of teachers to vest authority in students’ voices” and “a shift in authority [that begins] as part of a fundamental rethinking of the roles and relationships of teachers and students” (Marshall, Smagorinsky, and Smith 132); that is, some expressivists view the diminution of teacher authority as the first step in bringing about a dialogism that would liberate the interactive articulation of students’ thoughts and feelings. One of the main findings of the *Democracy through Language* coalition is that “presumption of an untroubled transmission of expertise from teacher to pupil had faded, and a more interactive, learning-centered view of English studies had emerged” (Lloyd-Jones and Lunsford xxi).

Dialogism was also the aim of a 1980s-1990s movement in English studies to establish a mode of “authentic questioning,” such as Arthur Applebee proffers in *Curriculum as Conversation: Transforming Traditions of Teaching and Learning* (1996). In authentic questioning, “teachers have been urged to ask more open-ended and higher-order questions, to encourage small-group discussion and collaborative activities,

and to value students' questions and tentative formulations rather than concentrating on final products" (106). Authentic questions differ from unproductive *recitation*, questioning in which teachers expect a foreordained answer, in that they encourage students to "go beyond previous learning to explore new territory" (107). Applebee appears to invoke Bakhtin when he says that under authentic questioning, "meanings are expected to be negotiated in the course of the discussion, the discourse is dialogic rather than monologic, and the outcomes emerge only as the discussion progresses" (107). To a question such as "Why does Hamlet hesitate?", students who are accustomed to authentic questioning will not, Applebee believes, resort to a recitation of interpretations they have heard before, but will instead engage in an polyphonic exploration of newly conceived readings (108).

Social constructionism, the dominant pedagogy of the 1990s, is, of course, *prima facie* supportive of the heteroglossic ideal, for it holds that it is through human interaction that knowledge is formed, although a social constructionist class discussion differs from an expressivist one in that participants are expected to ground their arguments in agreed-upon premises and reach new agreements rather than base their comments in personal truths. Other current pedagogies in English studies aligned with social constructionist assumptions, such as feminist theory, also accord the same importance to dialogism. Feminist literary critic Jane Tompkins, known for *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction 1790-1860* and other resistant readings of American literature, has advanced a pedagogy that is a kind of feminist dialogism. In contrast to a teacher-centered classroom, she proposes a student-centered ideal that

accords with Bakhtin, as is clear when one analyzes the assumptions underlying her descriptions of her teaching practices:

I find that my classes are better. The students have more say in every class, more students take part in the discussions, students talk more to each other and less to me, and the intensity and quality of their engagement with the course materials is higher than usual. Because I don't have the burden of responsibility for how things are going to go every time, I can contribute when I feel I really have something to say. . . . When the same person is doing the presenting all the time, inevitably one line of approach to the materials is going to dominate. But when it's not the teacher who is calling the shots, the interests of the individual students have a chance to emerge. You find out what they want to focus on, think is important, believe in. Several points of view get to be enunciated from the position of designated speaker. . . . (Tompkins 174-75)

The dramatic rise of poststructuralism in English studies has perhaps radically changed many conceptions about reading and writing, but applications of the various principles associated with those theories have resulted in a remarkably familiar version of classroom discussion. For example, Anthony Petrosky's proposal in "To Teach (Literature)?"—in spite of his work to theorize classroom conversation from the postmodern notion that all participants' expressions are local, contingent, and endlessly multiple—looks like Bakhtinian practice dressed up in newer jargon. He writes of how his postmodern classroom is open to a range of discourses:

This multiplicity invites a field of play that opens literature and interpretations to close readings through various lenses, particularly those offered through self-reflexivity in language and discourse. And I'm interested in how my teaching of literature might for us—for my students and myself—open a “field of possible options” and enable even “various mutually exclusive architectures to appear side by side or in turn” (Foucault, qtd. in Petrosky 166) in our writings about and discussions of literary selections. I'm particularly interested in understanding the classroom as a space where a multiplicity of interpretations might exist in a tentativeness open to examination and re-examination from multiple perspectives, including those offered by postmodern literary and language theory. (166)

Petrosky's renewal of the literature discussion as “posing questions that might allow students to formulate their takes on a text, constructing opportunities for students to critically exchange their takes, and then posing questions that beg self-reflexive readings of the already offered takes on the text, while it borrows from poststructuralist conceptions of self-reflexive attention to how certain readings are made possible for students” (170) merely adds an additional layer of metadiscourse, if a possibly helpful one, to the heteroglossic interchange: Beyond students' expression of different interpretations, in Petrosky's postmodern classroom students question how those beliefs are made available to them.

Almost 30 years after *Teaching as a Subversive Activity*, James Crosswhite's *The Rhetoric of Reason: Writing and the Attractions of Argument*, winner of the Modern

Language Association's 1996 Mina Shaughnessy Prize, also maintains dialogism as a goal of classroom practice, even though it rests upon a greatly different, and more complex, theoretical base than does Postman and Weingartner's work. Allied with social constructionism and inspired by Chaim Perelman's *New Rhetoric* and its attention to audience, Crosswhite sets forth the familiar Bakhtinian paragon in arguing the following:

Since students are each other's primary audiences, most of the communication that goes on in a course should go on among students. If I pass a writing classroom and find that day after day, week after week, a teacher is standing in front of a class talking to students, or calling on students to answer questions, I conclude that something has gone seriously wrong. Unless students communicate with each other frequently, they cannot learn to use each other as interlocutors and audiences, and they cannot learn to be effective interlocutors and audiences for one another. There are a great many things for a teacher to do in a writing course, but taking up most of the class time with his or her own speeches is not among them. (281-82)

Crosswhite does, though, make a greater space for the instructor's voice, and the voices of the academic discipline and the education institution, when he moderates his view of the importance of student-student interaction:

However, education is in part a process of becoming acquainted with new interlocutors—interlocutors who are more knowledgeable and experienced than oneself, interlocutors from different historical periods and different cultures. It is also a process of entering conversations that are already in

progress, of discovering and participating in conversations that are historically well developed and that have attracted interlocutors of a quality that is unusual. (282)

In making this claim, Crosswhite notes that some desirable viewpoints are accessible not through class discussion but only through reading. Still, what is remarkable is the persistence of the Bakhtinian notion that the more contending discourses, the better the classroom experience, as already lively student discussion is enriched with the views of the knowledgeable instructor and “interlocutors from different historical periods and different cultures.”

The current state of classroom conversation

Although Bakhtinian dialogism—to repeat Lachmann’s pithy definition, the “carnavalesque game of inverting official values” in “anticipation of another, utopian world in which anti-hierarchism, relativity of values, questioning of authority, openness, joyous anarchy, and the ridiculing of all dogmas hold sway, a world in which syncretism and a myriad of differing perspectives are permitted” (118)—has been a pedagogical aim of many theorists and teachers in English studies, others question just how free and open discussions are as they take place in actual classrooms. Even advocates for the most interactive student discourse temper their positions and instruct teachers to impose parameters to insure productivity: conversations must seem to come to a conclusion so that essays are still written and exams are still taken. An NCTE document quoted above, for example, warns that

in charge of their classrooms, [teachers] are professionals responsible for planning, implementing, and evaluating the process of learning. . . . They delicately balance the roles of manager/director and enabler/interactor with individuals, small groups, and the whole class. Teachers provide information and direction, respond thoughtfully to students' efforts, demonstrate appropriate actions and attitudes, and systematically observe students to assess their progress toward desired ends. Teachers are authorities on learning and pedagogy. . . . Teachers plan, organize, choose materials and teaching strategies, and set up structured learning environments to foster desired academic and social interactions.

("Position on the Teaching of English")

The idea that teachers must "provide direction," "demonstrate appropriate attitudes," and "assess students' progress towards desired ends"—in short, that teachers must manage the free class discussion—is a recurring caveat even in arguments that most tenaciously uphold the Bakhtinian model. For instance, Applebee and Langer employ the metaphor of *scaffolding* to explain how a teacher must construct a framework to limit classroom discussions as he or she mediates between personal, idiosyncratic student concerns and "the conventions of conversation within a particular domain: what is talked about, how and why"(Applebee 114, 102).

Empirical studies bear out that interaction in literature and writing classrooms is not as unfettered or heteroglossic as many would like to believe. As Bruce Pirie, in *Reshaping High School English*, writes,

For as long as I have been either a student or teacher of English, I have heard teachers claim that they encourage independent, original thought. And for exactly as long, students and graduates have complained that, despite those claims, English teachers don't really respect divergent readings and only want to hear echoes of their own thoughts. I'm prepared to believe those teachers' declarations of intention—I have to, since I've said those things myself—but how is it that that intention has been so miserably misunderstood and mistrusted? We may have failed to live up to our own promises. Observations on both sides of the Atlantic suggest that our rhetoric of “openness” and “student-centeredness” does not match the narrowly circumscribed range of possibilities we actually allow students. It is as if we invite learners to pick up their tools and build a structure but then fail to notice that we haven't stepped back to leave them any room to do just that. (69)

Observations of secondary English classrooms, where more pedagogical research is undertaken than in higher education, reveal findings that would most likely hold true for college courses as well: What passes for open discussion is usually “a teacher-centered dialogue in the service of a student-centered response” or the typical “three-turn pattern of teacher question—student response—teacher evaluation” (Marshall, Smagorinsky, and Smith 57, 6). Across 30 years of efforts to refigure dramatically reading and writing instruction, researchers have shown that classroom discourse has remained remarkably consistent, as “in general . . . a ‘transmission model’ of teaching and learning prevails in schools, with teachers providing the information that students are to absorb, and with

students allowed little room to bring their own knowledge or language to bear on that information” (Marshall, Smagorinsky, and Smith 6). At best, writes Susan Hynds, citing several researchers of class discussions, students of English employ “mock participation” or “procedural display,” interactive role-playing that looks like a true dialogism on the surface but which is really a disguised recitation of the teacher’s received opinions (95). Like Applebee, Hynds believes improved questioning techniques will “lead students to direct their responses to each other, rather than to the teacher alone—questions that encourage variety, diversity, and even idiosyncrasy, rather than conformity of response” (97). Drawing similar conclusions to disappointing research about classroom conversation, Marshall, Smagorinsky, and Smith resort to yet another call for an expressivist, collaborative literature class that employs a subjectivist reader response. Their ideal

teachers seldom set for themselves the goal of leading students toward an understanding of conventional textual meaning or the appreciation of authorial intention. Their interest, rather, seemed focused on the ways texts could be used to foster students’ reflection on their lives, their peers, their communities. In this view, the understanding of literary texts is not an end of instruction, but the means by which students are led to a richer and more fully developed understanding of themselves. (27)

Critiquing Bakhtin

Despite years of increasing calls for dialogism in the classroom, Bakhtinian heteroglossia has begun to be problematized by several theorists. This offensive has

been long in coming, perhaps, just as Raymond Williams has noted that the notion of *community* has long remained above attack.⁹ These closely related critiques take issue with Bakhtin's work as a pedagogical and political tool because of its relativistic pluralism, the short life of its resisting moment, its dubious employment of humor, its obscuring of power relations, and its lack of a teleology.

A familiar twentieth century quarrel with liberal democracy¹⁰—that in communication in which everyone has his or her say, true resistance is often defused—is often employed against the Bakhtinian classroom. These arguments maintain that after all class members have expressed their views, once criticism of the ruling social order is aired, the counterhegemonic impulse dissipates; the teacher then proceeds in his or her effort to build a nonthreatening consensus. Frank D. Walters notes that collaborative pedagogies have come under sharp criticism for using pluralism as an opening move to ultimately achieve a “group cohesion at the expense of students’ conflicting experiences within the social, economic, and political order” (823). Classroom pluralism has also been seen as an obstacle to real political participation. Richard Ohmann, in *English in America: A Radical View of the Profession*, explains that pluralism in higher education means freedom of expression, but not real commitment, especially not commitment to

⁹ Although he ultimately argues in favor of encouraging students “towards a kind of polyphony” (17), Joseph Harris finds composition studies has suffered from a simplistic use of the term *community*, which can mean a diverse dialogical exchange to some and a restrictive, monological force to others. Harris shares Raymond Williams’ perspective that teachers have failed to problematize community: “*Community* can be the warmly persuasive word to describe an existing set of relationships, or the warmly persuasive word to describe an alternative set of relationships. What is most important, perhaps, is that unlike all other terms of social organization (*state, nation, society*, etc.) it seems never to be used unfavourably, and never to be given any positive opposing or distinguishing term” (qtd. in Joseph Harris 13).

¹⁰ For differing conceptions of democracy in education and critiques of them, see John T. Sehr, *Education for Public Democracy*; David Bridges, *Education, Democracy, and Discussion*; and Elizabeth A. Kelly, *Education, Democracy, and Public Knowledge*.

action. "Though bourgeois culture declares its allegiance to freedom, the security of the well-to-do demands that there be close limits (law and order) to freedom of action by the powerless," writes Ohmann in the heady days of 1967:

Hence the ideologue settles on freedom of *thought* as fundamental, and he is willing to allow everyone that freedom so long as it does not lead to "disruption." The university perfectly embodies this notion. Our dogma is academic freedom, which in practice means that you can think and write what you like, but as your speech approaches to political action you are more and more likely to find yourself without a job. (87)

Ohmann states that as evidence of a pluralism that disables true conflict, English department battles among schools of literary criticism generally hold to the notion of "I disagree with what you say but I will defend to the death your right to say it," which is "easy to translate . . . into the implied language of the powerful: 'You are entitled to your opinion, and it won't affect my actions one whit'" (Ohmann 87-88).

The poststructuralist turn has strengthened the relativistic pluralism of English classrooms and encouraged the dialogic model, and some teachers see them as twin threats to a revolutionary pedagogy. "If the denial of foundations has robbed criticism of a place to stand as a form of social action," claims Bruce Henricksen in "Teaching against the Grain," "the relativism implicit in the dialogic model does not restore our footing" (33-34). Henricksen proceeds to catalog poststructuralist thinkers who have contributed to the paralyzing heteroglossia that flourishes in university classrooms:

The resurgence of one or more forms of relativism is a salient feature of late twentieth-century life. Historical relativism is found in the notion that

truth claims are generated by “discursive formations” (Michel Foucault) or paradigms (Thomas Kuhn) that are subject to cataclysmic historical change. . . . Cultural and cognitive relativism are found in the privileging of “little stories” over master narratives (Jean-François Lyotard) and in the belief that interpretations are “correct” only in relation to the interpretive conventions of specific communities of interpretation (Stanley Fish). Individual relativism is found in psychoanalytically oriented reader-response theories (Norman Holland and David Bleich). Various relativisms converge in assaults on “presence,” the stable center, the hierarchies of the dominant discourse, and so on.

Since relativism, in its denial of absolute standards by which rival claims may be negotiated, can discourage committed belief and action, it is entirely appropriate to see these assaults on absolutes as a legitimation crisis. Relativism corrects a reactionary authoritarianism that presented its claims, under the pretense of objectivity, as depoliticized “truths.” But it can also be simply another move in the game of depoliticizing intellectual work. (34)¹¹

While heteroglossia, even with its attendant pluralism and relativism, may be a helpful first step in questioning the interested nature of truth claims, Henricksen is concerned that “the dialogic model may seem to reduce the university to something like a perpetual motion machine for empty signifiers” (35). Whereas pedagogues like Martin

¹¹ Beyond the theorists mentioned here—Foucault, Kuhn, Lyotard, Fish, Holland, Bleich—one might consider Richard Rorty’s notions of conversation and normal-abnormal discourse and Wayne Booth’s critical understanding through pluralism and *rhetoric of assent* as proposing other

Nystrand and Adam Gamoran continue, in "Student Engagement: When Recitation Becomes Conversation," to promote Bakhtinian "conversation" as a tool for engaging students in their English courses, others declare that the extreme pluralism inherent in such a model ultimately negates its usefulness, for it offers "no firm ground on which to stand—nothing to believe in but the conversation itself" (Henricksen 35).

A special difficulty of the pluralist classroom is its confusion in confronting radically transgressive student speech. Pluralism allows speech such as "Queers, Bums, and Magic," a student paper that became the focus of a 1993 Conference on College Composition and Communication workshop to "pass through the classroom unread and unaffected," says Richard E. Miller in "Fault Lines in the Contact Zone" (391). This essay, about a student group's night of drunken violence against random homosexuals and the homeless in San Francisco, posed an unresolvable problem for a teacher who prided himself on an egalitarian consideration of all perspectives. Miller argues that to textualize this distasteful speech "turns the essay into a 'teachable object,' enabling an investigation of the writing's performative aspect—how it does its work, what its imagined project might have been, and who or what might be the possible subjects of its critique" (395). However, one must ask, of course, whether English teachers should desire to recuperate in any way an argument for sending gays to the emergency room and urinating on street people, which one finds in "Queer, Bums, and Magic." To do so through postmodern textualization, to focus only on the "how" of representation, is another kind of frustrating relativism, a move Masud Zavarzadeh has critiqued as complicit in a conservative politics (34).

antifoundationalist dialogisms. For a helpful comparison of these two, see James B. McOmber's "Rhetoric

Concerns about pluralism's effect of political dilution has entered the most visible debate of English studies in recent years, that of expanding the literary canon. In marked contrast with other liberals, Patricia Bizzell has questioned the effectiveness of opening up our classrooms to an ever-widening reading list; instead, Bizzell argues, teachers need to limit the dialogic choices available in their courses, for "we need to exercise authority as teachers to try to get students into these [select] texts even if they initially seem very uncongenial" (Bizzell, "Power, Authority" 67). Offering rare perspectives from the left in favor of restricting the books teachers present as valuable (while such demands typically emanate from the right), both Bizzell and Barbara Foley note that an all-inclusive literary polyphony can be counterrevolutionary. Because pluralism in the canon can mean little more than a debilitating tokenism for the resistant voices of marginalized authors, Foley writes that one may consider efforts to refigure the canon as "co-optation" and "reincorporation": "Despite the significant achievements of the canon-busting movement, however, I believe it in many ways it falls short of its emancipatory rhetoric and frequently ends up reconfirming those very structures of authority it purports to oppose" (73). The pluralists in the canon debate, Foley believes, only want to "carry on rear-guard guerrilla actions that will interrogate hegemonic discourses without superseding or replacing them" (82), and teachers might question if their hesitation to impose a political perspective in the classroom is not rooted in a similar fear of establishing their views as a new authority.

As a final critique of pluralism, one may consider Henricksen's surmise that the privileging of dialogism is imbricated in the power relations of the university, where

literature teachers must continually find something new about the texts they examine; the larger ideological state apparatus, to use Louis Althusser's term, ensures that discourse in the English department must never gather enough strength to truly disrupt the status quo.

Thus the conversational paradigm, states Henricksen, is

internally convenient to a profession that thrives on a multiplicity of viewpoints and must, to insure its survival, continually produce fresh illumination. To believe in radical epistemological breaks, and that we live in the midst of one, can function for academics the way the planned obsolescence of the light bulb does for GE. And a paradigm that encourages us to hold our views with something less than total commitment is also . . . convenient to an external power structure that does not want to be bothered by meddling professors. (34-35)

Reports from the dialogic classroom, which bear out some of the fears of Ohmann, Henricksen, Bizzell, and others, can certainly be discouraging. Abandoning the teacher's monological performance may have produced the most exciting class of Jane Tompkins' career, for example, but also "there were huge misunderstandings, factions, discussions at cross-purposes, floundering, a sense of incoherence, everything that one might have feared" (176). Fishman states that a more conversational classroom forced him into an uneasy tradeoff between greater self-discovery among participants and a failure to reach content-oriented goals, as "it became harder to get students to read classic philosophic texts, students often skipping assignments or protesting that such reading was too difficult. This development led me to worry that my classes were becoming

‘touchy-feely,’ paradigms of student indulgence and teacher irresponsibility” (Fishman and McCarthy 65).

Not only undergraduates become frustrated with unrelieved classroom relativism, but also graduate seminars suffer in a similar way as participants often do a lot of talking as they share their work on individual projects, but no one does much listening or serious interacting. Graduate seminars often lack a teacher’s expert direction, the necessary guide, even at such a high level, to continue students’ orientation into the profession’s ways of knowing. Fishman recalls that the liberal, expressivist, Bakhtinian pedagogy “which led me to treat myself as just another student, had the welcome consequence of promoting the communitarian ideal of organic solidarity. However, it also had the undesirable consequence of undermining my capacity to function as the communitarian leader, that is as disciplinary-initiator” (Fishman and McCarthy 64). In short, graduate seminars fail when they rely completely on dialogue without the strength of a monological voice to give shape to the proceedings. In contrast, while dialogue may enfeeble critique, an encounter with monologue can stimulate resistance.

A second argument against the polyphonic is that any opposition it enables is fleeting. Bakhtin upholds laughter’s “indissoluble and essential relation to freedom” (*Rabelais* 89): “Seriousness burdens us with hopeless situations, but laughter lifts us above them and delivers us from them. Laughter does not encumber man, it liberates him” (qtd. in Emerson and Morson 56). However, in the nonauthoritarian classroom, according to Zavarzadeh,

all participants are only liberated for a short period of time (as short, in fact, as the class) from their cultural situationality (students, teachers,

class, race, gender, etc.) into a libidinal unboundedness, into an “other” space without oppressive social roles, into a “playfulness” that is at odds with the “serious” bourgeois workaday life. (31)

Bakhtin’s dialogism—or carnivalization, which he uses as a synonym—rests on the idea of the medieval carnival, when monological authority is toppled and oppressed discourses are freed. However, carnival is only a temporary displacement of habitual rule. Structures of domination remain untouched while the carnival’s dialogism “merely changes, for a short time, the relation of the terms within the system—it brings about a passing ‘reform’” (Zavarzadeh 38); mechanisms of oppression reemerge in full power after carnival’s end. Because any change is so short-lived, as Bakhtin at moments seems aware, dialogism actually conserves the system within which it operates, and the suspension of power/knowledge relations in classroom conversations can be viewed as a strategy that protects exploitative social arrangements (Zavarzadeh 39). In Bakhtin’s words, dialogism-carnival-laughter creates “a second world . . . outside officialdom” (*Rabelais and his World* 6), but the first world, the dominant one, continues unchanged. To celebrate polyphony in the classroom by declaring, in effect, a carnival in which discourse will be unbounded, free from its usual connections to power structures in society at large, may be to doom any counterhegemonic impulse to the life of the 50-minute class period.

Carnavalesque laughter or play—which many teachers prize in their reading/writing classrooms on levels ranging from deconstructive *différance* to New Critical ambiguity to the humor they enjoy with students—troubles some theorists, for they find that the Bakhtinian classroom does not have to take subversion of authority

seriously. In heteroglossia, discourses interact through parody and irony, with “a sideward glance at someone else’s word” (*Problems* 199); for Bakhtin, the monological voice of authority is never able to reach complete supremacy when it is undercut through humor. However, Zavarzadeh identifies this activity as conservative—a throwing of the wrench of laughter into the machinery of social struggle whenever it commences, for laughter helps human beings forget the mundane historicity of their daily lives (36-39). While it might be pleasant for teachers to joke with students and to poke fun at themselves in their classrooms, “overthrowing bourgeois solemnities when they have become historically and politically counterproductive,” Zavarzadeh remarks, “is in fact one of the pastimes of the bourgeoisie” (37). Teachers might question their use of Bakhtinian humor as, at times, a strategy that consolidates conservative interests rather serves as a real critique of authority. Parody and satire depend upon a dominant discourse for their existence and thus, many would say, ultimately reinforce the status quo. Even when laughter is not present—as in a class undertaking what it considers to be the serious work of deconstructing a text, of displaying slippages within the system of representation, of demonstrating indeterminability—poststructuralist irony, some would argue, guarantees disengagement.

A related objection some pedagogues raise with Bakhtin’s laughing carnival is not only does its resistance not endure, and not only does its humor remain parasitic on hegemonic discourse, but also it continually obscures how social power makes some forms of expression possible and silences others. Marxist critics especially have assailed the notion of heteroglossia because it assumes that all discourses are available, that all have been authorized, that all are equal in resources. As Frank Farmer notes in

“Dialogue and Critique: Bakhtin and the Cultural Studies Writing Classroom,”

“Bakhtin’s arguments seem to be conveniently indifferent to the power relations that inevitably attend the problem of who may speak to whom and under what conditions.

This charge is familiar enough among those who hear in the valorized term, *dialogue*, a liberal-humanist palliative” (196). Since democracy is always imperfect, and surely no one will claim that the American democracy of this historical moment allows all to be heard equally, any Bakhtinian classroom that upholds an unquestioned liberal democracy promotes a harmful falsehood. The equality of perspectives in which the Bakhtinian classroom grounds itself is

one of the most powerful political strategies of containment that bourgeois democracy uses in order to conceal the dominant hierarchy of hegemonic power and exploitation in culture by positing the various sites of power as equal. Again, though, this “equality” is, however, a legal fiction mystifying the relations of power in society. It is through pluralism, that, for example, the real (economic) difference between a banker and a janitor is occluded in the name of the supposed equality of their individual voices. (Zavarzadeh and Morton 16)

Marxists argue that the dialogic classroom conceals the crucial power-knowledge relation by a facile position of collective democracy (“we are all in this together” and “everyone should have a chance to say what he or she really thinks”); in actuality, our economic interests are often at odds, allowing only the privileged to speak (Katz 232). Ohmann, for instance, has criticized English studies for proffering the misleading picture of a free and equal democracy, both in society at large and in the classroom. In his view,

a close examination of economic relations would reveal that the affluent elevate freedom into “a universal social goal, not seeing that the kind of freedom they enjoy can’t be made universal because it depends on the servitude of others: on the other side of the cash nexus is someone whose choices are fewer and who does not feel free” (*English in America* 87). Along with Marxist pedagogues, who believe that the appearance of democracy obscures the fact that economic difference prevents some from speaking, feminist teachers hold that such a classroom disguises real oppression by gender:

Granting voice to girls in the public sphere of the democratic classroom is an add-on tactic of incorporation. Such conceptual tactics do not begin to address the more fundamental problems of the gendered requirements of citizenship, or of the “democratic” participation within the social relations of school settings. (Luke 32)

In contrast, some theorists have urged that inequalities of power, and how those inequalities enable some discourses and disable others, must be made clearly visible, should indeed be foregrounded rather than hidden as may occur in the dialogic classroom. Adam Katz, a graduate student who brings a Leninist politics to his teaching, wonders how, without somehow limiting dialogue, the voices of members of oppressed groups can be heard above those students who spout the ideology of the dominant order. How may teachers, he asks, enable the positions of oppressed students without disabling others, “those positions of ‘comfort’ and ‘safety’ largely occupied by white males in our culture?” (232). Additionally, Katz believes that an intervening teacher may also empower those in his or her classes by questioning what students say, revealing that they

“can in fact be ‘spoken’—be, that is, the bearer of voices and interests inimical to their own” (228).

Fighting the Bakhtinian tide, a few pedagogues declare that under asymmetrical power relations, which will always exist in the classroom, an undistorted dialogism is impossible. Gerald Graff, for instance, reminds one of the necessary hierarchy inherent in the teaching situation, writing

No matter how democratic, dialogical, and open your classroom is, no matter how much you problematize your own authority and decenter the dominant ideological structures, your students will still remain intellectually dependent on *you*, if only because there is no one else present to depend on, and most students will not be in a position to be intellectually dependent without help—they would not be students if they were. (“Pedagogy of Counterauthority” 185)

Graff’s intriguing solution to reestablishing some sort of equality among classroom discourses is to bring another teacher, as counterauthority, into the classroom.¹² “In other words,” writes Graff, “what my classroom needs is someone who can stand up to me, something few of my students are yet able to do and something they are unlikely to learn to do without models of how to do it. I cannot serve as a model of how to stand up to myself—I need someone else to do it” (“Pedagogy of Counterauthority” 185). Graff’s proposal might be of some help to a committed English pedagogy, especially as, one hopes, the authority-counterauthority debate would demonstrate for students what the

¹² Bauer and Susan C. Jarratt, in “Feminist Sophistics: Teaching with an Attitude” agree with the team-teaching model: “Team teaching in itself productively mediated the teacher-student standoff for us. Because we occasionally stressed our differences of opinion and made those differences the subject of

discipline considers effective argument. In addition, such a model foregrounds power relations by declaring that this counterauthority is sanctioned to speak by his or her position in the institution. Yet the added teacher's voice could merely be an additional strain in the pluralist chaos that is dialogism, exacerbating the disadvantages of the Bakhtinian classroom. One might also consider the counterauthority another version of the expressivist teacher's desire to efface himself or herself, to deny that he or she fully inhabits the teacher subject position—with all its associated social power.¹³

Bakhtin holds that “dialectics is supremely monologic and must not be confused with dialogue” (Morson and Emerson, “M.M. Bakhtin” 65); he writes:

Dialogue and dialectics. Take a dialogue and remove the voices (the partitioning of voices), remove the intonations (emotional and individual ones), carve out abstract concepts and judgments from living words and responses, [then] cram everything into one abstract consciousness—and that's how you get dialectics. (*Speech* 147).

