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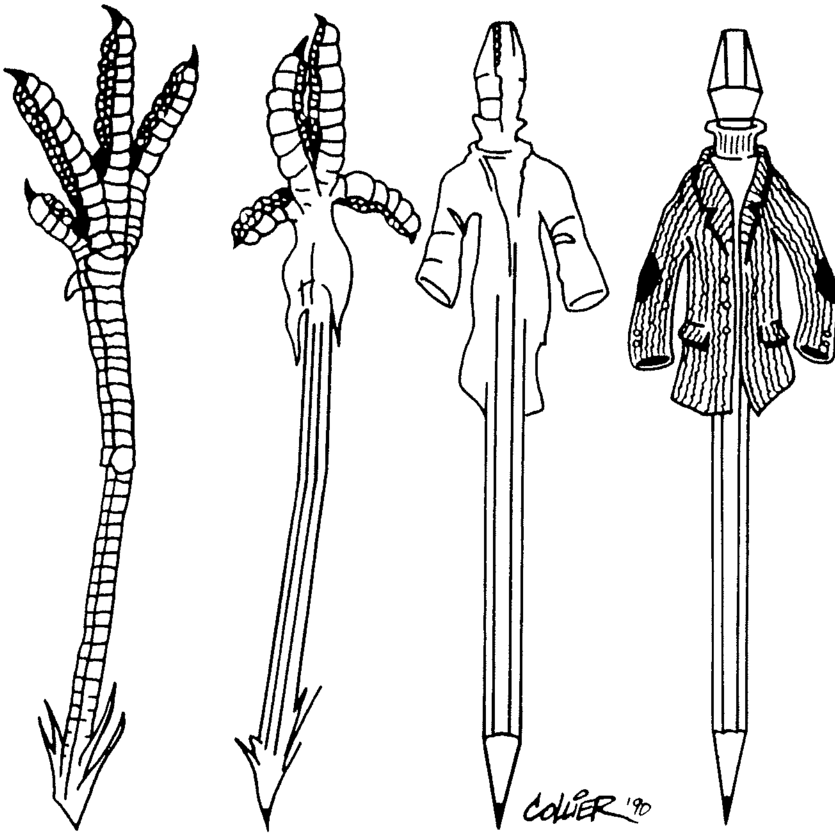

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Sartre's Plea and the Purposes of Writing

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One agenda is evident in much of Jean-Paul Sartre's non-fiction writing following World War Two: the resolution of apparent contradictions between his pre-war existentialist belief in individual freedom and responsibility and his post-war acceptance of a Marxist perspective that recognizes historical limits on autonomous action. I use the term "*apparent* contradictions" because Sartre himself believed that the tenets of existentialism and Marxism were complementary rather than contradictory. In his marriage of the two systems, Sartre sought to identify a margin of freedom for individuals to determine their own fate within the stringent constraints imposed by a historical context.

I see in Sartre's post-war works his recognition of two challenges that progressive educators must face today. The first challenge is posed by the anti-foundationalist turn in philosophy, a development that undermines the positivist epistemology on which previous theories of pedagogy for writing and other disciplines have been based. Sartre's post-war writing documents his own exploration of the social determinants of knowledge and the problem of ideological distortion, so I believe that we may find Sartre's work instructive as we consider the explanatory power — and the limits — of recent social constructionist theories of knowledge. The second challenge is posed by universities that are intent on meeting the demands of a marketplace that requires specialists in technical disciplines. Insofar as progressive educators pursue efforts in universities dominated by a technocratic agenda, we may expect to see our concerns ignored, our efforts marginalized. Sartre himself recognized by the mid-1960s that Western universities were producing increasing numbers of "technicians of practical knowledge" ("Plea" 237); however, he never succumbed to a simplistic reproductive view of education — a view that Henry Giroux correctly has criticized for its "one-sided determinism" (14) but that nevertheless remains prevalent today. In his unrelenting search for the freedom that exists in the margins of history, Sartre may serve as a guide for teachers — and especially for teachers of writing — who wish to construct a liberatory curriculum in the margins of the technocratic agenda.

The Limits of Freedom

The existentialist beliefs for which Sartre is best known are expressed most fully in *Being and Nothingness*; however, by the time that Sartre's seminal volume on existentialism was published in 1943, he already had begun to question the adequacy of the beliefs expressed in that work and in his earlier writings. The problem that obsessed Sartre was the existence of rigorous constraints on the freedom for individual action that he had posited in those works. Sartre himself noted that *Being and Nothingness* "should have been the beginning of a discovery of [the] power of circumstances" since he "already had been made a soldier" when he "had not wanted to be one" ("Itinerary" 33). From

Sartre's wartime experiences was born his awareness of the extent to which individual freedom is circumscribed by historical conditions. The post-war Sartre would describe himself as "truly scandalized" by his own earlier assertion that "[w]hatever the circumstances, and wherever the site, a man always is free to choose to be a traitor or not," and he would observe, "When I read this, I said to myself: it's incredible, I actually believed that" ("Itinerary" 34-35). By 1952, Sartre had modified his view of individual freedom to such an extent that he would assert, "The historical whole determines our powers at any given moment; it prescribes their limits in our field of action and our real future . . . " (*Communists* 80).

