The Dialectic Suppression of Feminist Thought in Radical Pedagogy

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Undoubtedly, the dialectic process articulated in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* has had major influences on some of composition's more notable theorists of radical or liberatory pedagogy. Theorists like Paulo Freire and Henry Giroux, although different from each other in a number of ways, seem to agree that the goal of liberatory pedagogy should be to bring about some kind of dialectic change. That is, students and their teachers should be able to enter into a relationship similar to the master-slave relationship described by Hegel, thus aiding them both in achieving what Freire calls a "critical consciousness." My aim, though, will be to challenge assumptions that the dialectic process works toward the benefit of all students; rather, I want to show that the dialectic search for critical consciousness contains an androcentric bias which can work to suppress the development of feminist thought in female students.

In recent years, a number of feminist theorists have argued that the dominant conception of the dialectic denies women the opportunity for transcendence. It is precisely this breakdown of the dialectic, I will argue, that suppresses feminist thought in the classroom. My ultimate goal here, however, is to show that the dialectical structure through which radical pedagogy presently operates does not have to be a totalizing construction. Instead, I will argue that the dialectic of radical pedagogy is merely inadequate for an increasingly pluralistic culture and that through feminist deconstruction of the phallogocentrism of the dialectic, a reconstruction can take place which allows feminist thought to engage fully in a multiplicity of dialectics which will ultimately bring about positive social change.

The Dialectic of Radical Pedagogy
Although some say that the seeds of the dialectic can be found well before his *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Clark Butler 174), it is Hegel's fully articulated dialectic that perhaps has had the most profound influence on modern critical thought. Hegel's dialectic process explains, among other things, how men and women come to acquire an awareness or consciousness of themselves, others, and, more importantly for the theorists of liberatory pedagogy,
their social situations within a dominant cultural system. It should be no surprise then that the theories of radical pedagogues like Freire and Giroux have been heavily influenced by the Marxist version of the dialectic, which locates the possibilities for social change in the confrontation between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, since the nature of their roles as educators often forces them to confront the problems that affect the performance of students belonging to socio-economically oppressed cultures. For these theorists, the dialectic presents a praxis that will ultimately bring about a sense of self-consciousness, which they view as the impetus for social change.

It would be prudent then to begin by noting briefly that the dialectics of radical pedagogy do not correlate fully with the dialectics of Marx and Hegel. There are, however, certain consistencies between the three dialectics where we can clearly see the influence of Hegel on the theories of Marxism and radical pedagogy. In the broadest sense, the dialectics of radical pedagogy, Hegel, and Marx are concerned with transforming a human condition, whether it be through perfecting philosophical knowledge or through attaining social agency. And it is in the latter where the dialectics of Marxism and radical pedagogy are perhaps most closely tied to Hegel.

For example, the position of the illiterate student in liberatory pedagogical theory closely mirrors the positions of both Hegel’s slave and Marx’s proletariat, for in all three instances we find a negated being, or that which is oppressed by that which holds power. In his master-slave narrative, Hegel writes: “But the [master] is the power over this thing [the slave], for he proved in the struggle that it is something merely negative; since he is the power over this thing and this again is the power over the other” (115). Although the slave here represents a number of philosophical concepts for Hegel, the slave also may stand as a metaphor for those students who have been mystified by an illiteracy resulting from oppressive socio-economic structures. Like Hegel’s slave, the students of liberatory theory are initially powerless. They have been marginalized by their lack of access to the dominant literacy, but it is here that liberatory theory seeks the dialectical transformation of the mystified students into socially conscious citizens with empowered voices. Thus, liberatory theory seeks to create a new literacy that is both democratic and non-oppressive.

The dialectic, then, is crucial to liberatory theory because, by definition, radical theorists are unhappy with the current state of things and, by definition, the dialectic represents a process for change. In Literacy: Reading the Word and the World, Freire and Macedo explain that the emphasis of liberatory literacy is on change:

In our analysis, literacy becomes a meaningful construct to the degree that it is viewed as a set of practices that functions to either empower or disempower people. In the larger sense, literacy is analyzed according to whether it serves to reproduce existing social formation or to whether it serves as a set of cultural practices that promotes democratic and emancipatory change. (viii)
We see here that merely reproducing the literacies of a dominant culture is unacceptable to the aims of liberatory praxis since this reproduction involves no transformation of the structures that oppress the marginalized students to begin with. Liberatory theory, according to Freire and Macedo, must somehow change social practices.

