UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN QUEENSLAND

CRITICAL POSSIBILITIES: DECRITIQUE, DERACINATION, AND THE D.I.S.

A Dissertation submitted by

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For the award of

Doctor of Philosophy

2005

Abstract

This dissertation presents the theory and practice of *Decritique*, a critical pedagogy for the first-year college English classroom that offers an alternative to contemporary applications of critical theory. Underscored by a philosophy of language drawn from Husserl's pure phenomenology and Derrida's deconstruction, a key characteristic of the pedagogy is delineation between re-cognition and recognition: the former actively seeking ways to re-position one's own thinking in relation to perceptions of the world; the latter endorsing existing perception. Concepts of "respect" and "tolerance" are questioned in *Decritique*, positing that they can operate as agents of oppression; instead, students engage in critical interaction and animated introspection that, in turn, opens the possibility of change. Concerned with the theory and practice of a reconceptualized critical pedagogy, the question at the core of *Decritique* is ways for students to reach a point of cognitive struggle leading to genuine discovery without the pain that can accompany criticism and critical self-reflection acting as a barrier to learning.

Chapters One through Three examine what constitutes "the critical"; namely, critical thinking, critical pedagogy, critical literacy, and critical care, Chapter Four discusses a reconceptualization of these criticalities, Chapter Five examines the theory of *Decritique*, Chapter Six presents a three-semester pilot study comparing *Decritique* with a pedagogy of "caring" in both face-to-face and online learning environments, and Chapter Seven provides the study's conclusions. Results indicate that students taught with *Decritique* consistently produced more writing than those taught with a "caring" approach, demonstrated greater evidence of critical reflection on essay revisions, engaged more animatedly in verbal and written discourse, exhibited a strong sense of critical camaraderie, particularly in the face-to-face classroom, and that essays averaged nearly five percent, or half a letter grade, higher. Retention and pass rates were higher in the *Decritique* classes and students were more likely to be satisfied with their learning experience. Implementation of the pedagogy on a wider, cross-institutional level is recommended in order to investigate the potential of *Decritique* as an alternative critical pedagogy for the first-year college English classroom, one that promotes reflective critical analysis of discourse with a commitment to the possibilities of praxis.

CERTIFICATION OF DISSERTATION

I certify that the ideas, experimental work, results, analyses and conclusions reported in this dissertation are entirely my own effort, except where otherwise acknowledged. I also certify that the work is original and has not been previously submitted for any other award, except where otherwise acknowledged.

_____ September 30, 2005

Signature of Candidate Date

ENDORSEMENT

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Signature of Supervisor/s Date

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Signature of Supervisor/s Date

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Over the four years it has taken to research and write this dissertation, several people have provided support and encouragement – and it is here that I would like to acknowledge them. Thanks and gratitude first to Assoc. Professor Chris Lee, my principal supervisor, not only for his care and guidance during my postgraduate studies but also as a teacher who saw something of value in me when, as an undergraduate in his class ten years ago, I began this journey of education. My thanks to co-supervisor Dr. Laurie Johnson who introduced me to Husserl, then patiently walked every step of the way with me on a long theoretical road that I've discovered is now just beginning.

Thanks must also go to Dr. Elisabeth Mermann-Jozwiak for first igniting and then sustaining my love of literary theory, to Dr. Vanessa Jackson who taught me with great style what it means to "do research," and to Robert "Yucatan" Miranda who patiently listened to interminable drafts and offered valuable reader responses. My sincere appreciation also goes to Dean Thorpe and Jeannette Jones-Sosa, without whose support in terms of teaching latitude and course assignments I could not have implemented *Decritique*, and to Christine Bartlett whose unfailing administrative assistance and cheerful notes lessened the tyranny of distance.

A special and heartfelt dedication, however, to Jacques Derrida, with whose words I continue to engage in a genuinely deep and rich reciprocity that imbues every essence of what I am with a fiery sense of beauty and appreciation for someone who, despite his absence, is so perfectly with my thoughts that it is like stepping outside of myself and then back into myself again in one gorgeous, velveted step.

Table of Contents

List of Figures

List of Tables

His vision, from the constantly passing bars,
Has grown so weary that it cannot hold
anything else. It seems to him there are
a thousand bars; and behind the bars, no world.
As he paces in cramped circles, over and over,
the movement of his powerful soft strides
is like a ritual dance around a center
in which a mighty will stands paralyzed.
Only at times, the curtain of the pupils
lifts, quietly – . An image enters in,
rushes down through the tensed, arrested muscles,
plunges into the heart and is gone. (Rilke 296)

1. Introduction

The ability to think critically – through writing and analysis of text – is consistently endorsed as a primary goal of a liberal, quality education. Yet, despite efforts to encapsulate the critical, whether through initiatives of critical thinking, critical literacy, critical pedagogy, or even "critical care," first-year undergraduate college English curriculum is struggling to meet the demands of graduate outcomes that increasingly call for students who can think critically, creatively, and analytically – and then effectively express that thought in writing. As for what constitutes "the critical," therefore, the goal is clear; the lens through which we view that goal, however, is tainted.

Rainer Maria Rilke's poem "The Panther" animates the essence of critical thought. As a metaphor of the human mind, it illuminates the shards of brilliance that can strike us as revelatory, but fleeting, moments of cognitive clarity. Released from "the constantly passing bars," the mind reflects its own workings, revealing engagement

in thinking beyond the possibilities of that which we know. To be critically reflective, to think past what *is* and envision what could be, is characteristic of a thinking, magnificent human being. The irony in education, however, is that too often the potential for genuinely reflective critical engagement in our own ideas and those of others are contained behind ideological bars, and that those bars are often of our own creation. Currently, the concept of what it means to think critically is a potent mismatch of simplistic applications that, through its inherent threads of positivity and hyper-rationalized contradictions, is grossly ineffective in practice. The critic – and the critique imparted by that critic – must reflect acknowledgment of such a fundamental incongruity and seek, even at the risk of ostracism and at the hands of pious condemnation, to clear the tainted lens through which we view our world and our places in it.

This research project aims to offer such a critique. Chapters One through Three outline past and present perceptions of what constitutes "the critical," specifically in terms of critical thinking, critical pedagogy, critical literacy, and what I have termed "critical care." Chapter Four then discusses a reconceptualized view of "the critical," which culminates in a revisioned critical pedagogy for teaching first-year college English called *Decritique*. Chapter Five provides the theoretical basis of this pedagogy, drawing from Edmund Husserl's pure phenomenology and Jacques Derrida's deconstruction, while Chapter Six puts the theory into practice through a three-semester pilot study that compares *Decritique* with a pedagogy of caring. Conclusions drawn from the study in Chapter Seven show that further research into *Decritique* is warranted and that it may potentially affect the way English as a critical pedagogy is taught to first-year college undergraduates.

1.1 The Question of the Critical

Part of the problem is that the term "critical" has become a muddied adjective that, in John E. McPeck's words, is "over-worked and under-analyzed" (*Critical* 2). Among the various critical approaches, "critical thinking" is historically the most contested. From early attempts at articulation by William Torrey Harris in 1873, to John Dewey in 1910, to the 1955 "crisis in literacy" prompted by the publication of Rudolf

Flesch's "Why Johnny Can't Read" – reinscribed in contemporary guises such as "Why Johnny Can't Read Even Though He Went to Princeton" in 2003 (Bartlett) and "Why Johny Cant Write, Its a Generasionel Thing" in 2004 (Ryan) – to the proliferation of tests to evaluate critical thinking skills in the 1980s and 1990s (NCEE; APA Delphi Report; Rockefeller Commission; Boyer Commission; Cornell Critical Thinking Test Level Z; Lazere; Follman, Lavely, and Berger), critical thinking currently ranges from association with formal and informal logic, rubric-based assessment, research and inquiry, and even admission to a vague understanding of what it means to think critically at all (Paul, Elder, and Bartell; McPeck; Sweet and Swanson; Braswell; Wilhoit; Lipman, "Critical").

Critical pedagogy and critical literacy are less contested, mostly due to a unifying concern with fostering what is broadly termed a critical social conscience (Giroux; Freire; McLaren; Aronowitz; Janks; Johnson; Luke and Freedbody). Although the objective to raise social consciousness over issues of inequality and oppression in race, gender, class, and culture is often successful, awareness of social injustice does not necessarily encourage people to think reflectively (Welch; Illich), and may even result in no more than exchanging one set of ideological beliefs for another (Petruzzi; Horner; Spigelman; S. Miller; Benesch; Gallagher; V. Anderson; Ellsworth).

In contrast to the chaotic contestations of "critical thinking," the concept of critical care is deceptively lucid, often manifested as an inherently *un*critical pedagogy. Its overriding commitment to respect and authentic dialogue is endorsed by the concept of safe learning environments maintained by expressivist discourse such as the personal narrative and use of freewriting as a conduit for individual voice (Fulweiler; Elbow; Murray). The objective is to assist students to engage in more fluent expression and to avoid formulaic thinking (Coles; D. Stewart; Hillocks) within a democratic environment of sharing (Noddings). Critics, however, see inherent danger in the concept of critical care in relation to unfettered respect-for-all-voices, a perspective that allegedly endorses egocentrism and quietism. Moreover, when individual expression of opinion is valorized to such an extent that it is immune from critical reflection, it becomes a barrier to critically reflective thought (Spigelman; Huot; D. Stewart; Bourdieu; France; Tingle,

Giroux; Bizzell; Bartholomae; Meyers; Connors; Dickson; B. Flores; R. Flores; Bean; Paul; Brookfield; Brookfield and Preskill).

While clearly there are many attempts to instigate what we might loosely call "critical thinking" in the first-year college English classroom, its misunderstandings paradoxically negate the opportunity for students to actively engage in critically reflective thinking, analysis, expression, and evaluation of their own and others' writing. I am careful here to deliberately risk tautology. "Critical thinking" is too problematic, too mired in misuse, to be an effective referent. Instead, I write of "critically reflective thinking," which seeks to capture the essence of moment in Rilke's panther: A conscious and critical awareness that reflects the ideological subjectivity of the truths we think we know.

As Robert H. Ennis points out, the "concept" – to borrow McPeck's careful word – of critical thinking as a goal of education has recursively gained and fallen throughout the twentieth century, yet neither its historical presence nor its current application provides definitive parameters of what it constitutes (Paul, Elder, and Bartell; McPeck, *Critical*). Some scholars emphasize the role of rubric as tools for critical thinking (*WSUCTR*; Ennis; Facione and Facione; Giancarlo and Facione; Jones), measuring how well students can identify and question the validity of assumptions, authorial bias, and the ethical dimensions of an issue. The problem is that such analyses are self-contained, meeting only the evaluative expectations that have already been set. Similarly, the "critical thinking questions" used in many college readers endorse critical thinking as a self-justifying slogan (McPeck; Horn; Maiorana).

Historically, logic has been touted as the "science of thinking," emphasizing the application of both formal and informal logic, but by the early 1980s emphasis shifted from the "science" of analysis to the attitudes and dispositions of people that can impede or promote critical thought (Lazere; Giancarlo and Facione; Kytle; Perry; Gilligan; Meyers; Battersby). As a result, critical thinking is linked with social awareness and discord achieved through dialogue, imagination, and tolerance of ambiguity (Gieve; Benesch; Bailin; Brookfield; Paul). Where few oppose critical thinking as a term, some – reflecting the contribution of feminist scholarship – see it as an endorsement of patriarchal linear thought, and as such reject the idea of dissent in favor of emphasizing

the importance of consensus and sharing within a community of writers and thinkers (Ruggiero; H. Anderson; Bruffee). Others, however, warn that critical thinking threatens the stability provided by consensus (Atkinson). A majority of researchers, however, concur that critical thinking can be both articulated and evaluated through writing and text analysis, particularly when accompanied by written and/or verbal dialogue (Blattner and Frazier; Meyers; Jonassen; Brookfield; Paul; Shermis; Brookfield and Preskill; Moffett; Giroux; Aronowitz; Freire; Tingle; Benesch; Berthel; Chomsky; Coles; Yager; Delpit; France; Foucault; Horner; Hardin; Illich; Lipman). Therefore, rather than promoting the concept that critical thinking is linear – that it begins with a problem and results in solution – it begins by searching for questions among many possibilities.

In terms of defining its applicative parameters, critical pedagogy is less problematic than its critical thinking counterpart. The primary goal of critical pedagogy is, to use Paulo Freire's term, "conscientization," or consciousness of oppressive social forces and how they can be changed (Freire; Giroux; McLaren; Aronowitz; Glenn; Petruzzi; Tingle), with key concepts including reflection, recursivity, re-cognition, and empowerment – all of which indicate a paradoxical need for circumspection, humility, and challenging taken-for-granted truths (Benesch; Petruzzi). The criticisms of critical pedagogy are sharp, asserting that rather than being an "emancipatory rhetoric" (Burbules 251), it instead reinforces non-critical thinking and promotes the status quo (Horn; S. Miller; Hardin), with those outside the consensual norm dismissed or even ostracized (Horn; V. Anderson; Ellsworth). While the term "empowerment" is also problematic, particularly when viewed as a commodity (Horner), others assert that critical pedagogy presents simplistic binary oppositions, privileging one set of social values and beliefs over another, and reflecting more the sociopolitical agenda of an instructor or institution than a genuine commitment to open discourse (Giroux; Hardin; Weiler; Benesch; Gallagher; Ellsworth; D. Seitz), leading even to allegations of dangerous indoctrination (V. Anderson; McLaren). Perhaps because of this, others argue that examining the brokerage of power through the mundane and the pedestrian may be more critically effective, revealing the insidious ideological workings of power and social norms precisely due to their non-radical and unquestioned acceptance (Tingle; V. Anderson; McLaren; Hardin). The concepts of what constitutes "home" and

"homelessness" are also integral in such critical examination of the familiar versus the unfamiliar as proponents of resistance to ideologically determined space and place (JanMohammed; Giroux; Freire and Faundez).

Like critical pedagogy, critical literacy concerns an examination of power and the ways in which language constructs and circulates social identities within frameworks of gender, race, and culture with a goal of social transformation by way of multi-literate interpretation (Degener; Luke and Freedbody; Patterson; Threadgold). Critics of critical literacy, taking one of its tenets, challenge whose purpose is served in its application, charging that teaching-to-an-agenda merely replaces a privileged center with a marginalized one under what Gerald Graff describes as a hopelessly inadequate notion that we all share common ground. Others cite concern that while critical reading of text can be taught, this does not necessarily transform into tangible individual or social change (Horner; J. Seitz; Graff; Janks; Sweet and Swanson) and may even negate its possibility entirely (Burbules; Hardin; R. Miller). Moreover, an unsettling undercurrent of consensus in critical literacy is incongruous with a pedagogy describing itself as liberatory: the "us" versus "them" mentality underscored with a why-can't-we-all-just-get-along rationale. The more critically acute question seeks to investigate the impetus for individual and collective change – or at least its genuine possibility.

The concept of critical care reflects the characteristics of respect, receptivity, and responsiveness in classroom discussion, dialogue, and written commentary. It can also evoke images of nurture and safety, particularly from those who claim that criticism is potentially harmful to the student psyche and that the classroom, therefore, should be a space that exudes support, trust, and the avoidance of conflict in an environment where all views are respected equally (Noddings; Heydenberk and Heydenberk; Rubin; Morand; Murray; Elbow; DeBlase). Others warn of inauthenticity in the concept of critical care, pointing to a culture of infantilizing dependency and (over)protection (White; Meyers; Brookfield; Brookfield and Preskill), one that focuses too much on self-esteem at the expense of self-reflection and, therefore, risks attitudes of shallow narcissism (Lerner; Begley and Rogers; Campbell and Foddis; Lipman; Ravitch; Smelser; Shokraii). While recognizing the crushing potential of criticism (Laird; Spigelman), many scholars maintain that overt protection from its impact can impede

critical thought (Lorde; Ellsworth; Paul; Brookfield; Brookfield and Preskill; Lipman; LaDuc; V. Anderson; Weil; Hillocks).

1.2 The Critical Reconceptualized

The historic and contemporary muddied application of "critical" and "caring" lend urgency to reinscribing the meaning of these terms and how they can be used in an affective critical pedagogy for the first-year college English classroom. Such an alternative, however, need not involve binary oppositions of *un*caring or the *un*critical, but instead consider a reconceptualized understanding of what it is to care critically. Although noting the traditionally pejorative connotations, some scholars seeking reinscription endorse the use of "shaming" (Yager; Coles, "Response"), or the liberal incorporation of parody, satire, irony, and even a sense of serious-playfulness (Bakhtin; Janks; Oakeshott; Giroux; Kenway and Bullen) in an attempt to foster the type of disequilibria that is characteristic of critically reflective thought (Phelps; Salibrici; Roberts-Miller; Shermis; Paul; Ellsworth). The concept of disequilibria as exile, of moving beyond self-imposed ideological barriers or borders to explore alternative cognitive worlds, is reflected in the work of Giroux, Piaget, Derrida, Said, Foucault, Tingle, Freire, and Husserl. At the same time, concern for authentic engagement from individuals and the degree to which their learning reflects genuine investiture is a crucial component of critical thought. A reconceptualized, critically affective pedagogy, therefore, would draw from aspects of all the "criticals" and merge them with a new understanding of what it means to care in terms of opening the possibilities for genuine transformative change. This is precisely the rationale for *Decritique* as a revisioned critical pedagogy, one that rests on two applicative elements: Deracination, and the Detached Intellectualized Space (D.I.S.). As a rearticulation of "the critical," *Decritique* provides a means to set the discourse and dialogue of individuals as self-reflexive inquiry that turns on itself (McKerrow; Castricano; France; Hardin), a phenomenological act of perceiving ourselves perceiving (Eagleton; Brookfield; Berthel), and an eidetic reduction to the essence of our own thoughts (Husserl). Once it becomes possible to re-vision our selves as containing many traces of otherness, many centers and re-centers that are sometimes reconcilable, sometimes not (Derrida), we set in place the critical

possibilities of change – and it is the possibility for change rather than the transformation itself that needs exploring.

1.3 *Decritique* in Theory

As a theory, *Decritique* is informed by Husserl's pure phenomenology and Derrida's deconstruction. Although acknowledging the tensions between the two, Husserl's eidetic and transcendental reductions, aligned with Derrida's concept of différance and the instability of meaning, combine to provide the theoretical premise of deracination and the D.I.S. In tandem, this forms the framework of *Decritique* as a reconceptualized critical pedagogy for teaching first-year college English. Within that frame is inherently an examination of what we think we see as truth and what we believe in our reality. For if truth is delible and impermanent, and if what we perceive as truth is no more than perception, then reality is a fiction just as fiction is reality – a possible world, a plausible world, and a self-referential world. As Foucault rhetorically asks, when "behind all these questions, we would hear hardly anything but the stirring of an indifference: 'What difference does it make who is speaking?'" ("Author" 988). If we could find a way for our students to examine the referential possible worlds of self and to critically reflect on those worlds, then we might discover that it may, indeed, make a difference who is speaking and who is writing about those thoughts.

1.4 *Decritique* in Practice: Purpose and Scope of the Pilot Study

In order to test the theory of *Decritique* in practice, I taught multiple class sections of first-year college English courses over three successive semesters. Half the courses were taught with *Decritique* and the other half with a pedagogy of "caring" so as to observe possible gains or differences between the two approaches, both framed by a research question comprising primary and secondary components:

Primary: Does the application of *Decritique* (DEC) in the first-year college English classroom result in student writing that shows greater depth, sophistication of analysis, and reflective thought than an equivalent classroom taught with a Concept of Critical Care (CCC)?

Secondary: Does the learning environment, whether traditional face-to-face computer assisted or fully-online classroom, affect the depth and sophistication of analysis and reflective thought in the writing of first-year college English students?

The scope of the pilot study involves analysis of writing produced by students during the course of their studies in first-year college English classes taught by the researcher at Del Mar College, Corpus Christi, Texas between September 2003 and December 2004, with the total population represented in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1
Pilot Study Population Fall 2003 to Fall 2004

Semester	Class	Pedagogy	Mode	Population	Retention
Fall 2003	English 1301	DEC	OL	11	91.6 %
	English 1301	CCC	F2F	15	65.2 %
Spring 2004	English 1302	DEC	OL	12	100.0 %
	English 1302	DEC	F2F	13	68.0 %
Fall 2004	English 1301	DEC	F2F	10	59.1 %
	English 1301	CCC	F2F	10	50.0 %
	English 1301	CCC	OL	9	81.8 %
			Total:	80	

Each semester, the student population from two class sections of English 1301 or English 1302,[1] with the exception of those students who either failed or withdrew from a course ($N = 80$), was considered eligible for inclusion. The mode of classroom environment is indicated by OL (online) or F2F (face-to-face). Students were assigned by an objective third party to the control-group class (CCC) and the intervention-group class (DEC). The participants did not self-select their groups and were not aware of their participation in the study. No student assigned to the intervention group (DEC) crossed over to the control group (CCC), nor vice versa (NCEERA 5).

[1] See Appendix A for Glossary of Terms

1.4.1 Methodology

Each semester, I instructed two or three course sections of English 1301 or English 1302. While the texts, WebCT environments, readings, course sequencing, and writing assignments were identical for the respective class groups each semester, the method of instruction differed, using *Decritique* (DEC) or the Concept of Critical Care (CCC). Table 1.2 represents the characteristics of both approaches to instruction.

Table 1.2
Characteristics of *Decritique* (DEC) and Concept of Critical Care (CCC)

Pedagogical Characteristics	DEC	CCC
Critical commentary; concept of "shaming"	Yes	No
Deracination	Yes	No
Extensive critical commentary on essays	Yes	No
Identical writing assignments	Yes	Yes
Rubric-Guided Peer Review	No	Yes
Sense of safe, respectful community of sharing	No	Yes
Sharp "negative" questioning	Yes	No
Supportive "positive" questioning	No	Yes
Weekly portfolio journal assignments (IPJ)	Yes	Yes
Working within parameters of D.I.S.	Yes	No

In keeping with the secondary research objective, courses were taught either fully online using the commercial educational software program WebCT[2] or face-to-face in an on-campus computer classroom, using WebCT as an auxiliary component.

1.4.2 Data Collection, Analysis, and Statistical Design

To enable a consistent set of writing samples each semester, data were collected from the following five assignments: Individual Portfolio Journal (IPJ)[3] from weeks 1-3

[2] WebCT: A password protected, integrated software system that provides course content materials, asynchronous discussion forums/bulletin boards, email, and resource pages accessible via the internet
[3] IPJ: Weekly student writing assignments posted in a private WebCT discussion forum/journal, with each forum accessible only to the individual student and instructor

and 10-12; Deracination (DEC) or rubric-guided Peer Critique (CCC); First Course Essay; Final Course Essay; and Course Grade. Data analysis combined qualitative analysis of IPJ writing, deracinations, peer critiques, and essay writing. Quantitative analysis was applied to component parts of student writing and grade averages for the essays and the course. Evaluation criteria were drawn from the Del Mar College *Expectations for Formal Written Work in College-Level Courses* (see Appendix B). While the first essay submitted by both groups was evaluated by the researcher with knowledge of the students and to which group they belonged, to assist in objectivity the final essays were submitted "blind" and co-evaluated by the researcher and a third party instructor of English 1301/1302 at Del Mar who had used the same essay prompts for instruction.

First essay submissions were read critically and commentary was provided before assigning a grade of A, B, C, or Draft; in the case of the latter, students were invited to resubmit the assignment after revision. Final essays were read holistically without commentary, and assigned a final grade of A, B, C, D, or F. Incremental plus or minus signs were used to scale the degree of each letter grade before conversion to a percentage, as indicated in Table 1.3.

Table 1.3
Conversion of Letter Grades to Percentages

Letter Grade	+ (%)		- (%)
A	98	95	92
B	88	85	82
C	78	75	72
D	68	65	62
F	-	50	-
No essay	0		

For "blind" assessment, writing assignments were submitted electronically in a standardized MLA format, but before being downloaded for evaluation, each student's name was omitted – along with identifying header fields – and the file saved under the student's social security number. In cases where font face differed from a standard

Times New Roman 12 or where discrepancies in formatting occurred within a single document, both font and format were altered to provide uniformity. The final essays were pooled with those of the third-party instructor, resulting in the researcher not knowing which essay belonged to whom, from both the perspective of student writer or teacher's class.

1.4.3 Margin of Error, Bias, and Variables

The potential margin of error was calculated by comparing demographic data including age, gender, and – where applicable – test scores in reading and writing for English 1301 students (TASP, ASSET, Compass, ACT, SAT, TAAS), or previous course grade in English 1301 for English 1302 students. A combination of constants and variables is apparent in this pilot study. The constants, or fixed elements, include identical texts, reading assignments, writing prompts/questions for both groups, and the use of WebCT for course readings and lecture notes, public/open discussion forums, and submission of private portfolio journal (IPJ) entries. A manipulated variable is the method of instruction, either teaching to the principles of *Decritique* (DEC) or the Concept of Critical Care (CCC). Other variables include demographic differences, standardized college test scores, and grades earned in prior college English courses.

1.4.4 The Null Hypothesis

In keeping with the principles of inferential statistics, at the beginning of the study I proposed a null hypothesis that: The application of *Decritique* (DEC), when compared with the Concept of Critical Care (CCC), in the first-year college English classroom makes no significant difference in students' ability to produce analytical essays characterized by depth and sophistication of argument with evidence of critically reflective thought. The null hypothesis is represented in Figure 1.1.

$$\mathbf{H_{O:}\ \mu\ DEC = \mu\ CCC}$$

Fig. 1.1: Statistical Representation of Null Hypothesis

By the end of the study, I expected to be able to either reject the null hypothesis or concede that the null hypothesis could be neither accepted nor rejected. If the null hypothesis were rejected, further research into *Decritique* as an effective pedagogy for the first-year college English classroom is warranted; if it were neither accepted nor rejected, it would indicate a need for further research into alternative critical pedagogies for the first-year college English classroom.

Between the idea
And the reality
Between the motion
And the act
Falls the Shadow
T.S. Eliot ("Hollow Men" ll. 72-76)

2. Critical: The Muddy Adjective

The ability to "think critically" is consistently endorsed as a desirable outcome for college and university graduates in the 21st century, and a laudable commitment to this objective, concisely defined in the 1998 West Review's *Learning for Life: Final Report* as "the capacity for critical, conceptual, and reflective thinking in all aspects of intellectual and practical activity" (47), has ensued from institutions of higher learning, governments, and private organizations. Yet, putting into practice what it might mean to "critically think," let alone articulating how to teach it – or even if it can be taught – has resulted in a highly contested, muddy paradigm that, to borrow Robin Hoople's eloquent analogy, is a "corpse-strewn critical landscape" (239).

In an apparent paradox between rampant twenty-first century individualism and globalization and the specter of Samuel Huntington's predictions of global cultural clashes and ideological war, the "critical" landscape is disturbingly sanitized in its educational context as a manifesto of tolerance and respect for difference, one promulgated in the quotidian world of day-to-day college teaching. As noted on a recent listserv exchange in regard to the teaching of first-year college English, the classroom "is not a battlefield or a place to harm others" (Mahan). The opening decade of the twenty-first century is making painfully apparent that indeed the classroom does not serve as a locus for brutal ideological conflict, but instead the "real" world is left to deal

with international and national politics, economics, and ongoing social issues of poverty, discrimination, and oppression; in short, social war happens "out there," but not within the safe and sanctimoniously respectful, caring classroom. Why the distinction?

If the first-year college English classroom cannot extend past the artificial barriers of good taste, good conduct, and good feelings – underscored and reinforced by the undeniably desirable elements of human interaction such as respect and tolerance – then, to paraphrase Foucault, what difference does it make who is speaking? The roles of managed conflict, respect, and humility are circulating as part of a much larger conversation for contemporary teaching of first-year college English – a pedagogy that emphasizes the need for "critical thinking" as a core objective. Yet, if such classrooms are not places for battle or to harm others, we can conclude that they are, therefore, places of safety and pleasant cooperation. The binaries at work here serve a singular purpose: To oppress the potentially invasive, harmful, or inflammatory. I propose that such oppression is a fundamental and significant problem in the first-year college English classroom and that current teaching and learning methods falling under a broad banner of "critical thinking" are not critical at all; moreover, that a motley misapplication in regard to what constitutes "critical thinking" poses an inherent threat to educating college students through their first-year English studies about the complexities and constituencies of the world in which they live. Further, it marginalizes the politics of praxis, rendering the possibilities of real change to a safe, decontextualized, and anti-confrontational *un*reality.

To set some comparative margins, we might consider a parallel of this opening decade of the twenty-first century with the emergence of its predecessor, the twentieth. The birth of both the Modern Age and, as its contemporary equivalent, the Information Age is marked by a collective consciousness of *fin de siécle* and *ennui* – a response to impending and massive political and social upheaval. The end of the nineteenth and start of the twentieth century was a time of rapid industrial and technological change, reflecting the apex of imperialistic international conquest and colonial aggression by England, Belgium, France, and Germany. Interest in science was intense, with the profusion of new theories and inventions including the Wright brothers and Charles Lindberg's flights, the Model-T Ford, fascination with the implications of Herbert

Spencer's Social Darwinism, the rise of psychiatry as a branch of medicine, and the increasing reliance on machines and the mechanization of industry. Humanity had embarked on a quest of progress, and at the turn of the nineteenth century the human being was unstoppable. Similarly, the opening of the twenty-first century has seen the imperialistic actions of the United States as a singular world power implementing a peculiarly American version of a Western democratic ideal, global information networks have been underscored by the proliferation of the internet – the effects of which have promulgated the new capitalistic currency of premium-value information exchange to serve and maintain the interests of a world minority who holds power.

Modris Eksteins, describing the first world war, notes that traditional vocabulary and language were "grossly inadequate" to describe the experience: "Words like *courage*, let alone *glory* and *heroism*, with their classical and romantic connotations ... had lost all power to capture reality" (218). When confronted with the social realities of the twenty-first century, we see the same ardent but ultimately empty descriptions of ideological action: Heroism, democracy, and freedom are shackled with false notions of respect, humility, and caring – often with devastating consequences, such as the barbaric acts of American military personnel in the Iraqi prison of Abu Ghraib. The horrors of such incongruity are reflected in the words of Wilfred Owen, whose poem "Anthem for Doomed Youth" expresses the irreconcilable differences between a world caught up in sanctimonious heroism and unmitigated barbarity:

> What passing-bells for these who die as cattle?
> Only the monstrous anger of the guns.
> Only the stuttering rifles' rapid rattle
> Can patter out their hasty orisons.
> No mockeries now for them; no prayers nor bells,
> Nor any voice of mourning save the choirs, –
> The shrill, demented choirs of wailing shells;
> And bugles calling for them from sad shires.
> What candles may be held to speed them all?
> Not in the hands of boys, but in their eyes
> Shall shine the holy glimmers of good-byes.

> The pallor of girls' brows shall be their pall;
> Their flowers the tenderness of patient minds,
> And each slow dusk a drawing-down of blinds. (832)

Owen's "Anthem" may have been written for another time, another century, and yet the essence of the poem reflects a tragic metaphorical death for the thinking mind in the twenty-first century: the critical, reflective, self-examining mind that seeks not cohesion and empty words of freedom, democracy, and the privileging of a Western democratic ideal, nor allows itself to fall into a calculated mosaic of impassioned blandness, but a barbed, critically thinking populace of minds not afraid to be caught on the shards of incongruity. In Owen's words we see a Western democratic process of world-thinking redolent of a cattle-crush of inherent mindlessness, of a population increasingly fattened on gluttonous excesses of mass consumption, sated by the ideological bliss of mediocrity. The monstrous anger that might arise if reality were exposed is tamed and lulled, paradoxically silenced by the rapid rattle of dangerous rhetorical platitudes endorsing the unexamined (mis)placement of idealism and heroism. The potential voices of mourning, those lamenting the unequivocal refusal to acknowledge that a sanctioned ideology may indeed be wrong – whether that ideology manifests itself in worship of a higher deity, a capitalistic ideal, or delusional and simplistic faith in democracy as representing the voice of the people – are castigated as shrill, demented choirs, and the potential for their voices to be heard is hushed at day's end by the drawing down of insipid blinds of respect, consensus, and unity.

Within this imagery the critic is relegated as an outsider, an irksome and pejorative Other whose positing of an anthem for doomed humanity is condemned as a plague of negativity threatening the security and certitude that is found in the positivity of being inherently and sanctimoniously right. The critic is caged, cautioned, and castigated; fed the colorless scraps of a languid collective mindset that increasingly fortifies the bars of its own ideological prisons and blunders on with a fixed and happy smile sutured in place by the deft, silken threads of tolerance and the unending mantra of the unanswered question: Why can't we all just get along? Rather than a pervasive – although perhaps perverse is a better word – and decontextualized "war on terror," "war on drugs" or "war on poverty," critical thought is a war on ideology; a war on the

inherent rightness of self, a war within our own minds and at once within our own societies' ways of thought, a war on the banal, the pedestrian, and the inane.

What I am proposing is a war on the means and modes that shape our collective thinking – one that is assaulted by a tide of mediocrity and conformity, delivered to a populace enthralled with reality television game shows and fantasized concepts of democracy that distort and debase the possibilities of the human mind, fragmenting it into easily manageable parts that can be refashioned into a socially conditioned whole: Every fragment is valued and afforded the same respect, provided the collective mosaic reflects the angle of light that shines the correct prism of social truth. Considering the ideological manifestations hidden beneath the term "critical thinking," Noam Chomsky's call to arms – whether in terms of revolutionizing a dullard and lumbering education system, or in providing our students with cognitive and ideological tools of self-defense – is a far deeper and more insidious barrier to overcome than we might first imagine.

2.1 Critical Thinking

Disconcertingly, to "think critically" has emerged in contemporary application as an ultimately meaningless trope – a synecdochical stand-in for a universally desirable outcome that, like being in favor of clean water or world peace, ranks highly in rhetoric but falls devastatingly short in practice. Although there are many attempts to engender "critical thinking" in the first-year English classroom, the misuse and misunderstanding of this term results in a shadow of obscurity. While there is little disagreement that students in first-year college English classrooms should actively engage in critical thinking, analysis, expression, and evaluation of their own and others' writing, misuse of what constitutes "the critical" dilutes these vaunted ideals.

Historically, the parameters for what constitutes critical thinking have remained elusive and constantly changing. In 1873, William Torrey Harris endorsed thinking as a tangible goal of education, defining it as "self-alienation" or "the learned ability to step away from one's immediate experience and view it with a critical perspective" (632-33, qtd. in Ravitch 36). By 1892, Charles W. Eliot was cultivating "the power to think, reason, observe, and describe" (31), although by 1908 Eliot reversed his position to

instead favor a vocational focus in order to sort students "by their evident or probable destinies" (86-87; Eliot [1908]). In 1910, John Dewey called for "reflective thought" in his text *How We Think*, giving rise to the 1920s Progressive Movement that challenged the rationale of vocational categorization. Marked by Intelligent Quotient (I.Q.) and Eugenics testing, this movement endorsed a scientific approach to thinking that justified "natural selection" through a series of intelligence tests. Touted as the "science of thinking," emphasis was placed on the formal logic of enthymemes and syllogisms complemented by the informal logic of fallacy and non-sequitur argument as a means to both ensure that students were learning "how to think" and providing scientific methods of assessing it (Ravitch).

In the 1930s and 1940s, likely in reaction to global depression and world war, the educational pendulum swung back to preparing students vocationally rather than academically – a situation that again fell from favor in the 1950s with the publication of Rudolf Flesch's "Why Johnny Can't Read" in 1955. Shadowed by the political realities of the Cold War and fanatical anti-communist McCarthyism, the educational system was deemed to reflect a "national crisis in literacy" (Ravitch 354). In response, test-taking returned to shadow critical thinking, with the 1961 publication *The Central Purpose of American Education* promoting the need for a "back-to-basics" test-score approach (EPC).

The 1970s and 1980s turned again, this time lauding the value of the individual and giving rise to the Self-Esteem Movement, but this was followed by a revival of basics once it was determined that focusing on self-esteem had not fulfilled its promise of a liberating and equitable education, but instead "accentuated narcissistic themes" in an environment of hedonism and socio-cultural anarchy (Ravitch 406-07). By 1983 the United States was allegedly a Nation at Risk, with a report of the same name warning that "the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people" (qtd. in Ravitch 412; NCEE). To this, Theodore R. Sizer endorsed the teaching of students "to use their minds well and to think seriously about what they had learned" (418), echoed by the 1990 call of the American Philosophical Association (APA) to steep the "post-secondary curricula with critical thinking" (Blattner and Frazier 47; APA). The

consensus was that despite increased attention to instruction in critical thought, the tangible nature of teaching critical thinking, especially in terms of its assessment, had been woefully neglected (Ravitch).

What remains consistent throughout this historical path, particularly in the latter half of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, is the proliferation of governmental and institutional statements on the need for critical thinking skills in college and university graduates. In the 1960s, the National Education Association asserted that "the purpose which runs through and strengthens all other educational purposes ... is the development of the ability to think" (Baron and Sternberg x; EPC); in the 1980s, the Rockefeller Commission on the Humanities and the Boyer Commission Report on Educating Undergraduates both emphasized the need for critical thinking; the California State University system specified "the study of critical thinking as a requirement for graduation"; the APA "urged philosophers to help with attempts to test for critical thinking" (Ennis, "Taxonomy" 9); and the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development "made critical thinking skills its number one priority for educational development" (Baron and Sternberg x).

In the latest of a long tradition, the National Commission on Writing in America's Schools and Colleges (NCWASC) seeks to address perceived tertiary education deficiencies in the United States, with its 2003 manifesto *The Neglected "R"* claiming that "[i]n this Commission's view, the concept of educational reform must be expanded to include ideas; the ability of students to think, reason, and communicate" (9). This same committee, citing the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) 1999 *Writing Report Card for the Nation and the States*, also asserts that "when asked to think on paper, most students produce rudimentary and fairly run-of-the-mill prose. Writing at the basic level demonstrates only a limited grasp of the importance of extended or complex thought" (NCWASC 17). This point is reflected in George Hillocks' call for the need to "avoid sterility ... in writing and the formulaic in thinking" (7), and the assertion from Ruth Stewart that "traditional methods of teaching critical thinking in first-year composition have had limited success" (163). Other critics, such as Noam Chomsky, allege that the educational notion of critical thinking is paradoxically part of an insidious drive indoctrinating students to a system of obedience. "Far from

creating independent thinkers," Chomsky writes, "schools have always, throughout history, played an institutional role in a system of control and coercion" (16); moreover, and particularly in the United States, education "is not a system that encourages independent thought and critical thinking" but one fostering an "instrumental skills-banking approach that often prevents the development of the kind of thinking that enables one to 'read the world' critically" (Macedo 3-4).

It is, therefore, not surprising that there is contention and disagreement over just what constitutes "critical thinking." Recent scholarship on this question is extensive, ranging from critical thinking as the ability to recognize, analyze, and evaluate argument through research and inquiry (Schlect; Jones), to the need for self-correction and self-reflection as components of good judgment (Lipman; Paul), to the critical thinker as "a kind of intellectual nit-picker" (Schlect), to reflective and perpetual skepticism (McPeck; Hillocks) or a self-reflexive critique of "permanent criticism" (McKerrow), to a cautious open-mindedness (Ennis, "Assessment") and to promote "active discussion of ideas and language for continuing dialogue about meanings" (Hillocks 7). Others, such as Haithe Anderson, call for less well-defined interpretations of critical thinking, basing their objections that the stretching of thought "beyond local boundaries and normative constraints to respond to others' points of view with the assurances of understanding ... would be the death of different ways of thinking" (213). While few oppose critical thinking as a concept, some feminist scholars see it as endorsing patriarchal linear thought, and as such reject the idea of dissent in favor of emphasizing consensus and sharing within a community of writers and thinkers (Ruggiero; H. Anderson; Bruffee). There are those, however, who warn that critical thinking has potentially "disastrous consequences" of destabilizing social order because "mundane life can proceed only when its vast tacit machinery remains by and large under wraps" (Atkinson 133).