However, Sartre's post-war acceptance of a Marxist outlook did not entail acceptance of the strongly deterministic beliefs that typify those forms of Marxism usually categorized as "vulgar." Instead, Sartre believed that the reciprocal relationship between individual freedom and historical conditioning was expressed succinctly by one line in a letter from Engels to Marx: "Men themselves make their history but in a given environment that conditions them" (qtd in Sartre, *Search* 85). In this line Sartre saw a formulation of the dialectical relationship in which self and society are mutually determining: history makes man, but man makes history. In fact, Sartre would criticize Marxist theorists for ignoring the free human agent as a factor in their analyses, and he would assert that this oversight could be remedied by a contextualized consideration of existentialist theory:

> The abstract relations of things with each other, of merchandise and money, etc., mask and condition the direct relations of men with one another. Thus machinery, the circulation of merchandise, etc., determine economic and social developments. Without these principles there is no historical rationality. But without living men, there is no history. The object of existentialism — due to the default of the Marxists — is the particular man in the social field, in his class, in an environment of collective objects and of other particular men. It is the individual, alienated, reified, mystified, as he has been made to be by the division of labor and by exploitation, but struggling against alienation with the help of distorting instruments and, despite everything, patiently gaining ground. (*Search* 133)

Thus Sartre saw existentialism as a necessary addition to Marxist theory, as the means by which theorists could explain how the impersonal material forces posited by Marxist theory are experienced at a personal level by every individual. By uniting Marxism and existentialism, Sartre was able to study the individual as an agent of change in a historical context that itself was the product of other human agents.

In rejecting the simplistic view of social reproduction that vulgar Marxists saw as a necessary corollary to Marx's theory of economic reproduction, Sartre acknowledge that every individual "interiorizes" the social factors that condition him/her and then "re-exteriorizes" those factors in acts that are consequences of the individual's social conditioning ("Itinerary" 35); however, Sartre insisted that each individual's actions are not the simple sum of the external influences that

the individual experiences. Instead, Sartre believed, a margin of freedom exists for individuals to act in ways that contradict their social conditioning:

> This is the limit I would today accord to freedom: the small movement which makes of a totally conditioned social being someone who does not render back completely what his conditioning has given him. What makes of Genet a poet when he had been rigorously conditioned to be a thief. ("Itinerary" 35)

Sartre saw Genet as an exemplar of both the power and the limits of deterministic social theory. Genet is both a thief and a poet: the former role is the predictable result of environmental influences, but the latter role is explicable only by acknowledging "that freedom alone can account for a person in his totality . . . " (*Saint* 584). In Genet, Sartre found evidence that existentialism and Marxism must be reconciled to define the margins of freedom, and he found (here I am borrowing Fredric Jameson's description of Sartre's own development) that "a lived synthesis of the two systems exists already, preceding, motivating, and founding the purely intellectual working out of the synthesis in the domain of thought" (*Marxism* 206-07).

In his post-war writings, Sartre explored the warp and woof of conditioning and freedom in the lives of several writers: not just Genet, but Baudelaire, Flaubert, and, in his autobiography *The Words*, Sartre himself. However, the works that I find most germane to my own concerns in this essay are not studies of individuals but instead studies of two types: *the alienated intellectual* (in "A Plea for Intellectuals") and *the writer-in-everyone* (in "The Purposes of Writing"). It is in these two works that I find Sartre's clearest explanations of how the contemporary university is dominated by a technocratic agenda and of how writing can serve as a means of resisting that agenda, allowing a socially conscious agenda to be written in the margins of the university curriculum.

Education and Alienation

In "A Plea for Intellectuals," Sartre explores how intrinsic contradictions in capitalist societies undermine the educational agenda that ruling-class interests impose on the educational system. That agenda, according to Sartre, includes two objectives. The first of these objectives is to instill in students a bourgeois humanist ideology — an "ensemble of ideas and values composed of a spirit of contestation, a rejection of the principles of authority and the fetters on free commerce, a conviction of the universality of man . . . " ("Plea" 237). Although this ideology "was adapted to a capitalism of family enterprises, and bears no relation to the era of monopolies" ("Plea" 237), it lingers on, transmitted chiefly at the levels of primary and secondary education. At the level of higher education, the transmission of ideology is being supplanted by a second objective: the training of middle-class students as "technicians of practical knowledge" who perform

specialized tasks in the corporate system. At the university level, says Sartre, "[t]oday the situation is clear enough: industry is trying to extend its control over the university to force it to abandon the old obsolete humanism and replace it with specialized disciplines, destined to supply firms with testers, supervisors, public relations officers, and so forth" ("Plea" 238). In pursuing these two objectives, "[t]he ruling class regulates education in such a way as to give its technicians (a) the ideology it judges suitable for them (primary and secondary education) and (b) the knowledge and skills to enable them to perform their functions (higher education)" ("Plea" 238).

In this bipartite division of educational objectives, Sartre sees two contradictions that potentially can undermine the capitalist educational program. Both of the contradictions emerge because the two objectives described above necessarily are at odds with each other.

The first contradiction appears in the competitive environment of the university itself. Because "the ruling class determines the number of technicians of practical knowledge in accordance with the dictates of *profit*, which is its supreme end" ("Plea" 237), the recruiting of technician trainees necessarily is a selective process. Sartre suggests that middle-class students (the majority in the universities) view their own success in the competitive selection process as "living proof that all men are *not* equal" ("Plea" 239), while working-class students (a minority in the universities) view their own success as the result of "traversing a complex and *invariably unjust* system of selection which has eliminated most of [their] comrades" ("Plea" 240). Both classes of students will experience their own success as being "in radical contradiction with the tenets of humanistic egalitarianism" ("Plea" 240); however, the newly trained technicians will be reluctant to renounce a system in which they have succeeded.

