Beyond Expressionism and Discipline-Specific Writing: Negotiating a Postmodern Landscape

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In "Foucault and the Freshman Writer," Kurt Spellmeyer invokes the speakers of Foucault's "Discourse on Language" to suggest, one might say, the Bosporus straits through which students of composition must pass: on the one side, *Inclination*, "dream[ing] of a language without prohibitions, where writers can assume any roles they please," a pure expressivism over which the shadow of correctness and inhibition has not yet fallen; on the other side, *Institution*, holding out "the safety of roles prepared in advance of speech itself," locating discourse as within a "natural order," an aggregate of language conventions in which and through which the speaker is conferred meaning (716). Although Spellmeyer applies his tri-chotomy (the third persona shall appear shortly) to discourse itself, this cast of characters can also serve as a metaphor for the field of composition itself within which the Siren of Expressionism and the Siren of Writing-in-the-Disciplines compete from their own rocky shores. At the mercy of either personal expression or academic discourse, the speaking "I" (Foucault's third character) has little chance of coming to voice.

The terrain of present-day composition studies is vexed and problematic to all but true believers—and that is, postmodernists might contend, exactly as it should be. What I wish to argue here, however, is that both the unproblematized conception of student voice in expressionism as privileged, authentic, and free, and the erasure of voice suggested by social constructionist pedagogy in which student utterance becomes the ventriloquism of a discourse community, are inherently disabling. Yet each does provide a landmark to steer by. In surveying this landscape and selectively re-reading two major trends in composition, I will construct—or constrain—an expressionist/social constructionist binary in order to negotiate a course through it.
Expressionism as “Inclination,” A Liberation Theology (Not)

It is now often forgotten that when expressionism burst upon the scene in the 1970’s, it provided a liberating alternative to existing composition theory and practice; namely, current-traditionalism and the rational humanist principles upon which it was based. Where current-traditionalism regarded reality as cut and dried, truth as “clearly and distinctly available to the person who views it in the proper spirit,” and knowledge “communicable in clear and distinct terms,” expressionism posited a world in which disagreement was not merely a product of “faulty observation” or “faulty language” but also the natural result of differences among perceivers’ selves (Berlin, Rhetoric 11). Where current-traditionalism extended the opportunity for rational discourse and intellectual progress, expressionism held out the possibility of self-discovery, insight, and growth. Where current-traditionalism offered students a pedagogy of drill, imitation, and rational analysis, expressionism promised expressive freedom, revelation, and even voice.

Although it has roots in American transcendentalism and depth psychology, the most significant influences on expressionism are the human potential movements contemporary with its inception—particularly Maslowian and Rogerian psychology. For this reason, expressionism subtly shares many of the same aims and assumptions of humanistic psychology: it postulates a unified, approachable (though elusive) self which one can “get in touch with”; it assumes that creativity and human fulfillment are enhanced the closer one’s proximity to the self; and it aims, through process, to provide the writer with greater authenticity and insight. Through expressivist methodology (such as freewriting, introspective journal-keeping, and revision), one gains access to and is empowered by the self. Although this undertaking is difficult and demands the willingness to “work in the dark, not be in a hurry, and have faith” (Elbow, Writing 312), it rewards the writer by endowing him or her with a distinctive “voice,” a pivotal concept in expressionist pedagogy.

This hard-earned voice—like an inimitable fingerprint of the psyche different for each individual—is the “authentic voice” of Donald Stewart’s The Authentic Voice; and the “one’s own voice” of Peter Elbow’s “The Pleasures of Voice.” It includes “the powers of the conscious and unconscious” and is “distinctive and original” (Hairston 19). The acquisition of voice through writing plays a role comparable to self-guided psycho-
therapy. As Stewart puts it, through “self-discovery” students acquire voice, “a kind of revelation in which you not only begin to see yourself through the eyes of others, but also acquire a fundamental sense of individuality, which transcends the roles you play in life” (Versatile 8). As in the human potential movements, this primacy of self and voice in expressionism lead directly to claims of uniqueness and individuality:

Your authentic voice . . . sets you apart from every other living human being despite the number of common or shared experiences you have with others; it is not a copy of someone else’s way of speaking or of perceiving the world. It is your way . . . (Stewart, Versatile 9)