What marks the recent movement into defining critical thought is increased awareness of its application in social, historical, and cultural contexts, paralleled by the dramatic rise of critical thinking resources in higher education, such as the Critical Thinking Consortium and Foundation for Critical Thinking at Sonoma State University, Washington State University's *WSU Critical Thinking Project*, and San Jose State University's *Mission Critical* – although it should be noted that the latter focuses on

applied logic rather than a broader, socio-cultural context. In short, by the late 1990s, critical thinking had generally moved from association with the science of analysis towards attitudes and dispositions of people and the factors that can impede or promote critical thought (Lazere; Giancarlo and Facione; Kytle; Perry; Gilligan; Meyers; Battersby). Timothy Crusius, as an outspoken critic of traditional uses of formal and informal logic, asserts that there cannot be apodictic – or absolute – truth "that attains certainty by a combination of strict, formal reasoning and empirical method ... [because] deduction is capable only of making explicit what is implicit in one's premises; induction is capable, at best, of a warrantable assumption of high probability" (24, 26). Such a rationale has driven newer applications of logic, particularly in terms of distinction between "monologic" critical thinking as an applied informal logic and "dialogic" critical thinking, involving social awareness, dissent, struggle, and discord through a process of dialogue and the dialectic (Gieve; Benesch; Whiteley; Shermis; Brookfield and Preskill; Salibrici; Coe). Several scholars assert the need to recognize elements of creativity, imagination, and tolerance of ambiguity (Bailin; Shermis; Brookfield; Paul) – the latter addressing the concerns of Ivan Illich who writes of students who "no longer have to be put in their place, but put themselves in their assigned slots, squeeze themselves into the niche which they have been taught to seek, and, in the very process, put their fellows into their places, too, until everybody and everything fits" (58). The recurring characteristic of positions relating to defining just what critical thinking means is a multitude of competing – and even irreconcilable – perceptions (Wilhoit; Lipman, "Critical"; Beyer).

Critical thinking is a muddy paradigm, and much of its obscurity draws from what McPeck describes as "approaching the concept as though it were a self-evident slogan," the precise constituent parts of which are "considered to be clear and self-justifying" (*Critical* 2). McPeck's critique is illustrated in one of the most ambitious – and disturbing – attempts to ascertain what constitutes critical thinking in a 1995 study of faculty at 38 public and 28 private Californian universities by Richard Paul, Linda Elder, and Ted Bartell. While 89 percent of respondents claimed that critical thinking is a primary objective of instruction, only 19 percent attempted to define what this might mean. Moreover, critical thinking was often associated with what the researchers

describe as "magic talisman" phrases such as "constructivism," "process and inquiry" and "Bloom's taxonomy" (5, 10, 18), with the majority of respondents "unable to intelligibly explain" any of them (5). The report concluded that "most faculty have not carefully thought through any concept of critical thinking" and are therefore "in no position to foster . . . [it] except to inculcate into their students the same vague views they have" (6). McPeck concurs: "Commissions have strongly recommended that schools start teaching people to be critical thinkers, yet neither they nor the programs which they have spawned are at all clear about what kind of thing critical thinking *is*, nor what these initiatives are supposed to accomplish" ("Trivial" 298).

2.1.1 Assessing Critical Thinking: The Rubric Approach

The assessment of critical thinking is frequently underscored by Benjamin Bloom's taxonomical scale, especially the three upper levels of analysis, synthesis, and evaluation, as measurable standards to gauge degrees of critical thought in writing. As Ennis points out, however, the main problem with adapting Bloom's principles is that critical thinking is not particularly hierarchical and does not necessarily follow such neatly ordered and sequential patterns; moreover, adherence to the taxonomy frequently overlooks the aspect of creativity when assessing critical thinking skill. In attempting to articulate what assessment of critical thinking might look like, Ennis offers a 10-point rubric that begins with measuring how well a student has judged the credibility of sources and identified conclusions, reasoning, assumptions, and argument in the writing he or she has produced, then works into a summative conclusion that is drawn "when warranted, but with caution" ("Assessment" 180). The irony, of course, is that while on the one hand Ennis disregards use of Bloom's taxonomical scale because it is too hierarchical and prescriptive, his 10-point rubric reflects the same characteristics. What is particularly troubling about the use of rubrics such as that provided by Ennis, Bloom – or even the much-lauded Washington State University *Critical Thinking Rubric* (*CTR*) – is the inherent and a priori assumptions made within the structure of such instruments that students of Ennis, for example, already know *how* to "[j]udge the quality of an argument" and precisely what constitutes "appropriate clarifying questions" (180).

The use of rubrics to measure degrees of critical thought is widespread, with many scholars reinforcing the need to assess how well students can identify and question the validity of assumptions, authorial bias, and the ethical dimensions of an issue (*WSUCTR*; Ennis; Facione and Facione; Giancarlo and Facione; Jones). Again, however, we see the problem of such analyses as self-contained: almost without exception the rubrics either limit analysis to information wholly within the situation or text, or require comparative judgment against pre-set criteria. Both result in evaluation that conforms to a pre-determined outcome. What is being measured is the product of thought, not the process that went into the production of that thinking. In a similar way, the ubiquitous critical thinking questions that often appear at the end of chapters in college readers carry the mistaken assumption that merely responding to such questions is a guarantee that thinking critically has occurred (Maiorana), something that Raymond Horn categorically rejects in his acerbic dismissal of both "critical thinking workshops and gurus who dispense graphic organizers" that allegedly teach students how to structure, compare, synthesize, and evaluate data (141).

The Washington State University *CTR* exemplifies the problematic nature of a priori assessment parameters. Offering a scale to ostensibly calculate whether critical thinking has taken place, the WSU rubric provides two comparative extremes for evaluation: Scant and Substantial. Beneath these headings are characteristics of what constitutes each, with the Scant column being the less contentious of the two in terms of assessing degrees of critical thought. The description of Scant writing is a fairly straightforward commentary of superficial analysis, such as addressing a single view or source, dealing with a single perspective, failing to establish alternative critical distinctions, or discussing the problem "only in egocentric or sociocentric terms" (1-2). The Substantial characteristics, however, are deeply concerning for two reasons – with the first leading into the second: The wording is not only vague and non-specific, but it also reinforces the idea that students already understand the concepts that are offered as a measurable comparison. To demonstrate this objection, consider the hypothetical responses to excerpts from the Substantial column of the WSU rubric in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1
Response to *CTR* Characteristics of "Substantial" Writing

CTR: Substantial	Response
Identifies main problem and subsidiary, embedded, or implicit aspects of the problem, and identifies them clearly, addressing their relationships to each other. Identifies not only the basics of the issue, but recognizes nuances of the issue	Essentially, a strong thesis. What is missing here reflects the concern that students will first often focus on writing a thesis before contemplating multi-faceted aspects of an issue; therefore, re-articulating belief(s) they already hold.
Identifies, appropriately, one's own position on the issue, drawing support from experience, and information not available from assigned sources	"[O]ne's own position on the issue" is just one of many possibilities; indeed, it could be argued that one's "own" position is the last place to begin analysis with regard to generating alternative perspectives
Identifies and questions the validity of the assumptions and addresses the ethical dimensions that underlie the issue	Frequently, first-year students have little skill or experience in recognizing the assumptive elements of their "own position," let alone underlying ethical dimensions
Observes cause and effect and addresses existing or potential consequences	Cause and effect parameters require a priori constituent components; without acknowledgment of this, examining existing or potential consequences is critically flawed
Analyzes the issue with a clear sense of scope and context, including an assessment of the audience of the analysis	Focus is on externalized, outward projection of ideas: How well does the message meet the expectations of the audience? Such a rationale may work well for advertising copy, but does not support critically reflective thought
Objectively reflects upon their [students'] own assertions	A key component of critical thinking, yet the problem is that students lack skill in how to objectively reflect on their own assertions

The problematic elements of the rubric are apparent in the work of Ennis, known for the *Cornell Critical Thinking Level Z* and *Ennis-Weir Critical Thinking Essay* tests. In regard to the latter, Ennis claims that this instrument provides a valid way to measure degrees of critical thought. The test constitutes a hypothetical, argument-based letter to a

newspaper editor, where each of the numbered paragraphs contains built-in errors. Students appraise the degree of thinking in each, and then defend their appraisals. Graders, who must be "proficient in critical thinking in order to handle responses that differ from the standard," assign a "certain number of possible points to the appraisal of each paragraph" ("Assessment" 185). There are a number of problems with Ennis' rationale. First, we should question the a priori nomination of an "argumentative passage" and balk at the "built-in errors" – aspects that conjure up comical images of an omniscient instructor planting prizes in a garden-hunt that students need to locate. Moreover, that students are asked to "appraise the thinking in each paragraph and the passage as a whole" is vague: We might envisage telling our students with a flourishing gesture, "oh, just appraise the thinking of this piece that *I* have selected and to which *I* already know the answers and see how you do." Finally, the scoring guide that assigns points for various aspects of the paragraph's appraisal is tightly prescriptive, with the inherent focus on application of formal logic reminiscent of a "grammar-police" attitude of deducting three points for every comma splice, two for pronoun-antecedent agreement, and five for the cardinal sin of a sentence fragment. In his own defense, Ennis concedes that the structure of the essay test does not allow students much cognitive freedom, yet does provide teachers with firm diagnostic information (185). This last point exemplifies a contestable element of the rubric position in terms of critically reflective thought because all it measures, in this case, is a student's ability to apply formal logic.

One of the fundamental issues overlooked in what I term the "rubric position" is that first-year college students do not have strong, refined critical tools of evaluation in their cognitive repertoire, and it is precisely this absence that needs to be addressed before implementing methods of assessment for critical thinking. The implicit binaries within rubrics like those of Ennis and the *CTR* offer exclusionary choices, prompting a series of "yes/no" responses from both student and instructor. Instead, it is when we endorse a "*description* of 'what *is*,' unfettered by predetermined notions of what 'should be'," that we can move into a position where it becomes possible to posit alternative perspectives (McKerrow 100, emphasis added). Moreover, as Raymie McKerrow argues, if our students "come to a system of discourse with an ideological grid already in

place and participate in terms of that grid's determinative nature" (102), the questions we might ask ourselves is when, where and how can students develop the tools to disturb or disrupt such cognitive barriers? Is it through the time-consuming process of commenting on essays? And, how many of our students read these comments? Moreover, how many students actively work on addressing the concepts and problems that arise from such commentary? How much time does it take faculty members to engage in dialogue with and among students in terms of fostering such skill? How do we, in Chomsky's words, "provide students with critical tools to unpack the ideological content of myths"? (34).

While these are questions that I address in the chapter that considers a reconceptualized application of critical thinking, at this point our concern should not be with establishing rubrics to assess critical thought, but of finding ways for our students to themselves internalize their own modes of thinking and to critically examine that supporting framework. It is then, when we have provided opportunity to be reflectively aware of the ways in which our own thoughts are generated, that we will have something significant to measure. Figures 2.1 and 2.2 (page 28) graphically represent the way such a revisioned process of assessment might look. The dividing line in Figure 2.1 represents a nominative point of contrast between the internalized process of thought that has produced the student's text (on the left) and the product of that thought (the shaded section on the right). A rubric-based means of assessment focuses on the right-hand side, or the product already produced, and measures the degree to which critical thinking is allegedly evident in terms of what has already been thought. A comparative position – one that attempts to offer students the opportunity to themselves internalize their own modes of thinking, and then critically and reflectively examine the framework that supports it – eliminates the rubric, as shown in Figure 2.2. In this second model of assessment, rather than privileging a set of pre-conceived attributes announcing that a given set of students within a given context and in response to a given set of objectives "can critically think" – as in rubric based assessment – aims instead to allow students to decide what is a "good argument" and to then be assessed by his or her own evaluative parameters.

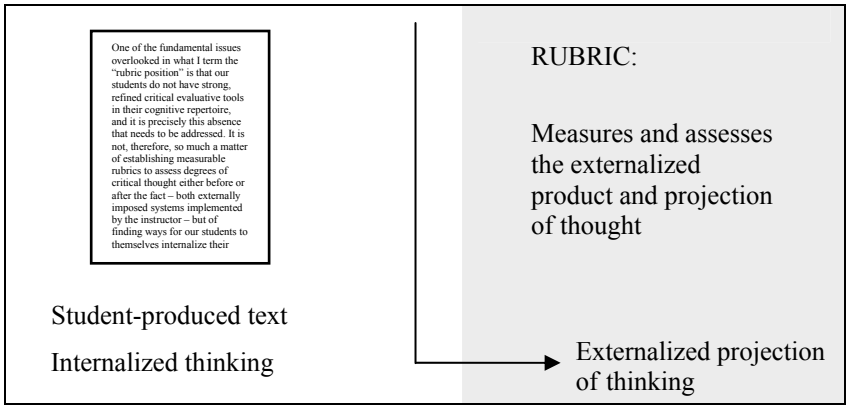


Fig. 2.1: Existing Model of Critical Thinking: The Rubric Position

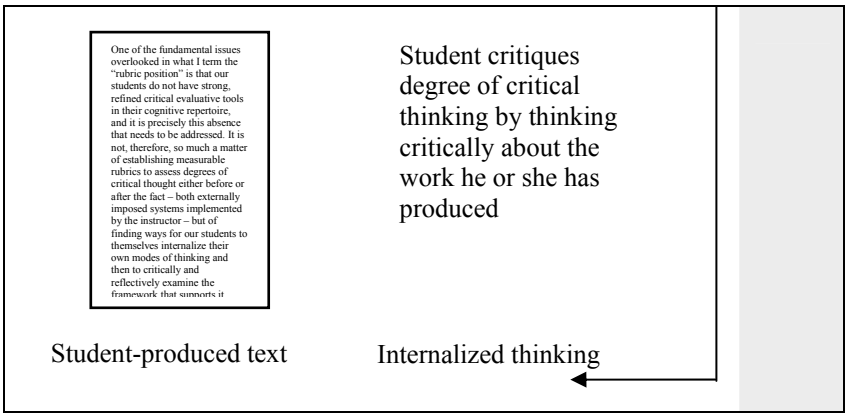


Fig. 2.2: Eliminating the Rubric-Based Position

The imposition of teacher-imposed rubric evaluation has, to a certain extent, been addressed by the use of peer critique, an activity widely endorsed in first-year college English classrooms, especially in relation to promoting student collaboration, investiture in their own writing, and the opportunity to read, like professional scholars and writers, the critical opinion of colleagues (Moffett; Dickson; R. Stewart; Petraglia; Brookfield and Preskill; Hillocks). Ideally, peer critique reinforces the call of Henry Giroux, James Berlin, and Virginia Anderson regarding opportunity for engaged criticism as an active search for contradictions in written thought. Theoretically, this can be achieved through collaborative revision of student writing by students. In practice, however, the lauded promises of peer critique fall short of the much-touted mark. Whether due to embarrassment, fear of failure, or influence by the rules of social

discourse and etiquette, peer critique is often characterized by ultimately meaningless commentary such as "excellent job" or "this is really good," more in keeping with sincere efforts to "be nice" than sincerely critical (B. Flores, "Deracination" 263).

The main problem with rubric-guided peer critique is not so much the inability of students to engage in critically reflective thought, but the relative inflexibility of the rubric's parameters. As Stephen Wilhoit believes, promoting critical thought in our students involves more than guidance in spotting an inconsistency, authorial bias, or judging the merit of conclusions and assertions (127). As an example, consider a recent peer critique rubric and the responses it solicited from a first-year college English student (Paper Review):

Table 2.2
Peer Critique Rubric and Student Response

Rubric Guide	Student Response
Did the entry begin with the required MLA formatting?	Yes.
Did the author objectively present the material and summarize the main points?	Yes. She did a good job.
Did the author find any fallacies in the material?	No.
Was the rhetorical context evaluated by the author? Was the audience well defined? Was the language audience appropriate?	She said what she thought.
Were the paragraphs well organized, unified, developed? Were examples provided throughout to exemplify the points?	Yes.

It should concern us that the number of words produced by the student is notably less than those in the rubric. Moreover, there is no evidence to indicate that the student providing the critique – nor its intended recipient – has had opportunity to seriously reflect on the text under review, nor engage in the type of collaborative exchange that many scholars suggest is a benchmark of critically reflective thought. Again, as in the *CTR*, we see an implicit set of "yes/no" binaries; furthermore, the rubric reinforces components of writing identified as valuable by the instructor: the "required MLA formatting"; the summarizing of main points; the defining of audience; the

exemplification of points. Here, we are proverbially one-step-away from the formulaic A, B, C construction of the much-maligned five-paragraph essay. Inherent within this framework is a question: Are we teaching our students how to write, or how to think?

2.1.2 Critical Thinking Through Writing

If agreement among scholars can be found it is that critical thinking can be both articulated and evaluated through writing and the analysis of text, with a majority concurring that it develops most acutely in environments of verbal and written dialogue (Blattner and Frazier; Meyers; Jonassen; Brookfield; Paul; Shermis; Brookfield and Preskill; Moffett; Giroux; Aronowitz; Freire; Tingle; Benesch; Berthel; Chomsky; Coles; Yager; Delpit; France; Foucault; Horner; Hardin; Illich; Lipman). The 2003 NCWASC *Neglected "R"* report not only emphasizes the importance of (w)riting in education, and identifies that "[o]f the three 'Rs,' writing is clearly the most neglected" (3), it also recommends that writing be the "centerpiece in the curriculum," that "[t]he amount of time students spend writing ... should be at least doubled" (4), and that writing "is thought on paper ... a complex intellectual activity that requires students to stretch their minds, sharpen their analytical abilities, and make valid and accurate distinctions" (13). Yet, the study finds that "more than 50 percent of first-year college students are unable to produce papers relatively free of language errors" and that analysis of argument and synthesis of information is "also beyond the scope of most first-year students" (14). The 1998 Boyer Commission on Educating Undergraduates, a document that reinforces "the importance of undergraduate writing," reports similar results (Bartlett 39). Concern over such data is reflected in the move by several high-profile universities in the United States, including Princeton, Duke, Columbia, and Brown, to either begin again with their first-year writing programs or make plans to do so. Thomas Bartlett, citing what he claims is a frequently stated concern of professors at such institutions, laments significant "writing-related shortcomings among students, most often their inability to construct the sort of lengthy, sophisticated research papers required in upper-division courses" (39). The objective in addressing this problem, Bartlett asserts, notably from the revamped first-year writing programs at Princeton and

Duke universities, is to "transform their students into more lucid, thoughtful writers" (39).

Recognition that student skill in writing and critical thinking is often below acceptable standards is not confined to the opening of the twenty-first century. In 1980, California State University's (CSU) chancellor Glenn Dumke announced that instruction in critical thinking was to be a requirement throughout the nineteen campuses of CSU (Lazere 1). Moreover, that:

> Instruction in critical thinking is to be designed to achieve an understanding of the relationship of language to logic ... . The minimal competence ... should be the ability to distinguish fact from judgment, belief from knowledge, and skills in elementary inductive and deductive processes, including an understanding of the formal and informal fallacies of language and thought. (Dumke, qtd. in Lazere 1)

As Donald Lazere points out, however, since the 1980s there has been a shift from the rigidity of prescribing formal instruction in deductive and inductive logic, asserting that the influence of philosophy on studies in critical thought has resulted in "a growing attention to the mental attitudes and emotional 'dispositions' that foster or impede critical thinking" (1). Drawing on the 1986 text of Ray Kytle, Lazere claims that a focus on dispositions and attitudes in critical thinking instruction "considers culturally conditioned assumptions, prejudice, ethnocentrism, primary certitude (absolutism), authoritarianism, and unconcretized abstractions" as barriers to critically reflective thought (2), a point reinforced in the later works of Richard Paul and Stephen D. Brookfield.

Contemporary approaches to critical thinking, therefore, endorse the concept that an essence of critically reflective thought involves searching for questions among many possibilities, and doing so through communication and open-ended discussion, whether in a group situation or through internalized self-dialogue, and often expressed through writing. Of concern, however, is some scholars who ascribe to the importance of shaping an externalized projection of thought, a point that relates back to the issues of rubric-based assessment discussed in the previous section. Vincent Ruggiero, as an example, provides a definition of the problematic term "critical thinking" in the context of

teaching writing, which is the "reviewing of ideas we have produced, making a tentative decision about which action will best solve the problem or what belief about the issue is most reasonable and then evaluating and refining that situation or belief" (149). Yet, nowhere does Ruggiero suggest ways in which we might problematize this context – make it uncomfortable, and not so narrowly palatable – or even how it might operate as a site of resistance. What, for instance, is "most reasonable"? To whom? And, for what purpose? Moreover, Ruggiero's call over the need for "self-dialogue" in terms of anticipating objections to received text falls squarely into the realm of persuasion: a means to an end rather than seeking an end to the means we take for granted. Ruggiero offers little more in his prescription for critical thinking and writing than a think-of-alternatives paideia – alternatives that search for syncretic and democratic consensus; a Bruffeean ideal to provide an ultimately impossible and equally rhetorical answer to the rhetorical question of why-can't-we-all-just-get-along?

In keeping with criticism of the narrow approach of Ruggiero, Heather Dubrow argues that current practices of teaching thesis-based writing works against the concept of providing opportunity for critically reflective thinking. As Dubrow asserts, many of her first-year students "have been trained to see only one side [of an argument], not only disregarding but also demonizing the opposition" (3). Describing the effects of thesis-driven drafting and writing as both "a disease" and "pernicious," Dubrow implicitly suggests that the problem is tied to an outcomes-based approach to writing; that is, students are concerned with the grade they will receive – one likely measured against a pre-determined rubric scale of assessment. She worries that her students "grasp an argument before they know the material well enough to decide whether it is valid. Persuaded that the success of their paper will rest on how well they support that argument, often they simply ignore anything that does not fit in, rather than rethink their thesis" (2). Marcia Dickson's commentary reflects the concerns of Dubrow. Her students, as "novice readers and writers" (vii), "cannot write critically" because they "do not think or read critically for nuances, implications, or abstract notions" (viii). In response, Dickson calls for a mediation between acknowledging the personal world of subjective opinion and belief along with a sense of detachment from it – and a conscious awareness of this detachment. At the same time, however, Dickson points out problems

with focusing too hard on personalized narrative or autobiographical writing, because first-year students in particular tend to "take the words 'personal experience' seriously and literally and, because they are not ready, willing, or able to be objective about their experiences, the 'personal essay' can become problematic for both student and teacher" (5).

The struggle for meaningful ways to implement critical thinking in writing is not limited to discussion over the form such writing should take, but also in its assessment, with rubric-based evaluation examined earlier in this chapter. Another form of assessing degrees of critical thinking in student writing is commentary by instructors on student-produced text. For one first-year college English class, despite asserting that "[u]pon successful completion of the course, students will be able to demonstrate skills in critical thinking" (J. M. Miller), the context of evaluation is based entirely on a set of numerically-linked commentary, or what Joyce Marie Miller describes as "revision symbols." Numbers from 1 through 30 represent errors in critical judgment or writing skill, and on receipt of their evaluated essays, students locate the corresponding number to a short definition of the problem, such as: Weak progression of ideas/weak organization/weak topic sentences (1); Faulty logic (6); Ambiguous/unclear meaning (10); and Faulty parallel structure (14). Yet, the mere act of students comparing the alleged deficits of the writing with prescriptive remedies does not constitute critically reflective thought; on the contrary, it is another example of teacher-imposed judgmental standards to which students are merely expected to conform.

Other teachers claim to structure their course sequencing around the central tenet of promoting critical thinking – itself a laudable ideal, but again one that is weakly put into practice. Elena Stone Shiflet, as an example, asserts that the "intended by-product" of her pedagogical process is to "empower learners with the ability to form individual methods of knowing through critical thinking" (1), and yet her four-essay assignment sequencing that begins with students researching a potential "issue" and ends in a traditional "research essay" promotes more the skills of research and inquiry, not necessarily critically reflective thought at all. Moreover, while Shiflet posits that "the acquired powers of critical thinking will equip the student with the ability to examine issues through individual knowledge" and that "[t]his means that the student can

determine personal truth" (3-4), there is little in this pedagogy that affords opportunity for students to reflect on just what constitutes their personal truth, what contributed to such constitution, nor what that personal truth might mean as part of a wider social milieu.

Personal truth as ideology and the role it plays in critical thinking is an issue poorly addressed in Michael Scriven and Richard Paul's draft statement on defining critical thinking for the National Council for Excellence in Critical Thinking Instruction. While Scriven and Paul attempt, in their four paragraphs, to provide some definitive parameters of what might constitute critical thinking, it is the parameters themselves that oddly enough reinforce a solipsistic mindset. To argue that critical thinking "is the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action" (1) is another way of articulating the threads contained in the word "ideology" – and by this I mean the fundamental ways in which ideologies function: We need to believe in ideologies and fortify that belief through systematic forms of justification in order for them to have power. Indeed, Scriven and Paul support this by acknowledging that thought can be unduly influenced by personal motivation or selfishness, with a resulting "skillful manipulation of ideas in service of one's own, or one's groups', vested interests" (1). Yet, to claim that critical thinking "is incorporated in a family of interwoven modes of thinking, among them: scientific thinking, mathematical thinking, historical thinking, anthropological thinking, economic thinking, moral thinking, and philosophical thinking" (1) is to intrinsically allege that the critical thinker – at least in Scriven and Paul's interpretation – is steeped in the benefits of a broad and rigorous liberal arts education. This is hardly good news for the marginalized, ostracized, discriminated, and oppressed who are unlikely to have been exposed to such a privileged educational experience.

Of the terms that Scriven and Paul ascribe to critical thinking in its "exemplary form," namely "clarity, accuracy, precision, consistency, relevance, sound evidence, good reason, depth, breadth, and fairness" (1), I would contest that depth and breadth, for their least tenuous links to ideological loading, are the most salient characteristics.

The others are drawn almost exclusively from a priori parameters – just what, for instance, constitutes clarity, accuracy, precision, sound evidence, good reason, and fairness? – or they hold questionable ideological loading, such as "relevance" and "consistency." If I were to argue, for example, in favor of a point that is not relevant or one that deviates significantly from a previous line of thinking, could I then be accused of not thinking critically? If I were working with the definitions put forward by Scriven and Paul, regrettably I would have to answer "yes."

Critical thinking is not about patriarchal discourse of argument, nor contested debate, nor about hierarchical thought processes, nor enthymemes of formal logic or the a priori assumptions of informal logic, nor even the authentication of a privileged, Western set of ideological values ascribed with the gloss of bona fide critical thought. Critical thinking has no desire to posit itself as better or superior, but is an act and process of critically reflective self-examination in relation and response to contextual parameters of a situation. As Alma Whiteley claims, learning about thinking is "the key to learning about meaning" (4), or re-cognition of the ways in which we, as individuals, conceptualize and articulate our own patterns of thought. When this occurs, critical thinkers are bothered by incongruity and take initiative to seek alternative perspectives in a process where they identify the borders of their own perceptions and are willing to temporarily suspend their belief in those borders.

2.2 Critical Pedagogy

Less contested than critical thinking, the core of critical pedagogy is development of a critical social conscience (Giroux; Freire; McLaren; Aronowitz; Janks; Johnson; Luke and Freedbody). While its detractors tend to be derisive and suspicious, levying allegations of unduly Marxist leanings and, at times, marginally veiled claims of intentional proselytizing, more moderate charges acknowledge the objective of critical pedagogy – the raising of social consciousness over issues of inequality and oppression due to race, gender, class, and culture. Yet, awareness of social injustice does not unquestionably equate with self-reflective thought, nor in itself engender change (Welch; Illich); indeed, it can manifest as no more than exchanging one set of ideological beliefs for another (Petruzzi; Horner; Spigelman; S. Miller; Benesch;

Gallagher; V. Anderson; Ellsworth), often without attention to the marginalized and oppressed, such as women and minorities that it inherently claims to represent.

Consistently present, however, are terms associated with critical pedagogy, including empowerment and a rhetoric of emancipation. What is less consistent is how to put it into practice, with acts of reflection, recursivity and re-cognition notoriously interpretable within the arena of critical pedagogy. Freire's term "conscientization," as the conditions in which students are able to form critical consciousness and thereby create opportunity to identify, examine, and change oppressive forces, is often evoked (Freire; Giroux; McLaren; Aronowitz; Glenn; Petruzzi; Tingle; Burbules), as is near-universal condemnation of what Freire calls the "banking concept" of education; that is, teacher as knowledge-holder deposits information into the passively receptive minds of students. The lack of delineation between teacher as power-holder and student as, in contrast, inherently powerless is a hallmark of critical pedagogy, underscoring the relatively recent trend towards student-centered learning environments and active endorsement of a more level field in terms of knowledge-brokering. The result for critical pedagogues has been to mark teaching with a recognized need for a circumspective humility (Benesch, *Critical*), and a willingness to reconceptualize values that have previously been taken for granted as truths (Petruzzi; Foucault). Students and teachers are partners in learning, ideally dissolving one-sided structures of power within the classroom in order to promote equity in education and a wider, more authentic exchange of a multitude of individual voices. For the critical pedagogue, expression and articulation of "authentic voice" is a cornerstone of individual empowerment, particularly among members of social groups who have been historically silenced by exclusion.

Many scholars find the term empowerment problematic, one ironically resulting in quite the opposite effect of that which is intended, because of the risk that the instructor's political lens or discourse will unduly influence student thinking and therefore exemplify the very banking concept against which Freire has argued so passionately. Moreover, empowerment positions the concept of power as a commodity. As Bruce Horner asserts, "the giver [of power] is ethically suspect for having power in the first place; and the giving [of] power itself is suspect for encouraging complicity

with the dominant power structure" (123). At the core of such allegations is the idea of simplistic binary oppositions that privilege one perspective against an opposing Other. The result is that one set of social values and beliefs are endorsed over competing ones, reflecting more the sociopolitical agenda of an instructor or institution than a genuine commitment to open dialectic (Giroux; Hardin; Weiler; Benesch; Gallagher; Ellsworth; D. Seitz). In the confines of such an argument, critical pedagogy in practice endorses both the status quo and paradoxically promotes non-critical thinking (Horn; S. Miller; Hardin). As Horn writes, "by not eliciting and challenging prior assumptions ... reinforces the disenfranchisement of viewpoints that are not part of the mainstream" (141). Against endorsement of what is "right" in a given classroom, any alternative argument deviating from a privileged center becomes inherently irrational, with proponents subjected to derision and ostracism (V. Anderson; Horn; Ellsworth). In this sense, critical pedagogy misappropriates the praxis envisaged by Freire, one of its original proponents. As Peter McLaren, drawing heavily from Giroux and Foucault, observes:

> A social critique of ideology that does not consider the complex and often conflicting structures of its own discursive premises does little to further the advancement of a critical pedagogy. In fact, just such a position can only reproduce the very strictures it is seeking to displace. (177)

While the critical pedagogue in theory, according to Chris Gallagher, sees education as a "vehicle for individual empowerment and social reconstruction" (63), Gallagher's criticism of its practice is sharp: "Teachers cultivate, articulate, prepare, generate, receive, and use – while students *respond*" (65), reflecting a patronizing notion "that students are culturally blind, and that critical teachers can bring them sight." In this light, critical pedagogy "defines and predetermines the pedagogical script, with uncritical students and critical teachers dutifully playing their prescribed roles" (66). Elizabeth Ellsworth is even more condemnatory of current practices in critical pedagogy, claiming that "student empowerment has been defined in the broadest possible humanist terms and becomes a 'capacity to act effectively' in a way that fails to challenge any identifiable social or political position, institution, or group" ("Empowering" 308). Empowerment, therefore, should not be about the giving of power

or even permission to speak, but instead power that circulates with a mission to articulate and retain the privilege of choice to rescind the inherent power ideologically contained in our own and others' words, ideas, and actions.

The more radical critical pedagogues often use equally radical means to convey or, as its most vociferous critics argue, indoctrinate a message of social oppression, including in their curricula contemporary cultural taboos such as pornography or graphic depictions of violence (Glenn; B. Flores, "Sheep"). While the shock and discomfort caused by such media is undoubtedly one way to identify the serious and often tragic ramifications of social dysfunction, there is a concurrent risk that students may perceive such messages as a militant agenda, resulting in some being cognitively cornered in order to rationalize their beliefs and dismiss the threat (V. Anderson). Such a response almost entirely negates the self-claimed goal of critical pedagogy – to instigate and underscore change in what is ideally an affective praxis. As McLaren argues, the rejection of what is perceived by some students as suspect ideological indoctrination can serve to justify, legitimize and strengthen students' existing truths, something that "in many ways is more dangerous" (56). Similarly, Joe Marshall Hardin posits the danger for students who "frequently choose to reject the authority of the teacher's often liberal position," instead expressing values that are more mainstream (6). Here, Hardin warns, are students who can see resistance and critique as a game to master, one that will "earn a different kind of academic approval" (54-55), particularly those who, already well-acculturated through the primary and secondary educational system, may resist what they see as more of the same. Of greater concern, however, as Richard Miller observes, are students who silently collaborate in production of the desired social transcript but question it only outside the classroom or forget it altogether (19; Hardin).

Acknowledging the problematic elements in a rhetoric of empowerment, other scholars claim that examining the pedestrian workings of power is more critically effective; in short, it reveals the insidious workings of power and social norms precisely because the circulation of power is situated in a context that is non-radical and unquestioned as common-sense (Tingle; V. Anderson; McLaren; Hardin). McLaren in particular is interested in the mundane and the practical, and the ways in which "these domains become sanctified inside schools" (170). Reinscribing Freirean concepts of

critical consciousness, Anthony Petruzzi in turn calls for intervention in the passive acceptance of reality as an easily accessible, commonplace understanding of an individual's "ways of being-in-the-world" (310). Such a "common-sense" critical pedagogy reflects the argument of Michel Foucault, who claims that criticism involves driving thought from hiding, attempting to change it, "showing that things are not as obvious as we might believe [and] doing it in such a way that what we accept as going without saying no longer goes without saying" ("Est-il donc" 34). Edward Said concurs with the danger of unquestioned normality, asserting that "[w]e take home and language for granted; they become nature and their underlying assumptions recede into dogma and orthodoxy. ... Borders and barriers ... can also become prisons, and are often defended beyond reason or necessity" (365, qtd. in Giroux "Paulo Freire" 9-10). In a similar light, and paraphrasing Ira Shor, Linda Keesing-Styles suggests that students need guidance in separating themselves from accepting the conditions of their existence unconditionally, and that it is only by achieving a conscious state of separation that students can prepare themselves for a "critical re-entry into an examination of everyday life" (11-12).

Yet, even in a re-visioned placement of critical pedagogy within the quotidian realm of day-to-day classroom discourse, the argument of scholars such as Ellsworth condemns critical pedagogy to failure because "its claim of enforcing the 'rules of reason in the classroom' ... reproduce violence against all those 'others' traditionally excluded within its purview" ("Empowering" 305, qtd. in Giroux, "Pedagogy" 15). In effect, while the theoretical framework is sound, in practice something is going terribly wrong. Nicholas Burbules, acknowledging the potential of dialogue, asserts that conceding to the rules of discourse can be condescending and ultimately discriminatory. "We fully welcome your participation *on these terms*," Burbules writes, exemplifying what he calls a pedagogy that reflects the "hegemony of reasonableness" (256). Precisely because of its apparent respect and inclusiveness for multiple points of view, it shifts fault and blame for a sense of exclusion from the conversation to the participants themselves: After all, "[w]ho could criticize or reject such a gesture [of inclusivity], except the ill-willed, the alienated, the recalcitrant?" (257, 267).

Like its theoretical cousin critical thinking, critical pedagogy has not retained a set of static binary oppositions, a description that may better fit its emergence in the early to mid-1990s when it focused strongly on dichotomies between students as social agents of change and students as cultural critics. The danger in the former is transference of teacher-driven political leanings onto passively receptive students; in the latter, privileging one set of collective and dominant cultural discourses over others. At the core of such criticism is the concept of student agency, and questionable ideological influences on its narration. In simultaneously negating the potentially persuasive nature of ideologically-driven instructors, and asserting that student agency is a utopian dream anyway, David Seitz argues that "[i]n reality, teachers never can or will have control over what is internally persuasive to each individual student, regardless of their [teachers'] pedagogical strategies" (504). Instead, he alleges that internal persuasion is at its most forceful when placed in the hands of students and their peers (505), and this latter characteristic is apparent in what Seitz claims is a generative shift of critical pedagogy into a more student-centered focus since the mid-1990s.

Reflecting a postmodern character, recent critical pedagogies have operated as more effective sites of resistance, reinscribed as borders to be transgressed. Drawing on the work of Abdul JanMohammed, Giroux emphasizes the idea of displacement by using the terms *home* and *homelessness*; the former a social formation and cultural space that is "safe by virtue of its repressive exclusions" and the latter "a shifting site of identity, resistance, and opposition" ("Paulo Freire" 4). Critical pedagogues, Giroux argues, should be homeless "border crossers" – ones who "take leave of the cultural, theoretical, and ideological borders that enclose them" (2). Such a "trope of homelessness" (4) reflects a postmodern lack of closure, and "no relief from the incessant tensions and contradictions that inform one's own identity, ideological struggles, and project of possibility" (9). Freire, too – particularly in his later work – endorses leaving one's home-self in order to gain a more critically distant and reflective position: "It was by being confronted with another self," he writes, "that I discovered more easily my own identity" (Freire and Faundez 13). For Giroux, the goal of critical pedagogy is clear: "Animated by a spirit of critique and possibility [it] attempts to provoke students to deliberate, resist, and ... move beyond the world they already know" through dialectic

engagement in "a public space where they can learn, debate, and engage critical traditions in order to imagine" ("Pedagogy" 20, 24). For critics of critical pedagogy like Ellsworth, however, such articulations reflect little more than participants united against an ostracized Other, still maintaining the binary of "us" against "them" ("Empowering" 314-15), one that cannot be reconciled, no matter how glossy the rhetoric of empowerment or freedom. Ellsworth's point is also reflected in the work of Sarah Benesch who, in critiquing the writing of Freire, invokes Kathleen Weiler's assertion that critical pedagogy undermines "'the specificity of people's lives,' including ways that they can be oppressed in one situation and privileged in another" (Weiler, qtd. in Benesch, *Critical* 57). In this way, Freirean critical pedagogy "dichotomizes oppression, allowing for only two possibilities: oppressor and oppressed" (57). Inherently, such a perspective casts a shadow on Giroux's eloquent promise of "situating pedagogy as a political practice grounded in a notion of hope" ("Pedagogy" 3).

As Ellsworth argues, the terms of dialogue, empowerment, student voice, and even "critical" remain as "repressive myths that perpetuate relations of domination" ("Empowering" 301), and her allegations underscore an inherent flaw in the critical pedagogy of Freire, Shor, McLaren, and Giroux: Pushing so hard for an objective of social reform paradoxically inverts the power balance, privileging the voice of the oppressed over others. We cannot so readily – and rationally – identify a singular category of oppression for our identities when "who we are" can be cast so widely across multitudinal and fluid boundaries. Yet, one of Ellsworth's main contentions is that argument and discussion as currently practiced in college classrooms *is* grounded in rationality: "that students and teachers can and should engage each other in the classroom as fully rational subjects" (303). The problem, as Ellsworth points out, is that "[r]ational argument has operated in ways that set up as its opposite an irrational Other. ... [R]ational deliberation, reflection, and considering of all viewpoints has become a vehicle for regulating conflict and the power to speak" (303). Moreover, "strategies such as student empowerment and dialogue give the illusion of equality while in fact leaving the authoritarian nature of the teacher/student relationship intact" (307). Empowerment and student voice frequently muddy the critical water because it is glossed over with a veneer that everyone has the right to speak and the words of everyone will be respected

in an environment of sharing, yet simultaneously delivered with the authoritarian rules of engagement set by the privileged and knowledge-holding power of the academy – ironically the one thing critical pedagogy consistently claims to dissolve.

The contestations contained in critical pedagogy underscore the question of what are its fundamental flaws. Hardin asserts that critical pedagogy needs to move beyond seeing itself "as the emancipator of students" (5) and instead focus on what Graff has termed "teaching the conflicts" in order to actively engender discomfort, dissensus, and even incoherence so that students come to understand that conventions of academic discourse are dynamic, incomplete, and unstable (Hardin 46-47). Keesing-Styles, acknowledging the work of Jennifer Gore, emphasizes the lack of applicability in critical pedagogy, condemning it as too theoretical, with abstract concepts of empowerment promoted at the expense of tangible guidance for putting it into practice (6). Certainly, while the charges levied at critical pedagogy in regard to suspicion over proselytizing may have prompted a recent shift towards concepts of "respect" in the classroom, token tolerance and respect are problematic in themselves. As Kimberly Gunter discusses, it's difficult to be in a classroom setting and endorse respect for a view that, as an example, all homosexuals are evil and corrupt and should be burned in hell under "God's" laws. As Gunter asserts, the politics of dissensus and humanistic outrage demand that such a mindset be quashed; the politics of tolerance and respect equally demand that they do not. At what point is the fulcrum of negotiation? Or, does negotiation even become a factor in the equation with such a narrow, hate-driven, and prejudiced dialogue?

History provides us with ample evidence as to why such perspectives should not be tolerated, let alone encouraged, in a humane society, and yet denying such individuals the option to articulate their beliefs is a transgression on the right for others to hold opinions that may be intolerably different from our own. It all becomes, then, a question over aspects of ideological workings and the degrees of influence that construct social identification within a referential framework of dominance. At some point we need to consider our own complicity in constructing ideological frames of reference and the degree, in turn, to which ideological frames of reference construct our identity. In either case, ascribing an ideology involves buying into what in many cases is a pre-packaged, logical, relevant, righteous, and rationalized set of systematic beliefs that is self-

justifying and therefore entirely tenable. Such a perspective dislodges the mainstay of argument presented against critical pedagogy as one of misplaced angst; a failure, in McLaren's words, to "explore the various factors which constitute truth's regulating gaze" (162). One concept least addressed in the literature over critical pedagogy is that unsubscribed ideologies are ethically neutral; that is, the power of the ideology depends on our belief in it. I will give further consideration to such an allegation in Chapter Four that deals with a reconceptualization of the critical.

