The Arts of Complicity: Pragmatism and the Culture of Schooling

Richard E. Miller

> *Those truly committed to liberation must reject the banking concept in its entirety, adopting instead a concept of men as conscious beings, and consciousness as consciousness intent upon the world. They must abandon the educational goal of deposit-making and replace it with the posing of the problems of men in their relations with the world.*
>
> (Pedagogy of the Oppressed 66)

For nearly thirty years, Paulo Freire's name and his writings have signified our brightest hopes about the importance of what we do: to invoke Freire is to declare one's allegiance to education as a practice of freedom and one's commitment to "revolution," "liberation," "conscientization," "problem-posing." And so, when scholars outside of composition wish to join in our discussions, they turn, more often than not, to Freire's work to establish the sincerity of their interest in pedagogical practice and their belief that teaching others to read and write has political consequences. Citing Freire is, thus, a way of establishing one's credentials in the field, of showing one's true colors. We see this, for example, in Jane Tompkins's much-discussed, "Pedagogy of the Distressed," where Tompkins links her discovery of "a way to make teaching more enjoyable and less anxiety-producing" to a set of reflections prompted by Freire's insistence that "you cannot have a revolution unless education becomes a practice of freedom" (656, 653). And we see this, as well, in bell hooks's *Teaching to Transgress*, where hooks identifies Freire as one of two teachers who has deeply influenced her efforts to enact a liberatory practice that "enables transgressions—a movement against and beyond boundaries" (12). And, as news of Freire's death spreads throughout the profession, such public testaments to his influence on our ways of thinking are bound to proliferate exponentially. Indeed, at the 1998 4Cs, Freire was posthumously commemorated for his

Richard E. Miller is Associate Professor of English and Associate Director of the Writing Program at Rutgers University. His book *As If Learning Mattered: Reforming Higher Education* was published this year by Cornell University Press. A frequent contributor to *College English*, Miller is currently at work on *Bone Matters*, an institutional autobiography.

contributions to the field and those presentations which reflected his work were specially marked in the program.

What are we to make of Freire's place in our profession's history? Why does his representation of the power of teaching hold such an appeal for so many of us? From a certain perspective, the answer to these questions is obvious. Freire has given teachers a way to see themselves as something other than the mindless functionaries of the state apparatus responsible for tidying the prose of the next generation of bureaucrats. His liberatory pedagogy has long provided an attractive alternative to the grinding and effacing processes of professional training that are so popular among those who equate education with vocationalism. Freirian pedagogy foregrounds the politics of teaching; it recognizes the interrelationship of word and world, language and power; it requires teachers to construct a teaching practice that is responsive to the students' needs and abilities; it offers a powerful critique of dominant educational practice. And, of course, Freire's well-known critique of "the banking concept" of education has succinctly captured all that is wrong with a teaching practice that has teachers deposit the oppressor's knowledge in the students in such a way that the students are sure to remain docile, unthreatening servants of the state. Freire's work has, in short, given weapons of resistance to those dissatisfied with instrumentalist approaches to education: it has offered a critical vocabulary, a philosophically grounded and politically defensible pedagogy, a vision of a better world.

When I entered graduate school more than a decade ago, I was among those swept away by Freire's vision and the possibilities opened up by renaming the goal of our work in the classroom as "conscientization." Having spent three years employed as a "learning skills specialist" on the margins of a major research university, I was only too well acquainted with institutional indifference and its consequences. I longed to work in the learning environment Freire advocated, where institutionally enforced passivity would be eliminated and the teacher, as problem-poser, would create, "together with the students, the conditions under which knowledge at the level of the *doxa* is superseded by true knowledge, at the level of the *logos*" (68). In such a place, where students were moved from *doxa* to *logos*, from belief to "true knowledge," the groundwork for radical social change would be put into place.

Of course, when I actually set out to do this kind of work I ran into a set of difficulties that, in retrospect, seem all too predictable: many of my students resisted the "politicization" of the classroom; those who didn't seemed overly eager to ventriloquize sentiments they didn't believe or understand; and, at the end of the semester, no matter how spirited and engaging the discussions had been, the quality of writing I received seemed, if I was honest with myself, to vary little from work elicited in other, more traditional classrooms. That there are problems involved in adopting Freire's pedagogy—originally developed to address the needs of the illiterate and dispossessed peoples of Brazil—to teach undergraduates in the United States is now commonly recognized (Elbow; North; Berlin; McCormick); and for

those committed to getting Freire's project to work with students in the United States, there are considerable resources to turn to for support (Berthoff; Shor; Kutz and Roskelly; Bizzell). What I wish to consider here is a rather different matter, though: why is it that this image of the teacher as liberator of the oppressed, upon which Freire's pedagogy relies so heavily, has had such a perduring appeal? Or, to put this another way, working in the spirit of Freire's own pedagogical practice, what can we learn by problematizing our community's most cherished self-representation? If we aren't in the business of liberation, uplift, and movement, however slow, towards a better social world, what is it we're doing in our classrooms?