Working initially with Brazilian peasants, Paulo Freire evolved a theory for education based on the dialogic interaction between student and teacher which focuses on those who were deemed hopelessly ignorant or incapable of learning as a result of their economic deprivation and lack of access to the educational systems of the wealthy. According to Aronowitz and Giroux, the student in Freire's dialectic process, like Hegel's slave, seeks a legitimate voice to reclaim that which has been taken away:

[Freire's] overriding goal of empowerment for oppressed Brazilian peasants entailed distinct but closely related steps: the validation of the "voices" of the people who are traditionally deprived of legitimate participation in political as well as civil society. Thus, Freire's pedagogy is dialogic: learning occurs within conversation, and not as top-to-down instruction between the teacher and student. (12)

As Hegel's dialectic is mainly a reaction to the linear rationality of Kantian thought, so too is Freire's dialectic a response to the linear inscription of what he calls the "banking concept" of education, the method that he claims is most practiced in today's educational institutions (Pedagogy 57). Freire's model eschews the banking concept because in this system knowledge is deposited by the teacher into students who act as docile receptacles. Conversely, an interactive dialogue is central to Freire's dialectic process, but with the banking concept of education, there is no dialectic. In Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Freire notes that "Dialogue with the people is radically necessary to every authentic revolution. This is what makes it a revolution, as distinguished from a military coup" (122). We find in Freire, therefore, a continuous process of dialogic interactions between teacher and student, between scholar and reader, between dominant culture and the oppressed.

Giroux reminds us that not only does liberatory theory utilize the dialectic in its approaches to teaching, but by nature it is itself dynamic, thus continually inventing and reinventing itself:

[Pedagogical theory] is a discursive practice, an unfinished language, replete with possibilities, that grows out of particular engagements and dialogues. It offers up new categories, examples, and insights for teachers and others to engage and rethink everything from the purpose and meaning of schooling to the role that educators might play as cultural workers. Its specificity and value lie in its success in providing a language that ruptures the business-as-usual relationship between theory and practice, pedagogy and teaching, and schools and critical public cultures. (4)

Perhaps unique to the dialectic of radical pedagogy is the role that the teacher plays in the educational transformation of both herself and the student. Ira Shor explains that "The crux of liberatory theory rests in the empowering
animation of critical consciousness, through the students’ object-subject switch, in an egalitarian, experience-based dialogue, initiated by a teacher functioning in a mobile complex of roles” (122-23). Even though the teacher in liberatory theory does not occupy exactly the same position as the master in Hegel nor the bourgeoisie in Marx, the teacher is ultimately transformed, along with the student, by the dialectic in a similar way that Hegel’s and Marx’s binary opposites are transformed in each of their dialectics. In *Education for Critical Consciousness*, Freire maintains that liberatory theory “frees the educator no less than the educated from the twin thralldom of silence and monologue. Both partners are liberated as they begin to learn, the one to know self as a being of worth … and the other as capable of dialogue in spite of the strait jacket imposed by the role of educator as one who knows” (vii-ix). Thus, we see that liberatory pedagogy is equally necessary for the teacher as it is for the student.

Although a number of connections exist between the dialectics of Hegel and radical pedagogy, the final connection I wish to make here concerns the concept of work and its relation to self-consciousness. Drawing from the theological implications found in the *New Testament* book of James, Hegel notes that it is through putting theory into practice that one achieves self-consciousness:

> the [slave], *qua* self-consciousness in general, also relates himself negatively to the thing [the master], and takes away its independence; but at the same time the thing is independent vis-à-vis the bondsman, whose negating of it, therefore cannot go the length of being altogether done with it to the point of annihilation; in other words, he *only works* on it. (115-16)

Hegel’s concept of *work* here is complex and difficult to summarize, but it appears that Marxist theorists and, hence, radical pedagogues have interpreted this idea to mean that by working on the problem of their own material condition, those who are oppressed can come to a self- or critical consciousness which can ultimately transform their condition—what Freire calls *conscientização* (*Pedagogy* 19). That is, by working on that which is the subject of one’s domination, one not only sees the need for transformation, but enacts in the subject of oppression the need for self-reflection, which causes the subject to enter into the dialectic with its object. Perhaps we can understand this interaction better in terms of actual classroom practice. For example, by focusing writing assignments on, say, the lack of economic opportunities for African Americans, or the immigration policies of the United States, teachers, in theory, can help students come to an awareness, through their work, of their own situations of deprivation. Furthermore, through their work, which might come in the form of letters of protests or essays demanding social change, the conditions of their oppression will at least be brought to the attention of the oppressors.

As we have seen, Hegel’s dialectic is fundamental to the process of
liberatory pedagogy, for according to theorists like Marx, Freire, and Giroux the dialectic is the process through which social transformation occurs. Through their engagement in a dialogic relationship—which entails the active exchange involved in dialogue—both teachers and students become liberated by the transformation of their consciousness. Thus, liberatory theorists tend to view the dialectic as an all-encompassing process, that is, as equally transformative for all oppressed student groups whether they be Brazilian peasants or African Americans, males or females.