The second contradiction appears as the newly trained technicians of practical knowledge leave the university and enter the workplace. Insofar as the technicians are still susceptible to the humanist ideology with which they were inculcated in their early education, they will believe in principles that are contradicted by the actual conditions of employment that they encounter. Insofar as technicians have acquired specific knowledge and skills, they will see their practical training as universally applicable since, as Sartre notes in an example, "[w]hen a doctor is engaged in research to find a cure for cancer, his quest does not specify, for example, that only the *rich* are to be cured, for the simple reason that degrees of wealth have nothing to do with cells of cancer" ("Plea" 242). However, as technicians of practical knowledge pursue their work, they will discover that they are "caught within a system of relations defined by the ruling class in terms of *scarcity* and *profit*" ("Plea" 242), and that "privileged social groups rob discoveries of their *social utility*, and transform it into a utility for the [wealthy]

minority at the expense of the majority" ("Plea" 242). For example, commercial interests can control the availability of useful inventions that technicians develop; thus, "the technician who creates inventions for all men may become . . . simply an agent for the pauperization of the working class" ("Plea" 242), his or her work resulting in the "relative impoverishment" of many. Sartre sees this process as "particularly obvious in the case of major improvements in industrial projects, which are promptly utilized by the bourgeoisie to increase its profits" ("Plea" 242). In *Search for a Method*, he provides a striking description of how relative impoverishment is experienced by underprivileged classes:

> Every man is defined negatively by the sum total of possibles which are impossible for him; that is, by a future more or less blocked off. For the underprivileged classes, each cultural, technical, or material enrichment of society represents a diminution, an impoverishment; the future is almost entirely barred. (95)

As technicians of practical knowledge "become aware that they are instruments of ends which remain foreign to them and which they are forbidden to question" ("Plea" 240), they discover alienation, and — most importantly — they make this discovery "in their very research" ("Plea" 240). As contradictory experience gives birth to new consciousness, the technician of practical knowledge is transformed into an intellectual. The transformation reflects a distinction made by Raymond Williams in *Keywords*, where he notes that "[w]ithin universities the distinction is sometimes made between *specialists* or *professionals*, with limited interests, and *intellectuals*, with wider interests" (170). Sartre asserts that "every technician of knowledge is a *potential intellectual* since he is defined by a contradiction which is none other than the permanent tension within him between his universalist technique and the dominant ideology" ("Plea" 244). A technician becomes an actual intellectual only by overstepping the limited function for which s/he has been trained in order to explore broader questions that are forbidden. Because these questions reveal "the lived impossibility of being a pure technician of practical knowledge in our society" ("Plea" 247), the technician who asks such questions necessarily experiences alienation — s/he becomes an *alienated intellectual.*

It is significant that Sartre describes the transformation from technician to intellectual as "potential" rather than "inevitable," noting that such a transformation "will depend in part on [the technician's] personal history" and that "in the last analysis only social factors can complete the transformation" ("Plea" 244-45). In fact, many — perhaps most — technicians never undergo the transformation that Sartre describes — they never consider the inherent contradictions in their experience, never ask the broad questions that would lead to increased consciousness. Their training as specialists does not dispose them toward asking such questions, and at present in America, the material rewards that technicians earn may lull them into complacency. It

should not be surprising that technician trainees also are unlikely to ask such questions — they possess the enthusiasm of initiates, an enthusiasm that generally is unchecked by sobering experience. However, the forbidden questions concerning the ultimate ends of their labor are precisely the questions that technicians and technican trainees *must* ask if they are to transcend a diminished existence as means toward ends defined by the profit motive.

Sartre sees alienation as a first step toward social consciousness; however, he also recognizes that intellectuals must move beyond alienation if they hope to identify possibilities for transforming the system from which they are estranged. A major obstacle that intellectuals must overcome in their efforts to envision alternatives to the status quo is that they are themselves products of the system that alienates them — and they do not cease being so even in their alienation. Their own consciousness is false consciousness to the extent that they have interiorized the ideological distortions of the society in which they were raised. Sartre's usage of the word "ideology" seems to anticipate Jameson's more recent usage grounded in "the great Althusserian (and Lacanian) redefinition of ideology as othe representation of the subject's *Imaginary* relationship to his or her *Real* conditions of existence' " ("Postmodernism" 90). This definition suggests that consciousness can be false or "imaginary" in discernible ways, but it does not imply that absolute or totalizing knowledge is possible. Sartre notes the difficulty of identifying the limits that ideology imposes:

> [I]t would be wrong to imagine that the intellectual could accomplish this task [of struggling against contradictions] by simply *studying* the ideology inculcated in him (for example by subjecting it to ordinary critical methods). In actual fact it is his *own* ideology — it manifests itself both in his mode of life (insofar as he is a *real* member of the middle classes) and in his *Weltanschauung*. In other words it is the tinted glasses through which he normally looks at the world. The contradiction from which he suffers is at first experienced only as suffering. In order to examine it, he must *take his distance* from it — and this he cannot do without assistance. ("Plea" 255)

While recognizing the difficulty of identifying the effects of ideology, Sartre does identify two conditions necessary for a person to unmask some aspects of the false consciousness that ideology imposes. First, Sartre notes that a person "must situate *himself* in the social universe in order to be able to grasp and destroy within and without himself the limits that ideology imposes on knowledge" ("Plea" 249). I see two warnings in this condition. Sartre is cautioning against abstract intellectualizing and suggesting that all true consciousness must be rooted in a specific social context; furthermore, he is warning that a person must not attempt to universalize the significance of context-specific observations — the universalizing tendency being a trap into which intellectuals often fall ("Plea" 249).