EVERYBODY GET IN LINE: LIBERATION AND THE OBEDIENT RESPONSE

Given the choice between the "mechanistic," "necrophilic" banking model of instruction and the life-affirming, consciousness-raising, history-transforming pedagogy of the problem-poser, it's not hard to see why so many of us have embraced the rhetoric of Freire's emancipatory practice and have continued to deploy it long after our own experiences have demonstrated its inutility. Of course, Freire long ago anticipated the possibility that his "problem-posing" approach would be accused of being nothing more than the "banking concept" in disguise, one that extolled the virtues of freedom while imposing a uniform vision. To counter such charges, Freire insisted from the beginning that the problem-posing approach had to "be forged *with*, not *for*, the oppressed (whether individuals or peoples) in the incessant struggle to regain their humanity" (33). Freire's commitment to the principle that a liberatory pedagogy should at every stage enact its participatory politics distinguishes him from those who think that social change requires giving the oppressed a healthy dose of revolutionary indoctrination before allowing them to participate in their own education. And, for this very reason, Freire's commitment to refiguring the teacher-student relationship creates a significant problem at the level of practice: as Freire himself posed the question, "how can the oppressed, as divided, unauthentic beings, participate in developing the pedagogy of their liberation?" (33). That is, if one begins, as Freire does, with a Marxist theory of the social sphere, where the oppressed are cast as the faceless masses who have been deluded into accepting their own powerlessness, then "collaborating" with the oppressed seems positively counterproductive. After all, given *their* false consciousness, *their* "divided, unauthentic beings," *their* lust for individual rewards over communal gains, what could *they* possibly have to contribute to the revolutionary project?

Freire's resolution of this problem is straightforward enough, though not without its own complications. In order for the oppressed to participate actively in the creation of their own pedagogical apparatus, they must first come to see that they have become host bodies for the oppressor's ideology and that they have

molded their lives to conform to this ideology's image. To assist the oppressed in acquiring this insight, Freire sends teams of investigators to the community that has been targeted for his educational project. These investigators approach the area "as if it were for them an enormous, unique, living 'code' to be deciphered" (103). Working in concert with local representatives, over time the investigators detect "generative words" and "generative thematics," revealing the contradictions that lie at the core of the target community's world of concerns. These words and themes are codified in familiar images from the community that are then "re-presented" to the learners for them to reflect on: the learners look at a picture of a well, say, and women carrying water bottles; they decode the images; they begin to speak of their frustrations over access to clean water in their neighborhoods; when the coordinator "poses as problems both the codified existential situation and their own answers," the learners begin to make connections between the themes evoked by the images and their own positions of powerlessness (110). And, presumably, as the learners come to this realization, by having their "false consciousness of reality" posed to them as a problem or "through revolutionary action, developing a consciousness which is less and less false" (125), they begin to liberate themselves from the oppressor's dehumanizing ideology.

One might think that turning to Freire's own examples of what his pedagogy looks like in practice would help to further clarify the differences between the banking and problem-posing methods. As it turns out, though, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* provides few glimpses of what it means to be a student under the problem-posing system, devoting its attention, instead, to presenting the theory and the methodology that gives rise to liberatory practice. Curiously, when the scene of instruction does surface in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* it seamlessly illustrates the smooth functioning of Freire's liberatory machine and the ease with which those in his system come to see the error of their former ways. Thus, for example, after Freire has argued that the oppressed internalize a logic of self-depreciation, he turns to one of his educational meetings to show how this logic can be exposed and dismantled. Here, we are treated to the following quotation from an unidentified Chilean peasant: "They used to say we were unproductive because we were lazy and drunkards. All lies. Now that we are respected as men, we're going to show everyone that we were never drunkards or lazy. We were exploited!" (50). And, in another example, where workers in Santiago were asked to discuss two pictures—one of a drunken man walking on the street and another of three young men talking on a street corner—Freire records the workers' open identification with and defense of the drunken man. For Freire, this response proves the value of the problem-posing method, which in this instance allowed the workers to say "what they really felt" (111). Although it may not be pleasing to learn, in this case, that the workers defend drunkenness, conscientization begins with the subjective perception of the world of lived experience and then "through action prepares men for the struggle against the obstacles

to their humanization" (112). Thus, in the first example, the Chilean peasants come to see that they never were drunkards, but rather were oppressed; in the second, the workers from Santiago have taken their first steps toward changing their lives by objectifying and naming their own way of being in the world. In both cases, it seems, the drunken consciousness is on its way to sobering up.

Freire offers up these examples of spontaneous assent as illustrations of the positive effects of his practice; we just have to take his word for it that the workers in these learning situations were saying "what they really felt"—on the assumption, perhaps, that the illiterate and downtrodden can only speak without guile or nuance or that Freire, in some way, knows how to divine when such authentic speech has occurred. Of course, in order to maintain the essential distinction between the two pedagogical approaches, Freire must insist that those on the receiving end of his problem-posing pedagogy are free to come to whatever conclusions they like because his teaching method leeches the power dynamic out of the teacher-student relationship. Acknowledging that all teachers have "values which influence their perceptions," Freire adamantly insists that the only value his teachers seek to share with the oppressed "is a critical perception of the world, which implies a correct method of approaching reality in order to unveil it" (103). Given Freire's examples of the ever-pliable peasantry and the force of his own argument, however, it is hard to believe that the "critical perception of the world" he seeks to impart through the problem-posing method is meant to produce anything other than a new citizenry with a shared set of values. What else could be the outcome of teaching others the ways to "unveil" reality, to shed their "false consciousness," to "cut the umbilical cord of magic and myth which binds them to the world of oppression" (176)?

One reason that Freire's pedagogy has so much appeal is that it comes armed with a rhetoric that overwhelms and neutralizes any effort to point out this tension between the Freirian insistence on a collaborative methodology, where people are taught not what to think but how, and a practice that, almost magically, produces people who know exactly what to think about injustice and how it should be redressed. Freire explains that those who resist his pedagogy with the complaint that they are being led by the hand to certain foregone conclusions respond in this way because they have begun "to realize that if their analysis of the situation goes any deeper they will either have to divest themselves of their myths, or reaffirm them" (155). Since divestment involves the painful process of renouncing whatever privilege it is that one has acquired, Freire continues, some choose instead to "reaffirm" their myths by accusing his pedagogy of "their own usual practices: *steering, conquering, and invading*" (155). In other words, with this brilliant reversal, Freire argues that those who feel that they are not, in fact, free or equal collaborators in his venture are the ones most lost to "false consciousness"—they are, in effect, the bankers among us.