What is important to note is that in Hegel's dialectic, the agent for change is located within the one who is oppressed. For example, in the master-slave narrative, it is the slave who provides the force for change. And for the liberatory theorist, it is the student who acts as the agent for change. In the dialectic, then, any student suffering from the domination of another gains the power to transform his or her own situation. A number of theorists, however, have critiqued the dialectic, arguing that within certain oppressive structures the dialectic merely reproduces the dominant hegemony by producing passive beings who cannot bring about change. For members of the Frankfort school, however, it is not that the dialectic is incapable of achieving the fully synthesized transformation that we find in Hegel; rather, the problem is that the dialectic has broken down in such a way that neither the oppressed nor the oppressors are able to change their situations.

The Breakdown of the Dialectic
Having explored the connections between Hegel's dialectic and the dialectic of radical pedagogy, I'd like to look at the ways in which the dialectic process can malfunction, exploring first how Hegel's/Marx's dialectic breaks down, and then how the dialectic of radical pedagogy suppresses the development of feminist thought.

In the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno present an argument that serves as an example of just how fragile the dialectic process is and how easily it can turn into a system of domination for the subaltern. They begin their critique of the dialectic by asserting, "In the most general sense of progressive thought, the Enlightenment has always aimed at liberating men from fear and establishing their sovereignty. Yet the fully enlightened earth radiates disaster triumphant" (3). In fact, it is not so much Hegel's dialectic that Horkheimer and Adorno are criticizing here; it is that, in their view, there is no true dialectic at work in Enlightenment philosophy. Humankind's *hubris* and desire to dominate nature—concepts that permeate Enlightenment thought—have negated and therefore suppressed the element of fear or self-reflection that we find in Hegel. As mentioned earlier, self-reflection is crucial to achieving transcendence in both Hegelian and liberatory theory. It is the single element that convicts the oppressor, and without it neither the student nor the teacher can achieve a critical consciousness.
How, then, can the dialectic break down in pedagogical practice? According to Horkheimer and Adorno, the dialectic breaks down when the subject of oppression mystifies its objects through labor. We have already seen how students can come to a critical consciousness through their work, but Horkheimer and Adorno suggest that oppressed people can become further oppressed through the wrong kind of work—that is, through work that hides their condition. Once again, we see this kind of work rooted in the banking concept of education. Even the most well-intentioned teachers can at times engage in banking concept practices, focusing students' attention on the formal elements of writing to such a degree that there is little room left for critical content. Thus, the teacher regresses to the position of the oppressive master and the students regress to passive slaves. Horkheimer and Adorno make it clear that such a dialectic utilized by the banking-concept teacher will always break down.

We can use Horkheimer and Adorno's discussion of Odysseus' encounter with the Sirens to serve as an analogy for the way in which the banking-concept teacher truncates the dialectic. For Odysseus, it is the fear of succumbing to the Sirens' song—which in the Marxist dialectic represents the call for a proletariat revolution—that prompts him to fill his crew members' ears with wax and to have himself tied to the mast of his ship. But to Horkheimer and Adorno, "The dread of losing the self and of abrogating together with the self the barrier between oneself and other life, the fear of death and destruction, is intimately associated with a promise of happiness which threatened civilization in every moment" (33). Thus, Odysseus resists the Sirens' song in order to maintain his mastery over himself and over nature, which Odysseus clearly sees as his rightful place. But in doing so, he has separated himself from his crew, who continue to labor undistracted by neither the song of the Sirens nor the commands of Odysseus:

Odysseus is represented in labor. Just as he cannot yield to the temptation to self-abandonment, so, as proprietor, he finally renounces even participation in labor, and ultimately even its management, whereas his men—despite their closeness to things—cannot enjoy their labor because it is performed under pressure, in desperation, with senses stopped by force. (35)

To extend this analogy, then, the banking-concept teacher similarly refuses to relinquish his or her domination over nature, and thus over students, for to do so would result in a loss of his or her classroom authority. Likewise, whereas in liberatory theory the students come to discover the need for critical consciousness through their work (praxis), in the banking concept students are oppressed by the work itself to the point where they do not become aware of the necessity for critical consciousness. Consequently, they continue to work, harder and harder, the way Odysseus' men worked when their ears were filled with wax, completely unaware of their own oppression. And because the students, now thoroughly mystified and disabled, cannot see
the need for critical consciousness and thus cannot enact change, the teacher too is relegated to his or her role as oppressor.