However, Sartre also realizes that even analyses rooted in specific social contexts are prone to ideological distortion, because a person cannot cast off ideological assumptions through an act of will, even as

he or she attempts to study those assumptions. The nature of ideology allows it to blind a person to its own existence. As a remedy to this problem, Sartre imposes a second condition on efforts to unmask false consciousness: he notes that "if [a person] wishes to understand the society in which he lives, he has only one course open to him and that is to adopt the point of view of its most underprivileged members" ("Plea" 255). Because the very existence of the underprivileged contradicts dominant ideological assumptions, the intellectual who assumes the perspective of the underprivileged may achieve sufficient distance to unmask his or her own false consciousness ("Plea" 256).

One way to interpret Sartre's second condition is as an assertion that the perspective of the underprivileged is free of ideological distortion. This interpretation seems plausible in light of Sartre's statement that the consciousness of exploited classes is characterized by "objective intelligence" ("Plea" 256). However, I believe that a more complex analysis suggests itself if one considers Sartre's use of point-of-view terminology. Sartre notes that the degree of consciousness achieved by exploited classes is variable but that their perspective necessarily "captures the dominant classes and their allies as in a *tilt shot* angled from below . . . " ("Plea" 256), and he adds that "[i]f the intellectual can adopt this simple and radical perspective, he would see himself *as he really is*, from below . . . " ("Plea" 257). By specifying the position from which the "real" is discernible, Sartre is employing a strategy that is consistent with his assertion that true consciousness must be based in a specific social context. I would suggest that Sartre uses point-of-view terminology as a reminder that what is knowable depends on the position of the knower. Here it may be useful to distinguish between false consciousness and partial consciousness by invoking Ann Berthoff's warning that "to acknowledge that all knowledge is partial is not the same as holding that all knowledge is error . . . " (85). It seems to me that Sartre is describing a process of triangulation by which intellectuals can estimate their actual position in society by comparing their own limited perspective to the perspective of the underprivileged. If Sartre attaches special value to the perspective of the underprivileged, he does so not because their perspective is either complete or errorless; instead, he values their perspective because it is locked into a dialectical relationship with the perspective of those who succeed in an unjust system. For intellectuals to see the need for social change, they must adopt the perspective of those whose need is greatest. From such a perspective intellectuals may overcome their ideological assumptions and then begin to redefine the nature of "practical knowledge" and the goals toward which that knowledge should be applied.

The Purposes of Writing

Sartre concludes "A Plea for Intellectuals" by examining the uses of writing in the production of knowledge. In this section of the essay

language emerges as one of the "distorting instruments" that nevertheless is necessary in the struggle for understanding. Early in this section Sartre adopts the structuralist position that "such elements as words or rules of syntax mutually condition each other and have no reality other than through their interrelations . . . " ("Plea" 269); however, he quickly advances to a position that is better categorized as poststructuralist, adding that the "dense materiality" of the words in ordinary language renders them "either simply superfluous or positively harmful" at the level of signification ("Plea" 270). Noting that imprecision results from "the variety of meanings that history has imposed on [words]" ("Plea" 270), Sartre clarifies why he views words as imprecise signifiers:

> One might say that the *word* tends both to point vaguely in the direction of the signified and to impose itself as a *presence*, drawing the reader's attention to its own density. This is why it has been possible for people to say that to name something means both to *present* the signified and to kill or bury it in the mass of the word. ("Plea" 270)

Despite his charge that words are either superfluous or dangerous if viewed as signifiers, Sartre does not dismiss the use of writing as a tool for producing knowledge. Instead, he asserts that words in literary works may serve a signifying function and that authors "who write their fantasies in perfect complicity with themselves necessarily deliver the presence of the world to us — precisely in so far as this world conditions them, and their place in society partially explains their style of writing" ("Plea" 274). Once again Sartre is asserting that socially grounded knowledge is possible, here substituting contextualized meaning for a transcendental signified. Although the polysemic nature of language defies efforts at final closure in interpretation, the writer is both product and producer of social conditions that may be partially discerned by readers who are attentive to their own social position and to the social position of the writer. As Sartre explains,

> The writer is not a special case: he too cannot escape his insertion in the world, and his writings are the very type of a singular universal. Whatever their category, literary works always have two complementary facets: the historical singularity of their being, and the universality of their aims — or vice versa, the universality of their being and the singularity of their aims. A book is necessarily a part of the world, through which the totality of the world is *made manifest*, although without ever being fully disclosed. ("Plea" 275)

In describing the writer's text as "the very type of a singular universal," Sartre is balancing the competing demands of freedom and conditioning. From one perspective the writer is a unique volitional agent inhabiting a particular historical context; this is the perspective that Sartre adopts when he says in his study of Genet "that freedom alone can account for a person in his totality . . . " (*Saint* 584). From another perspective the writer is a conditioned representative of a social class. Although a writer may attempt to construct a personal totalizing vision of reality in a text, the reader can debunk claims of either the writer's

singularity or the text's universality by situating the writer and the text within a determining social context. By then adopting the perspective of the underprivileged, the reader can unmask the ideological distortions that inhabit the subconscious of the writer and that are manifested in the text. This process of unmasking returns the writer to the position of a socially determined representative of a particular class, and it reduces the status of the text from a totalizing vision to a representation of one limited, distorted perspective. Sartre would attempt this process in his last major work, his three- thousand-page study of Flaubert.