But a Marxist critique of Bakhtin might hold that contrary to dialectics, there is no telos to dialogism, that it is without purpose and does not lead to action.¹⁴ Fredric Jameson

discussion, we opened options for the students beyond a simple polar acceptance or rejection of teacher authority” (159).

¹³ In several of his works on pedagogy, Graff has taken a reasonable, mediated position between a view of the classroom as unencumbered democracy and one of the classroom as the unbroken expression of authority. Still, Henricksen has criticized him for “being overly sanguine about the possibility of overcoming [institutional obstacles] so as to create free and unconstrained debate” (33). For Henricksen, Graff's *Beyond the Culture Wars: How Teaching the Conflicts Can Revitalize American Education*, which argues that English professors should engage their students in current debates in the discipline, insufficiently recognizes the powers that restrict classroom conversations: “Although an ‘ideal’ dialogue might assume a situation of equality and justice among speakers, in real social situations exchanges are influenced by unequal distributions of power. Graff only begins to formulate a self-referential curriculum, and he does not consider what is distorted or repressed in the illusion of ‘free’ and unconstrained dialogue” (31).

¹⁴ This critique of Bakhtin relies on the Marxist use of *dialectic*, a complex term used in many ways throughout the history of rhetoric. Dialectic can be considered the “Socratic method” of question and

wonders if dialogism in Bakhtin is simple difference, apolitical difference, or if it involves political meaning, based on class conflict (*Political Unconscious* 84). In contrast to Marxist dialectics, Robert Young declares in "Back to Bakhtin," "dialogism cannot be resolved; it has no teleology. It is unfinalizable and open ended. . ." (76). Bakhtin's heteroglossia, in contrast to dialectics but in accordance with much of poststructuralist thought, maintains a "refusal of all forms of transcendence, all attempts to unify" (Young 80), while "dialectic projects the possibility of teleological development in history and of transcendence or subsumption of limited positions in more comprehensive ones" (Bialostosky, "Dialogic Criticism" 218-19). That is to say, Marxist critics find that dialectics progress towards the end of socialism, but dialogism does not move human societies any closer to a more equitable future.¹⁵ Dialogism does not provide the telos necessary for critique, believe many Marxist theorists, for instead of "entanglements with the materiality of knowledge/knowing and the social order that underwrites it," Bakhtinian heteroglossia neglects those involvements (Zavarzadeh 31).

Because of its fear of the establishment of any kind of authority, the Bakhtinian classroom is without a telos; it refuses to establish a monological voice supporting any "emancipatory vision," to borrow Charles Paine's term for what relativistic education

answer, an argument that focuses on truth by a logical analysis of all aspects of an argument as opposed to rhetoric's emphasis on emotional appeal and effect on an audience (Lanham, *Handlist* 50). In some uses of the term, dialectic could be considered similar to dialogism since, in its Socratic form, it is "an interactive method of argumentation . . . as against the uninterrupted and *non*interactive speech of an orator" (Lanham, *Handlist* 50). For a discussion of differences between *dialectic*, particularly as appropriated by Aristotle; *rhetoric*; and Bakhtinian dialogics; see Bialostosky, "Dialogics as an Art of Discourse in Literary Criticism." The writers cited above, such as Young, use Marx's notion, adapted from Hegel, of dialectics as contradiction developing towards an end and reflected in material life. Lawrence Wilde thoroughly describes Marxist dialectics in "Logic: Dialectic and Contradiction."

¹⁵ See Bialostosky's "Dialogic Criticism" for a fine overview of the Marxist rejection of Bakhtin.

lacks (562). Instead of upholding the teacher's voice, in support of social justice¹⁶ and supported by authority, as beneficial, Bakhtinian pedagogies privilege a radical skepticism. Maxine Hairston, for example, in "Diversity, Ideology, and Teaching Writing," her well-known attack on a committed—not a dialogical—pedagogy, declares

I vigorously object to the contention that [these teachers] have a right—even a *duty*—to use their classrooms as platforms for their own political views. Such claims violate all academic traditions about the university being a forum for the free exchange of ideas, a place where students can examine different points of view in an atmosphere of honest and open discussion, and in the process, learn to think critically. It is a teacher's obligation to encourage diversity and exploration, but diversity and ideology will not flourish together. (188)

Since Hairston's misconceptions—that serving as a forum for "honest and open discussion" is an important function education can fulfill, that teachers may disassociate themselves from ideology and should be duty-bound from asserting "their own political views"—remain foundational for much of English pedagogy, perhaps teachers should consider other, preferable directions for classroom discourse.

¹⁶ "Social justice" is the telos of pedagogy urged in this chapter. Rhetoricians offer other versions of the telos of teaching: Booth, for instance, urges the teaching of social behavior, the Golden Rule, over social truths, and Crosswhite similarly aims for "the peaceful reconciliation of different groups with one another" (33). Bizzell's might be acculturation, persuading students to adopt socially grounded values by engaging "in a rhetorical process that can collectively generate trustworthy knowledge and beliefs conducive to the common good" ("Beyond Antifoundationalism" 671).

Toward a new pedagogy of classroom discourse

Proposing such a pedagogy is difficult, for it entails—if it is to be sophisticated and nuanced—recovering, altering, and combining helpful strategies from poststructuralist, Marxist, and rhetorical theory. Others note just how complex constructing such a model can be. For instance, in a repudiation of Freire’s fairly unequivocal embrace of dialogism, Farmer notes the unstable pedagogical position of trying to accomplish both (1) a call for students and instructors to engage in serious discussion of their political situations, and (2) the project of cultural studies, which recognizes how greatly language and social relations, including the authority of the teacher, curb resistance:

Dialogue needs critique to oppose its often blithe indifference to power relations, and how these relations shape the very conditions for speaking, and, of course, writing. Composition teachers who see the value of both dialogue and critique will, however, be faced with a difficult negotiation. Willing neither to silence our own commitments nor to require that the same be espoused by our students, desiring from students neither an intimidated assent nor an unchallenged answer, teachers who embrace both dialogue and cultural studies find themselves inhabiting an always precarious territory of the between. (205)

As a first step in assembling a bricolage of theory for a renewed classroom discourse, one might briefly summarize the negative, practices that might be harmful to English studies. What has become known as the “student-centered” classroom, the writing or literature course that works “to loosen the reins of student interpretation and

response” (Hynds 96) with the goal of discussions “moving toward a point where teachers could remove themselves, disappear, and ‘watch it happen’” (Marshall, Smagorinsky, and Smith 56)—in other words, unrestrained dialogism—will not serve. On the other hand, one cannot urge the kind of monologism Nystrand and Gamoran describe as facile and deadening: “By avoiding controversial topics, simplifying complex issues, and fragmenting tasks and information into small pieces that can be easily managed, teachers maintain control over students but at the same time eliminate enthusiasm and excitement in their classrooms” (258).

However, English pedagogy might supplement a limited endorsement of dialogism with a strong, monological instructor’s voice, one that can mount interventions to correct injustices and falsehoods, bolster the expression of the marginalized in the face of the ideology of the dominant order, evaluate competing claims, and synthesize opposing theses. While not holding to the reactionary Lukacsean dream so often contrasted with Bakhtin—one of harmonious closure, a reestablished unity of thought and speech, “a reconciliation between matter and spirit, between life and essence” (Jameson, *Marxism and Form* 172) in a final Marxist social formation—teachers might find that the impulse behind Lukacs’ hope for establishing a new Golden Age can be valuable for English pedagogy. That is, while Bakhtinian dialogue’s aim is simply the (temporary) absence of authority and the infinite play of difference, the Lukacsean monologue is established on the assumption that discourse works on behalf of a more humane social order, not merely to celebrate fragmentation. To this admittedly utopian end, pedagogues might construct a composite solution of a hegemonic instructor’s voice in the service of counterhegemony; this reinstatement of a more monological pedagogy

might result in two effects: (1) the introduction of values the teacher feels serve social ends, and (2) a rebirth of more energized resistance.

Monologism and values

Cary Nelson, in “The Cultural Work of Teaching Noncanonical Poetry,” stands as an example of one pedagogue who believes in reestablishing a teaching monologism in support of a vision of social justice. Nelson argues that politically relevant pedagogy does not take the same form across history. The expressivist model of the teacher’s self-effacement that may have been an appropriate strategy for the 1960s and 1970s, a time—if one may simplify—that student resistance to unjust power structures flourished through civil rights and anti-war activism, might not be effective in a different cultural-material situation (59). Teaching in the Reagan-Bush era, Nelson finds

with the Left in retreat across much of the postindustrialized world, and with the Right—short of economic collapse—increasingly in control of American institutions, a critical and subversive alternative pedagogy seemed essential. . . . There was a time when Left teaching meant collaborating with a sense of cultural, political, and educational necessity shared by a majority of the students. Now I was fighting a different action: I was doing resistance teaching in a conservative department under a reactionary government. (54, 57-58)

His goal, to confront his conservative students with the oppositional voices of noncanonical twentieth-century poetry, of discourse critical of the continued marginalization of others by race, class, and gender, demands a pedagogy that shores up

teacher authority rather than subverts it. As Nelson writes, “The content of the course and the cultural purposes I articulated for it seemed far more important than a critique of classroom hierarchy. The students would go through the experience whether they wanted to or not” (59). Nelson discovers himself in the position of establishing a monological critique of existing power structures by effectively shutting off the heteroglossic interplay of student discourse, which was largely colored by the dominant ideology:

What I was not particularly interested in doing, I might point out, however, was letting the course be shaped primarily by an effort to honor my students’ initial sense of their own needs. I was interested in learning what they hoped to get out of a poetry class, but I was not about to be constrained by it. I had an agenda of discovery and political consciousness-raising for them. . . . (55)

Nelson does approve of a degree of polyphony greater than is perhaps ideal, evident in his describing his class as, at times, “a theater of contesting interpretations” (56), and his outwardly objective appreciation of student remarks from both the left and the right as “examples of the way people read poems from the vantage point of their social positioning” (59). He tolerates appallingly racist and sexist comments, for example, and in grading essays, he notes objectionable remarks but does not penalize students for them. One could, however, consider his allowance for a measure of dialogism as a tactic of defusing reactionary opposition, since Nelson admits openly, in contrast to the Bakhtinian pedagogue who places his or her authority under erasure, that the course is directed by his political aims and not his students’ (55).

Like Nelson, others have been frank in their articulation of pedagogy as politics; teachers who consider themselves aligned with the cultural studies project or social constructionist rhetoric may be particularly forthright: “In that we make a deliberate attempt to influence students in terms of the knowledges and identities [students] encounter and take up, our courses are, fundamentally, politically staged events,” state Anne Balsamo and Michael Greer in “Cultural Studies, Literary Studies, and Pedagogy: The Undergraduate Literature Course” (295). In addition, Bizzell urges teachers of rhetoric to proclaim their teaching is inevitably “value positive” instead of objective or “value neutral,” stating that “decisions on what to teach and how to teach it are deeply informed by the teacher’s values, which, in turn, the teacher has learned from his or her own education in cultural values, education both in and out of school that included cultural attitudes about gender, race, and social class” (“Teacher’s Authority” 194).

Yet all three of these valuable viewpoints that endorse a more overtly directive monologism—Nelson, Balsamo and Greer, and Bizzell—remain fairly cautious. Balsamo and Greer retain the disclaimer that “as teachers, we feel a need to remain accountable to our students’ experiences and perspectives while at the same time to articulate a challenge to unmediated personal experience as a secure ground of cultural or social truths” (295); they strive to maintain a “complex dialectic of authority and empowerment” in their classrooms. Bizzell also takes a carefully moderated position:

A more correct statement of my views would be to say that while I do endorse teaching that promotes particular values, not claiming to be ideologically neutral, I do not believe that these values are simply those that the teacher prefers. Rather, I think that these values should be those

that are cherished in the society whose culture the educator is paid to reproduce. I think, then, that there is a third alternative . . . neither the teacher as conduit of ideas nor the teacher as propagandist: namely the teacher as acculturator or persuader. ("Teacher's Authority" 196)

Bizzell's classes, as she describes them, are "an ongoing exercise in collectively formulating and revising consensus on values" ("Teacher's Authority" 195). But at least in "The Teacher's Authority: Negotiating Difference in the Classroom," the social constructionist Bizzell perhaps places too great an emphasis on consensus. She limits too greatly what the "acculturator-persuader" teacher may argue by seeking to ground that expression in values mutually agreed upon by too many constituencies—by the academy, by society at large, by students, and by the teacher him- or herself. "This is a sort of republican theory of teaching, we might say, with the teacher as duly designated representative of the society," she states (196). An improved model of teacher monologue, though, would subtly shift this extreme emphasis on consensus more towards the instructor as propagandist or provocateur, leaving a greater space for his or her idiosyncratic political stance. (This stance is, of course, still connected to beliefs that are shared by interpretive communities in society at large, as the teacher's values do not spring from some kind of essential, private self as in an expressivist-humanist model.) Much of what the teacher brings to the classroom is the voice of what Fishman calls the *disciplinary-initiator*, but teachers belong to other discourse communities than those associated with academia (Fishman and McCarthy 63). English teachers should perhaps lessen Bizzell's stress on "collaborative classroom practices [that] might be seen as modeling the practices of a participatory democracy, fostering civic virtue among the

students, as much as direct teaching of civic virtue values content might do” (198). Instead, they might adopt a pedagogy that places more importance on teachers’ responsibility to inhabit fully the positions of authority that have been constructed for them as they, in a more monological fashion, forthrightly urge “values content” they believe furthers the social good. (One hopes working to obliterate oppression by race, gender, and class would top such a list of values.) Teaching in this leadership role would expend much less energy in securing consensus, in merely transmitting the cultural heritage, and much more in shaping it, a task Bizzell acknowledges but makes secondary (“Teacher’s Authority” 197).

The model of reinvigorated monologism would also lessen an emphasis Miller reveals in “Fault Lines in the Contact Zone”; that is, he “has tried to develop a pedagogical practice that allows the classroom to function as a contact zone where the central activity is investigating the range of literate practices available to those within asymmetrical power relationships” (399). A mere investigation of the linguistic and social structures that enable, to take Miller’s examples, the Rodney King beating, or unreasonable fears of AIDS transmission, or the backlash against feminism, appears feeble, the kind of complicit, pluralistic textualization Zavarzadeh, among others, critiques. While Miller believes that “reimagining the classroom as a contact zone is a potentially powerful pedagogical intervention only so long as it involves *resisting the temptation either to silence* or celebrate the voices that seek to oppose, critique and/or parody the work of constructing knowledge in the classroom,” (407, emphasis added), this very silencing may be an effective strategy. Used for the right ends, a teacher’s

forceful monologism can persuade some students to take up values and undertake actions that further social justice.

In this model of the politically crusading, isolated teacher, there is, of course, some residue of the humanist-expressivist subject, especially evident in statements such as the following from C.H. Knoblauch's "Rhetorical Constructions: Dialogue and Commitment":

Our speech may have to be boldly denunciative at times if it is to affect its hearers in the midst of their intellectual and political comfort. . . . We are obliged to announce ourselves so that, through the very process of self-assertion, we grow more conscious of our axioms. . . . The quality of our lives as teachers depends on our willingness to discover through struggle ever more fruitful means of doing our work. The quality of our students' lives depends on [it]. (139)

Without entering here the enormous debate of the degree to which the thoughts, emotions, expressions, and actions of subjects are determined by language and power, one might realize, however, that this pedagogical model does entail a measure of human agency. (See chapter four for discussions of Louis Althusser's and others' models of reproduction and agency.) That is, this pedagogy posits a teacher who, in spite of constraints upon what he or she can imagine, say, or do, still can choose critique. "The reality of any hegemony . . . is that, while by definition it is always dominant, it is never either total or exclusive," writes Raymond Williams. "At any time, forms of alternative or directly oppositional politics and culture exist as significant elements in the society" (qtd. in Sehr 19). Certain theorists of feminist pedagogy believe, for instance, that in the

face of biological and political constructions of gender and the way those constructions shape our subjectivities, the feminist teacher is still able to mount resistance; Bauer and Jarratt, for example, write of their ability to battle oppression,

Feminist teachers who offer counterhegemonic explanations of the way things are—such as those who teach students to recognize the way knowledge and daily life are based on systems of gender—make students confront the generalized diffusion of bureaucratic and institutional power under which teachers and students operate daily. This epistemic break—from the smooth continuum of knowledge built throughout a legacy of educational experiences within a unified system—forces every student to notice power. Many students resist being wrenched out of the now comfortable paradigm of liberal humanism, with its attendant structures of value and meaning: positivist science, bourgeois individualism, and capitalist progress. (149)

In contrast to a reified notion of feminist pedagogy—dialogic, nurturing, and radically egalitarian (Sehr 75)—Bauer and Jarratt instead challenge, in their classrooms, an oppressive sexual politics with a confrontational monologue, one that students may oppose. Taking this resolute stand in support of their values, they believe, is “what it means for a teacher to exercise rhetorical authority toward ends of social transformation” (149).

Unfortunately, this version of the Gramscian intellectual,¹⁷ leading a fight for social change, is always ripe for abuse. Hairston writes of the engaged pedagogies of Bizzell, Trimbur, Ohmann, James Berlin, Lester Faigley, Linda Brodkey and others, “Authoritarian methods are still authoritarian methods, no matter in what cause they’re invoked” (181, 187). Similarly, Knoblauch invokes Freire and Giroux in order to urge moderation of the monological teacher’s position; he notes

Freire observes that “one has to respect the levels of understanding that those becoming educated have of their own reality. To impose on them one’s own understanding in the name of their liberation is to accept authoritarian solutions as ways to freedom.” Giroux makes a similar but expanded point. The teacher does not set out to win converts to a personal ideology, even if it has to do with the evils of sexism or racism, through the manipulation of text as moral exhortation. To do so is to assume “an authoritative discourse which disallows the possibility for the students to tell their own stories, to present and then question the experiences they bring into play.” Such an abuse of power, whether overt as lecture or disguised as “discussion,” replicates the very structures of authority that the radical teacher aims to call into question, resulting either in students’ disengaged assent for survival’s sake or their sullen resistance. (Freire and Giroux qtd. in “Critical Teaching and the Dominant Culture” 17)

¹⁷ Sehr, pp. 20-24, discusses Gramsci’s notion of the role of the intellectual in society. Giroux and Patrick Shannon’s collection *Education and Cultural Studies: Toward a Performative Practice* contains four essays on the Gramscian intellectual in education today.

With Freire and Giroux, English teachers should bear in mind the dangers of the “authoritarian solution.” However, they might weigh the possibility of abuse against a greater danger: that for teachers to fail to use their authority in support of their convictions is an abdication of responsibility. As noted earlier, Foley writes that too often teachers in English studies refuse to speak or act, some out of a perverse enjoyment of inhabiting the political margins and some out of a paralyzing fear of the corruptive nature of power:

[These scholars] seem actually to relish the continuing existence of ruling-class hegemony, at least insofar as they take their own marginality as a condition of their scholarly being and think of themselves as a kind of loyal opposition. Fearing that, should the margins become the center, they would be transformed into sites of a new power that would be, *qua* power, as oppressive as the old, these scholars prefer to engage in skirmishes that never take as their goal the actual reconstruction of textual value and literary tradition—let alone the seizure of power in the society at large. . . .

(83)

But teachers who are courageous enough to use their power, to establish monologue, might discover opportunities to effect change. A move towards monologism, towards establishing the teacher voice instead of an uncontrolled classroom dialogue, may avoid the disadvantages of Bakhtinian classroom. The strategy of monologue may, through its commitment, lessen the weaknesses of a pedagogy debilitated by pluralism; may, in its earnestness, take resistance seriously; may, by aiming for the social good, restore a telos to teaching.

Wrestling with this ratio of the instructor's obligation to advocate and the potential of his or her mishandling of authority, Bizzell works to develop a "three-part anatomy" of teacher power. She first provides a description of *coercion*, "power as exercised by A over B, regardless of B's consent or best interests," and then one of *persuasion*, or dialogic, nonhierarchical collaboration—an interaction between A and B in which B alters his or her views only when "B is convinced that doing as A suggests will serve B's interests" ("Power, Authority" 56-58). Finally, Bizzell explicates a complex notion of *authority* in this way:

Authority is exercised by A over B instrumentally in the sense that sometimes B must do what A requires without seeing how B's best interest will be served thereby, but A can exercise authority over B only if B initially grants it to A. This means that I am imagining authority as being exercised through a two-stage process. The beginning of the exercise of authority lies in persuasion: A must persuade B that if B grants A authority over B, B's best interests ultimately will be served. . . . But, once B has been persuaded to grant authority to A, their relationship changes to a less dialogic one. B empowers A to direct their course of action without A's having to exercise persuasion at every step taken ("Power, Authority" 57-58).

Here Bizzell creates a role for the teacher, as she promotes this version of authority, that is more forceful than when she elsewhere upholds the consensus-conscious "acculturator-persuader." Still, a more effective pedagogy might more readily dispense with Bizzell's first step in authority as described above, the dialogic effort of A, or the teacher, to

persuade B, or the student, to grant authority. One might consider the granting of authority as largely inherent in the teaching situation, and that persuasion as largely completed as soon as the student has decided to enter the educational process.

Furthermore, a more monological pedagogy would indeed partake in some of what Bizzell calls “coercion,” or “power as exercised by A over B, regardless of B’s consent or best interests.” Students often do not know their own best interests or resist placing what is good for all above their individual concerns. Part of the awful responsibility of teaching lies in determining what social values teachers hope their students will adopt from having known them—and they should be so certain of those values that they are not above using a measure of coercion, of the instrumental power they hold. In “Relativism, Radical Pedagogy, and the Ideology of Paralysis,” Paine advises English teachers that even what seem to them the most humane values (for Paine, these values are “equality and democracy”) are not “transcendent goods” that their students also share, or if not, they will readily adopt through casually encountering a nonhierarchical pedagogy. Paine boldly states,

Rather, if those are the desired values, the teacher must recognize that he or she must influence (perhaps manipulate is the more accurate word) students’ values through charisma or power; otherwise, one must depend on the assumption that those values are latent in students, and the teacher’s job is merely to help the student bring them to the surface. It must be recognized, then, that emancipation is not a transcendental vision, but it is a value, which like all values, is contingent, and that if the teacher

wishes to instill such a vision in students, he or she must accept the role as manipulator. (563)

Perhaps it is not easy for left-leaning English teachers to associate themselves, even working toward a telos of social justice, with such loaded terms as *monologue*, *charisma*, *manipulation*, *coercion*, and even *power*, although they certainly cry out that those who promote values opposite of theirs, whether the Aryan Nation or advertisers, are certainly effective using such tactics to promote racism or empty consumerism. Yet while English pedagogues might not wholeheartedly adopt an unquestioned use of their power, they also might interrogate the unquestioned methods of liberal democracy, such as those promoted for the classroom in works like David Bridges' *Education, Democracy, and Discussion*. Bridges describes an unproblematized "moral character of group discussion" that entails reasonableness, peaceableness and orderliness, truthfulness, freedom, equality, and respect for persons (21-24). A skepticism of authority is foundational for Bridges' democratic classroom (56), as are the following paradigms for liberal discussion in the educational setting: that no subject matter is prohibited and no opinion is prevented, that all enter the conversation with an open mind, that the debate is accessible to all persons, that participants express themselves clearly and concisely and avoid self-contradiction, and that participants act non-arbitrarily in their acceptance and rejections of opinions (66-81). One of the greatest enemies to democratic education, Bridges believes, is the teacher's attempt to guide discussion to inculcate his or her beliefs (97), to allow the teacher to have any foreordained learning outcome or hoped-for conclusion for the class session. But Bridges bases his views of discussion on a simplified, pre-deconstruction concept of ideologically free language and

the Enlightenment subject, revealed in such statements as “In so far as we are to become the rational, autonomous, independent-minded and individualistic people that [J.S.] Mill and other liberals admire, we need as far as possible to have formed and to be able to form our opinions on the basis of our own assessment of the relevant arguments and evidence” (101). After poststructuralism’s refiguring of epistemology and ontology, it is difficult to maintain any serious possibility of the discussion Bridges imagines—free, equal, politically neutral selves meeting to search for universal truth through transparent language and outside of power. While Bridges claims that to attempt anything else would raise the “inescapable phoniness of the [classroom] enterprise” (114), perhaps to pretend to have the sort of discussion he envisions is what is disingenuous. Instead, English studies might adopt a new pedagogy of classroom discourse, a move towards a monologism of the politically engaged teacher that foregrounds the use of power, similar to Berlin’s argument for what he calls *social-epistemic rhetoric*:

Social-epistemic rhetoric is in accord with this perspective, pointing out that rhetoric was invented not because people wanted to express themselves more accurately and clearly, but because they wanted to make their positions prevail in the conflicts of politics. In other words, persuasion in the play for power is at the center of this rhetoric. . . .

(*Rhetorics, Poetics, Cultures* 83)

Such a pedagogy that frankly recognizes the teacher’s ability to dominate classroom discourse, to broadcast his or her perspective while silencing others, might answer the critique of dialogic teaching that it obscures power relations through a dubious suspension of inequalities that exist outside the classroom. The proposed

model's reassertion of teacher authority reestablishes a more authentic version of the social. Ironically, while collaborative pedagogies pride themselves on enacting social processes of decision-making, they in fact are poor representations of "real world" social interaction when they attempt to minimize the power of the teacher. In other words, classroom relations must not pretend to be utopian here and now, but should look more like troubled real world relations, in which some—the teacher—enjoy more authority than others (Horner).

An additional difficulty in making space for a greater degree of teacher monologue is that this tactic threatens to belie that (1) one can never be truly monological, and (2) the stances one takes so firmly are always contingent and provisional. Each of a teacher's utterances—now matter how much he or she attempts to present a coherent monologue—reverberates with *différance*; indeed each teacher, as Berlin writes of the poststructuralist subject, is made up of endlessly interacting discourses:

The speaking, acting subject is no longer considered unified, rational, autonomous or self-present. Instead, each person is regarded as the construction of the various signifying practices, the uses of language and cultural codes, of a given historical moment. In other words, the subject is not the source and origin of these practices but is finally their product. This means that each of us is formed by the various discourses and sign systems that surround us. These include not only everyday uses of language (discursive formations) in the home, school, the media, and other institutions, but the material conditions (non-discursive formations) that

are arranged in the manner of languages—that is, semiotically—including such things as the clothes we wear, the way we carry our bodies, and the way our school and home environments are arranged. These signifying practices are languages that tell us who we are and how we should behave in terms of such categories as gender, race, class, age, ethnicity, and the like. The result is that each of us is heterogeneously made up of various competing discourses, conflicted and contradictory scripts, that make our consciousness anything but unified, coherent, and autonomous. . . . In short, we are constituted by subject formations and subject positions that do not always square with each other. To state the case in its most extreme form, each of us is finally conflicted, incoherent, amorphous, protean, and irrational in our very constitution. (*Rhetorics, Poetics, Cultures* 63)

A teacher attempts to establish a more monological classroom, therefore, in full cognizance that “one is always *simultaneously* a part of several discourses, several communities, is always already committed to a number of conflicting beliefs and practices” (Joseph Harris 19).

In addition to reaching for an impossible monologism, the proposed pedagogy also asks teachers to undertake the tangled business of firmly espousing their beliefs while still asserting the contingent, constructed nature of those values—that is, still acknowledging, as do rhetoricians, that all language is situated and still holding to

postmodern critique's disavowal of foundationalism.¹⁸ In the words of Bizzell, "Key here is the values proponent's willingness to take personal responsibility for his or her values but at the same time to recognize their provisionality in changing historical circumstances and their openness to revision by debate" ("Teacher's Authority" 195). Although it seems oxymoronic at first glance, a committed tentativeness (or a tentative committedness) is just the position the effective teacher might take. In this way, teachers might take on the position of "commitment in relativism" William G. Perry describes in *Forms of Intellectual and Ethical Development in the College Years: A Scheme*, published in 1968 but more recently rediscovered by composition teachers in higher education. Having researched the intellectual lives of Harvard undergraduates, Perry traces college students' development from *dualism*, a black-and-white, right-and-wrong world view; to *relativism*, a belief that all views are equally viable; to *commitment in relativism*, a decision to uphold values not because they are based on absolutes or authority, but because one has judged them worthy as they have been encountered through social interaction. Ironically, Perry states that such a nuanced perspective is a

¹⁸ Berlin, among others, portrays poststructuralist antifoundationalism as a re-presentation of ideas that have existed throughout the history of rhetoric: "The influence of structuralist and poststructuralist theories in the humanities, social science, and even the sciences—what Jameson has called the linguistic turn—can be seen as an effort to recover the tools of rhetoric in discussing the material effects of language in the conduct of human affairs. One of the supreme conquests of the Enlightenment has been to efface the unique work of language in carrying out the ideological projects of the new dominant group. This victory has been accomplished by denying the inevitable role of signification in affecting communication, insisting instead that signs can and must become neutral transmitters of externally verifiable truths—truths, that is, existing separate from language. The structuralist and poststructuralist influence can thus be seen as an effort to recover the view from rhetoric, the perspective that reveals language to be a set of terministic screens, to recall Kenneth Burke, that constructs rather than records the signified. Examining the ways that language carries out that activity is the purpose of structuralist and poststructuralist projects, as it has been the purpose of a variety of rhetorics throughout Western history—from Gorgias to Vico to Kenneth Burke to Susan Jarratt and Susan Miller" (*Rhetoric, Poetics, Culture* xviii). "Rhetorics," writes Berlin, "have historically been concerned with the power of signification in public discourses of power, that is, in the provisional and probable realms of politics, law, and social ceremony. At present, no inquiry can be regarded as unquestionably outside the sphere of the

by-product of liberal education for most capable college graduates; perhaps teachers should aim for attaining the same position as well (Bizzell, *Academic Discourse* 153-54).