As Freire would have it, "well-intentioned professionals" are the ones most likely to fall prey to this way of thinking: they understand that following out his

method of analysis would require that they "cease being *over* or *inside* (as foreigners) in order to be *with* (as comrades)" and they are afraid (154). Borrowing a phrase from Althusser, Freire then goes on to say that, although these professionals are "men who have been 'determined from above' by a culture of domination which has constituted them as dual beings," and despite the fact that they "are in truth more misguided than anything else, they not only could be, but ought to be, reclaimed by the revolution" (156). In effect, then, Freire, the educator, is saying that it is those who have been most successful in school who are the ones most likely to be deeply wedded to the ideology that stands in the way of communal action. And, were it not for Freire's reassurance that even these professionals can and should be "reclaimed by the revolution," it might appear that he feels professionally trained educators are unsalvageable since they have been so successfully confused by the dominant logic.

Again, what puzzles me is why this vision of teaching and the rhetoric that surrounds it should appeal to teachers, particularly teachers of reading and writing. Why, as a profession, would we be drawn to an approach that depicts professionals in such a negative light? Is it the institutionally marginalized position of composition instruction that allows us to see ourselves as beyond the reach of Freire's critique? Do we imagine ourselves as somehow outside the very system that employs us to instruct entering students in the language arts? Is there something about literacy work that makes its practitioners immune to the desires for advancement upon which hierarchical systems depend? Or is this just a story teachers like to tell themselves about themselves—a way to make it from semester to semester that preserves the teacher's sense of self-esteem? And, thus, is the appeal of the image of teacher as liberator itself proof that liberatory teachers are, in fact, filled with the very false consciousness that they're determined to eradicate in others?

BENEATH THE RHETORIC OF RELEASE: STUDENTS SILENTLY MAKING THE GRADE

In *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, James Scott sets out to disrupt the discussion about false consciousness by arguing that all social action involves the performance of a "public transcript" and a "hidden transcript." As Scott defines these two modes of discourse, the public transcript serves "as a shorthand way of describing the open interaction between subordinates and those who dominate" (2); it is a text that rarely fails to "provide convincing evidence for the hegemony of dominant values, for the hegemony of dominant discourse" (4). If the public transcript is, by definition, always available for inspection, the hidden transcript describes the discourse "that takes place 'offstage,' beyond direct observation by powerholders," and for this reason, Scott insists, "whatever form it assumes—offstage parody, dreams of violent

revenge, millennial visions of a world turned upside down—this collective hidden transcript is essential to any dynamic view of power relations" (4, 9).

It is Scott's provocative contention that, because the analysis of power has focused almost exclusively on the public transcript, it has, to this point, ceaselessly produced evidence that the disempowered willingly and thoughtlessly participate in the system that insures their own subordination. Proof of this domination is always everywhere ready to hand in the public transcript: it's on the news, it's in the libraries, it's in the critique of mass culture; it's there to be ferreted out of the sales figures for televisions, VCRs, minivans, cellular phones, home security systems; it's in our students' papers, which never seem to tire of mindlessly reproducing "original" arguments about the virtues of individuality, hard work, self-determination. Focusing exclusively on the public transcript, in short, supports the view that subordinates are, in fact, mired in false consciousness; it supports as well the corollary belief that it is the job of the media and their analysts, including the functionaries in the academy, to make sense of the world for those less well able, translating the chaos of experience into a digestible and entertaining form that ultimately serves to reinforce the status quo. Scott disrupts this familiar depiction of the world gone wrong by observing that it rests on the assumption that there are those who misperceive reality and those who perceive it clearly, those with false consciousness and those with a scientific or true understanding of social reality. Drawing on his notion of a hidden transcript, though, Scott rejects what he calls the "thick version" of false consciousness, which casts subordinates as actively believing "in the values that explain and justify their own subordination," and the "thin version" of false consciousness, which argues that subordinates comply with the social order because they have come to accept that it "is natural and inevitable" (72). Although subordinates neither consent nor resign themselves to their fate, Scott argues, they do reliably collaborate in the production of a public transcript which creates the impression that they have accepted the tenets of the dominant ideology. They do this, he says, to avoid any "*explicit* display of insubordination" (86). Thus, so long as we are without access to the subordinates' "hidden transcript," so long as we are ignorant of what they say or think when they are outside the reach of those in power, we are left only with the image of the subordinates "on their best behavior," doing what is called for in order not to put themselves in harm's way (87). Off-stage, though, subordinates rehearse "the anger and reciprocal aggression denied by the presence of domination" (37–38), jointly creating "a discourse of dignity, of negation, of justice" (114). Away from the boss, away from the classroom, away from the oppressor's gaze, we all fantasize about alternative world orders.

