Social Organization and Emancipatory Opportunities in Higher Education:
An Investigation into the Social Organization of Student Learning
and a Search for the Space in Time to Develop
and Express Independent, Creative and Critical Thought

by

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We accept this thesis as conforming to the required standard

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ABSTRACT

An institutional ethnographic investigation into how student learning activities are coordinated and organized within a single academic course was conducted for this thesis in order to excavate aspects of the course organization that support and encourage independent, creative and critical student reflection and expression, as well as features of the course organization that work against the realization of these opportunities. This thesis arose out of a concern that aspects of the social organization of higher education impedes the development and expression of independent, creative and critical thought among students. Critical and creative thinking affords opportunities to ask questions, to confront problems and to realize emancipatory opportunities. It is essential for discovering new ways of thinking and new knowledge; therefore, it must be sponsored and nurtured in formal academic course activities.

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my husband Colin who has supported me in my personal quest to find and release the intelligent, confident person hiding inside my heart and mind.

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- Thank you Dr. Carroll and Dr. McMahon for pushing me to write the best thesis that I could. Although it was very hard, driving me to tears on occasion, this experience has taught me that realizing emancipatory opportunities in scholarly writing is hard work. It was worth the effort though because I am proud of what I have achieved.

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Introduction

In the fall of 1991, I resigned from a comfortable, secure job and proceeded to radically change the course of my life by going to university. I decided to pursue a university education because I wanted to challenge myself to strive to achieve my maximum intellectual potential. I wanted to grow as an individual - to learn, to think, and to become independently creative. I had great expectations for what university could do for me as an individual. You see, what made me leave my job and go back to university was a realization that I was limiting myself from becoming the kind of person I felt I had the potential to be. What does that mean? Perhaps if I share with you how I came to this personal epiphany I can clarify what I mean.

Have you ever seen the movie Shirley Valentine? Well, the message contained within this movie was the catalyst that set in motion the events that caused me to change the course of my life. It is the story of a middle-aged housewife. Her two children are grown and have left home. The only person remaining to take care of is her husband who likes chips and egg on Tuesday and steak on Thursday. In other words, her life has become routinely dull.

One afternoon during coffee, Shirley's girlfriend reveals that she has won a trip for two to Greece for two weeks; moreover, she wants Shirley to go with her and will not let Shirley decline the invitation. Shocked at first, Shirley cannot imagine leaving her husband alone to go on a holiday with her friend for two weeks. She knows her husband would not approve and that the suggestion would make him angry. She is also afraid of what her children, neighbours and friends would think; how ridiculous they would say it was for a middle-aged woman to go off without her husband to a foreign country.

This entire situation causes Shirley to reflect on what has become of her life. She thinks back to a time when she would not have thought twice about taking up an offer to go on a foreign vacation. She was a very different person back then, more spontaneous, more rebellious. So what happened? How has she come to be the person she is today? What happened to the independently rebellious, adventuresome person that she once was - Shirley the Great, Shirley the Marvelous? Life is what happened, life and the choices we make (choices that do not feel like choices sometimes and, in fact, sometimes are not choices) and the social organization that comes along with these life paths.

In this movie I could see the potential for the same thing happening in my own life. I saw myself heading down a particular road that would mean becoming a particular person and leaving the potential to become a different kind of a person behind. For me this was a frightening thought because the former person would always know that the potential to have become the latter person was not realized, and I knew it would leave me feeling bitter and angry later in life.

Fortunately, the most powerful message coming out of the story of Shirley Valentine is that it is never too late to change. The challenge is finding the strength of will to take that leap into change. Similar to the story of Shirley Valentine, critical recognition and reflection that I was not happy on the path my life was traversing helped me to realize an emancipatory opportunity and change the course of my life. So strong was my desire to make this change, to make a course correction in my life, that I found the will to take a chance and make a leap to see if I could become that other person I felt I had the potential to become. This potential person, in my heart, was more than the person I was becoming - more than a secretary and a housewife. Saying it like that makes me feel guilty because

secretaries and housewives are bright and lovely people, I just wanted something different for myself. I wanted to become Jacqueline the scholar, Jacqueline the writer. I wanted to actualize myself as an independent, creative thinker and writer. So just as Shirley Valentine went on her vacation to Greece to find the person she left behind in time, I went to university to realize my dream of becoming a scholar and a writer.

Eight years has now past since I began university and I can honestly say that, in general, my university experience has been very good and at times really wonderful. I will never forget how I used to feel reading through university course calendars, how I agonized over which courses to take because every course sounded so interesting. I wanted to take them all, but I picked my classes carefully and was delighted to have taken courses from professors who had a passion for what they were teaching. I also met many interesting people and some of them were real inspirations to me over the years. The best part of going to university though was having the opportunity to learn. Through my university education I developed a strong passion for ideas and knowledge.

I really worked hard in university, harder than I've ever worked in my life. I wanted to excel in my studies and to obtain good grades. It seemed so necessary and important. It felt especially important at the undergraduate level, as I learned that good grades are necessary in order to be considered for graduate level studies. There were also other incentives for getting good grades, such as: access to early course registration (which basically guarantees you will not be wait listed in courses) and scholarships to help cover tuition costs.

For me to achieve good grades, however, always required a great deal of time and effort. In school I attended every lecture and copied down as much of what my

professors were saying as possible. After classes I typed my notes in review, and I neatly organized my work into binders. I diligently read all of the required readings, again taking notes, and I never handed in a late assignment. In short, I did my best to be a good student.

For all my efforts, however, I rarely performed as well as I had hoped in exam situations. I always found them difficult and a source of great anxiety. To study copious amounts of course information and then frantically write it all down in a short period of time was very stressful. Inevitably I would forget something important or run out of time. Exams always left me feeling empty. I never felt they adequately captured what I had learned in my courses, and I questioned the value of spending all that time memorizing, regurgitating, and ultimately forgetting a significant portion of the information consumed. I also know that I am not the only student to feel this way, as I have heard other students echo this sentiment down the hallways many times in the last eight years.

As a result one question began to weigh heavy on my mind: was I really developing intellectually if I couldn't remember everything that I'd been taught in my classes? Eventually, the frustration of consuming and ultimately forgetting knowledge really began to bother me in my graduate years. At the graduate level students are expected to read a lot more course material. Not that this is bad, just that there is so much of it to be consumed in a short period of time. "No problem", I used to think to myself, "I'll just read what I feel is most important and do the best that I can."

There were problems however – problems initiated at the undergraduate level and carried on to the graduate level. The first was my desire to express my own ideas and

opinions but feeling incredibly uncomfortable doing so unless they had already been expressed by someone else. The second was an alarming realization that after five years of university, majoring in Sociology and minoring in Political Science, I did not yet know what it actually meant to be a sociologist or a political scientist.

These two discoveries launched me into personal crisis during my second term in the master's program. How could I have dutifully completed all of the course requirements, obtained a Sociology degree, and still not understand what it means to be a sociologist, or know where I intellectually stand as a sociologist in the discipline? Worse was the confidence I lacked to express my own ideas without first having them validated by some higher authority. I even had trouble choosing my own thesis topic.

Was I stupid? Did I miss something? It was at this time that I began to do a great deal of self-reflection and examination, and I began to ask questions. I asked my peers if they had ever felt similarly, and to my surprise many of them said they had. Given this added discovery, I seriously began to suspect that there is something not quite right about the university teaching and learning project. Something is adversely impinging that aspect of the education process that is supposed to encourage and support the development and expression of independent, creative and critical student thought. This "something" confused and angered me and I wanted to confront the issue and better understand its complexities. I wanted to show how it suffocates independent, creative student thought and expression. I wanted to raise awareness and get people talking about this problem. If students completing course readings and course requirements are not afforded adequate space in time to question, to criticize, to create and to meaningfully realize, articulate and share their creative and critical thoughts in their courses, how are

they ever going to discover and realize emancipatory opportunities – both for themselves and for society? Recognizing and realizing an emancipatory opportunity requires a great deal of critical and creative reflection and questioning. An emancipatory opportunity is an event, a moment of time in space, when an individual (or sometimes even a group of individuals) discovers new ways of thinking and being in the world. I believe that without such opportunities progressive personal and societal change is impossible.

In thinking and reflecting on this "something" that constrains the encouragement and development of critical, creative student thought and expression, I began to think about all of the requirements that surround learning and how this places a lot of pressure on students. I decided that for this thesis I wanted to take a closer look at how the project of educating students is socially organized, how students hook into such organization, and how this coordinates and organizes their learning activities. Through this thesis I have worked to reveal how social relations of ruling confound freedom of thought and expression which are necessary if students are to discover and realize emanciaptory opportunities through formal education.

In the next chapter I review literature about the social organization of education and teaching within universities. I chose to focus on this literature because in it I see a kindred spirit to the kind of critical thinking that I put into the study conducted for this thesis. In the critical pedagogy literature I see pedagogues who are committed to fostering greater potential for emancipatory opportunities because they are working to ensure that space in time is available for students to develop and express themselves independently, creatively and critically.

Chapter 1: Social Organization of Modern Pedagogy

Reflecting back on it now, when I first came to university, I had a rather naïve idea of what university education was going to be like. The image I had of university stemmed back to ideals from my childhood. In my youth I went on a number of field trips to the University of Victoria to attend theater plays and symphony concerts. Spending time on campus during these excursions was always a mysterious affair. I can remember staring at the buildings and imagining what might be going on inside. Bright, intelligent people thinking great thoughts, conducting experiments, sharing, discussing and debating their ideas with each other and changing the world with the knowledge gained from their intellectual work.

This ideal image was still a part of me when I submitted my application to attend the university, and it never occurred to me to question it prior to enrolling. I also did not give any thought as to how student education fit into this idea; I just assumed students would be a part of it some how. It was not until I began taking courses at the university that I learned that teaching and research are, for the most part, distinctly separate activities in the university. Interestingly, when reviewing literature for this chapter, I discovered that the ideas I held about university were, for the most part, around long before I was born, as university reformers did envision that teaching and learning would be intertwined in the university (Habermas, 1989).

Social Organization of the Ideal University

According to Jurgen Habermas (1989), early visions for universities were premised on the idea of institutional corporate consciousness, that is, everyone sharing and participating in the same project ideal of the university.

> Jaspers [1961][1] was still unabashedly proceeding from premises derived from the implicit sociology of German Idealism. Institutions are forms of objective spirit. An institution remains capable of functioning only as long as it embodies in living form the idea inherent in it. As soon as the spirit leaves it, an institution rigidifies into something purely mechanical, as an organism without a soul decomposes into dead matter (Habermas 1989, 101).

Over time, the living form of the university idea has come to include: intersubjective dedication of thought and activity toward the pursuit of truth and understanding through science and scholarship (Chapman, 1983); development of new thought and technologies that promote economic growth and well being; and critical scholarship to inspire and facilitate positive, collective social transformation (Maxwell, 1984; Castles and Wustenberg, 1979).

Originally it was thought that, for the living form of the university idea to exist and function as a unified whole, everyone working, teaching and learning within the university institution had to share in common and have confidence in this living idea (Habermas 1989, 101). Unfortunately, according to Habermas, early university reformers forgot to take into consideration differences of perspective and vested interests, and a great deal of tension has arisen around how universities should be organized. There are those who maintain that universities should be primarily dedicated to the basic search for truth and understanding. Others contend that universities should contribute to the economic well being of society through invention and development of high-tech products, knowledge and management expertise. Still others argue that universities must work to promote comprehensive consideration and understanding of social activity and social organization in all areas of cultural, social and political life in order to inspire

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[1] Karl Jaspers held a chair in philosophy at the University of Heidelberg both before and after the Second World War. He held strong beliefs about how universities should be organized and was an advocate for university reform in Germany (Habermas, 1989).

critical thought and activity for positive, collective change and social transformation (Castles and Wustenberg, 1979).

Early reformers also neglected to consider the reality of organizational structure. Specifically, they forgot that bureaucratic organizations are functionally designed to coordinate and organize the activities of workers without requiring that they understand the goals and ideals of the organization in order to be able to effectively perform their jobs.

> Couldn't he [Jaspers] have learned from Max Weber that the organizational reality into which the functionally specific subsystems of a highly differentiated society settle and take shape rests on completely different premises? The capacity of such operations and institutions to function depends precisely on the detachment of organizational goals and functions from the motivations of their members (Habermas 1989, 101-102).

Given the above it is not surprising to learn that, seventy-six years later, the ideal of the integrated university with corporate consciousness has not been realized. Universities have, for the most part, become segmented into specialized fields of study; research and teaching are treated as separate activities; and university autonomy is constantly under threat of erosion due to external economic and political pressures (Newson and Buchbinder, 1988).

As far as teaching is concerned, in the 1960s as societal demand for education grew, and the expansion of formal education rapidly increased, Habermas identified two pedagogical options for universities. Option one; align university curriculum with the needs of industrial capitalism.

> This type of university would be less concerned with grounding its activity in the kind of self-understanding that had characterized past university life and more concerned with integrating itself into social systems of production. University autonomy would be a matter of de-politicizing university education

> in order to concentrate on the business at hand. Efficiency of production would be the university's goal (Ostovich 1995, 473).