While acknowledging both the limits and the utility of the written word as a tool for producing knowledge, Sartre remained convinced throughout his life that writing fulfills a basic need. His most powerful statement that writing is a fundamental human activity appears in "The Purposes of Writing," where he discusses the desire for self-expression that writing fulfills:

> What I'm trying to say is that people — people everywhere — wish their own life, with all its dark places that they sense, to be an experience not only lived, but *presented*. They would like to see it disengaged from all the elements that crush it; and rendered essential by an *expression* that reduces what crushes them to inessential conditions of their person. Everyone wants to write because everyone has a need to be *meaningful* — to signify what they *experience*. (30)

Sartre views writing as "a need felt by everyone" and as "the highest form of the basic need to communicate" ("Purposes" 31), and he adds that "every single person feels, perhaps only unconsciously, the need to be a witness of his time, of his life — before the eyes of all, to be a witness to himself" ("Purposes" 31-32). Insofar as writing fulfills a basic need, we may speak of the *writer-in-everyone* as a potential identity that anyone can assume.

Writing in the University

Although Sartre does not address the role of writing instruction in the university, his comments concerning the purposes of writing and the technocratic agenda in education invite comparison with the work of recent composition theorists, especially those who advocate a rhetoric grounded in the social construction of knowledge to replace rhetorical practices grounded in a positivist epistemology. James Berlin will serve as a representative of these theorists, and his 1988 *College English* essay, "Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class," will provide a basis for comparing his thoughts to Sartre's.

Like Sartre, Berlin recognizes the demands that capitalism imposes on education; in fact, he asserts that the American university adapted to the demands of competitive capitalism in the late nineteenth century, adopting the role of providing "a center for experts engaged in 'scientific' research designed to establish a body of knowledge that would rationalize all features of production, making it more efficient,

more manageable, and, of course, more profitable" (480). When the university bowed to the pressures of capitalist production, the academic and economic "were joined as the path to success became a university degree in one of the new scientific specialties proven to be profitable in the world of industry and commerce" (480). Berlin argues that the rhetoric now commonly termed "current-traditional" flourished in the new university because "its positivistic epistemology, its pretensions to scientific precision, and its managerial orientation [were] thoroughly compatible with the mission of this university" (480).

Berlin then posits a trichotomy of rhetorical schools that have developed in the twentieth-century university. The first of these, "cognitive rhetoric," is heir to the current- traditional school, with a claim to scientific precision now grounded in the discipline of cognitive psychology. Berlin cites Linda Flower as an exemplar of this school and suggests that her research and the pedagogy based on it refuse the ideological question while reproducing the capitalist ideology, with "[t]he pursuit of self-evident and unquestioned goals in the composing process parallel[ing] the pursuit of self-evident and unquestioned profit-making goals in the corporate marketplace" (483).

The second school in Berlin's trichotomy is "expressionistic rhetoric." Emerging as a reaction to the dehumanizing effects of capitalism, this school identified the development and expression of the individual's "authentic nature" as the primary purpose for writing. Berlin notes that extreme representatives of this school "demanded that the writing classroom work explicitly toward liberating students from the shackles of a corrupt society" (485); however, the mainstream of the expressionistic school, exemplified by Donald Murray and Peter Elbow, pursued a moderate agenda, "continu[ing] the ideological critique of the dominant culture while avoiding the overt politicizing of the classroom" (485). Arguing that "expressionistic rhetoric is easily co-opted by the very capitalist forces it opposes" (487), Berlin details the possibilities for co-option:

> After all, this rhetoric can be used to reinforce the entrepreneurial virtues capitalism most values: individualism, private initiative, the confidence for risk taking, the right to be contentious with authority (especially the state) (487)

For these reasons Berlin concludes that "the ruling elite in business, industry, and government are those most likely to nod in assent to the ideology inscribed in expressionistic rhetoric" (487).

The third school in Berlin's trichotomy — the school that Berlin endorses — is "social-epistemic rhetoric." While social-epistemic rhetoric is defined in varying ways by its numerous practititioners, Berlin attempts to identify some distinguishing features of a fully articulated version of this approach:

> For social-epistemic rhetoric, the real is located in a relationship that involves the dialectical interaction of the observer, the discourse community (social group) in which the observer is functioning, and the material condi-

> tions of existence. Knowledge is never found in any one of these but can only be posited as a product of the dialectic in which all three come together. . . . Most important, the dialectic is grounded in language: the observer, the discourse community, and the material conditions of existence are all verbal constructs. This does not mean that the three do not exist apart from language: they do. This does mean that we cannot talk and write about them — indeed we cannot know them — apart from language. (488)

The implications that Berlin draws from this social constructionist model of knowledge generation are similar to the conclusions that Sartre advances in the works I have discussed. Like Sartre, Berlin arrives at a Marxist position, paraphrasing Marx as he asserts that "we make our own histories, but we do not make them just as we wish" (489). Like Sartre, he poses a process of reciprocal determination, noting that "[o]ur consciousness is in large part a product of our material conditions" while "our material conditions are also in part the products of our consciousness" (489). Both Sartre and Berlin balance determinism and free will in order to identify a margin of freedom for meaningful action, that is, for action that can transform consciousness by transforming the material conditions from which consciousness is constructed. Certainly Sartre and Berlin differ in their conceptions of ideology: while Sartre identifies ideology with "false consciousness," Berlin derives his definition from Goren Therborn, viewing all consciousness as ideological and holding that "no position can lay claim to absolute, timeless truth, because finally all formulations are historically specific, arising out of the material conditions of a particular time and place" (478). However, the significance of this difference diminishes when we consider that Sartre defines "the objective world" as "both society . . . and the objectified universe of inter-subjectivity . . . " ("Plea" 272), both specifications that necessarily limit knowledge to historically contextualized formulations like those posited in Berlin's definition.

Berlin cites Ira Shor's *Critical Teaching and Everyday Life* as the most complete realization of social-epistemic rhetoric for classroom use, noting that Shor's pedagogy "situates the individual within social processes, examining in detail the interferences to critical thought that would enable ostudents to be their own agents for social change, their own creators of democratic culture' " (490). Shor's practice encourages students to externalize their own false consciousness through a critical examination of their experience, a practice intended to help students discover their real power to transform the institutions that shape them.