Expressionism has of course been subjected to attack on a number of fronts—practical, pedagogical, and philosophical. A brief review of the charges is in order here. To begin, expressionism assumes that students already have within them what it takes to write well, as Burton Hatlen observes, and that self-expression is a sufficient end in itself. Moreover, it fails to cultivate students’ skill at writing academic performative prose and to prepare them, liberated or not, to accomplish the kinds of writing tasks required of them in the academy. Phyllis Lassner makes just this point in “Feminist Responses to Rogerian Argument”:

no matter how much we urge freewriting and create assignments which sequence the process of self-discovery in the social contexts in which students live and work, no matter how much we work against the production of ‘theme-writing,’ we are all aware . . . that students must adjust their self-expression to the requirements of academic coursework. (229)

From a practical perspective, then, expressionism in the academy appears to be eminently impractical. This impracticality, however, is not simply the result of a focus on “wrong” tasks; rather, it stems from fundamentally different assumptions about language and self than those valued in the academy. As C. H. Knoblauch notes, expressivist assumptions can lead to a romantic view of the classroom which prizes vaguely defined self-actualization, an attitude regarded elsewhere in the academy—and in the world beyond—as sentimental and fuzzy-headed. In recent years, social constructionists in particular have found fault with the notion of self that expressionism assumes. Lester Faigley, for instance, inveighs:
To ask students to write authentically about the self assumes that a rational consciousness can be laid out on the page. That the self must be interpellated through language is denied. It is no small wonder, then, that the selves many students try to appropriate in their writing are voices of authority, and when they exhaust their resources of analysis, they revert to moral lessons, adopting, as Bartholomae has noted, a parental voice making cliched pronouncements where we expect ideas to be extended. ("Judging" 409-410)

The social constructionist critique of expressionism, the most penetrating and persuasive to date, is the result of a far different approach to language and epistemology that is now in currency in composition studies, one in which "language and its products, such as thought and the self," are regarded as "social artifacts constituted by social communities" (Bruffee, "Collaborative" 641). By emphasizing uniqueness of self and the value of personal voice—rather than recognizing that the principle features of writing such as style, content, and tone are determined by the conventions of specific discourse communities—expressionists are thought to wrongly cast the spotlight on the composing individual. To teach writing as the expression of personal thoughts and feelings in the context of the academy, according to social constructionists, is to render students "powerless" and turn them into "suckers" (Bartholomae, "Reply" 128). What student writers need to learn, according to this point of view, is this:

The student has to learn to speak our language, to speak as we do, to try on the peculiar ways of knowing, selecting, evaluating, reporting, concluding, and arguing that define the discourse of our community. Or perhaps I should say the various discourses of our community . . .

. . . to extend themselves, by successive approximations, into the commonplace, set phrases, rituals and gestures, habits of mind, tricks of persuasion, obligatory conclusions and necessary connections that determine the 'what might be said' and constitute knowledge within the various branches of our academic community. (Bartholomae, "Inventing" 134, 146)

Social constructionists, particularly within the writing-in-the-disciplines movement, charge that the expressionist failure to teach the language and conventions of academic speech communities puts students at
risk when they must later do coursework in their majors, a danger that Spellmeyer, himself not wholly sympathetic to social constructionist causes, refers to when he warns: "Writers seduced by Inclination will find that their freedom of expression is not respected, or even tolerated, outside of freshman English" (Common 74). Critique of expressionist pedagogy and philosophy, then, casts significant doubt upon whether expressionism provides a sound basis for writing instruction within the academy. Whether the writing-in-the-disciplines movement, the logical outgrowth of social constructionist observation that students need to "extend themselves in successive approximation" into the conventions that "constitute knowledge within the various branches" of the academy offers a better alternative, is the issue next at hand.

From Social Constructionism to Writing-in-the-Disciplines

"Critical commonplace now has it," observes Charles Bazerman, "that disciplines are socially and rhetorically constructed and that academic knowledge is the product of sociolinguistic activities advancing individual and group interests" (61). In contrast to the stable, rational self of current-traditionalism and the elusive yet insight-and authenticity-producing self of expressionism, the self of social constructionism is pure social artifact, an evanescent product of competing socio-linguistic forces. In a watershed article on social constructionism, Kenneth Bruffee describes the philosophy as follows:

A social constructionist position in any discipline assumes that entities we normally call reality, knowledge, thought, facts, texts, selves, and so on are constructs generated by communities of like-minded peers. Social construction understands reality, knowledge, thought, facts, texts, selves, and so on as community-generated and community-maintained linguistic entities—or, more broadly speaking, symbolic entities—that define or 'constitute' the communities that generate them. ("Social" 774)