As Perry holds that one may have commitment in relativism, Bizzell explains that an antifoundational rhetorical authority, which holds that human beings do not merely investigate the truth through language but instead create it, does not have to entail a political quietism, which is too often the case. Teachers should, she argues in "Beyond Anti-Foundationalism to Rhetorical Authority," (1) accept as legitimate the provisionally binding truths created by discourse, and (2) proceed to announce, to borrow Knoblauch's phrase, their emancipatory vision. Of course, one person's emancipatory vision may be another's fascism, and the terrible danger of such an engaged pedagogy is that some might use their authority to propound a range of values unacceptable to liberals, such as racism, for example. One must hope that the aim of social justice, proposed throughout this argument, might mediate teachers' perspectives.

But the failure to take that second step, to remain on a deconstructive treadmill, is what Bizzell says too many teachers do, as they call "students to the service of some higher good which we do not have the courage to name. We exercise authority over them in asking them to give up their foundational beliefs, but we give them nothing to put in the place of these foundational beliefs because we deny the validity of all authority, including, presumably, our own" (670).¹⁹ The model of the monological teacher's voice one has considered here depends not only upon a recognition of the

provisional and probable. Even the physical sciences are coming to understand the rhetoricity of their own activities. . ." (*Rhetoric, Poetics, Culture* 69).

¹⁹ Feminist pedagogue Elizabeth Ellsworth identifies the ubiquitous instruction of "critical thinking" skills or "critical consciousness" in higher education as an example of teachers' cowardice to name their beliefs: Many academics use "critical" for a code word that disguises their real political

contingent nature of the teacher's beliefs but also, crucially, upon their positive articulation in support of social justice; Bizzell explains:

To take the next step in our rhetorical turn, we will have to be more forthright about the ideologies we support as well as those we attack, and we will have to articulate a positive program legitimated by an authority that is nevertheless non-foundational. We must help our students, and our fellow citizens, to engage in a rhetorical process that can collectively generate trustworthy knowledge and beliefs conducive to the common good—knowledge and beliefs to displace the repressive ideologies an unjust order would inscribe in a skeptical void. (“Beyond Antifoundationalism” 671)

Monologism and resistance

A new model of classroom discourse, the shift toward greater teacher monologism, is a composite solution to two general failures of Bakhtinian pedagogy. In one direction, the dialogic classroom suffers from its lack of overt leadership, and the forceful expression of the teacher's values works towards redressing heteroglossic teaching's deception about power relations and its lack of a telos. Monologism can help here as students might consent to the teacher's, in full use of his or her rhetorical authority, vision of the social good. In another direction, Bakhtinian strategies disappoint because of their relativism, which often result in a diffuse and debilitated consensus in the classroom; teachers are able, through an airing of all students' points of view, to

agendas—“antiracism, antisexism, anti-elitism, anti-heterosexism, anti-ableism, anticlassicism, and anti-neoconservatism” (93).

disable any committed, radical opposition to the status quo. However, monologism may also be able to address this need; that is, if students do not assent to the teacher's proposals, they might at least be strengthened in their resistance to the pressure of authority. English teachers might benefit from exploring the notion that monologue, which Bakhtin discredits as oppressive, can in fact stimulate intense opposition, counterhegemonic perspectives so vigorous that the teacher might not be able to coopt them into a dilute harmony.

While the collaborative classroom often reestablishes conservative structures, a monological pedagogy that limits student discourse may result in the freeing of counterhegemonic energies. Karen Fitts and Alan W. France identify the teacher's political advocacy as a necessary catalyst for generating rhetorical exchange, for students do not merely parrot the instructor's views but instead "find ways (rhetorical strategies) to subvert or resist oppositional pedagogies" (15). Similarly, Michael Clark describes one effect of postmodernism as offering a "new concept of discursive regulations, one that recognizes the productive aims of social constraints rather than its more obvious repressive functions." He writes, "For as both Foucault and Althusser have pointed out, the primary ambition of ideology as such is not the repression of conflicting points of view; it is the production of a point of view that will facilitate its hegemonic control. . . . Conceived in this way, power loses its status as restrictive rule and serves more as a generative principle for the production of discourse" (167). That is, according to these theorists, the expression of social authority not only oppresses resistance, it necessarily generates it. Thus the powerful teacher voice might be beneficial in just such a way, to

recuperate strong reactions to our “restrictive rule,” to use Clark’s term, into a general atmosphere of resistance.

One might ask here why a teacher would want to encourage opposition to the values he or she has proposed as furthering the social good, but some contend that any resistance—opposition from the far right as well as from the left—can shake the foundations of a hegemony that oppresses all citizens. It may be an uncomfortable position to consider that the resistance of the Unabomber or Timothy McVeigh can in any way be liberating, but, as Foley writes of some postmodern theorists, true difference (and not, as Foley states, the consensus of the dialogic melting pot) is a crucial element of a healthful social life:

Some of the new scholars would claim that they are not validating the myth of the melting pot but rather blasting it open, demonstrating that social life and discourse are constituted not by unity and consensus but by difference, alterity, and heterogeneity. Indeed they would argue, the politics implied by their critical practice is emancipatory, even revolutionary, for they are seeking out pockets of resistance and envisioning social changes coming from autonomous groupings of dispersed elements. (81)

Although one could find this argument, as Foley ultimately does, “little more than a rewarming of . . . liberal pluralism” (82), “difference, alterity, and heterogeneity” can be recovered as liberatory, as undermining an oppressive ideological state apparatus. (For more on Althusser’s concept of the ideological state apparatus, see chapter four.) In

other words, teachers might reincorporate from Bakhtin the very notion that has been assailed in this chapter—that a general freeing up of discourse can impair tyranny.

However, one might still question the tactics of Bakhtinian pedagogues, who establish the heteroglossic classroom and believe they have unleashed the forces of emancipation. Reading and writing teachers might instead employ a strategy, admittedly counterintuitive, that if dialogue begets monologue—it ultimately defuses opposition and uses it to reestablish the articulation of the status quo—monologue may spur forceful dialogue. Many students have experienced how the classes of an exceptionally “kind” teacher can be fatiguing, largely because the teacher refuses to engage in confrontation, thwarting any attacks on his or her positions by encouraging a benign dialogism. In contrast to these tranquil, heteroglossic classrooms, monological teachers may induce violent reactions in large part because they leave little space for polyphonic interplay; when class members do raise objections, they are quickly dismissed. Ironically, though, such authoritarian pedagogues may stimulate intense reverberations as students strive to invent arguments with which to combat them.²⁰

Some theorists of pedagogy hint at this effect of monologism, that it “can generate difference and transform hierarchical order” (Walters 824).²¹ For example, as he takes more firm control of his noncanonical poetry class, Nelson discovers that his more assertive claim to power also empowers his students: “For some of the students I

²⁰ One could view such a strategy as the kind of Oedipal confrontation described in Harold Bloom’s *The Anxiety of Influence*—as teachers urge participants to speak only through a forceful overthrow of themselves, the strong precursors.

²¹ Although Walters in his article applies the term *consensus* to the unity that generates difference, one could substitute *monologism* as it has been employed in this chapter for *consensus* as Walters uses it.

was a figure to resist or reject. . . . [I] preferred this open rebellion to silent resentment. It made for better debates, and it demonstrated clearly that people bring social and political values to the literature classroom. . . .” (“Cultural Work” 58). Bauer and Jarratt, like many teachers who make use of their authority, find that their students possess an unquestioned belief in a naïve version of equality and tolerance; students criticize their classes for being about ideology instead of about literature. But by establishing a kind of feminist monologism in the classroom, Bauer and Jarratt anticipate a later resistance, “a dialogic reflection in [their] students’ writing and oral responses” in reaction to their presentations (160). Finally, Katz also believes that students’ strong responses to a monological teacher can be beneficial. For Katz, effective pedagogy “means that the teacher is taking up a position of *political leadership* in the class struggle taking place in the classroom, critiquing reactionary and reformist discourses and strengthening revolutionary ones.” However, this use of authority “‘invites’ the student to critique the instructor in this role, to push the ‘leader’ along the path she had originally pointed out, and sometimes even to ‘lead’ the ‘leader’” (237).

In some ways the argument of this chapter has come full circle, from arguing against a Bakhtinian heterogeneity and affirming a powerful teacher who urges the social good in monologue, to reconsidering the advantages of a polyphonic classroom that can work to subvert hegemony. What is needed, perhaps, is for English teachers to hold both notions simultaneously: They should not fear to use power in winning over students to their vision of a better world, to affect their students through rhetoric, but should also celebrate that their authority may energize resistance that will undermine an unjust status

quo in which all teachers are both oppressed, and through their connections to educational institutions, also implicated.

Chapter Four

Examining the Nonauthoritarian Classroom:

Forming the Capitalist Subject versus Demystifying Power

Since at least the 1960s, many teachers of English have attempted to reconfigure their classrooms as sites where the power relations that operate in the rest of an academic institution or in society at large are suspended in the hope of opening spaces for student liberation. In the 1980s and 1990s, these “nonauthoritarian,” “student-centered” classrooms appeared to have become the norm in English studies. The editors of *Reclaiming Pedagogy*, a 1989 collection about progressive instruction in English, claim that in the best teaching of composition, “student-centered pedagogies flourish, branching from the work of Mina Shaughnessy, Paulo Freire, the varieties of ideological interpretation that would question authority, and the general wisdom of a decade ago, that the course should meet students where they are, empower them, make them comfortable and confident”¹ (Donahue and Quandahl 11).

A prominent example of these classroom practices has been a simple innovation, that of rearranging the traditional straight rows of classroom furniture to teach in a discussion circle. As with other nonauthoritarian strategies, proponents are attracted to this technique for practical reasons—because they believe it promotes students’ comfort level—and for symbolic purposes: Teaching in a nonhierarchical circle, they claim, demonstrates that instructors are not in complete control, that students can be free

¹ Later in that chapter Donahue and Quandahl, while holding to “student-centered pedagogies,” do clarify that they do not uphold them based on a humanist subjectivity, such as that prized by expressivism, but from the position that knowledge is “cultural and relational.” The teacher prompts the “recognition and naming of used and unidentified discourse strategies,” not a search for the personal voice (13).

thinkers and even resistant in the English class. The physical arrangement of the classroom, then, like any material aspect of the teaching environment, not only has an effect on what is being taught, but *is* a part of what is being taught, what is often called the *hidden curriculum*. Henry Giroux defines the hidden curriculum as “those unstated norms, values, and beliefs embedded in and transmitted to students through the underlying rules that structure the routines and social relationships in school and classroom life” (*Theory and Resistance* 47).

Anthropologists, such as Norris Brock Johnson in “Education as Environmental Socialization: Classroom Spatial Patterns and the Transmission of Sociocultural Norms,” have claimed that traditional room arrangement, ordered ranks of desks that face the teacher, socializes students “to an individual task orientation, a sense of standardization and interchangeability, competition and low levels of interaction with peers, deference to authority, passivity, and autonomy” (39-40). This reading of the traditional classroom’s hidden curriculum as revealed through its spatial construction is widely accepted: Desks in rows connote restriction, even oppression, of students by a teacher who uses heavy-handed control to regulate the activities that take place there. In contrast, many argue that a classroom configured in other ways, especially in the manner of the discussion circle, is made more humanized, more democratized. For instance, the easy transformation of placing chairs in a circle was included in February 1993 *English Journal* teacher responses to the question “How have you changed the physical arrangements within your classroom to create an optimal learning environment?” One teacher writes:

Like my teaching philosophy, the physical arrangement of my classroom has evolved. Twenty years ago, straight rows and the teacher as the “sage on the stage” were the norm. Today my classroom reflects my belief that we form a community of thinkers where student opinion is central, encouraged, and respected. Student desks are arranged in one large circle. . . .

As the teacher, I facilitate, not dictate, the learning in my classroom. To fulfill this role during class discussions, I sit at a student desk in the circle. I do not have my own desk but rather move to whatever desk happens to be empty, so I sit next to many students in the course of the trimester. Facing one another facilitates communication. Students readily share their thoughts, questions, and feelings. I become just another member of the group who may or may not have a question or a comment. In addition, in a circle, unmotivated students cannot hide. Everyone is in the front row! (Britton-Simmons 81)

Here this secondary teacher lists several advantages to teaching in a circle, such as its demonstration of respect for students, its encouragement of their expression, and the dissolution of the teacher’s privileged position. While this issue of merely rearranging desks from rows to a circle may seem trivial or at least benign at first glance, the claims that are made for it are certainly weighty. In *Empowering Education*, Ira Shor believes the method is important enough to mention in the narratives of how he opens his classes—“Hello! Welcome to English One. My name is Ira Shor. Why don’t we put the chairs in a discussion circle, to make it easier to talk to each other”—and lists physical

configurations in a list of significant political stances every teacher takes: “Whether they deviate from or follow the official syllabus, teachers make numerous decisions—themes, texts, tests, *seating arrangements*, rules for speaking, grading systems, learning process, and so on. Through these practical choices, the politics of the classroom are defined, as critical or uncritical, democratic or authoritarian” (2, 14, emphasis added). Paula Treichler mentions the strategy as one associated—to her mind, unfortunately—with feminist pedagogy in higher education, which entails “chairs in a circle, first names, collaborative agenda setting, and (as much of the literature puts it) collective re-visioning of the production of knowledge” (87-88).

While these claims seem compelling—that altering the physical space of the classroom will alleviate the negative aspects of education and create warm, interesting, natural sites for collaborative learning, some pedagogues have questioned this technique, which serves as merely one example of egalitarian strategies. Gerald Graff, for instance, writes that the complex problem of teacher authority cannot be solved “by the usual progressive devices such as encouraging more discussion, *replacing rows of bolted desks with a roundtable*, or even making the individual classroom more collaborative. . .” (“Pedagogy” 186, emphasis added). Drawing upon several theorists of culture, one may mount an intervention against not only teaching in a circle, but also nonauthoritarian pedagogy in general, and problematize these ways of teaching ubiquitous in English departments. Since many theoretical positions have contributed to these pedagogies, one must not read the nonauthoritarian methods “as a monolith, but as a heterogeneous conglomeration of differential and antagonistic positions that, despite their ‘differences,’ function to reproduce . . . the dominant common sense of the academy on questions of

pedagogy” (Katz 225). Such a critique might be indebted to Michel Foucault’s strategy of reversal, which has been described in this way: “When tradition gives us a particular interpretation of an event or an historical development, Foucault’s strategy is to work out the implications of the reverse or opposite interpretation” (Shumway 15). Foucault uses the strategy of reversal to interrogate social practices such as established medicine, the treatment of the mentally ill, or the social construction of sexuality. Here the received view of pedagogical practices, that teaching in a circle and similar techniques are liberatory, are reversed to “offer a more rigorous reading of the classroom as text” (Katz 231). In this intervention one might (1) first examine how power relations are reproduced in education despite the fact that most English teachers aim to develop critical students, resistant to the oppressive discourses and practices of society. In the words of Carl Freedman in “Marxist Theory, Radical Pedagogy, and the Reification of Thought,” one must bear in mind the pervasiveness of the bourgeois ideology all teachers inherit, for “the radical teacher is likely to reinvent ideas tied to the very hegemony he or she wants to smash” (77). Secondly, one might (2) argue that teaching in a circle and related nonauthoritarian strategies, though, are not the way to bring about an improved state of affairs; instead of fostering resistance, they may perpetuate the cycle of reproduction. Nonauthoritarian pedagogies might be counterproductive, since from a different perspective they appear to mystify power relations and interpellate students in pernicious ways: urging students to realize their freedom from the teacher’s and societal constraints, and calling them to be rational, creative individuals endowed with valuable personal experience, may be a fundamentally conservative move rather than a liberating

one. Finally, one might (3) propose an alternative model that lays bare, as much as possible, the way authority operates in the teaching situation.

Education and reproduction

“Most of us do not teach in universities simply to reproduce society’s divisions of labor, its class and patriarchal structures, and its ethnocentric values,” Bruce Henricksen begins in “Teaching against the Grain.” “Yet we were all trained and socialized to a profession in which such structures and biases were deeply rooted, and even the most oppositionally minded teachers will almost certainly, at times, reproduce what they would oppose” (28). Perhaps this acknowledgment is the first step in truly radical teaching, that unwanted social reproduction is inevitable when a teacher is connected to any sort of school as they exist in the United States today. He or she faces the intractable problem of being “dependent on the social function of bourgeois institutions and yet committed to far-reaching change within and beyond them” (Davis 249). If one fully realizes the power of social reproduction in schooling, a pedagogue committed to challenging the conservative aspects of education is “trying to destroy and reconstitute an activity even while performing it” (249).

In spite of teachers’ best efforts, according to educational and cultural critics, schools occupy a crucial role in the reproduction of existing social formations—and, as a Marxist would say, the social formations needed to sustain capitalism. Schools have become the primary sites where the tasks of reproducing work skills and producing attitudes that legitimate the social order are integrated and inculcated—tasks that were historically left to apprenticeship programs (for developing skills) and the family, church, and other institutions (for developing the consciousness of the ruling class) (Giroux,

Theory and Resistance 78). Two theorists who have done the most important work on education and reproduction are Louis Althusser and Pierre Bourdieu. Both Althusser and Bourdieu hold a view opposite to those on the right who believe “education is a value-free, fundamentally nonpolitical practice” (Davis 249). Theorists of social reproduction argue instead that teaching is never free of politics and that even an avowedly neutral stance is a conservative political position; as Shor writes,

Not encouraging students to question knowledge, society, and experience tacitly endorses and supports the status quo. A curriculum that does not challenge the standard syllabus and conditions in society informs students that knowledge and the world are fixed and are fine the way they are, with no role for students to play in transforming them, and no need for change. As Freire said, education that tries to be neutral supports the dominant ideology in society. (12)

Althusser, in trying to “tackle the difficult question of how a labor force can be constituted to fulfill the important material and ideological functions necessary for reproducing the capitalist mode of production,” believes that dominant powers must ensure that “workers will embody the attitudes, values, and norms that provide the required discipline for the maintenance of existing social relations” (Giroux, *Theory and Resistance* 79). This maintenance depends not on a direct, deterministic base-superstructure model of vulgar Marxism (that the economic system determines culture) but on a more complex mechanism involving both force, which he calls the *repressive state apparatus* (the army, police, courts, and prisons) and the use of ideological coercion, which he believes is instituted by the *ideological state apparatus* (the family,

the mass media, and, especially, the schools) (Giroux, *Theory and Resistance* 79). It is important to note that for Althusser, this ideological state apparatus is a form of self-delusion, “not a system of lies deliberately and cynically devised by despots to dominate the masses. It is an atmosphere of consent generated spontaneously by the social structures in which the ‘subject’ is entangled simply by being born” (Latimer 60).

For Althusser, schools do not mount any real challenge to capitalism, although “there are individuals within these institutions that may offer sharp criticisms and modes of oppositional teaching” (Giroux, *Theory and Resistance* 80). The basic function of the schools is to provide students with the correct attitudes for work and citizenship in the dominant society, which educational institutions accomplish by upholding the dominant ideology. Giroux explains, in *Theory and Resistance in Education*, the Althusserian notion of the school’s function in the ideological state apparatus:

First it has a material existence in the rituals, practices, and social processes that structure the day-to-day workings of schools. For example, ideological practices can be found in the very materiality of the architecture of the school building. . . . Second, ideology neither produces consciousness nor a willing passive compliance. Instead, it functions as a system of representations, carrying meanings and ideas that structure the unconsciousness of students. (81)

“Ideology,” according to Althusser, represents “the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence,” or, in other words, is the power-knowledge system that describes not reality, but a version of reality perverted to protect capitalist interests (155). Schools are fundamental in inculcating these misunderstandings, distortions that

are so omnipresent that, some argue, they are crucial in forming subjectivity, a process discussed later in more detail as Althusser's notion of interpellation.

Similarly, Pierre Bourdieu decries what he calls *symbolic violence*, the "imposition of systems of symbolism and meaning (i.e. culture) upon groups or classes in such a way that they are experienced as legitimate" (Jenkins 104). This legitimacy obscures power relations. The crucial disassociation of knowledge and power is, for Althusser and Bourdieu—and for Foucault and other poststructuralists as well—the main means by which dominant forces maintain their hegemony.

According to Bourdieu, symbolic violence is most effectively propagated by *pedagogic action*, education in all its diffuse and institutionalized forms (105). For Bourdieu, pedagogic action

reproduces the power relations which underwrite its own operation. . . .

Pedagogic actions reflect the interests of dominant groups or classes, tending to reproduce the uneven distribution of cultural capital among the groups or classes which inhabit the social space in question, hence reproducing social structure. Pedagogic action involves the exclusion of ideas as unthinkable, as well as their positive inculcation. (105)

Pedagogic action, for Bourdieu, rests upon the schools' *pedagogic authority*, which, in a misunderstanding similar to those explained by Althusser, is seen by practitioners and recipients as legitimate and positive, similar to the natural relationship between parent and child (105). However, Bourdieu shares the common postmodern notion that no knowledge or truth is available to human beings outside of power, but only knowledges and truths that serve the interests of different parties. Schools are effective enforcers of

the status quo because their pedagogic authority fosters the “illusion that the symbolic violence exercised by the educational system is unrelated to the overall structure of power relations. . . . The work which teachers do therefore appears as ‘disinterested’ and motivated solely by ideals of education and learning” (109).

In response to these models of reproduction in education, several pedagogues have developed teaching strategies to address issues raised by the two French theorists. This loosely allied group, known as *critical*, *radical*, or *oppositional* pedagogues, includes the Brazilian Paulo Freire, whose most famous book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, concerns resistance to colonial education in Latin America; and his follower Giroux, who has adapted Freire’s ideas for the United States.² Other names these “pedagogical challenges to oppressive social formations” may go by, according to Elizabeth Ellsworth, are *pedagogy of critique and possibility*, *pedagogy of student voice*, *pedagogy of empowerment*, *pedagogy for radical democracy*, and *pedagogy of possibility* (90). In addition to Freire and Giroux, a list of other critical pedagogues usually includes the community college teacher Ira Shor, Marxist theorist Stanley Aronowitz, and education professor Peter McLaren.³

Like Althusser, Bourdieu, and Foucault, Freireans stress that knowledge is an effect of social power, and that the first step towards resistance to the dominant culture is

² See, among many other analyses, the following for discussions of critical pedagogy: works by Freire, Giroux, Shor, Aronowitz, and McLaren; for commentaries, see Peter McLaren and Peter Leonard, eds., *Paulo Freire: A Critical Encounter*, and Robert Con Davis, “A Manifesto for Oppositional Pedagogy: Freire, Bourdieu, Merod, and Graff.” For applications in English studies, see C. Mark Hurlbert and Michael Blitz, eds., *Composition and Resistance*; C.H. Knoblauch and Lil Brannon, *Critical Teaching and the Idea of Literacy*; Dale Jacobs, “Beginning Where They Are: A Re-vision of Critical Pedagogy”; Thomas Recchio, “Some Versions of Critical Pedagogy”; Gary A. Olson, “Critical Pedagogy and Composition Scholarship”; and Carmen Luke and Jennifer Gore, eds., *Feminisms and Critical Pedagogy*.

³ For the most part, this chapter calls theorists and teachers in this camp *nonauthoritarian* or *Freirean* pedagogues.

an understanding of the politics of the production of knowledge. "Liberation begins" for Freire, Giroux writes, "with the recognition that knowledge, at its root, is ideological and political, inextricably tied to human interests and norms"—a starting place "for going beyond what Nietzsche has called the dogma of the immaculate perception" (*Ideology* 131). With that recognition of the knowledge-power relation, urges Freire, comes an imperative for a new pedagogy. Educators must rid schools of what Freire terms *banking education*, in which "knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing." Freire continues, "Education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiqués and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat. [In] the 'banking' concept of education . . . the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits" (58).

Following Freire, and noting other precursors from Socrates to John Dewey, critical pedagogues aim to replace banking education with what Shor says is an "empowering pedagogy": "participatory, affective, problem-posing, situated, multicultural, dialogic, desocializing, democratic, researching, interdisciplinary, activist" (17). They propose a wide range of goals in place of traditional schooling, such as Ellsworth's concerns of "classroom analysis and rejection of oppression, injustice, inequality, silencing of marginalized voices and authoritarian social structures" towards the goal of "critical democracy, individual freedom, social justice, and social change" (92). The strategies of critical pedagogues include training in the "ability to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions" in society and culture (Freire 19).

Additionally, the student—or the “oppressed” from Freire’s viewpoint of working with illiterate peasants—must be part of all pedagogical decisions, helping to determine what it is important to learn and how.

What these strategies have in common, according to the Freireans, is that they must be nonauthoritarian. “The implicit manifesto of oppositional pedagogy attempts to reverse the traditional, fixed hierarchy of teacher over student, active agent over passive receptacle—oppressor and oppressed—and critique that hierarchy,” writes Davis (264). Critical pedagogy holds that

to the extent that the teaching situation reflects the power relations currently in force, which are assumed to be oppressive and authoritarian, to that extent will the students themselves, when they come to power, reproduce that situation in another form. [Freire] argues that if political revolution is to succeed, pedagogy must first enact that very unalienated condition which the revolution presumably exists to usher in. (Tompkins 171)

In other words, Freireans argue the classroom can only become a site for resistance after its internal social dynamics have changed, and a belief in the “centrality of individualism” and “an affirmation of an ethics of care, solidarity, and liberation” have replaced a dictatorial teaching authority (Luke 29). For nonauthoritarians, the traditional classroom’s straight rows must, literally and figuratively, be made into circles before productive knowledge can be formulated, since “within Freire’s model, knowledge becomes a liberating tool only when it can be released from reifying social and political relationships. . .” (Giroux, *Ideology* 133):

For Freire this means that the mediation of knowledge demands classroom social relationships radically different from the top-to-bottom models of socialization that characterize traditional modes of schooling. In other words, the critical pursuit of knowledge has to be paralleled by a quest for mutual humanization among those engaged in such a pursuit. Unlike “banking education” that inhibits creativity and domesticates students, a radical pedagogy requires non-authoritarian social relationships that support dialogue and communication as indispensable for questioning the meaning and nature of knowledge and peeling away the hidden structures of reality. (Giroux, *Ideology* 133)

Many educators see feminist pedagogy as a project allied with critical teaching (although later in this chapter some feminists’ great misgivings about Freirean principles are discussed). John Schilb’s position, for example, views feminist and critical pedagogies as nearly identical, as Schilb sees collaboration and interaction, student responsibility for learning, the valuing of personal experience, and a diminished teacher role as fundamental to both (Schilb, “Poststructuralism” 51).

It is the destruction of the teacher-student hierarchy, and its promise of quick modifications in classroom relations, that many teachers in the United States have somewhat facilely gleaned from Freire. Although neglectful of the fact that Freire writes in a vastly different context from the education of privileged students typical of American universities, and that poststructuralism has effectively critiqued the humanist subject necessary for Freirean pedagogy, many teachers claim to be engaged in radical reform. Close scrutiny, though, often reveals that only the most simplistic methods based

on Freire have filtered into mainstream English studies, such as nontraditional grading, a more diverse choice of texts, or teaching in a circle. More disturbing, most American college teachers who claim to be Freireans have inadequately problematized the issue at the heart of critical pedagogy—the question of agency.

Although Althusser and Bourdieu are often invoked by the critical pedagogues, Freire and many of his followers differ from Althusser and Bourdieu in that they want to rescue human agency as capable resistance to education's forceful social reproduction. Freire's pedagogy of hope is generally considered too sanguine on this question; for Freire, human action can, in solidarity with others, overcome the school's barriers to freedom of thought and deed. At his most bleak, Freire views "schooling as [only] a *semi-successful* agency of legitimation within the context of larger socio-economic forces"; while schooling reproduces the dominant culture, there are some gaps in that hegemony (Giroux, *Ideology* 130).