Obviously, Scott is no easier to argue with than Freire. Where Freire argues that proof of one's false consciousness may be found in one's rejection of his ideas, Scott's sleight of hand is to maintain that proof of his theory's validity is to be found in the fact that the archives, home to the public transcript, house almost no evi-

dence of the private transcript! Absence equals presence. As Scott puts it, "the logic of infrapolitics is to leave few traces in the wake of its passage. By covering its tracks it not only minimizes the risks its practitioners run but it also eliminates much of the documentary evidence that might convince social scientists and historians that real politics was taking place" (200). Regardless of whether one finds this line of reasoning suggestive or solipsistic, it is important to recognize that the circularity of Scott's argument (proof of the hidden transcript's existence is to be found in its absence from the public transcript) leads to an understanding of what constitutes a "real politics" that differs markedly from the understanding produced by the circularities in Freire's argument. For, unlike Freire, Scott insists that, in comparing the subordinate and dominant classes, it is

> more accurate to consider subordinate classes *less* constrained at the level of thought and ideology [than the dominant classes], since they can in secluded settings speak with comparative safety, and *more* constrained at the level of political action and struggle, where the daily exercise of power sharply limits the options available to them. (91)

With this startling reversal, Scott relocates his version of false consciousness—that is, being more constrained at the level of thought and ideology—among the dominant classes; indeed, as he sees it, there is an inverse proportion between one's freedom to think and one's ability to function visibly as a political agent. The higher one climbs the social ladder, the more one must, in all phases of one's life, ascribe to the dominant ideology, the more confined are those spaces for voicing one's doubts about that ideology, the more one must see oneself as always on stage. And the lower one goes on that ladder, the less one must ascribe to party lines and ideological pieties, the freer one is to imagine other viable social arrangements, the less likely one is to be in a position to bring those utopian visions to pass.

Scott finds proof for this part of his theory in the fact that, historically, subordinates have repeatedly given voice to imaginative renderings that depict the collapse of the current dominant system and its replacement by a more just system; if one looks hard enough, one is sure to find in every cultural milieu a version of the idea that, someday, the last shall be first and the first shall be last. This is because, as Scott sees it, subordinates have no difficulty *imagining* a "counterfactual social order," one that involves either "a total reversal of the existing distribution of status and rewards" or the negation of "the existing social order" (80–81)—this capability is "part and parcel of the religiopolitical equipment of historically disadvantaged groups" (91). Thus, it is a mistake to think that subordinates have been so thoroughly colonized that they cannot conceive of or desire a better world. It is more accurate to say that they have no access to the channels of social power that might bring this better world into being. And, following this logic, we might say that it is not that students have been so mystified by the Ideological State Apparatus of higher education that they can't see or understand how the system has been designed to deprive them of a sense of individual autonomy. It is, rather, that they are

powerless to change the system and know only too well its ability to punish them for not complying with its demands. So they do what is required of them, slipping in enough of the hidden transcript to preserve their sense of self-respect: they write papers that lifelessly respond to the assignment; they contradict themselves, saying what they want to say and what they think the teacher wants them to say at the same time; they publicly announce their interest in the work at hand while manifesting no visible sign that their interest requires anything from them. They hunker down and try to get by.

Of course, in making this analogy between subordinates and students, the oppressed and those paying individuals seated in our classes trying to earn their degrees in business, say, I have opened myself to the criticism that I am trivializing the manifest differences between the two groups. Freire, as previously noted, wasn't concerned with teaching first-year college students the nuances of academic prose or the virtues of the expository essay. His work was with illiterate peasants who were struggling to combat their government's oppressive policies. And Scott, too, is generally more interested in forms of domination which carry the threat of physical violence, such as "slavery, serfdom, and the caste system [which] routinely generate practices and rituals of denigration, insult, and assaults on the body" (23). It would be foolish to equate the challenges Freire has confronted in the field or the oppressive situations that interest Scott with the challenges we face teaching composition in the academy: we teach those who have already found their way into the system, those who wish, at some level, to gain access to the material benefits that higher education is understood to promise. But, in making this analogy, I do not mean to imply the general commensurability of systems of oppression; rather, by noting that students occupy a subordinate position in the educational system, I mean only to suggest that they, too, have their "hidden transcripts" where they store their reservations about what is happening to them in the classroom.

I also mean to suggest that, however tempting it may be to describe our work as teachers as being pursued in the interests of "liberation" or "consciousness-raising" or "resistance," the truth is that this rhetoric's appeal is so attractive because it covers over our more primary role as functionaries of the administration's educational arm. In the right setting, we can forget that we are the individuals vested with the responsibility for soliciting and assessing student work; we can imagine that power has left the room at the moment the student announces the insight, "we're going to show everyone that we were never drunkards or lazy. We were exploited!"; we can convince ourselves to accept whatever gets said at face value. The students, however, never forget where they are, no matter how carefully we arrange the desks in the classroom, how casually we dress, how open we are to disagreement, how politely we respond to their journal entries, their papers, their portfolios. They don't forget; we often do.

This is not to imply that no "authentic" interactions can occur within the space of the classroom or, conversely, that all interactions in that space are necessarily

duplicitous, cynical, self-serving, or self-protective. I think it more accurate to say that we will never know, in any absolute sense, if the work our students do is "authentic" or if that work reflects their achieved level of "consciousness." Indeed, I would argue that the prevailing desire to re-construct the scene of instruction as a site where authenticity is forged and layers of false consciousness are peeled away indicates a general commitment in our profession to imagining that the power dynamic in the teacher-student relationship can, under ideal conditions, be erased. Thus, Freire presents the recipients of his pedagogy as coming to their own conclusions, as learning to think for themselves. He doesn't linger over the fact that all this self-motivated thinking leads his students to think exactly what he would like them to think; he doesn't imagine that, possibly, his students are mouthing his pieties, silently collaborating in the production of the desired public transcript and then sneaking back home where they are free to question his lessons or force others to accept them or forget them altogether. And Althusser invokes those few teachers who work against ideology ("They are a kind of hero," he tells us), while lamenting the fact that the majority of instructors little suspect that their labor "contributes to the maintenance and nourishment of this ideological representation of the School, which makes the School today as 'natural,' indispensable—useful and even beneficial for our contemporaries"—as the Church was in the days of old (157). Althusser doesn't think it possible that these benighted teachers might have reservations about the educational system, but know the professional consequences of giving voice to those reservations. Nor does he suspect that he too might have been captured by the ideology that draws people to the teaching profession, where the ideal pedagogue is in fact typically cast as the one who works against the system, critical of its movements, free of its impurities, allied with science and reason rather than myth and folklore.