Berlin acknowledges that his brief survey of Shor's theory and practice necessarily is reductive; my own summary of Berlin's survey necessarily is even more reductive. Instead of engaging in a detailed analysis of Shor's pedagogy, I simply will acknowledge his influence on the pedagogical agenda that I will identify in concluding this essay — an agenda that I find consistent with Berlin's definition of social-epistemic rhetoric and also with Sartre's analysis of the purposes of writing and

the state of the contemporary university. Before introducing that agenda, however, I must offer a brief critique of Berlin's description of the first two rhetorical schools in his trichotomy. Although I agree with Berlin's position concerning social-epistemic rhetoric, I also believe that he has oversimplified other rhetorical practices in locating them within his taxonomy.

Consider first Berlin's characterization of cognitive rhetoric, beginning with his assertion that "[f]or cognitive rhetoric, the structures of the mind correspond in perfect harmony with the structures of the material world, the minds of the audience, and the units of language" (480). While Berlin's description may characterize the beliefs of some early practitioners of cognitive research, I suspect that today most cognitive psychologists and many cognitive rhetoricans would disagree with his description of harmonious correspondences. Certainly cognitive researchers do assume that the mind has structure — such an assumption is necessary to explain similarities (but not uniformity) in language structure and acquisition across a variety of language families in various regions. Cognitive researchers also assume some correspondence between mind and world insofar as the mind is shaped by a person's experiences in an environment. However, the correspondence is never perfectly harmonious. For example, cognitive psychologist Ulric Neisser views cognition as an interactive process in which the observer uses mental schemata — sometimes called "cognitive maps" — to perceive aspects of an environment selectively. The perceived environment in turn alters the schemata that will govern future cognition. In this model cognition will be flawed if the observer mismatches schemata with environment; more significantly, cognition always will be partial, because the environmental information is always limited and the observer's perception of the environment is always selective.

Writing in 1976, Neisser criticized his colleagues who relied on computer models of information processing in their studies of human cognition, and he observed that some cognitive psychologists "may have been lavishing too much effort on hypothetical models of mind and not enough on analyzing the environment that the mind has been shaped to meet" (8). At the time that Neisser wrote these words, they certainly could have applied to many discourse theorists who relied on cognitive models — let Teun van Dijk serve as an example. However, throughout the 1980s van Dijk would use his earlier studies in producing an increasingly sophisticated body of work on social cognition, including several landmark studies on racism in discourse. Writing in 1988, van Dijk asserts that "the social power of dominant groups and their members can be expressed, enacted or legitimated in discourse only through ideologically framed social cognitions" ("Social" 129). I see van Dijk's conclusion as a logical progression in his work on cognition rather than as a radical departure from his earlier studies.

While I would hesitate to assert that a similar progression marks the work of Linda Flower — the person who bears the brunt of Berlin's

attack on cognitive rhetoric — I would call attention to an essay that Flower has published since Berlin's "Rhetoric and Ideology" appeared. In a 1989 *CCC* essay titled "Cognition, Context, and Theory Building," Flower acknowledges that the cognitive process model of writing that she and John Hayes advanced in 1981 "did little more than specify that the task environment was an important element in the [composing] process; it failed to account for *how* the situation in which the writer operates might shape composing . . . " (283). Flower then calls for research into the interaction of cognition and context, noting that she and researchers using other conceptual frameworks "share the goal of helping writers understand themselves as constructors of meaning within a social and cultural context — a context that can both nurture and consume an individual writer" ("Cognition" 284). Flower aligns herself with a research community that "lives in a post-positivistic world which acknowledges both the relative nature of knowledge and the social and cognitive process of interpretation in educational research" ("Cognition" 302).

In calling attention to Flower's recent comments, I am not suggesting that I see her work as an adequate basis for writing pedagogy — I do not. I see in Flower's work a concern with how a context shapes writers, but I do not see a balancing concern with how and why writers can and should shape a context. I see in her work an effort to empower writers without an identification of the appropriate social ends toward which writers should apply their power. Flower's acknowledgment of "the relative nature of knowledge" belies the charges of positivism that are leveled against her, but her ambition falls short of Sartre's goal of explaining why the knowledge claims of oppressed groups should possess special value for intellectuals. So I believe that Berlin is justified in charging that Flower's rhetoric "is eminently suited to appropriation by the proponents of a particular ideological stance, a stance consistent with the modern college's commitment to preparing students for the world of corporate capitalism" (482). However, I do not see Flower's work as an example of the positivist assumptions that Berlin attributes to the cognitive school, nor do I see the appropriation of cognitive rhetoric by capitalist interests as an inevitable consequence of intrinsic tendencies in the cognitive approach. Given the example of van Dijk that I mentioned earlier, I am reluctant to dismiss the possibility that other cognitivists may make contributions to a progressive agenda for writing research and instruction.

Nor am I ready to dismiss the entire school that Berlin characterizes as expressionistic. My concern here is similar to the concern that I have just voiced above, so I can express it succinctly: I suspect that some of the assumptions that Berlin identifies as intrinsic to the expressionistic position actually are not essential tenets of that approach. Again I agree with Berlin that the works of the exemplars he cites — Donald Murray, Peter Elbow — do not provide an adequate basis for progressive writing pedagogy. I see their work as subject to the same

criticism that I leveled against the cognitivists: they are attempting to empower writers without identifying appropriate social uses for that power. And some lesser representatives of the expressionistic position further reduce the utility of their work by ignoring entirely the social construction of individual identity. However, I question Berlin's generalization that the expressionistic school views writers as limited "not by economic and class constraints, but by their own unwillingness to pursue a private vision . . . " (487). Berlin himself notes that some proponents of expressionistic rhetoric during the 1960s and 70s demanded that writing classrooms free students "from the shackles of a corrupt society" (485). While this position may be atypical, it does suggest that belief in the individual rather than social nature of writing problems is not a necessary condition of the expressionistic position.