The prolific Giroux, who supplements Freire's Marxism with a sophisticated poststructuralism, has a much more complex stand on agency.⁴ Giroux seems to hold a dialectical view of the possibility for human action, one that alternates between the strength of constraints faced by human beings and the possibilities for liberation. On the one hand, he realizes that convincing models such as Althusser's and Bourdieu's depict an educational system that is hegemonic, one that functions so smoothly that there is no

⁴ While one might facetiously view all critical pedagogues as having a happy view of human agency, Patricia Bizzell states that one should not be indiscriminate: "As I read him, Paulo Freire may indeed be susceptible to the charge of universalism and insufficient attention to barriers to teacher-student communication; but Henry Giroux seems quite attentive to these barriers and committed to addressing them in a historicizing way" ("Power, Authority" 62). Bizzell distinguishes between Freire, who appears to hold that students are free agents capable, through student-directed education, to better themselves and the world, and Giroux, "who is alert to the historical contexts of pedagogy and to the ways pedagogical power must indeed be exercised but in a transformative project" (63).

room for agency: There appears no way to resist a mechanism that is so forceful that it is able to “invalidate or diffuse any type of resistance” (Giroux, *Theory and Resistance* 82). As a counterbalance, one of the main themes of Giroux’s seminal *Theory and Resistance* is its attempt “to develop a ‘theory’ of education that emphasizes the role of human agency, the possibilities for ‘change,’ and the necessary connection between working for better schools and working for a more equitable society” (Cain, “Education and Change” 83). In that work Giroux criticizes theorists of reproduction who do not allow for any resistance in schools:

Students and teachers do not simply comply with the oppressive features of schooling, as radical critics suggest. In some cases both groups resist; in some cases they modify school practices. In no sense do teachers and students uniformly function in schools as simply the passive reflex of the logic of capital. In other words, these radical accounts fail to understand that while schools serve the interests of capitalism, they serve other interests as well, some of which are in opposition to the economic order and the needs of the dominant society. (58)

Giroux and others have located resistance among teachers and students who block the recuperative force of capitalism by clear opposition, sabotage, or by abandoning the system altogether. Various educators, for instance, have resented what looks at first glance like student ignorance or laziness as resistance, similar to work slowdowns in industry (Shor 135, 143).

It is crucial to note, though, that while Giroux appears to attempt, at times, to recognize both Althusserian determination and Freirean possibility, he largely sides with

the latter, and bases his pedagogy on the belief that resistance is possible, and perhaps not as difficult as some have portrayed it. Like Shor, who finds “there is a culture of resistance in everyday life through which students and workers undermine authority, stymie the boss, cover for each other, develop their own communications, and negotiate for their needs” (116), Giroux remains optimistic about the ever-present potential for classroom counterhegemony, for liberatory spaces in the functioning of the ideological state apparatus.

According to the claims of critical pedagogy, to take advantage of those gaps teachers disable authority by employing teaching in a circle and similar nonauthoritarian techniques. In other words, in order to foster resistance to society’s dominant, oppressive discourses and practices, teachers might adopt a pedagogy that models justice and equality. Modeling that utopian state of affairs might, according to Freire and Giroux, bring about desired results in schools and the world.

Mystifying power relations and nonauthoritarian pedagogy

However, nonauthoritarian pedagogy might not accomplish what the critical pedagogues believe, as might be revealed by a close reading of teaching in a circle as an exemplary practice. This analysis depends upon theoretical insights from Althusser’s follower Foucault, particularly as found in *Discipline and Punish*, his critique of the modern prison. This book presents the “terrifying and outrageous paradox” (Latimer 103) that punishment in the days of physical torture was actually more humane and less oppressive than discipline in the day of the modern prison.

Discipline and Punish begins with a shocking recounting of a seventeenth century regicide’s death at the hands of state executioners, as they tore the criminal’s flesh from

his body with red-hot pincers; burned him with molten wax, sulphur, lead, and resin; and drew and quartered him with horses (Sarup 67). However, Foucault then describes how within 80 years vast changes occurred, as what became known as “cruel and unusual punishment”—torture—disappeared, and the modern practices of the prison, where inmates are not tortured but instead watched and regulated, began to be applied (67).

Foucault argues that moderns may have been “too ready to explain [these changes] as humanization (Shumway 116-17). He instead notices these features, among others, of the change from a monarchical model of torture to modern discipline: Punishment, which was once spectacular and public, is later closeted away within the walls of the prison. The marking of tortured prisoners—the leaving of visible signs of punishment—also disappears. Foucault reads these changes as harmful. Once spectacle and marking were expressions of the power that punishes, the re-establishment of the power of the sovereign, against whom all crime was considered to be committed. Torture was so strongly embedded in legal practice because it showed the operation of power, writes Foucault (*Discipline and Punish* 55). But in the modern prison, power is not visible and explicit. Finally, in the modern prison the aim of punishment changes from transformation of the body to a more frightening transformation of the psyche or soul. Rather than threats of physical violence from a powerful individual, which Foucault calls *monarchical power*, modern discipline, or *disciplinary power*, is founded on a meticulous observation of detail combined with an awareness of the political value of those details for purposes of control and efficient use—power becomes somewhat like Big Brother (Sarup 67).

Foucault finds disciplinary power symbolized by Jeremy Bentham's *Panopticon*, an eighteenth century architectural improvement for prisons (Sarup 69). Shumway writes,

Bentham's design calls for a circular building with an open yard in the middle. In the center of the yard is a tower with wide windows that make visible the whole of the surrounding building. The cells have two windows: one on the outside wall allows light into the cell, while one facing the tower makes the inmate visible to the keeper in the tower, who cannot in turn be seen by the inmates. The panopticon thus creates the possibility and the illusion of constant surveillance. . . . [It] allows power to operate automatically, for even though the guard in the tower may not be looking, the inmate must assume that he is. (Shumway 133)

In the Panopticon, then, prisoners begin to police themselves (Sarup 68). Alan Sheridan explains Foucault's view of the transformation of power from the monarch to a faceless network, in which the dominated are made complicit in their domination, in this way:

But this power is exercised rather than possessed; it is not the "privilege" of a dominant class, which exercises it actively upon a passive, dominated class. It is rather exercised through and by the dominated. Indeed, it is perhaps unhelpful to think in terms of "classes" in this way, for power is not unitary and its exercise binary. Power in that sense does not exist: what exists is an infinitely complex network of "micro-powers," of power relations that permeate every aspect of social life. (139-40)

But the prison is not seen by Foucault “as an isolated feature of the social landscape” (Shumway 138), nor should it be so viewed by teachers. Rather, it is only the most visible manifestation of the series of institutions—factories, the military, schools—that control the lives of human beings (Sheridan 135). For example, Dennis Carlson’s “‘Updating’ Individualism and the Work Ethic: Corporate Logic in the Classroom” shows how managers in industry more completely dominate workers by disguising their power. Through decentralization of managerial power in a humane workplace—where workers are encouraged to make friends, to celebrate birthdays, to socialize—employees begin to police themselves. The managers Carlson studies offered

new sets of incentives which were more social than monetary, and which addressed the individual’s interests at the workplace, rather than in the after-work, consumptive sphere. The hope was that workers would accept a humanized capitalist work system, at least to the point that they acquiesced to authority relations and experienced no real dissatisfaction with the work routine. An explicit concern for worker self-interests was expected to increase profitability margins by reducing the frequency of grievances, strikes, and other signs of worker anomie or disaffection.

(132)

One may easily turn from Foucault’s discussion of the modern prison, or critical analyses of industrial psychology, to teaching in a circle and other nonhierarchical techniques, for in a similar way, power relations in the nonauthoritarian classroom are

obscured.⁵ Carlson lists strategies of the humanized workplace that appear similar to those of student-centered pedagogy; he observes

(1) the withdrawal of close and capricious supervision over the workers and, where possible, allowance for worker pacing and direction of presequenced work tasks; (2) the use of the informal social life of the workplace, along with more rest stops and a generally “relaxed” and informal working climate, to compensate workers for the routine character of their work; and (3) the use of communication channels for worker “input” into decision-making, designed to make workers feel they are “listened to” and considered by management. (132)

Carlson states that the goals of industry in such cases are to make work seem like non-work and to bring about self-discipline. In a similar way, the aims of nonauthoritarian English classrooms are to make school seem like non-school, to forge more agreeable social relations than typically adhere in education. However, just as factory managers use humanizing tactics to more efficiently control workers, the nurturing teacher’s comparable pedagogy might be seen as helping students more readily accept their subjugation. When Carlson considers elementary classrooms in his study, the ones that most closely paralleled industry in their effects were in fact those “characterized by teachers as ‘homey’ and ‘cozy,’ with moveable cushions, reading nooks, and toys” (148).

⁵ Some pedagogues take the opposite view, that the traditional classroom is Panoptical while nonauthoritarian configurations, such as teaching in a circle, are liberating. See, for example, Mary Schmelzer’s “Panopticism and Postmodern Pedagogy”: “I am certain I am not the only one who has seen desks nailed to the floor in rigid rows, an efficiency move with the janitorial staff in mind who, when the desks are movable and moved, encourage you—with serious notices, material marks of vested power to oversee and judge—to restore order, to normalize the space, to efface the transgression. Nor am I alone in having faced tiered rows that form perspective lines to the center of power like those that confirmed James I’s sovereignty at Whitehall. The sovereign sees all and all see the sovereign” (130). Foucault also discusses the force of ordered rows in surveillance.

In other words, Carlson sees that the ostensible freedom of the nonauthoritarian classroom—more student direction of their work, more teacher listening to student concerns, a more relaxed atmosphere, more socializing, and more comforts of home—might be analogous to how industry disables worker resistance through cooptation. It becomes more difficult for workers, and students under nonauthoritarian pedagogies, to see that while some surface features of the factory or school have improved, the fundamental relations of power have not. Because power is disguised, as in the Panopticon, workers and students discipline themselves in order to avoid losing the petty gains they have been given by bosses and teachers.

In the nonauthoritarian classroom, as David Shumway writes of Foucault's description of modern carceral society, "subjects are dominated by a power that cannot be associated with an individual tyrant or with a self-interested ruling class" (139). One forgets that it is power and not truth that is spoken (Shumway 162). In the *English Journal* piece cited again below, one can see that as with the Panopticon's watch over prisoners, teaching in a circle leaves no place for students to hide; under constant surveillance they have no place to resist. Additionally, one could say that the students cannot hide, but the teacher, who denies that he or she is anything more than just a peer member of the circle, can more easily escape being observed: "I become just another member of the group who may or may not have a question or a comment. In addition, in a circle, unmotivated students cannot hide. Everyone is in the front row!" (Britton-Simmons 81).

In light of the teacher's powerful gaze in the Panoptical classroom, Shor's urging of research into student culture, a list of dozens of questions teachers should be able to

answer about those in their classes, seems less innocent. Some of the many details instructors should know about students, Shor believes, are answers to “What do they watch on TV, read about in newspapers, and listen to on radio?”, “Have they taken part in any political action? Do they belong to any unions or organizations? Do they vote?”, “What do students eat? What clothes do they wear? What kind of housing do they live in?”, “Are there signs of drug or alcohol abuse?”, “Are they sexually active?”, and “What are the typical relationships between men and women in their homes and communities?” (204-05).

Students are at the same time uncomfortable under surveillance and yet coerced into believing that power—now distributed along a network, now internalized—has been disassociated from the pursuit of knowledge. The fact that this knowledge is being produced for some political end is not easy to recognize, and power that is not easy to locate is not easy to confront. The truths that are produced seem not local and contingent but universal and natural. The Panoptical classroom, exemplified in teaching in a circle, accomplishes this seeming bifurcation of knowledge and power by representing itself as “outside” the familiar site of pedagogy. It is as though the teacher says, “Other places in the universities are classrooms where power relations produce knowledge. This site is different. In the circle, there are no power relations.” Descriptions of altering the pedagogical space range from bringing sofas (Tomasik) and trees (Brewbaker) into the classroom to less dramatic ways of creating the hoped-for atmosphere of a book club (Marshall) or workshop (Morton and Zavarzadeh, “Cultural Politics”; Zavarzadeh). These transformations seem to result from an impulse to make

the classroom seem like anything *but* a classroom, where knowledge is produced—as Althusser, Bourdieu, and Foucault remind teachers—in the interest of someone in power.

In “Theory as Resistance,” Masud Zavarzadeh argues along similar lines when he adapts Bertholdt Brecht’s notions of the familiarizing and defamiliarizing drama to the pedagogical situation. Brecht fights against the familiarizing drama, in which

the “walls” of the theater are demolished and the experience on the stage is represented as life itself. The audience is removed from its habitual cultural situationality and is transported to a world other than the one in which it lives its routine life; consequently, for a short period of time, the audience is “liberated” from the drudgery of bourgeois life . . . into autonomy. . . .

Brecht thinks that familiarizing drama and acting lull the audience into emotional submission and intellectual passivity. . . . His own theory of drama is based on the notion that the dramatic should not conceal itself but, on the contrary, mark itself as such—as a constructed act, a social use of codes and language, a textual entity—and never allow the audience to forget that it, too, is playing a cultural role. . . . (26-27)

“The purpose of such ‘marking’” in Brecht, explains Zavarzadeh, “is to prevent the naturalization of social processes,” and “the goal of this drama is to give the spectator the chance to criticize what it encounters” (27).

Not only does the circle classroom resemble the structure of the Panopticon, but also, believes Zavarzadeh, nonauthoritarian pedagogy “bears an uncanny resemblance to what Brecht describes as familiarizing drama”:

And like that drama, it produces certain ideological effects . . . that are necessary for the maintenance of the dominant social arrangements. . . . Like the familiarizing drama, [the nonauthoritarian] classroom attempts to liberate itself from its cultural situationality as a classroom. Like the familiarizing drama, it encourages its audience/participants to forget that they are being produced as subjects by their cultural positionality and to abandon not only their present but their past and future as well. (28)

Nonauthoritarian pedagogies of many different strains, from the liberal humanist to the poststructuralist, operate largely by obscuring power relations (Zavarzadeh 28). This production of truth must be disassociated from power, especially, as Marxists would say, from “all traces of its connections with the dominant economic practices that in fact determine what it ‘discovers’ as ‘truth’ and legitimates as ‘knowledge’” (Zavarzadeh 28). One way to accomplish this erasure, for both the familiarizing drama and the nonauthoritarian classroom, is to deny the walls of the proscenium theater or of the classroom. As Zavarzadeh argues, “The ‘walls’ are markers of ‘institutionality,’ that is to say, the ideological embeddedness of pedagogy in the ruling socioeconomic order,” and “bourgeois pedagogy has always made the eradication of these walls—denying the institutionality of the classroom—a professional priority for pedagogues” (28). To return to Foucault, this shift in practice is similar to the transformation from presenting power and punishment in a forthright way in a monarchical system to the obscuring of power relations in the disciplinary system.

Zavarzadeh declares nonauthoritarian teaching apolitical because it denies its historicity and the power that produces its truth, and in spite of its role in “reproducing

the exploitative relations of production,” he ironically calls this gentle, comfortable teaching “the pedagogy of pleasure” (31). Zavarzadeh characterizes these strategies in this way:

One of the most significant political features of the pedagogy of pleasure is that it places power/knowledge relations fully in the background or completely conceals them. The power relations that always exist in a pedagogical (social) situation are treated as accidental, as false and unnecessary “extras” that can be thrown away. Thus freed from social constraints, the student and teacher can relate to each other on equal terms as if they were in a “lounge” or, better still, in that privileged space in the bourgeois “home,” a living room (which is, of course, itself a culturally constructed site). (32-33)

Of course, one can readily see how bringing a sofa into a classroom is an effort to make it a bourgeois living room, or how bringing a tree into the room is an attempt to make it part of nature. But almost as easily one can discover that the simple act of teaching in a circle, perhaps the most common practice of nonauthoritarian pedagogy, tries to destroy the traditional classroom and create the illusion of a new site of knowledge free from the teacher’s and the institution’s awesome power. If it accomplishes this goal, if this pedagogy achieves the student’s perceiving that he or she is participating in truth that is not influenced by the interests of the teacher, the English department, the English profession, and the university, the student suffers. The ideological state apparatus functions more effectively in the circle classroom, when

students remain unaware that knowledge is being produced by power, that society is in the process of reproducing itself.

The interpellation of students

Perhaps teachers' upholding of nonauthoritarian pedagogy is indebted to their residual conception of the individual, possessed of a unique inner self that alone constructs reality—the free, yet stable, liberal-humanist subject. However, one must consider how nonauthoritarian teaching, which convinces students of such a notion of subjectivity, might interpellate them in harmful ways.

Interpellation, which means to address or to hail, is how Althusser describes the formation of the subject in ideology. Althusser adapts Jacques Lacan's notion that it is only with its entry into language that the child becomes a subject. For Lacan the child enters into the language system, the symbolic order, of society when it learns to

identify with the first person singular pronoun, and this identification constitutes the basis of subjectivity. Subsequently it learns to recognize itself in a series of subject-positions ("he" or "she," "boy" or "girl," and so on) which are the positions from which discourse is intelligible to itself and others. "Identity," subjectivity, is thus a matrix of subject-positions. . . . (Belsey 60-61)

Patricia Donahue and Ellen Quandahl also describe how Lacan, Julia Kristeva, and, for present purposes, Althusser, propose one enters into the symbolic order:

Put simply, the symbolic order of culture is its collective set of signifying systems, one of which is language, and language is a system that preexists the individual. The individual enters that system at a particular stage of

development, uses it to produce meaning, and is produced by it. That is, as Kaja Silverman has said, “the discourse within which the subject finds its identity is always the discourse of the Other—of a symbolic order which transcends the subject, and which orchestrates its entire history.” In other words, as any person, any “subject,” begins to learn language, that person is shaped by and “knows” negation, desire, exclusion, patterns of cultural prohibitions and sanctions and the institutions that support and legitimate them. (12)

Similarly, for Althusser, the political formation of the subject happens when he or she becomes part of a network of language and social practices. Human beings become subjects through interpellation, by answering when hailed. But Althusser believes that this hailing and response action called interpellation is heavily laden with ideology, placing subjects in a tightly woven social formation. He furnishes his famous example of the policeman who calls, “Hey you there”; when one responds, he or she is interpellated as the subject under the law, the good citizen—and imbricated in ideology.

What Althusser and his readers find troubling is that in interpellation, ideology represses the role of language and social relations in constructing the subject. As a result of this process, people “‘recognize’ (misrecognize) themselves in the ways in which ideology ‘interpellates’ them, or in other words, addresses them as subjects, calls them by their names and in turn ‘recognizes’ their autonomy. As a result, they ‘willingly’ adopt the subject-positions necessary to their participation in the social formation” (Belsey 61). Human beings mistakenly believe they are unfettered and active when they have been actually been recruited into the role capitalism designates for them. Althusser writes,

“The individual is interpellated as a (free) subject in order that he shall submit freely to the commandments of the Subject, i.e. in order that he shall (freely) accept his subjection” (169).

Accepting a subject position provides one a great benefit—a sense of stability in a world of flux. Human beings prize the idea of the individual consciousness, for in it they believe they are not only free, but also stable, rational, and unified—instead of being the fragmented intersection of conflicting subject positions; this “consciousness provides a principle of cohesion and union for the individual throughout his life; and by the agency of his consciousness the individual, in spite of fragmentary and diverse experiences, remains self-identical” (Zavarzadeh and Morton 3). But interpellation, in providing persons with the comfortable sense of a stable identity, also structures them politically. “The insertion of the subject into the social formation,” write Zavarzadeh and Donald Morton, “provides the individual with a post of intelligibility from which—as a mother, a successful man, etc.—he sees the world in a manner supportive of the dominant social relations; consequently he consents to the proposition that the existing order is not only the way things are, but also the way things ought to be” (6). In this way the status quo is maintained.

What teachers might employ from Althusser’s idea of interpellation is that subjectivity is formed by power relations in society and language, which ideology wants human beings to forget.⁶ A reflective, theorizing teacher might consider how his or her pedagogy helps form subjectivities: Specifically, one might examine how students are

⁶ For discussions of structuralist and poststructuralist notions of subjectivity, including that of Althusser, see Kaja Silverman, *The Subject of Semiotics*; Catherine Belsey, *Critical Practice*; Morton and Zavarzadeh, “Theory Pedagogy Politics: The Crisis of ‘The Subject’ in the Humanities”; Ronald Strickland, “Confrontational Pedagogy and Traditional Literary Studies” and others.

interpellated in nonauthoritarian teaching, how these acts insert them into the social formation, and how such strategies obscure power relations and might, thus, be suspect. Just as the modern prison seems more humane and less oppressive on a superficial level, the pedagogy of pleasure, according to Zavarzadeh, “promises spontaneity, originality, and freedom. Then, by virtue of these qualities, it places the student in a position of intelligibility from which she believes she is an autonomous, unique, ethical being” (31). Nonauthoritarian teaching, then, on the surface seems to interpellate the student in positive ways. But from the postmodern perspective, nonauthoritarian teaching might, to the contrary, be harmful, grounded in an apolitical idea of the self and interpellating the student

- as fully present, rational, creative, possessed of valuable and unmediated experience;
- as capitalist, with capitalist values and skills;
- as dependent or weak.

The subject of nonauthorian pedagogy: fully present, rational, creative, possessed of valuable and unmediated experience

All teaching helps to structure the student’s sense of self. However, nonauthoritarian instructors refuse to accept fully that subjectivity is formed by social forces and language. By interpellating students as liberal-humanist individuals, teachers present liberal-humanist individualism as the natural and universal mode of human subjectivity, instead of revealing it to be itself a product of a specific socio-historical framework (Strickland 293). Nonauthoritarian strategies, as Ellsworth writes of feminist

teaching, call for students to liberate their unique voices, or ask them to undertake self-definition (101). Methods such as teaching in a circle signal that the pedagogue considers each student marked by “an independent and private ‘consciousness’ that endows him with plenitude and presence,” as an individual that “not only understands himself, but also brings meaning to the world” (Zavarzadeh and Morton 2-3).

Interpellating students with distinctive voices as a guarantor of truth can perpetuate the notion of *presence*, which Jacques Derrida portrays as the unhelpful notion that there is an “immediate access of self to its inner truths which are void of difference and identical with themselves” (Morton and Zavarzadeh, “Cultural Politics” 164). When nonauthoritarian pedagogues reward students for developing a voice, they suppose their class members have arrived at knowledge, or a state of being, which is “self-situating, self-explaining, non-differential, and self-identical” (164)—that students have found the “reality” behind the “appearance of things” (165). But, as Derrida writes when he critiques *logocentrism*, there is no originaive center, no reality or truth, beyond appearances—outside of language, or outside of history.⁷ (Derrida’s presence and logocentrism are further discussed in chapter five.)

Techniques such as the circle, nonauthoritarian pedagogues argue, can negate the constraints of the traditional classroom, can frustrate the power that society holds over students, the power that the pedagogy dissolves in order to leave individuals free to fashion themselves as they wish. However, the promise to alleviate the burdens of the

⁷ One might say that the postmodern understanding of the relationship of language and subjectivity, mentioned in this chapter as associated with the work of Althusser, Lacan, and Derrida, owes a great deal to a predecessor from the 1930s, Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky. A simplification of Vygotsky’s complex theories is that “he proposed that thinking is produced by language, that language is learned first and then becomes internalized as thinking” (Fantino and Reynolds 170). See Vygotsky’s most

ideological network of language that shapes subjectivity is an empty one. In addition, because such a claim disconnects power and knowledge—it holds that one can access truths outside of social-historical-linguistic constraints—the individuals English teachers try to foster might be the effect of conservative, elitist politics instead of a liberating one (Strickland 293).⁸

In addition to its guarantee of presence, others find Freirean pedagogy unduly privileges reason as it interpellates the subject. Ellsworth, for example, finds that nonauthoritarian pedagogues consistently hail participants in their classes as rational, which enables students to evaluate rightly the various propositions put before them:

The role of the critical pedagogue [is] to guarantee that the foundation for classroom interaction is reason. In other words, the critical pedagogue is one who enforces the rules of reason in the classroom—“a series of rules of thought that any ideal rational person might adopt if his/her purpose was to achieve propositions of universal validity.” (96)

However, she continues, Freireans pretend that “all people have a right to freedom from oppression guaranteed by the democratic social contract” (96) and that using reason in the classroom will allow all to make correct judgments about how human beings should live and form themselves in community. Yet such a position obscures the fact that injustice is often produced in schools under the guise of truth:

important work on the linguistic shaping of consciousness, *Thought and Language*. For a thorough discussion of *Thought and Language*, see Alex Kozulin’s *Vygotsky’s Psychology: A Biography of Ideas*.

⁸ Interestingly, many students do not find nonauthoritarian pedagogy liberating, but instead, as discussed in chapter two, as the teacher’s refusal to share expertise. Anecdotal evidence points to a discrepancy between how teachers believe their students experience nonauthoritarian methods such as teaching in a circle and how students describe the experience.

Educators who have constructed classroom practices dependent upon analytic critical judgment can no longer regard the enforcement of rationalism as a self-evident political act against relations of domination. Literary criticism, cultural studies, post-structuralism, feminist studies, comparative studies, and media studies have by now amassed overwhelming evidence of the extent to which the myths of the ideal rational person and the “universality” of propositions have been oppressive to those who are not European, White, male, middle-class, Christian, able-bodied, thin, and heterosexual. (96)

Similarly, Carlson says that the kind of rationalism known as instrumental individualism (“the assumption . . . that the ‘rational’ individual always seeks the best ‘utility function’ of gains accrued for effort, money, or time expended”) is a key to understanding “the lack of . . . solidarity and the repression of revolutionary forces in advanced capitalist countries.” He writes that “to the degree that this instrumental, bifurcated individualism becomes taken for granted in society, capitalism is able to contain its contradictions and replace an underlying conflict of interests with a negotiated accommodation” (137). Critical pedagogy’s production of the rational subject, therefore, could be seen as a harmful means of reproducing capitalism rather than freeing human beings from it.

Especially when teachers privilege a Socratic mode, the teacher as midwife of truth, over Freire’s despised banking model, they hail their students as subjects who contain knowledge—and their role is merely to bring this knowledge to life (Zavarzadeh and Morton 11). English teachers are often too quick to view this knowledge produced by the individuals in their nonauthoritarian classrooms as original. For instance, English

teachers often expect students to share their original understanding of a poem, or inventive argument on a social issue, or intriguing personal stories, hailing them as creative and unique. (Chapter five briefly analyzes the politics of the confessional, personal narrative.) Yet poststructuralists believe that the English class, whether the text under discussion is *Hamlet* or African history or dorm life, is guided by political forces that shape the meaning of “cultural reality, and are not a matter of the reader/writer’s ‘private taste,’ ‘intuition,’ ‘sensitivity,’ ‘vision,’ or ‘originality.’ They are, in other words, not ‘natural’ acts but complex social practices which are acquired by the people of a culture in the process of being socialized through education” (Morton and Zavarzadeh, “Cultural Politics” 156).

Again, nonauthoritarian pedagogy’s interpellation of students as autonomous denies the role social forces, history, and language play in constructing the subject; therefore, in “The Cultural Politics of the Fiction Workshop,” Morton and Zavarzadeh believe that this rewarding of students for their apparent creativity is pernicious. They invoke Pierre Macherey on imagination: “In this ideology, man is released from his function in an order external to himself, restored to his so-called powers. Circumscribed only by the resources of his own nature he becomes the maker of his own laws” (qtd. in Morton and Zavarzadeh, “Cultural Politics” 163). Creativity, in other words, is the ability to transcend the political, the economic, the material conditions of reading and writing as a social person and find a liberated vantage point from which to speak (163). Donahue and Quandahl offer a similar critique of Peter Elbow’s expressivist belief in writing without teachers—indeed without anyone else, it seems:

In contrast to this view, we would argue that there is no such thing as creating words out of yourself, since subjectivity, one's self, is a social order, preexisting the individual. . . . One enters rather than generates a textual history. Thus, the new student-centered pedagogies [informed by poststructuralism] do not claim that students must learn to write in their own voice, as if there were a self-originating language, or that students must write about their familiar social life, if they are to write with confidence. (13)

Instead of asking students for original interpretations of literature, for creative arguments in composition class, Donahue and Quandahl would emphasise that knowledge is "cultural and relational," that students' views are always already situated (13).

A further aspect of nonauthoritarian pedagogues' interpellation of the liberal-humanist individual is that they form subjects who believe they have access to experience to "back up," to legitimate, what they have to say. However, this attitude rewards students for an achievement that poststructuralism has declared an impossibility: the ability "to penetrate the opacities of culture and know reality in its absolute plenitude" (Morton and Zavarzadeh, "Cultural Politics" 163). As Morton and Zavarzadeh write of the fiction workshop, "Experience, the uninterpreted, unmediated, and direct, intuitive knowing of the world is the ultimate test of truthfulness and authenticity" in the nonauthoritarian classroom ("Cultural Politics" 163). When teachers ask for students to rely on their experience, they seem to propose that they use their experience as some kind of absolute truth—in contradiction to the notion that "truth" and "reality," as poststructuralists tell us, are in fact political constructs "so produced as to legitimate the

interests of the ruling social arrangements” (Morton and Zavarzadeh, “Cultural Politics” 163). John Schilb summarizes how many poststructuralists analyze appeals to experience in this way:

(1) they presume immediate access to reality, thus ignoring how ideologies and subject positions shape knowledge of it; (2) they consider the self to be homogeneous, thus ignoring its internal conflicts; and (3) they often wind up generalizing about a category like “women” [or “women’s experience”], ignoring differences between its members” (53).