Again, it is important to note that what is key to the destruction of the dialectic in the Enlightenment according to Horkheimer and Adorno is humankind's desire for mastery over self and nature, which always includes a certain amount of arrogance. And such arrogance in any dialectic results in the perpetuation of the dominant hegemony, for it is arrogance that denies the need for self-criticism. Even though radical pedagogy does not intend to function like the banking concept of teaching, it, too, being a product of masculine Enlightenment philosophy, sometimes functions within a reductionist view of oppression which assumes that all oppressed people are equally oppressed and that all oppressed people are in an equal situation to enact social change (Weiler 451). For a number of feminist theorists, however, the dialectic itself is an oppressive process, a male construct formed on androcentric principles, which presumes to include women but, like the dialectic of Horkheimer and Adorno, merely reproduces the same hegemonic structures. Perhaps the important question to ask now is: How can women achieve a dialectical transformation when the subject of the dialectic is always male? In other words, can women achieve a critical consciousness through the dialectic of radical pedagogy or will the dialectic further repress their situation?

This appearance that radical pedagogy works from the position that there is some sort of universality in oppression has proved to be highly problematic for a number of feminist theorists, particularly those concerned with the construction of gender. According to theorists like Simone de Beauvoir, for example, the notion of universality can only be represented by the masculine. Consequently, any dialectic that assumes the commonality of the subaltern will never fail to reproduce masculine domination. In The Second Sex, de Beauvoir argues that asymmetrical gender relationships have caused the dialectic to fail because women have been socially constructed into roles that subjugate them to the position of other, whereas men are always the subject and, hence, control the entire dialectic process.

In Gender and Knowledge, Susan J. Heckman notes that central to de Beauvoir's analysis of gender prescriptions is that the "fundamental distinction between the Self and Other is not symmetrical" (74). De Beauvoir argues that the social relationship between men and women is represented fully in the master-slave dialectic of Hegel. In Enlightenment thought in particular, man is always defined as the master of nature; he is "both positive and neutral" (Heckman 74). Woman on the other hand, is not man; she is his antithesis. Thus, according to de Beauvoir, the engendered categories of man and woman predispose woman to a position where she is always already the subaltern to man's universal. In Gender Trouble, Judith Butler explains de Beauvoir's notion of how the universal is masculine and how it ultimately excludes and subjugates women:
For Beauvoir, the “subject” within the existential analytic of misogyny is always already masculine, conflated within the universal, differentiating itself from a feminine “Other” outside the universalizing norms of personhood, hopelessly “particular,” embodied, condemned to immanence. Although Beauvoir is often understood to be calling for the right of women, in effect, to become existential subjects and, hence, for inclusion within the terms of an abstract universality, her position also implies a fundamental critique of the very disembodiment of the abstract masculine epistemological subject. That subject is abstract to the extent that it disavows its socially marked embodiment and, further, projects that disavowed and disparaged embodiment on to the feminine sphere, effectively renaming the body as female. (11)

Because women are always already objects of the masculine order, they have become “locked into an Otherness that is central to human life” (Heckman 74). If through Enlightenment philosophy men have achieved mastery over nature, women have themselves become not only equated with nature—through the maternal activities of giving birth to and raising children—but are, according to de Beauvoir, a nature dominated by men.

Women, as objects of the masculine order, therefore, serve the purpose of reproducing that order, a role from which it appears they cannot escape. Heckman notes that “women, according to de Beauvoir, are more prey to the species because of their connection to reproduction, are more limited by nature than are men” (74). In other words, the biological sex of women has placed them in the role of giving birth to and nursing children, activities that do not necessarily demand that women be taken out of the work force entirely or for an extensive length of time, especially if child care responsibilities can be shared with men. It is the gender of women, however, which has produced a hegemonic system that essentially relegates women to full-time child care providers, which, in turn, strips them of nearly all economic and political power. Furthermore, the engendering system is such that it causes both men and women to believe that it really is natural for women to be the primary child-care providers and that men are indeed the ones who should rule the economic and, thus, the political world. Judith Butler calls this hegemonic system of gender reproduction a literalizing fantasy (70). Within this literalizing fantasy, then, women are so closely bound to nature, that they are at a loss to rise above it. They, therefore, become passive objects; that is, they come to believe that their gender prescriptions are natural and that any attempt to change them would be futile. Consequently, women become passive objects that cannot achieve transcendence.

De Beauvoir’s discussion of gender reproduction is important to the situation of women in liberatory pedagogy. As I have already mentioned, one of the criticisms of liberatory theory by some feminists is that it assumes a kind of universality of oppression. In de Beauvoir’s theory, then, liberatory theory is always already masculine and, therefore, it too situates female students as the objects of domination. In radical theory, all students begin as the objects of oppression, but according to de Beauvoir, female students cannot achieve the kind of critical consciousness that males can because
women have been constructed not only as objects, but as passive objects as well. Like Odysseus' crew, they are mystified, cut off from the knowledge of the purpose of their work. Hence, passive female students, like Odysseus' crew, engage in their work without the power to enact the dialectic which brings them to critical consciousness. In this way, liberatory pedagogy merely reproduces a masculine system where feminist thought is repressed.