2.3 Critical Literacy

While critical literacy shares with critical pedagogy a concern for examining the interactions of power in social frameworks, there is a greater focus on language as arbiter of social relations, particularly in regard to constructs of gender, race, and culture (Degener; Luke and Freedbody; Patterson; Threadgold; Johnson). Critical literacy is especially interested in social transformation through multi-literate interpretation – reading the world through texts and media – manifested by students identifying and critiquing social forces of oppression through reading and writing about their world, or what Greer Johnson describes as a "social justice perspective of language in use" (49). We might consider critical literacy, therefore, as an application of critical pedagogy that confronts the ways oppression exists within a literate society through Freirean dichotomies of "us versus otherness" and "superiority versus inferiority" as circulating forces in a culture to position us "as a classed, raced, and gendered subject" (Carlson 241). In practice, critical literacy programs promote literacy as a tool to critically analyze social place, to understand the ways in which cultural biases and assumptions put us at risk, to learn about challenging the status quo and to "accept and validate the different kinds of cultural capital that influence the way students make meaning of their learning" (Degener 27, 34). While critical literacy as practiced in the English classroom ranges from traditional research-and-inquiry based writing assignments (Lankshear and Knobel) to Carlson's advice that "students become aware of the sources of their anger through discussion and autobiographical writing," the overriding purpose is for students to experience through literate practice the ways in which a variety of discourses diverge and intersect (Pinar et al. 261).

One key to critical literacy in practice is making evident those connections that extend beyond the classroom hypothetical; that is, to situate critical literacy in "real" contexts (Street). Whether implemented through service learning or writing assignments that call for skill in research and inquiry, emphasis is on establishing meaningful connections between the student's individual context and that of an externalized social world, where the social "is defined as a practical site characterized by contestations over resources, representation, and difference" (Luke and Freedbody 3). In framing an articulated social practice for what they term a "New Times Discourse," Colin Lankshear and Michele Knobel endorse active questioning of existing power relations in order to determine alternatives that will foster appreciation of "the radically plural and discursive character of literacy" (95). As an example, Lankshear and Knobel nominate the oppressive workings of institutions that have made little adjustment in terms of child care, despite "the near complete entry of women into the paid workforce" (103), intrinsically inviting students to consider the anomalies that can undermine white, Western, patriarchal modes of power. Curiously, however, Lankshear and Knobel at no point attempt to address what is perhaps a far more radical position in such a discourse: Why is child care seen exclusively as a woman's issue? Moreover, and as a challenge to dominant ideological perceptions of what constitutes womanhood and femininity by those who live it, to what degree are women themselves promoting such a position? Without examination of the ideologies that underwrite critical literacy itself, in practice it is little more than the same old rhetoric with a different name.

The conceptual framework of critical literacy focuses too hard on the centrality of existing social ritual (Illich 54) – on what <u>is</u> – at the expense of engaging alternative perspectives. Social ritual in the case of Lankshear and Knobel positions women as the nurturers and caregivers of children. Here, the teacher provides existing "knowledge" to which students are then asked – after the fact – to identify and critique the oppressive forces of institutional power that prevent access to childcare. Asking students to merely observe and report the existing parameters of a "social issue" without seeking to transcend its contextual borderlines can, as James Seitz asserts, "encourage the production of a highly restricted, conventionally political discourse: arrogant, repetitive, predictable, banal, and ultimately oppressively boring" (7-8, qtd. in Horner 126), what

François Tochon derides as "declarative knowledge," or what Ruth Stewart laments as energetic, yet trite, "proclamations about abortion, gun control [and] capital punishment ... interspersed with poorly integrated, often only marginally relevant quotations from students' research" (163). Doug Sweet and Deborah Swanson are even more direct:

> [S]tudents effect their own erasure of the "political" from their thinking under the guise of being "critically" aware: they have, then, no access to matters of "consequence" to them except in a judging capacity, *after the fact*. From such a position, we could hardly expect our students to take us seriously when we utter platitudes about empowering their thinking. (52, emphasis added)

If the purpose of critical literacy is to promote social change, it is not so much a question of how to enlighten our students to the workings of oppressive forces of power and then asking them to articulate their understanding of it through literate analysis. Instead, it is to foster a deep sense of ambivalence or dissatisfaction within themselves in relation to identifying the incongruities of existing ideological frameworks; to recognize that "[i]ndividual consciousness is not the architect of the ideological superstructure, but only a tenant lodging in the social edifice of ideological signs" (Vološinov 13).

Enlightening students about difference does not alone translate into the confidence, skill, or desire to put that knowledge into practice. Moreover, "empowerment" is a notoriously sweeping term, even when attempts are made to tie it firmly to the constructs of language as an ideological system of restraint and oppression with the goal of liberating students from that hold. Rarely is it put well into practice, for its very predilection is steeped within already-situated rhetorical contexts, the agendas of which are pre-determined to persuade and agitate for social change within those boundaries. But social change for whose ends? We might argue that in a liberal democracy the *voix populaire* is the harbinger of social equity and justice, and the ubiquitous freedom of speech and opinion-holding will guarantee its implementation. Yet, clearly this is a fallacy if we consider that the freedom of expression for voice alone – and the means to do so – is far more likely to endorse Norman Fairclough's model of common sense analysis, one that depends on "logical reasoning and argument in relation to evidence in both text and context" rather than examining the territory that lies beyond

reason (Janks 9). As Hilary Janks contends, existing models of critical discourse analysis ostensibly "preaches to the converted" (21), with those who remain outside the sanctioned social discourse relegated to a place of exclusion and ostracism – again, the discursive concepts that critical literacy positions itself to redress.

The efficacy of critical literacy in practice outside the classroom is also a point of considerable concern. While students can be taught to examine words for political meaning, and to criticize the values that lie beneath the text to expose underlying assumptions and exclusions, the risk is that students are trained to produce a reasoned critique that is neither individually transformative nor brings change in student aspirations or practices (Janks; Horner; J. Seitz; Graff). As Janks argues, there is a need to go beyond concepts of social injustice *as* concepts; that is, students may be able to write about cultural, gendered, or racial injustice and oppression, but to what degree – if any – are students integrating these ideas into their own ideological practices, frameworks, and cognitive processes? Without critically reflective examination of the ideological ties that restrain and shape our articulation of thought and belief, the likely outcome of both collective and individual voice is a cacophony of silence. A radically critical pedagogy aims instead for what Nick Tingle, drawing on the work of Giroux, asserts is "a critical *self*-consciousness with respect to the impact of ideology ... [and] the ways in which ideology may suppress, repress, or generally determine their own wants and needs" (2; Giroux, *Theory and Resistance* 150). While James Moffett calls for individual soliloquy in response to the voices of such a heteroglossic world, we might instead assert that what is needed is a colloquy of selves – or, as Crusius terms it, "the interaction of all the voices we internalize" (48).

One of the most consistent critiques of critical literacy comes in the form of a challenge to whose purpose is being served in its application, ironically using one of the tenets of critical literacy to further such an objection: That teaching to-an-agenda, whether feminist, environmental, or even social justice merely replaces a formerly privileged center with a previously marginalized Other. The risk here is not so much opportunity to critique dominant social forms of power, but the very lack of it. As Brian Street asserts, such an approach is markedly vulnerable to manipulation by those "imbued with ideological fervour" who, driven so strongly by the concept of

empowerment for "'ignorant' peasants" that they cannot see the political and cultural domination they are, in turn, reinforcing (138). Annette Patterson, in deciding that she could not let her students choose texts for themselves, exemplifies the intrinsic danger of which Street writes. Patterson asks, in all sincerity, "what if they [the students] chose an inappropriate reading ... or chose not to support say, the antiracist reading but chose instead to construct a racist reading?" (340). Inherently, the uncomfortable question being posited is how to ensure that the student conforms to the correct, antiracist interpretation of text – a point that is startlingly irreconcilable with the liberatory rhetoric of critical literacy.

What is so troubling about critical literacy is not its focus on translating, interpreting, and understanding the way power and language are implicitly connected, nor its promoting a critical survey of texts to help students unravel the ideological threads preventing wide and equitable access to social power and resources, but that it lacks a means whereby students can critically examine their own selves within a complex inter-linguistic web. Critical positions are constructed from an a priori base rather than an internalized and critical reflection on what constitutes self – an examination by our students in relation to who they are, who they are not, and who they might possibly consider becoming. Instead, we see a sequence of pre-articulated notions of what constitutes "race," "gender" and "culture," and consideration for the ways in which students already fit into such categorical inclusions, ironically reifying a culture of exclusion by omitting to acknowledge our own and others' complicity in the construction of our selves and the multiple, fluid, fragmentary aspects of those selves. While we might well say that the term critical literacy "is concerned with social critique of the dominant forms of school knowledge and with a project of cultural rewriting" (Alison Lee 411), this is essentially an externalized projection or mapping of a socio-cultural landscape that already exists, and not an internalized critical reflection of what has not yet become. We are not asked, for instance, to consider an "anti-gender" reading nor a "racist reading" on the basis that this does not reflect current understandings and doctrines about the workings of power within collective social constructs we have chosen to label "gender" or "racist." Moreover, while we can educate students to read and write cultural narratives as reclaimed space for collective cultural, racial, or

gendered identity – and indeed they may be able to do this well – it does not address the social reality that gender oppression, racist oppression, and cultural discrimination still exist, and even raises the possibility of denial from students about its existence at all, wrought from those who are either unwilling or unable to reflect on a retracted imagery that exposes the self and the selves within that self amidst a self-constructed ideological trope.

3. Uncritical Pedagogy: The Concept of Critical Care

The title of this chapter nominates the characteristics of "critical care" as un/non-critical in the sense that such approaches to teaching English in the first-year college classroom align the word "critical" with negative overtones. Uncritical pedagogy promotes positivity, focusing on perceived strengths rather than weaknesses, encouragement as opposed to discouragement, and even reflects a "feminized" rather than "masculinized" approach to instruction. My description – and resulting critique – is not intended to cast "uncritical pedagogy" in a pejorative light, but to consider the tenets of what I term "critical care," and discuss its impact on the potential for critically reflective thought.

Critical care endorses respect and empowerment in classroom interactions, including discussion, dialogue, and written commentary on student writing. Some scholars ascribe to a "whole student approach" drawn from Nel Noddings' metaphor of student-as-infant/teacher-as-mother to promote a nurturing environment of warmth and care in keeping with idealized Western cultural images of a mother caring for a newborn (Noddings; Gilligan; White). Such a perspective considers that "the ethic of care is as old as the experience of women in relating to themselves, to one another, and to the world" and that "caring is rooted in the more feminine attributes of 'receptivity, relatedness, and responsiveness'" (Noddings 2, qtd. in White 301). Others maintain focus on the primacy of individual voice and opportunity for its expression by promoting classroom interactions within a safe space of sharing that exudes support, trust, and the avoidance of "disrespectful" conflict (Heydenberk and Heydenberk; Rubin; Morand; Murray; Elbow; DeBlase). In particular, responses to student writing are frequently framed by the call for constructive as opposed to destructive criticism, with notions of respect often requiring that teachers ask permission before commenting on student-produced work. Use of a red pen – or red font if responding electronically – is strongly discouraged, partly due to a stereotypical association with "high school horror-stories" of picky, pedantic teachers striking at every comma splice and sentence fragment, and partly due to a metaphorical association with bleeding and images of slaughter.

The overriding premise, however, remains one of care – caring for the student as an individual writer and thinker. The voice of each student in a concept of critical care is a key element in the collective environment of sharing and knowledge-exchange. Critical care also reflects vestiges of the 1980s Self-Esteem Movement, an educational directive marked at its high point in 1986 with the establishment of the California Task Force to Promote Self Esteem and Personal and Social Responsibility, the rationale of which alleged that "low-performing students would achieve more if they had higher self-esteem" (Ravitch 426). Sociologists and psychologists who criticized the Self-Esteem movement reported the dangers of sycophantic ego-boosting, warning that a strategy of false ploys through promoting self-esteem "in the absence of any concrete accomplishments, may [lead people to] develop narcissistic attitudes based on nothing but the desire to feel superior" (429), ironically undermining the principles of inclusivity and tolerance for difference espoused in both the Self-Esteem movement and, I would argue, the concept of critical care. Moreover, and disturbingly, *The Social Importance of Self Esteem*, a text resulting from the California Task Force's inquiry, reveals little evidence of a link between self-esteem and academic achievement. Even the introduction to that text admits that "[o]ne of the disappointing aspects of every chapter ... is how low the associations between self-esteem and its consequences are in research to date" (Smelser 15, qtd. in Shokraii 3; Mecca, Smelser, and Vasconcellos).

Applied in the contemporary college English classroom, the critical care instructor considers that students with poor prior experiences in the study of English are traumatized; they neither feel good about themselves as subjects, nor the object of their study. Attempting to change such perspectives, expressivistic discourse such as autobiographical narratives, especially ones concerning literacies-of-self, are highly valued to authenticate individual voice, permission-to-speak, and equal respect for all voices that do so. Avoidance of open conflict is evident, reflecting the pedagogy of theorists such as Donald Murray and Peter Elbow, who "emphasize that student writing [should be] centered on subjectivity and self-discovery," and that the teacher's goal in such a strategy is to "nurture students in this process" by way of "validating student experience and avoiding conflict" (DeBlase 368). The critical care classroom, therefore,

seeks to nurture the unique qualities or strengths that each student brings to the discourse community. As one first-year writing program policy describes it:

> [W]e do NOT want to fall victim to a "weakness-based" approach, one that is far too common in education. We do not see students as deficient, as "weak" in certain areas/skills, as needing diagnoses and remediations of various sorts. We do not see students primarily as lacking ... . Nor do we see them as hapless apprentices or followers, waiting for us to lead them into learning. (Blalock 1)

Attempts to ensure inclusion for all, however, can devolve into a form of quietism where the primary focus is the right to speak and feel good about doing it, even if nobody can hear what is being said in the cacophony of competing voices. Moreover, as early as 1985, psychologist Barbara Lerner wrote that the "ideology of '*feel-good-now* self esteem' produced students who were narcissistic and egotistical and responded only to the pleasure principle" (qtd. in Ravitch 427; see also Aronowitz; Benesch, *Critical*). By 1996, Lerner's work was reprinted in the American Federation of Teachers' magazine, the editor of which posited that "[w]ell-intentioned and misguided notions about self esteem ... constitute one of the most serious threats to the movement to raise academic and disciplinary standards and improve the learning opportunities and life chances of our nation's children" (qtd. in Ravitch 429). Lerner's warning of egocentrism is salient, for an egocentric mindset is a barrier to critically reflective thought. As Paul claims, "egocentric adults assimilate everything they hear or experience to their own point of view. ... But when there is conflict, they 'enter' them only to negate or refute. They never genuinely leave their own mind set" (138). Jean Piaget concurs: "Many adults are still egocentric in their ways of thinking. Such people interpose between themselves and reality an imaginary or mystical world, and they reduce everything to this individual point of view" (209, qtd. in Paul 137). Focusing on the primacy of the ego-driven individual results in perceptions of the world that fit within a singular, monochromic framework. That which does not fit is justifiably rejected as not belonging to a particular paradigm of "how things should be" (Weil 3). While feelings of self-esteem are integral to social achievement, a situation characterized by pleasant conversational exchange and where potentially contestable issues are

avoided or minimized, the concern of academia is intellectual advancement, not etiquette.

Despite – or perhaps because of – an emphatic endorsement of positivity and strength versus negativity and weakness, ground rules of communication are common in the critical care classroom, frequently drawn from student-led interaction. Students and instructor generate guidelines for respectful discussion, inherently endorsing a democratic ideal of consensus through respectful resolution of difference and conciliatory movements of compromise. Such rules of dialogue, as Ellsworth observes, is a pedagogical strategy to guide interaction through language, and assumes "that all members have equal opportunity to speak, all members respect other members' rights to speak and feel safe to speak, and [that] *all ideas* are tolerated and subjected to rational critical assessment against fundamental judgments and moral principles" ("Empowering" 314). Respect, a key word, underscores communication in an ambitious attempt to democratize thought, speech, and writing. Students are treated "in the manner ... advocate[d] that the culture treat all its citizens, [and that is] respectfully, honorably, and seriously" (Gunter 56), replicating an idealized informed, democratic discourse within a tolerant and respectful community of sharing.

Like its critical counterparts, problematic elements in critical care pivot on a core question of mediating exchange involving the articulation of different viewpoints without "squelch[ing] the 'vulnerable inner center' of youthful creativity" (Laird; Spigelman, "Argument" 124), or what Lois Rubin describes as the "delicate nature of the critique situation" (390). Here, the critical care practitioner is challenged in terms of how to facilitate disagreement between and among individuals, yet still maintain civility, tolerance, and respect for others. The ways, however, in which such pedagogy intersects with attempts made by students to subvert consensus needs consideration. As Gunter posits:

> [I]f indeed I am a feminist teacher who respects difference, should I not then respect [anti-feminist] difference of opinion and allow such speech to stand in my classrooms? If I squelch such hate speech, am I heaving my feminist principles just to prescribe beliefs that I hold, like some kind of patriarchal thought police? Do I subvert my own liberatory teaching

> theory when I judge what is ethically acceptable speech from my students and what is not? (57)

Gunter's dilemma is reminiscent of that facing T. S. Eliot's Prufrock who, when formulated, sprawled, pinned, and wriggling, rhetorically asks "how should I begin / ... And how should I presume?" (ll. 57-61). Indeed, criticism easily risks being perceived as presumptuous (Morand; Rubin) in that it can position one set of beliefs as more accurate or valid than another, just as Gunter recognizes when her liberatory, feminist beliefs are juxtaposed against what she considers – or presumes – to be an invective of dissent that she describes as "hate speech" (57).

While there is much evidence to support the assertion that critically reflective thinking needs exposure to diverse and even opposing viewpoints through accessible interaction and group discussion, the drive for consensus is strong within the collective. While Brookfield agrees that students need to engage in "identifying and challenging assumptions, and exploring alternative ways of thinking and acting," if groups are to operate effectively, there needs to be "some form of artificial resolution" (71). The process of conciliation requires a sequence of facilitation from the instructor, reminding students of the need for respectful interaction as they negotiate through dissent. One component of such navigation is, as Morand claims, reinforcement of civility and politeness, elements that can be "useful in buffering and mediating the emotional contingencies" of group discussion (246, qtd. in Rubin 391). Yet, this in turn creates its own ideological framework: that discussion takes place within a social context of discourse and exchange of ideas. It also links the ownership of ideas with emotional attachment, resonant of an exchange of capital that seeks profit from its own investiture – what Horner defines as a commodification of pedagogy. The medium of exchange is personal belief inscribed with "expressivist assumptions about the 'self' and about the nature of personal experience" (France 147). A non-commodified concept of pedagogy, Horner suggests, does not endorse the primacy of individual voice and reinforce its right to speak within a context of supportive nurturing, but instead recognizes that "students' difficulty in speaking, however painful, is inescapable, [and] something to be directly confronted" rather than eased into being, "[u]nlike the view of pedagogy as a

commodity, in which teaching and learning must be pain-free and must feel 'good' to all" (134).

If there is risk of presumption in the critical care classroom, it is not presuming the intrinsic rightness of one set of ideological beliefs over another, but the silent acceptance that we have the unfettered and absolute right to hold and express opinion. And, what is more problematic is refusal to examine the facets of what constitutes opinion. Many students have great difficulty identifying any incongruity between the ideas they produce and what they really think in both verbal and text-based discussion. It is as though the written text is truth and the articulated belief a hallowed component of being; neither are candidates for de(con)struction. Moreover, the egocentrism inherent in words such as "emotional fragility" and an intrinsic demand to maintain the social niceties of civil discourse creates an almost insurmountable barrier to critically reflective thought. While dissensus (Bercovitch; Graff; Burke), is encouraged in terms of process, it is not endorsed as outcome – and the alleged need to suppress conflict leads ultimately to consensus. The teacher who negotiates a path through conflict to consensus not only fails to acknowledge the complexities of dissent, but poses an artificial and contrived solution to the problem of why-can't-we-all-just-get-along. Conflict exists because of difference (DeBlase 377). If we innocently give credence to the opinions of all, our guilt is ignorance; it is "the incapacity – or the refusal – to acknowledge one's own implication in the information" (Felman, qtd. in Giroux, "Pedagogy" 26). The act of negating disparate points of view beneath a patina of tolerance and respect does little to counter, challenge, and question our own rationale for such perception, but instead reflects what Alan France calls a "ready-made epistemology: an egocentric humanism" where the student is positioned as "artist manqué," accompanied by the tragedy of what might have been, but what is not (147).

Reinforcing the expression of self, however, within the parameters of an uncritical, accepting pedagogy of complicity and compassion might allow for freer articulation of thought from students – even promoting an environment where all feel empowered to speak without fear of failure or embarrassment. The latter reaction is common for many students whose previous exposure to education has resembled what Jane Tompkins describes as the "performance model," where fear is a driving force for

"being shown up for what you are: a fraud, stupid, ignorant, a clod, a dolt, a sap, a weakling, someone who can't cut the mustard" (654). Critical thinking can be a fearful and intimidating request for those who are not practiced at it. As Brookfield states, if our students are intimidated or even insulted when asked questions that are critically insightful, or are the recipients of "devastating critique of generally accepted assumptions," there seems little point in exercising such critical acuity (74). Brookfield argues that the solution is to create an environment where perceived failure can be risked without students experiencing a sense of failure (75), and this is precisely what the critical care classroom attempts to provide. The point remains, however, that in such a system of incalculable rightness and positivity, anything remotely critical is perceived as negative and unwelcome. Within such a system, as Donaldo Macedo argues, "students are rewarded to the degree that they become complicit with their own stupidification" (5), or what Stanley Aronowitz describes as a misappropriation of Freirean pedagogy: "What is taught is unproblematic; the only issue is how to teach on the basis of caring" (8).

It is for these reasons that concepts of respect and tolerance sit uneasily in the critical pedagogue's repertoire. We might, for example, advocate the need for respecting difference in the rhetoric of our course syllabi, yet at the same time be confronted with our own explanations a few paragraphs down that personal email use or non-academic internet searching or even plagiarism will "*not* be tolerated." Tolerance, then, becomes contestable: we are tolerant in some situations, but not in others – and the incongruity invites risky opportunity for recalcitrance. From another perspective, tolerant discursive interjection from instructors, in an attempt to privilege the veracity of individual expression, can negate the concept of dialectical engagement in favor of tolerating difference solely in the name of inclusivity and respect (Lorde; Ellsworth). In this light, tolerance is too easily cast as a banal and insipid commentary that parodies respect, exemplified in the following hypothetical exchange between a first-year college English teacher and her students. The context is dialogue within a multicultural writing classroom underscored by concepts of respect and tolerance for difference. The students are discussing a writing assignment in which they have been asked to document their socio-cultural experiences through personal narrative:

Teacher: Thanks for that great insight, Tan. It's wonderful to hear the Asian-American perspective. We all respect your struggle. Now, let's hear from Barbara about the African-American cultural viewpoint.

Barbara responds with appropriately African-American clichés, no doubt after being "educated" about what constitutes the African-American experience. She makes liberal use of the copula "I been."

Teacher: Thanks for that great insight, Barbara. It's wonderful to hear the African-American perspective. We all respect your struggle. Now, let's hear from Tiatra about the European-American cultural viewpoint.

Tiatra responds with appropriately European-American clichés, no doubt after being "educated" about what constitutes the European-American experience. She ends her sentences with an inflection.

Teacher: Thanks for that great insight, Tiatra. It's wonderful to hear the European-American perspective. We all respect your struggle, especially the difficulties you have staying in shape for the school dance team. Now, let's hear from Vince about the Hispanic cultural viewpoint.

Vince responds with appropriately Hispanic clichés, no doubt after being "educated" about what constitutes the Hispanic experience. He speaks openly about the *barrios* and the associated culture of low-rider gang affiliation. He frequently ends his sentences with the word "man."

Teacher: Thanks for that great insight, Vince. It's wonderful to hear the Hispanic perspective. We all respect your struggle. And, the high cost of gasoline must be hitting you pretty hard. Now, let's hear from Hedony about the Lesbian Female Lifestyle Choice viewpoint.

Hedony, who chose the name herself – and the appellation is welcomed in the spirit of individual authentication – lashes out with a diatribe that speaks of pseudo, trendy, and superficial acceptance measured against mainstream social values that is nothing but a tarnished veneer for ugly homophobia lurking below the collective social conscience. She speaks of the damning and condemnatory social stereotypes in regard to what constitutes "cultural experience," and argues articulately about the shortcomings of

an educational system that measures difference against a standardized, sanitized multicultural normality. The students are enthralled by this voice of dissent.

Teacher: Thanks for that great insight, Hedony. It's wonderful to hear the Lesbian Female Lifestyle Choice viewpoint. We all respect your struggle.

Teacher pauses, unsure how to respond to Hedony's inflammatory remarks. Moreover, she senses potential revolt in the surreptitious eye-exchanges among the other students. Remembering, however, that reflective response time is the mark of a good, caring instructor, teacher silently counts to ten before speaking again. Adds another five counts for further credibility, then ends the class period with an unconvincing affirmation that the students have learned to allow all voices to speak and to afford each one the respect it deserves.

With the possible exception of Hedony, what the students have in fact learned is that giving teachers what they want to hear is a key to success – at least in this classroom. Hedony, on the other hand, is authenticated through silence, condemned both for her expression of exclusion and for endowing the environment with complicated and uncomfortable dissent. Despite Hedony's passionate pleas, the teacher responds with a deadpan formula, a blithe barrage of bland platitudes that pay token reverence to inclusivity, but in action endorse a prescribed and artificial social idealism that smacks of delusion. Dialogue is not neutral, nor transparent, nor scripted. Nor is it necessarily logical or reasoned – how can it be when opinion and belief are so indelibly colored by ideological drive? As Burbules asserts, replacing the concept of difference with tolerance "leaves dominant beliefs and values largely unquestioned – indeed, even insulated from challenge and change – because they are shielded within the comforting self-conception of openness and inclusivity" (258). Instead, the dissentious classroom environment is one where ideologies are embraced as being imbued with ideology *because* they are ideological. Agitation, examination, argument, deflection are all components of alternative perspectives – and within it is the inherent luxury of students given a choice to argue something they may not even necessarily believe.

Allowing students to transgress boundaries that have strong ideological roots – if they so desire – can simultaneously allow them to examine and bring out what *they believe* they believe and, in turn, enable others to respect them enough to show

*dis*respect for current or conventional views knowing that, at least in such an environment, by the time the end of class arrives, everyone can leave exactly the same way as he or she walked in, or walk out significantly changed, or anywhere in between these two extremes. On the inverse, endorsing a consensus of neutrality does not promote critically reflective thought; rather, as Linda LaDuc points out, it "suggests that all views are equal" and that "students already hunkered down in the 'everybody-has-a-right-to-an-opinion' foxhole may dig even deeper into a solipsistic rejection of new voices and ideas" (qtd. in V. Anderson 198). Enabling an environment that provokes deeper, more critically articulated ideas carries with it a freedom of thought that most strongly counters the risk of indoctrination or oppressive silencing.

Making a distinction between discursive contexts – the social and the intellectual – is critical. As Trish Roberts-Miller observes, there is a realm of uncertainty when attempting to define what constitutes successful discourse, with many ascribing to little more than a "vague sense of people remaining cordial" (538). Seen within the parameters of social discursivity, those who do engage in confrontation and argument violate the principles of civility, with condemnation or ostracism as the cost of such transgressions. Although Roberts-Miller concedes that evasion of conflict affords social harmony and, "as long as the disagreements are relatively minor," may even contribute to an efficient system of discourse, her concern is the exclusion of those who are "deeply unhappy with the system itself" (552). While we may accept that governance of social discourse prevents us from saying what we really think, let alone critically examining what we say, the goals of social conversation are complaisance and complacency, not critically reflective thought and attempts to promote disequilibria of the status quo. Effective social discourse relies on a sense of ultimate seamlessness, an integration of ideas that while initially may be disparate – even diametrical – eventually, through a systemized process of conciliation and mediation, merge to represent a consensual, communal whole. The maintenance of conflicting ideas is a threat to community, the unified premise of which cannot tolerate sustained discord and therefore relies on the eventual dissolution of any fragmentation.

The value of consensus, particularly in the expressivist writing classroom, is touted as an ideal precisely because it establishes an environment in which students can

express their thoughts in a safe and tolerant discourse community. Yet, some bluntly dismiss the core of such a pedagogy, asserting that it is a "mistake of traditional education thinking ... that schools and colleges have to *resolve* disagreements in order to teach effectively" and that if there is no consensus, the classroom will be confused and chaotic (Graff 52). Erroneously, Graff argues, the consensus approach reinforces the idealistic and hopelessly inadequate notion that there is some common ground for us all to share based on unitary values and truths, particularly when the question of whose culture is determining that common ground is not examined (52). Describing the drive for consensus as "prescription for paralysis" (53), Graff argues that the consensual classroom exemplifies a "cafeteria-culture," one that is stretched so far in order to accommodate a multitude of methods, interests, and minority cultures that attempts to represent every nuance of *being* ironically leads to the representation of no-one (53). Instead, Graff endorses the idea of confronting conflict in the classroom, embracing what is irreconcilable as a primary objective of discourse rather than seeking to minimize the painful effects such analysis can incur. Graff pejoratively analogizes consensus as a family, one in which conflicts are hidden from children by well-meaning parents in order to protect young minds. And, while acknowledging the "uncomfortably paternalistic" nuances in his analogy, Graff's defense counters with the "infantilizing effects" of evading conflict (55).

Associations of dependency and helplessness with the words "infant" or "child" is a frequently cited objection to Noddings' notion of caring. With a teacher positioned as maternalistic carer and the student as infant/child-recipient, the intrinsic and "dangerous powerlessness" of the cared-for in such a relationship becomes problematic (White 296), especially in light of calls for empowering students through independent and creative, critical thought. The incongruity in the carer/cared-for dichotomy is that where we presume the right to grant authentic opportunity for empowerment, it is tempered by a conduit of authority. Ironically, a position of power stereotypically characterized as masculine is internally dichotomized against the feminine traits of nurture and care. Moreover, if caring is not reciprocated from the student, as even Noddings concedes, the teacher has little choice but to withdraw the care, leaving some students who are cared for and others who are not (White). To extend Noddings'

mother-infant analogy, the classroom acts as home – a place to shield students from outside threats and provide the comfort of familial protection in a communal place of safety to grow and learn (Heydenberk and Heydenberk). Yet, as Virginia Anderson suggests, it is an environment of seductive illusion, one that promises the security of anchored stability in the face of potential disruption. Such a supportive structure allows students to feel at home with their own belief systems, and to rationalize alternative perspectives as belonging "out there" and not "in here." Rather than harnessing critical insight to challenge those who are most likely to resist it, the classroom as home-community is imbued with efforts to maintain the harmony of the status quo.

The concept of home is a contestable one for Giroux who aligns the word "home" almost exclusively with "those cultural spaces and social formations which work hegemonically," creating a place that exudes safety by nature of what it excludes ("Paulo Freire" 3-4; JanMohammed). In order to transgress those constricting ideological boundaries and explore cognitive possibilities, Giroux instead advocates a "trope of homelessness" as a "shifting site of identity, resistance, and opposition that enables conditions of self and social formation" (4). For those students who do seek to articulate opposition to consensual communities of care, the choice may be one of recalcitrance – or even attempts at radical subversion of the dominant discourse. As an exemplification, consider the situation Michael Wranowsky confronted in his first-year college classroom, one working with a pedagogy of self-esteem that focused on and celebrated individual strength as opposed to perceived weakness. The assignment required submission of a writing portfolio and "reflective overview" essay discussing personal strengths and how students were applying them in their daily interactions with colleagues and family. Using a publicly-accessible internet discussion forum, students were asked to publish their writing as a hyperlinked document to share with the class. One student chose instead to edit the assignment homepage, indelibly – although anonymously – registering cynical and caustic dissatisfaction with the communal goals by parodying the step-by-step sequencing of the portfolio assignment:

> Overview.
>
> Overview summary.
>
> Overview of the overview summary

> Misc. Touchy-Feely Crap
> Take a picture of you giving yourself a hug.
> Tell yourself you are special
> Be very descriptive
> Make everyone else in your family who you didnt [sic] interview the first time listen to your "Strengths"
> Be sure to bring a bag for them to throw up into.
> Bring one for yourself as well.
> Include a sample of the vomit in your portfolio
> Scotch tape your eyes open and repeat your strengths to yourself over and over for a whole weekend
> Write a 25 page essay about the experience. (1).

Here, the instructor teaching within a discourse community of care is confronted with dilemma: As the student's post appeared on the assignment's homepage, it was the first thing others in the class would see when publishing their own work, thereby challenging the validity of the assignment and leaving all with the uncomfortable question of how to acknowledge the dissent: Endorsement? Ostracism? Ignorance? Wranowsky's response was to remove the offending material and turn to his colleagues for counsel in what became a series of email listserv exchanges almost uniformly condemning the student's apparent inability to understand the concept of a "strengths-based approach"[4] to teaching and learning. Such "privileging of a happy community," as Roberts-Miller writes, "means that dissenters are the problem. When they criticize the status quo, it appears that everyone was happy until the malcontents started stirring things up" (552). In this instance, the mechanisms of community actively worked to oppress its critics and to rationalize incongruent behavior as ignorance – a dangerous hegemony that effectively silenced a voice of opposition by means of reinforcing consensus at the expense of dissent.

The potential for silencing is not restricted to consensual oppression, but can manifest in ways of inauthentic approval, often masked under the guise of support. While comments designed to make us feel good can certainly bolster self-esteem, they

[4] For more on a "strengths-based" approach to teaching and learning, see Clifton and Anderson.

can also project a sense of overdone sentimentality (Brookfield and Preskill), going so far as to border on the gratuitous or even obsequious. As Massey, Scott, and Dornbush note, "under the pressures of teaching, and with all intentions of 'being nice' ... 'oppression can arise out of warmth, friendliness, and concern" (qtd. in Delpit 45). Furthermore, and particularly in response to student writing, comments that focus almost exclusively on positive encouragement risk providing students with an unfair assessment of their abilities, even denying them the opportunity to extend their understanding through challenge and critique. Justification for rejecting the alleged negativity of criticism is, however, well-founded: Because it is common for student writers to consider their words as representations of themselves (Hillocks), they often perceive critical commentary as personal attack (Paul; Brookfield; Lipman; Brookfield and Preskill; LaDuc; V. Anderson; Weil; Janks). As Dickson points out, students become so "constricted by the personal" and their "commitment to what they know becomes so tenuous that they protect it vigorously" (13), reflecting what Tingle describes as "narcissistic vulnerability" (6, 9). Caring, positive commentary, therefore, attempts to bypass the potential for offense or embarrassment by eliminating comments that could be perceived this way. What can be located beneath this text of caring, however, is an insidious and imperialistic form of control: As Chomsky asserts, using a phrase from Walter Lippman, it operates to "keep the 'bewildered herd' – the naïve simpleton – from being bothered with the complexity of real problems that they couldn't solve anyway" (25).

Overwhelmingly, teachers use positive commentary in the spirit of a genuine commitment of care. As Amy Lee notes, most of her students are reluctant to engage in criticism that they perceive entirely as negative. Writing in the context of providing parameters for peer review, and in a dialogue with herself, Lee claims that "I felt a need initially to protect the [student] writers (from what? from whom?) from evaluative feedback because I did not distinguish between critical feedback and negative feedback" (230). This place of apprehension and misunderstanding of what the term "critical" means takes us back to considering "critical" as a muddy adjective. When inextricably linked with negativity, critical thinking is a loaded assumption, "a form of social or educational bad taste," with those who think critically parodied as "disgruntled and bitter

subversives or as elitist mockers of others' well-meant efforts" (Brookfield 35). To think critically and articulate that critical thought, therefore, is equivalent to harming people's self-esteem and damaging the psyche – even irreparably – particularly when we hear about students who have been allegedly traumatized by prior experiences of inadequacy in the English classroom, and I emphasize "English" here as representing the context of studying a language, its texts, and the ideas that underscore those texts. Writing, and expressing thinking through writing, is by its nature a personalized articulation of experience, one that draws from the interpretive parameters of what we know and believe – an egocentrism that may well promote the possibility of a true introspection. Yet, while conceding that "there is a way of living in oneself that develops a great wealth of ... personal images and schemas," Piaget argues that "at the same time it impoverishes analysis and consciousness of self" (209, qtd. in Paul 138). And, it is not just students who grapple with what Ellsworth describes as "moments of desire, fear, horror, pleasure, power, and unintelligibility" – emotions that are an integral part of discussing, analyzing, and writing about text, but that these are, paradoxically, "*exactly* what most educators sweat over trying to prevent, foreclose, deny, ignore, close down" (*Teaching* 46).

Although the premise behind critical care is one of concern for students and reflects commitment and sensitivity from those who practice it, there are contentious elements that can result in a very different outcome than first envisaged. What is important to consider is that if we were to posit an alternative to the concept of critical care, it should not be a binary opposition of *un*caring, but instead a reinscribed understanding of caring critically. I will discuss just such a reconceptualization of this problematic term "critical care" in Chapter Four.

4. Reconceptualizing the Critical

Various applications of the term "critical" leave an array of approaches ranging from formal logic to multiple intelligences to multi/critical literacies and pedagogies. My reconceptualization of the critical begins with an amalgamated critique, recasting its present parameters beyond existing borders in order to re-vision the possibilities of/into *de critique*. Theoretically, the concept of critical care dominates first-year college English pedagogy. An approach characterized by what Moacir Gadotti terms "institutionalized pedagogy," it not only "proposes congruency, empathy, reflection, and respect for the other," but is inherently marked with the problematic mantra that "if expressing oneself is all that matters, then all opinions are true" (Paul 60, 68). Yet, as Paul points out, students are well-versed in believing what they already believe, what serves and preserves their interests, and what minimizes inconsistency and ambiguity in, to borrow Danny Weil's phrase, a "grotesquely individualistic culture" marked by "consequent attachments to ego-centric belief systems, prejudices, biases, and misconceptions" (2-3). Reconceptualizing the critical, therefore, is primarily concerned with ways to challenge students' thinking and the writing such thought produces by circumventing what Moffett describes as "that censorious monomaniac, the ego" (*Coming* 178). This does not mean casting all that is critical into a distant – and, I would argue, unattainable – idealized objectivity or disinterestedness; rather, it begins with accepting the subjective state, recognizing the phenomenon of individuality as a social construction of self (Vološinov; Graff; Castricano), and seeking ways to temporarily rescind its ideological manacles. In this light, Paul emphasizes the role of passion in terms of ardent commitment, tempered by Brookfield's advocacy for humility and sincerity, and Rosalie Colie's "profoundly self-critical" re-visioning of self as a paradox where, in the process of thinking, the self "turns back on itself to see how it got stuck upon the paradox" in order to generate a self-referential reflection. This, in turn, constitutes a threat to self of a re-created self (7, 356, qtd. in Berthel 5, 35).

For many, particularly those steeped in a pedagogy of care, criticality is threatening, even terrifying (Rorty; Colie; Shermis). Yet, opening the possibilities of

change – of individual praxis – depends on transcending the borders of who we are and what we do. Sigmund Freud, in asserting that perception is filtered through the conscious mind and tangibly shaped by the ideological structure of that filtering, argues that it is trauma, or the traumatic experience, that can break the protective shield of the conscious and subconscious self. As Jacques Derrida posits, once it becomes possible to re-vision that self as containing many traces of otherness, many possibilities of centers and re-centers that are sometimes reconcilable and sometimes not ("Structure"), change becomes genuinely possible. In practice, critical thought seeks disturbance of belief systems we take for granted, and to engage in "permanent criticism" (McKerrow; Foucault), contradiction and disorientation (Crusius; Shermis), and skepticism that is "active yet detached" (Berthel), but also "reflective" (Dewey; McPeck; Meyers; Brookfield) as a means to reinscribe discourse as internalized inquiry turning in on itself and out again (McKerrow; Castricano; France; Eagleton; Hardin). Critically reflective thinking is, therefore, a phenomenological act of critically perceiving ourselves critically perceiving, reifying the possibilities of active, individual change. And, it is the *possibility* of change rather than the transformation itself that needs exploring in pedagogical application for the first-year college English classroom.