My reluctance to dismiss entirely the work of those who see writing as self-expression stems from my belief that Sartre is correct in asserting that all people have a need to see their lives "rendered essential by an *expression* that reduces what crushed them to inessential conditions of their person" ("Purposes" 30). I suspect that the attractiveness of expressionistic rhetoric derives from this need, and I believe that proponents of this school may identify strategies that help students overcome their conditioning to dislike writing. However, like Sartre I recognize that expressions of false consciousness are not liberatory. True liberation comes from recognizing both the necessity for and the possibility of socially significant action, and such knowledge can only arise from a socially contextualized perspective that renders visible the ideological distortions that typify middle-class consciousness.

From Alienation to Transformation

I would argue that we must encourage our students to transcend their false consciousness and to recognize their position in the corporate-dominated university. However, to do so we first must overcome our own false consciousness and recognize the possibilities made available by our own positions. We then must use our positions to work as agents of social change within our disciplines, the university, and the larger communities we inhabit. My main concern as I conclude this essay is to explore the possibilities available within our work as writing teachers; however, I share Patricia Bizzell's belief that "we American academics are anti- intellectual precisely in our reluctance to emerge from our respective disciplines, to act as intellectuals in the larger community of the whole university and the whole society" (54). By neglecting the broad social responsibilities of the intellectual, we reduce our own status to that of technicians of practical knowledge, reproducing rather than transforming the power relations of existing institutions. I agree with Bizzell that "scholars must simply acknowledge political activity as a professional responsibility" (53) and that we must pursue that activity both within and beyond the university.

Insofar as we do recognize the need to change power relations, we should be mindful of the distinction that Stanley Aronowitz and Henry Giroux draw between *critical intellectuals* and *transformative intellectuals*. In their analysis, critical intellectuals are much like Sartre's *alienated intellectuals* in that "they are critical of inequality and injustice, but they often refuse or are unable to move beyond their isolated posture to the terrain of collective solidarity and struggle" (37). On the other hand, transformative intellectuals are able to move beyond alienation and to recognize possibilities for meaningful action. They recognize "that schooling represents both a struggle for meaning *and* a struggle over power relations," and they view education as "a fundamental social project to help students develop a deep and abiding faith in the struggle to overcome injustices and to change themselves" (36). According to Aronowitz and Giroux, transformative intellectuals in the schools recognize that their position is contradictory:

> On the one hand, such intellectuals earn a living within institutions that play a fundamental role in producing the dominant culture. On the other hand, they define their political terrain by offering to students forms of alternative discourse and critical social practices whose interests are often at odds with the overall hegemonic role of the school and the society it supports. (40)

If we move beyond alienation and accept the challenging role of the transformative intellectual, we join Bruce Robbins in recognizing that the academy, "as the site where professional credentials are defined and dispensed, was and is a significant site of contestation for one of the major legitimizers of social authority, professional expertise" (17). We then must work within and beyond the university to redefine the nature of professional expertise, providing alternatives to the identity of technicians of practical knowledge that the corporate-dominated university prepares students to adopt.

I would coin the term *transformative professional* to describe the identity to which students should aspire. If we can assist our students in developing not only technical skills but also critical consciousness and social commitment, then they may participate in the broad project of social transformation to which we ourselves are committed.

The goal of developing transformative professionals may seem unattainable in today's university. I do not wish to underestimate the difficulty; as I noted at the outset of this essay, our concerns as progressive educators often are ignored or marginalized. However, I do believe that a margin of freedom exists, and that in the margins of the technocratic agenda we may pursue our own agenda for social transformation. I see Sartre as a guide for our efforts, because Sartre himself never succumbed to alienation; instead, he constantly explored ways for moving beyond alienation to productive action. In Sartre's directive that intellectuals must adopt the perspective of the underprivileged in society in order to identify the ideological distortions of their own position, I see a method that could allow our students and ourselves to expose our own false consciousness and to recognize our responsibili-

ties. Moreover, I see Sartre's guidance as especially useful for writing teachers, because throughout his life Sartre remained convinced that writing fulfills a basic human need and that every person possesses a potential identity as a writer.

In an article concerning how students develop identities as writers, Robert Brooke asserts that "[b]eing a writer involves taking a stance towards experience, towards reading, towards writing. It involves taking on a particular identity, a way of being a certain person in the social world" (38). He also suggests that "the process of modeling identity is what teaching writing is all about" (40). However, Brooke does not specify the stance toward experience or the particular identity that a teacher should model; instead, he states that "[i]t may not finally matter what version of the writer's identity is modeled or in what context (academic or otherwise) the identity is cast, because what emerges for students is a stronger sense of themselves as writers" (40). I agree with Brooke's assertion that writers develop their identity in part by modeling themselves after other writers; I also agree with the proposition implicit in Brooke's statement (and explicit elsewhere in his article) that students need not accept the identity that we model and will not become clones of ourselves. To assume otherwise is to adopt a deterministic view of education, with ourselves as the determiners of our students' identities. However, I believe that it *does* matter what identity we model for our students, because the model we present can make available to them an identity that they otherwise might not have considered. If we ask difficult but important questions, we may encourage our students to do likewise. If we consider the sources of our own opinions and subject our opinions to scrutiny from other perspectives, our students may do likewise. And if we consider our own social responsibilities and how best to fulfill them, our students may recognize that they also have responsibilities both within and beyond the professions that they plan to pursue.