Heckman notes that in some ways Luce Irigaray agrees with de Beauvoir's critique of the male-dominated dialectic, for she too argues that "any epistemology that is rooted in the subject is inherently phallocratic" (82). Irigaray, however, differs significantly from de Beauvoir in that she believes that women are not merely the objects of the androcentric dialectic, but that they are outside the dialectic altogether. In her discussion of Irigaray, Heckman notes that "since women cannot be subjects, they cannot be the active, autonomous agents that, men have claimed, make history" (83). According to both Irigaray and de Beauvoir, women have been powerless to create their own history and thus their own epistemologies. What differentiates de Beauvoir from Irigaray, however, is that de Beauvoir sees a place for women within the Enlightenment epistemology of the androcentric dialectic, whereas Irigaray believes that the inability for women to create their own epistemology ostracizes them from patriarchal epistemology. Irigaray, thus, begins with de Beauvoir's critique of the dialectic, but ultimately moves to a critique of de Beauvoir. Judith Butler notes that for Irigaray, "both the subject and the Other are masculine mainstays of a closed phallocratic signifying economy that achieves its totalizing goal through the exclusion of the feminine altogether" (9).

In *This Sex Which is not One*, Irigaray argues that, unlike the binary structures of androcentric signifying systems, women represent a multiplicity of positions, languages, and desires. However, because the dominant androcentric structures do not allow space for the multiplicity of women, feminine signifying systems are therefore marginalized:

Must this multiplicity of female desire and female language be understood as shards, scattered remnants of a violated sexuality? A sexuality denied? The question has no simple answer. The rejection, the exclusion of a female imaginary certainly puts woman in the position of experiencing herself only fragmentarily, in the little-structured margins of a dominant ideology, as waste, or excess, what is left of a mirror invested by the (masculine) "subject" to reflect himself, to copy himself. Moreover, the role of "femininity" is prescribed by this masculine specula(tion) and corresponds scarcely at all to woman's desire, which may be recovered only in secret, in hiding, with anxiety and guilt. (30)

Returning to de Beauvoir's argument, Irigaray asserts that "this domination of the philosophic logos stems in part from its power to reduce all others to the economy of the Same" and "from its power to eradicate the difference between the sexes in systems that are self-representative of a masculine subject" (74). Again, we find that the masculine reduction to universality or sameness is at
the heart of the breakdown of dialectic for women. Through this reduction, the difference and multiplicity that women bring to a signifying system like the dialectic is repressed. And if woman's difference and multiplicity is repressed, then she is essentially negated. She therefore becomes unrepresentable.

We know from theorists like Mikhail Bakhtin and Jacques Lacan that language itself is dynamic, that it works dialectically. If, as Irigaray argues, women are left out of the dialectic process, are they not also absent from language? Irigaray's theory of women as the unrepresentable is also seen clearly in the phallocratic theories of language espoused by Lacan. Heckman argues that "Lacan represents the most extreme statement of phallogocentrism" (84). In Lacanian theory, the universal signifier is the phallus. That is, everything meaningful is represented by the masculine, whereas everything that is non-masculine, hence feminine, is according to natural law lacking and thus exists outside the signifying system. Lacan says,

There is no such thing as The woman, where the definite article stands for the universal. There is no such thing as The woman since of her essence—having already risked the term, why think twice about it? Of her essence, she is not all. (qtd. in Heckman 84)

Although Lacan himself recognized that the nature of the phallus is indeed socially constructed, it remains that the symbolic order is masculine and thus women are both subjugated and ostracized by it. In "The Laugh of the Medusa," Hélène Cixous takes this a step further by arguing that phallocratic language is a locus for the reproduction of feminine oppression:

I meant it when I speak of male writing. I maintain unequivocally that there is such a thing as marked writing; that, until now, far more extensively and repressively than is ever suspected or admitted, writing has been run by a libidinal and cultural—hence political, typically masculine—economy; that this is a locus where the oppression of women has been perpetuated, over and over, more or less consciously, and in a manner that's frightening since it's often hidden or adorned with the mystifying charms of fiction; that this locus has greatly exaggerated all the signs of sexual opposition (and not sexual difference), where woman has never her turn to speak—this being all the more serious and unpardonable in that writing is precisely the very possibility of change, the space that can serve as a springboard for subversive thought, the precursory movement of a transformation of social and cultural structures. (249)

We therefore find, according to French feminists like de Beauvoir, Irigaray, and Cixous, that women are indeed placed in an impossible situation when it comes to the dialectic. Whether woman is merely the Other of the dialectic or whether she is unrepresented by the dialectic altogether leaves us with a situation where women are incapable of transcendence; that is, the dialectic has broken down for and has suppressed women. It follows then that the female student in radical pedagogy is also placed in a difficult situation. Even if the liberatory teacher is female, the epistemologies that govern the linguistic and dialogic systems in which transcendence is supposed to take
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place are totalizing in their male dominance. Furthermore, through this dialectic, women are constructed as passive beings.