4.1 The Contemporary First-Year College English Classroom

In the United States, most colleges and universities mandate either a one or two-semester first-year English program as part of an undergraduate degree, frequently emphasizing writing and analysis that is commonly termed rhetoric and composition. At its core is the study of text, whether that text is traditional literature or multi-literate "readings" of cultural media. Recent trends have favored writing communities that include portfolio assessment and collaborative teaching/learning projects across the curriculum. As a majority of students are required to take the course in their first year, the college English class is well-placed as a fulcrum to promote skill in critical thought and written expression across disciplines. While the goals of first-year college English courses depend on the educational philosophy of those who teach them and, to a lesser extent, the philosophy of the institution, the objectives of many first-year writing

programs reflect characteristics of Radical, Progressive-Humanist, or Liberal-Conservative philosophies, as in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1
Pedagogical Philosophies in First-Year Writing Programs

Radical	*Progressive-Humanist*	*Liberal-Conservative*
Politically motivated	Politically pluralist	Politically neutral
Focus: Ideology	Focus: Student centered	Focus: Teacher centered
Change social order	Enhance social order	Maintain social order
Marxist: Social reality	Existential: My reality	Essential: Reality of truth
Critical consciousness	Individual contribution	Knowledge consumption
Praxis	Constructivism; discovery	Direct instruction
Problem posing	Problem solving	Problem minimizing
Radical learning	Facilitated learning	Mastery learning

Source: Adapted from Sheritt, Caroline. "Education Philosophy." (Corpus Christi, TAMU-CC, 2004).

Given the discussion of "critical" in the preceding chapters, I posit that critical thinking, critical pedagogy, critical literacy, and the concept of critical care are represented within this pedagogical framework in the following way:

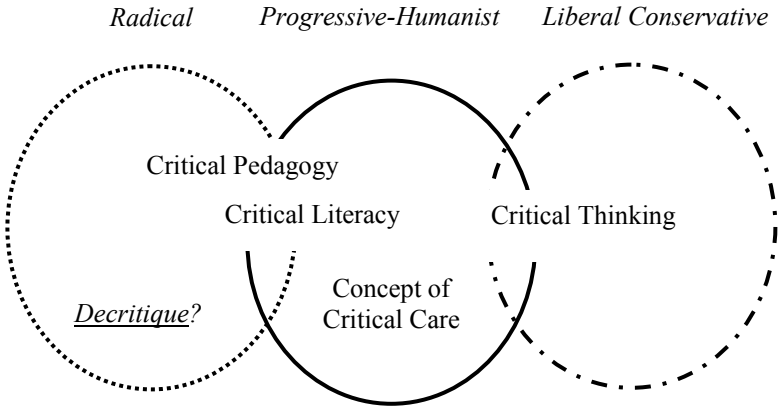


Fig. 4.1: Characteristics of "Critical" Across Three Conceptual Frameworks

Critical thinking, when its focus is on formal and informal logic, use of syllogism and enthymeme, positioning of teacher as transmitter of knowledge, establishing objective truth through systematic analysis, and adherence to political neutrality reflects a liberal-conservative[5] – or, as many would argue, a traditional – approach to teaching English in the college classroom. The concept of critical care, with its pluralist acceptance of multiple perspectives, student-centeredness, emphasis on collaborative sharing, consensual problem solving, promoting an individualized existential reality, and teacher as facilitator is well-situated within a Progressive-Humanist philosophy. Critical pedagogy and critical literacy, focusing on political motivation and praxis, consciousness of ideologies and their function in a social reality, objectives to change the social order, greater interest in problem posing than problem solving, and radical teaching and learning techniques bridge a divide between Radical and Progressive-Humanist teaching, with critical pedagogy slightly more to the left than critical literacy, due to the wider applicative scope of the former. The question arises, therefore, as to where a reconceptualized critical pedagogy fits in relation to its phenomenological and critically self-reflexive goals. Before responding to this question, I will discuss recent scholarship that addresses the issue of revising "the critical," and do so under four sub-headings: Respect and Empowerment – Critical Writing, Critical Voice; Disequilibria and the Egocentric; Reinscribing Caring; and Exile from Self, then discuss these four components within a revised framework of writing and thinking in the first-year college English classroom. Finally, and drawn from this discussion, I will outline a reconceptualization of the critical as a pedagogy I am calling *Decritique*.

4.2 Respect and Empowerment – Critical Writing, Critical Voice

Reflecting the tenets of a broad-based liberal education, the study of English in first-year college classes lends itself to political and socio-cultural awareness, where truths, powers, and individual rights circulate within a complex, globalized world. Within this milieu, the place of critical discourse is one of intersection in an interactive

[5] Here, I make the distinction of "liberal-conservative" to reflect a right-leaning political perspective rather than the term "liberal" as a left-leaning position, as in the United States.

network (McKerrow 98), where Foucault's concept of "power, right, [and] truth" plays an integral interpretive role. The right to speak leads to truth that leads to power; power then leads back to truth or the right to speak, which grants power to individual voice. This discursive premise is neatly self-contained, and supports the concept that we all have the right to speak and be empowered by our articulated thoughts, and as a right we are bound to respectfully grant it to all. Yet, such a triangle-of-righteousness can perpetuate as an unexamined privilege; a recursive pattern of justified self-fulfillment that is immune from questioning its own discourse *as* discourse. As Foucault observes, when discourse "transmits and produces power, it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it" (*Power* 92-93, 100-01, qtd. in McKerrow 98). Pointing to the duality of discourse, Foucault posits that by articulating positions of self we stake a claim of power: the process of speaking or writing our thinking is an assertion of our selves and a reinforcement of our right to give voice to that thought. In so doing, however, we also open ourselves to confrontation with opposing discourse from those with an equal right to voice. The problem in such discursive junctions is the real possibility of irreconcilable differences that degenerate into disputes undermined by subjective and emotional ardor. The right of "my right to speak" becomes not what I am saying, but merely a defense of my right to say it – the clichéd and ultimately empty defense of everyone being entitled to an opinion. Participants in such a cognitive stalemate are left with little room to maneuver other than concede a diluted, respectful agreement to disagree.

In the essay "Liberating Inner Speech," Moffett identifies the problem of promoting respect for individual voice. While accepting the right of everyone to hold an opinion, his concern is one of students falling into a cyclical trap of reiteration where the ideas and beliefs they already hold are processed through the acts of writing and speaking, reflecting what is already known and understood, and where "dominant emotions, motives, and fixed frameworks ... keep chaining or clustering [ideas] ... into the same trains or constellations of thought" (*Coming* 178). From this perspective, the act of thinking and its articulation both move outward from a fixed point of cognitive awareness – *what I know* or *what I believe* – rather than inward to reflectively examine from where such thought emerges. In Moffett's words, the danger of such "redundant

inner speech" is that it serves to "maintain a whole world view of reality, a sort of sustained illusion" (176). The way to break recycling of thought, Moffett argues, is by consciously engaging alternative perspectives and to vision "a new thought coming completely from outside the [student's] state of mind" in order to overcome "the self-limiting situation of inner speech" (175). To achieve this, Moffett advocates the concept of development in composition – of writing, rewriting, and revising – in order to sustain a "line of thought far enough to allow combinations of inner material to occur that has not so combined before" (177).

Implementing Moffett's act of re-writing, however, falls short in its application when students remain focused on audience and reception. Thinking about meeting the expectations of another set of readers does little to promote reflective and critical self-examination. Instead, we see the practice of tailoring ideas to achieve certain rhetorical effects for a specified, pre-determined rhetorical context. This triangulation of Audience-Purpose-Rhetorical Effect concentrates on reconciling potential tensions between writer and reader, but does not involve the self as observer or reflector, a distinction noted by Roland Barthes. Where the self-as-observer is the focus, the writer becomes, in effect, an observer of the interaction between writer and reader-recipient self – a phenomenological crossing of the borderlines or ridges between what is our conscious, constructed self and the possibility of that which is Other. Distinctions between the externalized projection of writing-to-audience and the internalized reflection of writing-to-self in relation to the Audience-Purpose-Rhetorical Effect (APRE) triangle are represented in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2

Externalized Projection and Internalized Reflection: The APRE Triangle

	Externalized Projection	Internalized Reflection
Audience	The identified and intended recipients of our purpose	We don't "know" or recognize our possible selves, so in the process of trying to write our selves we attempt to know the self that is unknown to us
Purpose	Desire to express a set of ideas or beliefs to another to achieve a pre-formulated goal or objective	By not knowing another self we are limited in the rhetorical choices we make. We need to think about creating something that is not there, and yet is there

Rhetorical Effect	The word choices, structure, and argument we use to best convey our purpose	The word choices, structure, and argument we use to best articulate a critical challenge to our thinking
Why Write?	To express our ideas or beliefs	To open opportunity for critical reflection on our ideas and beliefs
To Whom?	An identified recipient of those ideas and beliefs	An *un*identified self-recipient of those ideas and beliefs
For What Result?	To have our ideas and beliefs registered and recognized by another; to achieve a goal of change or modification to serve our own ends or those of a group we claim to represent	To have our ideas and beliefs registered and considered by another self; to achieve a goal of change or modification that may serve our own ends, those of a group we claim to represent, or those of a group (or set of ideas and beliefs) with whom representation or linkage has not before occurred to us

While Moffett confidently claims that awareness of audience and rhetorical effect enables students to "truly think *for* that audience ... [and to] think *like* that audience" (*Coming* 178), a critically reflective pedagogy is more interested in students recognizing how to think for themselves and to reflect on the ideological structures on which their own thought rests – a point curiously in keeping with Moffett's later assertion that "[t]he self-incarcerated can liberate themselves if shown how they maintain the walls themselves" (180). To question our thinking is not so much a case of tailoring that thought to persuade an audience or fit a rhetorical context as it is imagining ourselves in a series of positions that interrogate each other: to seriously consider the possible veracity of alternative truths within a shadow-world of shifting possibilities that have not yet been realized; to detach ourselves from the privileged belief-system of "our opinion" long enough to reflect on and analyze its validity in light of what we learn.

This brings us back to the likelihood of dissent, conflicting viewpoints, and opposing discursive premises. If we consider agreeing-to-disagree as an artificially imposed stalemate that only reinforces the right to hold opinion, we are left with a question of critical direction: Where to go next? Raymie McKerrow claims that critique is not impersonal and detached, but rather that the subject, when offering critique, holds as its object something that it is against (92). The essence of critique, at least for McKerrow, is a fulcrum of dissent, a context where we do not agree to disagree, but instead take active steps to show cause for our disagreement – to argue for what we are against by looking for difference rather than similarity (96). The dilemma comes when our disagreements are bound by social mores of what it means to be respectful and when

we are urged to find "structures/plans/policies ... to ensure that teammates 'play nicely with others'" (Wolff-Murphy 1) that our seeking of difference is, by default, cast on careful ground. Cognitive attack, therefore, must not be seen as such; instead, respect demands that we be mindful of feelings and the reception of our words. Again, we see reinforcement of Moffett's concern with audience and the rhetorical context of reception.

Citing Robert Hariman, McKerrow states that a "critical rhetoric must be grounded on a reconstitution of the concept of doxa" (103), a point that relates not just to literal translations of the word as opinion or belief in contrast with episteme as logical knowledge and understanding, but in the context of comparison with *alethia* – literally, a truth of "unhiddenness" (104). The praxis of a critically reflective pedagogy is not merely about stating opinion or belief, but the stating of opinion or belief in relation to what is said and what is not said; a repositioning of alternative opinion and belief as momentary truth. As Hariman asserts, the "dynamic of concealment and unconcealment (truth) – of authorizing and marginalizing – is the means by which we determine what we believe, what we know, and what we believe to be true" (49-50, qtd. in McKerrow 104) in what Pierre Bourdieu calls a realm of the "undiscussed" (qtd. in McKerrow 104). If we accept that our identities are made through interaction with social ideology and cultural practice, examination of that identity represents a tension between our constructed selves – our what *is* – and that which drives us internally through our psyches – the what *was* that we repress, or that *doesn't even occur to us could exist*. The drive for destruction of self that may come from critical examination of the self represents a metaphorical death, a process involving attempts to reconcile an identity that *is* with an identity that *was* along with an identity that *could be*. To engage in such critical self-reflection demands a sense of detachment, a skepticism that who we are is not an a priori and self-evidential being, but one shaped by ideological forces we have confronted in the process of becoming. If we can momentarily suspend our self-evident truths from the tenacious hold of what "I" believe, we can open the possibility for new action and thought (Rajchman; McKerrow).

Social change, as Illich argues, comes from "neither ideological criticism nor social action," but through "disenchantment with and detachment from the central social

ritual" (54). The concepts of disenchantment, disengagement, and detachment are imperative in fostering critical discourse rather than respect, inclusivity, and consensus that are characteristic of social discourse. Moreover, adhering to the principle that everyone is entitled to an opinion denigrates the reality that genuine differences do exist, and instead endorses the idea that realities merely need reporting, not argument – a perspective that, as Hillocks claims, "undercut[s] the idea of critical thinking" (95). If we are dealing with students who are already indoctrinated to a social norm-of-self constructed by family, society, and education, then there is little point in acknowledging the right to voice that self. Instead, the criticality of discourse is better served by reinforcing the importance of critical recursivity back on the self to examine from where that voice emerges. Because of this, it is difficult to reconcile calls for absolute respect in regard to the opinions of others when it is questionable that we should even respect our own. For critical discourse, it is not a case of tailoring our message and structure of meaning for reception by an audience, but of providing a method of analysis that promotes "serious intellectual inquiry into the formation of self as well as the articulation of selfhood," and of requiring students to critically examine and reflect on their own subject positions "that helped determine their responses in the first place" (France 163, 161).

While a sense of ownership of ideas lends degrees of subjectivity and sensitivity, we need to avoid dichotomizing critically reflective examination of those ideas as an objective act that is devoid of personal opinion. Rather, it becomes an act of recasting the parameters of objectivity to mean critical examination of our own opinion through and by dialogical exchange – with others and ourselves. Borrowing from Hillocks, we define our self by what we write, and our construction of that self governs what we write. In the first-year college English classroom, a critically reflective pedagogy requires that writing assist in the "invention and reinvention of self" (22-23). If serious critique is denied to student writing, even with the best intentions of fostering the freedom to speak unfettered by what is dismissed as "destructive" and potentially hurtful criticism, we are mired in ground demanding that our commentary is mindful of feelings, helpfully considerate, and cautiously "constructive." To exemplify the problematic nature of the latter point, consider the following metaphor: For the student,

an essay is a feat of engineering, with walls, windows, door, and roof. Through constructive criticism, we aim to point out problems with design or structure, how a loose joist might be tightened or a crack could be patched; that is, working with what is already-in-place, the essay is a site of construction and razing the edifice is not an option. Yet, the building may be so functionally flawed and so poorly assembled that it does not stand up to the scrutiny of critical inspection. Alternatively, it may be so bland in content and design that it becomes yet another cubicle in a mass-produced, industrial housing complex, devoid of character, substance, and even attempts at originality.

Sweet and Swanson see much of the problem with bland and formulaic essay writing coming from criteria set by instructors, claiming that asking students to construct a "'well-developed central argument' (only one argument per writer will persuade) with 'significant logical or persuasive evidence' (logic as 'rules-based' and evidence as 'objective') ... beg important epistemic questions" (41). Moreover, the assumption is made too frequently that thinking critically involves students looking at "the other side" of their own values, beliefs, and opinions (42). This, Sweet and Swanson claim, often results in the contrived rhetorical tactic of arguing one way through part of the essay and then switching half-way through to argue "the other side," usually with the ubiquitous transitional phrase *on the other hand* – one that "pops up to neutralize, to balance, to adjudicate" (44), but offers little scope for creative and critical thought – the *process* of which is not particularly interested in whether an argument is balanced, fair, reasonable or consensual. And, as Tingle argues, it is the conclusions of their thinking that students tend to give in their written work, rather than the process through which those conclusions have emerged (2). Moreover, and drawing from the work of Eric Carton, Tingle posits that such thinking represents a dogmatic and relatively shallow conception of self (13).

Lamenting what she describes as student essays consisting of "trite if energetic proclamations about abortion, gun control [and] capital punishment ... interspersed with poorly integrated, often only marginally relevant quotations," Ruth Stewart calls for a revisioned pedagogy with the concept of struggle and frustration at its core (163). The "toughest phase" of Stewart's assignment sequencing is not a polite exchange of "weigh[ing] the pros and cons of an issue," but when students "are confronted by

opposing arguments strong enough to make them question the validity of their own" (168), executed with, as Paul claims, "the ability to frame dialogical exchanges" (129). Rather than seeing the essay-as-product to be constructively reinforced and made stronger, both Paul and Stewart emphasize ideas-as-process, or an act of becoming. The essay as a document of production is, therefore, not the focus at all; instead, focus shifts to the ways in which students engage in the ideas that might – or might not – end up as an essay. Within such a revisioned perspective it is not only possible to conceive that the metaphorical building-essay needs to be razed, but that the planned ground on which it was to be built has not even been cleared of its previous structure.

Yet, like the incongruities between Moffett's assertions and methods-in-practice, there is a disconcerting anomaly in the application of Richard Paul's theoretical premise. Paul, in conjunction with Linda Elder and the Foundation for Critical Thinking, has produced a "thinker's guide" to essay writing, claiming that poor writers are not incapable of writing well, but instead lack intellectual discipline and the strategies needed for improvement. This problem can allegedly be rectified by providing "a theory that links substantive writing and thinking with the acquisition of knowledge" and an "awareness of how to design writing assignments that do not require one-on-one instructor-student feedback" (Introduction). While impressionistic writing is problematic in regards to fostering critical thought because, as the authors point out, our impressions and opinions are inherently justified as insightful and right because it is we who hold them (3), in practice Paul and Elder's text falls into the same patina of audience and rhetorical effect proposed by Moffett: Writing for a particular purpose, designed to achieve a particular effect, for reception by a particular audience. At best, the result is a piece of writing that achieves these goals; at worst, the writing is nothing short of advertising copy – the function of which is to sell ideas-as-product for popular and palatable consumption.

As an initial step in critical essay writing, Paul and Elder advise that first understanding the material about which we write is crucial. Given that our ideas need a contextual framework in order to make sense to ourselves and those who read them, this is a reasonable assertion. Advocating, however, that student writers achieve this understanding by paraphrasing is an ineffective strategy. Many students find it dull to

rewrite the ideas of others, seeing it as irksome busywork. Such an attitude not only makes it difficult to engage students passionately and critically about their thinking, but is one that students are warranted in holding. Consider a radical deconstruction over the idea of beginning from contextual understanding: What we are asking students to do is not work with their ideas and their understanding of a text – as they have read and interpreted it – but to start their thinking process by working exclusively with the ideas of someone else. Only once they have "grasped" what the text is "really" trying to say are students then considered in a position to respond. What is being taught here is little more than an effective way to measure – or perhaps validate – our comprehension. To extend this argument, consider a "model paraphrase" provided by Paul and Elder in response to the following quote from Martin Luther King, Jr: "He who passively accepts evil is as much involved in it as he who helps to perpetuate it." The student paraphrases King's quote as: "People who see unethical things being done to others but who fail to intervene (when they are able to intervene) are as unethical as those who are causing harm in the first place" (15).

The student's paraphrase exhibits good comprehension of King's quotation, and if this – comprehension – were the objective of the writing and thinking assignment, then it has been admirably reached. Now, compare a different response, one drawn from a student who has engaged with the ideas in a more critically spontaneous way:

> I have a real problem with the references to "he" and this idea of passively accepting evil. Why are women excluded – yet again – from any state of social power? I suppose women don't accept evil, whether passively or actively. Moreover, what constitutes passive acceptance of evil, anyway? And, what is evil? As defined by whom? Is Ken Lay from Enron evil? He doesn't think so – he just defends his actions as ignorance and that ignorance isn't a crime. Yet, if we turn this around and think of passive acceptance, as King asserts, *as* evil, then this starts to weaken Lay's defense, too. But, is Lay really evil anyway? And what are the distinctions between what he did in terms of how I perceive it – like, getting his grubby, greedy little hands on everything he could take from that company and lining his own pockets at the expense of, referring to

> those tapes of Enron phone conversations, "grandmothers in California" – or how he perceives it, as an error of judgment in not knowing more about what was going on in HIS company. This brings me back to the idea of *his* company ... I wonder if women would be any different or if there's truth in the concept of that quote (who wrote that?) about absolute power corrupting absolutely? ...

What I have tried to demonstrate is a distinction between formulaic "comprehension" of text and critical, subjective spontaneity. Not only is the student able to write her thoughts, but at the same time open a means for further dialogue. The student's reference to Kenneth Lay and mismanagement of the Texas-based energy company Enron raises many questions in regard to the concept of "ethics" – yet it is an intrinsic connection drawn from the student's own thinking about those experiences, not the arbitrary act of "defining what ethics means" in a dry and ostensibly meaningless – at least to the student – paraphrase of King's words.

From a 60-page text, Paul and Elder devote 23 pages to paraphrasing, clearly endorsing its value as an exemplary tool of, as they term it, "[t]he art of substantive writing." The latter part of the book focuses on exploration of conflicting ideas, drawn from the work on paraphrasing that precedes it. The fundamental problem that persists, however, is that such exploration is still working from an a priori point of departure: It has not asked students to shift recursively into their own underlying ideas and responses, but instead moves *outwards* from ideas that belong to someone else. As Shermis asserts, the unexamined premises we hold begin a deductive process that systematically informs our conclusions, yet if the assumptions are unexamined, "the product of thought is undisciplined, random, and disconnected" (9). The concept of an unexamined premise is especially problematic when Paul and Elder, towards the end of the book, instruct students to analyze the reasoning behind the writing produced by others. Here, we are left in a cognitive blind alley, asked to critically analyze the author's purpose, the questions addressed by the author, the "most important information" – there's no reference to the "least" important information, which, on critical analysis, may in fact prove to be important after all – the implications of the author's viewpoint and speculation on possible authorial bias. Such a rubric-like checklist does not promote

internalized self-critical analysis. Instead, it operates as a self-contained rationale to assure ourselves that we have been "thinking critically" provided we answer the questions appropriately. The point that remains startlingly unanswered by Paul and Elder is thinking critically about whose perspective? Ours, or the authorial intent and effectiveness of its delivery? We are back to the Audience-Purpose-Rhetorical Effect triangulation.

Finally, Paul and Elder's text presents strategies for instructors to assist students in assessing their own and others' writing through peer critique, a strategy that allegedly frees the instructor from being "burdened by extensive grading of papers" (58). Any criticism that is offered, the authors state, "must be constructive, indicating where and how each paper could be improved" (58), a comment that invokes the metaphor of essay-as-building that I discuss earlier in this chapter. Further, it is recommended that once peer revision is complete, the students nominate several essays as candidates for "best paper of the day" – a process that, under the instructor's facilitation, is guided by "explicit intellectual standards in the assessment" (58). What such practice endorses is reification not only of how well a student has comprehended the ideas of another, how well that student can paraphrase those ideas, and to what degree the student can then mold those ideas into a coherent prose piece, but which student most closely matches the already-determined academic matrices established for comparison. With every step outlined as a sequential, non-recursive pathway, dependent on the parameters set by that pathway and allowing little room for deviation, Paul and Elder's applicative theory reflects many characteristics of "critical thinking" in the way I've defined it; that is, use of analytical logic, teacher as transmitter of knowledge, establishing objective-truth through systematic analysis, and adherence to political neutrality – in effect, a liberal-conservative framework for the teaching of English in the college classroom. Students are not positioned as agents provocateur of their own and others' thinking, respect is maintained for the authority of the text in regard to both its interpretation and further application, and empowerment, in this model, is neither individually transformative nor radical.

The promise of empowerment in a framework marred by urgent social problems of race, gender, and cultural conflict is an ambitions aim, one that seeks to enlighten

students about social silencing and reinforcing individual voice within a radically revisioned society. Touted as a liberatory rhetoric, empowerment can instead operate as a hidden curricula of oppression, one based on "a network of assumptions that, when internalized by students, establishes the boundaries of legitimacy … since at no time are the assumptions articulated or questioned" (Apple 99; see also Pinar et al.). Within this context, notions of empowerment become, to use Roger Simon's term, "woefully insufficient" (374). Protected by its alluring promise of liberation, empowerment is trapped within its own ideological framework. Simon is a vociferous critic in his condemnation of empowerment. First, however, he outlines the way this concept is frequently viewed:

> When we hear the word empowerment used in education, it is usually being employed in the spirit of critique. Its referent is the identification of oppressive and unjust relations within which there is an unwarranted limitation placed on human action, feeling, and thought. Such limitation is seen as constraining a person from the opportunity to participate on equal terms with other members of a group or community ... . To empower in this perspective is to counter the power of some people or groups to make others "mute." To empower is to enable those who have been silenced to speak. It is to enable the self-affirming expression of experiences mediated by one's history, language, and traditions. It is to enable those who have been marginalized economically and culturally to claim in both respects a status as full participating members of a community. (374)

The inadequacy of the rhetoric, as Simon asks, is "empowerment for what?" Instead, and drawing from the work of Ernst Bloch, he posits an alternative prescriptive, one that "empowers for possibility" and is linked with "educating students to take risks, to struggle with ongoing relations of power, to critically appropriate forms of knowledge that exist outside of their immediate experience." This, Simon argues, creates the possibility for students "to envisage versions of a world which is 'not yet'" and, in turn, "be able to alter the grounds upon which life is lived" (375).

It is through self-reflective and critical examination that we can begin to address the often painful truths that confront us in "taken-for-granted ways of thinking which justify war, racism, and indifference to human suffering" (377; Corrigan). Simon emphasizes the need for counterdiscourse to open the possibility of new voices for students to define and interrogate their own and others' experiences (378-79). The issue for critical pedagogues, therefore, is not one of revealing injustice or oppression – as if students are nothing more than unenlightened members of the masses – but to question existing truths and consider alternative perspectives we may never have thought possible, involving "a serious dialogue (perhaps even a struggle) over assigned meaning, over the interpretation of experience, and possible versions of 'self'" (379).

4.3 Disequilibria and the Egocentric

The concept of disequilibria is fundamental to all four "criticals" – thinking, pedagogy, literacy, and care – although the applications are distinct. For critical thinking within a liberal-conservative framework, disequilibria cannot be tolerated in regards to formal and informal logic and is, therefore, systematically eradicated when striving to arrive at a logical truth. For critical pedagogy and critical literacy, disequilibrium are contentious fulcrums serving as points from which oppressive social forces can be identified and challenged, reflecting a pedagogy that aims to instigate praxis. In critical care, however, with its Progressive-Humanist principles of respect for multiple perspectives, emphasis on collaboration, consensual problem solving, and focus on individual reality, disequilibria is a threat that needs defusing through facilitated discussion. And, it is because disequilibria is potentially so problematic in critical care that I will focus on it here.

At the core of critical care is respect for and authentication of individual voice. Opinions in the critical care classroom are equally valid, and ground-rules for discussion set early in the semester serve to guarantee such transactions. The environment is one of nurturing, sharing, and hospitality – a place where students feel comfortable and at-ease participating in the respectful exchange of ideas. Disagreement, although not discouraged, needs to be phrased carefully and with consideration of the recipient's feelings. Rules governing interaction with colleagues, therefore, involve a commitment

to "take turns [in] speaking and listening, always with courtesy and respect" with a distinction made between "offering criticism that proves helpful in the revision process and making disparaging comments" (Carstensen 1). When disagreement occurs, there is an acute awareness that critique can be taken personally, and even equated as attack (Paul). The concept of critical care works to negate the possibilities of such contextual reception, and it does so by an ardent and unfettered commitment to individual respect.

It is not so different to expect the same kind of tolerance and hospitality in settings of social exchange. Even the concept of hospitality invokes images of guest and host, with the accompanying rules of social engagement determined by a culture generally understood by both parties. We listen politely to views that may be different from our own, and when we choose to disagree it is enacted in a way that minimizes or, preferably, eliminates the possibility of offense. Yet, given such a framework of exchange, people still tend to consider criticality "as a form of hostile interrogation" and "come to believe that those who question their ideas and points of view are ... attempting to undermine their very being" (Weil 11). Indeed, many students equate critique as something negative. The pejorative adjectival semantics of "critical" has construed it as "a form of social or educational bad taste. Being critical is seen to have harmful consequences, such as destroying others' motivation or causing irreparable harm to their self-image" (Brookfield 35). Other condemnations of criticality are justified by claims that "overly critical, overly zealous demands too often result in defensiveness and resistance" (Spigelman. "Argument" 81), or that it is a form of "toxic shame" that causes students to "suffer from such a negative self-image" that interactions take place in a polluted context of self-hate and self-abasement (Bradshaw; Scheff 398; Yager 58). Certainly, such environments are not conducive to learning, and therefore we can readily understand an emphasis on the need for respect, tolerance, and even the non-judgmental in written and spoken interactions. As such, students often actively seek the affirming power of saying something – anything – positive in the active pursuit of tolerance. However, as Audrey Lorde asserts, "[d]ifference must not be merely tolerated, but seen as a fund of necessary polarities between which our creativity can spark like a dialectic. Only then does the necessity for interdependence become unthreatening" (112, qtd. in Ellsworth, "Empowering" 318).

Reducing the perceived threat of criticism in peer critique is a point Rubin addresses when she writes of her students "sandwiching" critical commentary between positive remarks. What is interesting about Rubin's approach is that it exemplifies the strong place of social discourse in critical care. The tone taken by Rubin's students is conversational and friendly, in peer critiques that average 140 words apiece and allegedly identify insufficient explanation and lack of development in the writing of their colleagues (383). Rubin claims that 77 percent of the reviews are "couched in polite language," making it "easier for the writer to accept" criticism (386, 385). Given the 140-word average, this leaves only 32 words of critique – hardly impressive when we consider it is about the same number of words that are in this sentence. Curiously, Rubin also refers to the concept of detachment in her classroom, yet it is more a detachment from personal responsibility than the subjectivity of taking criticism personally. As she writes, at times her students turn to absolving themselves of responsibility for the content of their critiques by appealing to the teacher's authority, such as a student writing "it seems as though we are supposed to have some sort of reflective paragraph ... so you *might* want to add what you learned or got from this interview" or "I'm pretty sure that the paper has to be 2 pages long. So *she* [the teacher] might not give you full credit" (386-87). Absolving responsibility, however, is a contentious claim if we are to recognize the importance of encouraging students' authority over their own texts and the words and ideas that produce those texts. While the social niceties of bolstering confidence and not-being-too-negative are apparent in Rubin's classroom, the result that students feel good about both giving and receiving critiques is ultimately only a victory for self-esteem.

The dilemma, therefore, is clear: How can students reach a desirable point of cognitive struggle and confusion that, in turn, leads to discovery and learning without feeling the pain that criticism undoubtedly delivers? This apparent incongruity is a further point of contention when we consider that if all those in an academic community "should be accorded opportunities to express their views openly, without fear," it is not unreasonable to expect that in such an environment "all viewpoints will be and should be critically interrogated" (MLA 159). I emphasize the phrase "academic community" because there is a tendency to misalign the tenets of social discourse with that of

academia, or what William Coles describes as "clichés about classroom etiquette, that code of good manners that can freeze intellectual inquiry" ("Response" 78). In this context, dissent becomes a privilege rather than a place to promote a sense of "academic quest and endemic unrest" (Illich 49, 51). Ironically, although driven by a sincere desire to not cause offense or tension, what we posit to be sincerity in social situations is often inauthentic and actively seeks to evade dissent. For the academic environment, however, it is precisely these difficulties and tensions that underscore the development and analysis of thought – the learning that Alma Whiteley describes as part of an iceberg below the surface that can't be seen, the "portion that comes through struggle, debate, discussion, and thinking" – a part that is not always legitimized by the student (1). At issue is the world of the egocentric and perceptions of its fragility. This raises questions about the existence of an ostensibly impenetrable barrier between perception and consciousness, something that Freud posits can only be broken through traumatic experiences that pierce our protective internal shield of psychical consciousness.

As William Coles asserts, it is the trauma of acerbic honesty in criticism that can provide impetus to challenge the manacles of personal belief. With an open and confrontational style of criticism, Coles exemplifies terse, radical written commentary as a way to "shame" students from complacency and to avoid giving false platitudes. Coles articulates what many instructors of first-year English courses often see: Student writing where "[n]o observation was too trivial to escape oratorical pronouncement; no moral stance too obvious to assume" and essays that are "triumphs of self-obliteration ... as much a bore to read as they must have been to write" (Coles, qtd. in Yager 66). For students to accept a sense of shame is a difficult issue, and "learning to question our own belief systems relative to another point of view, and learning to substitute self-questioning for self-righteousness is ... an often downright threatening process" (Weil 2). Conditioned to the mantra of social discourse that mandates the gilt-edged rule of saying nothing if we can't say something "nice," receiving honestly critical criticism can be a crushing experience. Yet, a radical pedagogy inherently carries disequilibria as an internal principle of change (Phelps; Salibrici), seeking transformation in learning that does not reward students for thinking a certain way, but promotes, as Tingle points out, "real psychological resistance – anger, depression, and despair [as] the painful

consequences of that narcissistic wounding which must occur as students seek to realize and confront their own limitations" (19). These signs of narcissistic wounding should not be seen as regression or irrationality from the student, but understood as "the painful effects of self-fragmentation" (14-15).

Bernard Meltzer and Gil Musolf advance the concepts of shame and narcissism into a distinction between two forms of response termed resentment and ressentiment. The former is "a feeling of displeasure induced by being insulted, offended, or deprived" and the latter "a consequence of explicit or implicit adverse judgments by others" (241). Ressentiment, it is argued, is the source with the greatest potential for both individual and collective action that in turn leads to social change (251). Foucault, too, emphasizes the need to create possibility for transformative change, as opposed to the superficial and self-deceiving platitudes that can beguile us into thinking we have been transformed. Transformation, Foucault posits, "is never anything but the result of a process in which there is conflict, confrontation, struggle, resistance," and when we reach the stage where it is no longer possible to think the way we usually do, transformation of our selves "becomes simultaneously very urgent, very difficult, and altogether possible" ("Est-il donc" 34). Virginia Anderson, citing Dale Bauer and Kenneth Burke, asserts that Bauer believes it is "only where there is division, with its concomitant dissonance and instability, can movement or change take place," while for Burke it is "only when a rhetor persuades one of his [or her] own dissident selves can real conversion take place" (389, 39, qtd. in Anderson 200). Here is the challenge for the critical pedagogue. Questioning the existence of the self can be terrifying, threatening what Tingle cites as "ontological security" in the sense of an "elemental doubt concerning the right to exist" (Laing, qtd. in Tingle 6). And, in light of challenges to the security of being comes the intrinsic need to argue for that being's beliefs, of arguing for the right to one's own existence (6).

4.4 Reinscribing Caring

It is apparent that enacting a radical and potentially transformational critical pedagogy is very much concerned with students as individuals – concerned with what they think, what they write, and how they reflect on that writing and thinking in active

ways. When I care enough to be honest with my students, I take the time to tell them, through writing, what I honestly and critically think about their points, ideas, and words. It would be easy to siphon off the pile of papers before me with a few check marks, an encouraging word or two, and perhaps a line about the need to revise sentence fragments. Yet, to do this means that I am disengaging from my students' writing at the same time that I am emphasizing the need for them to become engaged with it. As a critical pedagogue, this is an irony I cannot reconcile. What does, however, call for reconciliation is how to enact such critical honesty, yet avoid students perceiving it as personal attack. Extending Coles' concept of shaming – an approach also apparent in the work of Socrates, Nietzsche, Sartre and Marcuse (Yager; Coles) – many scholars endorse the concept of playfulness (Bakhtin; Janks; Derrida; Oakeshott; D. Seitz; Giroux; Kenway and Bullen) to foster the type of disequilibria that is characteristic of critically reflective thought (Phelps; Salibrici; Roberts-Miller; Shermis; Paul; Ellsworth). Others, drawing on the application of disequilibria as a form of exile, see it as a way for individuals to move beyond self-imposed ideological barriers and to explore alternative cognitive worlds, reflected in the scholarship of Giroux, Piaget, Derrida, Said, Foucault, Tingle, and Freire. In attempting to revision what it is to care, the authenticity of such self-inscribed borders is problematic because without critical, self-reflective examination of such cognitive frameworks, a priori validation of thought is maintained. Learning is not pain-free and should not "feel 'good' to all" (Horner 134; Goffman; Lewis; Scheff; Ellsworth; Tompkins; Shermis). Engagement in critical thought requires us to move beyond who and what we know, and even be willing to see ourselves "in the unflattering light of another's angry gaze" (Delpit 46-47).

David Seitz asserts that humor and parody are potentially students' strongest critical tools (507), in keeping with the idea that humor – particularly satire and irony – is effective because those who identify with what is humorous, satirical, and ironic do so because they understand the framework of comparison within which the points are made. To recognize irony, we must see where incongruity is apparent and why it is incongruous; for satire, we need to first know the deeper implications of a situation; for humor, we need to at least be able to draw parallels with our lived experiences and recognize our own investiture in what is constituted as humorous: Simply, we must get

the joke. Humor can also offer acerbic social commentary, and this relates to Seitz' qualification of the *potential* for parody and humor to be strong critical tools. Satire, as Hillocks claims, is the key to an "ambience of renewal ... . It offers resources that encourage, perhaps demand, seeing in different ways ... [with] all the tools of the satirist – diatribe, exaggeration, understatement, symbolism, irony, travesty, and parody" (131). Yet, unless we are willing to turn the humor on ourselves, the potential power of this tool locates the humorous as a distant Other at which we can laugh or even shake our heads in disquieted sobriety at the way things "ought to be," but are not. If we are to engender the possibility of real social change, such concern needs to be internally directed as the painful pleasure of examining and reflecting on the way we "ought" to be ourselves.

The pleasure of consternation in a revisioned critical pedagogy comes from investiture by each student. Rather than requiring students to analyze the writing of others, this can be better achieved through critical examination of the student's own ideas. The objective is to assist students to move into a cognitive state of being that makes a reinvention of self possible, or what Graff describes as a means by which to divide ourselves from the text of self; "to generate a second, third, or fourth self to see what is written from the outside" (qtd. in Hillocks 7). Moffett calls for recognizing that the mind and self "are social artifacts, and [as] the constituents of the self mirror the constituents of society, [critical] thought involves ... addressing oneself internally as one would address another externally" (*Teaching* 67, qtd. in Crusius 56). I posit that not only are such tools under-used in the critical care classroom, but are actively, if unintentionally, prevented from reaching their critical potential by the need to be mindful about critique and to whom it is directed. Moreover, clear distinctions are drawn between what constitutes private and public spaces. Political satirists, for example, are free to caricature politicians by the nature of public life; offer a satirical critique of the individual in private life and we may well confront allegations of slander or libel. Yet, the pedagogy of critical care, with its referents of warmth, nurture, and home exude, endorse, and ultimately privilege a space of private sphere safety.

The concept of space and its role in a critically reflective pedagogy is addressed by Janks who suggests that critical thought can be granted the interpretive and analytical

complexity it demands when we actively move into territories of self-identification, desire, the transgressive and the taboo. It has also been described as engagement in the profane (Kenway and Bullen), as "disturbing pleasures" (Giroux), and giving students "permission to be other than sensible and serious" (Comber, qtd. in Janks 9). Endorsing the use of irreverence as "a rebellion against authority and how to transgress the restraints of political correctness" (11), Janks claims that "joke work" is effective because it operates at a level beneath the consciousness-of-self that can function as a barrier to expression of thought. Moreover, it may directly or even indirectly challenge the accepted truths of the status quo (12). It opens a means by which we can deviate from "discursive policing," or what Janks describes as offering an invitation to transgress the organized "field of the sayable" (13), engaging in what Erving Goffman claims is an embarrassment that can be "exquisitely painful" (qtd. in Scheff 397). Hillocks alludes that it is the teacher's role to extend such an invitation by way of asking questions "that push at the edges of student ideas" (65), yet I would argue that while a teacher may facilitate – or even model – such transgression, the deeper investiture comes when it is students themselves who forge new transgressive paths. As Ivan Illich argues, such avenues for "real learning" occur when students challenge the ideas of other students through exposure to confrontation and criticism, guided "by an experienced elder who really cares" (109). Similarly, and describing a constituent point where "learning happens," Ellsworth describes "an ellipse, rather than a circle. Learning happens when the very question we asked in order to seek a learning has been displaced by the return of a difference, a surprising, unexpected, interfering encounter" (*Teaching* 147).