Drawing upon the work of Thomas Kuhn in philosophy of science, Richard Gergen in psychology, and Richard Rorty in philosophy, social constructionists such as Bruffee, Bartholomae, and Bazerman have rapidly advanced the social constructionist cause in composition studies. At the same time, a wash-over effect from literary theory has also contributed to the trend to turn attention away from the lone composing author to the communities in
which texts come to be composed, and thus, to a social constructionist-style reading and writing of text. Joseph Petraglia describes the paradigmatic shift in this way:

Compared to current-traditional and cognitive rhetorics which focus on the individual writer and how he or she can and/or should shape discourse to gain the audience’s assent, one might say that constructionists focus on the ways in which the audience (that is the community) shapes the discourse of its members. (317)

It is in the pedagogical consequences of this inversion of traditional emphasis that one can discern the natural trajectory of social constructionism into the writing-in-the-disciplines movement. And indeed, it is in the percepts and potential pedagogy of disciplinary-specific writing that some of the most telling differences between expressionism and social constructionism begin to emerge. In an expressionistic classroom, the teacher, like a therapist, cannot tell the student what the truth is or how to express it; the teacher’s task is simply to provide “an environment in which individual students are allowed the freedom to arrive at their own versions” (Berlin, Rhetoric 13). In contrast, social constructionism provides a clear pedagogical focus: “initiation into academic discourse” (Bizzell 197). As James Porter observes, “[o]ur immediate goal is to produce ‘socialized writers,’ who are full-fledged members of their discourse community” (42). In the following, Bartholomae describes what this prescription means for the student:

[He] must become like us... He must become someone he is not. He must know what we know, talk like we talk... The struggle of the student writer is not the struggle to bring out that which is within; it is the struggle to carry out those ritual activities that grant one entrance into a closed society. (“Inventing” 300)

To Bartholomae, the education of the writing student involves neither discovery of truth nor exploration of self, at least in expressivist terms: rather, it is a process by which one gains membership into a new discourse community, a socialization into a new branch of knowledge.

With the assertion that the goal of composition should be to facilitate induction into disciplinary communities, the effort to isolate and taxonomize the rhetorical properties of academic disciplines has been put into swing. Bazerman and Russell’s Landmark Essays on Writing Across the Curriculum (1994) features two such studies, one in chemical engineering and one in
biotology. In *Landmarks*, Bazerman and Russell renew Bartholomae’s call to “determine just what [a given] community’s discourse conventions are, so that these conventions could be written out, demystified, and taught in our classrooms” (Bartholomae, “Inventing” 147). Behind this call for advocates of writing-in-the-disciplines to investigate the discourse conventions within academic communities is the assumption that we “use language primarily to join communities we do not yet belong to and to cement our membership in communities we already belong to” (Bruffee, “Social” 784). Some advocates of disciplinary-specific writing are sufficiently convinced of the principles and direction of the writing-in-the-disciplines movement that they have called for the abolishment of general composition courses altogether. In a recent article in the *Journal of Advanced Composition*, for instance, Russell suggests that general composition courses be eliminated in favor of writing courses situated within particular fields—such as psychology, economics, or biology—in which students focus on acquiring the specific discourse of a single academic discipline. (“Vygotsky” 195)

**Writing-in-the-Disciplines: Down and Out in Academic Discourse**

In “Reflections on Academic Discourse,” Elbow responds to the idea of giving over freshman English to academic discourse by arguing that “life is long and college is short.” Few students write academic discourse upon finishing school, Elbow observes, and some must even “unlearn the academic writing they were rewarded for in college” (136). In “Portfolios and Public Discourse,” Doug Hesse makes a related argument that college composition is best directed toward “goals other than getting students ready for some imagined future classes” (5). Hesse contends that composition courses should stress writing that is characteristic of public discourse: non-fiction prose that will give students practice in “the rhetoric of citizenship,” developing their ability and awareness to write in the public spheres. In “A Common Ground: The Essay in the Academy,” Kurt Spellmeyer argues that the personal essay should be the focus of freshman writing since it provides a common ground between the specialist discourses of the disciplines and the native languages and knowledge-bases of students, allowing students to bring their own experiences to bear on the texts which they should be asked to “relate to” (in the full sense of that phrase) rather than merely assimilate in college work.