Option two; orient pedagogical goals toward facilitating self-understanding among students as well as turning out knowledgeable, skilled graduates.

> The other option for university reform was to focus on the process of reaching for self-understanding (not the foundational "idea") that characterizes university practice. This entails looking at what Habermas identifies as the three other functions of the university besides producing knowledge and skilled graduates: equipping graduates with the "extrafunctional" abilities (attitudes and attributes) necessary for success in a profession but not strictly professional knowledge; critically transmitting and developing the cultural tradition of a society; and forming the political consciousness of students (Ostovich 1995, 473).

Although Habermas favoured the latter option over the former, and advocated democratic discussion (as outlined in his theory of communicative rationality) he later admitted, "there was less critical reflection going on than he had hoped" (Ostovich 1995, 475). The democratic discussion Habermas advocated in university reform was resisted within the academy and was, therefore, not widely realized in practice (Ostovich 1995, 475).

The literature reveals universities to be located in the middle of competing interests in society. Should university education be socially organized to meet the needs of capitalism, or should university education be socially organized to develop and foster independent, critical and creative thought and expression with the expectation that this activity will serve to inform and improve human development? Sensibly speaking, universities should be socially organized to meet both these needs, and there is evidence to suggest that this is the desired intent, but the literature emphasizes the difficulties associated with achieving a balance (Newson and Buchbinder, 1988).

Thinking about the problem of social organization of universities from a different angle; specifically, in relation to my experiences as a university student, I have come to

the realize that part of the reason why I have experienced such difficulty voicing my own thoughts and ideas in university, and why I have had such difficulty understanding and locating my intellectual perspective within the discipline of sociology, has much to do with the way university education is socially organized. In other words, the way my learning activities were organized and coordinated in university did not always encourage and support independent, creative and critical thinking and writing because my education was organized and coordinated with a focus on meeting requirements and achieving high grades. Little emphasis was placed on helping me learn to critically question and discuss the ideas and arguments contained within the material I was hearing and reading, and to develop and express my own thoughts and ideas – informed by the material but uniquely my own.

The remaining sections of this chapter review what the literature has to say about the social organization of student learning and the impact this organization has upon the development and expression of independent, creative and critical student thought in formal education.

Social Organization of Modern Pedagogy

In university I felt pressure to meet the curriculum requirements in the prescribed timeframe and I often felt I was left with very little time to reflect on the ideas I was working with in the literature I was required to read in my courses. What seemed most important was demonstrating that I had memorized the material enough to be able to write the test, and to ensure I understood it enough to sound like I had a basic grasp of the topic being considered. Critically reflecting on and questioning the material, and actually comprehending the complexities of the issues under consideration, seemed an almost

secondary concern. To ease the pressure, I use to take courses in the summer so that I would not have to take as many courses during the regular school season. Doing this gave me a little more time to read and seriously think about the ideas and arguments presented in the course readings. Still, I wish more class time could have been dedicated to critically reviewing and discussing issues and problems related to the subject matter being taught, and to helping me articulate my stand on the topic.

Jurgen Habermas: Instrumental Rationality and the Life World

In the critical pedagogy literature scholars have articulated concerns that students are not being adequately prepared to reflect and question existing knowledge (Little 1991). They maintain that little freedom exists within formal education settings for students to actively explore, question, critique and conceptualize improved forms of social organization. Employing Habermasian theory these pedagogues reason that, as institutions of higher education have become increasingly formal, particular forms of instrumental or technical rationality have become predominant in education while other forms of rationality, such as communicative rationality, which embody the spirit of creative discussion and reasoned consensus among individuals, have become marginalized in higher education. Habermas's theory of knowledge and human interests, as well as his theory of communicative rationality, informs this particular critique of higher education.

In Knowledge and Human Interests, Habermas (1970) identifies three primary human cognitive interests. Each one of these cognitive interests generates knowledge, and thus constitutes three distinct learning domains: the technical, the practical and the emancipatory (Mezirow 1981, 4). Each of these learning domains is closely linked to

different aspects of social existence: work, interaction and power respectively (Mezirow 1981, 4).

The technical domain is concerned with control and manipulation of the environment. Through instrumental action, which is based on empiricism and technical rules such as deduction and prediction, investigations are conducted. The knowledge emerging from these investigations is then used to manipulate and control the environment (Mezirow 1981; Ewert 1991).

The practical domain is concerned with human understanding and interaction. Through communicative action, which is based on categories of understanding, intersubjectivity and shared understanding between individuals develops. The knowledge emerging out of shared meaning and intersubjectivity among groups of people is then used to clarify positions, to achieve consensus, and ultimately to build up a body of shared historical knowledge (Mezirow 1981; Ewert 1991; Turner 1991).

Finally, the emancipatory domain is geared towards freedom, growth and improvement. Through critical reflection, which involves critiques of ideology and of structures of domination, understanding and knowledge of social domination and constraint are derived (Turner 1991, 261).

According to Habermas, with the development of capitalism and growing interest in instrumental and technical advancement,

> ... technical control through work and the development of science have dominated the interests in understanding and emancipation. And so, if social life seems meaningless and cold, it is because technical interests in producing science have come to dictate what kind of knowledge is permissible and legitimate (Turner 1991, 262).

In *Legitimation Crisis* (1975), Habermas wrote that issues that were once solved through communicative action in the practical domain have since come to be addressed by the state and capital using instrumental methods emerging out of the technical domain (Turner 1991, 264). Moreover, as the practical domain has become increasingly marginalized, the life-world, or the cultural component of social life, has also become "colonized" by the instrumental and technical priorities of the capitalist state system (Habermas 1987, 187; Turner 1991, 274-275).

Within the sphere of education, under such conditions, opportunities for students to exercise independent, creative and critical thought and activity are reduced as instrumental coordination and organization of both learning increases within the academy. Less emphasis is placed on helping students participate in and achieve communicative understanding, critical reflection and personal enlightenment as greater emphasis is placed on meeting instrumentally rationalized requirements of curriculum and evaluation.

Reflecting on my own experiences, I have to admit, I did not always find meeting the instrumentally rationalized requirements to be an entirely a negative, unpleasant affair. I liked attending lectures and taking notes, I generally enjoyed reading the assigned readings, and I did learn a great deal in the process. I also loved researching and writing papers for my courses. In performing these activities do feel that my mind was actively engaged in thinking and learning, and often I could see and understand how the information and ideas were related to real world situations and problems.

What I did find disappointing and frustrating, however, were the times when I was required to read and learn material that I could not relate to, materials that I could nothing

but passively absorb because I had no frame of reference to compare it with. I did not find this information interesting because it did not mean anything to me; that is, I could not relate to or connect with this material in any real way.

Paulo Freire: The Banking Concept of Education

In university, education is not always socially organized to meet the individual interests of learners. Although learners are free, for the most part, to choose their courses, once in the courses they are presented with a great deal of information, and while some of the information is of interest some of it is not of interest. Regardless of whether the information is of interest or not, however, students are expected to learn the material.

Brazilian educator Paulo Freire likens education to a banking system and he argues that education suffers what he calls "narration sickness" (Freire 1970, 57). Teachers make knowledge deposits as they narrate course information to students. Students dutifully listen and memorize this information in preparation for further recitation. According to Freire, the process of educating youth has become a subject-object relationship. It is a system that stifles student creativity as students are given little choice but to passively accept and regurgitate information (Freire 1970, 58).

Freire argues that this traditional teacher-student relationship is both oppressive and damaging for students. In this relationship knowledge is treated like, "a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing" (Freire 1970, 58). Students are not given opportunities to critically consider what they are learning (Freire 1970, 61). Learning is made all the more difficult under such circumstances when a teacher, "expounds on a topic completely alien to the

existential experience of the students" (Freire 1970, 57). From Freire's perspective the banking system of education does not allow for personal empowerment through learning.

Personal empowerment through learning: this is something that I thought would flow naturally from a university education, but again I was not quite correct. Personal empowerment is something that students often have to extract for themselves from their education experience. Originally I thought professors would empower students through their teaching. I naively assumed university education would be socially organized much the same as Brookfield's (1985) vision for adult education.

> Adult education, ... is that activity concerned to assist adults in their quest for a sense of control in their own lives, within their interpersonal relationships, and with regard to the social forms and structures within which they live (Brookfield 1985, 46).

Helping students in their quest to gain a sense of control in their lives, however, is not a high priority for university professors as a general rule. If it arises as a priority it is because a professor makes it a priority in his or her course, and in reality, not all professors have this as a goal in their courses.

Feminists: Social Organization of Knowledge

According to Bell Hooks (1994), professors who have student empowerment as part of their teaching goals are a rather rare breed (Hooks 1994, 4). In fact, in pedagogical discussion circles, the idea of injecting a little excitement (something Hooks feels is necessary to encourage and foster student empowerment) into higher education is considered disrespectful and inappropriate (Hooks 1994, 7).

> *Excitement* in higher education was viewed as potentially disruptive of the atmosphere of seriousness assumed to be essential to the learning process. To enter classroom settings in colleges and universities with the desire to encourage excitement, was to transgress. Not only did it require movement beyond accepted boundaries, but excitement could not be generated without a full recognition of the fact that there could never be an absolute set agenda

> governing teaching practices. Agendas had to be flexible, had to allow for spontaneous shifts in direction. Students had to be seen in their particularity as individuals (I drew on the strategies my grade-school teachers used to get to know us) and interacted with according to their needs (here Freire was useful). Critical reflection on my experience as a student in unexciting classrooms enabled me not only to imagine that the classroom could be exciting but that this excitement could co-exist with and even stimulate serious intellectual and/or academic engagement (Hooks 1994, 7).

Feminist pedagogues, like Hooks, deplore the "banking" approach to education as much as Paulo Freire, and they argue that students should be doing much more in school than passively absorbing and reciting existing knowledge.

Feminist pedagogues want students to take charge; to become independent, creative and critical thinkers (Rich 1985). Students, they contend, should be actively encouraged to question and challenge existing knowledge (Weiler 1991; Rich 1985; Maher 1985). They should not be made to feel subservient or personally alienated from the learning process (Lewis 1985; Ellsworth 1989; Schick 1994). Culley et al (1985) states that,

> The feminist classroom is the place to use what we know as women to appropriate and transform, totally, a domain which has been men's. Let us acknowledge and welcome the intrusion /infusion of emotionality – love, rage, anxiety, eroticism – into intellect as a step towards healing the fragmentation capitalism and patriarchy have demanded from us. Our admitted histories and contexts, when subjected to examination can alter the form and content of how we learn and teach. Affirming that we and our students are concrete subjects of the learning process, our model becomes dialectic rather than positivistic (Culley et al. 1985, 19).

A domain which has been men's, it has taken me a very long time to come to terms with and really understand what this means. Intuitively I have always sensed its meaning, but I have always found it difficult to explain it in my own words.

The first time I attempted to put it into words was in my third year at university. I was taking an undergraduate course in political theory. For one class assignment I wrote a story about a young girl named Sophie, whose father was a friend of Socrates. Sophie's

father's house was a popular meeting place for intellectuals, men of thought, and Sophie often hid and listened to their conversations. Over the years, while in hiding, Sophie learned a great deal from these men. She became passionate about knowledge and longed to come out of hiding to present her thoughts and ideas. In this forum of men, however, she was denied a voice with which to speak, and even if she were given leave to speak, there were some feelings and thoughts for which Sophie had no words. She experienced these as restless emotions perched on the outside edge of articulate consciousness. Having no words or concepts to accurately express these thoughts and feelings made Sophie feel extremely insecure and so she remained in hiding, a passive pupil of the ideas of man.

I did not realize it at the time, but this story was my cry of frustration. Men had written so much of the knowledge I had learned in university. It was written in a style that did not allow me to understand it from an everyday standpoint of reference. Where are the people? This is a question I asked quite frequently. I was studying politics and society but there were no people. Intellectually I knew that people were making and remaking these structures I was studying on a daily basis, and yet there was no admission, no discussion of this, only objectified, lifeless discussions of the impact reified phenomenon/concepts have upon society and culture as an abstract entity. I was confused and dissatisfied.

It wasn't until I started reading feminist critiques of the social organization of knowledge that I began to understand the source of my confusion and dissatisfaction. From feminist scholars I learned that for hundreds of years knowledge has been derived using scholarly methods of investigation that have been developed by men (Smith 1990a,

13; Rich 1979, 22). Knowledge also, for the most part, continues to be socially organized according to the way men have historically tended to view, understand and explain reality.

> Sociology, its methods, conceptual schemes, and theories has been based on and built up within the male social universe, even when women have participated in its doing (Smith 1990a, 13).

These approaches to the study of the social objectify everyday lived reality. Individual experience and subjectivity is not included and that is why there are no people. For many women in the academy (and some men) the way knowledge is socially organized is problematic because objectified explanations bear little resemblance to the actualities of peoples' lives and, therefore, preclude understanding from the standpoint of lived experience. Understanding from standpoint of lived experience is very important for many women, myself included, because so much of who we are is tied to the realities of our everyday lives.