I posit that one of the characteristics of a revisioned concept of caring is radically honest critique, delivered and motivated by sincere interest in and genuine care for each student. Coles takes a similar position when contending with formulaic student essay writing. It is not unusual for Coles to offer commentary that asks the student if the essay is "only intended to be another god-damned paper for another god-damned English course" (*Plural* 31), or "[c]ome clean now – didn't writing this bore [the] hell out of you?" (19). Working with concepts of shame, humor, and critical honesty, Coles seeks to defamiliarize the cognitive space of an essay and, by extension, the ideas of the

student who has produced it. Further, his objective is to radically alter the perceptual framework of many students in regard to their education. As Coles writes:

> The students behaved like Students. What I heard from was not individuals but The Committee, The Perfect Student, Mr. Corporate Identity, which informed me that he had come to college to be Educated: to be guided, steered, directed, formed, shaped, molded, and so on by teachers (that is, by Teachers) whose sympathy, tolerance, understanding, and unfailing goodwill he was sure he could be depended upon to throw the switch that would painlessly complete the circuit of knowledge. (I was also assured, however, but with no sense of the contradiction involved, that of course it was the Students' responsibility to "digest" or "incorporate" his Knowledge into his Own Life, thereby learning to Think for Himself. (8)

The troubling concept in Coles' caricature of the typical student, however, is the belief that teachers are sympathetic, tolerant, understanding; in short, teachers care. To rearticulate such caring, if we first consider the binary opposites of these words we can then begin to examine their ideological loadings: unsympathetic, intolerant, misunderstanding; teacher does not care. Yet, what constitutes a lack of sympathy, tolerance, and understanding depends very much on the contextual framework in which it is placed. As a critical pedagogue, for example, I cannot sympathize with nor tolerate – and find it very difficult to understand – perceptions of racism or homophobia. An intellectualized response, within that critical pedagogy, calls for one of critical challenge, argument, and dislocation. In this context, I am not sympathetic, nor tolerant, and I will articulate my inability to understand the oppression of another human being based on color of skin or sexual orientation. I will care enough about the circulation of hatred and social injustice in the society of which I am a part to argue critically and fiercely – yet expect the same in return. Such an exchange is not particularly one of sharing and in most cases will not reflect the pleasantries of a Sunday afternoon barbeque, but entertaining revered visitors is not my purpose as a critical pedagogue; critiquing and opening ideas and their ideologies for analysis is.

A radically revisioned critical pedagogue cares deeply for her students and the social conditions in which all play a part as members of a society, whether that society is beyond the classroom or within its walls. In this light, critically reflective thought and the extension of its argument is creative, subjective, and passionate. Such re-visioning works against traditional concepts of what constitutes "logical" and "critical" thinking, with the associated belief that to be objective is to provide a faithful and balanced reproduction of "both sides" of an issue and, moreover, that reason is the antithesis of emotion. As Paul writes:

> [W]e must challenge the reason-versus-emotion stereotype, which fosters the view that a rational person is cold, unfeeling, and generally without passion, whereas an irrational person is passionate but unintellectual. A false dichotomy is set up between reason and passion, and we are forced to choose between the two as incompatible opposites. (141)

The synthesis of creativity, passion, and subjectivity, as Crusius observes, achieves something that the logic of literal synthesis rejects as illogical; that is, the accommodation of contradictions (109). Moreover, as Brookfield claims, "[m]ost significant advances in people's ability to think critically arise out of periods of frustration and struggle" (234). Inherent in such struggle are emotions such as anxiety, stress, tension, uncertainty, and discomfort (7), reflecting Tingle's call for "a position that is anti-narcissistic, which posits as its notion of maturity the uprooting of narcissism" (13). My reinscription of what it means to care is, therefore, committed to the concepts of dissonance, discrepancy, and disequilibria (Brookfield 31). It is not my intention to measure success in terms of how many students take on my ideological view of the world at the expense of theirs, but that the process of teaching critically reflective thinking might make it clear that I care about the possibility of them reconsidering their own.

4.5 Exile From Self

Subjecting our selves to Delpit's "angry gaze" of our own construction can be a painful act of cognition. One way to alleviate it is to enact an exile from self, of moving beyond self-imposed ideological borders to explore alternative cognitive worlds. As

Brookfield posits, "[a]ttempting to understand our frameworks of understanding ... is like trying to step outside of our physical body so that we can see how a new coat or dress looks like from behind" (29). Applied to the college English writing classroom, such exploration constitutes a "meta-discursive writing pedagogy" that seeks to examine "a position based on personal experience [and] yet transcending it – bridging the phenomenological gap" or chasm of the "dialectic between self and culture" (France 155, 149); an act of venturing out and then coming back to where we began (Eagleton 48). By way of exile from self, it is possible to see, as France claims, that "our deepest aversions may not really be 'ours' at all; they may be culturally constituted" in a "dialectic of selfhood and subjectivity" (155-56). Critically reflective thinking, then, is not an externalized projection of what we are and who we know, but an internalized reflection on what we acknowledge our selves as being, with the genuine possibility of being something very different.

Places of territory can be represented by images of cognitive space, a map of the mind that marks the points of our own belief systems with a borderland surrounding that space delineated by ridges we do not usually cross. Whatever lies beyond those ridges of cognition is an unknown landscape, and there lies the possibilities of alternative spaces our thoughts might occupy. When investigating these unknown spaces, we may find a self that is a stranger to us, or in Ellsworth's words, "a loss of the self thought to be here and a finding of the self elsewhere, caught up in the different patterns of relations to self and others" (*Teaching* 59). If in light of juxtaposition with our own systems of belief we discover an irreconcilable incongruity, we may find it is no longer possible to think in ways we have done previously. Part of the self dies and yet, simultaneously, a reconstituted part of our selves comes into being. Crossing the ridges or borders of our own ideological selves, and subjecting our beliefs to the "considerable strain and buffeting" of dialectic movement, represents a journey of adventure, one that resembles "the mythic pattern of death and rebirth" (Tingle 6).

The importance of the self as an individual undertaking this movement beyond its own cognitive and ideological borders is crucial in terms of fostering genuine opportunity for change. As Tingle asserts, "critical consciousness requires critical self-consciousness" (10). Drawing on the work of Giroux, Tingle claims it is not enough for

a liberatory pedagogy to merely demonstrate through text and lecture that "the thought of our society is ideologically informed," but that students need active engagement in a "critical *self*-consciousness with respect to the impact of ideology upon their 'inner' lives," or what constitutes their own ideology of knowing (Giroux 150; Tingle 2). Tingle endorses the concept that once his students "have understood their interpretations as the expression of beliefs, they will [then] examine their beliefs in a way that allows for yet another return to the text at an even deeper level of complexity" (2). As Burbules posits, encounters "with a radically different, unreconciled, and unreconcilable point of view, value, voice, or belief can ... cause us to question the horizons of our own assumptions, to explore within ourselves ... the possibility of a radically different way of approaching the world" (260). Yet, as Aronowitz observes, individuals often resist change, and by default invest in the maintenance of their own oppression, because "they recoil at taking risk" (9). Critical self-consciousness, however, requires an individual precisely to risk losing part of the self, to stand back from his or her own established beliefs about what constitutes that self, and be committed to seeing that self as potentially problematic. As a phenomenological act, the process of critical self-reflection is a means by which the individual positions his or her self/being as alienated, intangible, and unknown.

Giroux, focusing on what he sees as a misappropriation of Paulo Freire's work, writes of "border crossers," those who recognize their own ideological borders and transgress them as an intellectual component of the "discourse of invention and construction" as opposed to a "discourse of recognition whose aim is reduced to revealing and transmitting universal truths" ("Paulo Freire" 2). Mikhail Bakhtin, too, asserts that "language, for the individual consciousness, lies on the borderline between oneself and the other" ("Discourse" 293). Some, however, find it difficult to accept that we are capable of transcending our own ideological borders, claiming that disengagement is not only a painful process that will be deeply resented by students, but also a prescription for martyrdom (Hoth 1). Moreover, "[m]any students won't even have enough mental energy to maintain a 'personal belief,' much less the need to 'disengage' from one, and those who have a 'personal belief' aren't likely to embrace the trauma of treating it as a construct" (1). And yet, as Edward Soja presents, the ability to separate from and objectify the world is a constituent part of being human:

> This process of objectification defines the human situation and predicates it upon spatiality, on the capacity for detachment made possible by distancing, by being spatial to begin with. ... Objectification, detachment, and distancing, however, are but one existential dimension of consciousness, the basis for only a minimal definition of being. To be human is not only to create distances but to attempt to cross them. ... Thus, as [Martin] Buber argues, human consciousness arises from the interplay ... of distancing and relation. (132-33)

While the student writer may well distance herself through internalized questioning and raise objections to her own ideas, the emphasis is "within the boundaries of his [or her] own utterance" (Bakhtin, "Speech" 72). The more critical question is how does one ask, guide, or assist a student to see beyond those boundaries; that those boundaries are, indeed, an ideological framework drawn from a "very complexly organized chain of other utterances" (69). These internalized boundaries are manifestations of individuality – yet paradoxically an individuality that has more to do with the influence of others than the individual – and it is this "imprint of individuality marking the work [that] also creates special internal boundaries" (75). Bakhtin writes of borders as "junctures and points of intersection" ("Text" 103), rhetorically asking "[h]ow are the firm boundaries of the utterance determined?" As he replies to himself, "[b]y metalinguistic forces" (114). It is not, therefore, the linguistic elements of sentence structure that create the boundaries of utterance, but the cognate process of joining and rejoining different sets of linguistic forces into a coherent whole, and that the whole has meaning, whereas the parts on their own do not. Critical thought focuses on a shifting frame of reference; the points where boundaries overlap and are, therefore, in a constant state of definition and redefinition (Bailin 26).

In practice, many students are not equipped to confront such radical concepts. Frequently the products of an educational system that rewards memorization and re-articulation of knowledge for reproduction on standardized tests, first-year college students are, in Patricia Braswell's words, often "reasonably happy and content" when they get what they expect: to come to class, to sit, and to absorb (66). When Braswell radically altered her teaching in one semester, providing students with the latitude to

lead their own learning through critical initiatives, those in the critical control group were frustrated with "this 'new stuff'":

> They felt that they were having to *do* too much; they were ... reluctant to lead discussions and present workshop findings. In short, they were threatened by the whole idea of assuming the responsibility for their own learning, of looking through different eyes, of realizing that often there is not a "right" answer. ... They were shocked, and – at the outset – quite miserable. They got what they did not expect. Rather than sitting and absorbing, they came, they thought, and they talked. (69, 68)

It is not surprising that Braswell's students were uncomfortable. As Salibrici has observed, the constitutive normality of the Western classroom lends itself to students who "want to know the truth, any truth, and they want me to tell them"; and, when such answers are not forthcoming, students "become confused and disconcerted" (635). Yet, although Shermis asserts that some degree of puzzlement, confusion, disorientation, or bewilderment is an integral component of self-reflective thinking (30), ironically many teachers fear "the prospect of a classroom of students expressing themselves vehemently, disagreeing with one another, and ultimately refusing to accept the teacher-approved and authoritative version of truth" (30-31). Knowledge, however, at least from Giroux's perspective, emerges from "an ongoing process of struggle and negotiation" ("Pedagogy" 10), and the role of education as provisional place to engage in knowledge-building should also be "a place to resist hegemonic authority, unsettle strategies of domination ... from a position of engaged self-criticism and as a critical object of classroom analysis" (14-15). While Zygmunt Bauman claims that "[t]he trouble with our civilization is that it has stopped questioning itself" (6-7, qtd. in Giroux 1), I would posit that the real root of the problem is not so much the questioning of civilization, but the civility in which we surround our questioning, the primacy we afford to privileging veracity of individual truth, and a near-refusal to acknowledge the implication of our selves in the ignorance of its cognitively dangerous design.

4.6 *Decritique*: The Critical Reconceptualized

Opening this chapter, I asked where a re-visioned pedagogy of critique might fit in regard to thinking and writing in the first-year college classroom, and outlined my discussion in terms of Respect and Empowerment, Disequilibria and the Egocentric, a Reinscription of Caring, and Exile From Self. The result is a reconceptualized and radical pedagogy I call *Decritique*, in which respect and empowerment are recast as agents provocateur of *dis*respect and *dis*empowerment: The primacy of self is de-centered through seeking disequilibria of the egocentric; the concept of care is revisioned as caring enough to critique critically; and the individual actively seeks temporary exile from the borders of self. *Decritique* aims to move students towards thinking critically not only about their writing, but the thinking that produces the writing. The two componential aspects of such critical writing and thinking are Deracination and the Detached Intellectualized Space (D.I.S).

Deracination stems from the French word *déraciner*, meaning to uproot from an environment geographically or socially, though in the context of *Decritique* it means to uproot cognitively: to criticize, problematize, and complicate points of view in order to expose and disrupt their verbal motifs (Bakhtin, "Discourse" 353). The objective is not an artificial binary of a both-sides argument that is characteristic of debate: There is no two-sided issue, no declared winner, and no presentation of an issue from position-Y or position-X. Deracination is more concerned with the *process* of argument than the outcome; indeed, establishing something about which to argue is part of the thinking involved. To deracinate is to take a consciously critical stance as a deracinator, whose task is to act as agent provocateur in critiquing the expression of thought, and engage in a dialogue of *de*constructive rather than constructive criticism. Such critique comes from both teacher and students (see fig. 4.2). In the teacher-to-student model, instructors engage with students by way of critical commentary; students respond by writing back a re-visioned work in what is an ongoing process of cognitive advance and retreat. In the student-to-student model, students take the role of deracinator, critiquing a student-colleague's writing. The student recipient then responds with a counter-deracination to further deconstruct the developing dialogue. While the examples given here of student deracination and counter-deracination constitute what I call a "deracination set," such

dialogue could continue ad infinitum. Absolved of the need to say something positive merely for the sake of it, deracination is a movement of critical recursivity, providing a means for students to re-vision their ideas in a process of struggle for meaning and "engaged self-criticism," even when the target of satire is writing they have produced themselves (Giroux, "Pedagogy" 14-15; V. Anderson; B. Flores). In deracination, everyone gets the point of parody because all have been part of its construction. From the instructor comes a refusal to see students as anything less than scholars-in-training, as learners who need to recognize the parameters of their own knowledge and to experience the exquisite pain of creating possible change.

A crucial accompaniment to deracination is willingness from students and instructor to operate in what I have termed the Detached Intellectualized Space (D.I.S). Because many students perceive the nature of critical inquiry to be hurtful, deracination requires a conscious decision to desensitize our responses; an agreement to not take criticism personally. It involves asking students to momentarily assume a different self, aligning with the Vygotskian ideal of "an imaginary space in which the self attempts new identities" (Yager 59; Vygotsky), and to step into an unreal world of the Bakhtinian carnivalesque, a "sociolinguistic fun fair" (Richter 725) where there is a sense of flouting prevailing truths and authorities (Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 11). Within the D.I.S, points and contentions can be quite literally pulled up by the roots – deracinated – and because there is a conscious commitment to operate within this detached space, critical examination occurs without the perception of it as personal attack. Within the D.I.S we can anesthetize the potential pain of critique to our selves. We are free to write something that is not nice, and we agree to evaluate the merits of what is written without allowing slighted feelings to color the words we choose. No longer do we need to be mindful of the standardized rules of social discourse. We need not concern ourselves with the idea that if we cannot say something nice, we ought to say nothing at all. The D.I.S is interpellation of self into a public area of carnival, where rules are free to be transgressed. And yet, it is an intellectualized space: name-calling or obscenity is regarded as ungrounded in intellectual inquiry. To use Derrida's term, the D.I.S is a "borderless" space in which we are free to temporarily rescind our ideological truths

without fear of consequence. It is a place of Bakhtinian "publicistic discourse," a shared space of critical possibilities.

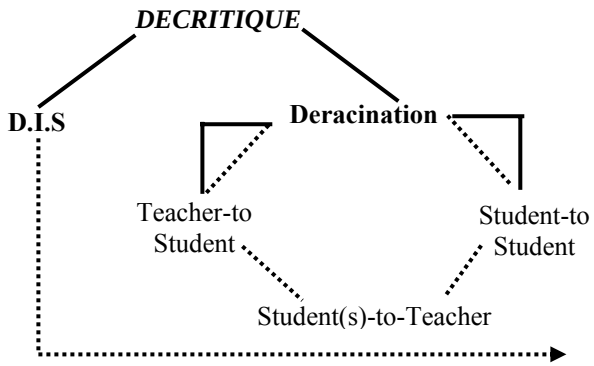


Fig. 4.2: Model of *Decritique*: Deracination and the D.I.S.

4.6.1 Implementing *Decritique*

When walking into a *Decritique* classroom on the first day of semester, one of the first concepts I introduce to my students is that "confusion is good," a statement that often results in quizzical expressions and sometimes laughter. It is good, I emphasize, because if we have no confusion then we are perfectly clear about an issue or situation and therefore have no need to learn more about it. Confusion, however, comes in different guises, from mildly disconcerted doubt that something just doesn't seem right, to total bewilderment, or anywhere in between. I reinforce the idea that what we do with this confusion constitutes the parameters of our own critical thought: We recognize a need for change and take the initiative to consider alternatives as genuine possibilities. Recognizing the need for change involves giving credibility to our confusion, acknowledging it as though a puzzle piece were missing or that the piece we have in place does not fit after all. Inspiration to implement change, once recognized, is also grounds for confusion – for as learners we can be unsure about how to modify our understanding. In short, because we haven't cognitively "been there," we don't even know what "there" looks like. I tell my *Decritique* students things I would not ordinarily consider saying: That their class will be a critical one, that they will find me acerbic and direct, that I have no interest in knowing about internet down-time, grandmothers who are dying, issues, problems, work schedules, or tyrannical bosses. Typically, the response of students is a stultified silence that momentarily leaves me with a sense of dread, and inevitably I ask myself what is it that I'm trying to achieve? My answer is

that I'm trying not to take the pallid and colorless "you'll be fine" with plenty-of-encouragement route, and that my critical commentary is in keeping with the degree of criticality that I posit is effective. Still, initial meetings with my *Decritique* students carry an inherent sense of fear that I'm walking on the edge of an abyss.

There are four applications of criticality through writing in the *Decritique* classroom: The two primary forms focus on critical responses made by teacher and students to formal essays, with the more traditionally accepted terms for teacher commentary being "grading," "evaluation," or "marking," and for students "peer review" or "peer critique." The secondary application is used in less formal writing, for this study delivered through use of asynchronous electronic discussion forums – both "open" and "private" – within the educational software package WebCT. The concepts of "public" and "private" are important in *Decritique*, and characteristic of both the primary and secondary forms of its application. As Brookfield asserts, a crucial tenet of critically reflective thought involves "alternating phases of analysis and action" (23), or what I term "advance and retreat." The rationale behind public, open advance and private, reflective retreat seeks to exemplify a concrete re-cognition of the difference between our public and private thoughts (see fig. 4.3). Because student perceptions of self are often cast into immutable frameworks of "what I believe," it can be initially difficult for them to re-cast their conceptual views of the world into discrete private and public spheres.

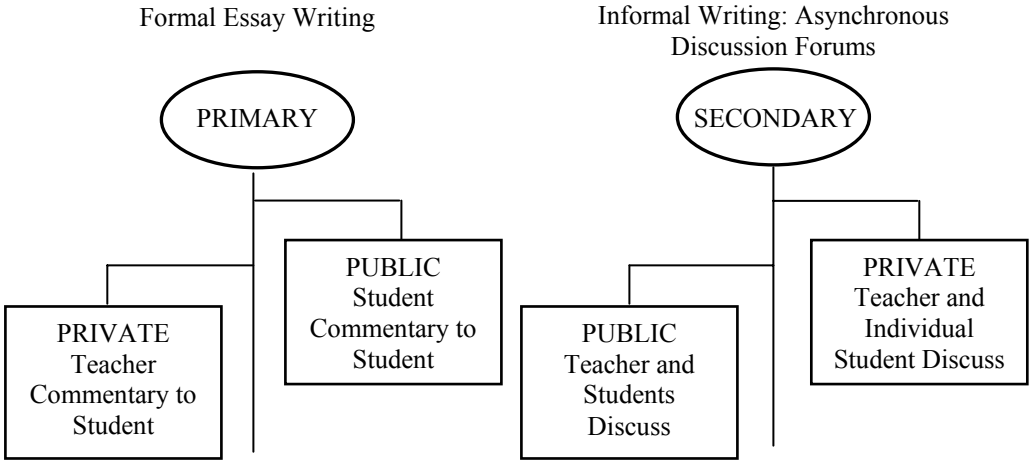


Fig. 4.3: Four Applications of Criticality Through Writing in the *Decritique* Classroom

Here, Stephen Brookfield and Stephen Preskill offer a useful semantic comparison that assists students with this transition, making a distinction between "discussion" and "conversation." Discussion, they claim, "is a way of talking that emphasizes the inclusion of the widest variety of perspectives and a self-critical willingness to change what we believe if convinced by the arguments of others" (xv). Alternatively, and drawing on the work of Matthew Lipman, conversation "seeks equilibrium, with each person in turn taking opportunities to speak and then listen but where little or no movement occurs" and the exchange of thought takes place in an atmosphere of prevailing genial cooperation (4). Discussion does not seek consensus, but rather disequilibria. It is a risky and unpredictable process whereby "each argument evokes a counterargument that pushes itself beyond the other and pushes the other beyond itself" (Lipman, *Thinking* 232, qtd. in Brookfield and Preskill 5). The classroom where distinction is not made between discussion and conversation risks a misplaced understanding of what constitutes critical discourse, one with only "some vague sense of people remaining cordial" (Roberts-Miller 538).

The precept of cordiality, characteristic of critical care, focuses on public space at the expense of private reflection. Moreover, it is a public space construed by the rules of social discourse. Here, Brookfield and Preskill warn of inauthenticity lapsing into bland tolerance that, because almost any comment is acceptable, leads to "the meandering classroom conversation" that is devoid of developmental depth (16). Those who challenge the niceties of conversational exchange are considered argumentative and frequently condemned for violating the rules of engagement. Alleged perpetrators are silenced, either through public beration or silent ostracism (Roberts-Miller 552). To circumvent the quashing of dissent a model of teaching is needed "that makes conflict not simply a preliminary step toward consensus but a 'public space where students can begin to form their own voices as writers and intellectuals'" (Harris 116, qtd. in Roberts-Miller 555). Such a model also needs to act as "a public space in which people do not simply speak to each other but one in which they listen. And one in which they argue" (555). While attaining consensus may provide a sense of closure, expecting an outcome of neat resolution is unrealistic and unnecessary in critically reflective thinking and for *Decritique*. While disagreement runs the risk of exacerbating inequalities and

differences, the alternative is to accept the ongoing inequity of the status quo (Brookfield and Preskill 28).

Consensual endorsement of the status quo is not, however, eliminated merely by the presence of dissent. Equally, there is risk of impasse where dissidents merely agree to disagree. The importance of private space retreat is apparent when dissenters cannot be accommodated; moreover, students inexperienced in critical argument can feel deeply threatened by challenges to their beliefs and resort to belligerent claims about the validity of "my opinion," or even seek refuge in a disaffected silence. Neither is desirable. As Brookfield points out, there is little purpose in "practicing a devastating critique ... if people are insulted or intimidated in the process" (72). While responses that dissolve analysis into a defensive mechanism of subjectified name-calling or personalized attack offer little in terms of the possibility for critical self-analysis, a response of silence holds promise in harnessing the essence of personal opinion within the safety of retreat as a place to "consider the different – the other – and to ponder the fragility of our own identities and our own ideals" (Brookfield and Preskill 20). Removed from the fear of exposure to ridicule or condemnation through public performance, students in private retreat can reflect on issues and contentions that challenge their own perceptual and cognitive frameworks, safe in the sense that their deliberations are removed from the potential hostility of a critical, public gaze. In such a space, students can risk failing "without feeling that in doing so they have actually failed" (Brookfield 74-75). Public and private spaces are, therefore, complementary aspects of critically reflective thought, where it becomes possible for one to both participate as a member of a discourse community and also risk alienation from its boundaries (Petruzzi 324). Movement between the public and the private spheres of discourse are, in Jamie Beth Berthel's words, a paradox of self-effacement and confirmation where the subject seeks to both affirm and extinguish itself (8).

In terms of responses to student writing in the *Decritique* classroom, public space criticism comes by way of deracination in which all participate; the dialogue of private space critique is restricted to the instructor and each individual student. Yet, regardless of whether public deracination or private evaluation of student writing, critical commentary is driven entirely by a focus on what students have written, just as if a

spoken conversation were taking place. Students, in turn, respond to the commentary, contributing to the development of critical dialogue. This interactivity minimizes measurement solely against pre-determined criteria and links discourse directly to the teaching and assessing of writing (Huot). The expression of thought, therefore, is not condemned to meeting the parameters of a rubric; instead, students engage in "rethinking cherished assumptions and ... subjecting those assumptions to a continuous round of questioning, argument, and counterargument" (Brookfield and Preskill 7). Critique is blunt, but contains a combination of sobriety and humor. Student assertions such as "racism is a problem and something has to be done about it" are likely met with a term borrowed from William Coles: "And who might take this issue on? The 'Jolly Green Giant'? What about some critical interpretation on this issue?" Another example is in response to the pedantic this-essay-will-show proclamation: "Why state the obvious? Do we need the pre-emption here? What about some critical reflection on themes, symbolism, characterization, and interpretation of these rather than some bland announcement about something that will ultimately be evident – or should be."

Clearly, students need to be prepared to accept such critical remarks, reinforcing the importance of agreement to operate in the D.I.S. Yet, there also needs to be commitment to the recursive practice of revision and rewriting, and it is for this reason that the first essay submissions in the *Decritique* classroom often receive a "non-grade" of Draft. Although students who are locked into the expectations of writing as a finite product find this frustrating – at times preferring the concrete failure of an F – assigning a draft status shifts the focus from measuring a piece of writing against a pre-determined standard to a statement about the writing as a work-in-progress. While the former ostensibly indicates hierarchical sorting of student ability, the latter is concerned with critically developing the thought that underscores the writing. The objective is to demand cognitive excellence from all, or what Brookfield and Preskill cite as "hold[ing] our students to a higher deliberative standard" – but one that can be risky if imposed too early (15). While eventually every assignment needs "a grade," the process of establishing where that mark will fall initially needs to be fluid, undetermined, and open to the possibility of excellence. Through deracination, instructor commentary, student responses, and opportunity for revision, I want my students to engage in cognitive

possibilities and alternative modes of thinking that previously they may not have considered, underscored by the potential to initiate change on their own accord.

The place of peer critique in the first-year college English classroom is widely endorsed, with its touted benefits ranging from collaboration and shared knowledge-building among a community of learners, to students' active engagement with their own writing and its assessment, to providing opportunity for critical dialogue, to lessening the burden of teacher-grading. As a concept, peer critique has merit. Encountering "equals who hold 'inconvenient' opinions" is a potentially powerful force: "We cannot skip or skim contrary views that are expressed by peers in the same way that we can skip a few paragraphs in a book or tune out parts of a lecture" (Brookfield and Preskill 23). Peer critique also provides opportunity for practice in assessing writing, a skill many first-year students lack. Entering college with "strict, text-based notions of how to judge writing," students are "ill-equipped to make the kind of evaluative decisions ... that our pedagogy expects" (Huot 169). Indeed, even the most adventurous revisions tend to place superficial focus on correcting grammar and mechanics, as indicated by one *Decritique* student who was reflecting on her prior experiences with peer critique: "In our revisions and rewrites we paid attention to punctuation and word usage. Instead of giving the student ideas on more convincing arguments or better reasoning, we corrected their spelling errors." The student's observations reflect what Brian Huot asserts is a lack of "experience of instruction in ascertaining the value of one's own work," and that this is a "crucial missing element in most writing pedagogy" (169).

A major part of what drives superficial responses to peer critique is not so much an inability to critically comment on the work of others, but a genuine fear of delivering honest criticism in the belief that it may cause offense. As such, students experience a sense of restrained latitude about what is acceptable to write, especially if their names accompany the critical comments (Brookfield and Preskill 50). While the fear of providing such commentary could be circumvented by students remaining anonymous, anonymity clouds the authenticity of discourse – endorsing the need to hide; it is a form of deception that undermines the honesty of individual authority over ideas. There is no doubt, though, that such fear is genuine, as expressed by another *Decritique* student: "Every time I read critiques about my work, I feel my ego being put through great

torture ... feeling like I am falling from a skyscraper to my inevitable doom on the concrete sidewalk." And yet, while Brookfield and Preskill claim that anonymity "means that participants can be as brutally honest and critically frank as they like, with no possibility of recrimination" (50), I would argue that an ideal critical context is one where brutal honesty and critical frankness are given and taken freely without fear. Underscoring critical exchanges with an understanding that all are working within a detached and intellectualized space is one way to minimize such fear. Moreover, it enables students to engage in dialogue that is authenticated with "public" use of their names in an environment where "[a]sking impertinent questions" becomes acceptable because all are doing it (Brookfield 116).

We should not, however, disengage entirely from the idea that fear, or even incertitude, is something to be avoided if it can be harnessed to motivate change. When students are encouraged to defend their ideas and disagree with others they attain a meaningful stakeholding in the classroom (Hillocks 65-66). Deracinations focus on writing that is both produced and critiqued by students. As a result, the students' investiture and interest in the assignment is high, and they hold little deference to teacher authority. Through collaborative exchange it is the students, often to their initial dismay, who determine word length, content, direction, degree of argument, and veracity of their points, often in written critiques that produce 800-1000 words apiece – although there are no prescribed word-counts. Initially guided by one or two critical examples provided by their instructor, students see the painstaking attention to small incongruities, the presentation of "possible distorting factors in meticulous detail" (43), and are exposed to "the complex and frightening underbelly of the simple solutions and comfortable opinions they have entertained" (V. Anderson 210).

When asked to "do deracination" students are active participants in examining their colleagues' texts in ways that they determine are critically appropriate. As instructor, I do not provide students with a check-list of points against which to measure their critiques. Although I may, borrowing from Richard Coe, "advocate perspective by incongruity, it is not I [as teacher] who provides or generates the perspectives" (640). The only stipulation is that criticism is detached, which means that students write *about* a piece of writing, not *to* the author who has produced it, and so – as in conventional

scholarly criticism – the pronoun "you" is substituted by the author's last name. I am also clear in drawing a distinction between deracination and the more traditional tenets of debate. Deracination is not, in Berthel's words, "the superficial, practical difference of winning or losing. The residing sense of competition within that difference results in self-righteousness when we win arguments and alienation when we don't, neither of which is appropriate in academic discourse, which should promote the detached skepticism of critical inquiry" (3). There are no declared winners and no remonstrated losers in deracination; the evaluative merits of critiques are discussed within their own contextual parameters, and assessed in turn through counter-deracinations. The arguments contained within such a deracination set constitute their own comparative bases where, by operating within the D.I.S, "the mind of the subject can be at once the investigator and the thing investigated" (4), or what Jodey Castricano describes as "the production of an uncanny imaginary space: of writing and reading *the other* writing and reading (the other)" (131).

For students used to giving their teachers precisely what is wanted in relation to clearly stated evaluative criteria, this is a liberating experience – and for many, a frightening one. Working in the D.I.S is designed to defuse *and* diffuse that fear. By operating within the D.I.S, students are free not to be themselves and, because it is accepted that the text is under analysis – not the writer of that text – then it is permissible and possible to consider ideas as fraudulent, weak, fallacious or even inane. As Foucault asserts, we need to "stop treating thought – this essential thing in human life and human relations – lightly" ("Est-il donc" 33), and instead create genuine possibility for transformative change. There is nothing easy about transforming oneself, and Foucault does not promise it. Yet, confronting this difficulty, dealing with it, examining it, and reflecting on it in an atmosphere "agitated by permanent criticism" is what makes genuine transformation possible (34).

Apart from formal essay assignments and deracinations, critical engagement with ideas in the *Decritique* classroom occurs with informal writing, both publicly and privately. In application, opportunities for such writing works effectively when using electronic, asynchronous discussion forum "posts" – or text-based messages – because it allows for both timely responses and a detachment from the reality of time, space, and

physicality that is characteristic of face-to-face discussions. In public forums, students are asked to participate in open discussion of ideas that emerge from the texts being studied in the classroom, and interact with one another through written responses that all can read and review. As such, public forum writing is a means by which students can advance their thinking and informally test its reception by an audience in a discourse that itself "stimulate[s] discussion rather than remain[ing] something to be graded" (Crusius 49). Yet, while the public forum offers a way for students to articulate their ideas and receive commentary from their teacher and peers, it also carries a sense of caution designed to disavow the fear of ridicule. Frequently, students will preface their open forum discussion posts with concessionary and apologetic comments that serve to unfairly excuse a lack of critical assertion, such as "this is only my opinion." As a critical pedagogue, I need to ask how I can validate that opinion as worthy of critical debate rather than one deserving conciliatory and even paternalistic tolerance.

I have found the answer in adapting the idea of a colleague at the college where I teach. In many computerized educational programs, including WebCT, there is no limit on the number of discussion forums that can be constructed. Given this ability, my colleague created individual discussion forums that are designated as private; that is, each student has an individual forum accessible only by that student and the instructor, and he calls these private forums Individual Portfolio Journals, or IPJs. As a private space for discussion between teacher and student, the IPJ provides a place for retreat both from the rigors of critical commentary characteristic of deracinations, and from the inherent tentativeness of exploring and expanding opinion in the public forums. In the IPJ, I can bring out points made by a student on the open forum and, through questioning, seek to extend a critical analysis of such opinion – one that is separated from the scrutiny of public vision. As a place for critical reflection, the IPJ provides a means by which students can comfortably engage in minimizing the perceptual barriers of social discourse by way of respite from the uncomfortable nature of open, critical commentary.

A word of caution is needed here, however. As a re-visioned critical pedagogy, *Decritique* does not validate the authority of individual voice, or the "rhetoric of individualism ... [as] a search for the 'true self'" (Benesch, *Critical* 71; Berlin).

Decritique emphasizes the possibility for exploring a "false" or "untrue" self – precisely the place where seeds for change can most fruitfully be sown. In the act of genuinely considering who we are not, we provide for ourselves a reflection of that which we are. The concept of possibilities is an internalized perspective in the sense that seeing through the lens of another's perceptual framework allows us to look more closely at who we think we are. In this light, does it become possible for a left-leaning feminist to convincingly argue a right-wing misogynistic line of logic? Yes, it is *possible*. We may come away from such an experience with a slightly altered conceptualization of self, or a radically deviant one, or one that has not changed at all. The outcome is not a concern; the possibilities contained in the process *is* because it allows us to re-vision the framework on which our beliefs depend, and to recognize that the potency – or impotency – of those ideological parameters depends on where we choose to invest our ideas.

Decritique does not erase difference, but highlights it, explores it, examines it. It seeks not consensus, but dissensus; to bring to light the things that cannot be said, or that we believe cannot be said. In the process, we watch our selves as phenomena in action, interacting with other selves in a carnivalesque hall of mirrors where our selves are reflected *as* reflections we may never have seen before. And, while *Decritique* is concerned with elements of identity and how identities are influenced by constructs of race, culture, and gender, it is not so concerned with implementing real and radical externalized change to social relations as it is to focus on internalized reflections of the construction of identity. It pushes for individuals to recognize the possibility that they may want to change on their own volition. The critical core of *Decritique* is developing skill in cognitive fluidity, with the resulting ability to transcend and temporarily suspend established ideological belief. This latter point is the most contestable part of my hypothesis, with sharp criticism levied at both the possibility and even the desirability of students being able to transcend their own ideologies. The "cultural logic" of what makes sense to an individual in a self-contained and self-justifying way within cultural parameters is, my critics argue, an integral part of the freedom of individuality. The chapter that follows seeks to address such concerns, providing a theoretical explanation

and discussion of the possibilities for such a transcendental phenomena, and justification for its application in a radical, re-visioned critical pedagogy such as *Decritique*.

5. Theorizing Decritique: The S-Sense of All S Are P in the D.I.S.

The theory of *Decritique* rests on two principles: Deracination as an acutely critical form of inquiry that actively interrogates textual incongruity so as to destabilize what otherwise appears as a stable system of thought (de Beaugrande 554), and the Detached Intellectualized Space (D.I.S.), as a temporary attitude or moment of noetic reflection where truth is perception as much as perception is truth in order to concretely imagine the possibility of change. Drawn from Edmund Husserl's pure phenomenology and Jacques Derrida's deconstruction, within the theory are threads of paradoxical interplay as binaries expressed in the form of what Derrida would call an *aporia*: truth/fiction; stability/instability; concrete/imagined; identity/erasure; presence/absence. Unsure whether to take itself seriously or not, the dichotomous tensions are apparent in the intensity of conviction and certitude cast alongside the frustration of ambiguity and confusion that together constitutes logic in illogicality. It recognizes the real only to conceptualize the non-real, and in doing so disturbs the ground in which truth is firmly/tenuously planted. At once both protagonist and antagonist, its own conflict comes in terms of deracination as brutal, ruthless agent provocateur and the D.I.S. as mediating conciliator. The essence of *Decritique* is, therefore, a spatiotemporal moment where sentience, sapience, perception, and paradox affirm the impossible possibility that indeed all *S* are *P*.

In light of such a theoretical framework, the relationship of deconstruction to deracination is apparent in the identification of incongruity, the binary oppositions, and the freeplay of ideas inherently situated within a stable system of thought. Theorizing the D.I.S, however, is problematic due to the tensions in Derrida's reading of Husserl's concept of the transcendental attitude. In keeping with deconstruction, such tensions do not need metaphysical resolution in the attempt to locate consensual ground, but are examined here in the sense that the premise/promise of *Decritique* is most animatedly illuminated in tracing the adumbrations between two contrasting perspectives. This moment of incongruity now (and) here is paradoxically one of nowhere: A question posited, but never answered, by Derrida to an issue never addressed by Husserl,

involving the essence of Husserlian pure phenomenology. The transcendental attitude, itself essential to the D.I.S., is a space where it is possible *for* the self (first person) to *talk to* the self (second person) *about* the self (third person). The third person, therefore, constitutes an objective presence of being, or, as Derrida claims on behalf of Husserl, a "pure and irreducible core of expression" as the essence of objective truth (*Speech* 73). Such a transcendental, objectified internal discourse constitutes the essence of Husserlian expression and, therefore, meaning. For Husserl, "expression" is not merely the act of "expressing oneself," as one might expect to find in a psychological self-analysis – of coming to discover a truth of intentionality – but of "expressing oneself *about* some*thing*" (Husserl *Ideas* I §7, qtd. in Derrida 73, emphasis added). While simultaneously critiquing what he sees as the inescapable metaphysical nature of Husserl's own claim to anti-metaphysicality, Derrida deconstructs the syllogistic logic in the assertion – paradoxically through syllogistic logic of the universal affirmation that "all *S* are *P*."

In this universal statement of logic, the term *S* refers to all things while *P* is the predicate that is affirmed or rejected in relation to *S*. From this position, Derrida posits that Husserl's transcendental reduction, of "talking to oneself" cannot be a "'talking to oneself about oneself' unless this can take the form of a telling oneself that *S* is *p*" (74). This, Derrida argues, constitutes an impossibility. *S* cannot be a person substituted by a personal pronoun because "in all real speech the personal pronoun has merely an indicating value" and, therefore, no truth value (73). In linguistic analysis of the verb "to be" in "all *S* are *P*," the copula "are" – as representative of third person indicative – *is not* a statement of fact; thus, all *S* are *not P*. From a perspective of logic, an argument is valid only if its truth value is affirmed; in the case of Husserl's transcendental reduction, analysis by way of this universal statement shows that it is not. According to Derrida, then, the claim that the essential and objective presence of truth can exist – can *be* – in the transcendental attitude is negative.

Such tensions initially augur poorly for the possibility of the D.I.S. in *Decritique*. To salvage the possibility of a transcendental "I," one that can re-present an objective truth to the subjective "I," we must first consider Husserlian phenomenology as ontic, related to things, rather than ontological, related to being. In this way, it is possible to

alleviate Derrida's critique of Husserl by showing the way Derridian *différance* and the traces of absence/presence complement Husserl's concept of *Verstellung*, or the potential potency of faint, interwoven fragments located within what is and what is not. To begin, we will accept the first person copula of I *am* to the third person indicative, he/she/it/they *are*. What (the thing) I *am* is subjective; I know what it is this "I" sees, hears, smells, tastes, touches, and believes. I cannot say the same in terms of he, she, it, or they. Although I can observe the third person from a position of objectivity, I cannot reconstitute this as a re-perceived subjective truth for I have no way of knowing the third person other than through my first-person subjective lens. In terms of Husserl's concept of "talking to myself," I can say – in an accusatory and reprimanding second-person *sense* – "you did not mow the lawn yesterday." But if I am speaking in third person, that "Becky did not mow the lawn yesterday," inherently I am speaking about something/one that is *not* this I and that *I* can never know. *I* do *not* know a thing that *I am not*; therefore, a transcendental space and place of knowing that I can not perceive as truth is not truth.