In sum, nonauthoritarian teaching in both literature and composition classes typically demands that students contribute their unique personal experience to bolster their contributions to the class, instead of problematizing and contextualizing the concept of experience.

The subject of nonauthoritarian pedagogy: capitalist, with capitalist values and skills

As Althusser explains society’s structures of reproduction, the ideological state apparatus must recruit and develop subjects that will further the capitalist project. Educators do this by interpellating their students in ways advantageous to the ruling economic system. (Chapter three, for example, describes how students in the English class are hailed as full members of a participatory democracy; falsely believing that state of affairs to be an accurate depiction of social relations around them, they acquiesce in their own subjugation.) Students’ acceptance of the notion of the liberal-humanist subject, as nonauthoritarian pedagogy encourages, not only does nothing to challenge capitalism, it is essential for capitalism to be able to reproduce itself. Morton and

Zavarzadeh declare that “at the ‘heart’ of bourgeois life” and its attendant economic and educational systems, “is the theory of the sovereign subject—the free, independent, and enterprising individual” (“Cultural Politics” 160). However, if teachers are convinced by poststructuralism, they hold that subjects are constructed by society, not always already autonomous. These teachers know that one must realize the constraints upon subjectivity, must understand that human beings are *not* at liberty to fashion themselves as they choose, for the illusion that persons are free is a necessary step towards incorporation by hegemony. Failing to recognize how they are constructed by capitalism, for example, persons live under the impression that “in capitalism they ‘freely’ exchange their labour-power for wages, and they ‘voluntarily’ purchase the commodities produced”—and thus submit to oppression (Belsey 61). Nonauthoritarian English instructors may be complicit in this illusion-incorporation process, as many such teachers’ classes resemble the following:

The subject, in short, is the vehicle by which the individual is situated in prevailing social and economic arrangements. In bourgeois ideology the subject is proposed as an independent, unitary, rational, and self-cohering individual who is free to initiate actions and take control of her life and is thus the source of all cultural and social “meaning.” She reads the texts of culture and “describes” their inherent meaning (put there by an equally free subject, namely the author) in the privacy of her consciousness, aided by her creative imagination and personal taste. Such a subject is necessary for the reproduction of social relations in capitalism, and the support of this subject by dominant literature and writing programs is in

fact a collaboration with the reigning political and economic order based on capitalist exploitation (Zavarzadeh and Morton “Cultural Politics” 160-61).

Educators’ promoting the idea of liberal individualism, instead of that of subjects constructed by a society in the thrall of capitalism, might encourage students to participate in the very unjust social relations that oppress them. An extreme view of this position, that English studies works to perpetuate capitalism, is found in Richard Ohmann’s well-known 1976 treatise *English in America: A Radical View of the Profession*. (Ohmann has also been discussed in chapter three.) Through his devastating critique of the political dubiousness of English textbooks, the Modern Language Association, the Advanced Placement program, the hierarchical structure of English departments, and especially the post-war dominance of the New Critical method in those departments, Ohmann questions literature and writing teachers’ compliance in replicating an inequitable system—that they build “civilizing influences” and interpellate their students as good capitalists under the law (24). For Ohmann, an allegiance to larger institutions makes English teachers a function of the ideological state apparatus. While English instructors are a part of society, they are unclear that

Society has other uses for us than those we have generally chosen. It uses schools and colleges to sort out young people for various kinds of work. English teachers must do that and use literature to help in the sorting. Society needs help from the schools to justify its present divisions, including much inequality. . . . The ruling classes want a culture, including a literature and a criticism, that supports the social order and

discourages rebellion, while it sanctions all kinds of nonthreatening nonconformity. If we want to teach literature, we had better adapt to this task, too. (24-25)

Perhaps teaching in a circle, like other nonauthoritarian techniques, would fall under the rubric of “nonthreatening nonconformity,” while English departments simultaneously inculcate a range of attitudes and competencies necessary for the continuance of the status quo. A typical example of Ohmann’s critique of English studies is his description of the Advanced Placement program’s role in rewarding students with an appropriate mindset:

So the society implied by the apparatus of the Advanced Placement examination in English is a neat hierarchical one, in which the student carefully follows directions, the reader consults his table leaders when he confronts an unruly examinee, the teacher steers his charge toward those ideas that will be safe for him, and the writer makes elegant formal structures that display technique and use “devices.” In this society all contradictions are held in balance, and no emotion exceeds its proper limit. This is what Marcuse calls “total administration.” (Ohmann *English in America* 62-63)

Beyond ensuring that attitudes beneficial to capitalism flourish, Ohmann claims, English teachers also help divide the population into managers and workers, developing in compliant students the practical abilities necessary for a managerial class and relegating others to a life of subjugated labor:

We train young people, and those who train young people, in the skills required by a society most of whose work is done on paper and through talk, not by physical labor. We also discipline the young to do assignments, on time, to follow instructions, to turn out uniform products, to observe the etiquette of verbal communication. And in so doing, we eliminate the less adapted, the ill-trained, the city youth with bad verbal manners, blacks with the wrong dialect, Latinos with the wrong language, and the rebellious of all shapes and sizes, thus helping to maintain social and economic inequalities. Most of these are unwilling consequences, and, since they also run counter to the egalitarian ideology of the larger culture, it is not surprising that the English department fails to point them out when justifying its pay. (*English in America* 230)

Composition teaching especially changed, believes Ohmann, in response to the desires of business for “a corps of managers who could size up needs, organize material, marshal evidence, solve problems, make and communicate decisions. Government and other bureaucracies had similar need for exposition and argument and allied skills. Writing was no longer mainly a private and public art, but a tool of production and management” (*English in America* 93-94). Accordingly, the practicality of the English 101 composition theme replaced the artistry of earlier rhetorical and oratorical models (94).

English teachers, in spite of the professional literature’s suggestions that the majority is committed to challenging hegemony, promote the interests of the bourgeoisie by making the goals of that social class the department’s goals, and like all ideologies, by presenting these aims as universal aims. However, what some offer as natural and

uncontested—promoting belief in a free and open democracy, advancing the objective viewpoint, aiding courteous interpersonal relations, instilling effective organizational habits, furthering clear communication—are not activities that stand outside of politics, but instead are deeply supportive of capitalism. These are the types of values Ohmann uncovers in his analysis of English textbooks, which occlude that “irreconcilable differences of material interest exist” between groups and are, in fact, “the ideological tenets that dominate our liberal-capitalist society as a whole, and especially its middle-class intelligentsia” (Freedman 76).

In addition to his claim that English courses further the tenets and talents on which capitalism depends, Ohmann writes that when counterhegemonic impulses do arise in the English class, they are ultimately recuperated into the ruling system. His chapter “English 101 and the Military-Industrial Complex” has been called a complex, dialectical reading of social relations within English departments, a way to “coherently explain why radicals like Ohmann himself are able to exist within the academic system” (Freedman 77). Ohmann proposes that it is in the interest of the military-industrial complex that underwrites the existence of large research institutions, for instance, to confine dissensus to English courses, where it is easily aired and diffused. In this way, one could see Freirean pedagogies, that ostensibly critique the status quo, as in fact necessary for the reproduction of those same socioeconomic relations. While nonauthoritarian English classes might sit in a circle and, at best, voice their grievances about present injustices, the work of business schools and weapons labs continues unchecked.

The subject of nonauthoritarian pedagogy: dependent or weak

Finally, one may begin to critique the nonauthoritarian classroom by taking it at an extreme, by imagining the super circle—a class marked by the super-nurturing, super-helpful, super-open, super-democratic teacher. How does such a classroom interpellate students?

It is easy to recognize that students are interpellated as weak under such teaching; one could even go so far as to say they are shown disrespect. Here the notion of interpellation appears remarkably similar to the psychological concept of self-fulfilling expectations, that is, that as students are treated as needful of the aid of the nurturing teacher, just so they will be dependent upon him or her. In an open letter to just such an instructor, published as “The University and Revolutionary Practice: Towards a Leninist Pedagogy,” graduate student Katz accuses his professor of “reproducing the student as ‘incapable,’ ‘frightened,’ ‘confused,’ and in need of ‘sympathy,’ ‘comfort,’ and ‘nurturing’” (227). At the same time, Katz writes, this comforting teacher was “reproducing the position of the instructor as the capable, self-assured and certain authority who ‘helps’ the student ‘feel good about herself’” (227). Katz proceeds to discount that such a pedagogy is, as it is often considered, nonauthoritarian:

I would call this *authoritarian* because, rather than representing the teacher (as a materialist should) as the occupant of a socially and institutionally constructed position, and/or as one who, because of that position, has had access to certain discourses with which the student is unfamiliar, it mystifies the position of the teacher by representing it in terms of the attributes surrounding it (“helpful,” “in control,” “smart,”), as the possessor of what the student lacks (“self-assurance,” “knowledge”)

but “of course” wants. It is authoritarian in the same way that the “Phil” and “Oprah” shows are authoritarian, however “open” and “democratic” their discussions might appear to be, since it positions the teacher as the one who helps the student “discover” herself, her “real self,” or to “think for herself,” and therefore fixes the student even more intractably in those positions from which such “thinking” is produced. (227, emphasis added)

Considering that the helpful liberal-humanist teacher might actually subordinate students rather than free them firmly contradicts the model teacher Freireans propose.⁹ Freire scorns banking education, for in such a pedagogy, he claims, the following roles are reinforced: “the teacher knows everything and the students know nothing,” “the teacher thinks and the students are thought about,” “the teacher talks and the students listen—meekly,” “the teacher disciplines and the students are disciplined,” “the teacher chooses and enforces his choice, and the students comply” (59). However, in light of the arguments of Katz and others who question how the nurturing teacher interpellates students as incapable, one might turn instead to a pedagogy that constructs students as noble adversaries, as resisters.

⁹ In addition to Katz’s arguments, feminist Valerie Walkerdine explores, in “Progressive Pedagogy and Political Struggle,” how nonauthoritarian pedagogy not only constructs students in harmful ways but also places oppressive constraints on the teacher as well. For Walkerdine, a primary teacher, it is not coincidental that the vast majority of elementary teachers are women, who are caught in a cycle of being constructed/subjugated as nurturers and constructing/subjugating their students as those in need of nurturing. She writes, “The position of women as teachers, particularly in primary schools, is vital to the notion of freeing and liberation implied in such a [progressive] pedagogy. It is love which will win the day, and it is the benevolent gaze of the teacher which will secure freedom from cruel authority in the family as well as the school. Through the figure of the maternal teacher the harsh power of the authoritarian father will be converted into the soft benevolence of the bourgeois mother” (16).

A demystifying pedagogy

What is the solution to the weaknesses of nonauthoritarian pedagogy as it has been formulated by Freire, Giroux, Shor, and others? Discussing *English in America*, Freedman finds that Ohmann's answer to teachers' malaise is "perfectly forthright": "socialist revolution" (76). But as that ideal slips farther away at the turn of the century, what kind of strategies may teachers follow to bring about significant change in their students and in society?

A model that addresses the shortcomings of nonauthoritarian pedagogy would still go a long way with the Freireans' philosophy, making use of their insistence that all teaching is political, that education largely reproduces the capitalist system, that students must be motivated to question hegemony and the ways that illegitimate power produces dubious knowledge in the world. But a crucial point of disagreement between a new strategy and nonauthoritarian ones might take the form of different means to the same end, as can be explained by drawing upon a useful distinction in Giroux's 1981 *Ideology, Culture, and the Process of Schooling*. In the chapter "Beyond the Limits of Radical Educational Reform: Toward a Critical Theory of Education," Giroux criticizes both what he calls *content-focused radicals* and *strategy-based radicals* as simplistic and incomplete. The content-focused radicals "define radical pedagogy by their insistence on the use of a Marxist-based perspective to provide a demystifying analysis for students of the dominant ideology reproduced in varied forms in the prevailing system of schooling" (64). Content-focused radicals believe they can bring about change by presenting convincing critiques, primarily Marxist, of society, but are not concerned with altering established teaching methods. On the other side, the strategy-based radicals define their pedagogy as "the development of 'healthy,' non-alienating classroom social

relationships. In this case, specific classroom social encounters are designed to help students break through the engineered boredom and oppression characteristic of late capitalist relations of production and its everyday life” (64). Strategy-based radicals, then, believe that teachers’ first responsibility is to transform their classrooms into the kind of utopian spaces they would hope to find in a post-revolutionary, or at least dramatically changed, world. Shor calls this move “desocialization from traditional school conditioning” (114).

Freire and his followers, whose tremendous influence on current English teaching cannot be underestimated, come down heavily on the strategy side, that social relations in the classroom must change immediately. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire argues that to do anything less than drastically transform instructor-centered teaching is to play the banking educator, to issue communiqués instead of to engage in communication. Offering critique through the same fatigued, brutalizing techniques is, for Freire, to employ “the oppressors’ methods of domination” (130); instead one must undertake revolutionary education before the revolution (82). Current teaching, “carried on by ‘A’ for ‘B’ or by ‘A’ about ‘B,’” instead of “by ‘A’ with ‘B’”—or instruction relying on the same unequal relations between teacher and student—is not popular revolt, but a “military coup” (122). For Freire, radical content presented in traditional methods is not acceptable even as a transitory first step: “In the revolutionary process, the leaders cannot utilize the banking method as an interim measure, justified on grounds of expediency, with the intention of *later* behaving in a genuinely revolutionary fashion. They must be revolutionary—that is to say, dialogical—from the outset” (74).

While Freire places his faith primarily with what he sees as liberating strategy rather than content, Giroux holds a more balanced position, arguing that Marxist/poststructuralist critique and progressive, student-centered technique must go hand in hand to be successful. But an even more effective model for English studies could be nearly opposite to Freire's and quite distinct from Giroux's: that is, it might deliver radical content through traditional—some would say reactionary—methods in the reading and writing classroom. One might call this paradigm the *demystifying teacher* in reference to the importance Zavarzadeh and others place on exposing asymmetrical power relations in the classroom. A first step towards a demystifying pedagogy would be to identify some broad areas of content English studies might embrace, including the study of how power produces knowledge and subjectivity, of how social inequalities have been constructed in history, and how the teacher's position is interested.

Content and demystifying teaching

The various theories that demonstrate the social and political construction of truth and the self might become a more substantial part of the content of English, as Robert Scholes and others aligned with cultural studies have urged for quite some time. When demystifying teachers determine the content of their English courses, they would bring the insights (and, one hopes, the actual texts) of Althusser, Foucault, Bakhtin, Derrida, Lacan, Kristeva, Irigaray, Gates—or any favored opponent of the white, heterosexual, patriarchal, capitalist world—that enable one to critique how truth and personhood are produced by, and undergird, the dominant social order. That does not mean Freshman English has to become Theory 101, but it does mean teachers, who are in the knowledge-production business, might present as honestly as they can important explanations of the

formation of knowledge/subjectivity by power. As English teachers proceed with their surveys of American literature and argumentative-writing lessons, they might include, for example, discussions of the major tenets of Althusser similar to that found in this chapter.

Ronald Strickland, in "Confrontational Pedagogy and Traditional Literary Studies," writes that such a pedagogy, one that keeps the power-knowledge-subjectivity triad at the forefront, is effective in disrupting the reproduction of capitalism because it "resists individualism" (294). In his classes, Strickland opposes individualism in many ways, such as by historicizing and contextualizing students' beliefs instead of praising them for their centered, original positions. Drawing upon postmodern emphases on intertextuality and intersubjectivity, Strickland's demystifying pedagogy "strives to displace the traditional model of the individual scholar/critic and to replace it with that of the interrogating intellectual who could recognize his/her subject position as the product of discursive conflict" (298). By bringing to the forefront the disagreements they find within themselves, with each other, with the teacher, and with texts, and by fully exploring the specific "socio-historic framework" of the literary works they encounter, Strickland's students attempt the difficult work of piercing ideology to identify nodes of the power network shaping their truths and their subject positions (293). They attribute knowledge produced not to their own creative individuality but to the effects of language and history.

In conjunction with the study of power-knowledge-subjectivity, a major component of English studies at this historical moment might be telling the stories of groups that have suffered under oppressive power-knowledge-subjectivity systems.

Giroux and Peter McLaren discuss how this aspect of the curriculum might become fundamental to literature and composition courses in “Teacher Education and the Politics of Engagement: The Case for Democratic Schooling”:

Intellectuals can link knowledge to power by bringing to light and teaching the subjugated histories, experiences, stories, and accounts of those who suffer and struggle within conditions that are rarely made public or analyzed through the official discourses of public schooling. Thus we can point to the histories of women, blacks, working-class groups, and others whose histories challenge the moral legitimacy of the structures of society and therefore contain knowledge too “dangerous” to make visible. Of course, teachers of “dangerous memory” must do more than excavate historical reason and subjugated knowledge; they must also make clear that people are called to struggle, that political alternatives do in fact exist, and that such buried knowledge needs to be appropriated in the interest of creating more critically democratic societies. (227)

Through the expansion of the literary canon and the study of social issues in many composition courses, English departments are, in large part, doing an effective job of exposing students to histories of subordinated groups. Yet, as Giroux and McLaren urge above, those narratives must not become reified; they should be remade and retold with the aim of furthering students’ comprehension of how power enables, and makes difficult, certain knowledges and subject positions for them today.

Finally, in the area of content, demystifying pedagogues might present to students, as forthrightly as they can, how their own positions are interested. (Of course,

one wonders if it is truly possible for a teacher to reveal his or her true interests if such a revelation runs counter to furthering those interests.) Katz, for example, believes that the English class should attempt to identify, and then open to analysis and debate, the interests of teachers:

This means asking *why* students have certain interests and concerns, *why* they have one thing to say as opposed to another, and above all, *why* the teacher privileges one kind of thinking, questioning, and inquiry.

Otherwise, one simply reproduces the commonsense notion of pedagogy dominant throughout the American educational system: the student moves from “knowing less” to “knowing more,” or from being a “worse” (simple) thinker to being a “better” (complex or, perhaps, “critical”) thinker along a well-marked trajectory, according to an implicitly quantitative scale of measurement that marks the degree to which one has become an able “problem solver,” in the terms set by those ideological constraints that serve the needs of the ruling class. (228)

In other words, Katz would constantly have teachers reflect on their interests in what and how they teach.

The demystifying pedagogue, then, might always prepare by asking, “What is at stake for me in teaching this class? What is at stake for me in trying to make sure that some kinds of knowledge—and some kinds of students—are reproduced and not others?” Answers to such questions might be presented to students on a variety of levels. One degree of disclosing the responses would entail revealing information that some might think of as “personal,” although poststructuralists are able to reframe the personal as the

socially constructed. That is, instead of explaining “I made a personal decision to become married and have two children”—perhaps as a way for a teacher to explain why it is in his or her interest to further middle class values—one could frame the narrative as “Certain sociolinguistic forces made available to me a limited number of subject positions, and bourgeois father/mother is the one I adopted.” One would probably not, of course, employ exactly that same stilted language, but the teacher should aim to couch the individual as the political, or else fall into the trap of furthering the model of the liberal-humanist subject. Such a model is often perpetuated, as noted in chapter two, in expressivist writing methods; often social interests are disguised by this pedagogy’s emphasis on the personal, the individual’s unique point of view and actions. In contrast, a goal for the demystifying teacher is to attempt to expose his or her interests as much as possible. For instance, an instructor might boldly declare that “it is in my interest to produce a radical student because I have certain radical political beliefs, constructed by my working class upbringing.” Or “it is in my interest to reproduce students with respect for the arts because my personal appreciation of public productions of drama, dance, and music depends upon developing another generation of capitalists to fund them.” Or “it is in my interest to produce students who achieve in certain ways valued by my educational institution because I am professionally rewarded for that accomplishment; I am able to enjoy certain economic and psychic benefits if others perceive me as successful in that way.”

Unmasking teachers’ political goals under a demystifying pedagogy will, more honestly than in other models, demonstrate that teachers’ desires are not always identical with those of students. Instead, perhaps by the definition of what it means to be a teacher

and what it means to be a student, it is impossible for teachers not to have a stake in strengthening their own authority (and, conversely, in disempowering students).

Ellsworth hopes to acknowledge her own implication, as a teacher, in reproducing unjust social formations (100). Taking issue with the Freireans' easy solidarity between teacher and student, she writes,

The concept of critical pedagogy assumes a commitment on the part of the professor/teacher toward ending the student's oppression. Yet the literature offers no sustained attempt to problematize this stance and confront the likelihood the professor brings to social movements (including critical pedagogy) the interests of her or his own race, class, ethnicity, gender, and other positions. (101)

Because of the difference in her agenda and those of her students, she believes she remains always, at least partially, in opposition with the goals of her class members:

As an Anglo, middle class professor in C&I 607, I could not unproblematically "help" a student of color to find her/his authentic voice as a student of color. I could not unproblematically "affiliate" with the social groups my students represent and interpret their experience to them. In fact, I brought to the classroom privileges and interests that were put at risk in fundamental ways by the demands and defiances of student voices. I brought a social subjectivity that has been constructed in such a way that I have not and can never participate unproblematically in the collective process of self-definition, naming of oppression, and struggles for visibility in the face of marginalization engaged in by students whose

class, race, gender, and other positions I do not share. Critical pedagogues are always implicated in the very structures they are trying to change. (101)

The demystifying teacher, answering for his or her class the question, “How am I, as a teacher, transformed into—to borrow from Lacan—‘the subject supposed to know’?” (Strickland 294), might try to historicize his or her position. Students may then realize how the teacher has been constructed. Again, such an effort might begin with the “personal,” perhaps along these lines (but made more complex throughout the course): “I am the teacher because I went to College A, which my parents were able to afford because my mother is in profession B. My family, class, community, and schooling constructed me in ways C, D, and E. Then I attended graduate school at University F, largely underwritten by corporations G and H, which aims to produce students with values I and J. Having such an investment now in my position, and benefiting now from my middle-level income and home in neighborhood K, it is in my interest to maintain the status quo—with the possible modifications of political programs L and M. As you can see, not only do I try to wield power from this position, but also I am an effect of power in that my position has largely been created for me.”

Disclosing how the teacher’s subject position is an effect of power should include explanations of the cultural-historical forces that greatly shape the teacher and his or her politics. As Giroux and McLaren write, students must know that the teacher’s authority is not politically neutral, but connected to the interests of larger forces, part of a larger and diffuse network of power relations, and “inescapably related to a particular vision of what schools should be as a part of a wider community and society” (225). Two specific

areas, of several possibilities, that might help students understand how teachers are constructed are discussions of the way (1) educators are configured in the American class system, and (2) of the politics of English as a discipline.

Demystifying teachers might try to situate for their students their own class allegiances, which are extremely complex for educators in America.¹⁰ The college or university teacher, according to Freedman, seems akin to Marx's productive worker if he or she is selling what Marx called labor-power for tuition, but also seems to fit what some have called "a subsumed class: that is, a class that neither creates nor extracts surplus-value, but that helps to produce the social circumstances in which such creation and extraction can take place" (79). As educators all know, teachers seem to be caught between "the subjective sensation of greater freedom often associated with intellectual work"—they can largely determine their hours and the dispensation of their time—and the fact that they are "in certain respects the most completely imprisoned by the commodity structure" (79). That is, as Freedman points out with allusions to Georg Lukacs, teachers might suffer more than other workers because of their "more severe *intellectual* subjection to capitalist relations" (79), that they must bend their intellect to hegemony rather than just their physical labor. Much work remains to be done in articulating the function English teachers fulfill in the class system; Katz's understanding of the English teacher's function is that it is deeply imbricated in a type of monopoly capitalism:

¹⁰ For more detailed discussions of the class position of teachers, see the works of Michael W. Apple, especially "Work, Class, and Teaching" and *Teachers and Texts: A Political Economy of Class and Gender Relations in Education*.

Under late capitalism, knowledge has been raised to a force of production that increasingly takes on the form of a monopoly (eliminating many “small producers,” like the “independent” “inventor,” “writer,” “journalist,” or “social critic”). Its primary sites of concentration are the mass media conglomerates and, in the case of “specialized” or “advanced” knowledges, the university. The university instructor, as an alienated laborer in the global system of social relations articulated within the academy, exists to (re)produce the ideologies and subjectivities required for the perpetuation of capitalist relations of exploitation and domination. Insofar as this process is working “correctly” and “efficiently,” the student receives from the instructor a reified form of knowledge with some currency in the construction of a socialized subjectivity. The process interpellates the student as a validated subject of knowledge capable of assimilating and mastering the discourses that mark one as an “acceptable” subject of (Western) society and culture. . . . The economic structure of the university (where the student is a quasi-client of the instructor and is buying a product) encourages this system. . . . (236)

As another take on the class position of English teachers, Ohmann emphasizes that throughout the twentieth century, college instructors have encouraged the growth of publications, of professional organizations, and of rigidly hierarchical departmental structures to assure their social acceptance as professionals. Freedman, in his article responding to Ohmann’s work, adds that university teachers’ reluctance to unionize, or ally themselves with clerical or maintenance workers throughout the institution, is

symptomatic of this ideology of professionalism (80-81), which guarantees teachers certain material benefits:

In the first place, [professionalism] helps allow English professors to participate in the general affluence of American capitalism while at the same time partly shielding us from its worst competitive ravages by constituting the profession as a kind of craft guild. Second, it helps insulate English professors from political controversy by positing a specific skill, the ability to do literary criticism and scholarship, as unrelated to any but the most empty and abstract values. (75)

Demystifying teachers might make explicit that they often stand at an intersection of overwhelmingly tangled class loyalties—at times little more than underpaid workers in the brain factory, at times petty bourgeois, at times part of the professional-managerial class of monopoly capitalism (Freedman 80-81)—in the ongoing effort to make clear to students how power acts upon teachers and works through them.

Secondly, Strickland writes that the most effective way of discouraging passivity in students is not to deny the teacher's authority, but rather "to acknowledge and demystify the institutional function which this authority is constructed to serve" (294). A useful means to this end, of contextualizing the teacher's interests and authority, is making the history of English studies part of the course. This kind of metadiscourse, using the English class to study the study of English, has become part of many graduate-level courses, but still rarely occurs on the undergraduate level. Yet in "The Cultural Work of Teaching Noncanonical Poetry," Cary Nelson urges his colleagues to do just that, claiming,

In the course of the 1980s . . . it became increasingly impossible to teach theory without also reflecting on and theorizing about the social mission of English studies. Consequently, I could not now imagine teaching an introductory literature course which would not also introduce students to current debates in English and to the politics and social positioning of the discipline. (61)

The name most often associated with disclosing to students the political battles of English studies is Gerald Graff. Graff asks English teachers to “teach the conflicts,” to expose their classes to the debates conducted behind the scenes, how those in the discipline argue over the direction of English studies and its power-knowledge-subjectivity effects. In addition to initiating students into current disputes, Graff historicizes the interests of the English department. He reminds English pedagogues “that the familiar subjects and methodologies of our curricula are themselves products of historical conflicts which have been systematically forgotten”—not natural and inevitable academic forces (Strickland 294).