One of the more incendiary arguments against the teaching of disciplinary-specific writing in freshman composition arises from a deconstruction of the inculcation-initiation metaphor in which writing-in-
the-discipline contentions are often couched. In "Imitate Me; Don’t Imitate Me," for instance, Richard Boyd takes Bartholomae to task for the mimesis apparent in his conception of disciplinary writing cited earlier:

Behind Bartholomae’s summons for students to enter into a new discourse community with all its codes and conventions is a simple demand made of student writers by the teacher: ‘Imitate me!’ The student must learn ‘to speak our language, to speak as we do,’ and this is best accomplished when he or she ‘mimics the language and the interpretive systems of the privileged community. (157, 134) (336)

In Boyd’s critique of Bartholomae, he argues that the methods presupposed by Bartholomae’s theoretical stance are first of all bad pedagogy: imitation. Moreover, they largely preclude interdisciplinary and public-sphere critical thinking. Boyd asks pointedly, “What happens to the critical perspective of these students, to their capacity to reflect on the world from the ground of their own historical and cultural situation and then take responsible action, when they are told merely to ‘crudely mimic’ the ‘peculiar ways of knowing, selecting, evaluating, reporting, concluding, and arguing’ that the teacher as model embodies for them?” (Boyd 340).

But the call of advocates of disciplinary-specific writing such as Porter, Bizzell, Bruffee, Russell, and Bartholomae for student initiation into academic communities, for students to be like us, to be one with us, betrays a potentially even more troubling corollary: the uncritical reproduction of academic values. “[M]ost academic discourse has as its subtext the maintenance of the values and prestige of pre-existing knowledge communities,” as Mary Cayton (653) notes in “Writing as Outsiders.” By privileging a reified and unproblematized conception of academic disciplines—whether as the rhetorical bodies of biology, of economics, or of political science—writing-in-the-disciplines’ proponents assume that for the student of composition, a discipline is a worthwhile and self-justifying end in itself. This is especially hazardous in the context of freshman writing, for as Spellmeyer observes, “the choice of a discipline is for most students a reflection of presuppositions which discipline-specific instruction leaves virtually unchallenged” (Common 269). The value of one disciplinary discourse over other discourses is of course a presumption that a tenured professor in mid-career may reasonably make, but one which skews the values and needs of a student who plans to graduate and leave the academy behind.
Although the appeals of writing-in-the-disciplines’ proponents have now adopted empowerment rhetoric, such as Bazerman’s recent assertion that discourse-specific instruction “enable[s] students to enter disciplines as empowered speakers rather than as conventional followers of accepted practice” (67), the potential mimesis required of students’ initiation and membership raises significant doubts about these claims.7 Joy Ritchie notes, for instance, that the teaching of the conventions of a specific discourse “often is translated into pedagogical strategies which reduce learning to drill and imitation” (152). Ritchie’s observation evokes the specter of a return to current-traditionalism (or a “neo-current-traditionalism,” as ugly and convoluted as that phrase may be), rhetoric which “makes the patterns of arrangement and superficial correctness the main ends of writing instruction,” to use Berlin’s description of formalist methodology (Rhetoric 9). Writing-in-the-disciplines enthusiasts have recently attempted to deflect such criticism by portraying academic discourses as “locales of heteroglossic contention” rather than “purveyors of hegemonic univocality” (Bazerman 63). And yet the very call for “taxonomic” study of disciplinary rhetorics (with the Aristotelean division and classification that taxonomies typically employ) so as to render such rhetorics teachable in freshman writing, assumes that they are bounded, ordered, and at least relatively stable.

Indeed, it is from the very conception of “academic discourse” advanced by proponents of writing-in-the-disciplines that a great deal of confusion arises, for much of the writing on disciplinary-specific instruction fails to distinguish between the academic writing done by academics for academics and the academic writing done by students for their teachers. In “Resemblance and Similitude in Academic Writing,” Irwin Weiser exposes the common conflation of the two that often lies at the heart of the disciplinary-specific argument:

On the one hand, academic discourse is the writing done by academics—by people who have chosen to pursue research and scholarship and to engage in discourse with their peers. It is the discourse of journal articles, books, and conference papers, written for an informed audience of professionals whose interests and knowledge resemble the author’s. On the other hand, academic writing is what students do when they write for college courses: exams, papers, reports of various kinds. (177)
Weiser insightfully points out that academics use a variety of conventions to situate their discourse within *sub-discourses and sub-disciplines* ("a particular community of ideas" [178]) and that their audience is an audience of peers who are fellow experts. In contrast, students write principally for a single instructor who is an authority rather than a peer; the main purpose of their exposition tends to be knowledge-telling, as they demonstrate "their understanding of specific course material or techniques so the instructor can evaluate their learning" (178).  