> The worlds of men have had, and still have, an authority over the worlds that are traditionally women's and still are predominantly women's – the worlds of household, children, and neighborhood. And though women do not inhabit only these worlds, for the vast majority of women they are primary ground of our lives, shaping the course of our lives and our participation in other relations. Furthermore, objectified knowledges are part of the world from which our kind of society is governed. The domestic world stands in a dependent relation to that other, and its whole character is subordinate to it (Smith 1990a, 13).

Despite these feminist critiques, knowledge continues to be socially organized in an objectified manner because masculinist methods and theories continue to comprise the dominant paradigms in academia. As a result, all students, women included, learn and practice these theories and methods.

> We have all learned well the lessons of dutiful daughters in reciting the fathers. We learned the Greeks, we learned Hegel and Marx, we *did* Dewey, and we did Freire. We agonized over Piaget or Kohlberg, Foucault or Derrida. We

> managed to learn their discourses inside out in order to frame our theses in the master discourses (Luke and Gore 1992, 3).

Students, women and men alike, are taught not to trust or use personal experience as a source of knowledgeable information (although this is changing somewhat as a result of feminist and postmodern critiques). In scholarly investigations students are taught to reference the literature in order to study how other researchers are thinking about the problem and how they approached their studies of the problem. Students are taught to follow these researchers' lead, to stay conceptually within the same frame, and perhaps work to further understand and clarify an aspect of the problem from within this frame (Smith 1990, 15).

Everything that students do in their courses is socially organized and coordinated, and as students take up the task of learning their thoughts are also coordinated and organized.

> While working on a topic that did interest me a great deal, I realized that my reading, interpreting, and speaking were all externally controlled experiences (Schick 1994, 3).

The social organization of academic studies affords students little leave to express independent, creative and critical thought. As a result, students often find thinking for themselves a challenge.

> ... I found it increasingly difficult to choose a thesis topic to research and to write about. I did not know or was unaccustomed to naming where my real interests lay. The process of asserting my own personal choice in the face of so much external authority was an overwhelming task (Schick 1994, 3).

It is the ambitious students that struggle to free themselves from the grip of external authority in an attempt to find their own voices. Less ambitious students continue to

defer to the voice of authority; they imitate, and while they sound clever, their thoughts are not original. Bell Hooks writes,

> There is a serious crisis in education. Students often do not want to learn and teachers do not want to teach. More than ever before in the recent history of this nation, educators are compelled to confront the biases that have shaped teaching practices in our society and to create new ways of knowing, different strategies for the sharing of knowledge... With these essays, I add my voice to the collective call for renewal and rejuvenation in our teaching practices… I celebrate teaching that enables transgressions – a movement against and beyond boundaries. It is that movement which makes education the practice of freedom (Hooks 1994, 12).

In the above quotation Hooks is talking about the education in the United States, but I maintain that the same crisis exists within the Canadian education system.

Summation

Historically universities have been seen to fulfill a number of functions in society: creating new knowledge, contributing to the economic well being of a society, and acting as the social conscience of the nation. Not everyone agrees that universities should concern themselves with all of these demands, and not everyone feels that universities are doing a good job of performing these functions.

With the advent of capitalism, interest in technical and instrumental advancement and control has increased, and the demand for post-secondary education has grown. Universities are increasingly being pressured to orient their activities to be more accountable to the interests of the state and capitalism. As a result, the extent of instrumental rationalization within universities (and throughout society) has increased and is tangibly evident as the "banking" approach to education continues to guide curriculum development within the academy.

In the next chapter I outline the study undertaken in this thesis, which investigates in greater detail the social organization of student learning beginning from the site of academic activities of students as they work to complete their course readings and requirements. Through this case study of a single academic course I excavate aspects of course organization that enable the development and expression of independent, creative and critical social thought, and highlight aspects of course organization that hinder the development and expression of independent, creative and critical student thought. This kind of thought is necessary if students are to discover and realize emancipatory opportunities through formal education.

Chapter 2: Problematic and Inquiring Method

This thesis is a case study of a university graduate level, social theory course. The heart of the study is comprised of students' accounts of working their way through the course material and course requirements. This chapter describes the study, the theory and the method used to guide this entire project. The subsequent analysis has been organized into three chapters. Chapter three reviews the relationship between the social organization of student consciousness and the social organization of the academic course. Chapter four investigates how students in the course took up the task of completing one of their required course assignments – weekly e-mail commentaries. Chapter five attends to how students took up the task of reading the required course material. The analysis chapters are organized in such a fashion so as to allow me to deconstruct and examine individually the key organizing features of the academic course – the course syllabus, the course assignments, and the course material – and how students' thoughts and activities were articulated to these features of the course.

The Course of Study

A social theory course was selected for this study because theory forms the foundation of any social science discipline (arguably of any discipline) and social theory courses are a core prerequisite in all social science disciplines. Social theory courses are also a key component of students' indoctrination process into their chosen discipline of study as the ideological perspectives that guide and support the discipline are the central focus of these particular courses.

A graduate level social theory course was selected primarily for two reasons. One, because the class was a manageable size for in-depth student interviews using limited

resources, and two, because at the graduate level students are not simply expected to memorize theories. Students at this level are also expected to demonstrate that they both understand and have seriously considered the truth and logic of the arguments presented in the course material. This feature is important because I wanted to explore how students, in striving to demonstrate higher level analytic thinking in their work, take up and work with the discourses they are required to read. This kind of student activity is a first step on the road toward critical and creative thought and expression, and the potential discovery and realization of emancipatory opportunities.

The Informants

There were nine students enrolled in the graduate level social theory course chosen for this study - one doctoral student and eight master students - five women and four men. Two of the students had come from the United States to study in Canada, and there were two international students, each from a different country. All but two of the students were from the department in which the course was taught. The other two students were enrolled in interdisciplinary degree programs. The course was a program requirement for the master students of the department. The interdisciplinary students enrolled in the course through special arrangement.

The Interviews

The interviewing technique I used for this project is best characterized as ethnographic description (Spradley 1979), meaning that student informants were asked to describe in detail, step by step, their work activities related to the weekly course readings and graded assignments for two different weeks (see Appendix A). Two interviews were conducted. The first interview was the most in-depth and time consuming; lasting, on

average, between 1.5 and 2 hours. The second interview gave students an opportunity to review their transcripts and to provide additional detail or clarification. Interviews were audio taped and transcribed.

Informants were free to select the weeks they wanted to discuss, but they were asked to describe one week when they really enjoyed the readings and another week when they did not particularly enjoy the readings. Interviews took place after the weeks that were chosen, not during. The objective of designing the interviews in this manner was to obtain a richly descriptive collection of accounts to work with in my analysis.[2]

It is important to emphasize that this thesis goes beyond traditional ethnography which strives to, "grasp the native's point of view, his relation to life, to realize *his* vision of *his* world" (Malinowski 1922, 25). Rather than just working to understand how individuals subjectively understand the reality of their lives – what Habermas (1970) calls the practical domain of shared meaning – the investigation undertaken in this thesis has also involved excavating and elucidating how peoples' lives are coordinated and organized by social relations, both local and extra local, that they may or may not subjectively be aware of as they carry out the particular activities of their everyday lives. I learned this investigative approach from sociologist and feminist scholar Dorothy E.

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[2] In hindsight I could have broadened data collection to include student daily activity, perhaps by having students keep logs of their daily activities and how they worked to fit their course work requirements into their daily lives. It would have allowed for a more detailed analysis of how students' lives are organized by the order of university. Also, my analysis of the course is not comprehensive as two facets of the course were not examined. These include the weekly in-class discussions of the week's readings and the research paper students were required to write for the course. These two course features afforded students opportunities to discuss the course material and to explore theoretically a topic of their choosing. During data collection, I did attend a majority of the classes and took field notes with the intent to use them in the analysis, but due to inexperience, I was not sure of what practices to annotate. As a result, my notes are fragmented and I did not feel comfortable using them in my analysis. Had I taped the discussions I would not have hesitated to use them to fortify the analysis.

Smith (1987), and it has given my work as a sociologist both purpose and meaning. I describe this approach in greater detail in the next two sections.

The Everyday World as Problematic

In searching for a method and a theoretical framework to guide this thesis project I was drawn to the work of Dorothy E. Smith (1987) because I wanted to approach my study from the standpoint of students. I wanted to examine how students take up their studies and to better understand how they are affected and changed by the experience.

Smith (1987) advocates beginning and locating one's investigation from the site of peoples' everyday/everynight activities. She talks of *the everyday world as problematic* meaning that the everyday worlds of people and their experience are not self-contained; rather, they are organized by social relations linked to others' everyday worlds elsewhere. In other words, through social relations, local activities in one site are coordinated by local activities in another site. It is important to note, however, that the social relations that enter into and organize the everyday worlds of people's experience are not readily accessible to people's immediate experience. Here is where the problematic is located, and a job for the sociologist. Viewing the everyday world as problematic locates the focus of sociological investigation; directing sociologists to work towards understanding how the local and particular actualities of everyday life are affected by social relations that are not readily apparent at the experiential level. It is a commitment to learning how social reality works, how it is put together by many people acting and relating throughout time and space/place.

An example of this approach to sociological investigation is George Smith's (1985) study of AIDS care in the province of Ontario. With the assistance of AIDS Now, an

Ontario based AIDS action group, Smith approached the problematic of his study from the standpoint of people living, and working, with HIV/AIDS. His problematic was to "determine why new, experimental AIDS drugs had not been available to people living with AIDS and HIV infection in Ontario" (Smith 1995, 18). Ontario AIDS organizations through networking with AIDS groups in the United States were aware that AIDS patients could live longer if aggressive, accelerated care was provided (Smith 1995, 20). The Ontario health system, however, only provided palliative care to their AIDS patients.

Ontario HIV/AIDS organizations considered the province's apparent reluctance to deliver alternative treatments to be the result both of bureaucratic "red-tape" and homophobia (Smith 1995, 23). Smith, however, revealed that the Ontario health care system, the administrative infrastructure, was organized ideologically from the perspective that AIDS is a fatal disease, hence the palliative care policy. As a result, the health care system in Ontario was unable to deliver aggressive, accelerated care because the professionals working within this system had not been given the mandate or the resources to deliver alternative treatments (Smith 1995, 19).

> The medical profession, although responsible for treatments, has generally been unable or unwilling to use new experimental AIDS drugs. This turned out to be, in part, because they are prohibited from using unlicensed treatments by public health regulations and threatened by the possibility of malpractice suits or of losing their hospital privileges should they do so (Smith 1995, 19).

Social relations of power, Smith illustrates, are channeled via the administrative apparatus of public health regulations into the health care system, effectively organizing health care delivery and doctors' activities in relation to AIDS patients.

As a result of reading Smith's work, and a sampling of studies that have taken up this investigative approach (Campbell and Manicom 1995), I began to think about my

own position as a student. I reflected on how my scholarly activities have been coordinated by extra-local ruling relations of university administration and organized ideologically by the authoritative discourses I have encountered in the courses I have taken. These reflections helped to frame and guide this thesis. Using my own reflections as well as the accounts provided by the students who participated in this study, I have worked in this thesis to better understand how students are organized and guided into academic studies, and how their thoughts are organized by extra-local social relations of ruling.

Ruling Relations, Ideology and Ruling Apparatus

The concept of ruling relations "grasps power, organization, direction, and regulation as more pervasively structured than can be expressed in traditional concepts provided by the discourses of power" (Smith 1987, 3). Smith (1990) argues that in contemporary capitalist society, an objectifying method of organization has emerged. This method involves the use of concepts and categories to translate the actualities of people's into lives into conceptual merchandise which can then be manipulated in order to effectively organize, direct and regulate the local and particular activities of people in their everyday lives. Prior to these objectified modes, social organization was a local and particular phenomenon, intimately tied to the actualities of people's everyday/everynight activities and relationships.

In contemporary society, religion, business, government and academia create ideological concepts and supporting discourses that are transmitted to society through various media such as books, radio and television. These discourses have immense potential to organize groups of people similarly across different local settings (Smith

1990, 211). Take for example, the concept of multiculturalism. It is a word that virtually all Canadians know because it has been artfully woven into the very fabric of Canadian existence. This word operates to organize consciousness and local activities in diverse local settings. Formally introduced to Canadians in a speech delivered by Prime Minister Trudeau in the House of Commons on October 8, 1971 (Ng 1995), Trudeau's multiculturalism speech did two things. One, it articulated an ideological framework through which to view Canadian society; and, two, it contained a set of instructions for the bureaucracy with regard to how to conduct its affairs within this new ideological frame. The contents of this document were translated into government policy and "played a determinate role in the reframing and reorganization of Canadian society in the 1970s" (Ng 1995, 36-37). Even today when Canadians, for the most part, are asked to describe Canada the word "multicultural" comes to mind – Canada is a multicultural society. Each year Folk Festivals are held in cities across Canada to celebrate multiculturalism – a tangible legacy of the federal government's multicultural initiative. In general, Canadians, have adopted an ideological discourse constructed and perpetuated by "ruling relations within the bureaucratic state apparatus" (Ng 1995, 36-37).