The demystifying pedagogue might make such histories an element of his or her classes to demonstrate that what is now considered innocent knowledge is the residue of some past debate in the discipline; today’s seemingly neutral truths were produced in history by some power in the interest of someone. (Yet, as Foucault argues, teachers should bear in mind these power-knowledge-subjectivity relations are not easy to disentangle, but are instead hopelessly complex and obscure.) Some relevant histories of English studies that might be appropriate, at least in excerpts, for undergraduates, would include not only Graff’s *Professing Literature: An Institutional History* (1987) and

Beyond the Culture Wars: How Teaching the Conflicts Can Revitalize American Education (1992), but perhaps selections ranging from 1967's "Where Do English Departments Come From?" by William Riley Parker, through Ohmann's *English in America: A Radical View of the Profession* (1976) and *Politics of Letters* (1987), to 1998's *The Rise and Fall of English: Reconstructing English as a Discipline* by Robert Scholes. Students in composition classes might benefit from several of the good short histories of American writing instruction that appeared in the 1980s and 1990s, such as Donald Stewart's "Some History Lessons for Composition Teachers" in Gay Tate and Edward P.J. Corbett's *The Writing Teacher's Sourcebook* (1988) and Lester Faigley's "The Changing Political Landscape of Composition Studies" in his *Fragments of Rationality: Postmodernity and the Subject of Composition* (1992). A useful but much longer study would be James Berlin's *Rhetoric and Reality: Writing Instruction in American Colleges, 1900-1985* (1987).¹¹

While running the risk that students might find such a project self-absorbed, historicizing English studies in the classroom would help to demystify the political nature of the teacher's work; in contrast to nonauthoritarian pedagogy's claim to be student-centered, reading works such as Graff's, Ohmann's, Faigley's, or Berlin's would expose the social program that English teachers further as members of the discipline. It is likely that a careful classroom interrogation of the politics of English studies would reveal not

¹¹ Other histories of composition studies might include Jean Donovan Sanborn's "The Essay Dies in the Academy, circa 1900" in Sullivan and Qualley's collection, *Pedagogy in the Age of Politics* (1994); Michael Clark's "A Rhetorical Ethics for Postmodern Pedagogy" in Donahue and Quandahl's collection *Reclaiming Pedagogy* (1989); and Sharon Crowley's *Composition in the University: Historical and Polemical Essays* (1998). Histories of the development of the discipline in England would include Ivor Goodson and Peter Medway's collection *Bringing English to Order: The History and Politics of a School Subject* (1990) and John Dixon's *A Schooling in "English": Critical Episodes in the Struggle to Shape Literary and Cultural Studies* (1991).

the promotion of a radical agenda, as teachers often think, as much as a conservative one. Having classes discuss such histories might reveal that English is as complicit as any other discipline in reproducing the status quo, that teaching English is a bourgeois life, that it has an important function in bestowing class markers to distinguish the middle class from pretenders, that it is undergirded by ugly corporate and industrial monies that flow into the colleges, and that it ultimately supports existing social relations by segregating counterhegemonic impulses to the English classroom, where they are safely diffused. Most importantly, English courses support existing social relations because they so often reinforce the liberal humanist subject, declaring students free and autonomous instead of created and constrained by unjust power structures. Faigley, for instance, questions how composition teachers promote the unified, centered subject when they reward students for their coherent personal narratives, written in a unique, individual voice; Strickland explains how literature classes are complicit in reproducing the humanist notion of subjectivity:

[English] helps to maintain liberal humanist individualism through its emphasis on authorial genius (focusing on “great men,” such as Milton, to the neglect, for example, of the socio-political determinants of textual production and reception) and through its cultivation of “original,” “individual,” response to literature in students. By representing individual genius as the essence of literature and by granting literature a privileged role as the prime repository of human experience, the traditional curriculum represents liberal humanist individualism as the natural and universal mode of human subjectivity. (293)

Strategy and demystifying teaching

The content proffered for English studies, because it “helps students link knowledge to power and human interest” might help foster resistance to the dominant social order (Giroux, *Ideology, Culture* 81). While Freirean pedagogy works to reveal the political nature of education, it often stops short at critiquing the teacher’s own politics. The proposed demystifying pedagogy, however, explores where the instructor’s interests are firmly in conflict with those in his or her courses; only after that step might students possess “the conceptual tools that they themselves can use to begin to understand the tyranny of imposed meanings” (Giroux, *Ideology, Culture* 81). Examining as course content poststructuralist conceptions of power-knowledge-subjectivity might further students’ recognition that they are not always already autonomous but constrained, occupying subject positions created by forces largely beyond their control.

In Giroux’s two-part solution from *Ideology, Culture, and the Process of Schooling*, he claims that revitalized course content is insufficient to effect dramatic change, that the curriculum of the content-focused radicals must be supplemented with the techniques of the strategy-based radicals. Throughout most of his writings, Giroux argues, like Freire, that in order for radical content to be effective, it must not be abstracted from the classroom social encounter; instead, liberalized, humanized, democratized social relations between student and teacher must be immediately established. English teachers must begin, the strategy-based pedagogues might say, to teach in ways that are student-centered, nonhierarchical, and dialogical—one could say, to use techniques such as teaching in a circle.

However, perhaps a different strategy is necessary for a more revolutionary teaching: the dissemination of radical content, but delivered in exactly the traditional form that Giroux and Freire discount. Instead of the nonauthoritarian pedagogy's deceptive depiction of equal power relations between teacher and student (when they must always remain asymmetrical), instead of nonauthoritarian pedagogy's interpellation of students as free (when they are actually created by language-history-power), English studies might benefit from demystifying methods that are, in many ways, hypertraditional. Some superficial aspects of such a classroom would resemble what many consider an outmoded, unenlightened, teacher-centered approach—chairs in straight rows before the “sage on the stage,” who lectures and leads some very guided conversations. But a teacher in the demystifying model would, rather than being oblivious to its pedagogy's effects, expressly and consciously *dramatize* asymmetrical power relations between teacher and students and how knowledge and subjectivities are constructed by them. As noted throughout this chapter, even the most progressive of the Freirean pedagogies closely resemble more authoritarian models; changing the seating configuration, tweaking grading methods, or encouraging student-directed discussions does not erase the fundamental inequalities of the teaching situation, but merely disguises them. As Ellsworth writes, the superiority of the teacher is always implied, and her statement about dialogical teaching might be applicable to all nonauthoritarian pedagogy, that it “is impossible in the culture at large, because at this historical moment, power relations between raced, classed, and gendered students and teachers are unjust. The injustice of these relations, and the way in which those injunctions distort

communication, cannot be overcome in a classroom no matter how committed the teacher and students are . . .” (108).

The goal of this hypertraditional classroom would be to interrogate all teaching, to make it call attention to itself, defamiliarize itself, problematize itself as a cultural-political situation (Zavarzadeh 41). Instead of advancing the deception that all members of the English class are able to freely fashion themselves and create truth, the demystifying pedagogy lays bare the power-knowledge-subjectivity constellation for scrutiny. Teachers’ performance of the constraints students face might be a helpful move toward raising awareness that “there is no escape from but only opportunities to understand—or begin to understand—the conditions of power,” which is unevenly distributed in the educational setting and in the world at large (Donahue and Quandahl 4). As demystifying teachers perform the hypertraditional classroom, they would perhaps “teach the conflict” of their decision to reject nonauthoritarian methods; a pedagogy such as teaching in a circle, they might explain, “does not ‘free’ students, but demonstrates how components of ideological systems come to appear as ‘choices’ or ‘freedoms’” (Donahue and Quandahl 3).

This demystifying model, though, opens a real possibility, discomfiting for many teachers, of confrontation between teachers and students. As Ellsworth comments on “Giroux’s formula for dialogue,” nonauthoritarian pedagogy

requires and assumes a classroom of participants unified on the side of the subordinated against the subordinators, sharing and trusting in an “us-ness” against “them-ness.” This formula fails to confront dynamics of

subordination present among classroom participants and within classroom participants, in the form of multiple and contradictory subject positions” (106).

Since, in Ellsworth’s words, “acting as if our classroom were a safe space in which democratic dialogue was possible and happening [does] not make it so” (107), teachers must acknowledge conflict between the subject positions they inhabit and those of their students.

Such disharmony is unavoidable, in spite of nonauthoritarian pedagogy’s “illusion of equality while in fact leaving the authoritarian nature of the teacher/student relationship intact” (Ellsworth 98). Theorists Strickland, Robert Miklisch, and bell hooks have actually promoted confrontation as advantageous in the English classroom, that conflict should not be buried but instead raised to the surface. All three find that an oppositional stance toward students (discussed in chapter three as the “monological” pedagogue) is often necessary for the politically engaged teacher who intervenes on behalf of his or her vision of social justice.

Strickland begins from the premise that when “conflict is not ignored or suppressed, it constitutes a discursive site where knowledge can be produced” (292). For Strickland, confrontation aids the English class because it allows teachers to actively oppose students allied with hegemonic capitalism, those whose views they find objectionable. As he addresses a hypothetical liberal, nonauthoritarian teacher,

The liberal humanism that characterizes your pedagogical practices (that sees the classroom as a “friendly” or “collective” space of learning) “forgets” the very distinction you made yourself, as a politically

committed pedagogue, have made and must make between those students who belong to oppressed groups and those who do not. . . . Unless you theorize the differences at work here in terms of the struggles being staged and carried out within the classroom, your (well-intentioned) attempts at enabling students who belong to oppressed groups are bound to reproduce the hegemony of those positions to which you claim to be opposed. All students cannot be enabled equally: in no classroom is this possible.

(232)

A worthy aspect of Strickland's method is that he challenges students, many of whom seem to be English majors convinced of the ideological purity of their newly chosen field, about the importance and direction of English studies. For example, he critiques with his classes the figure of Milton, who has been appropriated for a wide range of oppressive political positions throughout history, such as his views on women, and confronts students with feminist attacks on the author:

This position conflicts with the expectations of some students—Christian fundamentalists who seek to read Milton as a great Christian poet, students steeped in the assumptions of New Criticism and traditional literary historicism who seek a purely literary or literary-historical study of Milton, and students who simply seek to fulfill a humanities requirement as painlessly as possible and who are eager to continue their preparation for business and professional careers unencumbered by an encounter with a teacher committed to feminist consciousness-raising. These students make it difficult for me to pursue my political/intellectual

agenda. My role, as I see it, is to make it as difficult as possible for them to get what they expect from the course, to confront and contest students in ways that will challenge them to recognize and rethink their assumptions. (297)

Next, when Strickland asks the questions the demystifying teacher finds valuable, about why and how teachers teach what they do, and toward what political ends, he does not shy away from implicating English studies in a conservative politics:

What has happened, some may ask, to the goal of producing students who can appreciate Milton? The very fact that such an audience has to be produced—that it will not just be found—begs the question: Why produce it? What interests are served by its production? What does it mean to produce a fit audience who will acquiesce in subjection to a conservative historical reverence which supports an oppressive status quo. (299)¹²

In addition to Strickland, Robert Miklisch emphasizes an even more forceful confrontation in the classroom. In “Punk Pedagogy, or Performing Contradiction: The Risks and Rewards of (Anti-)Transference,” Miklisch tries to locate disharmonies between his positions and those of students, and contradictions among student positions, when they are definitely “in conflict and no amount of intellectual benevolence would change that ‘fact’” (264). Whereas dialogical pedagogues might try to reconcile disagreements, Miklisch underscores one student’s subject position as the Lacanian Other

¹² Unfortunately Strickland’s confrontational pedagogy often dissolves into something resembling expressivist “facilitation” as he (1) opts to engage students in discussions about the value of English studies but sometimes retreats from discussions of other political issues, and (2) puts a great deal

of another and “aggressively contests” student arguments through dramatizing the unbridgeable gaps between his subject position and those of class members (265). In spite of the risk of reinforcing students’ docility through intimidation, Miklisch believes he more often arouses resistance through his emotive theater:

The “lesson” of punk for me is that the dialectic of scholastic production is inseparable from pedagogic performance; that it is not enough, for example, merely to recognize contradiction, that one must *perform* it in the classroom. More specifically, one must perform contradiction . . . because ideological formation, as Gramsci and Althusser among others have taught us, is not simply an “intellectual” matter. In short, if ideology, like hegemony, is primarily an unconscious process, critical pedagogy must engage both affect and intellect, emotion and cognition—if it is to be persuasive, which is to say transformative. (266)

Finally, bell hooks, cited by an admiring Patricia Bizzell in “Power, Authority, and Critical Pedagogy,” sees teacher conflict with those inhabiting subject positions aligned with hegemony (that is for her, white, middle class, male Republicans) as essential to championing the oppressed in her classes. Hooks writes,

My classroom style is very confrontational. It is based on the assumption that many students will take courses from me who are afraid to speak (especially students from oppressed and exploited groups). The revolutionary hope that I bring to the classroom is that it will become a space where they can come to voice. Unlike the stereotypical feminist

of faith in Freirean strategies of dialogue and democratization, such as negotiating grades and encouraging student input on the conduct of a course, as a way to temper his provocations.

model that suggests women best come to voice in an atmosphere of safety (one in which we are all going to be kind and nurturing), I encourage students to work at coming to voice in an atmosphere where they may be afraid or see themselves at risk. The goal is to enable all students, not just an assertive few, to feel empowered in a rigorous, critical discussion. Many students find this pedagogy difficult, frightening, and very demanding. They do not usually come away from my class talking about how much they enjoyed the experience. (qtd. in Bizzell, "Power, Authority" 65)

Hooks urges the teacher to take up what Ellsworth calls an *emancipatory authority* (as C.H. Knoblauch, discussed in chapter three, uses the term *emancipatory vision*) to confront oppression; as Ellsworth declares, "Here the question of 'empowerment for what' becomes the final arbiter of a teacher's use or misuse of authority" (99). This notion does not assume an emancipated teacher, one free from prejudices, but one who intervenes in spite of being biased and complicit in reproducing unjust social relations.

Certain caveats are in order for teachers who encourage conflict in the classroom, as all of the theorists associated with this position acknowledge. Domineering teachers might remember that combat cuts two ways and prepare to find the student resistance they seek, perhaps in the form of outright rebellion or perhaps in the form of students' dropping the course *en masse*. But a classroom of confrontation does not have to be overwhelmingly unpleasant place. Trying to avoid the mystified power relations of nonauthoritarian pedagogy does not give the teacher license to take his or her rule to an extreme; to dramatize that there are asymmetrical power relations between teacher and

student, even in Miklisch's highly charged way, the teacher does not have to become a jackbooted dictator. In arguing for the value of confrontation, Strickland, for instance, seems especially wary of moments when "conflict takes the form of what can be a monotonous authoritarianism on the part of the teacher and a deafening silence on the part of a student" (292). Miklisch warns "you can lose a whole class [through these methods], and you can lose them for good" (265), and asks teachers to be honestly reflective, assuring that they do not merely engage in "intellectual one-upmanship masquerading as demystification, pedagogical oppression in the guise of a pedagogy of the oppressed, fascism as enlightenment" (265). Perhaps the best way to sidestep conflictual but unproductive relations between teacher and student is to refuse to portray classroom battle as a "personal" fight. Contextualizing a disagreement as personal opposition would be to reproduce liberal humanist selves instead of demonstrating that the disagreement is between historicized, textualized subject positions. Katz, for instance, disagrees with a professor who criticizes him as relishing personal conflict, writing her that while he does confront other students, he does not see the challenge in the "'gladiatorial' sense you speak of, in which one 'individual' throws down the gauntlet before another, but a challenge to the common sense, to particular discourses, and to the subjects employing these discourses to examine, critique, and evaluate them, for the purpose of assessing the ends and interests they represent" (226).

Under demystifying pedagogy, a principal concern of English studies might become the examination of reading and writing practices toward this end: making students aware of how sociolinguistic forces construct the subject and legitimate knowledge and authority. An effective model might utilize in a dialectical manner both

content (the work of a variety of theorists who concern themselves with this issue) and strategy (a dramatized, but mediated, traditional classroom). Although the proposed content—readings on power-knowledge-subjectivity, the history of English, and discussions of teachers' class loyalties as supplements to literary and composition studies—might not emphasize agency, it does open possibilities for critique of the status quo and the educational institutions that uphold it. Such a curriculum's utopian moments, of uncovering human beings' power to resist, might balance and bolster traditional teaching methods that demonstrate limits to agency—and vice-versa. While "traditional methods" might entail a firmly authoritarian teacher, perhaps they also allow for an instructor who emphasizes consensus rather than difference. In either case, the essential aspect of the demystifying approach is a call for a teacher who is honest about the asymmetrical power relations inherent in any pedagogical situation and is willing to use his or her authority for social justice. This integrity about inequalities of power between teachers and students, instead of disguising or ignoring those disparities, strengthens revolutionary impulses rather than stifles them. As Walter Benjamin writes about deceptive teaching in "Program for a Proletarian Children's Theater": "For the proletariat does not need all the thousands of little words by which the bourgeoisie masks class struggles in its own pedagogy. The 'unprejudiced,' 'understanding,' 'empathetic' bourgeois practices, the 'child-loving' teachers—these we can do without" (32).

Chapter Five

The Promise and Problems of an Electronic Classroom:

Agency and Control in the Networked Environment

As with the nurturing writing tutorial, the student-centered class discussion, and other techniques of classroom egalitarianism, English teaching strategies that intuitively seem emancipatory may fail to live up to their vaunted promise. Liberating pedagogies—whether grounded in a nonhierarchical social constructionism, Bakhtinian dialogism, or Freirean theory—might in fact further the very aim they oppose: education as a forceful mechanism for reproducing inequitable power relations. In recent years the most daring claims for freeing the English literature and composition classroom have been made by supporters of networked computers.

The birth of computing and the English classroom

A rudimentary sketch of computer use in composition courses would emphasize how in the 1970s, the remaining supporters of current-traditional rhetoric viewed computer-aided instruction as a new means to deliver drill in grammar, punctuation, and mechanics. In the 1980s discussions centered on the pragmatics of how technology facilitated the writing process, that word processing made prewriting and editing much easier (Barker 9; Hawisher, “Blinding Insights”). Cynthia Selfe writes in 1990’s “English Teachers and the Humanization of Computers,”

Our profession now has evidence that the use of computers can facilitate invention by encouraging the generation of ideas, creating a more positive attitude toward writing tasks, and increasing fluency; enhance drafting and

revision by removing the drudgery of repetitive text production; and improve editing by providing a means of checking certain spelling and style conventions. (192-93)

But with the 1980s advent of connectivity through networks, “the ‘P’ in PC [came] to mean public as well as personal” (Eldred 216), and composition theorists, followed by literature instructors, began to focus on what they considered the revolutionary possibilities of electronic collaboration. “English teachers and teacher educators can now see computers in two complementary lights,” adds Selfe: “First, as personal tools that facilitate an author’s process-based approach to discourse production, and, second, as social tools that link readers and writers in rich electronically based conversations” (“English Teachers” 192).

English classes first participated in asynchronous communication, as students began to use networked servers to “store their papers, exchange them with other members of peer-critique groups, establish electronic mailboxes, hold dialogues or conversations with teachers and professional writers, revise a common text, or establish a public conference on various topics of interest” (Selfe, “English Teachers” 193-94). Later came the more exciting synchronous capabilities, or electronic “conversation that occurs in real time complete with the ability to interrupt speakers/writers as they communicate” (193-94). Most followers of networking pedagogy credit Trent Batson, of Gallaudet University for the deaf, as the innovator who in 1985 adapted electronically linked computers for real-time discussion in the English class. Using the software called CB Utility and later the application RealTime Writer, Gallaudet’s writing class was tremendously important to his hearing-impaired students as, he reported, “People *typing*

to each other over the wires in a room full of computers could simulate a spoken conversation and thus, for the first time ever, allow deaf people to directly experience and participate in a live *group* discussion in English” (Batson, “Origins” 99). Early users of the cyber conversation at Gallaudet called the phenomenon *ENFI* (Electronic Networks For Interaction), which referred not to a single software program but to using a variety of applications for networked, synchronous class conversations.

Throughout the 1980s the technology spread to dozens of institutions, particularly to the University of Texas, where researchers known as the Daedalus Group developed software named InterChange specifically to support networked writing activities in colleges. The Daedalus program became so popular that “on many campuses, people don’t talk about ENFI, but about ‘interchange,’ the lower case recognizing its arrival as a generic descriptor” (Bruce, Peyton, and Batson 2). Networks today link not only local sites, such as a group of computers in a lab, but also users around the world via modems and telephone lines. Students as young as elementary school age often join each other in electronic discussion not only under school auspices but also in ubiquitous *chat rooms* available to anyone with an Internet connection.

Real-time computerized discussions, such as achieved through the Daedalus InterChange and similar programs, can be difficult to envision if one has not experienced them, but their typical occurrence in the English class has been described in this way:

Students and the teacher each sit at computer terminals and compose messages in a private window at the bottom of their computer screens.

When they press a key, their message is immediately transmitted to all of the screens in the class. As users type and send messages, their messages

scroll up the screen in a continuous dialogue tagged with the name of the sender (or whatever name the sender logged on with), as in the script of a play. While individuals are composing, the messages of the other class members continue to scroll visibly up the screen. Participants can scroll back to read previous messages they might have missed, but new messages continue to be received at the same time.

The computer stores the entire discussion, which can be reviewed at any point during the class session or printed out in its entirety at the end. (Bruce, Peyton, and Batson 2)

An option in many software applications is to allow channels for a subgroup to hold a private conversation while the larger dialogue rolls on, a kind of electronic whispering in class.¹

Bertram Bruce, in "Innovation and Social Change" from the collection *Network-Based Classrooms: Promises and Realities*, uses *technocentrism* to describe "technology as sufficient unto itself to effect change" (9); *technological determinism*, as used by countless others, of course means that a specific technology must shape the character of that change in an ordained manner. The discourse of technocentrism has colored much

¹ Thomas Barker and Fred Kemp also offer a good description of electronic class discussions: "Mail messages exist in *file time*, which means that when a message is sent it is stored in a special mail database waiting to be summoned by the addressee. . . . But messages can also be sent immediately, or in real time. In this case, when Student A sends a message, that message appears simultaneously on every monitor in the computer-based classroom. When Student B reads the message on his monitor, she calls up an electronic scratch pad (editing box), writes a response, and sends it. The message of Student B then appears on every monitor in the room directly below that of Student A. A message sent by Student C at another computer would appear directly below that of Student B on every monitor in the classroom, and so forth, with all subsequent messages sent by anybody in the class. Except when a student is composing a message to send, all the monitors in the class reflect the same scrolling message stream—a stream to which anyone in the class can add at will" (21-22).

of the writing about technology and the English classroom from the 1970s on—that computers, by themselves, will of necessity bring about tremendous upheavals to a tired English studies. Other commentators have surmised that the new technology will not only transform the writing and reading classroom, but that it will necessarily alter composition or literature practices in a foreseeable direction. For example, in “‘Whose Machines Are These?’ Politics, Power, and the New Technology,” Elizabeth Klem and Charles Moran summarize some determinist arguments:

According to Helen Schwartz, writing in 1984, computers will encourage our students to take risks. To Elder, et al., writing in 1989, computers will give students greater authority over texts. Each of these authors would acknowledge, of course, that the new technology, in and of itself, would not force change, but all believe that the new technology has *some* force—and that through its use student writers might be more fully empowered than they would be in a conventional, pencil-and-paper writing classroom.

(75)

Klem and Moran find that the underlying tone of 1980s writing about computers in English studies is optimistic, that technology will be employed for liberatory ends, that “students might be more fully empowered than they would be in a conventional, pencil-and-paper writing classroom” (75). In “The Rhetoric of Technology and the Electronic Writing Class,” Gail Hawisher and Cynthia Selfe look back on a decade of writing about networked classrooms to discover a technological determinism that appears as an “uncritical enthusiasm that frequently characterizes the reports of those of us who advocate and support electronic writing classes” (“Rhetoric” 57). The excessively upbeat

response that Hawisher and Selfe call the *rhetoric of technology*—one of “hope, vision, and persuasion” (“Rhetoric” 57)—has been similarly described by Moran, in a review of some prominent manifestos for networking, as the “almost magical connection between the new technology and the new pedagogy” (“Computers and English” 195). In other words, linked computers in the English classroom began to produce, in the views of theorists like Lester Faigley, the very “discourse of postmodernity” (184), enacting at once the student-centered classroom, some of the aims of feminist pedagogy, the principal tenets of social constructionism, and the poststructuralist critique of subjectivity and truth claims.

Computer networks and the rhetoric of technology

A first step in deconstructing the rhetoric of technology is to sort out the many and varied claims of the networking advocates. The overlapping assertions encouraging the use of linked computers, as a way to lessen teacher authority while empowering students in egalitarian collaboration, echo those made by supporters of other ostensibly emancipatory pedagogies.

Lessening the teacher's authority

In appraisals of the networked English course, a common argument is that while “traditional . . . classrooms—group discussions, lectures, teacher-student conferences, written assignments—generally support a traditional hegemony in which teachers determine appropriate and inappropriate discourse,” computer-mediated discussions disable the dominance of the teacher (Cooper and Selfe 849). As Marilyn Cooper and

Selfe argue in "Computer Conferences and Learning: Authority, Resistance, and Internally Persuasive Discourse," the power relations of "traditional academic forums," which are "shaped by the value our society places on strong authority and competitiveness" (852), dissolve when "computer-equipped classrooms [take] from the teachers traditional modes of authority—the teacher's desk, the blackboard, the rows of chairs facing the teacher" (Klem and Moran 76). Cyber classrooms are, then, an architecture seriously disadvantageous to instructor representatives of education's oppressive-reproductive force. Teachers are compelled instead to question their privileged position bestowed by the academy: "The pedagogical effect . . . is that we remove ourselves from a position of authority in order to challenge the traditional classroom dynamic. We are showing students that they should take some responsibility for their education and needn't feel that one authority knows all the answers" (Handa, "Politics, Ideology" 170).

Communicating through ENFI, hoped early users of networked discussions, "would blur social distinctions in the classroom" between instructor and learner (Bruce, Peyton, and Batson 4) and transform vertical relations into what Batson calls *horizontality* ("Origins" 101). To some supporters of cyber English, this equalization is evinced by the fact that students usually use teachers' last names in a typical setting but first names in an electronic one. Batson writes:

I liked that I could be just Trent with the class. I became a collaborator in their learning, not the authority, the one who could do no wrong, the great evaluator, the director of all learning, the knowledge giver, the protector

of the purity of the language, and all the absurdly contorted roles we are thrust into as teachers in the traditional writing classroom. (“Origins” 101)

In an electronic forum, the teacher is not only “released from being trapped as constant arbiter” (Batson, “Origins” 102-03), but furthermore often loses all management of the class’s direction. In contrast to the usual “three-part sequence of initiation, reply, and evaluation” of most class discussions, networked communications, in the experience of Faigley at the University of Texas, veer towards the anarchic:

The *InterChange* session begins like usual classroom discourse with the teacher asking a question of the class. But unlike a usual classroom teacher, Lester cannot recognize one student to answer his question. Because most of the class responds quickly to his question, there is no opportunity for Lester to make a conventional evaluation statement. When Lester replies to his students . . . he does not evaluate the students’ responses, nor does he supply the answer, nor does he introduce a new topic. By this time he has lost control of the floor. (180)

As other students hijack the computer-mediated discussion, Faigley believes, “In terms of discourse structure, Lester has become a student in his own class” (181).

Such a drastic change in the usual way of doing business is difficult for many English teachers, but pro-networking pedagogues cheer those persevering instructors who, instead of “fighting the environment” (Klem and Moran 79), “alter their expectations, syllabuses, strategies, manner, and sometimes their understanding of what education means” in order to accommodate ENFI’s student-centered imperative (Batson,

“Teaching” 252). Joy Kreeft Peyton and Bruce recount one such success story in “Understanding the Multiple Threads of Network-Based Classrooms”:

When Marshall Kremers first used ENFI at NYIT, he had to struggle seriously with issues of teacher authority and student power. His traditional, authoritative classroom style was challenged when his students took control of the network discussions and pushed him to the sidelines. He was forced to either stop using the network entirely, in order to maintain his authority, or radically alter his teaching style to accommodate the new power the network interaction gave his students. He chose to do the latter, and has developed a series of ENFI activities in which students adopt roles and discuss current events, working in groups without teacher intervention. The version of ENFI that Kremers developed involved completely relinquishing the authority he had been so comfortable with for years and sharing it with students. (Peyton and Bruce 72)

Creating the electronic democracy

A corollary to the proposition that the computerized classroom decreases teacher authority is that it increases student power. Many researchers have pointed to anecdotal support that “indicates that the conversations occurring on computer-based conferences encourage groups to function in a more egalitarian and democratic manner because they encourage more active participation by more group members” (Selfe, “English Teachers” 193). Electronic pedagogy, claim several observers of its use in English studies, discourages passivity; more students join the conversation because of the “disparity

between student expectations of the classroom setting” and the cyber environment: The “actuality of the network communication, a seemingly more democratic arena, causes a release of student energy (as if a dreaded meeting were being postponed)” (Batson, “Origins” 102-03). One aspect of networked conversation that increases participation is the fact that all class members can talk—that is, type—at once, a capability that causes a zealous Faigley to surmise that for some teachers, the student-centered classroom has been realized, that “the utopian dream of an equitable sharing of classroom authority, at least during the duration of a class discussion, has been achieved” (Faigley 167).

Yet beyond a release as “if a dreaded meeting were being postponed,” as Batson characterizes the experience, some contend student participation in the electronic classroom is greater because it opens possibilities for substantially divergent thinking, for intellectual risk-taking, for real opposition to hegemony. Cooper and Selfe state,

Students writing in computer conferences . . . resist by introducing their perspectives and concerns and by taking on more authoritative roles than those offered in traditional forums of academic discourse. Creating these alternate subjectivities allows students to become active in their own learning process, to become speakers in a dynamic context rather than being the subjects of a predetermined discourse. (851)

Perhaps one of the most intriguing notions offered by networking advocates is that electronic discussions are diverse and egalitarian because the difficulties of face-to-face conversation—particularly its attendant, sometimes intimidating, physical presence of body language and facial expressions—are erased (Feenberg 23). Cooper and Selfe opine that “because the forum of the [traditional] class discussion is based on face-to-face

encounters, visual and aural cues—cues of dialect, clothing, skin color, gender, age—enable the social hierarchies of our culture to apply, again privileging some students over others” (852). Networked conferences, though, according to advocates of cyber equality, can serve as a site oblivious to social distinctions. “If we can’t eliminate the effect of racism, sexism, or classism in our traditional classrooms because of social inertia,” Cooper and Selfe propose, “we may be able to set aside smaller electronic spaces in which such problems can find expression and be debated” as students are liberated from social constraints connected to the body (867).