Transcending the Dialectic
We are left, then, with what appears to be an irreconcilable problem presented to women students by the androcentric dialectic of radical pedagogy. We have seen how, in seeking to liberate all oppressed students, the dialectic of radical pedagogy breaks down and feminist thought is thus suppressed. This suppression is accomplished, first, by radical pedagogy's tendency to reduce all oppressed objects to a universal subaltern; and, second, feminist thought is suppressed by women's impossible situation of being always already constructed by the dominant discourse of our society into the role of Other, a role from which it seems they cannot escape, a role that shapes them into passive beings who are unable to enact dialectical change.

As teachers who are truly committed to feminist concerns, we must, at this point, ask ourselves some pertinent questions regarding the future of our pedagogical practices: Are women doomed to totalizing masculine pedagogical systems for which there is no hope for transcendence, and, thus, no hope for a social change that includes the empowerment of women? Is there anything in radical pedagogy worth redeeming or should we discard it altogether? Feminist theorists are divided on these issue. Theorists like Irigaray and Cixous, one the one hand, believe that since women exist outside the dialectic to begin with, they should create their own dialectic epistemology based on purely feminine perspectives. On the other hand, theorists like Judith Butler, Teresa de Lauretis, and Kathleen Weiler believe that feminists should work from within the androcentric dialectic, to deconstruct and transform it.

Luce Irigaray, having already argued that women are excluded from the male dialectic, sees the effort for reconciliation between the androcentric and the gynocentric as futile. Instead, Irigaray argues that women need to separate themselves in opposition to men in order to escape the constraints of male domination:

For women to undertake tactical strikes, to keep themselves apart from men long enough to learn to defend their desire, especially through speech, to discover the love of other women while sheltered from men's imperious choices that put them in the positions of rival commodities, to forge for themselves a social status that compels recognition, to earn their living in order to escape from their condition of prostitute... these are certainly indispensable stages in the escape from their proletarization on the exchange market. But if their aim was simply to reverse the order of things, even supposing this to be possible, history would repeat itself in the long run, would revert to sameness: to phallocraticism. It would leave room neither for women's sexuality, nor for women's imaginary, nor for women's language to take (their) place. (33)

By rejecting the male dialectic, according to Irigaray, women become freed from the negation by the universal and thus find space to create their own
existence, to create a stable feminine subject. For Cixous, what is central to creating women's own existence is having the uninterrupted time and space to develop women's writing. Like Irigaray, Cixous believes that women should resist the phallocratic dialectic, that they should “break out of the snare of silence” (251). Cixous notes, “It is by writing, from and toward women, and by taking up the challenge of speech which has been governed by the phallus, that women will confirm women in a place other than that which is confirmed in and by the symbolic, that is, in a place other than silence” (33).

For some feminists, this rejection translates into the call for a separatist education. In her essay, “The Soul of a Woman’s College,” delivered at Scrips College in Claremont, California in 1984, Adrienne Rich explains why she too believes that women should separate from the masculine order to gain their own identity. According to Rich, a gynocentric education produces in women a sense of confidence and self-esteem that would otherwise be repressed in a phallocratic education. Rich notes that her reason for desiring the proliferation of women’s colleges stems from the exclusion of feminine participation in co-educational colleges. “I wanted a place which women would feel was theirs,” says Rich: “That most of the world is not a women’s place, but a women-negating place, and that women need a sense of what a women’s place can be. . . . That’s my word—I think today you feminists call it ‘consciousness’” (195-96).

Although some feminists see complete separation from male economy as the only alternative to domination, a number of other feminist theorists believe that the creation of the thoroughly gynocentric order that Irigaray and Cixous argue for can become equally oppressive as an androcentric one. In Gender Trouble, Judith Butler argues that by seeking an identity that is exclusively female, one essentially constructs a “stable” subject which in turn works to suppress feminine difference in the same way that liberatory pedagogy does:

Indeed, the premature insistence on a stable subject of feminism, understood as a seamless category of women, inevitably generates multiple refusals to accept the category. These domains of exclusion reveal the coercive and regulatory consequences of that construction, even when the construction has been elaborated for emancipatory purposes. (4)

In Thinking Fragments, Jane Flax takes a slightly different view than Butler as to why women should not seek complete separation from male systems. Flax says, “By conceptualizing woman as the problem, we repeat rather than deconstruct or analyze the social relations that construct or represent us as a problem in the first place. If the problem is defined in this way, woman retains her traditional position: the ‘guilty one,’ the deviant, the other” (138). For Flax, then, a women’s paradigm that excludes the male merely reduces both paradigms to a male/female binary structure where the male economy is dominant.
Once again, we find women placed into a seemingly impossible situation. If the possibility for women to achieve a social transcendence does not exist through the dialectic of traditional liberatory pedagogical practices, and if women cannot achieve liberation by creating a dialectic that is wholly gynocentric, then what can women do to break the cultural hegemony? The answer for some, and the answer for which I am arguing in this essay, is for feminists to begin by resisting totalizing structures—thus deconstructing the androcentric dialectic—then reconstructing a dialectic based on a plurality of subject/object positions.