Dorothy Smith (1990) argues that the discipline of sociology contributes to ruling through its long-standing objectifying practices. As sociologists study the social world, they observe people in their everyday lives. In their work they take the verbs that describe people's activities and convert them into nouns, thus turning actions into conceptual merchandise. She refers to this as "the ideological practice of sociology", and there are three tricks involved.

> Trick 1 Separate what people say they think from the actual circumstances in which it is said, from the actual empirical conditions of their lives, and from the actual individuals who said it.
> Trick 2 Having detached the ideas, arrange them to demonstrate an order among them that accounts for what is observed. (Marx and Engels describe this as making "mystical connections."...)
> Trick 3 Then change the ideas into a "person"; that is, set them up as distinct entities (for example, a value pattern, norm, belief system, and so forth) to which agency (or possible causal efficacy) may be attributed (Smith 1990, 43-44)

These tricks that positivist sociologists use are the very same tricks used to rule in other spheres of social life. Once a norm, a belief, or an ideology is constructed, a mode of communication is then needed to deliver and administer the message to the target audience.

Television, radio, newspapers, magazines, journals and books are all effective media for delivering a message. Public and private organizational structures are then effective for coordinating and perpetuating the constructs. Smith refers to these as ruling apparatuses as they serve to facilitate ruling, to shape and organize everyday life.

> ... The ways in which we think about our society – our images of how we should look, our homes, our lives, even our inner worlds – are given shape and distributed by the specialized work of people in universities and schools, in television, radio and newspapers, in advertising agencies, in book publishing and other organizations forming the "ideological apparatuses" of the society (Smith 1987, 17).

Implicit in this discussion is the knowledge that language is vital in order to coordinate and organize the activities of people in many different local settings. Through categories of language "a subject's bodily site is entered into the social as a social organization of subjectivity" (Smith 1990, 55).

Summation

The knowledge of any academic discipline is stored in texts, organized textually, passed on in textuality. Academic courses take students to the subject matter of the discipline. Teaching involves coordinating and organizing students' thoughts and activities within the course setting, preparing them to enter into the translocal realm of academic studies. As students take up the work of completing their course assignments their thoughts and activities become oriented to the social organization of the course and to the discourses they encounter.

In the next chapter I sketch out how within institutions of higher learning, words, language, discourse and texts are used to frame and organize the academic experience. I begin with a discussion of consciousness and how individual consciousness is linked to the external realities of everyday life. It is an important preliminary discussion leading to a working understanding of how student consciousness becomes articulated to academic courses and course work. Following this discussion, I move on to investigate how student consciousness becomes oriented to the social organization of the course work and the course material.

Chapter 3: Social Organization of the Academic Experience

On a daily basis during any given term students enter chalk-dust filled rooms, sit in hard, cramped desks for an hour or so, while their minds are taken on journeys through time and space courtesy of the discourses that organize the courses they are taking. This articulation of consciousness from the actual world of desks and chalk to the translocal realm of academic course studies is accomplished through textually mediated discourse. How this shift in consciousness is accomplished is the focus of this chapter.

Social Organization of Consciousness

Alfred Schutz (1962) asserts that consciousness is located within the world of the body, a 'paramount reality of a world in action and direct manipulation' and that relative to the body, aspects of the social world are organized (Smith 1990, 54-55). The social world, comprised of language and social relations also embedded within this paramount reality, emerges from people's activities.

> The wide-awake man within the natural attitude is primarily interested in that sector of the world of his everyday life which is within his scope and which is centered in space and time around himself. The place which my body occupies, my actual Here, is the starting point from which I take my bearing in space. It is, so to speak, the center 0 of my system of coordinates. Relative to my body I group the elements of my surroundings under categories of right and left, before and behind, above and below, near and far, and so on. And in a similar way my actual Now is the origin of all time perspectives under which I organize the events within the world such as the categories of fore and after, past and future, simultaneity and succession, etc (Schutz 1962, 222-3).

Smith (1990) argues, however, that Schutz has jumped too quickly to the level of categories. She maintains that knowing from the sight of the body actually constrains knowing from the social.

> The individual's experiencing from within the here/now moment of her own consciousness constrains the knowing expressed and displaced in the deictic

> categories that have already construed the subject within the social (Smith 1990, 55).

Smith is interested in determining and understanding the social practices that individuals enter into from their bodily sites of being; in particular, what kinds of language mechanisms are at work organizing and guiding individual's activities within the social sphere of life.

In language certain pronomial words are employed by speakers, or writers, to draw in and orient their listeners, or readers, to what is being addressed in the discourse. In using these words the speaker/writer positions the reader/listener's subjectivity within the discourse in terms of time and place. This results in an orientation of consciousness from the everyday world of bodies and action to the translocal realm of texts and discourse. In grammatical theory words that are used to orient the listener or reader within the discourse are referred to as deictic terms (Smith 1980, 56).

Deictic means to point or indicate, and deictic terms such as: here, there, now, then, I, they, we, and you, all serve to orient or situate a reader or listener within the text. The primary point to note about deictic terms contained within discourse is that any group of individuals listening to or reading the same discourse or text will enter and be situated within the discourse in the same way regardless of where they are located in the paramount reality of their everyday lives. The discourse or text located or nested within the paramount reality of bodies and action contains its own social organization, referencing an alternative reality not located at the level of bodies and action.

It is this deictic order of the discourse which facilitates the social organization of an individual's consciousness as well as accomplishing intersubjectivity among a group of people who are hooked into the same discourse (Smith 1980). Smith observes that,

> In any given encounter between persons, more than one social relation, each with its distinctive deictic order and level of generality, may intersect. People are apparently able to move between such differing levels without difficulty (Smith 1990, 59).

As individuals hook into discourses or texts contained within any given social setting, their consciousness becomes socially organized by the order of the discourse. For example, in a meeting, the chairperson provides participants with deictic instructions that serve to orient and lock the participants' bodily sites of being and consciousness into specific positions within the meeting room (Smith 1990, 62). In an academic course, the professor works to guide and orient student consciousness and activity into the social organization of the course. How the professor accomplishes this task is the focus of the next section.

Fostering Course Consciousness

In this section I outline instrumental, rationally organized features of the university system that both professors and students know, understand and follow (Habermas 1976). These aspects of academic organization and coordination are enforced through relations of ruling of university administration and mediated through ruling apparatuses of the university such as policies and directives of the university. Many of these policies are readily available for anyone to review in the calendar that is produced yearly by the university.

As students make their way to campus on the first day of classes they already know courses they are registered to take, roughly what each course is about, and that a professor has been assigned to teach the course. They also know that when they get to class they will receive a course syllabus from the professor, and that once they receive this document they are responsible for learning the course material and completing the

course requirements within the time frame of the course. In return they will receive grades for the work they submit to the professor for assessment and they will receive an overall final grade for the course.

The professor's job on the first day of class is to complete the institutional deictic locking procedures for the course. He or she begins this task by establishing his or her authority in the classroom, and by drawing attention to the "we" of the course, namely, the students occupying desks, or sitting around a table, in the classroom and orienting students to the course material and course requirements. This procedure is periodically reinforced throughout the duration of the course.

Academic classrooms are generally organized spatially in a lecture type format; thirty or forty desks facing a blackboard, a desk and a podium. The professor will set up his or her teaching material on the desk and will deliver the lecture from the podium. Students will occupy the desks facing the professor. There are exceptions, however, to this typical classroom arrangement as some courses are conducted in seminar rooms – rooms containing large rectangular tables (or a group of tables pushed together to form a rectangle) around which numerous chairs are situated.

The course examined for this thesis was a seminar course and classes took place in a seminar room. Spatially, the professor occupied one entire edge of the rectangular table while students sat down the sides and across the opposing end of the table facing both each other and the professor. Interestingly, both the students and the professor, in effect, reproduced the professor/student division that exists in the typical classroom setting by virtue of their choice of seating arrangement. The professor was situated in a unique position relative to the students, much the same as he would have been in a larger, more

formal, classroom setting, visually emphasizing his distinctive position in the course as well as indicating the respect and authority of his position.

Smith writes that,

> [t]he spatial ordering of members of the occasion is of great importance in complementing the uses of pronomials in deictic locking. It coordinates the deictic procedures of the natural attitude which are organized around the location of the body with the social organization to be entered at a given position. The social organizational referents can be ostensively made (Smith 1990, 62).

The professor standing or sitting at one end of the room will use deictic terms like: I, you, my, your, etc. and members of the class collectively, recognize and know who the professor is talking about when he or she uses these deictic terms. The spatial arrangement of the classroom, and the reproduction of this arrangement in the seminar room setting, essentially establish and support the deictic order of the class.

Once the professor has established his or her presence in the classroom (by perhaps going through the class list, adding those who have not yet been enrolled into the course) he or she will then turn his or her attention to introducing and reviewing the content of the course. At this time professors hand out a course syllabus to each member of the class. The syllabus is the agenda for the course, listing what the readings will be each week, what assignments will be required, when they are due to be handed in to the professor, and other pertinent information associated with the course.

The Course Syllabus

The syllabus for the course studied in this thesis included the following information:

- Course title and session
- Professor's name, office location, phone numbers, and office hours
- Course texts
- Course organization and format

- Course assignments and grade designations (i.e., how much each assignment is worth)
- Schedule of topics and readings (broken down week by week)
- Grading policy and course prerequisites (of the department and the university)

On the first day of classes professors normally take students through the course syllabus. They explain what the course is about, how the course has been structured, what books students will need to purchase, what the assignments will be and when they are due, when exams will take place and what material they will cover.

Below is the introduction from the course syllabus that was provided by the professor in the course examined for this thesis and quoted in this thesis with his permission. An introduction similar to what is written below was also articulated orally by the professor on the first day of class as a way to introduce the course and to begin to facilitate the intersubjective organization of consciousness among students in the course. The numbers located to the left of the text have been added for referencing purposes during this analysis.

1. Course Organization and Format

2. This is a seminar course in which the emphasis will be placed upon close
3. reading of texts and extensive discussion of the issues raised by those texts.

4. Our sessions will be introduced each day by brief remarks of my own,
5. followed by a roundtable discussion in which each member of the class will
6. comment on the assigned reading. In the roundtable format, other members
7. of the seminar have an opportunity to respond to each speaker. This format
8. will help us bring our various resources directly to bear upon the course
9. readings and their theoretical/practical implications.

10. The second half of each session will begin with a general discussion in
11. which key themes flagged in the roundtable will be revisited. Following the
12. general discussion of issues arising from the readings, we will turn our
13. attention to the term paper assignments and take up any points of common
14. concern. Beginning in February, I will each night ask one or two students to
15. make brief, ungraded progress reports on how the term paper is shaping up,
16. with the objective of receiving constructive feedback from the group.

17. The most effective way of preparing for class is to study the assigned
18. reading well in advance, preparing notes as you work through the material.
19. Aspects of your notes can then provide the basis for a brief written (and
20. oral) commentary.

The text above contains the deictic devices needed to orient student consciousness intersubjectively into the order of the course. For example: line 2, "this is a seminar course"; line 4, "our sessions" and "brief remarks of my own"; line 5, "each member of the class"; line 6, "other members"; line 7, "each speaker"; line 8, "help us" and "our various resources"; line 12, "we will turn our"; line 14, "I will each night"; line 16, "the group"; line 18, "you work through"; and line 19, "your notes". As the professor reviews the syllabus, students in the class recognize and understand who the professor is referring to when he employs the pronouns "I", "you", "your", "we" and "our", and that he is talking to the students enrolled in the class when he refers to "the group.

From then on, when the students review the syllabus they will recognize the 'we' and 'our' deictically, as applying to them. The organizing language of the text categorizes the current group of students present in the room as "the class" (see line 5). These people are now, for the duration of the course, more than simply a group of individuals sitting together in a room.

To review, the order of the course is established through the use of deictic locking procedures. The individual subjectivities of students located in the paramount reality of their bodily sites of being are guided into the order of the course as their consciousnesses articulate to the deictic locking devices employed by the professor and settle into the temporal sequencing of the course.

> With respect to the events of the occasion and to its past, the members of the occasion are related to it from within and not as something external to them.

> Their here/now is mapped into a temporal sequence which is the sequence of the meeting or the series. Its temporal structuring becomes theirs. Or vice versa (Smith 1990, 65).

What happens, though, when the students leave the classroom and the university setting? Does the deictic order that was created in the classroom disappear? The answer is no; this is where the course syllabus becomes vitally important. Once students leave the classroom the syllabus becomes the primary referent for the course, and each time the student refers to this document they are once again hooked into the social organization of the course.

The course syllabus is a powerful organizing device. The syllabus organizes the activities of student in other sites of their lives. The syllabus organizes the participation of both teacher and student in a joint project within the relations of ruling. Remember, ruling relations is a concept that "grasps power, organization, direction and regulation" (Smith 1987, 3). It actually refers to an

> internally coordinated complex of administrative, managerial, professional, and discursive organization that regulates, organizes, governs, and otherwise controls our societies (Smith, unpublished manuscript, 54).