Cyber conversation advocates claim that even within a group seemingly homogeneous in visible markers such as race or sex, mediating discussions through computers neutralizes the nonverbal support that teachers and the class give to those who voice the officially sanctioned discourse. In the traditional classroom, “students who have the willingness and ability to cooperate with the teacher’s goals . . . are privileged. Hence, students who are willing to demonstrate their knowledge publicly and students who are more articulate about their knowledge are rewarded by the smiles and nods of other students and of the teacher” (Cooper and Selfe 852). However, ENFI communication, say its proponents, negates the competitive and charismatic student (Kiesler, Siegel, and McGuire 1125), ensuring that “those people with powerful ideas will have more influence than those with powerful personalities” (Spitzer “Writing Style” 20),² that what is said is more important than who said it (Faigley 191). As Faigley quotes a student in one of his networked classes, “Something that the InterChange did do

² The articles of Kiesler, Siegel, and McGuire; Schriener and Rice; and Spitzer are cited in Hawisher and Selfe’s “The Rhetoric of Technology and the Electronic Writing Class.”

that is sometimes not done in conversation is that it made everyone equal. One comment had no more impact than another because the computer has only one color and the same print" (Faigley 182).

An important aspect of cyber democracy in the English class, write several defenders, is its facilitation of student-to-student communication instead of the typical setting's teacher-to-student interaction. The "lines of contact proceed from every workstation to every other workstation," the authors of "Network Theory: A Postmodern Pedagogy for the Writing Classroom" argue. "No link is privileged" (Barker and Kemp 16). Marshall Kremers finds that computerized networking is more conducive to discourse among class members than other strategies, such as placing the room's chairs in a circle:

I discovered the true power of ENFI in 1988, the first time I tried to lead a class discussion in real time on one of our new local-area computer networks (LANs). Expecting that my students would follow me in discussion, I found instead that they much preferred to converse with each other, forcing me to the sidelines. I could not imagine that happening in my conventional classroom. No student had ever tried to take over the discussion in all my 20 years of teaching, even during my progressive period, when I arranged the desks in a circle. I had always done more or less what I wanted. But interaction in real time on the LAN was totally different because it seemed to give all the power to the students, who outnumbered me 20 to 1. ("Student Authority" 113)

Proponents of networked reading and writing courses claim that due to decreased teacher authority, lessened interference from divisive social markers, and increased student participation in class—in particular student-to-student interaction—meaningful collaborative work flourishes—from initial conversations about current events or literature to peer response groups to ensemble production of essays. Batson writes of this last capability, “Up until now, two people sitting next to each other could work on the same legal pad, three could share a white board, but larger groups did not have a convenient collaborative medium” (Batson, “Teaching” 251). He states in an earlier piece, “Most collaborative learning classes stop short of actual group writing. They may think together and plan together and then, after they write individually, critique their writing together, but they probably won’t write together. They don’t observe each other’s writing process. ENFI makes that last step possible” (qtd. in Bruce, Peyton, and Batson 5).

Regularly invoking Kenneth Bruffee’s “Conversation of Mankind” vision of the intimate and supportive writing community, or Peter Elbow’s teacherless classroom (Spitzer “Local” 63), researchers such as Delores Schriner and William C. Rice remark that contrary to expectations of computer isolation, these students instead band together in a remarkably collaborative and harmonious group:

All the instructors in the pilot project reported never having seen a group of first-year students, thrown randomly together by the registrar’s computer, become as close as their students had. Students set up meetings in the library and in campus computers labs, came early to class and stayed late, made plans together for the next semester, and exchanged

addresses. The computer, far from making the class more impersonal, fostered a strikingly close community in one of the nation's largest universities. (476)

Such a pedagogical practice is grounded in social constructionism, and supporters of networking find that electronic discussions demonstrate vividly that theory's notion that knowledge-truth is not foundational but instead created and negotiated within discourse communities (Schriner and Rice 472; Selfe, "English Teachers" 191). This student-centered production of knowledge, pro-network teachers find, is the reverse of instructor dissemination of material.³ Because this truth is forged among students, instead of merely reproducing the position of authority, Cooper and Selfe again find it forcefully counterhegemonic. English teachers, they believe, should use computer networks with the aim of encouraging a Freirean "critical consciousness about discourse and its societal functions, to use writing as a means of thinking against the grain of convention as well as with it, to resist the normative function of academic discourse as a way of learning from a different perspective" (850).

Not only does writing in an electronic community dovetail nicely with social constructionism, but also with feminism, some rhetoricians and literary critics argue, for the network can escape patriarchy. The opportunities of ENFI to minimize the power of

³ Barker and Kemp's "network theory" is basically an electronic social constructionism: "The essential activity in writing instruction is the textual transactions between students. These transactions should be so managed by the network as to encourage a sense of *group knowledge*, a sense that every *transactor* influences and is influenced by such group knowledge, and a sense that such group knowledge is properly *malleable* (responsive to the influences of each transactor). The result of textual transactions so managed is a *deneutralizing* of text itself and a greater emphasis and skill on the part of the transactor in rendering such text" (15).

the male body and to recover obscured ways of knowing appeal to those searching for a pedagogical site removed from masculine oppression:

Computer networks may provide such spaces, electronic and cultural “lacunae” in which both teachers and students can learn to listen to multiple voices, and thus, in Carol Gilligan’s words, learn the importance of “different truths.” In these spaces, writers and teachers of writing may be able to recapture, from women and other “silenced” minorities, perspectives we have lost. (Cooper and Selfe 858)

Faigley in particular reports that his women students participate more actively in the electronic class, freed from the male gaze (Faigley 182).

Champions of the pedagogy claim student writers refine their sense of audience through their networked collaboration. Local area networks may join plugged-in participants of a single class, but the Internet can join a class with another group located somewhere else on campus, at another university, or anywhere in the world. Advocates of ENFI argue that their students write not to a teacher grading a stack of essays over the weekend, but “to a live and present audience”; furthermore, they claim that such an audience is more authentic, that “group collaboration reduces the artificiality of the traditional writing classroom” (Batson, “Teaching” 253). Networking supporters claim student-to-student work in computer conferences is “not merely perfunctory; it [is] purposive” (Schriner and Rice 478), that it cancels the worn-out game described as

Don’t address me, the teacher, directly, taking into account what I know and don’t know, and that I am going to grade you and all that, but pretend to be writing to some vague audience out there who doesn’t know about

the story we've just read. . . . The class works in a jungle gym of surmisals, a let's pretend authenticity. It's a highly convoluted communication structure, yet we expect students to take it in stride and work within it. (Batson, "Origins" 100)

Instead, the collaboration of ENFI brings about an improved state of affairs, say proponents, as students write together and to each other to make meaning, not merely writing individually to make a good grade (Bruce, Peyton, and Batson 4).

A final claim associating enhanced writing, ameliorated power relations, and the use of networked computers is that a fundamental difference between ENFI and the typical English classroom is that a computerized discussion is *textualized*. Students are completely immersed in writing in the electronic course, producing an amount of written material many times greater than they would in a traditional class (Bruce, Peyton, and Batson 5). Moreover, an advantage of the electronic conversation is that an entire class discussion may be printed for students to review later when continuing to construct their arguments: "A group which exists through an exchange of written texts has the peculiar ability to recall and inspect its entire past," writes Andrew Feenberg in "The Written World: On the Theory and Practice of Computer Conferencing" (25).

New technology and old problems

The assertions supporters make in favor of using computer-mediated communication to revitalize English pedagogy are indeed weighty. A glance at some of the titles furthering this movement reveals that many teachers have welcomed the new technology with unrestrained optimism: "Radical Changes in Class Discussion Using

Networked Computers” (Bump); *Computers and Community: Teaching Composition in the Twenty-First Century* (Handa); *Mindweave: Communication, Computers, and Distance Education* (Mason and Kaye); “English Teachers and the Humanization of Computers: Networking Communities of Readers and Writers” (Selfe); “Computer Conferences and Learning: Authority, Resistance, and Internally Persuasive Discourse,” (Cooper and Selfe); *The Electronic Word: Democracy, Technology, and the Arts* (Lanham); and “The Achieved Utopia of the Networked Classroom” (Faigley, from *Fragments of Rationality*). The words *radical*, *community*, *humanization*, *resistance*, *democracy*, and even *utopia* fairly jump from this list of titles. As Cooper and Selfe believe, what seems at hand for writing and reading teachers is a revolutionary tool to achieve an unfettered egalitarianism, free from constraints that have hampered true learning in institutions:

Computer conferences, after all, do not have their roots in traditional academic value systems. They exist on the intellectual margins of most traditional academic discourse communities in a new medium that is as wild and unsettled as any frontier. Because change, exploration, and divergence are central values of this medium already, the appropriate social, intellectual, and philosophical codes and political structures often run directly counter to those found in the traditional forums we use in our courses. (858)

However, one must carefully analyze these claims for technocentrism, that these arguments hold that the computer networking mechanisms are by themselves capable of effecting change, and technological determinism, that it must affect English classrooms

in predictable—for these writers, predictably beneficial—ways. As William Costanzo argues in “Reading, Writing, and Thinking in an Age of Electronic Literacy,” unlike Walter Ong’s largely accepted position, social relations produce machines—and not the other way around. If Selfe (with Cooper) leaned towards technocentrism or technological determinism in the article quoted above, published in December 1990, in a piece appearing just weeks later she questioned such tendencies. Joining Gail Hawisher for a February 1991 article, she writes that “computers do not automatically create ideal learning situations. This is not to say that electronic technology cannot encourage social interaction and cooperative undertakings but rather to stress, in Michel Foucault’s words, that a technology cannot ‘guarantee’ any behavior alone ‘simply by its nature’ . . .” (Hawisher and Selfe “Rhetoric” 60). Drawing upon Foucault’s readings of social mechanisms, Hawisher and Selfe state the computerized classroom cannot be politically neutral, and may be as disciplinary as liberatory. “Like the traditional classroom,” they remark, “the architecture of electronic spaces can put some students at a disadvantage, thwarting rather than encouraging learning” (60). At least one commentator has surmised that the architecture of networked meeting places is not greatly different from that of the real university in any case, since user interfaces often mimic the actual college campus, with desktops, various buildings and classrooms, and park-like areas for conversation. The metaphors adopted for the virtual university might reproduce it in a fashion remarkably like the brick-and-mortar one (Moran, “Computers and English” 197). Problematizing computer-mediated conversation in such ways may uncover forceful arguments that neutralize the gleeful rhetoric of technology and present a more sobering view of its pedagogical possibilities.

Deskilling workers

A first objection to the notion of computer-mediated communication is a fact often overlooked at a time when many suppose “everyone has a computer,” or “schools have lots of computers now.” Pedagogues cannot rely on electronic networks to bring about an exemplary democracy when computer hardware and software costs remain prohibitive for many schools and huge numbers of individuals lack access to technology both at school and at home (Duin and Hansen 98; Hawisher and Selfe “Letter”). Secondly, even when access to computers is assured, Andrew Sledd warns in “Readin’ not Riotin’: The Politics of Literacy,” that “schemes to educate young people in the latest technology of communication, the computer, are not intended to enlighten or empower them all in its use. Rather the plan is to produce a few experts in the service of established power” (499).

Not surprisingly, Richard Ohmann has raised the most dire predictions of the disempowering potential of computers in education, describing the specter in “Literacy, Technology, and Monopoly Capital,” a 1985 *College English* article and a chapter in his 1987 *Politics of Letters*. In these works, Ohmann traces a history of technology that has almost always strengthened the power of the social elite (675-80), and for him computers in education “are an intended and developing technology, carrying forward the deskilling and control of labor that goes back to F.W. Taylor and beyond, that has been a main project of monopoly capital” (683). Ohmann argues that bringing to the masses computer literacy, like the question of literacy itself, is a political one, and wonders who will be made computer savvy and for what ends (“Literacy” 675). Charles Knoblauch similarly questions “those who use the concept [of literacy], those who profit from it, and

those who have the standing and motivation to enforce it as a social requirement,” following the tendency that “the cultural left does not emphasize the progressive nature of literacy but, rather, its oppressive nature, its function to ‘safeguard the socioeconomic status quo’” (“Literacy” 74, 76). Ohmann surmises that while a select few may become technologically proficient to fill roles as corporate decision makers, the majority will be introduced to computers in school to staff menial positions. Although it is difficult to see a direct path for most students straight from the ENFI classroom to the electronic workstation at McDonald’s, as Ohmann might have it, his historicizing of the use of computers, that the last few centuries’ pattern of technological improvements has been generally to curb freedom rather than generate it, is useful. Ohmann’s argument, posed in the face of a general reversal of the left’s anti-technological bent when it comes to computer networking, serves as a caveat to optimistic technological determinism.⁴

Producing verbal violence

In a challenge to language and literature teachers to use computer networking as a humanizing force, Selfe writes:

If we, as humanities scholars, cannot approach the machine in a humane manner that serves to link human beings in a complex network of communication and exchange, how can we hope to influence like-minded approaches to technology in the fields of math, engineering, or computer science?

⁴ Ellen Barton explores this phenomenon of the left’s embrace of computers in education, using as a primary example Cooper and Selfe’s enthusiasm about technology. See Barton’s “Interpreting the

Our job, then, is to teach people in ways that celebrate the diversity of the human spirit. Computer support for English programs will succeed when we identify for the profession our own uniquely humanistic vision of computer technology and its ability to support the networking of individuals. ("English Teachers" 200)

Other commentators believe that Selfe's challenge has been happily met, that the virtual classroom is indeed more kind to the disadvantaged and the different, and more inclined to close, community relationships than is the traditional English class.

Faigley, though, argues against a facile understanding that empowering all in computerized expression will lead to harmony: "This equality of participation, however, does not necessarily lead to 'community building' as some teachers have theorized. . . . Indeed Lyotard theorizes just the opposite, that conversation is inherently agonistic and to speak is to fight" (Faigley 185). Many teachers' experiences at building the electronic utopia have not been as successful as they expected. As some remark, while "real-time written interaction seems to create an urge to engage in language play, to show off one's wit, to display one's verbal audacity," a possible benefit of the network experience, "at the same time, the result can be emotional and even confrontational and insulting dialogues" as students begin to "curse obsessively" in "a tidal wave of obscenity and puerility" (DiMatteo 79, 80). One recurring snarl in ENFI work has been that computer-mediated discussions are indeed liberating: liberating of offensive, antisocial discourse that can take the form of a generalized racism or homophobia, or of the attacks upon

individuals known in computer argot as *flaming*. For example, one firm supporter of the cyber classroom admits,

Sometimes the conversations became ugly. Once, for example, I unwittingly created a scenario about San Francisco that led immediately to an attack on homosexuals; it was so vile that I threw out the whole transcript for that session. On such occasions the discussion spiraled inexorably downward, and no one was able to pull the group out of it. There were no leaders, no one to rescue the discussion and turn it toward a productive end. . . . Although I tried my best to strike a balance between control and freedom, that ideal proved elusive. (Kremers "Student Authority" 115)

Electronic pedagogues like Faigley often include in their accounts of networking practice long transcripts replete with this type of aggressive, hostile rhetoric; the problem seems to be greatly exacerbated when pseudonyms are used as allowed by many software applications. Instead of consistently praising the harmony of the cyber conversation, Faigley notes, "Electronic discussions are just as likely to move toward dissensus as consensus, toward name-calling rather than agreement" (Faigley 189).

The editors of *The Networked Classroom: Promises and Realities* describe the difficulty of flaming:

The power of ENFI for altering patterns of interactions may be greater than anyone expected. Unleashing students from their normal roles in the classroom seems to result in an explosion of energy, and that explosion can scare away even the most energetic and committed teacher. . . .

Flaming from students emerges as a varying phenomenon, identified by the teachers here as when students write messages that are sexually oriented, insulting, or rude. However, in national network discussions among faculty, flaming is considered instead to be when someone delivers a harangue or uses an angry tone. In both cases, apparently the diminished social dimensions, immediacy, and ease of writing all encourage communication that is out of normal bounds.

(Bruce, Peyton, and Batson 83)

Oddly, some of the same commentators who defend electronic discussions as an aid to understanding audience, the very enactment of social constructionism, explain flaming as a result of “the apparently diminished social dimensions” of the networked environment. Yet many teachers who have tried computer-mediated conversation have been stunned by its lack of positive intellectual interaction. “We expected a focused, coherent negotiation of a text’s meaning, an exhaustive discussion from word- through text-level—suggesting possibilities, posing questions, strengthening purpose—discussion that would provide the text’s author with commentary for revision,” write Geoffrey Sirc and Tom Reynolds in “The Face of Collaboration in the Networked Writing Classroom.” Instead they found, and reconstruct in their article, for example, a sustained attack on the shoes a class member is wearing, a kind of electronic dissing session. Instead of being freed from the kind of self-protection one often finds in the flesh-and-blood classroom, students remain worried about saving face when their work is reviewed online, perhaps in response to the belligerent atmosphere of the networked student editors. Participants in their cyber community, say Sirc and Reynolds, greeted students whose work would be discussed as

“next victim” (sic), and applied metaphors of violence to the process, such as “start ripping.”

Perhaps the most strongly worded warning about uncivil behavior on the computer network comes from E. Laurie George in “Taking Women Professors Seriously: Female Authority in the Computerized Classroom.” George discusses her former adherence to a feminist model of the pedagogue as “resource person/facilitator, nurturing mother figure,” a role she abandons in the violent face of what she calls the cyber classroom’s verbal *wilding*—alluding to a term used to describe a vicious gang attack on a Central Park jogger. For George, in ENFI discussions “the combination of unbridled bigotry and heady power produce exchanges less interactive than ‘interinsultive,’” a brutality that intensifies a constant patriarchal tyranny in the world. In opposition to this uncivil electronic behavior, George takes a more dominant pedagogical stance:

I have become as a female teacher in the computerized classroom more demanding, more exacting, more insistent that students take themselves, take me, and take the power of language—electronically conveyed or not—seriously. . . . I agree with [Adrienne Rich] that if we are to change student attitudes toward themselves, ourselves, and the workings of society as a whole, we must claim the authority to use all of our powers in the classroom.

If that means that I must at times use my authority in ways that do not fit nicely with notions of nurturance and that indeed could be criticized as less feminist than masculinist (e.g., by demanding as I do that students

scrutinize their impulses to make racist comments or by insisting that they read aloud their parts in printed transcripts, giving embarrassing voice to biases that seemed not very serious when they appeared silently on the screen), I will accept the challenge. . . .

If it is my responsibility to lead us to a safe destination where someday we might unbridle ourselves—and I do believe that is my responsibility—then I must keep us on course by taking seriously my authority to control those reins.

Losing the academic view

In spite of grandiose claims in favor of teaching composition and literature through electronic means, commentators offer no real evidence to undergird assertions that the process results in an improved written product. On the contrary, several relate studies that show independent judges, usually using rubrics and holistic evaluation, find academic essays by ENFI writers are no stronger, and may in fact be weaker, than those of students in typical classes (Bruce and Peyton 35; Peyton and Bruce 68). One comparative study of networked and traditional classroom texts found

ENFI essays *tended* to be less formal, more conversational and idiomatic, less predictable, more focused on the writer as author and the writer's own experiences, and more likely to address an audience directly. The non-ENFI essays tended to look more like traditional compositions, with the writers carefully following standard formats (a thesis with four or five supporting paragraphs and a conclusion) and attempting to achieve a

dispassionate, “academic” voice. It appears that the conversational nature of the network writing promoted a conversational style in compositions.

(Bruce and Peyton 34)

Students may accomplish networked writing in great quantity, but it often suffers in quality: “The interactions are sometimes confused and off-topic, focusing on everything but the topic at hand. Rather than writing complex thoughts or extended, logical, thoughtful prose, students . . . who take the time to think and compose may be laughed at, criticized, or ignored and left behind” (Peyton and Bruce 67). “Their responses are unconnected and tentative, almost like an inner dialogue being heard in public,” comment Schriner and Rice (474), and some studies show that such writer-based prose does not later readily transform itself into more reader-based discourse.

At best, there seems to be a “disconnect between what happens on the screen during the network talk and the traditional academic essay,” and at worst, ENFI may actually hinder students from developing an academic voice (Peyton and Bruce 69). Faigley praises electronic composition because it “displaces the modernist conception of writing as hard work aimed at producing an enduring object. Acts of networked writing are most often quickly produced, quickly consumed, and quickly discarded. . . .” (191). However, one wonders if students who enroll in composition courses to learn to create just such polished prose, the academic writing their teachers know how to craft, are content with producing examples of poststructuralist incoherence; students know they are judged and rewarded throughout the university for their ability to construct academic discourse. Instead, networked arguments, conversational and informal according to several evaluators, attempt to establish authority not by appealing to an audience but by

insisting on or pleading for the authority of the speaker. . . . They did this rather than use the forms of appeal more common to academic texts, texts that deploy the more covert rhetoric of dispassionate authority, the presentation of evidence, the citing of proofs or master texts. Rather than appeal to conventional classroom sources of authority, students in the ENFI class imagined a different context and mode of address, one where the force of their own voice or eloquence would create assent.

(Bartholomae 242-43)

Yet advocates of cyber composition usually dismiss reports that networked writing seems at odds with academic prose, arguing that while ENFI does not have any clear impact on the writing of essays, it embodies a more authentic form of communication than academic writing—that they would prefer, if given a choice such as that presented in the study quoted above, the conversational and idiomatic expression of ENFI writers to the servile, rigid academic writing of the conventional groups. Batson, for example, does not seem concerned about the radical disorganization of most ENFI writing, what he calls “individual coherence building”; again, this claim for individual meaning making seems strange coming from one of networking’s defenders, who typically argue that the medium makes social interaction easier. The confusion of the online discussion seems to Batson preferable to a teacher’s imposed coherence—perhaps, he implies, the only way to wrest ordered claims from the ENFI chaos (“Origins” 112). As with the expressivist writing conference, which students often see as an unhelpful game of 20 questions, a postponement of substantial work, and a refusal of expertise on the part of the tutor, participants are often deeply frustrated by their involvement with

networked language and literature classes. Peyton and Bruce note that sometimes this supposedly student-centered pedagogy makes students greatly displeased with teachers' imposition of an experience that, like medicine, should be good for them:

ENFI activities did not fit many students' understandings of what schooling involves, and they felt they weren't really learning. At Gallaudet, for example, . . . it seemed to the precollege students like playing around, a waste of time, a useless diversion from the "real work" of writing paragraphs, doing grammar drills, and practicing for the writing test they had to pass to enter freshman English. (73)

The online denizens of Kremers' class "welcomed ENFI because it was always fun," but "they did not necessarily like the freedom that went with it. They expressed feelings of fear, confusion, anger, and distrust—feelings they had hidden from me" (Kremers, "Student Authority" 117). While Kremers was content with his networked class, an independent evaluator found that "for many of these students, ENFI was not an exciting innovation, but rather a new and empty space into which we threw them without explaining why. Already upset at being placed in a remedial course, they were less than eager to participate in an experiment that had no apparent link to the exit exam" (117).

Much of the discomfort students in online classes experience comes from a disturbing confusion about audience, in contrast to backers' arguments that networked discussion sharpens an understanding of those for whom one writes. What these troubled participants rightly detect is that while ENFI presents itself as teacherless, or at least student centered, the teacher's function in the class is undeniable. Because he or she retains his or her full power as the ultimate arbiter, the possessor of the gradebook, the

teacher remains the students' most important audience—despite some instructors' pleas that students should write for each other. Students are caught between a teacher who encourages them to type furiously online guided by their own whims, in their own idiom, and an expectation that their finished product must meet, without much assistance from the instructor, at least some standards for what is acceptable in form and content as academic writing (Duin and Hansen 105). In this light, one might consider the expression of bigotry and disrespect online as a serious disregard of audience; that is, even though some networking participants might thrill to such taunting, an almost certainly disapproving instructor still remains part of the online discussion.

Remembering that the teacher, and his or her undeniable academic expectations, remains a part of the virtual classroom can be one trait of a student who can successfully negotiate the networked environment. Ann Hill Duin and Craig Hansen, in "Reading, Writing, and Thinking on Computer Networks as Social Construction and Social Interaction," notice that younger students often lack this capability while more experienced students have developed it:

We find that the older students recognized that the instructor was watching; while able to reach beyond this social context, they chose not to for the bulk of their collaborative discussion. They read the social context, and the network became an extension of regular classroom expectations and power relations, albeit a facilitative and convenient extension. In contrast, the younger writers did not recognize the presence of the instructor while they were using the network. The academic experience was likely a new one for them. Because they did not feel any

real pressure to accommodate their communication to an academic context, the younger writers centered their dialogue on a struggle for social advantage in the class rather than on the needs of the immediate academic discourse community. (Duin and Hansen 99)

Rediscovering teacher power

What Duin and Hansen's older students are wise enough to perceive is that in spite of claims that the network can take students beyond the reach of the instructor, beyond social inequalities, beyond the power relations that operate in the institution, the teacher may still, in fact, exercise as much control over a virtual classroom as over an actual one. In other words, just as instructors might arrange their students in a circle in an unsuccessful attempt to subvert their own authority, situating the class in an electronic circle, a network, does not destroy the teacher-student hierarchy. To the contrary, in the analysis of Duin and Hansen, "Used during class time and viewed by the teacher, the computer network supported the traditional hegemony in which the teacher imposes the boundaries on interaction within a larger community," boundaries that "still function in an educational system that essentially preserves the social and political status quo" (Duin and Hansen 100, 103). Without extremely careful, theorized planning, Duin and Hansen state, "networks can exacerbate the potential to inhibit interaction and collaboration, permit students to avoid active participation and learning, allow only a select few to control the power, and limit accessibility" (Duin and Hansen 104).

In contrast with the ENFI utopians, other pedagogues find that computer discussions reflect and reinstate the models of hierarchy that apply in the real world

(Duin and Hansen 98). Even when teachers in the conventional classroom employ group work in hopes of a more democratic collaboration, mini-hierarchies according to social status still form among students (Schriner and Rice 476); just because participants cannot readily note differences of appearance online, it is not unreasonable to think that the electronic community may become stratified in similar way. When the instructor is intimately involved in a computerized discussion, the valorizing of certain subject positions, certain points of view, and certain ways of expression occurs as surely as in the traditional course. Cooper and Selfe describe this phenomenon in the brick-and-mortar English class as teachers' (and other students') encouraging comments and body language in response to hegemonic discourse, but their position, both stated and implied, is that these difficulties disappear in the cyber environment, that the network can almost completely disable cultural hierarchies (852). But Cooper and Selfe never quite answer how or why; certainly, even under the computerized cover of pseudonyms, students who support the views of the teacher, those who are aggressive and speak—type—up frequently, and those who are articulate will earn the instructor's electronic smiles and nods of approbation.

As a few dissenters to the rhetoric of technology remark, in many ways the virtual English classroom embodies the same failures (or strengths, depending on one's perspective) as the traditional one. Some studies show that students participate very little in ENFI settings; in a class that Peyton observed for two days, for example, the teacher made about 37 percent of comments, while some individual students, in a small class of nine, contributed as little as .05 percent of the time ("Technological"). Research cited by Duin and Hansen reveals that in some instances students with low SAT verbal scores

modestly boost their participation rates under networking, but that student-to-student interaction, lauded by computer discussion supporters, remains rare (102). Lynn Davie, who has such a difficult time generating online student conversation that she titles a section of one article "Fear of Publication or How to Get Them to Leave a Note," finds *lurking*, a refusal to participate, as the greatest threat to developing electronic community. Davie invokes E.K. McCreary and J. Van Duren's "Educational Applications of Computer Conferencing," which holds that instead of being liberated by the network, some class members remain silent because of social insecurities:

Once on-line, the student may act as a read-only participant, never venturing a comment. To some extent, individual participation is determined by the personality, degree of confidence and level of interest in the subject matter of each student, much as in the classroom situation. . . . Student conferencing behaviour may in general be influenced by academic level, curriculum area and relative status of conference participants. . . . (qtd. in Davie 80)

As with the conventional discussion, English teachers may dominate networked environments; in fact, their power to control the conversation may increase when mediated by linked computers. Not only are participation rates sometimes low in ENFI classes, perhaps as low as that of their actual analogues, but also, Peyton demonstrates, the structure of virtual class conversations differs little from "much of oral classroom discourse, with the teacher asking a fact question, the students answering, and the teacher evaluating the responses and asking another questions to probe for elaboration or to

introduce another topic" ("Technological"). Transcripts of cyber discussions often reveal Socratic strategies that can be extremely teacher-centered:

In [electronic Socratic tutoring] . . . the whole class was on the network together, but the teacher engaged in one-on-one dialogues with each student, shifting from one to the next as a chess master would in playing multiple simultaneous chess games in an exhibition. In these dialogues, the teacher asked questions and challenged ideas to push students to rethink their arguments and support assertions they had made in essays they were writing. The dialogues were thus highly teacher directed.