In *Alice Doesn't*, Teresa de Lauretis suggests that feminist resistance from within androcentric culture is not only entirely possible but perhaps most profitable for women as well. Unlike Cixous, who see feminist writing as tool to create an identity for women outside the boundaries men, de Lauretis believes that feminist (re)reading and writing are themselves the beginning for deconstructing androcentric dominance:

Strategies of writing *and* of reading are forms of cultural resistance. Not only can they work to turn dominant discourses inside out (and show that it can be done), to undercut their enunciation and address, to unearth the archaeological stratifications on which they are built; but in affirming the historical existence of irreducible contradictions for women in discourse, they also challenge the theory in its own terms, the terms of semiotic space constructed in language, its power based on social validation and well-established modes of enunciation and address. So well-established that, paradoxically, the only way to position oneself outside that discourse is to position oneself within it—to refuse the question as formulated, or to answer deviously (though in its own words), even to quote (but against the grain). (7)

Even though Lacanian theory essentially negates women's place in language, de Lauretis argues that women can indeed find voices by using androcentric language as a means of resistance. De Lauretis attacks the dialectic by attacking its power to reduce to the universal binary. By foregrounding the numerous contradictions of totalizing masculine theories, de Lauretis effectively creates a space for women to position themselves, not merely as the *Other* or the *unrepresentable*, but as viable voices of opposition to phallocratic dominance. In fact, *Alice Doesn't* serves as one example of feminist resistance to and thus recreation of male dominated cinema through its deconstruction of it. De Lauretis remarks that her book "may be seen as an eccentric reading, a confrontation with theoretical discourses and expressive practices...which construct and effect a certain representation of 'woman'" (5). Thus, for de Lauretis, the mere recognition that the dialectic breaks down in its masculine form is itself enough *conscientization* for women to begin to enact change.

Judith Butler likewise agrees that women can gain power and thus enact social change by deconstructing masculine signifying structures. Butler, like de Lauretis, begins by challenging the totality of the "unrepresentable" in Lacanian theory (147). Drawing on the works of Jacqueline Rose and Jane Gallop, Butler argues that the many contradictions involved in the construc-
tion of gender provide women discursive space to challenge the phallocratic order. For Butler, the task of feminist theory is to utilize this discursive space, "to disrupt the foundations that cover over alternative cultural configurations of gender . . . to destabilize and render in their phantasmic dimension the 'premises' of identity politics" (147).

We find, then, that it is de Lauretis' and Butler's insistence on the *plurality or multiplicity* among women—that women truly are the "sex which is not one"—which effectively deconstructs the masculine dialectic. And it is here, moreover, that as teachers of writing we can raise our own consciousness about the limitations of the present condition of liberatory pedagogy. The problem isn't so much that the dialectic of radical pedagogy cannot work for the development of feminist thought; rather, the problem, as Kathleen Weiler argues in "Freire and a Feminist Pedagogy of Difference," is that traditional liberatory theory is too limiting. Weiler begins her essay by noting that liberatory pedagogical theory and most feminist theories have a number of things in common. She suggests first that the two kinds of theories tend to acknowledge that people are oppressed by their material conditions; second, that consciousness must contain with it a critical capacity; and, third, that both theories "hold strong commitment to justice and a vision for a better world and of the potential for liberation" (450). Weiler, however, notes that these goals alone do not provide an adequate foundation for a liberatory pedagogy that includes women:

> As universal goals, these ideals do not address the specificity of people's lives; they do not directly analyze the contradictions between conflicting oppressed groups or the ways in which a single individual can experience oppression in one sphere while being privileged or oppressed in another. (450)

Perhaps, then, the problem with the relationship between radical pedagogy and feminist students is that radical pedagogy's own internal dialectic, the process that keeps it dynamic and thus pertinent to its social purpose, has, contrary to Giroux, failed to keep up with the rapidly changing social climate of American education. As Weiler argues, liberatory theory grew out of real-life situations of poverty and oppression. For example, Freire's theory grew out of the very real oppression of Brazilian peasants. His theory is specific to that situation (although clearly commonalities exist in oppressive situations elsewhere), a situation which was not so much concerned with liberating women from androcentric political structures as it was with helping an entire class of people to survive.