It includes "the activities of those who are selecting, training, and indoctrinating those who will be its governors" (Smith 1990a, 14). Ruling is,

> a complex of organized practices, including government, law, business, financial management, professional organization, and educational institutions as well as the discourse in texts that interpenetrate the multiple sites of power (Smith 1987, 3).

Ruling is a verb, not a noun. It is both an activity and an organizing practice that is accomplished through the use of words, language, and discourse (Smith 1987, 3). Practices of organization and ruling are written into texts by people from local sites of being and then introduced into social relations through various ruling apparatuses. Once

these texts are activated, or entered into, by readers or listeners, the ruling discourses contained within them operate to organize thoughts and activities.

> A mode of ruling has become dominant that involves a continual transcription of the local and particular actualities of our lives into abstracted and generalized forms. It is an *extralocal* mode of ruling. Its characteristic modes of consciousness are objectified and impersonal; its relations are governed by organizational logics and exigencies.... We are ruled by forms of organization vested in and mediated by texts and documents, and constituted externally to particular individuals and their personal and familial relationships. The practice of ruling involves the ongoing representation of the local actualities of our worlds in the standardized and general forms of knowledge that enter them into the relations of ruling. It involves the construction of the world as texts, whether on paper or in computer, and the creation of a world in texts as a site of action (Smith 1987, 3).

The professor organizes the course to be taught. He or she reviews the literature related to the topic to be investigated, develops a framework to organize the contents of this field of study, chooses articles and books for students to read and comprehend, writes lectures, and devises forms of examination to test what students have learned. All of this work and organization is written into the syllabus. Students' work activities in the course are then coordinated and organized by this social organization of the course mediated by the course syllabus. The social organization of an academic course and the subsequent social organization of student consciousness into this order creates a sort of 'platform' which helps to prepare and ease students into the translocal, textually mediated sphere of academic learning.

Summation

In this chapter I have worked to reveal that there are certain words that operate to hook, coordinate and organize people activities within the social worlds they operate within. For example, in an academic course setting, a professor will use words like I, you, us, here, now, and so forth to create and draw students into the social organization of

the course he or she will be teaching. The syllabus is an important tool used to orient students to the social organization of the course. In next chapter, my investigation attends to how the students took up the work they were required to complete in the course. In this analysis I work to excavate how student's thoughts and activities were coordinated and organized by the assignments they were required to complete and the course material they were assigned to read.

Chapter 4: Students Take Up Course Assignments

During the course of their studies, students are required to complete course assignments for assessment purposes. There are many different types of assessment tools, including exams, research papers, presentations, labs, quizzes, and so forth. Whatever the incarnation, assessment tools are always selected and designed by the professor. This chapter examines how students took up the task of completing the required assignments for the course being investigated in this thesis. The professor decided on two different assessment tools for the course: weekly electronic mail (e-mail) commentaries (eight in total) and one term paper.

The analysis in this chapter focuses on the e-mail commentaries, beginning with a review of the course syllabus; specifically, the section of the syllabus that explains the e-mail assignment and the associated grading criteria. The purpose of this exercise is to attend to how the professor, through the syllabus, instructs students in how to take up the task of completing their commentaries. Following this exercise, I look at how students actually took up the task of completing their e-mail commentaries. Here I am looking to see if and how students' activities related to this task were oriented to the syllabus. Remember, the course syllabus is an organizing device. As the reader activates the text, the discourse contained within mediates between the local activities of the reader and the inter-textual organization of the syllabus (Smith 1998, 134). In the academic setting, ruling is accomplished through the use of such organizing devices.

Commentaries and Grading

The section of the syllabus that addresses the e-mail assignment states that commentaries provide the students with an opportunity each week to demonstrate how

well they comprehend the assigned readings and to discuss what "implications" the readings have for "theorizing the social world". To help them with this task, the professor advised the students on how best to prepare to write the commentaries. This advice appears in the course syllabus as follows,

> The most effective way of preparing for class is to study the assigned reading well in advance, preparing notes as you work through the material. Aspects of your notes can then provide the basis for a brief written (and oral) commentary. The oral commentary need not be longer than five minutes or so. There are various ways in which you might develop ideas for the commentary, e.g.:
>
> 1. Highlight a point made (or a passage) in the day's reading that you find particularly insightful, convincing, confusing, or contentious. Say why you have this reaction to the point.
> 2. Cite an example -- from your own experience, current events, or the historical record -- that sheds light upon the reading -- or that the theory under review might shed light upon. Does the example tend to support the theoretical analysis, or does it raise problems?
> 3. Compare some aspect of the theory with readings and analyses we have already taken up in this course, or with other literature with which you are familiar.
> 4. Consider the philosophical underpinnings of the theory -- ontological, epistemological, ethical -- and/or its implications for the role of [the discipline] in social change processes.
> 5. Provide an overall evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the analysis presented in the reading. Because most of our readings are secondary sources -- accounts of primary theoretical works -- this evaluation can be twofold; i.e., the assigned reading can be appraised as well as the theory of which it gives an account.
>
> Don't limit yourself to any one of these modes of engagement; try out various of them -- or try completely different approaches -- in preparing your commentary.

In addition, the professor stated that he would be using the following five-point scale to grade all of the commentaries:

> 5 = excellent -- brimming with insightful and articulate comments that reflect a strong grasp of the assigned reading;
>
> 4 = very good -- indicative of a comprehension of the readings, or of a strong grasp of important aspects of the readings;

> 3 = somewhat lacking -- due to inadequate comprehension, unclear writing, too narrow a focus, or some combination of the three.

No value lower than three was assigned. Students were free to read each other's commentaries, as they were all to be posted on the Internet. Instructions on how to subscribe to receive access to the commentaries were included in the syllabus.

The professor's decision to grade the commentaries appears to have inspired students to spend more time thinking about and writing their commentaries. Had the professor decided not to grade the commentaries the result might have been quite different.

> ... if they weren't graded I probably wouldn't have spent as much time. I would probably just have summarized the readings (Personal Interview, Herb).

The professor's decision to have the readings posted on the Internet for all the students in the class to read also created feelings of anxiety among some students.

> I don't feel comfortable having everyone read mine [the commentaries], I just don't feel comfortable with it. I feel foolish because some of the things I've written I haven't been comfortable with. So if I feel that way other people may feel that way (Personal Interview, April)

> I guess [I don't want other people reading my commentaries] because I'm self conscious and I don't want other people judging my writing. The instructor has to and I'm okay with that because I've done that for years, but it's personal, your writing is very personal and I guess I don't want people to judge me negatively or whatever (Personal Interview, Fay).

In university, it is uncommon for anyone other than the professor, and sometimes the professor's assistant, to read a student's work. The anxiety some students experienced as a result of having their peers read their work is linked to a fear of "looking foolish" or perhaps being "judged negatively" by their peers. I have also felt this myself on occasion. The reason why I found having others read my work uncomfortable is because I never thought myself to be as intelligent as my peers. I always lived in fear that they

would find out that I was not as bright - that I would be exposed as the phony I felt myself to be on the inside. These feelings are unfortunate because they cause students to be less open to voicing what they really feel or think because they are afraid of looking foolish. If emancipatory opportunities are to be recognized and realized in formal education methods of overcoming such anxieties and of encouraging creative student expression need to be developed.

The fact that the professor provided students with an opportunity to creatively express and share their own thoughts and ideas through the e-mail commentaries, however, is a good first step to overcoming shyness and giving students a public voice. The fact that students were given the opportunity to read each other's commentaries is another potential avenue for promoting dialogue and perhaps increased understanding among students, and this feature increases the possibility for critical and creative exchange of ideas and discussion. Unfortunately, the grading of the commentaries and perceived expectations for academic writing tended to subvert the potential benefit of the e-mail exercise. These are looked at in the next two sections.

Negotiating Requirements

Making the Grade

Students in the course did, in fact, read each other's e-mail commentaries, but more diligently at the outset of the course than they did as the course progressed. Their motivation for reading the commentaries was varied, but for some students an important reason for doing so had to do with assessing how good their commentaries were in relation to other students' commentaries. You see, each week students were expected to read and comprehend approximately ninety pages of text and there were many interesting

thoughts and arguments contained within these pages. As a result, there were countless ways to approach the writing of an e-mail commentary.

> I would read them [the commentaries] but in a very skimming fashion because there wasn't a lot of time. I would read it to get a sense of where people were at, or to get a sense of where I was at in comparison to what other people were writing because sometimes I would send out an e-mail and I didn't feel terribly confident that it was brimming [with insight] (Personal Interview, Byron).

Notice how Byron made use of the term "brimming" when discussing his e-mail commentary. The grading criteria stipulated that an excellent commentary is one that is "brimming with insightful and articulate comments that reflect a strong grasp of the assigned reading". In taking up the task of writing the commentary Byron was deeply concerned with producing a commentary that met the criteria needed to achieve an excellent score. His activities related to the task of writing the commentaries were organized and mediated by the grading discourse contained within the course syllabus.

Improving one's understanding of what was required to get an excellent score on the commentary sometimes involved comparing grades with other students as well as reading their commentaries.[3]

> We all had 3.5's. And then the only other one I saw was Byron's, and I saw he had a five that week and I looked at it and I thought, okay. And I read his commentary and realized how casual and relaxed his style was. So I used that and thought, okay, if that gets you a five, I'll do it (Personal Interview, Ida).

> I was shocked and really disappointed when I found out my first score, 3.5 out of 5, but then when I found out everyone else had just made the same amount I felt great. I felt, 'okay, I'm right in there, I'm okay' (Personal Interview, Fay).

> So we all spent a lot of time trying to figure out what he wanted, what he was looking for, how can we get the five? That's what we want. How can we get the most points? (Personal Interview, Emma)

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[3] Grades were not made public by the professor. If a student wanted to know what marks other students received on their assignments the student would have to obtain this information from the other students.

> I only wanted to know if I was doing well, but not actually competing with someone, but when you know about other people's grades, [that] you are getting worse or something like that, then you have to do better, you have to put in extra to get good grades. But if all the grades are the same then you know that it's not your fault (Personal Interview, Ida).

Again, in taking up the task of writing the commentaries these students' thoughts were organized and mediated by the grading criteria for the course and obtaining good grades in general.

Everything Counts

In reading other students' commentaries some students were annoyed to discover that the syllabus instructions relating to commentary lengths were not being followed. The syllabus stipulated to the students that commentaries were "not to exceed 500 words", but some students found it difficult to stay within the count. As a result other students felt compelled to write longer commentaries due to the pressures associated with the drive to obtain high grades.

> At first he said 500 words commentary each week. So I tried to fit everything in 500 words, but I noticed that everyone was sending in long comments. So I started to write longer comments (Personal Interview, Byron).

> ... The first week I know Byron and I both struggled really hard to keep it under 500 words, which was what he [the professor] said in the outline, [but] then other people put in 1500 words so then the next week we both made ours longer (Personal Interview, Herb).

> If other people in the class are doing a certain amount of work, we all have to do that. We have to hold the highest standard, we all have to elevate to the highest standard. If I was a skillful writer and could be very clear and concise about my comments and express them in 500 words, but I don't have those skills; therefore, I would have to do the volume of material to make sure I covered everything because we're all thinking in our minds, he's making comparisons between us as he's grading these. So if he's comparing us to each other for grading then we have to do the same type of material (Personal Interview, Emma).

All of this activity around writing the commentaries and achieving good grades has led me to wonder how much these activities direct student attention away from independent, critical and creative thought and expression. All of this extra effort takes up a lot of time that could be better spent learning, thinking and reflecting on the course material. In the course studied for this thesis, however, I did not sense that this was a serious problem for everyone. As the next section illustrates, the students in the course did enjoy reading each other's e-mail commentaries, when they had the time to read them, and they did find them very interesting – providing them with ideas to think and reflect on.

Discourse and the Reading Reality

In their commentaries, students took up and discussed certain readings. Sometimes they shared similar thoughts related to certain aspects of a particular reading, and at other times their opinions would differ completely. Students picked up on this when reading each other's commentaries.

> All weeks were really interesting reading the commentaries, and actually I thought it was interesting because I think this week [week one] not very many people talked about that paper by [theorist A] which I thought was kind of surprising because I thought that was the best one... [A]s I say, everyone sort of talked about different things [in their e-mail commentaries] (Personal Interview, Charlie).

> I found [it] very interesting that we [Fay and I] approached things from almost the opposite side of the coin on certain issues... Byron is another person who approaches things differently than I do in the way he phrases his ideas and the ways of looking at things ... I don't know, it's linguistically, he just approaches things differently... I can understand sometimes where he's coming from in his e-mail commentaries, but I don't approach things in that same direction (Personal Inteview, Emma).

> I wish I had more time to actually engage with the ideas, but there were an awful lot of great ideas. Of course there were a lot of things where I would like

> to question them too because their understandings were much different from mine, but there were a lot of wonderful ideas (Personal Interview, Charlie).