While Freire and Althusser thus struggle, in different ways, to establish the possibility that the classroom can indeed function as the site of authentic engagement, Scott argues that, historically, the classroom has promoted "radicalism" precisely because it has served so well as a scene of betrayal. That is, because the classroom is the place that promotes "the implicit promise of the dominant ideology (If you work hard, obey authority, do well in school, and keep your nose clean you will advance by merit and have satisfying work)," it functions to encourage students to conform, to make sacrifices, and to develop often highly unrealistic expectations about what the future holds for them (107). And, when those expectations are not realized—when a good job isn't waiting at the end of all those years of smiling subservience—a general, almost palpable sense of betrayal spreads among those who formerly believed in the dominant ideology. (Think, for instance, of the prevailing mood among those about to enter the academic job market.) And for this reason Scott sees the gravest threat to hegemony as resting not with the oppressed masses, but rather with those individuals who have worked their way up through

the system, believing all the rhetoric about equality, liberty, opportunity, and merit, only to have those beliefs betrayed by a system dominated by glass ceilings, old-boy networks, off-stage agreements, and double-dealing administrators.

Scott momentarily entertains the idea that the potential for radical institutional change resides in this untapped reservoir of betrayed individuals: "the system may have most to fear from those subordinates among whom the institutions of hegemony have been most successful" (107). Perhaps this is an instant when Scott's own "hidden transcript" surfaces in his argument, a place where he can revel in the subordinate's familiar fantasy that raging against the machine constitutes a viable politics. For whatever reason, Scott quickly drops this detour into the roots of radicalism and returns to his original concern—how one cultivates the arts of resistance when revolutionary transformation is out of the question. His value to us here lies precisely in this refusal to lead us down the path to revolution: that is, his refusal to repeat the pieties of those committed to the liberatory project allows him to focus on the actual actions and experiences of those who labor under conditions of constraint. The classroom is, of course, one such place where the labor of others—both teachers and students—is constrained to meet the demands of outside forces. It is to that compromised space that we must now turn our attention.

RUPTURING THE PUBLIC TRANSCRIPT: "ALL MY MOST BRILLIANT PROFESSORS ARE TRULY MEDIOCRE TEACHERS"

Although Scott is, as I've already noted, generally concerned with more repressive forms of domination than those found in the classroom, he does invoke the teacher's mastery as an example of a particular kind of authority, one that "can tolerate a remarkably high level of practical nonconformity so long as it does not actually tear the public fabric of hegemony" (204). Thus, the teacher can lecture about the beauty of literature or the politics of literacy or the liberatory powers of the cultural studies paradigm, say, knowing all the while that the students aren't paying attention, aren't taking notes, aren't even listening. As long as no one actually stops the class to say it's all nonsense or to perform some other public gesture of contempt, the teacher's role as the ultimate arbiter of meaning is never really in danger. Any student who has made it to college knows these rules of behavior and knows, as well, the boundaries of permissible signs of disengagement (or learns them soon enough): eyes may close, pencils may doodle or be laid to rest, in some classes newspapers may be allowed to open, heads even may go down. Snoring, listening to headsets, audibly parroting the teacher's remarks are all ill-advised, as is—in most cases—openly contesting the teacher's point of view. The classroom can tolerate all manner of nonconformity, but every classroom has its limit, whether it be the expression of doubt about the virtue of the academic enterprise, open speculation about the teacher's qualifications for running the class, or insistent disre-

spect for the methods of assigning and assessing the work the students produce. At some point, every teacher must enforce the boundary between the concerns of the hidden transcript, where students regularly rehearse their misgivings about the education they're receiving, and the public transcript, where the virtues of the educational system are taken for granted.

The violation of this boundary can be quite shocking, but it is important to recognize that the shock arises not because the public revelation of the hidden transcript discloses unknown information but rather because, in the act itself, the revelation threatens to "tear the public fabric of hegemony." Thus, if we take, for example, the frustrated student who suddenly "goes off" in class—announcing he's only taking the expository writing course because it's required, that he was graded more fairly in high school, that all this writing about culture has nothing to do with what he plans to do with his life—it is safe to say that nothing in the content of what the student has said can be construed as surprising; rather, what grabs everyone's attention is the fact that the student has chosen to make this statement within his teacher's hearing. Or, to refer to a recent example from my own experience, when I summoned a graduate student to my office to discuss the open disrespect he had shown his peers in our Teaching Seminar by reading through the course catalogue during their presentations, the content of the graduate student's response was not shocking, but the fact that he shared that content with me was. He said he really had no interest in pedagogy, but had come to the university to study literature. He told me he was taking the course because it was what was required of him to be eligible for funding. And then he said, "all my most brilliant professors are truly mediocre teachers." In the silence that followed, we were both embarrassed, I think, by the fact that he made this final statement in my presence. To quell such "revolts" we teachers often do what we do best: we start talking. Perhaps we are solicitous, perhaps not. Perhaps we invite the student to reflect on the assumptions that inform the stated critique, perhaps we tell the student exactly what those assumptions are and why they are so pernicious. But the goal, more often than we care to admit, I'd say, is to restore order, return to the lesson plan, get the hidden transcript back offstage and out of sight.