**Reconstructing Liberatory Pedagogy**

Throughout this paper, I have argued that the dialectic of radical pedagogy in its present form can suppress the development of feminist thought in at least two ways: the first is by effectively reproducing gender prescriptions that always already construct women into the role of *Other*, which, in turn, create
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passive objects that cannot transform their condition. The second way that the dialectic of radical pedagogy suppresses feminist thought is through its tendency to reduce all oppressed people into a category of *sameness*. That is, liberatory theory tends not to distinguish between, say, the oppressed condition of a male migrant farm worker and the oppressed condition of a white, middle-class female. Both indeed may be oppressed, but their oppressions and, hence, the solutions to their oppressions will be very different. The problem with this kind of reductionist view of oppression is that it silences *difference*, which, therefore, as a number of feminists have argued, silences women, thus essentially leaving them out of the dialectic altogether.

We are left wondering, then, if the dialectic is so destructive to the development of feminist thought, what beneficial role, if any, can the dialectic play in the writing classroom? Although it would be impossible for me to answer this question adequately at this point, I would like to suggest that the feminist critiques of the dialectic can provide us with a starting point for reconstructing a liberatory pedagogy that includes women. Perhaps one of the implications of these feminist critiques of the dialectic is not a new concept in pedagogical practice but one that bears repeating: that we as writing teachers must consciously work toward deconstructing the always already otherness of female students. We must first be aware that by the time both male and female students get to our classrooms, they have been thoroughly engendered into roles that to many appear to be *natural*; for female students, unfortunately, this usually means their subjection to the passive role of *object*. And part of the reason why these gender roles are so powerful is that they are rarely challenged openly, especially in legitimating institutions like the university. In our teaching practice, then, we can help female students to become conscious of the oppression brought on by their gender constraints by foregrounding feminist issues and concerns. The obvious benefit of doing this is that both male and female students become aware that their genders are not entirely natural but that they have been constructed into certain sexual, and, thus, social and political roles. The important thing, though, is that by deconstructing the female student as object, we provide a space for an active student, and an active female student, even within an androcentric dialectic, is capable of creating social change.

The second implication that feminist critiques of the dialectic provide for writing teachers comes from their insistence on plurality in the classroom. What we need is a pedagogy that rejects the universalization of the dialectic. That is, we need to be aware that a number of shifting and competing dialectics can occur simultaneously, and that the teacher must be conscious of his or her shifting roles within these dialectics. These shifting and competing dialectics become very clear when we consider issues of race and economic status as areas that complicate the binary master/slave dichotomy of the dialectic, for it is possible to be both oppressor and oppressed at the same time. In fact, one recent criticism of some feminist theories is that the
theorists themselves—mostly white, middle-class Europeans and Americans—work from positions of privilege and that they neglect issues concerning women of color and women who are physically oppressed, such as those politically imprisoned in South America. Kathleen Weiler notes that “Recognizing the standpoints of subjects as shaped by their experience of class, race, gender, or other socially defined identities has powerful implications for pedagogy, in that it emphasizes the need to make conscious the subject positions not only of students but of teachers as well” (470). Thus, by foregrounding our own positions as subjects and objects of oppression, we can encourage students to explore their own often ambiguous positions. The foregrounding of such ambiguities can only lead to a better understanding, a better consciousness of difference among both students and teachers.

Finally, it is important for us to keep in mind that the dialectic is only a story, albeit a very powerful one, a story that explains a masculine view of the Western world. And as a story, it explains certain things accurately, but as an androcentric story, it leaves out a host of alternative world views. What we can do as writing instructors, however, is help our students see the limitations of this story and to help them take control of it, to augment it, to create a place for themselves within it, and to respect and engage with the stories of others.

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Works Cited


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**Composition in the 21st Century**

The Council of Writing Program Administrators, the University of Connecticut, and Miami University will sponsor a conference on Composition in the 21st Century: Crisis and Change at the Marcum Conference Center of Miami University from Oct. 8-10, 1993. The conference is organized around three-hour sessions that encourage full audience participation and discussion.

There are seven sessions, with no more than two running concurrently, and each addresses a major question about the future of composition: (1) What is composition and why do we teach it? (2) Who should teach composition and what should they know? (3) What have we learned from the past and how can it shape the future of composition? (4) What political and social issues will shape composition in the future? (5) Who will assess composition in the 21st century and how will they assess it? (6) What directions will research take and how will research affect teaching? and (7) What will be the relationship between writing program administration, teaching, and scholarship?

Speakers include David Bartholomae, James Berlin, Miriam Chaplin, Robert Connors, Sharon Crowley, Peter Elbow, Linda Flower, Sarah Freedman, Anne Gere, Shirley Brice Heath, Sylvia Holladay, Andrea Lunsford, Steven North, James Slevin, John Trimbur, and Edward White. Conference directors are Lynn Bloom, Donald Daiker, and Edward White.

Registration is limited to 400, so please register early. Write to Don Daiker, Department of English, Miami University, Oxford, OH 45056.