> There were times where I would find commonalities. Someone emphasized the same thing that I did in a particular commentary, and then other times somebody would write something that I thought, 'oh, now that's a different angle' and 'that's interesting' or 'oh, he or she wrote that well, I like that.' You know, so there was something ... yeah, or a different, 'oh, that person took a different approach and I like the way they did that' (Personal Interview, Fay).

Taking up different readings and different ideas in the commentaries, coming at issues and problems from different perspectives and different interpretations, and different styles of speaking and writing. The students found all of these observations fascinating in talking about each other's e-mail commentaries. Some of these observations were brought up in the classroom and resulted in interesting round table discussion.

There was, however, something that one of my informants said to me that I found particularly striking. He found there were, in some instances, discrepancies between what people really thought of the readings, what they actually wrote in their commentaries, and how they talked about the readings in class discussion.

> I found it interesting to see whether or not certain people, or some people in general, would confess to being confused by the material, or was it more trying to cover that. I mean, in talking with people in general during coffee break or before class or whatever, [they would say things like], 'the material is challenging, it's abstract, it's this, it's that, it's confusing,' and yet there appeared to me to be less admittance of that in a commentary, probably for my own part as well. There seemed to me to be a very definite difference between what they were saying and what they were writing (Personal Interview, Byron).

Another student also made reference to academic writing as being something completely different from talking to someone informally about the course readings.

> ... That's interesting, because if talking on a personal basis, interacting just on an informal basis with someone about the material, it strikes me that that's quite different than writing a commentary and putting down your thoughts in an academic way. There's quite a separation, because when you say, 'just tell me about that', it suddenly came to my mind that, well, should I talk in an academic

> way which is maybe more diplomatic, or shall I really say what I feel? (Personal Interview, Charlie).

Yet another student encountered a great deal of difficulty writing the e-mail commentaries, but she found writing from personal experience helped her to attain better marks even though writing in this way was not in accordance to how she had been taught to write assignments.

> I've made personal comments [in my commentaries]. That conflicts a lot with how I've been taught to do, or how I understood [or was] taught to do assignments ... you're not being objective then, you're talking about your own personal experiences, and that's something that has never been professional in any way... So, however, it seems that the few of these that I've gotten better marks on are the one's where I've basically talked about my own personal experience. So that says to me, 'ah, this is what we're after here'. It's a little late to figure it out at the end of the course, but, hey, I've learned something (Personal Interview, April).

All of this is very interesting because, in the course syllabus, the professor encouraged students to draw from their personal experiences when engaging the readings. These instructions, however, are not in keeping with traditional forms of academic scholarly engagement or expression which supports a more objectified (or "diplomatic" as Charlie characterized it) treatment and discussion of the course material. These traditional approaches to academic engagement work against the alternative pedagogical approach the professor attempted to introduce into the course. Breaking from tradition is difficult and perhaps even risky for some students; difficult because, one, it's not the norm and, two, the students are being asked to disclose more personal judgments in their discussions; something that could potentially be criticized and, therefore, damaging to one's self-confidence.

Evidence of students' unwillingness to disclose in their commentaries how abstract, confusing and inaccessible they found the readings to be, led me to conclude that, for

many students, there is a real fear of disclosing a lack of understanding. Perhaps it is because students are afraid of exposing what they perceive to be intellectual inadequacies to the professor, or it could be that they are afraid that if they do so they will receive a lower grade. Linked to that is a fear the professor will be hurt and will not understand. These silences on the part of students take away from their abilities to realize emancipatory opportunities. If the standards students have learned to reproduce in their academic work, and the fear they harbour about saying what they really think, are causing them to hold back and not openly and adequately confront that which they do not understand, then emancipatory opportunities are less likely to be recognized.

That being said, however, I do still think it is possible to have an emancipatory experience under such circumstances; especially if the professor is clear that she or he is working to resist and subvert tradition and if he or she reassures students that it is okay for them to do the same and encourages them in their attempts. The reason why I say that is because I think April recognized an emancipatory possibility when she discovered that writing from personal experience is a respectable option. It is my hope that April, as a result of taking this course, will experiment with using personal experience in her writing more often. It is imperative, however, that professors clearly articulate their alternative pedagogical intentions so as to alleviate any student misunderstanding or confusion, because I do think, looking at April's transcript, that she was confused in this regard.

Summation

In an academic course, professors provide students with a course syllabus – usually on the first day of class. One of the functions of a syllabus is to detail the assignments that students will have to complete in order to receive a grade in the course. In the course

investigated for this thesis, the syllabus also provided students with advice on how best to take up the readings in order to prepare for both the written and the oral commentaries they would have to prepare for class. The syllabus did not include instruction on how to write commentaries, but it did state that the commentaries should not exceed 500 words. The syllabus also outlined the grading criteria to be used for the commentaries.

In taking up the task of writing the commentaries, students' thoughts were instrumentally oriented to the professor's instructions in the following ways. Some students worked to stay as close to 500 words as possible, although, they reported that this was not adhered to by others in the class and they felt pressured to lengthen their commentaries as a result. Some students' thoughts were oriented to the grading criteria outlined by the professor as they worked to "brim" in their commentaries and obtain high grades. Some students oriented themselves to what other students were writing in the commentaries and to what grades other students were obtaining. The purpose of this was to see how well they were doing in relation to other students and to pick up tips to improve their own performance on commentaries through working to understand the professor's likes and dislikes.

All of this activity was taking place in addition to reading and comprehending the course material. Moreover, considering the actual writing of the commentaries, there is evidence that the students were adhering to stylistic conventions of speaking and writing social theory. As a result, some students did not disclose their actual experiences of reading the material (i.e., that they found the readings abstract and confusing) in their commentaries and in class discussion.

In the academy, excellence is both desired and rewarded. Students in the academic setting are aware of this and many orient their activities with this in mind. Students work to obtain high grades so that they may be rewarded with money, special privileges, freedom to progress up the academic ladder if they so desire, and tangible confirmation of quality intellect. This is how relations of ruling operate to coordinate and orient student activities toward striving to achieve academic excellence, and it can sometimes work against a professor's best efforts to employ alternative pedagogical practices in the classroom.

Also part of this picture is students working to become competent practitioners of the discourses that operate in their discipline. If this means writing in an objective and objectifying manner then that is what must be done in order to make the grade. In other words, as students take up the work of reading and writing, they are also working to become competent practitioners of the discourse, which will help to ensure that they obtain first class grades. Again, students do come into courses already having been organized by relations of ruling operating within the university and the disciplines they have become a part of; it is something that the critical pedagogue has to deal with in every course.

Picking up on this point one of my advisors pointed out to me that students often introduce and reinforce the ruling order of the university when they enter into the classroom, and she advised me to look at Bell Hook's book, Teaching to Transgress (1994). In this book I found a passage that I think captures nicely a point my advisor was making,

> Time is just one of the factors that prevented this class from becoming a learning community. For reasons I cannot explain, it was also full of "resisting"

> students who did not want to learn new pedagogical processes, who did not want to be in a classroom that differed in any way from the norm. To these students, transgressing boundaries was frightening. And though they were not the majority, their spirit of rigid resistance seemed always to be more powerful than any will to intellectual openness and pleasure in learning. More than any other class I had taught, this one compelled me to abandon the sense that the professor could, by sheer strength of will and desire, make the classroom an exciting, learning community (Hooks 1994, 9).

In other words, professors can do their best to lead students but they cannot force students to recognize and realize emancipatory opportunities. They can do their best to make the learning environment a positive place within which to realize emancipatory opportunities. They can even try to lead student to where they perceive the opportunities to exist, but after that it is up to students to open their minds to the opportunities present; to want to see and realize as much as possible.

The above paragraph also shows that professors do not always know why students are sometimes resistant to the possibilities, and that is partly what my thesis seeks to better understand. My thesis, working from the student standpoint, is an attempt to work towards an understanding of what frightens students, what causes them to seemingly resist in the classroom.

In the next chapter, I present some of the students' accounts of how they approached the task of engaging the course material as well as what they felt they learned from the exercise. I show how students' activities as they relate to the course are organized and coordinated by the social organization of the course. As students read the course material and in describing their reading experiences with me it is possible to see how, in taking up the readings, students were working to practice the discourses they encountered in their readings.

Chapter 5: Students Take Up Course Readings

In the course investigated for this thesis, the students were to review and discuss readings on a different issue each week. In this chapter I show how the course material operates to organize students' thoughts and activities as they relate to the topics under investigation. In reading the course material, the students orient their thoughts to the social relations of the discourse; assisted in this venture by the deictic order of the texts. This social organization of thought brought about through the reading of the texts later serves to inform the students' thoughts on the subject. The students then use the content of the course texts to discuss the topic under investigation and to complete course assignments. Essentially, these students are working to both practice and participate in the various theoretical discourses they encounter.

Engaging the Course Material

In the interview, Herb told me he enrolled in the theory course because it is a required course in his degree program. Each week he approached the assigned readings in the order in which they appeared in the course syllabus. One week Herb found the readings particularly interesting because there was an issue embedded within the readings that he had not previously contemplated.

> The [A book] sort of laid out the history of his [a social theorist's] past and sort of his values and then the [B book] described the theory and you could see how his [the theorist's] values were his theory and that his theory sort of validated what he stood for ... it made me very self-conscious about whatever I write for sure, to really look at what I'm saying and is that more a reflection of me or is it actually what ... is true (Personal Interview, Herb).

Herb activated the theoretical discourse by reading two texts, each containing writings about the same theorist - the first text a biographical account of the theorist, the other text a description of his theory. In taking up the discourse Herb began to compare

what was written in one text to what was written in the other and in doing so he discovered the connection between the theorist and his theory. As his thoughts became oriented to the discourse he began to consider how academic work is influenced by subjective biases. Reflecting on the discourse, Herb then started to question the objectivity of his own academic writing. In practicing the discourse, Herb took from his engagement with the course material a newfound sensitivity to subjective influences informing theoretical formulations.

It is not always the case, however, that a reader agrees with or adopts arguments presented in the discourse. Sometimes readers do not share the same ontological or epistemological perspectives of the authors they read. For example, Charlie is well read in social theory. He enrolled in the theory course because it fit with his personal interests in social theory. The way in which he approached each week's readings depended on what was required in the other reading course he was taking at school. For the week of readings he was interested in talking about in the interview he said he read the assigned readings early in the week. As he read the readings he wrote notes in the margins of the document. In these readings he encountered something that bothered him, something associated with the epistemological assumptions of the text. He described his experience as follows,

> ... I started out by relating very well. One of the main, one of my own main points of contention with academic research is the way it objectifies. You know, this analytical mode of thinking, objectifying everything. So I was attracted to that aspect of the work. Um, however, as I read into it I felt there was some major discrepancies... Especially when I read the other article ... she seemed to be doing exactly what she kind of criticized in the other article, otherwise objectifying. So I found that rather bothersome (Personal Interview, Charlie).

As Charlie took up the task of reading the class material for the week under consideration, he initially was attracted to the author's discourse, because it accorded nicely with his own way of thinking and theorizing the social world. Then, however, as he began to take up the discourse more closely he began to perceive discrepancies both within and between the author's two texts. As a practitioner of a particular type of discourse that seeks not to "objectify everything", and recognizing that the theorist he was reading is also a practitioner of this type of discourse, Charlie was confused by the apparent contradictions contained within the readings.

Charlie told me that he did not feel he was able to work his way through the problem to a satisfactory conclusion due to time constraints. In attempting to work his way through the problem, however, he did take up and practice the discourse in order to evaluate and critique the discrepancies he perceived within the two texts assigned for reading. Through reading and working with the course material, Charlie practiced writing theory by participating in a theoretical discussion, and the discourse organized his thoughts as he attempted understand the source of the discrepancies contained within the discourse.

What I found particularly interesting when reviewing the students' accounts of their thoughts related to the readings is how they incorporated the language presented in the readings into their discussion of their work activities relating the week of readings they were describing. For example, Ida, told me that in reading one of the articles for class she was reminded of a particular experience she had at a conference in the past.

> [The reading] said that, you know, the postmodernist thing that there should be some sort of diversity. They were trying to relate feminism to diversity and said that if women have different views ... it will be difficult to bring them together as a group. So there should be a way of bringing them together through

> dialogue, having dialogue. This is what interested me most because I have attended a few of these conferences where people ... impose their ideas on the others... so what I wanted to find out is how dialogue will be possible among people with different views, and not only divergent views but a group, whether we like it or not, a group that thinks it's better than the other group... Dialogue can only be held with people with the same level of understanding and power (Personal Interview, Ida).

In thinking about the conference in relation to the course readings and in discussing her thoughts on the experience and in comparing the two she used words like "difference" and "diversity", both of which are commonly used in postmodern theory. Ida's thoughts around the conference were organized by the discourse contained within the readings she took up for class. In her discussion she practices the discourse by bringing into her reflections of the conference the discourse she picked up from the readings she had done for class. Ida was practicing the discourse in our discussion, she took it beyond the confines of the text, and applied it to social relations and social organization that she personally encountered at the conference in order to help her to work towards a more enlightened understanding of this experience.