One essay that seems to go out of its way to transgress the boundary that separates what can and what cannot be said about the culture of schooling is Richard Rodriguez's frequently anthologized "The Achievement of Desire." In this piece, Rodriguez recounts how disorienting his academic success has been for him: the son of Mexican immigrants, Rodriguez describes his increasing alienation from his parents as he began to excel at school, his growing embarrassment at their broken English, their apparent ignorance, their impoverished state. Mechanically devoting himself to his studies, Rodriguez rises through the ranks, goes to graduate school to study Renaissance literature, wins a scholarship to pursue research at the British Museum. To all outward appearances, he would seem to have realized the American

Dream; inwardly, though, Rodriguez is consumed with doubt about what he has done and where it has taken him. He feels that he has betrayed his parents and that he has been betrayed by a system that has left him incapable of producing anything but "pedantic, lifeless, unassailable prose" (499). He is, in short, the very kind of person that Scott would be willing to describe as having "false consciousness," one of those trusting people who "made sacrifices of self-discipline and control and developed expectations that were usually betrayed" (Scott 107).

When I first assigned Rodriguez in my composition courses, I was surprised at the amount of hostility that students unleashed in response to his essay. Far from seeing Rodriguez's reflection on the long-term effects of schooling and the consequences of committing oneself to always pleasing the teacher as an invitation to air their own critiques of institutionalized education, the students responded, as a rule, by accusing Rodriguez of being a traitor to his parents, his heritage, even his teachers. One didn't have to sacrifice anything to do well in school, the students would say; indeed, many went out of their way to demonstrate that as far as they were concerned doing well in school was all but irrelevant to how they thought about the world, related to others, moved through the social sphere. And thus, in their own rush to rehearse again the lines about the virtues of education drawn from the public transcript, they transformed Rodriguez into a two-time loser: first, for betraying his parents and his heritage; and second, for allowing his education to play such a large role in his life that it shaped who he was and how he thought about himself and the world. As one of Rodriguez's more vocal critics put it: "The way in which he treats his parents angers me, he is so obsessed with his studies that he neglects his parents and his childhood. In the second grade all I remember was having fun with friends, feeling love from my parents and always respecting my parents. This punk shows no love to his parents, and that is what I can't understand. . . . I see his parents in my mind. They are just like my parents, and I feel like hugging them and telling them that they are great parents. At the same time I feel like taking Rodriguez and wringing his neck."

It's hard to know what to make of such responses. For my purposes, though, they are of interest because, on the surface at least, they appear to articulate a desire about how schooling should function—that is, that schools should restrict themselves to providing "know-how" and that they should not disturb one's place in the world. And such responses suggest a fear that schools do not actually function in this isolated way, but rather produce (or reinforce) an estrangement from one's past, an uncertainty about one's place in the world, a resigned sense that what one must give up during the educational process can never be recovered. While this fear of education's disruptive powers is something that Freire and Scott would both agree is well warranted, Rodriguez concludes his essay by declaring that it is his education that has allowed him to see the consequences of his own academic success: "If, because of my schooling, I had grown culturally separated from my parents, my

education finally had given me ways of speaking and caring about that fact" (585). What many students and teachers can't forgive Rodriguez for is his public insistence that education inevitably alienates one in these ways and that this is one of the appeals of scholarly work.

So, when confronted with this argument, the students put on a good show of being shocked that Rodriguez was attracted to something that created a barrier between himself and his family. They are less sure, though, about how to respond to Rodriguez's critical description of schooling; for good reason, they are wary, knowing that to speak openly in class of what one loses through academic advancement (or of what one gains in the way that Rodriguez does) is to risk rupturing the public transcript about education's unquestioned virtues. And so, rather than have this piece of the hidden transcript of schooling make its way onto the public stage, the students collaborate in repairing the rupture and rise, in unison, to the defense of self-determination, freedom, individuality. They argue that being good at school need not change one in any substantial way; they insist that this son of immigrants could have had the best of both worlds; they declare that the rewards of a loving family far outweigh whatever benefits one might receive from mastering the scholarly apparatus. They lay it on thick. And, in the right context, everyone can sigh with relief that a catastrophe has been averted.

TO TEACH AND TO LIVE IN A BUREAUCRATIC WORLD: ON THE USES OF INSTITUTIONAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Between the poles of these two representations of schooling as either radically liberating and empowering or ceaselessly oppressive and instrumentalist, one finds a vast, unexplored territory—the fraught, compromised world where all of our classes are actually convened. I have detailed the attractions and the perils of the rhetorics of liberation and violation most frequently deployed in analyses of the political consequences of teaching; in closing I would like to suggest that, in order for students to begin to imagine other ways of framing their experience of schooling, they must first be given an opportunity to formulate a more nuanced understanding of how power gets exercised in the social sphere. And for this to happen, we must provide them with opportunities to discover the virtues of discursive versatility, by which I mean the ability to speak, read, and write persuasively across a wide range of social contexts. Lest this sound like a refurbished but thinly disguised call to renew our commitment to rhetorical instruction, let me make clear that I am interested in promoting a fluency in the languages of the bureaucratic systems that regulate all our lives; a familiarity with the logics, styles of argumentation, repositories of evidence deployed by these organizational bodies; a fuller understanding of what can and cannot be gained through discursive exchanges, with a concomitant recalibration of the horizon of expectations. Were I a polemicist, I might say what I was after is

a pragmatic pedagogy, one grounded in "the arts of complicity, duplicity, and compromise," the very same arts that are deployed, with such enervating effect, by the host of social, bureaucratic, and corporate institutions that govern all our lives.