But it is the potentially coercive and hegemonic role of academic discourses that is perhaps their most disturbing quality and one which empowerment rhetoric cannot totally gloss over. In *Talking Power*, linguist Robin Lakoff discusses the relationship between academic discourse and the need that academics have for "signals of solidarity and acceptance by peers." The conventions of academic discourse are acquired by slow degrees, Lakoff observes, and "deviation in any direction is punishable" (emphasis added). Like Weiser, Lakoff points out that "undergraduates . . . are not encouraged to play the same game as their betters." (157) And she concludes that the "discourse style of academia turns out not to be solely a by-product of the knowledge factory" but also "the language of a society with complex and covert power and territorial assumptions" (159).

Lakoff’s perception of the role that academic discourse plays in the establishment and perpetuation of hierarchy—in which students are of course at the bottom—integrates the critique of Cayton noted earlier (that academic discourse "has as its subtext the maintenance of the values and prestige of pre-existing knowledge communities") and Boyd’s observation of the crucial role that mimesis plays in writing-in-the-disciplines pedagogy. It is through inscribing students with disciplinary-specific codes (and students’ active mimesis of those codes) that academic communities perpetuate themselves. While the absorption of such codes may be necessary—indeed, inevitable—for those who embark on a career in a particular branch of the academy, the enlistment of students in the academic disciplines during freshman writing is likely to be far more disabling than empowering. Despite the claims of advocates of disciplinary-specific writing that the codes and assumptions of an academic field can be "foregrounded" when taught to students, the trajectory such courses create for students during their first year in college casts them into deep-cut "grooves of Academe" (to borrow the phrase which serves as Lakoff’s chapter title), convention-bound perspectives that will hardly serve them well in developing skills at public discourse, cultivating
critical literacy, or even, practically speaking, gaining the disciplinary-specific language of a different major should they decide to change their area of study after freshman year.

If student writers who worship “Inclination” find undisciplined self-expression little valued outside the expresivist classroom, those conscripted by “Institution” discover—if they notice at all—that the bounds of their intellectual expression are tightly circumscribed by their discipline. And neither free exercise of utterance nor the willing submission to disciplinary discourse lead to personal voice or critical literacy.

Toward Personal Voice and Critical Literacy

In traditional rhetoric, voice has typically been considered an element of style—or a particular kind of style in which sentence construction, word choice, and treatment of subject matter are seen as indications of an informing personality. In “Parentheticals and Personal Voice,” Arthur Palacas observes that the “concept of personal voice is not even mentioned as such in the index of the typical college composition handbook, where voice refers only to grammatical voice, the opposition between active and passive sentence structure” (507). Despite the value attached to “authentic” voice by expressionists—utterance as unproblematized, natural, and free as described earlier—the role of voice in the composing process and in intellectual understanding has received far too little serious attention in composition studies. In its fullest sense, voice signifies the self-conscious participation of a subject in the act of speech resulting in an unabashed—rather than intentionally effaced—authorial presence. In one of the most insightful definitions of voice to date, Gretchen Flesher writes:

Voice is both agent and evidence of empowerment. Students, women, minority group members, the non-traditionally prepared—seek a voice, demand a voice, gain a voice, or perhaps stifle a voice. . . . [W]e use [voice] to signify a kind of verbal identity, a self rendered sensible in language, or to generalize, a kind of verbal group identity. We recognize voice in an interplay of words, sentence styles, patterns of organization, sources of information and evidence, practices of inference and conclusion, modes of address. Voice is to writing roughly what genetic coding is to human beings: the unique compound of elements defining the individual. (51)
The presence of voice in writing, then, Flesher suggests, is instrumental to self-empowerment and self-identity, however transient or protean they may be. It is for this reason that Mary Rose O’Reilley warns, with the sort of pedagogy advocated by the writing-in-the-disciplines movement in mind, “[t]o teach beginning students to write a formal, academic dialect is to disable them not only emotionally but also politically” (60). At the same time, with an eye towards the hazards of expressionism, Linda Flower’s quite different caution rings equally true: “the individualistic emphasis of the expressive tradition and its faith in simply ‘letting them write’ seems to produce little impetus to critical thinking and critique” (26).