In addition to using the discourse to understand past events in a new way, course readings can also be picked up and used to articulate one's own feelings on a particular topic. Dan was very passionate about what he had read in a set of readings because it brought to the surface feelings and opinions that he holds regarding a particular school of thought.

> ... that's where it was interesting with [theorist A]. You see, he's talking about the limitations with Positivism. I always reacted against that, always had problems with [Positivism]. I always felt it missed the big part of the human condition; feelings, spirituality, just the context, the groundedness [of] people's subjectivity (Personal Interview, Dan).

In this account Dan has taken up the discourse and is using it to articulate his own frustrations with positivism – a particular theoretical school of thought in the social sciences. His discussion is articulated to the discourse present in the course material. Again, similar to Ida, Dan has picked up the discourse contained within the text and has taken it into areas beyond the discourse, into areas of special interest to him personally (i.e., the human condition, emotion, and spirituality).

For another student, Emma, one of the week's readings also helped her voice feelings and experiences she did not until that time have the language to express.

> I was looking at [theorist B] and he talks about - what was so exciting to me, and what really sparked my interest was what [theorist B] had to say. I felt that he dealt with things that I had been dealing with on my own. He kind of gave some vocabulary to the feelings that I had been dealing with on my own, and he kind of gave some vocabulary to the feelings that I had been experiencing.
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> He talked about that there is these two sides, that there's the side of us that's based in reality that makes us function. That's what school is like and business and anything that wants to accomplish something, it has to be based in reality. And that's what makes production. It keeps us within the framework of the organization we're working in and it makes us productive and keeps us working and motivated. And then there's this other side of us that's our imagination. It's our creative side. And that the imagination has been suppressed and we can't really embrace that because that's not productive. And our whole capitalist system is based on the fact that we have to be productive and we have to be little soldiers inside our offices and stuff to get the work done to make life happen. I've spent my life trying, with one foot in this creative side, with one foot in this imaginative side.
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> So if I'm looking at someone to do my [thesis] topic with, I want somebody who's based in the reality principle because I want to get through – that's the reality principle talking. But at the same time, I want to have this other brilliance, this other creativity, this unleashed mass of information and ideas that you can tap into.
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> So this is the stuff I was going through because of this reading. It didn't just last that week. It's gone on since. Especially the week after and the week after, it really sparked a lot of these ideas that I'm telling you now. It really started my mind in motion and thinking about these concepts (Personal Interview, Emma).

Here we see, just as is the case with the other accounts presented thus far, that Emma's thoughts on the subject about which she is speaking were informed and shaped by the course readings. In the readings she discovered a language that fit her feelings and experiences. As she hooked into and picked up the discourse from the readings, she discovered a medium through which to articulate certain feelings and experiences. The readings also provided her an entire theoretical framework through which to reason, understand and explain the "why" of her feelings and experiences.

Emma's experience is a nice example of someone who has, I would say, realized an emancipatory opportunity.[4] Similarly is Herb's experience of realizing that personal biases can creep into one's work in unexpected ways. To a lesser degree, by no means less important, Ida and Dan's reading experiences were also insightful and supportive for them as they were able to pick up and use the discourses they encountered to better understand and support their perspectives. As I said in the introduction, emancipatory opportunities do not have be hugely mind altering, simply that as a result of being exposed to such an opportunity students will feel better informed and self-assured in their thoughts and ideas.

As the students in the course described to me their work processes and their thoughts associated with this work, they also made reference to certain pressures they had to negotiate in the course. These pressures included time, the volume of reading material, highly abstract, complex writing and a lack of theoretical background. The next section looks into these features in more detail.

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[4] The readings the professor chose to have students read included works by critical theorists such as Marx, Foucault, and Marcuse. These readings combined with the e-mail exercise indicate that the professor was

Time, Volume and Abstract Discourses

Balancing time and the volume of learning material associated with course loads is something virtually every university student experiences at some point or another during their academic life, and the course studied for this thesis was no exception. The readings my informants were to review each week averaged approximately ninety pages with some weeks being heavier than other weeks. The professor lectured very little, therefore, the bulk of learning came from independent learning through reading and discussion with peers both inside and outside of class.

Every one of the students in the course talked about the time pressures of the course brought about as a result of the substantial reading requirements. As well, many of the students critiqued the course material for being too abstract. For example, when I asked Fay to take me through a week of readings and what her thoughts were as she read the material she had a great deal of difficulty fulfilling this request because she could not easily recall the thoughts she had in relation to the readings.

> I usually forget it as soon as I can. I'm sorry. I'm one of those that, I move really fast and it's like, 'okay, next, next assignment.' I'm just trudging through this, but frankly, it's a shame in a way, but it's almost necessary for survival for myself, it's like, 'okay, I'm just grinding this out, grind, grind (Personal Interview, Fay).

Forgetting seems to have almost been an intentional act on Fay's part ("I usually forget it as soon as I can"), as though it were a strategy for getting through the large volume of textual material assigned for review in the course ("it's almost necessary for survival"). She approached the readings as material to be consumed for a short period of time, only to be forgotten as she moved to take up the readings for the next assignment.

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interested in encouraging students to be critically and creatively thoughtful and expressive. Under such circumstances the potential for discovering and realizing emancipatory opportunities was enhanced.

Fay did not align herself with the discourses she studied, perhaps because she found little of the course subject matter to be academically helpful.

> I went into it [the course] pretty open and just allowing it to flow through me and just kind of taking whatever, and quite frankly, I did not find myself fitting into anything specifically. In fact I would say that I got discouraged to some degree about social theory. There is part of me that is finding it [theory] quite arbitrary and just, I mean, everybody critiquing one another and there's no consensus about things, and what I hate most of all that I learned in this class is I really hate the way [scholars in the discipline] are writing.
>
> I just felt that a lot of the readings were so abstract, or abstract enough to where you need a translator.
>
> And I think because it was such heavy reading I'm not coming out with any major insights, or any major direction for myself because I don't think I had enough time to absorb, to really reflect on, to work with it. That's the sad part about it. This theory is good stuff. I want it, I want it, I like this class, and I like this subject, but it seems like it could be a whole year course, and done in a way in which to can find your place or really have that opportunity and really do some reflecting on the material (Personal Interview, Fay).

From the above it is clear that Fay is not opposed to taking up theory. It appears though that in taking up the readings for this course she did not really discover much that she wanted to hang on to and practice. The tight timelines for completing the readings did not allow for enough time to adequately pick up the discourse - to absorb, to reflect and to work with the ideas contained within discourse, and the abstractness of some of the readings appears to only have compounded the problem.

In taking up the readings, April experienced similar difficulties both recalling and connecting with the content of the readings once she had read through the assigned material.

> One of the problems that I've had with this is the readings have been so, there has been so much to read, that I've found that I've gone through and even if something did click, you know, then I would sort of lose that because there's so much. And if I sat and wrote something about everything as I went along I

> know I would never have finished the readings, so it was always this sort of conflict with time.
>
> I think probably the readings on feminist theory have been the most interesting to me; the ones that have any real meaning for me. And the particular readings we are doing right now on [theorist C] seems to be more related to my world. Frankly, so much of this seems very esoteric and, you know, do I need to know this? What will this do for me? What will this ever mean to me? In six months will I remember any of it?
>
> I'm not connecting with it [the reading] hardly at all. There's the odd thing that is of interest, but then again, for me, when I'm reading something like this it has to have some concrete meaning for me. So for instance, when I'm reading something that talks about the state and bureaucratization and such, well, I work for the federal government, so yes, I can sort of see things in that, and sort of compare it to what I live. And so again, if things don't have a meaning for me they don't stick very well. It's like watching a movie of somebody else's life (Personal Interview, April).

April found that she was forgetting what she read because she was reading to get through a great deal of textual material in a short span of time. Also she was looking to see how the readings relate to the social realities of her life. What she discovered, however, is that she was not easily able to identify with the material because the readings did not readily connect up to the realities of her life due to the abstract nature of the discourse.

Students recognize that sometimes it is next to impossible to read all the required textual material for their courses. It is not uncommon, therefore, for some students to either skim or completely skip their course readings. Each student devises his or her own methods or strategies for dealing with the volume of course material and requirements within the time frame of the term.

> Okay, I actually did not read this article because everyone talked to me that week and said, 'Have you read it? Have you read it?' They just started scanning it because at some point it just didn't make sense to them. So I wound up reading the first page or so and not even looking at the rest of it just because everyone else said they spent time on it and didn't get anything out of it (Personal Interview, Emma).

In an attempt to alleviate the problem of not being able to easily pick up and practice the discourse the students turned to the professor for help. They asked the professor if he would, at the end of each class, provide some orienting remarks about the next week's readings so that they would not be going into the readings without having some idea about what the readings were all about. The professor agreed to the students' request providing a brief precis at the end of each class to help orient students to the following week's readings.

Some students blamed their inability to easily grasp and engage the material based on what they referred to as a lack of background knowledge. Never having been exposed to certain theories and theorists covered within the course they felt caught in a very difficult position. They were discouraged by the fact that they were only crudely able to comprehend some of the readings. They were also deeply concerned about their inability to engage the ideas contained in the readings more critically and creatively. These individuals felt distinctly disadvantaged in comparison to others in the class who they perceived as having the theoretical background required to properly review and engage the course material.

> I keep telling myself there's nothing I can do, I just don't have the background like other people. I can do whatever I can do and get out [of the course] whatever I can get out ... It's like, you know, the person who doesn't know how to swim suddenly jumping into the deep end of the pool. I can't swim! ... but somehow I come to the edge... And so it's the end of the term and I'm feeling that I've got a ways to go, but I still do not know how to swim in this pool. (Personal Interview, Gail).

> Some of us are not familiar with the theories or the themes so we should be told something to enable us to and engage us in the discussion... So I always have problems ... I don't grasp the concept, the main theme, and it is not my fault because I have to learn all those things within a very short period (Personal Interview, Gail).

The comments some of the students made regarding their lack of background were all very similar. They argued that if they had of been more familiar with the discourse, that is, if they had been exposed to it in the past, it would have been much easier for them to take up the readings and to write their e-mail commentaries for the class. When they were familiar with the discourse, taking up the readings was less difficult and less time was spent working to comprehend and take up the discourse.

> ... I put more emphasis on the readings that didn't mean a lot to me personally. Simply because they were more challenging in the sense that not being able to connect with them on the levels that I value, and also in some areas not having much of a background either. So they were more challenging in that sense and I really had to strain to keep my mind on what I was reading and struggle with it and engage myself with it even though it was hard to find an engagement there. And then with the other readings that I did really feel inspired by and connected with it was "easier", in the sense that it was easy to get a personal engagement with the reading and also there was at least some sort of a background in it (Personal Interview, Byron).

Compared to occasions when an individual had personal experiences or background knowledge about a particular theory, theorist or theme, unfamiliar readings were much more difficult for certain students to both comprehend and review critically. It was especially difficult when the readings were perceived by students to have been written so abstractly as to be beyond reach of their comprehension. These challenges combined with time pressures caused some individuals to experience significant levels of frustration or stress. They were also limited in their capacity to pick up the discourses and use them to think creatively and critically.

Summation

Upon entering the institutional setting students enter into a whole complex set of local and translocal social relations, relations mediated by texts and discourse. As students take up the readings for their courses their thoughts are organized by the

discourses contained within the texts they are required to read. The discourse contained within the text is paramount and it organizes the way anyone accessing the text speaks about their personal experiences because,

> [i]n working as sociologists within established methods of thinking and inquiry, we "enter" a social relation organizing our relations with others into determinate forms. We get into this mode very much as the driver of a car gets into the driving seat. It is true that we do the driving and can choose the direction and the destination, but the way in which the car is put together, how it works, and how and where it will travel structure our relation to the world we travel in (Smith 1987, 73).

As the students in this course took up the weekly readings for the course, their thoughts became organized by the discourse. Even as they brought their own thoughts and experiences into consideration, these were viewed, discussed and analyzed through the lens of the discourse. The discourse contained within the text effectively organized the student's activities and thoughts. What they wrote about in their e-mail commentaries was coordinated by the discourse. As students took up the discourse they made connections, they made comparisons, and they took the discourse beyond the boundaries of the text applying it to other areas of interest and concern.

Those students, however, who had difficulty taking up the discourse, those who had difficulty comprehending the text, experienced a great deal of discomfort trying to write the commentaries because they were not able to tap into the order of the discourse. As a result they did not receive marks as rewarding as those who were better able to take up the texts and apply them to problems and experiences contained within the social world. The education system, Smith writes,

> trains people in the skills they need to participate at various levels in the ideological structuring of society (they must be able to read at least); it teaches them the ideas, the vocabularies, images, beliefs; it trains them to recognize and approve ideologically sanctioned forms of relations and how to identify

> authoritative ideological sources (what kinds of books, newspapers, etc., to credit, what to discredit; who are the authoritative writers or speakers and who are not) (Smith 1987, 26).