But, if Scott is right in positing the existence of a hidden transcript that runs alongside the public transcript, it would seem that there is little need for inaugurating this pragmatic pedagogy: that is, according to Scott's theory, everyone already has a sensitivity to context and learns, through the process of familiarization, where and with whom it is safe to speak openly and when discretion is the better part of valor. The goal of a pragmatic pedagogy, though, is not to create discursive versatility where none existed before; it is, rather, to build on the discursive versatility that our very humanity has bestowed upon us. Thus, with regard to the classroom, the goal is not to teach the students that there is a difference between the literate practices valued in the academic and domestic spheres: undergraduates are already well aware of this differential valuation and its consequences. (Rodriguez is hardly exceptional in being able to detect this difference the moment he entered *primary* school.) The problem, thus, is not that students are unaware of the conflicts between these competing spheres, but that, within the space of the classroom, their very sensitivity to the differing contexts manifests itself, more often than not, either as silence or as open assent to the teacher's position. And, as every teacher who has heard the exasperated plea, "just tell me what you want and I'll do it," knows, when the students set out to conform to what they believe are the teacher's expectations, more often than not they simultaneously convey the impression that what a teacher finds most pleasing is the fully compliant, obedient, perhaps even unthinking student. As Scott explains, all students have been taught the consequences of not assuming this pose: "One deserter shot, one assertive slave whipped, one unruly student rebuked; these acts are meant as public events for an audience of subordinates. They are intended as a kind of preemptive strike to nip in the bud any further challenges of the existing frontier" (197).

And, of course, as teachers we too are subject to the demands of the classroom drama, which requires that we meet the ambient expectations about what it means to teach and to be an authority on one's subject. Thus, we are quick to cover our own ignorance, talk over our own confusion, hide our own doubts about the rewards of learning because, if we act otherwise, we would risk rending education's public transcript by exposing the highly credentialed person at the front of the room as nothing more than a fraud. Under such learning conditions, it is hard to know what lasting lesson anyone is getting from the experience, beyond sustained instruction in the ways educated people are meant to carry themselves in public. This is, to be sure, an important lesson, but it's one that's all about the deadening effects of formal compliance—a lesson that leaves no room for thinking about the range of permissible forms of action that can occur within the flexibly bounded, inevitably permeable space of enforced compliance.

By providing a forum for teachers to discuss what actually occurs in their classrooms, composition studies has helped to show that there are other roles for the teacher to occupy besides unquestioned master and final arbiter of meaning. The discipline's abiding interest in reconsidering how power and authority are distributed and conferred in the classroom reflects a genuine desire on the part of the majority of its members to be seen as working to undermine an overarching system that is hierarchically organized ("We'll sit in a circle," I say), status-conscious ("Please, just call me Richard"), exclusive ("Everyone's opinion is valued here"). Similarly, the waxings and wanings of the discipline's debate about whether composition instruction should introduce students to academic discourse or help them articulate and generate insights about their personal experiences reveal a constitutive ambivalence in the workforce about what it means to write in the academy: when you teach composition, are you working for the system or against it? This ambivalence about the status of our work is easy enough to understand. After all, since composition is situated on the margins of the academy, in the borderland of remedial and basic instruction, it is regularly staffed by people who know firsthand how casually and quietly the bureaucratic system of higher education parcels out economic injustice. Why prepare students to produce work that is valued by such a system? Why not teach them to resist, to intervene, to dismantle?

I don't believe that these two activities are mutually exclusive—that preparing a student to succeed in business, say, is incompatible with the project of teaching a student to think about the effects of discriminatory hiring practices. In the current fraught environment, though, I've stopped trying to convince teachers and teachers-in-training about the "merits of complicity" through argument: with the seductive rhetorics of liberation and resistance in the air, I've learned that it isn't long before the conversation produces charges that I'm selling out, cashing in my ideals, kissing up to the man. To circumvent this thoroughly familiar exchange, where the principled work of education in this corner squares off against the mercenary interests of the business world in the other, I've designed an assignment that asks teachers-in-training to write in the entirely unfamiliar (perhaps nonexistent) genre of the institutional autobiography, a genre which unites the seemingly opposed worlds of the personal—where one is free, unique, and outside of history—and the institutional—where one is constrained, anonymous, and imprisoned by the accretion of past practices. In this genre, the conventional questions that reside at the heart of the autobiographical enterprise about how one has become the person one has, overcome the obstacles one has, achieved what one has, get inflected in such a way that the concern becomes locating one's narrative within a specific institutional context. So inflected, the questions become: What experiences have led you to teach, study, read, and write in the ways you do? What institutional policies have promoted or inhibited your success?

When I assigned this project in a graduate seminar this past summer, I didn't know what I'd get in return and the students weren't sure what to produce. We had

watched the film *Dangerous Minds* and critiqued Hollywood's fascination with producing classroom narratives of conversion and redemption; we had noted the prevalence of this narrative at our own conferences and in our journals where, as one student put it, after some initial difficulties, the teacher-hero gets down to the business of "liberating right, left, and center." Critiquing the master narrative was easy enough; the challenge lay in figuring out how to work within and against its constraints simultaneously, acknowledging but not overstating the influence of past teachers and one's own work in the classroom. Although the students had no models for how to do this at their immediate disposal, they were not working in a vacuum; I encouraged them to return to the archives—their own personal archive, including the papers, notes, and other pedagogical paraphernalia they'd saved, and the public record, including transcripts, graduation requirements, professional correspondence, and so forth—to unearth material evidence of past practices. I also had the students read a set of texts that focus on the institutional constraints that shape the business of higher education: Ian Hunter's *Rethinking the School*, Robin Varnum's *Fencing with Words*, Howard Tinberg's *Border Talk*, and David Tyack and Larry Cuban's *Tinkering Toward Utopia*. Then I stood back and waited to see what would happen.