To advocate either unbridled personal expression or disciplinary-circumscribed discourse is to abstain from the effort to achieve the critical consciousness that can occur when knowledge is transposed across disciplinary or social boundaries. Such transposition of knowledge, leading to voice, is perhaps best conveyed by the concept of critical literacy.

In contrast to the notions of functional literacy (such as the ability to read at a particular grade level or to decipher common written messages) and cultural literacy (the possessing of a private storehouse of important public facts such as those prescribed by E.D. Hirsch), the concept of “critical literacy” denotes the ability to discern how culture—or academia—is a “domain of competing interests in which dominant and subordinate groups live out and make sense of their given circumstances and conditions of life” (Aronowitz and Giroux 49). Instead of emphasizing the straightforward decoding of text or the accumulation of canonized information, pedagogy that has critical literacy as its aim seeks to cultivate students’ awareness of knowledge as a field of struggle, a perpetual competition for primacy of certain forms of social perception. Aronowitz defines it this way:

The real issue. . . is whether [students] can decode the messages of media culture, counter official interpretations of social, economic, and political reality; whether they feel capable of critically evaluating events, or, indeed, of intervening in them. . . Literacy is best understood as “the ability of individuals and groups to locate themselves in history, to see themselves as social actors able to debate their collective futures.”

Applying this concept of critical literacy to the composition classroom, Barbara Henning argues,
Students in our urban basic writing courses emphatically need to learn how to read and write texts and situations collectively and rhetorically, reading, writing, and talking across boundary lines, discerning authorial attitudes, assumptions, and intentions, measuring the distance between themselves and the intended audience, analyzing and transforming the dominant narrative in the academy and in the world of their communities. And it is important as well for teachers to constantly read their own practices and classrooms to participate together as conscious literate citizens. (683)

Neither purely expressive prose nor disciplinary-specific writing can achieve the kind of critical consciousness—or personal voice—demanded by critical literacy, for it is only in the productive counterposing of discourses that culture and disciplinary knowledges can be perceived as fields of struggle rather than monologic unities. As Carol Wershoven observes, “personal writing . . . creates the illusion of growth but . . . keeps [students] in a state of arrested development, discouraged from making the link between ‘I’ and ‘we’” (35). Likewise S.L. Gradin notes of disciplinary prose, “Writing instructors have come to realize that students can produce academic forms without necessarily engaging on any personal level with what they are writing or without engaging in critical thought” (79).

To foster critical consciousness, composition pedagogy needs to focus on work that traces the process of self-construction, deconstructs common types of discourse, and allows students to explore the discursive space between discourses rather than forcing them into the roles and rules prescribed by one. While it has not been my purpose here to propose a specific writing curriculum—but rather to define the context in which composition teachers can productively create their own—among the various possible writing tasks which reflect these aims are the following:

**Revising private experience toward public discourse:** Many of the issues that students have the strongest opinions about are largely personal, and when asked to take a position on them they respond in what amounts to spontaneous testimonial rather than situated argument. In “Beyond Dualism: Writing and Responding to Religious Rhetoric in the Freshman Composition Classroom,” Rhonda Dively explores one of the academy’s most forbidding—if not
forbidden—topics: religious conviction. She asks students to write about the role that religion has played in their lives. By identifying the students’ audience as “the general public,” however, Dively creates parameters for the assignment which ultimately force students to consider their own subject positions in relation to other potential perspectives. Students’ initial drafts tend to be more emotional and “dualistic,” but in the revision process, as student writers consider the reasons they are presenting and locate points of personal experience which may be of mutual interest to themselves and a heterogeneous audience, they become more conscious of how their own experience is situated in relation to others. The process that Dively uses can, of course, also be applied to a variety of emotionally-charged, thought-provoking issues.

Local narratives and micro-ethnographies: Having students write descriptively and analytically about subcultures they participate in encourages them to consider their own agency and to explore their subject relationship with mainstream culture. In Fragments of Rationality, Lester Faigley uses micro-ethnographies of rap music and the “Rocky Horror Picture Show” to demonstrate how investigating local narrative—such as his students’ involvement with rap and Rocky-Horror subcultures—requires them to analyze and select data, describe a subculture, and ultimately to consciously locate themselves in relation to their chosen subculture and the mainstream cultural discourses around them.