Recalling Derrida's assertion that in order for Husserlian transcendental meaning as essential truth to be true – that "I" can tell "myself" that "all *S* are *P*" – let us consider examining what I am *not*, that I am no/thing, in light of the universal statement as both graphic representation and syllogism:

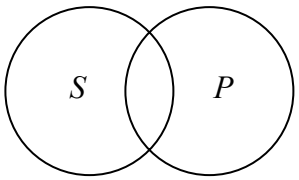


Fig. 5.1: Graphic Representation of All *S* are *P*

Graphically, Figure 5.1 represents the overlapping of *S* and *P* in a Venn diagram. Syllogistically, we can cast the following statements, then re-examine the representation in terms of its constituted truth/affirmation:

Nothing is both *S* and not *P*
No *S* is *P*
Nothing is both *S* and *P*

Logically, if nothing is *S*, then nothing constitutes the space of *S*. If nothing is not *P*, then nothing cannot constitute the space of *P*; therefore *P* is some thing. If no *S* is *P*, then *P* constitutes no thing of *S*. If nothing is both *S* and *P*, then no thing can constitute both *S and P*.

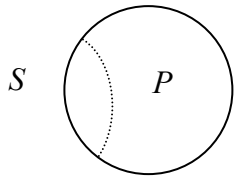


Fig. 5.2: Erasure/Absence of *S* and Affirmation of *P*

The result of such reasoning is that the presence of *S* is erased (fig. 5.2). Because *S* cannot be constituted in the space of *P*, *S* shows its presence only through its absence. Can I tell my self, therefore, that all nothing *is* something? Patently, logically, I cannot:

> Nothing is both *I am not* (*S*) and not *I am* (*P*)
> No *I am not* (*S*) is *I am* (*P*)
> Nothing is both *I am not* (*S*) and *I am* (*P*)

Here, *S* signifies no thing/nothing in relation to the signified *P*, I *am*; in this case, it is not possible for me to know anything but a truth that is present to me as subjective knowing. Objective truth is absent. All that is possible from this Derridian critique of Husserl is truth cast as subjective idealism – a paradoxical placement of truth and meaning as an idealized fiction, and therefore not truthful or meaningful at all. The transcendental attitude, then, is one of intention rather than expression of meaning. The logos of truth cannot be affirmed in a space of absence/nothing; rather, truth is constituted in the presence of the word that can carry meaning.

True to Husserl's exaltation of "to the things themselves," if we perform an eidetic reduction on the last sentence of the paragraph above, we locate what things *are* through bracketing and essentialize all that is *not*. Therefore:

> [The logos of truth] cannot [be affirmed] [in a space of] absence/nothing; [rather, truth is constituted] [in the presence of the word that can] carry meaning.

Within the bracketing, the words "cannot," "absence/nothing," and "carry meaning" are negatives; they hold no meaning because there is no positive correlation to a positive conceptualization of actual *being*. "Cannot" and "absence/nothing" are the inverse of "can" and "presence/something," and "carry meaning" is negative in the sense that it inherently requires some*thing* to carry before it can *be*. Conversely, "the logos of truth" is an affirmative statement, as is "be affirmed," "in a space of," "rather, truth is constituted," and "in the presence of the word that can" – all active statements of *being*; that *are*. What the eidetic reduction has attempted to achieve is an erasure of the essence of meaning, or what Derrida calls *sous rature*, not to determine a point of positive or negative metaphysical closure, but a mark of différance in the traces of otherness – of that which is not. Through an elemental eidetic reduction, we have opened the possibility of a transcendental attitude that can perceive the possibility of truth in the traces of an interplay that constitutes both presence and absence, both thing and no thing, in the form of a question that has not only brought us full circle to the unanswered question, but made it possible to transcend *it* as simultaneously both indicative statement *and* interrogative question: Absence/nothing cannot carry meaning; Cannot absence/nothing carry meaning?

Let us examine this in terms of the universal statement: Logically, if nothing is absence/nothing, then nothing constitutes the space of absence/nothing. If nothing is not meaning, then nothing cannot constitute the space of meaning; therefore meaning is *some* thing. If no absence/nothing is meaning, then meaning constitutes no thing of absence/nothing. If nothing is both absence/nothing *and* meaning, then *no* thing can constitute both absence/nothing *and* meaning. Yet, here in this syllogism we have established that meaning is *some* thing. Therefore, it is logically valid that *some* thing – in this case, meaning – CAN constitute both absence/nothing and meaning. The distinction here is between the indicative mood and the interrogative: The indicative indicates subject and verb as statement of positive fact; the interrogative as negative inverts subject and verb as question.

Statement: Absence/nothing cannot carry meaning.
Question: Cannot absence/nothing carry meaning?

It has already been established as logically valid that meaning can constitute both absence/nothing and meaning; therefore, the statement is invalid. Moreover, the question "cannot absence/nothing carry meaning" can be answered in the affirmative. Yes, meaning can be found in both absence/nothing and meaning. Yes, it is possible for me to *not* know a truth that is present to me as subjective knowing. Objective truth is present. Placement of truth and meaning is not an idealized fiction, but a realized possibility. Truth is not constituted in the presence of the word that can carry meaning. This deconstruction of the alleged unity contained in the perceptual truth of what constitutes "meaning" through an eidetic reduction evokes the real possibility of a transcendental alternative substitution, whereby the presence of meaning can be meaningful in its absence and does not need to be present in the communicative aspect of the expressed word. For Husserl, "communication and intimation, while the *raison d'être* of expressions, is not essential to their use, whereas their being meaningful is essential" (Simons 109). Theoretically, we have reached a point of entelechy: a realization of the possible, where potential has become a potent actuality. The essence of my perception, therefore, is one where it is possible for me to tell myself that all *S* are *P* because, paradoxically, I am at a place and space of Husserl's epoché – a logical suspension of logic. Rather than myself being *hic et nunc* (here and now), I have inverted being to not being; being *is* now/here. The solidus (/) implicates the barriers of our own now and here perceptions, where what we perceive to be now is both presently now and here simultaneously. By erasing the solidus, we see "nowhere" and, in turn, that our own perceptual possibilities of fulfillment are now constituted by non-fulfillment, of absence as presence.

To illustrate this further, consider Norman Maier's Nine Dots Puzzle, which comprises three rows of three dots (fig. 5.3). The task is to connect all nine points with four straight lines, yet not allow the pen to leave the paper.

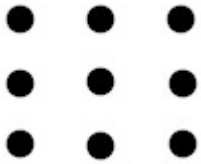
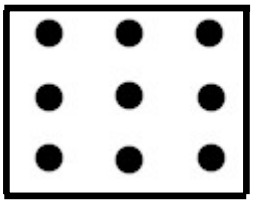


Fig. 5.3: Nine Dots

When attempting to do this task, most people typically find that five straight lines are the minimum number required. Four is an impossibility. Yet, at the same time it is possible if we employ an atypical "*a*perception" of what we do not perceive (figs. 5.4 and 5.5).



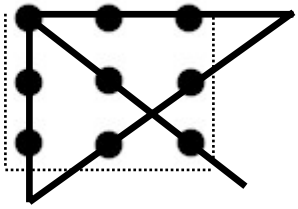


Fig. 5.4: Nine Dots in Perceptual Framework and Fig. 5.5: Nine Dots Beyond Perceptual Framework

As Martin Scheerer has suggested, the first response is often perceiving the dots within the framework of fixed points, or a square, because "people are so dominated by the perception of a square that the[y] do not 'see' the possibility of extending lines outside the square formed by the dots" (qtd. in Kershaw and Ohlsson 489). Extending this phenomenon to a relation of a nowhere space of absence as presence, our predispositions are "*to turn on a dot*, as opposed to turn on a point on the paper where there is no dot … on a non-dot point" (490). Here, what is not signified in its absence is in fact a sign in its non-presence, and perception of that absence depends on an ability to go beyond the borders of what – the things – we perceive that we see. As Husserl claims, things in themselves can exist independently of consciousness (Woodruff Smith 380), and that what we intuitively know is not the same as what is.

5.1 *Zu den Sachen Selbst* (To The Things Themselves)

Husserlian pure phenomenology – as Husserl himself terms it "to the things themselves" – enables both a conscious separation from and cohesion with the primacy

of egocentric sensing, feeling, and privileging of the unilateral "I." Phenomenology, then, is concerned with "the concrete institutions upon which the mind applies its activities of attention, abstraction, collective combination, and reflection" (Mohanty 48). In a phenomenological application it is possible for an object to be both real *and* non-real; that is, meaning is not immanent but perceptible – and perceptible in multitudinous ways that we otherwise may not accept as possible. If there is a truth, its meaning – at least in terms of corresponding with the object perceived and the fulfillment of the way in which we expect to perceive such an object – can be reinscribed as not so much truth but a coincidental act, and therefore subject to a reinscription of what constitutes belief (50). In effect, the meaning of our experience of an object is simultaneously both grasped and created.

When we perceive an object, it is through a framework of perception that we have already determined, a singularity of perception that Husserl refers to as "fulfillment." When we see "a house," for example, our perception is already informed by our prior expectations of what constitutes "a house." Moreover, such perceptions do not even have to be multi-dimensional in order to reach perceptual fulfillment. If we see just the front of a house, we still perceive "a house." Even if they are unseen, we at once also perceive the sides and the back of the house, not by looking at them directly, but on drawing on our empirical observations to fill in what is missing; in other words, to (ful)fill the expectation of this frame of reference concerning "what a house looks like." In Husserlian terms, these shadowy, partial disclosures are adumbrations, or the parts sketchily revealed to us as a perceived whole. As Herman Philipse points out:

> Husserl starts with the notion that all objects of outer perception are given in adumbrations. ... When, for example, we walk around a house, the different adumbrations of the house succeed each other in an ordered manner. If these ordered sequences of adumbrations are disturbed or broken, we suffer a perceptual illusion or even a hallucination. (257)

Confusion, or an interruption to the process of perceptual fulfillment, occurs when – in the case of this example – we are confronted by the information that this house is not like any other we have known or experienced. We might find that the back of the house

has been demolished in the process of re-building, or that there is a highly unusual glass greenhouse and swimming pool that gives the structural whole precarious, interesting angles. With this interruption, or skew, our perceptual fulfillment is arrested and we find the need to question what we think we see. Such internal questioning is a cornerstone of critically reflective thought, for it can take us to places of investigation that might otherwise not have occurred to us.

Yet, the degree of discomforting confusion associated with such diversions is often perceived as something negative – aligned with misunderstanding and even a sense of hopelessness. It is reassuring to contemplate a return to the relative safety of what we "know" and what we "believe." We are comfortable with such perception for we already know it well, and to move beyond it is to consider confrontation with what is unknown:

> Haunted by the absence of essential and shared definitions of our lives which might tell us how we *ought* to be, transfixed by the nothingness or possibility which pervades our lives and fills us with anxiety and dread, we seek to escape by ... choosing not to choose, by passionately attaching or centering our lives on some external value, thing, person or cause. ... We want to play a part half-consciously chosen so that we don't have to be responsible for the choice. We want to do what everyone else is doing, because it seems safe and solid in a life which has lost all security and orientation ... . [Yet] to recognize the *need* for choice, not to avoid it but to affirm it in living, is to choose to choose. It is to be "authentic," that is, it is to relate oneself to oneself, to affirm one's own and unique existence. (Brockelman 20-21)

If, as in the case of the glass greenhouse and swimming pool, our frame of perceptual reference is broken by a startling claim or provocative challenge, we need to stop, reflect, and re-evaluate our impressions that initially seemed so secure. This latter reflective process is part of the Husserlian eidetic reduction, which leads to what I term an eidetic impasse; that is, a stage of cognitive blocking in which to continue on the same lines of thought one has held previously is no longer possible, and the only feasible alternative is to seriously consider and negotiate alternative perspectives.

The problem with the house analogy, as Joseph Kockelmans claims, is that cognitive movement does not necessarily follow sequentially from one point to another ("Intentional" 141). Cognition, and particularly critically reflective acts of cognition, should not presuppose a singular, successive forward motion towards something, but a shifting, recursive series of what might better be described as gains and losses, advances and retreats, tentative hypotheses and disenchanting deadlocks. What all of this indicates is that the nature of thinking – of a mind's being in regard to any given object – depends not on what the object *is*, but on both the ways in which it is presented and the subjective judgment framing such perception (Mohanty 50). The differences in perception here are a distinction between ontic phenomenology and noetic phenomenology; the former focusing on a phenomenon of an object's being, the latter as a phenomena of the act of perception as having constituted that being. *Decritique* is concerned with the latter.

Phenomenologically, it is the act of our perceptions towards the object-things themselves to which we shift our attention in a twofold reductive movement: first, the eidetic reduction; secondly, the phenomenological reduction. The former involves awareness of what constitutes our knowing and our non-knowing, of ignoring individual existence "in order to dwell exclusively on the essence" (Levinas 100); the latter is a process of phenomenological reduction, describing the ways in which our awareness of multiple layers of meaning has constructed our knowing – or, as Gerd Brand claims, "a self-reflection in which the ego unfolds itself in its self-alienation" rather than "a putting into action of a subjectivity that exists for itself" (206-07). And yet it is not a case of seeking destruction of our perceived world, but a de(con)struction:

> The reductions do not destroy the world in which we live, nor do they deny it; they only put this world between parentheses. What remains after the reduction is nothing but the transcendental ego with its transcendental life. Once we have gained access to the transcendental sphere with the help of the reductions we can start the task of clarifying the essence of what we find there by means of the intentional and constitutive analyses. ... The phenomenological reductions make it possible for the mind to discover its own nature. (Kockelmans, "Phenomenological" 222)

The phenomenological act concludes by considering the *possible* ways that not-knowing can be reconceptualized as knowing; a deconstructive reduction of the certainties of knowing on which we have based perceptions of what we understand to be true. The possibility becomes inherent through this process because, as Quentin Lauer points out, "when the ego is objectified, its constitution does not enjoy the same priority as does subjective constitution" ("Other" 171). We are free to intuit critical possibilities, not in the intuitive sense of some psychic-awareness that deliberately rejects rational inference in favor of what might colloquially be called "gut instinct," but in the act of trying to consciously recognize the most fundamental foundations on which a sense of knowing presents itself to our "I." Such a process of methodical working-back is what Husserl calls reduction, and undertaking this reduction occurs when one is consciously and deliberately aware of working in a transcendental sphere. As Kockelmans puts it, this attitudinal sphere is one "in which we can perceive things as they are in themselves, independent of any prejudice" ("What is" 30).

The significance of such assertions is that what we often take as the givenness of understanding is not a given at all, but rather a construct of consciousness. Our perceptions of the world and the meanings we make from the objects we perceive as existing independently of spatio-temporal frameworks is drawn from concrete and conscious acts of perceiving. Consciousness, therefore, is conscious of consciousness; we cannot be unconscious of what is a conscious conceptualization. The ramifications of such consciousness are that all we perceive is a result of conscious cognition, whether we choose to believe that it is an unconscious and internalized given or not. Naturalized assumptions, therefore, may be perceived as givens in relation to culture, gender, race, socioeconomic, and religious conditions – and conditioning – but to acknowledge the consciousness of perceptual choice we use when directing our perceptual gaze to objects is to instigate the process of reflecting on such acts and to also initiate the possibility of change. In Husserlian terms, to acknowledge these perceptual conditions is the basis of bracketing; we are conscious of our own consciousness and momentarily seek to suspend our subscription to the perceptual results this consciousness delivers in order to constitute an essence of belief – what J. N. Mohanty describes as the residue of pure consciousness – "not as another region of being but rather as the absolute ground of all

positing of being" (61). The act of bracketing, or undertaking a descriptive transcendental reduction is, therefore, a matter of transcending notions of the psyche as inherently and immanently constituent of being to instead become consciously and critically aware of the possibilities to project the very notion of being as a separate ontological schemata – occurring within a spatio-temporal moment of which we are conscious of having constructed. This is the basis of distinction between ontic and ontological existentialism: the former, as it is concerned with real being, or of relating to having real being, is not phenomenological; the latter, focusing on that related to the nature or meaning of being-and-existing is phenomenological in that it seeks to transcend a state of privileging the primacy of being in and of itself (Edie).

The concept of being and consciousness-of-being as separate from time and space is important in the phenomenological process; indeed, Aron Gurwitsch asserts that for consciousness, "time would not exist at all" (134). If we consider the recollection of memory as an act of consciousness, our memories are presented to us as fragmented images of time. It is irrelevant, insofar as our memories are able to recall, how much or how little time has actually passed between the event and its recollection. We can conjure the image and replay it in our minds as a moment of re-perception. Whether the event happened six months, six years, or six decades ago is unimportant for the act of perceiving the memory. However, the object (noema) of memory depends, and is a correlation of, my act of perception (noesis) – and in the act of perceiving the object-memory I am unlikely to recast the event as it contextually and objectively stood – as it occurred. At best, I am able to reconstruct a facsimile of reality, but one that is shadowed by my perceptual experiences both before and since the temporal fixture of that moment-in-memory.

Such transcendental reductionism, however, does not seek to replace existing truths with other truths of an apodictic alternate perspective (Mohanty 67). In the process of transcendental reduction it is not the *noema*, or outcome of inscribing an object with meaning, nor the *noetic*, the act of perceiving or thinking, but a process of describing the acts in which we both perceive and inscribe meaning; the active movement of correlating what goes on within, between, and during the *noema* and the *noetic*. In Husserlian terms, this is the noetic-noematic correlation. During the process

of descriptive reflection, it is possible for us to perceive all and any assertions to be "truth." Key concepts to consider here, however, are notions of active and passive, and their relationship to logic, persuasion, and truth. Whereas an accepted, undescribed, and unreflective relationship between perceiving an object and the fulfillment of that perception in terms of establishing a meaningful truth can – and frequently does – fall within the realm of logical construction, thereby establishing its veracity by an apparently scientific and rigorous means, logic is a passive form of thought. If I assert that A is B, and B is C; therefore A is C, I construct a hypothetically valid syllogism. And yet, without reflection in terms of stepping back to observe and describe what this "I" who is doing the act of perceiving has constructed as A, B, and C to begin with, then my argument is one of a priori parameters. In Mohanty's terms, all this "I" is doing is passively synthesizing modes of consciousness that begin at one point and linearly travel to a seamless "logical" conclusion (69).

The logic of truth, however, appeals to us primarily because it is "given in itself and as itself in such a manner that the subject of the act cannot doubt the being of the act" (Lauer, "Evidence" 150). To do so would be to doubt what we have constituted as our selves, a solipsistic mindset that refutes alternatives as untenable because they have the potential to disrupt the perceived world we think, and therefore believe, that we see. Yet, in doing so, we construct a sequence of logic that is in keeping with the intentional fallacy of authorship (Wimsatt and Beardsley), one that reveals "only itself and whatever is contained in it" as the "essential intentionality of consciousness" – truth-perceptions that are ultimately unseen and unacknowledged because they reflect the cognitive sheen of logical substance that "contains its own evidence, its own guarantee of givenness" (Lauer, "Evidence" 151). It is as though the act of perceiving is like the drawing of a bow, the arrow of which is taken from a quiver constitutive of our experience; we draw the bow (noesis), the bow springs back and then forward to hit the target (the object-noema) that we have intentionally already placed in our sights.

In relation to intentionality and the part it plays in phenomenological reduction, as Kockelmans asserts, "all consciousness is intentional" ("What is" 32). The subject actively seeks unity in order to quash an inherent intolerance of ambiguity when seeking to "make sense" of things. As the subject experiences an act, the act may in turn be

characterized "as a *consciousness of* an object whether real or ideal, whether existent or imaginary" (Gurwitsch 119). The mind, however, seeks to "make sense" of what we might call discrete object components, much like the way a tiled mosaic is constituted by assembling various fragments to make a whole. When we pass by the mosaic, we are generally unaware of the mortar lines that connect the pieces and instead perceive the image in its entirety. As Gurwitsch points out, "[b]ecause of the resemblance among the sense data [the mosaic pieces], the mind passes so smoothly and so easily from one to another that it is scarcely aware of the transition" (121). In contrast, we can easily perceive a sense of non-sense when we stare, for example, at an individual word for a long time without interruption. The word begins to lose its sense, and the idea of connecting the letters *d-o-g* with a canine seems suddenly odd and incomprehensible. Something we previously have taken for granted becomes, through semantic satiation, objectified to the point where it becomes possible to consider the ways in which it has been constructed as an arbitrary sign. Similarly, identity – the way we perceive ourselves – is not fact, but a fiction constructed from our own imagination, and our imagination is informed by our own perceptive filtering.

A "logical" argument that builds from accepted, unquestioned a priori beliefs is an essential point of contention in Husserl's noetic-noematic correlation, for a linear unidirectional path of the noetic (the act of perceiving) towards the noematic (the object of perception) does not allow the possibility of a skew to the perceptual fulfillment. As Richard Schmitt asserts, the noetic implicates "the subject-in-relation-to-the-object," while the noematic involves "the object-in-relation-to-the-subject." In the noetic-noematic relationship, each determines the other and is understood within this reciprocity. The noetic subject-I examines an object framed and informed by what has been experienced, yet simultaneously considers the noematic feelings, desires, and beliefs that have formed those experiences (67). In effect, the ego-as-subject does not exclusively exist (Brand 207), but that the subject-I is reconceptualized as an object-I, and – to be "logical" – each agrees with the other.

The concept of reinscription and recasting the subject-as-object can be seen in the Hegelian dialectic, particularly in terms of a logical progression of thesis-antithesis-

synthesis-thesis. And yet, Hegel's dialectic does not account for the constituent parts of such a perceptive triangulation and re-triangulation. From Husserl:

> [T]he *attempt* to doubt any object of awareness in respect of it *being actually there necessarily conditions a certain suspension (Aufhebung) of the thesis*; and it is precisely this that interests us. It is not a transformation of the thesis into its antithesis, of positive into negative; it is also not a transformation into presumption, suggestion, indecision, doubt ... . *Rather, it is something quite unique. We do not abandon the thesis we have adopted, we make no change in our conviction*, which remains in itself what it is so long as we do not introduce new motives of judgment, which we precisely refrain from doing. And yet the thesis undergoes a modification – whilst remaining in itself what it is, *we set it as it were 'out of action,' we 'disconnect it,' 'bracket it*.' ("Thesis" 76)

Phenomenologically, the problem with the Hegelian dialectic is that what we take as our thesis is constituted from our selves, the antithesis is its opposite, and the synthesis becomes a new thesis. While the freedom of consciousness to articulate an antithesis and, in turn, actively synthesize and reconstitute the thesis into a new thesis may appear to negate any preconceptions or presuppositions, it is still a forward movement drawn from a starting point of what we know. Although it may be argued that the original consciousness contained in the initializing thesis is no more, the antithesis that negates the thesis is not entirely presuppositionless because its own opposing parameters are based on a comparative binary from the thesis to begin with (Farber). Even the meta-analytical idea that we can construct thesis, antithesis and synthesis is, in itself, a presupposition – explaining why Marvin Farber notes that "the principle of presuppositionless has been called the greatest presupposition" (37). In contradiction to the Hegelian dialectic, where we might begin to think critically and reflectively is at the point where we begin to be conscious of our intentions to ascribe meaning *before* meaning has even been ascribed (Smith and Woodruff Smith 9).

The experiences of empirical observation constitute a framework of suppositions and cannot, therefore, be called a presuppositionless state of being. In Farber's words:

> [Presuppositionlessness] must lead to a mind divested not only of all bodiliness, but also of all real and ideal conditions of experience and thought. It would seem that solipsism is the unavoidable beginning. If one's quest for ultimate understanding leads him [or her] to such a basis, he [or she] must be prepared to pass beyond solipsism. The phenomenological method undertakes to meet this problem. (41)

Such consideration leads to the ambiguity of presuppositionlessness as a concept in itself. It can refer to ideas or assumptions we hold in advance; it can also refer to facts we accept as true beyond doubt. The structure of a presuppositionless position, then, would mean rejecting its determination by its own laws. It is because of the verisimilitude that reflecting on one's self appears to engender that acts of self-reflection have been attributed to a psychology-of-self, an internalized analysis and explication of *why* we do what we do, yet this is not phenomenological. It is also not difficult to see why, therefore, phenomenology has – mistakenly I would assert – been associated with the literary theory of Reader Response and its hermeneutic application (Selden and Widdowson). Where we might accept that a valid interpretation of text – and, by extension, the world around us – can reflect an externalized projection and analysis of self-introspection that embraces concepts of "what this text means to me," the introspective nature of self-reflection, at least phenomenologically, is not one of analysis, of finding out "who I am" and "from where I come" as an act and validation of truth-in-individual meaning, but ways in which we might describe a conscious awareness of what we have constructed as truth in a transcendental act that enables us to conceive and perceive the possibility inherent in who we are *not*.

As an example of a Reader Response interpretation as a non-phenomenological and unidirectional noetic-to-noematic hermeneutic, consider an excerpt of student writing provided by David Bleich. Here, Bleich's "Student K" is interpreting the meaning contained in a poem about a wall, and has chosen to project that interpretation based on empirical understanding of what "the Berlin Wall" signifies. Bleich both advocates and endorses the intrinsic value for his student in making such "personal connections" to the poem's meaning: "The 'Berlin wall' ... was built to keep the East Berliners from going over to the *better life* plus it walled out the possible chance of

jealousy of seeing *how well the others are living*. This wall could *also mean* the wall of *racial prejudice* and *narrow-mindedness* ... ." (qtd. in Bleich 1267, my emphasis). Yet, at no time does Bleich comment on or even acknowledge the incongruent claims made in this interpretation by "Student K." The student first inherently posits the fallacious assertion that *all* West Germans have a "better life" of which East Germans are jealous. In the next sentence, the student claims that the wall could also represent narrow-mindedness or racial prejudice. Neither Bleich nor the student, however, considers the prejudice and narrow-mindedness apparent in the statement. While Bleich does claim that such an interpretation is a "useful form of expressing feelings about literature" (1270), the excerpt here expresses some rather startling assumptions drawn from individual experience that, phenomenologically, need consideration. It is a rather arrogant assumption to make that life is "better" in the West and, by extension that East Germans are/were unhappy and jealous. If we were to dig into the perceptual ideals informing the student's analysis, we might move to a position where it is possible for Student K to reflect on the constituent, noemic parts that underlie her noetic projection; in short, we would be asking Student K to think critically and reflectively about her own thinking much more so than merely expressing a subjective feeling-response.

By the same token, there is a need to deliberate what might be meant by an assertion that calls for students to think critically as an act of internalized reflection instead of externally expressing a projection of what one subjectively already feels. Schmitt, arguing that reflection is "the mind thinking about itself," also claims that a mind thinking about itself can occur with absolutely no reflective qualities at all, and uses examples of such manifestations as "brooding about one's own feelings and emotions, self-pity, nursing feelings of resentment or a sense of [personal] injury" (62). It is for this reason that I make the distinction between the subjectivity and the objectivity of critical argument: It is not that subjective responses are to be completely eliminated and replaced by a coldly unfeeling analytical mind, but that a focus on what the individual-I *as* a singular, individual feels and thinks is phenomenologically transcended. It is quite possible, for example, to argue passionately about an issue or topic – exhibiting characteristics that may easily be ascribed to subjective fervor – yet, in a phenomenological application of such argument, whether the "individual" who is

arguing the point "personally" ascribes to it at all becomes irrelevant. Husserl puts it another way: "It makes no essential difference to an object presented and given to consciousness whether it exists, or is fictitious, or is perhaps completely absurd" (qtd. in Simons 116). On the other hand, when an argument ensues that is drawn from outside the parameters of the *epoché* of phenomenological description – that is, an argument based on what an individual *does* personally believe – what is at risk is the perception of personal affront, of taking criticism personally, of being driven to a place where the only room to maneuver involves defense of existing ideological belief. Schmitt makes an interesting analogy that relates to this point, and it concerns the characterization of a revolutionary:

> To be a successful revolutionary a man [or woman] must think but [s]he need not, and perhaps should not, reflect. If the reformer were to reflect [s]he would have to temper his [or her] revolutionary zeal, detach himself [or herself] from his [or her] aims and his [or her] habitual attitude toward the world, and question what had seemed self evident before. (63)

The distinction, therefore, involves one between an insulated subjectivity and a transcendental subjectivity, the latter seeking to be consciously aware of the parts that have constituted the whole of the individual-I. Phenomenologically, existence is not assumed, and this state becomes possible by Husserl's notion of essential intuition in which we can grasp an essence, yet simultaneously posit that it has no existence (Farber 50). Although we may begin with the "self-validating cognitive experience" (56), it is through an acute state of presuppositionlessness, or an awareness of the ways in which we internalize and self-validate our acknowledgement of suppositions as "real" that underscores the notion of critical possibilities that, in turn, can lead to the possibility of praxis.

Martin Heidegger, however, argues that transcendental detachment is an impossibility, for we are intrinsically an integral component of *Dasein*, of Being, and here lies a distinction between Heidegger's existential phenomenology and the transcendental phenomenology of Husserl. Whereas we might say that existential phenomenology considers the meaning of Being as a given constituent, transcendental phenomenology attempts to radically ground and make explicit the meaning of *possible*

being (Kockelmans, "Phenomenological" 223, emphasis added). For Heidegger, what constitutes our humanness is that "our consciousness both *projects* the things of the world and at the same time is *subjected* to the world by the very nature of [our] existence ... . We are inevitably merged with the very object of our consciousness" (Selden and Widdowson 52). Yet, as Jaakko Hintikka asserts, "it is crucially important to emphasize that, according to Husserl, there is an actual interface of my consciousness and reality, that reality in fact impinges directly on my consciousness" (83). This leads to one distinction between Heidegger and Husserl; for the latter, reality directly impinges on my consciousness of being, while for the former, being constitutes my consciousness of reality. My contention, therefore, is that if our consciousness is something of our own creation, we should not condemn our selves to accepting it as such without any acknowledgement to the possibility of conceiving it another way. In support of this claim, Lauer takes up a contrast between Heideggerian phenomenology and that of Husserl, describing the latter approach as one that "effectively unite[s] immanence and genuine objectivity" by positing that:

> Our everyday way of looking at things may clothe them with attributes our philosophical thinking cannot justify, but we must have the courage to eliminate such attributions from our consideration. ... With nothing but phenomena to go on, we can find by noetico-noematic analysis all that objectivity available to us in a reflection on the acts of consciousness themselves. ("Evidence" 152, 154)

In the same light, and to extend the application "to the things themselves," our consciousness – our being – can be as much a thing as the objects of our perception. Rather than thought emerging from a Kantian "notion of sense-experience as an intrinsically undifferentiated, chaotic, disordered mass of impressions" (Edie 240), Husserl rejects the subject as an enclosed and self-containing form. Instead, the experience of intended perception is both at-once transcendent and immanent. In Husserl's terms, "the subject is intentionally directed towards a world which it *is not* but *of which* it is the *lived experience*" (242). Phenomenological description, therefore, demands consciousness that is aware of these acts as objects within consciousness (243). When I speak of objectivity or detachment, it is not in terms of artificially severing what

we perceive as our intrinsic selves, but reflecting on our awareness of such a construct as one of many alternative possibilities – an acknowledgment and acceptance of phenomenon being "the world as experience, from a certain point of view, under a certain aspect" (243). Phenomenology is not intended to describe a "real world," but a world constructed as a primary reality through perceptions of experience (245). In this regard, Husserl writes of grades of clarity and obscurity, emphasizing the need for awareness of degrees of intensity within such gradations:

> When an apprehension that reaches *beyond* what is intuitively given weaves empty apprehensions into the real intuitive apprehension, for now, by degrees as it were, an increasing amount of what is emptily presented can become intuitable, or of what is already intuitable emptily presented. Thus the procedure of *making clear to oneself* consists here in two interconnected sets of processes: *rendering intuitable*, and *enhancing the clearness of what is already intuitable*. ("Eidetic" 108)

Intuitive essences are brought closer to us – more sharply in focus, or rendered as more intuitable – if we accept what Husserl describes as the "*zone of obscure apprehension*" (109) and are willing to transcend psychological resistance to tolerate "fluctuating clearness and intermittent obscurity" (115). Whatever is obscurely presented comes closer to us in its own peculiar way, allowing us to genuinely consider the possibility of being that which we are not.

5.1.1 Reality as Truth is Not Reason For Being

The Husserlian notion of a transcendent consciousness is not, however, without its critics. Jean Paul Sartre, for example, challenges Husserl's position, arguing that it "renders the unifying and individualizing role of the *I* totally useless. It is consciousness, on the contrary, which makes possible the unity and the personality of my *I*. The transcendental *I*, therefore, has no *raison d'être*" (329). Here it appears that Sartre is positing that all understanding and meaning in the world is constructed, maintained, and endorsed by an a priori subjective ego-I and anything that seeks to transcend it is, by default, incapable or voided of the ability to construct, maintain, or even bestow possibilities of meaning and understanding. Claiming that the transcendental *I* is

"superfluous" and "a hindrance," Sartre asserts that "it would tear consciousness from itself; it would divide consciousness; it would slide into every consciousness like an opaque blade. The transcendental *I* is the death of consciousness" (350). Here, Sartre attempts to turn Husserl's assertion about consciousness as an awareness of consciousness back on itself in order to support an argument that is on tenuous ideological ground to begin with. Questions arise that Sartre does not satisfactorily address: Can we not perceive consciousness as opaque? Must it be as lucid as Sartre suggests? While we might agree that the transcendental *I* may be the death of consciousness, it is only on the terms that self-consciousness has been constituted by the noemic horizon and contained by the arêtes or borders of existing cognition and ideological structure. Further, although Sartre objects to the Husserlian assertion that "reflection *modifies* the spontaneous consciousness" (334), the objection is not sustainable. If we were to argue that it did *not* modify spontaneous consciousness, then we would also have to assert that all consciousness is concrete, a priori and therefore non-modifiable.

At issue in our perceptions and the beliefs that inform them is what constitutes reality and truth, whether the perception is one of individuality or of the collective. For many, however, the manacles of belief are iron-clad, constituting the inalienable truth of both what-I-see-I-believe and what-I-believe-I-see. If, however, we were to consider a concrete reality juxtaposed with an abstract unreality, we may well be moving into the concept of possible worlds, with the parallel Husserlian "life world" that emerged during his so-called fourth period between 1928 and 1938 (Kockelmans, Introduction 19). What I as an individual perceive as being, as living "my life," is not necessarily as concrete as I initially conceive it to be. I can say that I am a being in this world; my act of living, of existing, of being here is real enough. I am aware of things – of objects – as they are perceived by me. There is "a clock" on the wall above me, "a bird" outside in the tree (even though I can't see it), a "sheepskin rug" on the floor behind me (though I can neither see, hear, nor presently touch it); I am aware of the existence of "my son" who, even though he is not here in the room with me is still "here" in the sense that he has gone to the grocery store with his father. Yet, as Husserl writes, "[w]hat is actually perceived . . . [is but] a dimly apprehended depth or fringe of indeterminate reality"

(“Thesis” 69). My son, for example, is "my son” because "he is." And that's about as far as the perception of a determinate reality goes.

If, however, I were to think about the conceptualization of "my son," of his name as the word "Tio," and describe its connotative characteristics – even to the point of my reference to the pronoun "he" – we might say that I have moved into an elemental eidetic reduction. I have identified and categorized elemental parts of perceptive understanding that a moment ago I perceived as givens; moreover, I am willing to detach my "self" from such fundamental "understanding" and bracket these conceptual moments for the purposes of further descriptive observation. This would then mark the point where a phenomenological reduction can begin: the act of examining what I perceive and *do* with that perception in relation to a deeper descriptive consideration of the elements – the noemics – that constitute the words articulating "my" perceptions. Here, we might describe the constituent parts of concepts such as "love," “mother,” "biological relationship," "helplessness and youth versus wisdom and maturity," and even consider "my" acts in relation to these perceived understandings, motives, justifications, and rationalities. All of this is constitutive of a phenomenological act. Through the eidetic and phenomenological reductions, I move from a world of facts into one of general essences – of considering valid those possibilities outside what I have previously known. My objective is to shift my understanding from what I “know” to ideas *about* knowing, and I do this by considering ways in which things can be known or seen differently, while still maintaining whatever it ostensibly *is* (Kockelmans, “What is” 30-31). In essence, I am working in a transcendental sphere in order to see in a radical and original way.

Husserl distinguishes between concepts of the natural world and what he later came to call his Life World theory, and here again is evidence of a response to critics who claim that it is not possible to transcend what one constitutionally *is*. Yet, this is not what the Husserlian phenomenological reduction seeks to do, as Kockelmans strives to make clear in a commentary on the natural world:

> [The human] cannot seriously ask himself [or herself] the question of how [s]he can get outside his [or her] “island of consciousness” and how what manifests itself in his [or her] consciousness can acquire objective

> significance. For when I apperceive myself as a natural [hu]man, I have already apperceived the spatio-temporal world and conceived of myself as in space where I already have a world-outside-me. Transcendental questions can be asked only within the phenomenological attitude, which is to be opened up by the phenomenological reduction. ("Transcendental" 184)

Clearly, there is a distinction between the natural and phenomenological aspects of perception, or what Husserl calls "attitudes." In the natural attitude, human thought and perception focus on those things that appear unquestionable and obvious, and that we express our perceptions first as singular judgments before progressing deductively and inductively to construct new understanding and knowledge as a result of that perception and thought (Kockelmans, "What is" 27). In contrast, the phenomenological attitude does not implicate deductive or inductive processes, but is a process of descriptive analysis (29) – and the term "descriptive" as opposed to "explicative" is a critical distinction. Engaging in a sphere of possibilities, truths – as referents of expressions or consciousness (Simons 127) – are neutralized rather than explained or justified:

> [T]he question of whether the object intended is real, illusory, hallucinatory, imaginary, independent, subsistent, or transitory is set aside for purposes of description. Whether the intended object is veridical has nothing to do with its status as intended. ... Just as phenomenological reduction neutralizes the ontological placement of an object, so it sets in abeyance the belief in personal identity, history, and empirical reality of the individual making phenomenological descriptions. (Natanson 338-39)

In the *Cartesian Meditations*, Husserl declares that he invalidates, inhibits, and disqualifies commitment to objects as they are experienced; in short, to "bracket the objective world" (qtd. in Schmitt 59). The result of such objective-world bracketing, as Schmitt points out, correlates with discovering the transcendental ego: "I suddenly experience that it is I who must decide whether the claims to reality of the objects of experience in particular, and of the world as a whole in general, are valid claims" (60). And, it is this "aware 'I'" that constitutes the essential or, in Husserl's terms, the pure ego. In this sense, the word and concept of transcendentalism relates to going beyond

lived experience through awareness of one's mind having constructed that experience, a process that requires at least some degree of imagination in order to be able to conceive an alternative world at all, or what Husserl describes as "an 'open horizon' of possible perceptions" (qtd. in Smith 404). As Barry Smith and David Woodruff Smith assert, "[a]ssociated with each act of consciousness is a *horizon* of possible further experiences of the same object (25), bringing with it a correlation to transgressing Freire's and Giroux's conceptualization of borders. If we extend this to consider the possibility of worlds and the possibility of being, it also becomes possible to "imagine things that do not exist or radically misconceive things which do exist" (26).

It is the possibilities of being that is a core component of *Decritique* in its application as a critical pedagogy. This sense of not-knowing, of unsurety, reflects Kockelmans' summative phrase in reference to Husserlian phenomenology, that of a "sphere of ambiguity" ("What is" 24). It involves a willingness to refrain from making judgment about our acts of perception, to suspend the final call on what *is* and instead commit to a genuine engagement in considering what might be. Objects are reduced to a state whereby they are all perceived as equal within individual consciousness (Smith and Woodruff Smith 12). The suspension of endorsing truth *as* truth, of consciously abstaining from ascribing conditions as veridical, is the basis of what Husserl describes as the "assumptive turn" (Simons 125), and informs the method of *epoché* – literally, suspension of judgment.

5.2 De(con)struction

While elements of deconstruction are apparent in Husserlian pure phenomenology, there are specific aspects of Derrida's theoretical mode that inform *Decritique*. The act of moving from what we accept as knowledge, of being something other than who we are, relates to a fundamental component of deconstruction – that of destabilizing a privileged center; in a sense, to move beyond the "ledge" of what we "know" and reinscribe it with the possibilities of being something very different. As Tochon asserts, "[k]nowledge is not at issue in the deconstructive process" (67). The lines or parameters of what we think become, to use Derrida's word, the *arêtes* or barriers that constitute the logic of what fits with the ways in which we always-already

make sense of things. Here, the components of Husserlian eidetic reduction (bracketing) and the transcendental epoché are reflected in Derridian *différance*. To perceive difference, one must be aware of points or definitive aspects of comparison, and then deconstruct such borders by deferring attempts to establish fixed truths, embracing the conceptual non(sense) that absence is presence.