One of the teachers responded to the assignment by recounting how she moved from being a part-time instructor on the fringes of her home institution to being a full-time member of her department as a result of the governor's decision to commit the state's educational system to technological innovation. Surrounded by others who were understandably reluctant, in the early eighties, to learn about computers and computerized instruction, this teacher volunteered to give it a try and slowly made her way to seemingly permanent employment, only to learn that, in the competitive market of the late nineties, she needed to show progress toward the doctorate to maintain her position. Neither wholly the victor nor the victim in this process, this teacher concluded her institutional autobiography with this observation:

> I know I am a better teacher than I would have been if technology hadn't interfered. That technology, forced into my teaching career by the bureaucracy, pushed me to "see" writing courses and writing itself in a new framework. That new framework emphasized my lack of knowledge in a subject I was struggling to teach and forced me to read, research, and realize how much more I needed to know.

Though this teacher had begun the course by describing herself as working in a state educational system that was ruled by bankers and businessmen, by the end of the semester she had revised her story so that it could account for the relative freedom she had experienced while working within a system governed by shifting and arbitrary requirements.

This is not to say, though, that this is an ideal story or that it is one with a happy ending. The state educational system that employs this teacher continues to be dependent on the whims of corporate culture; she finds her classes filled with students who are driven by an interest in financial success that she does not share; and

her own ongoing employment is contingent upon her upgrading her credentials—a requirement that means she must move away from her family while she does her coursework. Pointing out the manifest injustices of this situation may be personally cathartic; it does not, however, alter the fact that the most pressing problem this teacher confronts is how to construct an inhabitable and hospitable life within these constraining conditions. There are those who would use this situation to raise once more the call to overthrow the system; others would say that the teacher has no choice but to roll over and take it. I would suggest, however, that none of us knows for certain what lies ahead for this teacher, her institution, or the state she works in. We don't know what will happen. All we know for sure is that the future will be like the past in that it will ceaselessly demand of us all that we improvise solutions to problems we never imagined possible.

Far from being powerless, as teachers who have years of experience in this frequently capricious and indifferent system for distributing social privilege, we are actually very well positioned to assist our students in acquiring the skills necessary for persisting in the ongoing project of navigating life in a bureaucracy. Specifically, we can teach them how to work within and against discursive constraints simultaneously, thereby helping them to experience the mediated access to "authenticity" that social action allows. Having our students develop this kind of discursive versatility won't serve to knock down or permanently remove the barrier that will always separate the public and the hidden transcripts, nor will it necessarily produce supporters of the kind of social justice Freire envisions. Rather, the more modest goal of the pragmatic pedagogy I've outlined here is to provide our students with the opportunity to speak, read, and write in a wider range of discursive contexts than is available to them when they labor under the codes of silence and manufactured consent that serve to define the lived experience of subordinates in the culture of schooling. If, through this process, the students learn how to register their reservations about academic practice in ways that can be heard as reasoned arguments rather than dismissed as the plaintive bleating of sheep, if they learn to pose their questions about the work before them in ways that invite response, and if, finally, they learn how to listen to and learn from the responses they receive, they may well be in a better position to negotiate the complex social and intellectual experiences that await them just beyond the classroom's walls. There is no knowing if the students will, in fact, be in this better position at some future moment, but this is the goal. It is only the polemical rhetoric that surrounds the discussion of pedagogical practice that would lead us to expect that any more definite outcome could be guaranteed.

WORKS CITED

Althusser, Louis. "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards an Investigation)." *For Marx.* Trans. Ben Brewster. London: Allen Lane, 1969. 127–86.

Berlin, James. "Not a Conclusion: A Conversation." *Into the Field: Sites of Composition Studies.* Ed. Anne Ruggles Gere. New York: MLA, 1993. 193–206.

Berthoff, Ann. E. *Reclaiming the Imagination.* Upper Montclair, NJ: Boynton/Cook, 1984.

Bizzell, Patricia. *Academic Discourse and Critical Consciousness.* Pittsburgh, U of Pittsburgh P, 1992.

Elbow, Peter. "Pedagogy of the Bamboozled." *Embracing Contraries.* New York: Oxford UP, 1986. 85–98.

Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed.* 1968. Trans. Myra Bergman Ramos. New York: Continuum, 1989.

hooks, bell. *Teaching to Transgress.* New York: Routledge, 1994.

Kutz, Eleanor, and Hephzibah Roskelly. *An Unquiet Pedagogy: Transforming Practice in the English Classroom.* Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook-Heinemann, 1991.

McCormick, Kathleen. "Always Already Theorists: Literary Theory and Theorizing in the Undergraduate Curriculum." *Pedagogy is Politics: Literary Theory and Critical Teaching.* Ed. Maria-Regina Kecht. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1992. 111–31.

North, Stephen M. "Rhetoric, Responsibility, and the 'Language of the Left.'" *Composition & Resistance.* Ed. C. Mark Hurlbert and Michael Blitz. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook, 1991. 127–36.

Rodriguez, Richard. "The Achievement of Desire." Rpt. in *Ways of Reading.* Ed. David Bartholomae and Anthony Petrosky. 3d ed. Boston: Bedford, 1993. 481–504.

Scott, James C. *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts.* New Haven: Yale UP, 1990.

Shor, Ira, ed. *Freire for the Classroom: A Sourcebook for Liberatory Teaching.* Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook, 1987.

Tompkins, Jane. "Pedagogy of the Distressed." *College English* 52.6 (October 1990): 653–60.