Those who have difficulty taking up theoretical discourses have difficulty participating in the academic project. Those who are able to pick up and relate the discourse to other areas beyond the text become the authoritative writers and speakers – competent practitioners of theoretical discourse. This is not to say that those who have difficulty are doomed to failure, but it will take them longer to get to that point. I am also not arguing that those who are able to pick up and relate to the discourse will necessarily become independent, creative thinkers who will discover and realize emancipatory opportunities. I say this because I believe that some of these people could potentially accept and adopt ideologically sanctioned forms of thinking without question, and never critically consider the possibilities that these forms of thought have flaws and that better alternatives could exist or be realized.

Conclusion

At the outset of this thesis I stated there is something not quite right about the university teaching and learning project, something adversely impinging that aspect of the education process that is supposed to encourage and support the development and expression of independent, creative and critical student thought. This "something" has confused and frustrated me for many years. I have always wanted to better understand the complexities of the problem, and this thesis has provided good opportunity for just such an investigation. Through this thesis I have worked to identify, confront and gain a clearer understanding of the complicated relationship between formal academic course organization and opportunities for independent creative and critical student thought and expression in higher education.

In the literature a number of critiques and theories highlight, examine and explain various aspects of the problem. Jurgen Habermas argues that with the development of capitalism, interests in technical advancement and control have come to dominate over the interests in understanding and emancipation. Pedagogues working within this paradigm argue that as instrumental rationalization of education has increased, opportunities for independent, critical and creative teaching and student activity have become marginalized. This critique accords nicely with Paulo Freire's argument that education suffers from narration sickness, and together they help to explain why curriculum development is organized according to the "banking" approach to education. At the same time their critiques of the instrumental rationalization of curriculum and curriculum development also helps to reveal how creative teaching and learning activities are subdued within the academy.

Feminists argue, however, that capitalism and instrumentally rationalized forms of pedagogy are not entirely to blame. Socially objectifying methods of investigation developed by men are also part of the problem. As objectified knowledges are picked up by students in local sites of reading and speaking they effectively organize and govern students in their everyday lives as they participate in complex relational webs of academic ruling. The authority of objectified scholarly discourses can be intimidating, confusing and even alienating to some students, leaving them feeling they have no voice. Under such circumstances opportunities for independent, creative and critical student thought and expression are impaired.

Upon entering institutions of higher learning students hook into and begin to participate in relations of ruling through their scholarly activities. As they take up their academic studies their learning activities are highly organized and coordinated. The literature reviewed for this thesis revealed aspects of social organization within the academy that operate to inhibit independent, creative and critical student thought and expression. From my perspective, academic course coordination and organization is not entirely without merit. Good course organization can help to encourage effective understanding and learning, as professors introduce and take students through the subject matter of the courses highlighting and clarifying important concepts and arguments. Course organization and coordination of student learning becomes a problem, however, when students are not encouraged to question the material they are learning. When they are given no choice but to passively absorb the subject matter being taught and they are not encouraged and helped to express independent, creative and critical thought. Under

such conditions, emancipatory learning opportunities associated with critical, creative student thought and expression is hindered.

The study conducted for this thesis was designed to investigate this problematic further, investigating both the positive enabling features of formal academic course organization and the negative, disabling aspects of the social organization of the course. Starting from the local and particular activities of a group of students as they worked their way through a graduate level social theory course, I paid particular attention to language as I worked to reveal the power that language has to organize and coordinate individual consciousness and activity.

In the analysis I deconstructed the course syllabus to better understand how certain words operate to guide and locate students into the social organization of the course. I also examined students' accounts of how they approached the task of completing the e-mail writing assignments for the course. Finally, I studied the students' accounts of how they approached the task of reading the assigned readings for the course and how they talked about what they learned.

Findings from my investigation reveal the syllabus to be a powerful tool for organizing students' activities both inside and outside of the classroom. In taking up their course activities, students in the course studied for this thesis remained close to the order of the syllabus, both in terms of reading and in terms of writing. In taking up the required reading many of the students read the readings in the same order as listed in the syllabus, and some students oriented their thoughts to the grading criteria for the assignment as outlined in the syllabus.

In taking up the e-mail assignments for the course, many of the students were highly motivated to obtain first class grades. To this end, a number of students read their peers' e-mail commentaries and compared grades in order to determine what kind of work the professor was rewarding with top marks. They worked to adjust their own writing accordingly. The benefits of first class grades in university are well known and understood by students. Students learn as a result of hooking into the order of the university and participating in relations of ruling that the university is socially organized around the importance of grades and that serious rewards such as money, academic advancement, and early course registration are tied to first class grades. Since students want to receive these rewards and opportunities, grades have become about as important as what is learned in courses.

As far as learning is concerned, in taking up the required readings, students oriented their thoughts to the order of the discourses that they were reading. In their accounts of what they read, students picked up the conceptual language to help explain what they learned. They also employed the order of the discourses to talk about issues and problems that were not discussed in the readings, that exist beyond the contents of text.

In relation to both the reading and the writing students recounted in the interviews how they worked to develop and express critical and creative thoughts and ideas in relation to the readings. There is evidence in the accounts to suggest that some students did realize emancipatory opportunities as they discovered formulations that helped them to articulate thoughts and ideas they had not up until that time had the words to express. There were, however, aspects of the course experience that constrained independent critical and creative thought and expression.

There was a great deal of assigned reading in the course, and all of the students felt the pressures of time while working to complete the readings and write their e-mail commentaries. A few of the students reported having difficulty grasping the content of the readings some weeks, explaining that they felt they lacked the background necessary to effectively understand and engage these readings. This was not the case every week and not all of the students found the readings difficult to comprehend.

Those students who did encounter difficulties with the readings, however, confronted additional challenges in the course. For them, the problematic reading requirements of the course in combination with the time constraints of the course (resulting from the organization of the university semester system) essentially left them with little time to reflect and to be critical and creative. They reported feeling that they did not have enough time to adequately grasp, reflect, engage, discuss and critique the ideas contained within the readings they encountered. As a result, they were less satisfied with what they had learned and with what they had written those weeks.

For the students who encountered difficulties, the instrumentally rationalized order of the university, and resulting academic course organization was unforgiving. Had they been able to comprehend the course readings each week they would perhaps have had more time to spend working to develop and articulate creative, creative thoughts and ideas. As this was not always the case, however, some of the students experienced confusion, frustration and a sense of "drowning" while working to accomplish the course requirements on certain weeks.

Students are not homogeneous learners. Instrumentally rationalized relations of ruling within the university, however, treat students as homogeneous because it is more

efficient than socially organizing academic courses in a manner that is responsive to what is best for each learner in a course. Therefore, as professors participate in relations of ruling, they construct one course syllabus for each course and give one to each student as is required by university policy. The syllabus requires that all students read the same material, submit the same type of assignments and answer the same exam questions at the same time, within the same time frame. If students are able to take up and complete their course requirements without difficulty all is well, but when they encounter problems opportunities for independent critical and creative learning and expression are compromised.

To conclude, aspects of the social organization of higher learning in university encourage and support the development and expression of independent, critical and creative student thought, but on occasion it works against helping students to realize these aspirations. Mitigating the social organizational influences that work against the realization of positive learning activities, including the development and expression of critical, creative thought, is a real challenge.

What this thesis has taught me is that teachers and students need to work together to maximize teaching and learning opportunities in academic courses. Teachers have to be responsive to the difficulties students are having and to help them through the problem. Students have to be willing to admit they are having difficulty (professors should also be willing to admit the same). It is a difficult dialectic to achieve, but if positive dynamic teaching and learning for both professors and students in a course is to take place it is necessary to create a learning environment that makes everyone feel comfortable enough to say anything that is on their mind. Silence is not the answer, share the pain and joys of

teaching and learning. Do as Bell Hooks advocates, make teaching and learning exciting. Refuse to accept passive teaching and learning – strive to realize emancipatory opportunities in education.

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Appendix A

Ethnographic Interview Schedule

Check list: - tape recorder, tape and batteries are working properly
- set tape recorder in good place to capture both speakers
- **check the time when you start the interview**

I: Introduction:

a) Greetings

b) Ethnographic Explanation:

i) As I told you previously when I asked for your participation, I am interested in the types of comparisons you have made as you have worked your way through the theory course.

ii) But before I go into this is greater detail. I would first like to tell how I envision your role in my research. First of all, I do not view you as being a subject or a respondent in my research. In my research you will be referred to as an informant, and as an informant your role is that of a teacher, and my role is to learn from what you tell me and to be faithful to what you teach me as I proceed with my research.

iii) Now, given the nature of my study (one that is studying students) you may make assumptions which assume that I will know what you are talking about, given that I am also a student. This may be true, but I want to bracket the fact that I am a fellow student and make no assumptions about what I may or may not know. Answer my questions as if I have no knowledge of what it is like to be a student, as if I am a stranger that knows nothing about the topic you are discussing and that you are teaching me what you know, what you do, and how you do it.

iv) Okay, given what I have just said, let me explain my project some more. I want to learn about the types of comparisons you have made as you have worked your way through this theory course, with whom (or what) you have made these comparisons, and why you felt the need to make them. I guess what I want to know is whether or not comparisons help to you understand what you are learning? What prompts you to make them in the first place? Basically, what it is that you get out of making comparisons. I think that this will help us to better understand the role that comparisons play in the lives of students as they work their way through school?

II: The Ethnographic Interview:

a) Asking a Friendly Question:

i) Why did you decide to take this theory course?
ii) When you signed up for this course, did you have any expectations for the course? In other words, what were you hoping to learn?
iii) In what ways have your expectations been met, and if they haven't, why not?

b) Descriptive Question (for readings on a positive week):

i) Looking at the course outline we can see that [professor's name] has structured the course in terms of various theoretical themes. For each theme a number of readings have been assigned for you to read and comment on both in class and in your e-mail commentaries. I would like to ask you now to take me on a journey through your work practices as they relate to this theory class, but I would like you to pick the week for me. Was there a week were you really felt you learned something, a week that really had an impact on you, that "clicked" for you? I would like you to take me through that week. Describe to me how you accomplished your task this particular week. For example, what reading did you do first? How do you do your readings (eg. I take notes on my computer)? What did you learn from that reading? (Probes: What kinds of comparisons did you make? Did you talk to anyone along the way?)

ii) I would like to learn a bit more about e-mail commentaries. I would like you to describe for me me the process you went through to write your e-mail commentary, but before you do that can you please tell me why you think you are being asked to write e-mail commentaries? Okay, back to the process of writing the e-mail commentary, how do you approach this task, what were you trying to convey to your reader?

iii) What was it like reading other people's e-mail commentaries on this particular week? What did you learn from reading their commentaries?

c) Descriptive question (for reading on a negative week):

iv) Can we perhaps do the same thing for a week where the readings were not so positive, when the readings really bothered or confused you? (Refer back to: b) i, ii, and iii).

d) Ethnographic Question (about e-mail commentaries):

i) I would like to know a bit more about e-mail commentaries. What is the purpose of doing e-mail commentaries? Do you like writing e-mail commentaries? Why or why not? Do you learn anything from reading other people's e-mail commentaries? What kinds of things do you learn?

e) Structural Question (about grading in the course):

i) I understand that you are being graded on your e-mail commentaries? The range is between 0-5, am I correct? What is that like, how does it make you feel? What is the purpose of grading? Have you ever received a poor grade? Do you think you were fairly assessed? Did other people around you do better or worse? How did they feel? When you read other people's e-mail commentaries do you ever wonder what grade they were given? Do you know what anyone got on their assignment? How did you find out? Have you ever asked anyone what they got on their commentary? If so, who did you as and is there a reason why did you asked that person in particular?

f) Contrast Question (on grading):

i) Has there been any instances where there has been a difference between the grade [professor's name] gave you on your work and the grade you think you should, or were hoping to, have received on your work? How did this make you feel? Do you think there is a difference between the way [professor's name] grades and the way other professors you have had grade? What do you feel is the difference? How does this make you feel?

g) Ethnographic question (on grading)

i) How important is for you have some sense of how others are fairing in terms of grades in the course? Why?

h) Ethnographic Question (on the final paper):

i) I am interested in learning a bit more about the final paper that is required for this course. What is the purpose of writing a paper for this course? Why are you being required to write a paper? What is the topic you have chosen and how did you come to choose that topic?

ii) I understand that in addition to writing the final paper you are/were required to write a prospectus with a preliminary bibliography (Due February 18, 1997) , as well as write a progress report with an annotated bibliography (due Tuesday March 18, 1997). Why do you feel you are/were asked to do these things? What is the purpose for doing these things? Are you comfortable with doing these projects? What has been your approach to doing these projects? Have you sought help or talked about how to do these projects with others in the course? Do you know how other people have faired in completing these projects (i.e. the grade they have received)?

III: Conclusion

a) Well, that's great! I've really learned a lot today. I'm sure there are other things to learn. Probably after I go over my notes and transcribe this tape I'll think of other questions, which I can probably ask you when I get you to fill out the questionnaire.

b) Thank you so very much for letting me into your world, everything you are doing is so very interesting and I look forward to meeting with you again.

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An Investigation into the Social Organization of Student Learning and a
Search for the Space in Time to Develop and Express Independent,
Creative and Critical Thought

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