(Bruce and Peyton 62)

Beyond directive questioning, teachers control ENFI by the same weaving comments (the forging of connections between bits of online discourse) and other techniques of meta-communication: establishing rules for the conference, asking for clarification, and summarizing the discussion as they often do as moderators of real-world class discussion (Feenberg 34).

While many proponents of computer conferencing dream of establishing a teacherless electronic classroom, even Kremers, a Peter Elbow-influenced sympathizer with this camp, leans towards reasserting teacher power when he tires of "riding the beast"—his term for cyber chaos. While Kremers could be considered an apologist for students' boorishness in the ENFI class, when faced with a dramatic online mutiny, he says,

On such occasions, I find it desirable to intervene in the network conversations. I do so not because I want to control the class, but because

I want to learn from my students; I want to write with them rather than talk at them. Such participation is a challenge because in order to act as a true collaborator, as a coequal, instead of a dictatorial authority, I need at times to carefully coordinate the real-time dialogue in order to move it in productive directions. ("Sharing Authority")

Kremers protests that he intrudes gingerly, but the fact is that he intervenes nevertheless: A result of this lightly imposed guidance (in contrast to what he considers others' much more heavy-handed control), is that his networked class remains as regulated by the teacher as does the actual one, for better or worse.

Maintaining constant surveillance

After analyzing the printed records of dozens of cyber English classes, David Bartholomae concludes that "the figure of the professor was certainly evident in the network transcripts I read, *even when the professor remained silent*" (261, emphasis added). In what way, though, could a teacher who does not actively intervene, who does not take up the keyboard to regain supremacy in his or her class, maintain a power advantage in the group? The answer lies in the possibility of a teacher who lurks, who employs the same student strategy that professors decry as evasive and antisocial, as a somehow suspicious taking but not giving in the life of the writing-reading community. As a lurker, the teacher assumes, as in nonauthoritarian strategies in real-world English classes, a Panoptical position.

Advantages of electronic discussions, according to a 1988 instructor survey cited by Hawisher and Selfe, include that "Students share more with other students and

instructor” and “Communication features provide more direct access to students, allowing teachers to ‘get to know’ students better” (“Rhetoric” 59). However, as noted in chapter four’s interpretation of Ira Shor’s research into his students’ private lives, the network’s facility in helping instructors “get to know students better” can take on a more sinister cast.

In addition to the survey responses Hawisher and Selfe allude to, others encourage the use of computer-mediated communication for eliciting a student’s closely held thoughts, emotions, and stories as a purported step towards developing a more authentic personal writing. Students’ utterances in the virtual classroom are almost like, as quoted earlier, “an inner dialogue being heard in public” (Schriner and Rice 474), or as Cooper and Selfe write, “One of our purposes for these conferences is to get students to let us in on some of the things they talk about under their breath in class lectures and discussions” (848).

Even though this pedagogy’s stated aim might be to liberate students’ “truer” interior voices for the purpose of creating more impassioned arguments, Faigley questions the motives of English teachers who valorize the gushing personal narrative or response to literature. In “Ideologies of the Self in Writing Evaluation” from *Fragments of Rationality*, Faigley grounds in Foucault a position that urging such vulnerable honesty in our students’ writing misapprehends the postmodern conception of the subject (since humans have no real access to a more true, unified inner being) and establishes a disturbing mechanism that reinforces unequal power relations. Too many English teachers, Faigley believes, use the personal narrative or personal response to literature to reward (mistakenly) students who can present (mistakenly) in their writing an authentic

humanist self, signaled by the expression of deeply held emotions and stories that cohere in a clear moral the writer learned on the path to self-discovery. Students who, on the other hand, reflect a fragmented postmodern subjectivity in writing that does not reach an understanding of a truer, rational, private being are punished with a poor grade. “The freedom students are given in some classes to choose and adapt autobiographical assignments,” writes Faigley, “hides the fact that these same students will be judged by the teachers’ unstated assumptions about subjectivity and that every act of writing they perform occurs within complex relations of power” (128).

Writing on the network, claim many advocates, facilitates the exhibition of a student’s personal experience for public display; Mary J. Flores, for instance, promotes electronic discussion as aligned with a 1980s-style nurturing feminism, as a way that students—perhaps because they type faster than they think, perhaps because presenting themselves on a computer screen seems more protected than the face-to-face encounter—readily share private experience. While cognizant that “the widespread adoption of computers as an educational tool gives universities opportunity for more power than ever before,” Flores is, however, confident that “we have choices about that power—whether to use it to extend our authority or to empower our students” (109). The notion that women are empowered from sharing their personal stories in the virtual classroom wrongly assures Flores that the network distributes institutional-social authority rather than preserves it.

Batson writes, incredibly, that such freedom of expression emerges in a manner similar to the emancipatory power-sharing of parishioners unburdening themselves to religious authority:

The computer-created virtual space was bringing to the forefront something essentially human. I came to see that students are really very eager to talk to us teachers but are prevented from doing so by social forms, by hierarchy, by the physical presence of each other. In Catholic churches, this problem of hierarchical barriers to communication has been addressed by using a confessional: The priest is a disembodied voice who invites the disembodied or true voice of the penitent to speak. Our network seemed to be our confessional: It also removed the troubling physical presence of a teacher. ("Origins" 105)

While extremely unfortunate, Batson's metaphor is revelatory: Faigley notes that in *The History of Sexuality*, volume 1, Foucault writes, "Since the Middle Ages at least, Western societies have established the confession as one of the main rituals we rely on for the production of truth" (qtd. in Faigley 130)—and Foucauldian truth is always an expression of asymmetric power relations.

The cyber confessional could be interpreted, then, as a powerfully effective way of placing students under constant electronic surveillance. In comparison to the Freirean classroom, in which the teacher attempts to set aside normal power relations, the Panoptical potential of the virtual classroom is even greater. Klem and Moran argue that linked computers make available to teachers new modes of control, such as the ability to force messages on students anytime they log on to the university network (76). The instructor may in some ways be in all places at all times through the power of the computer. More troubling for several commentators has been the instructor's use of a pseudonym in electronic discussions. Kremers, a proponent of pseudonyms, avows,

ENFI makes teachers better able to listen to what their students are saying.

I have found it useful to join in a group dialogue as a masked participant, an arrangement that simply calls for having everyone log on under a pseudonym. The masked approach is liberating because it allows teachers freedom to experiment, to create personas, and to join students in discussion as an equal. ("Student Authority" 123)

However, while Selfe, in some places, writes that a teacher's electronic disguise can engender democracy—"Because I employed a pseudonym much of the time, my contributions to the conversation were frequently unmarked by my role as a teacher and were treated like those of any other participant" (Selfe, "Technology" 127)—in other places, she questions instructor use of pseudonyms as harmful eavesdropping and the network, therefore, as a strategy of control: "A critical re-examination of these on-line exchanges suggests that while conferences can help teachers create new and engaging forums for learning, they can also serve in ways that might inhibit open exchanges, reduce active learning, and limit the opportunities for honest intellectual engagement" (Hawisher and Selfe, "Rhetoric" 62).

Selfe comes to the position that in computerized conferences, teachers need to more clearly announce their participation, and their expectations, such as if students' contributions to the conversation will be graded. Yet an insidious danger of the Panoptical classroom—a real one with actual desks or a virtual one with students plugged in to computers—is that, aware of the inhospitable architecture, participants begin to discipline themselves. As prisoners in Bentham's proposed Panopticon cannot see the guards but assume their every action is being scrutinized, so must participants in an

electronic discussion be wary of lurking professors—and begin to police themselves, to adapt their discourse to hegemony’s accepted ways of knowing. Just so did Duin and Hansen’s older students adapt to the sense of uninterrupted observation. Teachers and students “know, after all, that electronic conferences are, in some ways, spaces open to public scrutiny, places where individuals with the power of control over technology can observe conversations and participants without being seen and without contributing”⁵ (“Rhetoric” Hawisher and Selfe 63). Students must self-discipline when they realize that on the network, as Schriner and Rice say, their inner dialogue becomes available for scrutiny, or according to Cooper and Selfe, even their under-the-breath mutterings are displayed for the teacher’s inspection.

Denying authority

In many ways, the ENFI classroom seems merely a more extreme version of the technique of teaching in a circle analyzed in chapter four. Both pedagogies hope to subvert the usual trappings of academia, a place where teacher and students are set in a firmly asymmetrical power relations; both aim to construct a site where everyday social hierarchies of race, class, and gender dissipate. However, Zavarzadeh’s reading of the nonauthoritarian classroom warns that socioeconomic positioning is not a mere extra that may be thrown away at our convenience (32); it is never erased, but in Jacques Derrida’s terms, remains “under erasure,” or still apparent in traces. Even if all were to agree (and

⁵ In her chapter “Panoptic Power and the Social Text,” from *In the Age of the Smart Machine: The Future of Work and Power*, Shoshana Zuboff studies a networking experiment in the corporate world that quickly turned dystopian. What began as a nonhierarchical, democratic forum for sharing ideas became briefly a place for worker resistance but later, with managers lurking online, a disciplinary technology. The experiment was finally abandoned.

many do not) that it is suspect, complicitous with maintaining an oppressive status quo, the instructor's authority inherent in the teaching situation cannot be wished away. As in the real world classroom, in the virtual world unequal power relations are suspended by nonauthoritarian pedagogy only temporarily—in networked conferences just until the computers are shut down. While many teachers rejoice that the electronic discussion is free from the “cues of dialect, clothing, skin color, gender, age” (Cooper and Selfe 852) that make face-to-face dialogue difficult (or perhaps easier and better), one could see that imperfect power relations as signified through these markers are not addressed through the electronic discussion but only set aside. Perhaps because ignored during the computer-mediated conversation, treated as if they do not matter, these social inequalities might even be fortified.

Valorizing dialogism

If English in the electronic setting appears a more intense reiteration of the Freirean nonhierarchical classroom, it also embodies a more radical form of another related nonauthoritarian pedagogy, the use of dialogism.⁶ The network does not, of course, guarantee heteroglossia, or widely divergent points of view: some teachers have

⁶ Instead of relying solely on Bakhtinian dialogism as a description of conflicting classroom discourses, Faigley also uses Jean-François Lyotard's notion of the mini-narrative. Lyotard employs metaphors of electronic communication in *The Postmodern Condition*, as Foucault also applies *network* as a metaphor for the distribution of power. Faigley summarizes Lyotard in this way: “He locates a ‘self’ at ‘nodal points of specific communications circuits. . . . One is always located at a post through which various kinds of messages pass.’ When a speaker makes an utterance, Lyotard argues that a ‘displacement’ occurs that necessarily provokes countermoves, and thus for Lyotard a theory of communications is a theory of agonistics of ‘language games.’ Lyotard sees the grand narratives of the Enlightenment as having illegitimately monopolized the discourse of philosophy, and he would replace these narratives with a plurality of voices. . . . Just as in Lyotard's postmodern condition of knowledge, the teacher's role as guarantor of authority—providing the ‘metanarrative’ that gives coherence—is disrupted when a class makes extensive use of electronic written discussions” (185).

noticed a stultifying sameness to cyber discussions, that participants tend to join the electronic crowd (Schriner and Rice 475). Research does not bear out the early claims of Selfe and others that ENFI activity necessarily tends to dissent from hegemonic ways of thinking and writing. But just as many physical classrooms do contain a struggle of several conflicting discourses, so that, as Bakhtin believes, the voice of authority can never fully establish itself, computerized discussions can indeed be cacophonous. Perhaps, as noted earlier, students do not participate in some classes' online conversations, but in other classes they do: typing furiously, sometimes dozens of participants "talk" at once, in disregard of convention and the expectations of others, and rarely pause to listen (read). Writing to Bartholomae, who evaluated his networked courses, Sirc approves the anarchy attendant in such an experience in language strongly reminiscent of Bakhtin's interpretation of carnival:

The ENFI-version of academic writing, then, is writing as carnival, the celebrants dressing in the drag of authority to mock it and affirm their own authority. . . . This might be, ultimately, the best function of ENFI, its ability to carnivalize a classroom, letting students put on the masks of pseudonyms and, amid lots of laughter, overturn official culture; by doing so they unmask official cultures. . . . It's no wonder you saw few traces of flat, sterile academese in the ENFI classes: the colloquia of carnival opposes itself to the authoritarian word, not accidentally (sic) but purposively so. (qtd. in Bartholomae 256)

The dialogism of computer-mediated communication may be refreshing as students explore new ideas and modes of expression. But on the other hand, the fact that networked writing seems to violently resist closure may also be profoundly frustrating:

In oral class discussions, the remarks that stand out are those that neatly state positions and seem to tie up segments of knowledge. In *InterChange* transcripts, however, there are no such peaks followed by nods of agreement. The movement of discourse in *InterChange* is more wavelike, with topics ebbing and flowing intermingled with many crosscurrents. Not only do the many voices act out Bakhtin's principle of the multiaccentual nature of the sign, but the movement recalls the opposition he described between the monological centripetal forces of unity, authority, and truth and the dialogic centrifugal forces of multiplicity, equality, and uncertainty. (Faigley 183)

In other words, careful arguments can be hard to construct when everyone speaks and no one listens, when the conversation lacks all semblance of coherence. As argued in chapter three, for serious critique to overcome a debilitating pluralism, a monological voice must be able to gain some footing, which might be almost impossible in an electronic setting where "no one can control the conversation, no one can lead it" (Batson, "Origins" 102-03). Furthermore, many instructors experienced in ENFI note that it is a technology easily given to amusement and humor; dialogism, according to Bakhtin usually occurs when one way of thinking and speaking parodies another (Cooper and Selfe 857; Batson, "Origins" 104): A difference between virtual and actual class discussion, according to Batson, is that cyber conversation is "infused with the lightness

of play” (“Origins” 104). But in the midst of the online classroom’s endlessly recurring Lyotardean language games (see note 6), how may students, or teachers, muster authority to speak to grave issues? Masud Zavarzadeh’s reading of the laughing nonauthoritarian classroom, discussed in chapter three, is that a pedagogy that encourages laughter may be deeply conservative, refusing to take counterhegemonic arguments seriously and deflecting any substantial attacks upon the status quo.

The uses of postmodernism and the networked classroom

While computer networking may be new, the pedagogical difficulties associated with its use are old, problems English teachers have seen before with other, in Foucault’s terms, technologies and architectures. Many promises of electronic pedagogy fade in the light of theoretical and empirical inquiry. In answer to the claims discussed in the first section of this chapter, in the second section networking technology appears to be

- elitist, in that it is unaffordable for many and possibly trains students for menial work;
- inhumane, in that it gives rise to the verbal attacks known as flaming;
- unproductive, in that it does not further students’ goals of mastering academic writing;
- silencing, in that potentially large numbers of students do not participate in online conversations, which may be as dominated by teachers and social markers as actual class discussions;
- disciplinary, in that authorities may use it to encourage confession and maintain surveillance; and

- conservative, in that its dialogical and playful nature defuses strong, serious attacks upon the status quo.

However, in spite of the multiple failures of the networked classroom, its use—limited and presented in context—might be beneficial to English studies. The most intriguing claim for ENFI is raised most forcefully by Faigley: the assertion that cyber exchange in the English class can dramatize poststructuralist notions of contingent truth and malleable subjectivity. Faigley claims that the fallacies poststructuralism has located in the Western heritage—invocations of truth outside of language, social interaction, and ideology; the metaphysical presence of the autonomous subject; and the logocentric privileging of speech over writing—cannot hold sway in the computerized classroom. Instead of a situation in which computers are changing the way human beings think at the end of the twentieth century, Faigley surmises, perhaps electronic networks are reflecting radical changes in human thinking, that is, the postmodern turn (165-66).

In the social constructionist English classroom, students come to understand that truth, for the postmoderns, is not absolute, but instead made through consensus: “Knowledge is no longer a result of an individual Cartesian privately examining the certainty of contents of thought. Instead, it is produced socially. . .” (Hoy 17). But what electronic networking brings to the classroom is that it can demonstrate vividly the poststructuralist notion that knowledge-truth is not foundational but instead created and negotiated within discourse communities (Schriner and Rice; Selfe, “English Teachers”). Because the exchange is textualized, written and recorded, it can dramatize that truth does not exist outside of language but instead is created *through* the sharing of language among human beings. Visualizing on a computer screen or in a transcript the interplay of

human agents employing language to construct meaning may make such a process comprehensible for students in a way that spoken discussion may not. The goal of such an exercise would be for class members to understand that since truth is made through language in social interaction, all truths are interested; as Rorty writes, "Investigations of the foundations of knowledge or morality or language or society may be simply apologetics, attempts to eternalize a certain contemporary language-game, social practice, or self-image" (9-10). Students who experience this phenomenon, of human truth-making in the dramatic way cyber discussions make available, might be more apt, therefore, to recognize the politics that underlie other truths and all knowledge as always already ideological.

Secondly, entering the world of the electronic exchange, while perhaps not erasing all the difficulties of face-to-face interaction, does allow students to see that subjectivity is unstable; as soon as they "go online" they may, especially with the use of pseudonyms, assume an alternate subject position. Playing with identity in networked discourse can allow students to see how the self is multiple and mysterious as they try on other selves through language (and, instead of unfettered self-fashioning, find those selves constrained by the language of others). Feenberg writes:

Computer conferencing is one of several new technologies which create novel forms of identity. Electronic bulletin boards, dialogue systems and computer conferences present their users to each other only through explicit written language. When writing, it is easier to choose a tone and attitude than it is in speech, dress, and gesture. . . . The written "I" is not the same "I" who appears in face-to-face encounters. (24)

Of course, poststructuralists hold that the autonomous, unified subject exists no more in the actual world than in the virtual one, but it is the computer medium's intense *dramatization* of the slipperiness of the self that makes it a useful tool.

Thirdly, experience in computer discussions may help students understand the poststructuralist relationship of speech and writing. What Derrida calls logocentrism is "a set of themes in the history of philosophy and the human sciences that systematically privileged the human speaking voice, and just as systematically devalued writing" (Crowley, *Teacher's* 1). In other words, Derrida finds that from Plato to the present in the Western heritage, writing has been considered but a pale shadow of speech, which is more authentic, that touches the thing itself in absolute plenitude. Writing, in this view, is a mere supplement to the unmediated way of speech, which contains self-sufficient truth. To simplify Derrida, his notion of deconstruction is to consider the implications of reversing this hierarchy, to argue instead that speech is but a supplement to writing: the voice (speech) is always already dependent on the mark (writing, or language as system), which precedes it and captures *logos*, or truth. Derrida ultimately argues that no truth is self-sufficient, that meaning is only made through *différance*, or in relationship to an Other; writing depends upon speech just as speech depends upon writing, as, for example, the concept of body depends upon mind (and vice-versa), nature depends upon culture (and vice-versa), and male depends upon female (and vice-versa). These "straw binaries," as Sharon Crowley calls them, are constantly shifting, as what seems superior at one moment (mind, culture, man) appears at the next moment as but a weak dependent on what was lesser (body, nature, woman) (*Teacher's* 11-12). The aim of furthering the poststructuralist understanding of the relationship of writing and speech is for students to

know that other binaries to which they are prey in their everyday lives (for instance, black/white or middle class/working class) are also unstable. The superior term not only depends upon the inferior for meaning, but also one cannot always distinguish the greater from the lesser since their relative positions are always in play. The political implications of upending these reified ways of thinking are, as many have noted, powerfully counterhegemonic.

Feenberg says that today, Westerners still privilege speech over writing:

In our culture the face to face encounter is the ideal paradigm of the meeting of minds. Communication seems most complete and successful where the person is physically present “in” the message. This physical presence is supposed to be the guarantor of authenticity: you can look your interlocutor in the eye and search for tacit signs of truthfulness or falsehood, where context and tone permit a subtler interpretation of the spoken word. (22)

To the Western mind, writing seems dessicated and inauthentic compared to the lively, true spoken word. However, the fact that the networked conversation takes place in writing, and not in speech, can help students upset, or deconstruct, the speech/writing binary. Writing on the network feels to many participants just as abundant and authentic as speech, “an electronic site in which people’s minds can weave together” (Moran, “Computers and English” 196).

But while it may be useful for students to try on the notion that writing may be superior to speech, just as on the network they experiment with many truths and identities, proponents of networking must not overreach in their praise of writing in the

cyber environment. Advocates of computerized discussions approach claiming that on the network, writing (as Westerners usually claim for speech) can reach unmediated truths or bring together human essences beyond the political constraints of language. For instance, cyber conversation advocates sometimes state that they get to know their “real students” or that they find a true merging of minds in networked writing; Batson, for instance, believes that in the network he has found communication in its absolute plenitude: “Our physical reality had diminished to such an extent it was as if our minds were talking directly among themselves. Social trappings, the hierarchy that defines and confines us, had diminished and quieted. I talked to my students as never before. We had found ‘neutral’ social space” (“Origins” 102). Such statements smack of what Derrida calls the *metaphysics of presence*, or to find that a truth can be self-sufficient, accessible to human beings outside of the mediation of language, or *différance*. Ironically, metaphysics of presence in the networking situation is associated with writing when in the history of the West it is strongly connected to speech. Champions of ENFI forget that valorizing writing over speech is just as harmful as the reverse, and that deconstruction demonstrates that the relationship between the two is unstable, forever shifting back and forth in brief-lived hierarchies.

Afterword

While computerized discussions may be helpful in English studies to illustrate complex postmodern concepts such as the social nature of truth, the flux of subjectivity, and the deconstructive reversal of hierarchies, teachers might limit the use of this technique in light of the serious questions raised by several critics of the pedagogy.

What has been lavishly praised over the last decade as an emancipatory strategy for the English class may be, viewed from other perspectives, deeply disempowering.

Perhaps more important than restricting the amount of time an English class spends in networked conversation is the need to place that technology in perspective. While students may glean from their cyber discussions that there is no foundational knowledge, they should also know that there is no escape from history. In other words, while students learn they make meaning through social interaction, they must also recognize such a process does not happen in a power vacuum. While class members may understand through the network that identity is not fixed, they must also know that one does not choose a subject position in perfect freedom: socioeconomic constraints upon human agency may determine one's subject position for him or her—or at least severely circumscribe what subject positions are made available. While students may discover, through examining in cyberspace the opposition of speech and writing, the liberating potential of deconstruction, they must realize that oppressive power structures still reign everywhere.

Ultimately, the pedagogy of the electronic discussion may include the failures of the teaching strategies discussed in earlier chapters. As argued about the expressivist writing tutorial in chapter two, the pedagogy of networked writing cannot rely on the student looking within, nor upon a collaborative input of equals; electronic conversations about writing would also benefit from the guidance of the directive teacher, one trained in the academy's ways of knowing and of expressing that knowledge. Secondly, the networked discussion, marked by a hyper-dialogism, suffers from the weaknesses chapter three identifies in Bakhtinian pedagogy: since the cyber setting might encourage even

more chaotic student discourse, with less teacher input, it may be even more vulnerable to a debilitating pluralism than the actual English classroom. Finally, ENFI encompasses some of the negative aspects of the nonauthoritarian, Freirean classroom analyzed in chapter four, because it also promises a freedom that might help form the humanist subject—fully present, independent, and in league with capitalism.

As the weaknesses of these various pedagogies demonstrate, English teachers hoping to make their classrooms a place where social justice is furthered might benefit from a viewpoint nearly opposite the one that unites those techniques; that is, literature and composition teaching might currently suffer precisely because it tries to deny the power differential between student and teacher/institution. Instead, English pedagogy may benefit from making this asymmetrical relationship explicit; such techniques must not be abusive to students, but might reveal how making meaning is always tied to power—which, in the academy, teachers have in greater store than students.

In a more suitable, demystifying pedagogy, English teachers temper their reformist zeal (for their discipline and for the world) with a cognizance that they are themselves never free agents, that they are shaped by a dominant ideology in ways of which they are only dimly aware. First, they fill roles formed by a dubious past; as Crowley states,

We inherit an oppressive institutional history and a repressive intellectual tradition. We inherit an institutional structure that was created in order to serve as a social and intellectual gatekeeper. Its operational status was and still is grounded in nineteenth-century hopes for literacy, assumptions about who was, and who could become, “an educated person” and about

the most efficient ways of fitting people to compete aggressively, if obediently, in a capitalist society. (Crowley 235)

Secondly, English teachers cannot conveniently set aside their own socioeconomic interest in reproducing an unjust status quo. “We teachers of language and literature are mostly bourgeois subjects, engaged in trying to replicate ourselves in the service of government and corporate interests,” writes Scholes in *The Rise and Fall of English* (67). Instead of seeing themselves as radicals at the barricades, Scholes suggests, English teachers might more realistically view themselves as fulfilling a limited role of “developing better bourgeois subjects—better than ourselves, that is, as well as better than they might be without our teaching” (67).

Neither, however, must one capitulate completely to bourgeois injustices: A responsible pedagogy entails the proper and even forceful use of the teacher’s authority to attempt to change the world for the better. Such a model could be grounded in a social constructionist rhetoric that recognizes that truth might be made by consensus, but it is also created in asymmetrical relations of power. As described by Robert Connors and Cheryl Glenn,

Social constructionism rejects both an absolute relativism of knowledge as anything an individual chooses to believe and the positivism of objective truth directly discerned from reality. Social constructionists believe that individuals experience the world according to the shared beliefs or paradigms of one or more communities of knowledgeable peers to which they belong. (141)

Therefore, the theory accounts for social constraints, in that a community of knowledgeable peers must negotiate what counts as truth; this idea can be seen as affirming “the importance of the teacher as an essential member of an academic discipline who helps to perpetuate and revitalize the enabling conventions of the discourse community and as an initiator of new members. . . ” (Connors and Glenn 149). In other words, while some versions of social constructionism are radically egalitarian, emphasizing the equality of students and subverting the authority of the teacher, a version of the theory that takes seriously hierarchical power relations in society reasserts the primacy of the teacher. The teacher as rhetor might not pander to a specific audience of students, but instead appeal to the imaginary *universal audience* as conceived by Chaim Perelman, searching for the adherence of “the broadest class of open-minded, intellectually astute people capable of following extended argument” (Ede 145; Romano 14). The instructor, as the one in the classroom most skilled in what counts as knowledge and appropriate discourse in the institution, would be stationed to lead rather than follow, overcoming the difficulties described by Patricia Bizzell as “we want to serve the common good with the power we possess by virtue of our position as teachers, yet we are deeply suspicious of any exercise of power in the classroom” (“Power, Authority” 54).

Serving a vision of social justice may entail pedagogues’ reinvigorating the study of rhetoric, which will, as many theorists note, regain its essential place in the curriculum as courses focus on the relationship of language and power:

We must take as our province the production and reception of semiotic codes, providing students with the heuristics to penetrate these codes and their ideological designs on our formation as subjects. Students must

come to see that the languages they are expected to speak, write, and embrace as ways of thinking and acting are never disinterested, always bringing with them strictures on the existent, the good, the possible, and the resulting regimes of power. (Berlin *Rhetorics, Poetics, Cultures* 93)

Reestablishing the study of rhetoric might necessitate teachers' active intervention in students' political and ethical decision-making, a function many have resisted since the 1960s, for as Pirie believes, an English teacher must make students aware of the ramifications of the positions they discover in the English class:

We need to help students understand *how* and *why* they are making the choices they do, what other choices are available, and what consequences may ensue from their choices. In other words, part of the focus has to be on students working through the complexity of their individual position(s) in the web of society and culture. (12)

Secondly, therefore, serving social justice might also take the demystified form of visible teacher advocacy, instructors affirming their beliefs while still acknowledging those values as temporal and social—that is, still holding to postmodernism's critique of universal truth. "Key here is the values proponent's willingness to take personal responsibility for his or her values"—Bizzell's words again—"but at the same time to recognize their provisionality in changing historical circumstances and their openness to revision by debate" ("Teacher's Authority" 195). As English studies proceeds after the tumultuous crises of the last fifteen years, the renewal of the discipline may depend upon teachers' courage to use power responsibly, to invoke a rhetorical authority in a pedagogy that aims for a more equitable society—not just temporarily in the classroom,

but more permanently in the world at large. Perhaps English teaching may be advanced by instructors who are neither afraid nor ashamed to apply the strength of the position in which they find themselves. As Zavarzadeh writes, “‘Authority’ removed from the specificity of its uses in the Paris Commune or in fascist Italy thus becomes one and the same. The question, however, is whether authority is used to oppress or enable” (41).

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Mr. Walkington taught English at Doyle High School for five years and then began doctoral studies full time at the University of Tennessee in 1992. After serving as an English teacher, as the first director of the Writing Center, and in other administrative positions at Webb School of Knoxville from 1993-98, he accepted a position as head of the Upper School at Cannon School in Concord, NC.