Construction of meaning within our individual consciousness is, therefore, surrounded by a borderline of knowing. To examine this borderline critically and expose the areas of perception where what is real and what is not meet enables the juxtaposition of our beliefs with whatever we do not believe, and as a result to compare these states as alternatives with equal validity. Of critical importance, however, is this concept of validation – of a genuine commitment to entertain the possibility of real alternatives that are currently not perceived as real at all. The value of the D.I.S. is that it operates as a conscious commitment to rescind our beliefs – if only temporarily – in order to become consciously aware of our consciousness engaging in alternative modes of thought, whether that thought is constituted theoretically, culturally, politically, or institutionally (Derrida, "Living On" 85). If there is no agreement to detach from an awareness of our own existing ideological beliefs, we at once negate the possible validity of alternatives, and reflection of our own thinking remains mired in the precepts of already-constituted truths. By agreeing to operate in the D.I.S., students consciously recognize they are temporarily taking on another self, receptive to alternative perspectives, and with a willingness to criticize all with equal skepticism. Once students understand and agree to this concept, they are ready to participate in the process of deracination, both in terms of giving and receiving it.

Critics argue, however, that it is not possible for such detachment from our selves to occur. Indeed, as Tochon asserts, while philosophies of metacognition presume "that human beings can transcend their condition-action rules and grasp their control processes at a level of pure awareness," such subjective idealism is not apparent in postmodern philosophical approaches, ones arguing that "higher levels of meaning are always embedded in a complex of nested values," and because "meaning is situated, it cannot be grasped without reference to its interconnections with situations" (24; Garver). In response, I agree that socio-historically and ideologically we are categorically

constituted by race, gender, and culture, with a subset of the latter comprising sexuality, nationality, political persuasion, and religiosity – among other things. In short, who we are is in many cases determined by powerful forces in which we come to "find" ourselves. Indeed, Heidegger posits that "[a]ll interpretation is situational, shaped and constrained by the historically relative criteria of a particular culture" (qtd. in Eagleton 62). And yet, we might in turn rhetorically posit, as Derrida asserts, "what makes a rhetorical question possible can sometimes disturb the structure of it" ("Donner" 115). Why must choice and circumstance, whether inherently or not, fix us into our own historical contexts in terms of interpreting meaning and truths? Certainly, the "historical distance between ourselves and a work [or moment] of the past, far from creating an obstacle to true understanding, actually aids such cognition by stripping the work of all that was of merely passing significance about it" (Eagleton 63), and this – I assert – is one of the principles of the D.I.S: A distancing of what we know and what we are in order to step out from such self-imposed parameters and remove the ideological gloss that can tarnish our perceptive understandings, before returning again with an unfamiliar, or perhaps defamiliarized, re-visioning of our selves and of our being, "objectified to the point where we can criticize and so revise them" (68).

A re-visioning of self, however, carries with it the potential for destruction of self – or, as Tochon terms it, of contemplating a dangerous ridge where "it is easy to fall off into the gulf that nearly surrounds you" (35). The possibility of the dissolution of self, whether in part or whole, can be a threatening concept – and yet simultaneously one of liberation, of Roland Barthes' *jouissance*. The dissolution of meaning also carries with it a latent force of a "freeplay of words, which seeks to undo repressive thought-systems by a ceaseless slipping and sliding of language" that in the shattering of self-constructed perceptions can be a "private, asocial, [and] essentially anarchic experience" (Eagleton 71-2). In such fertile ground, tilled, sown and scattered with seeds of new thought, possibility for change becomes real rather than imagined:

> Caught up in this exuberant dance of language, delighting in the textures of words themselves, the reader knows less the purposive pleasures of building a coherent system, binding textual elements masterfully together to shore up a unitary self, than the masochistic

> thrills of feeling that self shattered and dispersed through the tangled webs of the work [thought] itself. (72)

The concept of the death of self – at least in terms of the ways in which we have come to know our self – involves exploration of an internalized crypt of the mind, where a collection of images, thoughts, feelings, and perceptions are stored before being organized according to the conduit of ideological processing. As Richard Rorty asserts, "the word 'I' is as hollow as the word 'death.' To unpack such words, one has to fill in the details about the I in question, [and to] specify precisely what it is that will not be [to] make one's fear concrete" (23). The aim of the D.I.S. is to establish and enact awareness that we *can* temporarily halt the process of ordered cognition; to make a process that we think we know unknown, and within that process to make concrete our fears of that which we do not know in order to "become aware of our own half-articulate need to become a new person, one whom we as yet lack words to describe" (Rorty xiv). In short, we can reinforce the concept that "the very idea of the first-person singular, with all its claims to agency and consciousness, is irrevocably undermined when that pronoun is shown to be plurally determined" (Castricano 10).

Derrida addresses both the issues of the death of self and disrupting ordered cognitive processing in his texts *The Gift of Death* and "Where a Teaching Body Begins and How It Ends." In the former, it is through theoretical discussion; in the latter, it is through exemplification. Derrida's "Teaching Body," at first glance, appears to have all the characteristics of incoherent rambling. As Rorty puts it, "Derrida is interested not in the 'splendor of the simple' but, rather, in the lubriciousness of the tangled" (126). Yet, the series of unrelated, tumbling thoughts marked by parenthetical inserts and metaphors-building-on-metaphors serve not only to delineate shifts and movement in thought, but expand on them in loosely connected layers – as though Derrida is aware of his own awareness of constructing multiple truths. It is reminiscent of Friedrich Nietzsche's conceptualization of truth as a "mobile army of metaphors" (qtd. in Rorty 27), one uttered by a subject that is inherently a fiction, and whereby "the ego of which one speaks when one censures egoism does not exist at all" (Nietzsche 370). Through his writing, Derrida does not seek to represent reality, but to instead describe an unreality. Although writing about teaching, it is possible to apply Derrida's thoughts to

the process of thinking itself, especially in terms of what he describes allusively in regard to binary oppositions as "fighting on two fronts, on two stages, and according to two ranges [so that] a rigorous and efficient deconstruction should at one and the same time develop a (practical) critique of the current philosophical institution *and* engage a positive, rather affirmative, audacious, extensive, and intensive transformation" ("Teaching" 89). Moreover, it is necessary "for deconstruction not to limit itself to the conceptual content of philosophical pedagogy, but to tackle the philosophical scene and all its institutional norms and forms, *as well as all that renders them possible*" (87, emphasis added). For Derrida, deconstruction "must not, cannot, simply pick and choose among long and relatively immobile chains on the one hand, and short and rapidly obsolete chains on the other." Instead, he argues that "it must exhibit this strange logic whereby … the multiple powers of the oldest machine can be reinvested and exploited in a situation never encountered before" (93). In effect, we can reinvent the wheel.

As Rorty points out, however, such a Nietzschean view in regards to "the impulse to think, to inquire, to reweave oneself ever more thoroughly, is not wonder but terror" (29), and one circumvented by the recognition of *Gelassenheit*, "the ability *not* to wish to overcome" by those "who are unable to stand the thought that they are not their own creations" (118, 109). And yet, as Derrida asks in relation to the question of self, we frequently fail to consider "'who am I?' not in the sense of 'who am I' but 'who is this I?'" ("Donner" 92). Returning, then, to the question as to whether it is possible for us to detach from ourselves, it is salient to consider Derrida's thoughts on the issue: [I]f there were no absolutely heterogeneous interiority separate from objectivity, if there were no inside that could not be objectified, there would be no secrecy either. ... Is it not sufficient to transform what one complacently calls a context in order to demystify ... or decipher all the secrets of the world? (101, 82). To deny the possibility of movement within structured thought processes is to affirm the power of the ideology, the belief in a set of ideas that makes our actions not only possible, but self-referentially plausible. As Derrida claims, the roots of knowing – of the *episteme* – are "thrust deep into the soil of ordinary language" ("Structure" 960), and there is a distinction that can be drawn between structure as stratified, non-movement and the freeplay that is immanent within structure. This apparent paradox is something that can both restrict the free movement of

ideas within that structure or, alternatively, allow it (960). Derrida's point in relation to this is that when we privilege our beliefs as central, immutable components of our being, we are disavowing the existence of alternative centers and thereby privileging monocentric, egocentric meaning. The concept of a singular self, as Derrida asserts, is ostensibly one of delusion, for within the self are many traces of otherness. What constitutes the boundaries of the self is correlative with a point of impasse – the *aporia* and arêtes of Derrida and Foucault. For the individual consciousness, therefore, language and meaning rests on a schismic conflict between *svoj* – one's own – and *čužoj* – that which opposes one's own (Bakhtin, "Discourse" 292). If we reach such an *aporia*, or impasse, then we cannot move forward, nor can we move sideways. There are, it seems, at least two avenues open to us in such a situation: we can retreat along the path we've already traveled, or we can allow the pressure to build, like internalized volcanic forces on tectonic plates, until the only escape is explosion – or, cognitively speaking, a reorganization of our existing "cogitography" in order to realize that our internalized boundaries are both manifestations of what we call individuality, yet an individuality that has more to do with the influence of others than the individual. It is through the process of self-objectification that Bakhtin's concept of *vnenakhodimost* – or outsideness – can occur, and this is precisely what the D.I.S. attempts to engender. As Bakhtin writes, "[by] objectifying myself (i.e., by placing myself outside [of myself] I gain the opportunity to have an authentically dialogic relation with myself" ("Text" 122).

Ironically, in our deference to presence, to that which is and to what we are, we cannot defer meaning beyond the frame that portal allows us to articulate and envision. Therefore, we privilege cognitio, to know, rather than incognito, to not know, with the accompanying elements of disguise and concealment of identity. Here we might think of an "incognitive act" – the examination of who or what has not been and is not as an interruption, a signifying function in that it contains elements of that which it does not signify, much in the same way that presence constitutes itself by the existence of absence. The reinscription of self is a movement punctuated by the possibility of being, or at least the self-imposed parameters of our own frameworks of self. We may speak of privileging individual writing voice and legitimizing the intention of the utterance, but

where and when do we pause to critically reflect on that intention? From where has this intention come? Bluntly, “individualistic subjectivism is *wrong* in ignoring and failing to understand the social nature of the utterance and in attempting to derive the utterance from the speaker's inner world as an expression of that inner world” (Vološinov 93). If we can separate the act, the event, the utterance, and the presence from its contextual linguistic structure, the form of its expression and contextual parameters, what do we find in the gulf between them, or beyond and outside of them? We may well find a referential signifying framework that is mobile, casting a reflective lens of *différance* through which we can examine these differences of self and yet simultaneously defer from re-casting it in a cognitive domain that privileges immobility, inflexibility, and certitude. Subtle shifts in perspective and re-perspective expand, therefore, in a cascading framework, where "each [comparative presence/absence] perspective shows the error of the other in an irresolvable alternation or aporia [impasse]" (Culler 96).

The human mind can imagine any *thing*. Even in non-sense, sense can be constructed by imagining a context in which it does have meaning. “What counts,” as Jonathan Culler claims, “is the plausibility of the description of the circumstances” (122-23). Here, we might consider Derrida’s “Living On”/*Borderlines* as an act of *writing* what operating in the D.I.S. might look like. The whole concept of Derrida’s title is curious, reflecting the polemics of the piece. The text, horizontally divided at a position two-thirds from the top of the page, splits the text into two parts; the lower a personalized meta-narrative (*récit*) that underscores the upper, or what I might describe as superlative and supralative monologues – even going so far as to further divide it into representations of dominant supermonologue versus subordinate submonologue of self, while in actuality still being part of a whole dialogue that is linearly fractured by the presence of a *present* line. What is *absent* here is a deliberate attempt to cross that borderline to interrogate the spaces between, suggesting what Derrida means by the "enigma . . . of translation" (89). There is also a deliberate attempt to distinguish the “Living On” from the *Border Lines*, something that itself proves problematic in attaching to it conventional means of citation: Do we capitalize? Underline? Italicize? Place in quotations? In the process of thinking, deciding, and reflecting on even the title we find ourselves confronted with potentially subversive acts of mutilation to accepted

practice, the standardized normality over methods of citation, which in turn offers us space to question the *why* of why we even endorse standardized normality and who has constructed it. Through such deliberation, it becomes possible for one to enter a strange borderland, a "frontier region which seems to give the widest glimpse into the other land … though this land may not by any means be entered and does not in fact exist … . This procedure is an attempt to reach clarity in a region where clarity is not possible. In the failure of that attempt, however, *something moves*, [and] a limit is encountered" (Hillis Miller 231, emphasis added).

It is the potential for change found in "some*thing* moving" that constitutes a critical component of deracination and the D.I.S. As Foucault posits, discussing the concept of thought, criticism of our self-thoughts is inextricable from self-transformation. Applied to critique, it "does not consist in saying that things are not good as they are. It consists in seeing what kinds of self-evidences, liberties, acquired and non-reflective modes of thought, the practices we accept rest on" (Foucault, "Est-il donc" 33). Moreover:

> Criticism consists in driving this thought out of hiding and trying to change it: showing that things are not as obvious as we might believe, doing it in such a way that what we accept as going without saying no longer goes without saying. To criticize is to render the too-easy gestures difficult. In these conditions, criticism (and radical criticism) is absolutely indispensable for all transformation. Because a transformation which would remain within the same mode of thought, which would only be a certain matter of better adjusting the same thought to the reality of things, would be a superficial transformation. (34)

While Foucault often makes reference to the transformative, he does not suggest that this is a necessary and intractable element. Rather, he emphasizes creating the *possibility* for transformative change, as opposed to the superficial self-deceiving platitudes that may come when we *think* we have been transformed. The latter is a deception-of-ease. Transformation-as-reform, Foucault argues, is "the result of a process in which there is conflict, confrontation, struggle, [and] resistance" (34) – a form of cognitive hardship

that we often prefer to avoid. And yet confronting this difficulty is the only way, Foucault believes, for any kind of genuine transformation to occur. Catharsis, as change within the individual mind, becomes possible when we are prepared to consciously engage in de-mapping the cognitive landscape, of demarcating the borders and ridges that encapsulate our intellectual territory, of refusing to name the noetic geography that has, in turn, been named for us, and to transcend our own impositions of self in a movement that is at once an externalized projection of *and* internalized reflection on our own being.

5.3 Theory in Practice: Deracination and the D.I.S.

One question that readily arises is why consider alternate ways of being, particularly in an educational and sociological milieu driven by multicultural tolerance, acceptance, and respect? Within such a framework of diversification, some may argue, tolerance equates with acceptance which in turn, and by default, leads to respect for those who are different from ourselves. My contention is that such an argument reflects a hidden curriculum of empowerment, one that operates on the tangible and alluring promise of liberation but in action can too easily be trapped within an ideological framework of its own design – or what Michael Apple describes as a "network of assumptions that, when internalized by students, establishes the boundaries of legitimacy ... since at no time are the assumptions articulated or questioned" (99; Pinar et al.; B. Flores, "Sheep").

Rather than endorse a veneer of tolerance, acceptance, and respect as an a priori constituent of human collaboration and interaction in the 21st century, I instead posit that we endorse the quixotic complexities that are characteristic of the human mind and, by extension, the human psyche. Creatures of adaptability, humans are rational beings capable of both constructing and passing judgment within an ostensibly disinterested natural world, yet within which the human has essential interest in terms of each individual existence – one that is formed and re-formed through our interactions with others and our experiences of what we perceive as truth and reality in the world. It is not until death that our being is concretely set as immutable and final. Yet, what is perplexing here is that as humans our being is not chosen nor constituted by our

individual selves, but by following the paths of others – at the hands of class, culture, gender, education, contemporary media, and religion. Moreover, although there is an inconstancy of living in that ideas and situations present themselves at apparently random opportunity, we seek to realign the incongruities and bring them back into a justifiable alignment with what we already perceive as our existential self. Within this perspective, even the current privileged triad of tolerance, acceptance, and respect can be easily reinscribed to fit existing frameworks of referents, and exhibit startlingly different characteristics of what constitutes each in the process of such reinscription, resulting in the sketchily obscure adumbrations of meaning that Husserl describes.

Decritique in practice, therefore, is concerned with interrupting the process of perspective, and of disturbing, through cognitive interjection, the "ordered sequences of adumbrations" (Philipse 257) that together inform our rationalistic systems of thought and belief in order to open the possibility of challenge, query, or critique. As a mode of articulating thought, the two main – and complementary – parts of *Decritique* are deracination and the D.I.S. Deracination, or the critique of ideas functioning within a transcendental and eidetic reduction, is fundamentally a critical dialogue, whether delivered in a formal sense – as in students "doing deracination" of their colleagues' writing – or the more informal and personalized dialogic exchange between student and instructor through verbal or written conduits. By identifying inconstancies in ideas expressed through speaking and writing, we can begin to pull at the thread of cognitive fabric, unraveling and disturbing the patterns and textures that constitute the thought that has produced the articulation. What follows are two instances of deracination as a semi-formal dialogic exchange between student and instructor in order to exemplify the application of the theory in the first-year college English classroom.

The first instance involves a student who was preparing to write a critique – a deracination – of a colleague's draft. The student claimed that she found the piece very well written and that she did not disagree with it at all; therefore, could she write a "positive" deracination? My response countered her proposition as undermining the essential characteristics of critically reflective thought that the act of deracination seeks to engender. In this case, it is irrelevant that the deracinator agrees with the points made in the draft, or even that it is "well-written." The purpose is to disengage such personal

perceptions of what is right and what is "evident as real" so as to look beyond that: to actively seek our injunctions or sanctions on the points made in a piece of writing. It is as if we were to say, let's hold that point right there, suspend it, rearticulate it, turn it inside out – reminiscent of Bakhtin's *á l'énvers* – in the process of describing its perceptual framework in another form (*Rabelais* 11). In essence, it is not about this student passing judgment that concerns using her awareness of the parameters of her own sense of "being" and how that being perceives what constitutes "good writing" – the Husserlian "spatio-temporal existence" – but of transcending such parameters to go beyond a self-constituted framework. There, I posit, is the critically reflective challenge of a deracination. Ideally, and through the act of deracinating, the student demonstrates her own acknowledgment and awareness of the ways in which her constituted "self" both operates and transcends the noetic-noematic correlation of perceptual understanding.

The second instance occurred in an English 1301 course in which a text dealing with the contested issue of abortion, Sappho Scott's "Letter to You," was being read and analyzed. Scott's piece is a short narrative that poignantly reflects the deeply disturbing ambivalence of a 47-year-old professional woman as she writes a confessional letter of lament addressed to her unborn child. One student, a deeply committed Christian, not only strongly objected to discussion of the topic, but refused to consider Scott's piece as validating any point of view other than an evil attack on contemporary Christianity. Using the principles of *Decritique* to frame a response to the student's objections, and in keeping with the concept of actively seeking critical dialogue between student and instructor, my reply sought to reflect a guided eidetic reduction, one that acknowledges the perceptions of "I" – in this case, the student's perceived view – as merely one among a number of perceptions, whether those are "real" in lived experience or not, in an attempt to engage the student in what Brockelman describes as the "difficult process of mental ascesis in which one neglects the individual in favor of the essential" (33).

The student's lengthy note opened with the caveat that it had been written in the spirit of respectful disagreement, and then launched into a vitriolic and passionate defense of Christianity as the source of all logic, liberty, and even concepts of "meaning" and "truth." The email note concluded with the rationale that as a Christian

"God" will ultimately determine punishment and reward in a day of judgment, there is little need to deliberate over irrelevant questions concerning society. In its perceptual entirety, the argument is built on an unmitigated adherence to a logic of religiosity, one that draws its sustenance from its own parameters of reason. The critical question for the educator practicing *Decritique* is how to offer perceptual alternatives while working within those same cognitive parameters produced by the student. Deracination, because of its singular focus on providing alternatives within the structural framework of the text, much like an algebraic equation, seeks to bracket the concepts and reduce the whole meaning to conceptual parts that are then subjected to reflective analysis that, while inherently acknowledging the argument presented, simultaneously aim to decenter and shift the privileged subjectivity of personal belief to a more marginal and detached place for analysis. It is also important that, as an educator, my own privileged belief system is seen to be just as marginalized – just as open to the possibility of alternatives. Here is an excerpt from my reply:

> Whether the ideology of Christianity is "devoid of critical logic, reasoning ... and/or does not engage in its usage" is not the issue here because the validity of the Christian belief system is not under attack, nor are individuals who may hold such beliefs personally under attack. Therefore, individual belief that meaning does not "exist outside of and apart from God" is not an issue for contention. ... The question over "what is liberty" is a telling one. Liberty, from the perspective of the argument we read [in the course notes], is John Stuart Mill's interpretation – not necessarily "mine." So, while it seems that the question is more directed in terms of rhetorically asking me to define what I consider to be liberty, whatever it is I personally believe is equally irrelevant. We might claim [as she wrote] that "[l]iberty is a Christian view and it was the foundation on which this country was established," but how would such an assertion sit in the eyes of a Marxist? An Islamic? An atheist? Moreover, consider the statement that "[o]ur forefathers, renowned intellectuals in their own right ...," and then re-cast it from the perspective of a radical feminist. How would she *or* he consider the term

> "fore*fathers*" and "renowned intellectuals"? A counter-argument might run, for instance, that the implied binary opposition set up here is that men are renowned intellectuals and women are not. The point is that all these perspectives of argument frequently cast different shades of meaning on a question. Whether we choose to believe in and ascribe to these perspectives at the end of the day is not relevant to the activity of engaging critically reflective thought. [The student asks:] "Why are these questions important?" It would be easy to fill several textbooks examining this, tracing it from the roots of Socratic inquiry to contemporary and urgent social problems relating to massive inequality of wealth, oppression, exploitation, war, and social injustice. All of these are both buoyed and driven by ideological manifestations. Not questioning ideological belief is, by default, to accept and endorse the current social status quo – an ideology in and of itself. (B. Flores, "Reply")

My response attempts to decontextualize, paradoxically, the Christianity within the Christian perspective and to assist the student question and challenge these perspectives by juxtaposing indelible alternatives. While accepting the cognitive framework of a contemporary Christian interpretation, it is at the same time a separation from the personal inscription of belief in such an interpretation in order to reach a point of detachment – the *epoché* of suspending belief – where it becomes possible to perceive our own perspectives in alternative ways.

Promoting the possibilities of such genuine alternatives is what Richard Lynch, in defining what constitutes part of thinking critically, claims is an objective that "raises the possibility that both the critical thinker and her milieu will be challenged, unsettled, and perhaps changed" (3). Rather than focus on the objection *as* inherently negating or even dismissing the Christian perspective entirely, an act that risks alienating the student into a position of defense and perception of personal attack or even ridicule, my reply aims to reinscribe the meaning already given and produced by the student through what Paul Brockelman describes as a series of questioning "expression-meanings which intend or point to a 'sense' which never can be adequately contained *in* any of those

expressions, and yet which is disclosed *through* them" (65). It becomes a metaphorical attempt to isolate the thought concepts from their contextual parameters by chiseling at the cognitive mortar holding such sequential elements together in order to envision a different picture – to experience the possibility of a different understanding.

Other topics of investigation could equally be applied as terms and concepts in themselves: Consider words such as "freedom," "empowerment," and "democratic voice." These are all things, aspects, ideas, and ideals for which we often espouse we should die to preserve, and yet these ideals look strange when reflected back to us as a mimetic paradox: Freedom *on these conditions*; empowerment *the way I constitute it as you cannot because you are not free*; democratic voice in a country where votes are the ideological whores of wealth – bought, bartered, sold, and traded by and in the interests of a wealthy and powerful ruling class. In light of the shifting lenses of ideology that are carefully laid onto meaning and articulation by those in power, I posit that it is quite possible that we can *not* know "reality" for any number of reasons, most of them having to with the machinations of a social system set on fulfilling the perceived needs of the handful in power at the expense of those who are not. Becoming aware that knowledge of reality is a matter of what we choose to perceive about it, in its essentialized state, is part of being human. As Brockelman puts it, the act of attempting to avoid choice is a "self-limitation from being a full self . . . to live a sort of pallid half-existence, [or] what ... Nietzsche referred to as 'bad conscience'" (19).

While any topic could be used for phenomenological investigation and eidetic reduction, it is often the more contestable social issues such as abortion and racism that present starker contrasts when subjected to critique. As object-noema we would likely find a great many trite and formulaic assertions in our student essays such as "abortion is murder" or "racism does not exist due to policies of affirmative action." Indeed, we might say now that in any given social group most "rational" people would say that racism is wrong. Yet, if we have so many who agree, in principle at least, that it is wrong, the question remains as to why we have so much of it? Why the need for affirmative action? Why, if it's acknowledged as being so wrong does the concept of racism even flourish as an agenda for discourse? Here, we return to the adumbrations of perception, and of the mosaic-tiling that pieces together our perceptual referents: The

pieces as stagnant ideals, such as the concept that "racism is wrong," may be accepted at face-value, but within a collected individual consciousness the outcomes we see enacted may look very different in their articulations.

It is not just "topics" that are open to a deracinative focus, but concepts themselves. One of the more common assertions I hear or read from first-year college students is the notion that "I am entitled to my opinion." To apply deracination to such a statement we would first consider it as a phenomenological event comprising constituent parts – the things themselves – and the first-stage bracketing of the eidetic reduction would look as follows:

[I] [am] [entitle(ment)] [my] [opinion]

The [I] and [my] are the most problematic elements of such an equation, because – phenomenologically speaking – [I]/[my] cannot be taken as a concrete given, one with immutable, pre-constituted boundaries. Who this "I" is may even shift according to time of day, state of health, state of mind, and reaction – emotional and cognitive – to the immediate surrounding context. The [am] is of secondary focus, because it implies a past-state of being; an acceptance of what has already been constituted and an inherent unwillingness to re-perceive the being as anything but reflecting the image the perceiver believes she has seen and internalized. Issues of [being entitled], or [entitle(ment)] reflect the [am] of being and concepts of what is right and just given what inherently *is*, and [opinion], in turn, reflects a constitutive sum of [I], [my], [am], and the corollary [entitle(ment)] that are justified as belonging to [I], [my], and [am].

Theorizing, however, remains an abstract ideal until it is put into practice, and we might ask what such a phenomenological analysis of sentence structure would look like in application. In response to the rhetorical question, consider the following comment posted on a WebCT discussion forum from a student in a face-to-face *Decritique* course: "It's only my opinion, but there are some odd and interesting students in this class. ... But, I have the right to my own opinion." There are a number of elements to consider in terms of guiding the student – through response – into an eidetic reduction of his own words and thoughts. The first is to focus on the words themselves

and what "things" they constitute; the second is to work towards deconstructing the inherent premise of autonomy contained in the concept of "I," "am," and "entitlement"; the third is to provide means for generating alternative perspectives within the context of the ideas expressed themselves. What follows is my response to the student's comment:

> Most people, at least in a democratic society, would have little argument with the statement "I have the right to my opinion." But, the issue in terms of critical analysis is not challenging the right for "I" to "have" an opinion, but of questioning – sincerely and reflectively – who is this "I"? What has constituted this "I"? What informs what this "I" thinks? (A multitude of ideological factors: family, culture, religion, education, media, literature, government ...). Has this "I" ever genuinely considered an alternative mode or way of being, even if in the end the "I" holds on to original ideas/opinions? Look how the comment that "there are some odd and interesting students in this class" is followed with the statement "[n]ot that I am at all prejudiced about any one, I think everyone has a valid reason for being who they are, and I have no reason to question any of them. I just know people are all different." The words "odd" and "interesting" often have pejorative connotations, and this may be why the post offers reassurance that there's nothing disparaging about the observations. However, they are fascinating words because they are so ideologically loaded; that is, they "mean" a great deal more than what initially appears. Because of this, we feel the need to justify their use for the context in which we're speaking/writing. "Odd," as in different from the norm – and in a wider social context – indicates possible suspicion, even threat, and "mass society" is, almost paradoxically, incredibly effective at quashing any threat to its gelatinous mediocrity. (B. Flores, "Response")

True to the phenomenological concept of "to the things themselves," the response does not seek to pass moral judgment, nor to contemplate the uncomfortable position of inherently agreeing with the student about his "odd" or "interesting" colleagues, nor circumvent the opportunity to establish critical dialogue by endorsing the

notion that everyone, indeed, does have the right to an opinion. Instead, it aims to focus exclusively on what the student writer has produced, and to reflect critically and open-endedly over the ideas contained within the text itself. The objective is to articulate an interruption to the process of perspective, and through interjection, to disturb the sequence of thought patterns that have constructed the articulation expressed through text in order to open extended margins of possibility for alternative modes of thought. These aspects will be considered in the following chapter – one that presents a pilot study contrasting the pedagogy of *Decritique* with the Concept of Critical Care.

6. Pilot Study: *Decritique* and Critical Care

As a pilot study to test the null hypothesis of *Decritique*, I taught seven class sections of first-year college English 1301 or 1302 over three consecutive semesters from fall 2003 to fall 2004 at Del Mar College. Del Mar is a fully accredited junior college in Corpus Christi, Texas that each year provides instruction to 21, 000 credit and non-credit students in the first two years of a four-year college or university degree, as well as granting associate degrees in vocational and technical education. As a community college, Del Mar maintains an open-admissions policy that caters to a broad cross-section of students ranging from Dual Credit courses in which advanced-level senior high school students study for concurrent first-year college course credits, to remedial coursework for under-prepared students seeking college entry, to both traditional college aged and mature-aged students. A recognized Hispanic-serving institution and ranked in the top two percent of community colleges in the United States that grant associate degrees to Hispanics, demographically the average Del Mar student is a 26-year-old Hispanic female in receipt of financial aid and likely the first in her family to pursue a college education (DMC Statistical Profile).

Four of the seven classes were taught using *Decritique* (DEC) and three with the Concept of Critical Care (CCC), with the student population including Dual Credit high-school, traditionally-aged, and mature-aged students. The class sections were further divided in terms of delivery – either face-to-face (F2F) in a computer-assisted classroom or fully online (OL) using the educational software program WebCT. The objective was to establish on observation, through qualitative and quantitative analysis, and in keeping with the primary and secondary components of the research question, whether there were tangible differences in sophistication of analysis and reflective thought between the two approaches, and if further investigation into *Decritique* as a reconceptualized critical pedagogy was warranted.

Several limitations of this study need acknowledgement in relation to reliability of the data and the statistical significance of the results. These are:

- A small population of 80 students;

- External factors of class assignments;
- Inconsistency in content of courses; and
- Researcher bias

The first three points are interrelated. Ideally, the study would have drawn from a far larger student population, but as an adjunct instructor there were restrictions placed on the number of courses I was permitted to teach. Moreover, decisions about the classes assigned to adjunct instructors are made by departmental chairs and scheduling faculty; as a result, I was unable to select the classes I would teach. While the results would carry greater validity had the seven class sections been identical in terms of all English 1301 *or* all English 1302 course material, this study reflects a combination of both. The content of the courses taught over the three semesters, therefore, is inconsistent, and this is why in certain sections of the analysis particular focus is given to the English 1301 classes. Finally, while researcher bias was minimized through the use of blind evaluations and genuine commitment to the project, results would carry more conviction had the classes been taught by independent, third-party instructors informed about the two different pedagogical approaches.

Students considered eligible for the study were those who, regardless of a passing or failing grade in the course, had completed all the assignments used for research analysis. These assignments were: Individual Portfolio Journal (IPJ entries) from the first and last three weeks of each semester; the first essay; the final essay; and peer critique (CCC) or deracination (DEC). Courses were divided between English 1301 (fall) and 1302 (spring), mandated first-year college English classes usually taken sequentially. In my teaching of these courses, emphasis was placed on students writing thesis-driven analytical essays that showed evidence of critically reflective thought. While both classes focused on text analysis, English 1301 looked more closely at themes of contemporary social issues while 1302 applied socio-cultural theory to thematic interpretation of literature. However, regardless of a CCC or DEC class, the readings, lecture notes, WebCT environments, and essay and IPJ writing prompts were respectively identical for English 1301 and English 1302.

Table 6.1

Pilot Study Population Fall 2003 to Fall 2004

Semester	Class	Pedagogy	Mode	Population	Retention
Fall 2003	English 1301	DEC	OL	11	91.6 %
	English 1301	CCC	F2F	15	65.2 %
Spring 2004	English 1302	DEC	OL	12	100 %
	English 1302	DEC	F2F	13	68.0 %
Fall 2004	English 1301	DEC	F2F	10	59.1 %
	English 1301	CCC	F2F	10	50.0 %
	English 1301	CCC	OL	9	81.8 %
			Total:	80	

Over the three semesters, as represented in Table 6.1, the population of 80 students comprised 46 (57.5 %) instructed with *Decritique* and 34 (42.5 %) with Critical Care. Of those, 48 (60.0 %) were taught in a face-to-face classroom and 32 (40.0 %) online. Statistically, the mean DEC demographic was a female aged 20.2 years taking the class either OL or F2F, while the average CCC student was also female, slightly younger at 19.5 years, and taking the course F2F. The average age of the population was 19.9 years, with 40 percent being Dual Credit students aged between 16 and 18 years. Average age excluding the Dual Credit students was 21.8 years. The DEC F2F students represented a wider age variance from a low of 19 to a high of 52. While the median, or middle, age for this group was 24 years, the modal age of 19 years reflects a concentrated group of 19-year-old students; moreover, those in the 19-to-24 year age range constituted over 50 percent of the population. Average gender distribution across semesters was 32.5 percent males to 67.5 percent females, although the DEC classes showed a slightly increased enrollment of male students at 6.9 percent when compared with the CCC groups (Tables 6.2 and 6.3).

Table 6.2

Overview of Population All Semesters

Semester	Group	Students	Average Age	Males	Females
Fall 2003	DEC OL	11	17.2	36 %	64 %
	CCC F2F	15	21.4	39 %	61 %
Spring 2004	DEC F2F	13	28.4	31 %	69 %
	DEC OL	12	17.7	33 %	67 %
Fall 2004	DEC F2F	10	21.4	45 %	55 %
	CCC F2F	10	20.3	29 %	71 %
	CCC OL	9	17.0	18 %	82 %
Total:		80	20.0	32.5 %	67.5 %

Table 6.3

Comparison of Demographic Data All Semesters

Group	Students	Average Age	Males	Females
All Students	80	20.0	32.5 %	67.5 %
CCC OL and F2F	34	19.5	28.6 %	71.4 %
CCC OL	9	17.0	18 %	82 %
CCC F2F	25	21.0	34 %	66 %
DEC OL and F2F	46	21.2	36 %	64 %
DEC OL	23	17.5	34 %	66 %
DEC F2F	23	24.9	38 %	62 %

Retention statistics were broken into three components: the first examined the entire population; the second considered all students eligible for the study; the third excluded Dual Credit students, with the rationale for exclusion based on the mandated high school attendance requirements that was not a factor for non-Dual Credit college students. Average retention between the two groups based on the eligible population was 79.6 percent for DEC and 65.6 percent for CCC, a difference of 14.0 percent in favor of the *Decritique* classroom. Excluding the Dual Credit students, the disparity was less marked, with 63.5 percent DEC retention compared with 57.6 percent CCC, a difference of 5.9 percent. Retention data is presented in Figure 6.1.

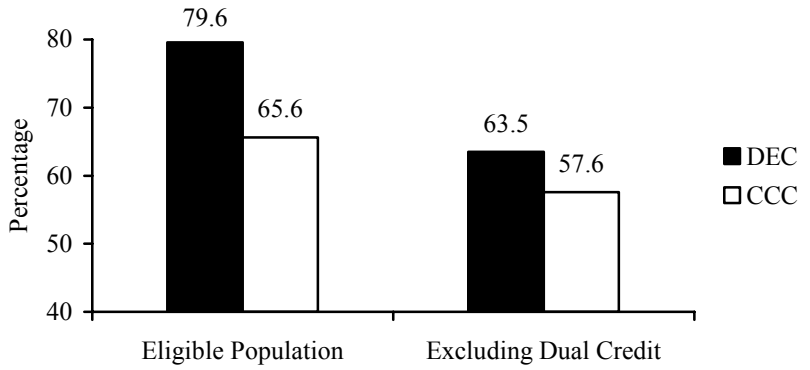


Fig. 6.1: Retention Comparison: Eligible Population and With Exclusions

For English 1301 students, admission for enrollment at Del Mar College is regulated by the results of state-designated reading and writing placement tests. For this study, test scores of the eligible English 1301 students were collected to ascertain if there were significant variations between the groups. Del Mar accepts any one of the following five tests to determine such eligibility:

- TAAS: Texas Assessment of Academic Skills
- TASP/THEA: Texas Academic Skills Program[6]
- SAT: Scholastic Aptitude Test
- ACT: American College Test
- COMPASS: Computer Assisted Assessment

Table 6.4

Equivalency of Minimum Passing Scores in College Placement Tests

Test	Reading Score	Writing Score	Combined Scores
TAAS	89	1170	1259
TASP	230	230	460
SAT	500	500	1000
ACT	19	19	38
COMPASS	84-100	82-100	166-200

[6] In late 2003, the TASP test was renamed THEA (Texas Higher Education Assessment)

A comparative equivalency of minimum passing scores for entry into English 1301 is shown in Table 6.4. As the only requirement for enrolling in English 1302 is successful completion of English 1301, the 1301 course grades of eligible 1302 students were used as an equivalent comparison rather than standardized placement test scores.

Analysis of the IPJs was by word count, complexity of thought, written expression, and range of vocabulary. IPJs also served as a place for students to write their observations and reflections about each class, which were incorporated into the analysis of the study. The peer critique (CCC) and deracination (DEC) assignments were evaluated by word count, development of ideas in relation to examples and discussion of their relevance, the tone of writing – whether formal, semi-formal, or informal – and degree of concrete, critical direction that a student provided to his or her colleague. Evaluation also included word count, sentence complexity (words per sentence; passive tense percentage), and Flesch-Kincaid Reading Ease (RE) and Reading Grade Level (RGL). Generally, the lower an RE score, the easier an essay is to read; conversely, a higher RGL indicates more complex written expression of ideas. A low RE score accompanied by a high RGL, therefore, indicates an essay that articulates complex ideas in a sophisticated, yet clear style. A high RE score combined with a low RGL suggests the inverse. Ideally, then, students would decrease the RE score and increase the RGL. Finally, analysis of these assignments involved constructing categories to reflect either a positive (+) correlation for "critical" commentary or a negative (-) for "uncritical." The rationale for the positive/negative correlation was that the more specific and detailed the commentary, the more it reflected depth of critical thought (+ve); the more students resorted to token niceties of social discourse, the lesser degree to which the student was thinking critically and reflectively (-ve). The correlation data used for measurement is presented in Table 6.5.

Table 6.5

Positive/Negative Correlation: Peer Critique and Deracination

Analytical Categories	Examples/Definition	+ or -
Personal Communication	"I hope I've done this right …"	-
Token Niceties	"This essay is good" or "excellent job"	-

Vague, Generalized Finalities	"You need to elaborate more"	-
Sandwiching Critical Comments	Criticism comes between praise	-
Specific or Summative Criticism	Criticism drawing on cited examples	+
Contradictions/Objections	Identifying contradictions and developing objections	+
Stand-alone Critical Comments	Critique that stands without exemplification	+

Although first essays were evaluated by the researcher through written commentary to each student, final essays were submitted electronically and graded "blind" by two first-year college English instructors, one of whom was the researcher. Such blind submissions involved removing any references to student or course identity, saving the files under each student's social security number, and holistic evaluation without commentary. As for the peer critiques and deracinations, essays were also evaluated by word count, sentence complexity, RE and RGL. Essays could earn a maximum numeric grade of 100, with letter-grade divisions represented as follows: A (90-100); B (80-89); C (70-79); D (60-69); and F (59 or below). Assessment criteria, known in advance by all students, were drawn from the Del Mar College English Department's *Expectations for Formal Written Work in College-Level Courses*, and this also served as the criteria for analysis (see Appendix B).

6.1 The Concept of Critical Care: Fall 2003, Fall 2004

A total of 34 eligible students were enrolled in three CCC classes in fall 2003 and fall 2004; of these, 9 were Dual Credit students. While two class sections were taught F2F and one OL, all three were English 1301 courses. Average age in each semester was 21.4, 17.0 and 20.3 years, with an overall mean of 19.5 years. Gender was nearly equally distributed, with a male:female ratio of 28.7 to 71.3 percent.

Table 6.6
CCC Age and Gender

Semester	Students	Average Age	Male	Female
Fall 2003 F2F	15	21.4	39 %	61 %
Fall 2004 OL	9	17.0	18 %	82 %

Fall 2004 F2F	10	20.3	29 %	71 %
Total:	34			
All Averages:		19.5 years	28.7 %	71.3 %

As none of the placement tests for entering English 1301 students was common to all students, a mean was established within the population to provide high, average, and low points of comparison for the disparate test scores. The established mean taken from all five tests is represented in Table 6.7.

Table 6.7
Mean Across Semesters CCC English 1301 Placement Tests

Placement Test	High	Average	Low	Minimum Pass
TAAS	2, 330	2, 003	1, 890	1, 259
TASP/THEA	518	493.8	462	460
SAT	605	540	440	500
ACT	47.5	40.9	31.5	38
COMPASS	168.5	160.8	118	166

It is important to note that averages taken from three of the tests showed means below the minimum passing score (SAT, ACT, and COMPASS). This anomaly is explained by an essay-writing component of the placement tests. If a student receives a high-passing grade on the test's essay portion, the low reading/writing score is dismissed. For the purposes of this study, the essay scores were not calculated for comparison. Analysis of test scores from all 34 CCC students indicated that 25 (73.5 %) were above the minimum passing score and 9 (26.5 %) were below.