In the identities that our students assert in their writing, we will find evidence of both freedom and conditioning. Sartre notes that each person's thought is a singular manifestation of "the class prejudices inculcated in him since childhood, even while it believes itself to be free of them and to have attained the universal" ("Plea" 249). As people become aware of both their freedom and their conditioning, they recognize their "singular universality," a term that Sartre poses to resolve the opposition between determinism and free will and the illusory conflict between existentialism and Marxism. However, we may expect our students to be ignorant of the extent to which they speak with the voice of the social order in which they were raised. To the extent that they have accepted — either consciously or unconsciously — the bourgeois humanist ideology that the elementary and secondary school systems promote, these students are likely to assume

either that their writing presents unique perspectives they have chosen freely, or that it presents universal truths independent of their social position. To assist our students in recognizing their potential identities as writers and as transformative professionals, we first must assist them in recognizing that the identities they bring to class may be based in large part on unfounded ideological assumptions that they have accepted uncritically.

In Sartre's conditions for revealing the limits that ideology imposes upon knowledge, I see a basis for valuable work that we may pursue within the university writing curriculum. Our writing classes can provide the margin of freedom for our students to be witnesses to their lives and times, and the classes can provide the opportunity for them to examine critically their own lives. Writing classes also can provide a multiplicity of voices to reveal the limitations of each person's perspective. If we work to bring the underprivileged into the university while we also introduce their voices from outside the university through reading and writing assignments, the students may become aware of the extent to which their own assumptions and sense of identity arise from their social position, and they may learn that many of their beliefs are contradicted by injustices in the social order they inhabit. They also may recognize their own responsibility to redress the injustices that they discover. If we assure that writing classes are places where students can pursue critical inquiry of the sort that Sartre describes, then we also will assist them in discovering the possibility of becoming transformative professionals instead of mere technicians of practical knowledge.

The Margin of Freedom in Writing Instruction

An alternative vision of the writing curriculum threatens the vision that I have described above. As the technocratic agenda permeates higher education, writing teachers may be pressured to restructure the writing curriculum to suit that agenda better than it already does. In place of the identity that Sartre proposes for the writer, the technocratic agenda would mandate the identity of the *technician-or- businessman-as-communicator.* In place of critical inquiry into fundamental human questions, the technocratic agenda would impose "practical writing for the work world" as the standard which the writing curriculum should uphold, and it would reduce writing classes to training in methods, formulae, and rules for producing prose that the corporate world finds appropriate for its purposes. If we succumb to pressure and accept the technocratic agenda's diminishing view of our curriculum, we will deny to students an opportunity to discover the empowering identity that they deserve. Our own margin of freedom for pursuing a progressive agenda will disappear.

I see Freshman English as the first line of defense against the technocratic agenda. There are two reasons that Freshman English occupies this important position. First, in many universities Freshman

English is the sole course that all students are required to take — it is the sole curricular vehicle for reaching every student in the university. Second, Freshman English may be unique in the openness of its content. As David Bartholomae has observed, the very name "Freshman English" is "an open term, indeterminate" (41). Like Bartholomae, I believe that we must preserve the openness of this required course. By preserving the openness of Freshman English, we may respond to Bartholomae's charge "to provide occasions for talk, not lecture and silence" (49). We may maintain a margin of freedom for ourselves and our students to pursue important work within the technocratic university.

A second line of defense against the technocratic agenda could form in writing-across-the-curriculum classes. Although not blessed with the openness of Freshman English, WAC programs remain partially indeterminate because of their relative newness, and they can serve either the technocratic agenda or a progressive one, depending upon how they are designed. Catherine Pastore Blair has noted that WAC programs can provide opportunities for dialogue among the discrete disciplines that compose the university, and she also has cautioned that equality among the participants is necessary to prevent the dialogue from becoming a one-way discourse dominated by the English faculty (386). Patricia Bizzell has warned that in teaching the discourse of various academic disciplines across the curriculum, we must be wary of assuming that we "enable students to analyze any discourse that they encounter, so they can participate in it or escape its influence, as they choose" (46). I would add a third caution: if a WAC program simply introduces students to the dominant assumptions and practices in a discipline, the program can become part of an indoctrination process that conditions students to accept uncritically the values held by the class interests that may dictate the discipline's projects. It can promote false consciousness, perpetuating ideological distortions instead of dispelling them. On the other hand, a well-designed WAC program can observe Sartre's conditions for unmasking false consciousness: it can encourage students to scrutinize the social context in which the discipline pursues its projects, and it can allow students to consider the perspectives of those who are excluded from the benefits of the discipline's projects. Sartre has noted that intellectuals achieve awareness "*first and foremost* at the level of [their] professional activities and functions" ("Plea" 246); it seems reasonable that students could begin pursuing awareness while in training for their professional activities. By doing so, they may recognize early that they must choose between the diminishing identity of the technician of practical knowledge and the empowering identity of the transformative professional.

The experiences that we provide in our writing classes can encourage students to make the socially responsible choice. Michael Holzman has noted that "all too often the organization of literacy education, of education in general, in this country is at the service of institutional or

bureaucratic rather than human priorities" (32). We must ensure that the human priorities are not ignored altogether, that they at least are represented in the margins of the university curriculum. In speaking of the need to write that every person feels, Sartre charges that "[e]very person is always faced in his own lifetime with the task of wresting his life from the various forms of night" ("Purposes" 31). The task awaits us.

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