Media critique: Since contemporary social identity is to a large extent reproduced through mass media, deconstruction of particular media messages and forums can be used to expose the prevailing cultural codes and values of dominant discourse communities. In “Foucault, Feminism, and Writing Pedagogy,” Kristine Blair sets forth writing tasks that encourage students to question and critique the images of women in mass media. By analyzing advertising appeals (such as those of “Guess Jeans”) and identifying characteristics of the target audience of specific magazines (such as GQ or Mademoiselle), students can come to better understand the assumptions underlying the construction of selves in popular culture. Moreover, through tracing the magnetic lines of influence media images exert on their own self-conception, students have the opportunity to determine whether they wish to be merely acted upon or to resist the hegemonic forces of culture in media.
Drafting towards multiple audiences: Writing academic papers with separate versions directed toward different audiences—such as toward family members, peers, or professors in other classes—allows students to explore the discursive space among and between discourses. In “Reflections on Academic Discourse,” Peter Elbow describes one such assignment which requires a paper on a topic that students are studying in another class. After an initial draft, the paper must be revised in two separate strands: one for the “amateur audience” of the general writing class and one for the “specialized audience” of the other course. Juxtaposing the separate discourses throws the rhetorics of both into sharper relief. This same approach be used across academic disciplines, such as in papers on the same topic drafted toward differing discourse communities of say, psychology and history, or business and political science.

In closing, my argument is that composition instructors must allow their students to assay the discursive space between academic discourses and private knowledges, to engage in the same struggle to come to voice that at least some compositionists are themselves experiencing, such as Nancy Sommers who reflects in a recent article in College Composition and Communication, “I have been the bloodless academic creating taxonomies, creating a hierarchy of student writers and experienced writers, and never asking myself how I was being displaced from my own work. I have never asked, ‘What does my absence signify?’” (26-27). In helping students to negotiate between the demands of the disciplines as “Institution” and the self-gratifying instinct for “Inclination,” teachers can portray bodies of knowledge as contested activities as they encourage students in the creation of an “I.” For, as Spellmeyer observes, “even if our speech is never unrestricted, even if our language surreptitiously uses us, no discourse writes itself; we are still ‘obliged to begin’ as Foucault does—in the first person singular” (“Foucault” 18).

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Notes

3 In *Writing in the Academic Disciplines, 1870-1990*, Russell implicitly acknowledges this trajectory in his observation that “[u]ntil individual disciplines accept the responsibility of studying and teaching the writing of their communities to students, WAC programs will continue to be marginalized, subject to the vagaries of existence in an institutional no-man’s land” (298).

4 Bruffee similarly observes, [m]uch of what we teach today—or should be teaching—in composition courses is the normal discourse of most academic, professional, and business communities. The rhetoric taught in our composition textbooks comprises—or should comprise—the conventions of normal discourse of those communities” (“Collaborative” 643).

5 See also earlier quotations from Bizzell, Bruffee, and Porter for additional instances in which the initiation metaphor is invoked or implied.

6 Horner rightfully takes Boyd to task for “straightening” some of Bartholomae’s statements in “Inventing the University” to suit his own argument: Horner observes Boyd’s *reding* of Bartholomae as transforming Bartholomae’s work “into ready formulations” and portraying “Bartholomae as the drill sergeant of academic prose.” Wall and Coles’ depiction of Bartholomae’s stance is less vitriolic and more dependable: it situates Bartholomae in the same theoretical position, but refrains from taking liberties with his prose.

7 Spellmeyer similarly observes: “The proponents of discourse-specific writing typically invoke the ethos of ‘empowerment’—breaking down longstanding distinctions between student-writers and ‘real’ writers—but their sense of the term is often synonymous with pragmatic accommodation” (*Common* 267).

8 Bartholomae, however, cannot be faulted for failing to recognize this distinction. He is insightfully critical of what he calls “bastard discourse,” i.e., the knowledge-telling often required of students (144).

9 Bartholomae’s “Inventing the University,” which I have used here as representative of the disciplinary-specific position, is rife with statements which assume that hierarchy and privilege within the institution are not only unproblematic, but desirable; for instance, he repeatedly calls for students to “take on the role of privilege” and “attempt to establish authority” (162).

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**Works Cited**


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