6.1.1 Pedagogy in Practice

For the CCC classes, I made a concerted effort to emphasize a sense of nurturing and understanding, being sure to establish direct eye contact with the students in the F2F classroom and to smile encouragingly when they spoke. During the first class meeting, whether F2F or OL, we undertook an introductory activity involving the writing of a short biographical statement, which students then exchanged and used to "introduce"

each other to the class. Students were then asked for input about the type of classroom environment that would be most conducive to their learning, and ensuing discussion endorsed the value of open sharing and support. This, in turn, led to the establishment of ground rules for communication drawn on the principles of tolerance and respect. I advised the groups that while I took note of absenteeism, attendance was neither mandated nor evaluated, and that those students who were prepared for class and attended regularly – physical presence in the F2F classroom and virtual presence for the OL students – not only demonstrated respect for their peers, but also tended to achieve better results in the course. I promoted the classroom as a place of warmth and caring, emphasizing the pronoun "our" when describing assignments or activities, and reinforcing the importance of involvement, concern, and investiture by all, including the instructor.

During the weeks that ensued, in each of the classes a pattern began to emerge, whether in the OL environment or in the F2F, where the majority of students showed a marked preference for my initiation and development of discussion. In the F2F groups, many students came unprepared for class, having not read the assigned material – a point few were reluctant to admit, whether through half-embarrassed silence, smiles, or shrugs. While the OL group, based on their contributions to the discussion forums, fared better in this regard, the content of their posted messages reflected a sense of "answering the question" posited by the instructor, and was frequently prefaced with words of concern, such as "I hope I've got this right" or "this is only my opinion, but … ." Subsequently, both as a whole class and within small groups, we went through the readings, collaboratively identifying points for further discussion. Each student who made a point was validated by name as an authentic contributor – "so, as Roberta says ..." – in order to foster a sense of community and sharing. In the F2F classrooms, I also made sure to sit beside students as they spoke, avoiding the authoritative teacher-presence at the front of the class.

In the open discussion forum interactions and in responses to IPJs, my comments were marked by a positive, encouraging tone – almost always opening with a point of affirmation and with any critique "sandwiched" carefully between two compliments (Rubin 386). Yet, the CCC IPJ posts – whether OL or F2F – continued to be problematic

in terms of development, exemplification, and reflection. Moreover, responses were driven almost entirely by observation from lived experience as veridical evidence. Abortion, as a topical example, was often wrong because "God and the Bible say so" or that it is "murder, plain and simple," or "my cousin had an abortion and regrets it to this day." Attempting to expand discussion beyond the parameters of "the personal," I often posited "what if" questions integrated into the narrative of my replies. While seeking to build the students' sense of trust in me as a non-threatening partner in their learning, I also modeled development and exemplification by paralleling their writing style; that is, using personal examples from my own experience, yet extending those examples into a broader social application. Verbal discussion in the F2F classes and written open forum posts for the OL group also tended to focus on the veracity of individual truth. When we engaged the topic of religion and poverty, typical answers ranged from personal stories – "I worked at the diocese office here in the city and I know what goes on with the food voucher system" – to experiences about being saved by the Christian faith or affected by what is written in the Christian Bible. Carefully phrased objections such as "how might a Muslim respond to such a comment" were often met with disparaging assertions about Muslims as religious fanatics, with the conversation quickly digressing into the September 11 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York as "evidence" for such statements. While I would have liked to have seen fewer examples driven so clearly by personal belief in the CCC classroom, following the principles of this pedagogy that seeks to respect rather than directly challenge the opinions of others, I did not critically intervene, allowing students the unfettered and authentic expression of their individual voices and ideas. Authenticating such voices also extended to my vocabulary choice with the CCC students, using the language and diction with which they were comfortable. Rather than using words such as "arbitrary," "ubiquitous," or "that's acceptable" – terms that are part of my vernacular – I chose "random," "everywhere," and "that's cool" in an attempt to foster common ground.

In keeping with the socio-cultural analysis characteristic of English 1301, writing assignments drew from readings and class discussions that presented contemporary social issues of homelessness, abortion, and gender-relations. One of the readings, "Breakfast at McDonald's," described a woman's experience buying breakfast for two

homeless men at a fast food restaurant. Students were asked to analyze the text in relation to a thematic question of "what's wrong with this picture?" There are several instances in the story positioning the protagonist as representing the Christian-duty of giving, and a sanctimonious tone that glosses over the material conditions of existence for the two men. In discussion, there was near-unanimous agreement that the woman's actions were warm-hearted and caring. Many supported this claim by stating that on occasion they had given one or two dollars to the homeless – except, interestingly, when such people smelled offensively of alcohol. Five students (one in F03; two each in the F2F and OL F04 semesters) demonstrated discord by raising more serious questions about why the homeless men were destitute in such an economically advanced country as the United States. Attempting to support the objection and foster deeper, more critical reflection, I encouraged this line of thinking in a non-threatening way by asking the students as a group "what do you think about these other viewpoints?"

Despite this intervention, the majority perspective dominated in the CCC classes: People are homeless because they don't try or work hard enough, and that anyone in America can rise if he or she puts forth enough effort, reflecting an intrinsic commitment to what might be termed the "American dream of opportunity." Although this consensus was reached through collaboration, there was spirited, yet ostensibly one-sided, discussion. F2F students at times talked over one another, demonstrating enthusiastic engagement with the topic, and posted discussion messages in the OL class also temporarily increased at this point. Assertions drew heavily on stereotypes about "drunken homeless people" who deserved what they got from their own actions or the relating of personal stories about friends or relatives having participated in socially unacceptable behavior such as drug abuse or criminal activity and suffered as a result. The few students who had raised discord did not continue with their opposition and, although they offered some reflection in their private IPJ entries, ultimately conceded to the points of the group.

6.1.2 The Individual Portfolio Journals

The primary objective of the Individual Portfolio Journal (IPJ) was to actively engage students in critical reflection on their learning, and two sets of IPJs were

examined from the CCC classes: Weeks 1-3 from the start of semester and Weeks 10-12 from the end. My responses were positive and encouraging, offering constructive questions to prompt further student response. Analysis focused on calculating word count and examining language use. The first IPJ set comprised twelve questions ranging from initial impressions of the course, to difficulties students thought they may encounter with their learning, to prompts relating to the first set of readings.

Students from all three CCC classes wrote a total of 58, 141 words (9, 286; 21, 663; 27, 192) in their first set of IPJs. The highest word count at 27, 192 came from the CCC OL students, and this is not surprising considering that communication in the online environment is entirely text-based. The comparison between the two remaining CCC classes, both F2F, is interesting. In the fall 2003 semester, CCC F2F students produced only 9, 286 words in the first IPJ set, compared with students in the comparative fall 2004 group, who wrote 21, 663. The final set of IPJs yielded similarly comparative results. Again, the highest word count was from the OL class at 20, 105 words, with the two F2F groups recording 10, 541 and 19, 421 words – or a total for all classes of 50, 067 words. With a total enrollment of 34 students, the average word count produced across semesters for the first IPJ set was 1, 710 and for the final set 1, 472. This data is represented in Figure 6.2.

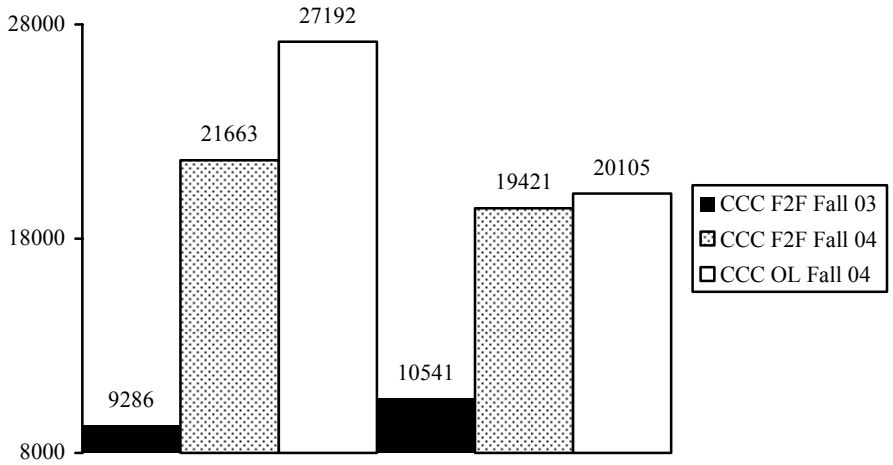


Fig. 6.2: Comparison of IPJ First and Final Word Count: CCC

Analysis of the students' language in the IPJs yielded consistent results in terms of diction. In addition to drawing on the veracity of personal truth when exemplifying points, CCC students did not show evidence of a wide vocabulary, often using colloquialisms such as "this freaked me out" and short, syllabic words such as "scared" and "hard." In reference to completing the course, many expressed abstract and generalized notions of desiring to "get through it" or "do well enough to pass" rather than communicating more tangible, concrete goals and expectations. Responses in regard to the course readings were answered diligently, yet frequently in a sequential pattern of separated "answers" to each "question," and often enumerated. Moreover, CCC students consistently rewrote each IPJ question in full before providing their response beneath it.

As the purpose of the IPJ was for exploratory and informal writing that made personalized, individual connections with the course themes and reading, I emphasized that grammar, punctuation, and spelling (GPS) would not be graded for accuracy. On observation, the IPJ posts were likely to use slang expressions, misspellings and, curiously, often an omission of capitalized letters. CCC students also tended to use clichés and formulaic assertions. When offering a definition for critical thinking, as an example, most students responded with a single statement such as "thinking outside the box" or "looking at both sides of an argument." My responses to the CCC posts were underscored with positive reinforcement, careful use of the student's name, and reference to "me" as an individual and identifiable audience-reader, as in the following: "This is a very good point you've made here, [student name], and I think I understand what you mean. Perhaps you could use some more specific examples, though, to make your point clearer to me."

By the fifth week of semester, I began to comment less in the IPJs, reasoning that students would sustain the established momentum. This was the case with IPJ writing, but with the exception of an animated debate over homelessness, open forum discussion dwindled considerably. Although I again began responding to the few contributions that appeared on the open forum, my posts frequently ended up far longer than those to which I replied. Still, several OL students communicated to me their concern about my perceived interactivity; one emailed to ask "why are you angry with us? Don't you like

us anymore?" The reference to the pronoun "us" indicates that this student had discussed the situation with colleagues in her high school class and acted as spokesperson for the group. In keeping with the principles of Critical Care, my return email was positive, emphasizing how well the students were doing and reassuring the group that there was no ill feeling on my part.

6.1.3 First Essay

It was course policy that all students who submitted the first essay on or before the due date could rewrite the assignment for a better grade provided the essay was evaluated at less than an A. Letter grades of A, B, or C indicated a passing paper, but the D or F was not given on these first essays; instead, students not meeting passing criteria received a non-failing grade of "Draft." If the student chose not to rewrite such an essay, the grade would revert to a failing F by the end of semester. The objective of my CCC commentary was to guide students in making significant revision to their work, endorsing the concept of writing as a recursive process rather than a final product. Emphasis was placed on encouraging, positive remarks designed to bolster student confidence and self-esteem. I also sought to maintain the integrity of the students' writing by commenting only at the end of each paragraph. The following excerpt from an F2F 04 essay, one that received a "Draft," exemplifies the typical style and tone of CCC commentary. The essay prompt asked students to consider embedded gender-relations in a newspaper article that discussed the attempts of single men and women to find their "ideal partner" through a blind-date competition. My comments are in italics and prefaced with an arrow (←):

In the Caller Times newspaper there was recently a contest called The Most Eligible Bachelor/Bachelorette. In this article, people choose one of several different people and vote for one single man and one single woman who seem like the "most eligible" bachelor and bachelorette. Readers can also vote for their favorite couple. The couple that wins this contest get to go on a free date at the expense of the Caller Times. Society has molded everyone to overlook the small underlying social commentaries in an everyday article or ad.

←*The direction of your essay is outlined very clearly here, [student name], but can you see the leap from discussing the article to your quite strong thesis about society having molded everyone? We need a smoother transition here to help me understand the*

connections between your ideas. Why not try to open your essay with the last sentence of this paragraph and then work in an introduction to the newspaper article?

In this article, the winners of the contest were [names identified]. The main reason the audience picked these people is because they were probably the most "high profiled" out of the bunch. [One] is a young reading teacher and [the other] is a news reporter for the local television station. A big factor for [the male] getting chosen is the fact that it is a good publicity stunt for the TV station. The voting is not a completely fair vote. Before the date the two writers [of the article] interviewed [the female contestant . . .]. While waiting for her to "primp" herself up before the date she [the writer] mentioned that while Benavides fixed her hair the family dog was watching her transform into an evening glamour princess.

← *This last sentence is great, [student name]! Maybe you could also think about how the idea of "eligibility" connects with being "a woman," too – that is, she "has" to look like a "glamour princess." Not too sure about saying that the voting "is not a completely fair vote," because we don't really know this, but overall, you're on the right track. I really like the part about the family dog watching it all!*

← *Final Remarks: There's lots of potential here, [student name]. You show a very good understanding of the concepts behind looking deeper into something that on the surface is not very significant at all. Some minor grammar problems need attention (review section 4.2 in your grammar book). Read over my comments and then let's see a rewrite.*

Of the 34 first essays submitted, 18 passed (52.9 %) with 4 As, 8 Bs, and 6 Cs. Sixteen (47.1 %) received a status of Draft. After rewrites, the grade distribution changed to 28 passing (82.4 %) with 10 As, 11 Bs, and 7 Cs. Six essays (17.6 %) failed with either no rewrite submitted or a rewrite that received a D or F. Ten students from the F2F 03 class submitted rewrites, with all but one of these receiving a passing grade of C or higher for the first essay. From the F04 students, four had received an A and so did not qualify for a rewrite. Eleven of the remaining students submitted rewrites. Ten of these received a passing grade of C or higher, with only one essay earning a failing grade of D. None of the F2F rewrites, however, earned a grade of A on rewrite. Of some concern is that four of the OL students did not submit a rewrite at all, and so the grade reverted to an F by the end of semester. This data is represented in Table 6.8.

Table 6.8
Distribution of CCC First Essay Grades

Before Rewrites	#	After Rewrites	#
A	4	A	10
B	8	B	11
C	6	C	7
Draft	16	D/F	6
Total	34	Total	34

As for the peer critique assignments, analysis of the essays examined word length, average words per sentence, percent of passive sentences, and Flesch-Kincaid Reading Ease (RE) and Reading Grade Level (RGL). While the two F2F classes averaged a similar grade for the first essay at 83.2 (F04) and 81.8 (F03), the OL class scored a significantly lower average at 71.8. The explanation is that four students from this latter class whose essays had received a "Draft" chose not to submit a rewrite, and the average OL grade at 89.2 is far higher than the F2F when re-calculated with the four non-rewrites excluded. The RE score is consistent across the three classes in the mid-to-high fifties, as is the RGL at 10.3 (F2F F03), 9.0 (F2F F04), and 10.0 (OL F04). Use of passive sentences ranged from a low of 8.3 % to a high of 15.0 % in the F2F F04 and F2F F03 semesters respectively, and the average words per sentence holds reasonably steady at between 17 and 20. The average length of the essays is greater in the F04 classes (the identical average word count of 904 in each is a coincidence) than the 728 word average of the F2F F03 class. A summation of averaged results for the first essay – after rewrites – is provided in Table 6.9, while summative averages across the three semesters for the first essay are presented in Table 6.10.

Table 6.9
Analysis of First Essay CCC After Rewrites

Structural Analysis	F2F F03	F2F F04	OL F04
Word length	728	904	904

Average words per sentence	19.4	16.9	20.2
Passive sentences	15.0 %	8.3 %	12.0 %
Flesch-Kincaid Reading Ease	55.4	59.8	54.9
Flesch-Kincaid Reading Grade Level	10.3	9.0	10.0
Average Grade	81.8	83.2	71.8

Table 6.10

Summative Analysis of CCC First Essays After Rewrites

Structural Analysis	Average Across Semesters
Word length	845
Average words per sentence	18.8
Passive sentences	11.8 %
Flesch-Kincaid Reading Ease	56.7
Flesch-Kincaid Reading Grade Level	9.8
Average Grade	78.9

6.1.4 Peer Critique

While the objective of students analyzing, assessing, and evaluating the work of their colleagues is the same for both deracination and peer critique, the application is different. In undertaking peer critique, CCC students followed the Washington State University *Critical Thinking Rubric* (*WSUCTR*), reading and discussing it in class, and focusing on the rubric's organizational headings that categorize degrees of critique into a sequence of Scant, Minimal, Acceptable, and Substantial (see Appendix C). The peer critique assignments were tied to the writing, drafting, and submission of the final essay for the course. My analysis of this assignment compared key phrases with either a positive (+) or negative (-) correlation; I also examined word count mean, passive sentence percentages, and Flesch-Kincaid Reading Ease and Grade Level.

Total peer critique word count produced in the three CCC classes was 11, 844, or an average of 348 words for each of the 34 critiques. The OL group recorded the highest word count at 5, 039; next was the F2F fall 2004 class at 4, 749 words; last was the 2, 056 words recorded by the F2F fall 2003 group – as represented in Table 6.11.

Table 6.11
Comparison of Peer Critique Across Semesters

Category of Analysis	CCC F2F	CCC F2F	CCC OL
Average words per sentence	16.2	11.7	15.9
Passive sentences	8 %	2 %	6 %
Flesch-Kincaid Reading Ease	64.2	67	62
Reading Grade Level	8.1	6.7	8.5
Word Count	2, 056	4, 749	5, 039

Although the sample is very small, one point to note is that higher word counts did not result in increased reading grade levels (RGL), nor a lower percentage in passive sentence use. The highest RGL of Grade 8 was achieved by the F03 F2F (8.1) and OL (8.5) groups, that recorded a total of 2,056 and 5,039 words respectively in their peer critiques. The 4, 749 words produced by the F2F F04 class nearly equaled that of the OL (5, 039), yet the RGL was a very low 6.7 with a correspondingly small 2 percent of passive sentences. This group did, however, record the highest reading ease of 67, although the other two classes were not far behind at 64.2 and 62. Interestingly, and despite the low word count, the F2F 03 students averaged the highest number of words per sentence at 16.2, compared with 11.7 (F2F F04) and 15.9 (OL F04), indicating that while the total word count was not high, the sentence structure for this first group was more complex than their F2F counterparts, and on par with those in the OL class.

Comparing the positive/negative correlation in the key phrases of analysis showed that, on average across the three classes, 87.9 percent of the peer critiques reflected negative correlations of personal communication, token niceties, vague or generalized finalities and the "sandwiching" of critical commentary between two non-critical statements (86.7 %; 82.7 %; 94.2 %). This left 12.1 percent, on average, of

positive correlations in terms of specific or summative criticism, developed contradictions/objections, and stand-alone critical comments (13.3 %; 17.3 %; 5.8 %).

Table 6.12
Positive and Negative Correlations Across Semesters

Positive/Negative Correlatives	+/-	CCC F2F	CCC F2F	CCC OL
Personal Communication	-	6.5 %	5.6 %	8.3 %
Token Niceties	-	9.8 %	6.7 %	15.6 %
Vague, Generalized Finalities	-	48.5 %	53.2 %	46.9 %
Sandwiching Critical Comments	-	21.9 %	17.2 %	23.4 %
Specific or Summative Criticism	+	4.5 %	5.8 %	1.7 %
Contradictions/Objections	+	6.3 %	11.1 %	3.0 %
Stand-Alone Critical Comments	+	2.5 %	0.4 %	1.1 %

Analysis of the correlations often reflected minimal development that frequently stayed well within the confines of the concrete, either in terms of the essay prompt's requirements or commentary that focused only on specific points the writer had made without attempts to expand the direction of ideas. In short, the CCC students tended to stay with what had been prescribed by the assignment's prompt, the associated readings, and the guidelines provided in the *CTR*. Of all three classes, the F2F F04 students averaged the highest percentage for positive correlatives at 17.3 percent, the OL F04 class the lowest at 5.8 percent, and the F2F F03 group falling in the middle at 13.3 percent.

6.1.5 Positive Correlations

Specific or summative criticism, defined as a critique that pinpoints perceived deficits, yet is unsupported by convincing counter-arguments, was below 6 percent in all three classes (4.5 %; 5.8 %; 1,7 %), and almost uniformly offered at the end of a peer critique. Examples from the three classes include: "since it is the closing of the paper, these new topics aren't going to get touched on" and "in the second paragraph you present the woman contradicting herself and then state the same idea in the third

paragraph" (F2F F03); "[y]our first paragraph is also scant, due to the fact that it does not reflect the prompt" and "[t]he rest of your body [paragraph] does nothing more but talk about the story that we all read and know about" (F2F F04); "without a clear and easy to isolate thesis statement the reader is lost" (OL F04).

The *identification of contradictions* then showing the development of objections to the incongruity was highest in the F2F F04 class at 11.1 percent, followed by the F2F F03 group at 6.3 percent and a low of 3.0 percent from the OL F04 students. For this category of analysis, the working parameters were objections to a point, coupled with development of a strong counter-argument to support the objection. Both the F2F classes showed stronger performance in this category than their OL counterparts, with comments such as "a point you don't back up is why women should be religious, someone who is caring and compassionate – unless of course you believe that those concepts of woman are wrong" (F03), "let's recall that the feminist movement is the fight for women to acquire rights and, therefore, the anti-feminist goes against all of this" (F04) and "you say that [character's name] does not work and she still has freedom,' – well, you contradict yourself because it clearly states [in the reading] that she is a writer" (F04). The OL students, in contrast, tended to focus more on the specifics of the essay assignment in this category, with a fairly typical example as follows: "As your intro, it must set up your essay by pointing out a clear thesis and must also include the major points that your supporting paragraphs will provide. You have not done this" (OL F04).

Stand-alone critical comments were apparent the least in all the categories for analysis, with all three classes recording less than 3 percent of the total peer critique word count (2.5 %; 1.1 %; 0.4 %). While the F2F 04 students recorded the highest in contradictions and objections, they were the lowest in the stand-alone comments at 0.4 percent, followed closely by the OL F04 group at 1.1 percent. Typical examples from both these groups include "the people writing this junk are full of bologna" (F2F F03), "the second paragraph begins rather oddly" and "this sentence confuses me" (F2F F04). The OL F04 students showed the least amount of stand-alone critical commentary at a dismal 0.4 percent, with one example being: "Your third body paragraph makes no sense to what you were trying to say in the previous two."

6.1.6 Negative Correlations

Given that the OL F04 class recorded the lowest positive correlation percentage, it is not surprising that this group recorded the highest for negative correlations at 94.2 percent, followed by the F2F F03 class again falling in the middle of the three groups at 86.7 percent, and the F2F F04 students at 82.7 percent.

Evidence of personal communication, where a student writer communicates an individualized message or note within the critique, was highest in the OL F04 class at 8.3 percent. The two F2F groups showed less than a one percent difference, at 6.5 and 5.6 percent for the F03 and F04 classes respectively. Such messages always appeared either at the beginning or at the end of a critique, and include such examples as "thank you for allowing me to help in your essay" (F03), "I'm not going to lie, I don't really know if I'm doing this correctly, but I will try my best" (F2F 04), "I hope that I didn't come across as being rude, and if I did then I am truly sorry" and "[r]emember, I am not trying to be offensive in any way" (OL F04). The most curious phenomenon out of all the peer critiques, however, was the incidence of the phrase "this is just my opinion," which constituted just over one-third of the total percentage for the personal communication category.

The use of *token niceties*, or the saying of something positive without sandwiching a negative comment in-between, were characterized by their near-sycophantic appeal to emotion and often marked by the use of exclamation points or smiley-faced "emoticons." The OL students not only had the highest percentage in this category at 15.6 percent, but also tended towards messages designed to bolster the self-esteem of the writer rather than to comment positively on the work produced. Examples include: "Keep up the good work ☺," "[g]ood luck, I know you can do it," and "you incorporated that [example] into the beginning better than any of the papers I had read!" While the F2F students also appealed to emotion in their use of token niceties, the tone was more generalized than the OL group, and more likely to relate specifically to the writing rather than the writer: "Overall, your paper is excellent"; "good job of wrapping up your essay" (F2F 04), and "your paper was interesting – I learned a bit of history at the same time, so thank you!" (F2F 03). The F03 group recorded the second-highest

percentage of token niceties at 9.8 percent, with the lowest of 6.7 percent apparent in the F04 class.

Respectively, the F2F 03, OL F04, and F2F 04 students showed a 48.5, 52.3 and 46.9 percent use of *vague, generalized finalities* in their peer critique assignments. Defined as the attempt to pass critical observation, these comments are more successful in conveying empty ideas that lack substance. Key words and phrases often used in this category include references to whether an essay "flowed well" (or not), a perceived need to "elaborate more," and observations that "a lot of work" was needed. The two F2F groups recorded the highest percentages for vague generalizations, at 53.2 (04) and 48.5 percent (F03). Typical examples taken from these two groups are: "I got confused when you started talking about the two stories [only one was assigned] in your essay, so therefore I give your intro a scant"; "I give you an acceptable on your first body paragraph. The same can be said for your second body paragraph, which was good just like the first, so therefore I give it an acceptable" (F2F 04); "the closing paragraph was acceptable. It may have been a bit brief, though" (F2F 03). The OL class scored the lowest for vague generalities at 46.9 percent, with such examples as: "This paragraph has a topic sentence so that is a plus" and "If I must, I would rate the body paragraph ideas as 'acceptable,' yet could still use silly grammar work."

The final category of analysis for peer critique is the "*sandwiching*" of criticism (Rubin), a term describing placement of a negative comment in between two positives. The two F2F classes scored closely in this regard, at 21.9 (03) and 23.4 percent (04). Examples, with the sandwiched criticism underlined, were: "Your second body paragraph is done very well, *just emphasize more about her* [the protagonist] *with some word changes*, but other than that you did great" (04) and "the ideas are great, *although this is obviously a work in progress*, but the essay has alot [sic] of potential" (F03). The OL students showed the least amount of sandwiching at 17.2 percent, but the caliber of criticism was similar to their F2F counterparts: "Again, great examples from the text. *One thing is that you should use more symbols to show your points*. Otherwise, it's a good paragraph."

6.1.7 Final Essay

Although there was no rewrite option for the final essay, its topic of abortion had been discussed throughout the semester, as had a focus on gender-related and feminist themes. Students had also been introduced to basic elements of fiction such as protagonist, antagonist, conflict, irony, and symbolism. The text used for the final essay was Sappho Scott's short story "Letter to You" – a poignant and highly symbolic reflection on a mature, professional woman's decision to terminate her pregnancy – and the writing prompt asked students to identify symbols and ironies that supported an anti-feminist theme. The final essays were evaluated blind and holistically by two first-year college English instructors, of whom the researcher was one, and the grade determined collaboratively. No written comments were recorded. In addition to following the style and content criteria for college-level essays provided by Del Mar, evaluations reflected the parameters of the prompt: We looked for evidence of an anti-feminist theme supported by examples of symbol and irony from the text. In addition to a letter-grade evaluation, essays were also analyzed in terms of word length, average words per sentence, passive sentences, Reading Ease (RE) and Reading Grade Level (RGL). Finally, using the latter categories, a comparative analysis was done between the first and final essay averages for CCC students across the three semesters. This data is presented in Table 6.13.

Table 6.13
Analysis of Averages CCC Final Essay with First Essay Comparison

Structural Analysis	F2F F03		F2F F04		OL F04	
	First	Final	First	Final	First	Final
Word length	728	774	904	972	904	935
Words per sentence	19.4	22.2	16.9	15.2	20.2	17.8
Passive sentences	15.0 %	13.1 %	8.3 %	15.8 %	12.0 %	17.0 %
Reading Ease	55.4	56.8	59.8	59.9	54.9	57.4
Reading Grade Level	10.3	10.5	9.0	8.5	10.0	9.0
Average Grade	81.1	81.2	83.2	83.0	71.8	81.1

All three classes show a marginal increase in average word count for the final essay when compared with the first: 3.3 % (F2F F03); 6.1 % (F2F F04); and 2.8 % (OL F04). In the average words per sentence, while the two F04 classes showed a decrease of 1.7 (F2F) and 2.4 (OL), the F2F F03 students recorded an increase of 2.8. A similar pattern was observed in terms of RGL with the F2F F03, up from 10.3 to 10.5, recording the only increase; the two F04 classes dropped from 9.0 to 8.5 (F2F) and 10.0 to 9.0 (OL). The trend was reversed in analysis of passive sentence averages. Comparing the first and final essays, both F04 groups increased the percentages from 8.3 to 15.8 (F2F) and 12.0 to 17.0 (OL), while the F03 essays showed a decline from 15.0 to 13.1 percent. Change in the RE over the semesters was minimal, with a divergent range of only 2.4 (F2F F03, up 1.4; F2F F04, up 0.1; OL F04, up 2.5). The average grade showed high consistency with the F2F F03 and F2F F04 essays reflecting a minuscule deviation of 0.1 and 0.2 respectively. The OL F04 class showed wide variation, but the 9.3 percent difference between first and final essay averages (71.8; 81.1) is again likely the result of four students in that class who did not submit a rewrite of the first essay draft and therefore received a failing grade on that assignment.

Table 6.14
Summative Averages of CCC First and Final Essays

Structural Analysis	First Essay	Final Essay
Word length	845	894
Average words per sentence	18.8	18.4
Passive sentences	11.8 %	15.3 %
Flesch-Kincaid Reading Ease	56.7	58.0
Flesch-Kincaid Reading Grade Level	9.8	9.3
Average Grade	78.9	81.8

Summative averages of the first and final essays across the three semesters, as represented in Table 6.14, show an increase in four areas of analysis: word length (up 4.1 %), passive sentence use (up 3.5 %), RE (up 1.3), and grade (up 2.8) – the latter indicating an increase of just over a third of a letter grade. Minimal decreases were

apparent in the average words per sentence, down 0.4 from 18.8 to 18.4 and the RGL, down 0.5 from 9.8 to 9.3.

6.1.8 Retention, Attendance, and Participation

To ensure comparative consistency between the disparate modes of interaction in the F2F and OL classrooms, and as all students had access to identical computer-based environments, attendance and participation was measured using the WebCT tracking feature, which recorded how many times each student logged in and a tally of the posted discussion messages (both open and IPJ) of all students eligible for the study. Of the 58 students initially enrolled in all three CCC classes (23 F2F F03; 24 F2F F04; 11 OL F04), 36 (62.0 %) were retained; that is, students who did not withdraw from the courses. From the retained group, 30 (83.3 %) passed the classes and 6 (16.7 %) failed. Of these students, 34 were considered eligible for research inclusion; that is, regardless of a passing or failing grade for each course, 34 students completed all the assignments used for analysis in this study.

Retention, as an auxiliary and incidental component of this study, was examined using data from all students, both eligible and non-eligible. The percentages vary widely across the semesters, with a high of 81.8 percent (9 students retained; 2 withdrew) in the OL F04 class, to 65.2 percent (15 retained; 8 withdrew) for F2F F03, to a low of 50.0 percent (12 retained; 12 withdrew) for F2F F04. High retention in the OL F04 group was expected; this class comprised Dual Credit students whose high-school graduation depended on passing their college course. For the non-Dual Credit classes, retention in the F2F F03 group fared better than the F2F F04, with 15.2 percent more students retained in the former. While all eligible students from both the F2F 04 and OL F04 classes passed, 11 (73.3 %) passed the F2F F03 course and 4 (26.7 %) failed. These four students either failed the final essay or final exam, assignments that together constituted 50 percent of the course grade, through a failing essay/exam grade or non-submission of examination. Average retention, pass, and fail statistics for all CCC students, eligible and non-eligible, were: 62.1 percent retained, 83.3 percent pass, 16.7 percent fail.

Table 6.15

Overview of CCC Enrolment, Retention, and Pass/Fail

Category	F2F F03	F2F F04	OL F04	All Classes
Initial Enrolment	23	24	11	58
Withdraw	8 (34.8 %)	12 (50 %)	2 (18.2 %)	22 (37.9 %)
Retained	15 (65.2 %)	12 (50 %)	9 (81.8%)	36 (62.1 %)
Passed Course	11 (73.3 %)	10 (83.3 %)	9 (100 %)	30 (83.3 %)
Failed Course	4 (26.7 %)	2 (16.7 %)	0 (0 %)	6 (16.7 %)
Eligible Students	15 (100 %)	10 (83.3 %)	9 (100 %)	34 (94.4 %)

In relation to reasons for withdrawal, of the eight students who withdrew from the F2F F03 class, four stopped attending during the first four weeks. The remaining four had sporadic attendance through the semester and eventually dropped the course on their own volition. I made several attempts to talk with students who had more than three absences, communicating through email, after-class discussion, or phone calls. With the exception of two students who could not be contacted, all expressed varying degrees of challenge in their personal lives; none indicated perceived difficulty with the assigned work. Similar observations were apparent for the 12 students who withdrew from the F2F F04 class. Three stopped attending and nine identified various personal, non-college related problems as a cause for their failure in the class. The two students who withdrew from the OL F04 course did so at my recommendation as, due to non-submission of assignments and poor participation, both risked a failing grade. As Dual Credit students, they were subsequently transferred back to a high-school English course. While caution needs to be exercised in drawing conclusions from a relatively small sample, overall there was a tendency for CCC students to divulge personal problems perceived as barriers to their learning and to see those barriers as concrete and insurmountable obstacles to their completion of the course.

Participation of the 34 eligible students was measured by the number of log-ins to the WebCT environment and average number of posted forum messages (Table 6.16).

Table 6.16
CCC Participation of Eligible Students

Category	F2F F03	F2F F04	OL F04	Overall Averages
Log-in Averages	468	603	652	574
Total Posts	351	335	317	334.3
Average Post/Student	23.4	33.5	35.2	30.7

The average log-in statistics for each student was higher in the F04 semester than F03, at 603 (F2F) and 652 (OL) compared with 468 (F2F), as indicated in Table 6.16. Although the total number of posted messages, both in the open and IPJ forums, was similar for all three groups at 351 (F2F F03), 335 (F2F F04), and 317 (OL F04), there is a deviation between the F03 and F04 semesters in terms of the average number of posts made by each student. In F03, the 15 F2F students averaged 23.4 posts, while the 10 F2F F04 and 9 OL F04 students each averaged 33.5 and 35.2 posts respectively. Examination of attendance and participation from all three classes show that eligible students averaged 574 log-ins, 334.3 total posts, and 30.7 posted messages per student.

6.1.9 Student Observations

Student perceptions of the CCC classes were collected by way of three IPJ questions posited at the end of semester, focusing on experiences with peer critique and its relationship to critically reflective thinking, and a reflection on the course itself. Although semester's end student commentaries, particularly those that are not anonymous, are objectively unreliable, the observations of the CCC students nonetheless provide a basis for comparative analysis with their DEC counterparts.

Generally, responses over peer critique from CCC students reflected identification – or recognition – of a collective normality, and the ways in which it was maintained. As an example, consider the following F2F student responses: "Critiques are good. You can reflect back on what the person has said. And, I also think it's

respectful"; "[h]onestly, I never doubted my work. Not even when I was critiqued. I was satisfied and confident [that] I knew what was asked of me"; "although I do not agree with some, I do respect those opinions [of the critique] because I want others to respect me like I respect them. … I am reminded of a quote that I heard: 'Do unto others as you would have them do unto you'"; "everyone is always going to have their [sic] own opinions on everything"; "receiving those helpful tips from one another [in the critiques] did us all a great favor"; and "my thoughts on revisions of my final essay were mainly to fix the little glitches I made." Note the use of words that reinforce conformity to idealized communal expectations: "Critiques are good"; they are "respectful"; everyone is entitled to an opinion, even if "I do not agree with some"; "I knew what was asked of me"; "I want others to respect me like I respect them"; the receipt of "helpful tips from one another did us all a great favor"; and the "fix[ing of] the little glitches" in order to produce an essay that met the group criteria. In this latter assertion, "glitches" are inherently negative; an abnormality that needs to be "fixed" so as to produce an acceptable whole.

Reflections from the OL students showed similar concern with maintaining the status quo, yet a disconcerting aspect of the online students' writing was the ways in which some sought to reconcile what they perceived as potentially unsettling disruptions: "I was not comfortable with the experience of critique"; "[m]y critiquer was nice about it. I didn't get offended … [and it] was a very positive experience. If she disagreed with one of my statements, she said so, but nicely"; "it is so hard, for me at least, to not sound rude"; "my critique went over smoothly. I found new ways of relaying constructive criticism and helpful suggestions without causing hostility"; "[c]ritiquing helps let the writer understand what went wrong, what they should do to prevent that happening in the future, and how to accept constructive criticism"; and "[student name] was really nice in her critique and I wish she hadn't of been." Phrases such as "not comfortable," "didn't get offended," "positive experience," "said so, but nicely," "[i]t is so hard … to not sound rude," and "constructive criticism" – as inherently opposed to "destructive" – all indicate an awareness of the social collective and that disturbing the status quo is something negative to be avoided. There was also recognition when the collective unity had been maintained and not marred by dissent, as

in the comment that "[m]y critique went over smoothly. I found new ways of relaying constructive criticism … without causing hostility." Only one student voiced dissatisfaction with the process of critique, and it was a marginal, undeveloped objection: "[Student Name] was really nice in her critique and *I wish she hadn't of been*" (emphasis added).

As one of the objectives for the courses – and as a tenet of this study – the component of critically reflective thinking was important. Students were asked to define the term and then discuss what it individually meant to them, particularly in relation to perceived changes they saw between the start and end of semester. Unlike the observations made on peer critique and the course as a whole, there was no significant difference between the F2F and OL classes in regard to this question, so they are presented together, verbatim:

- "Critical thinking is great and makes you feel good about yourself"
- "… is thinking outside the box"
- "Wow!!! My concept and view of critical thinking has changed undoubtedly a lot. As a matter of fact I have a whole new perspective towards critical thinking thanks to this semesters English class"
- "I have learned to reflect on things that I usually though[t] as commonsense"
- "… it is important to not accept what is on the surface but always question what seem[s] to be reality"
- "It might sound idiotic or just ironic but my sense of critical analyzation has become more critical. Even though I thought I couldn't analyze things anymore than I already did, I found out I could"
- "I like that I have the ability to dissect ideas into concepts and feelings"
- "My opinion toward critical thinking has changed a little. Basically this semester I have learned to analyze in depth what the common eyes sees is not always true"
- "…the tolerance in my critical thinking has grown"
- "[C]ritical thinking isn't just using the knowledge that you already know but opening yourself up to the knowledge of those around you and other resources and using to analyze your answer to find more than one answer"

- "My concept of critically reflective thought is that it is a most important tool to use for writing because it gives a more credible point to what you're writing about"

Relatively few students showed evidence of specificity in their responses, but three in particular stand out as exemplifying aspects of criticality that involve going beyond one's own perspective: One student "learned to reflect on things that I usually though[t] as commonsense"; a second claimed to have developed ability to "analyze in depth what the common eyes sees [sic] is not always true" – although what the student likely meant was analytical depth beyond what the common eye tends to perceive as true; and the third wrote about the importance of not accepting what is on the surface but to "always question what seem[s] to be reality." Other students used interesting word choices, such as "the tolerance in my critical thinking has grown" and "the ability to dissect ideas into concepts and feelings." Here, while there is some evidence of making tangible the abstract concept of critically reflective thought, in the first instance it is tied to "tolerance" and in the second to dissection of "concepts and feelings."

The majority of comments, however, were of a far more generalized nature, such as "it is a most important tool to use for writing because it gives a more credible point to what you're writing about" or that it is "thinking outside the box." Other responses were perplexing, as though the students did not quite know how to articulate what they were thinking: Although one claimed that "Wow!!! My concept and view of critical thinking has changed undoubtedly a lot" and "I have a whole new perspective towards critical thinking," the student did not elaborate any further. Another offered the convoluted "my sense of critical analyzation [sic] has become more critical," then followed up with "[e]ven though I thought I couldn't analyze things anymore [sic] than I already did, I found out I could." And, though the comment expressed awareness of alternative perspectives and multiple viewpoints in critically reflective thought, a final student defined it as "using the knowledge that you already know but opening yourself up to the knowledge of those around you and other resources and using [it] to analyze your answer to find more than one answer."

Overall, the F2F students' perceptions of their classes were positive. The comments, however, lacked specific details, tending instead to draw on generalizations.

And, although many claimed that they learned to look more deeply into things, ironically this ability was not apparent in their own reflections on the course:

- "All the topics we wrote about seem to expose our true feelings and emotions towards certain subjects. … I have strongly developed my understanding on how people think and what influences their thought"
- "All the entries made in our IPJs related to some form of Socratic questioning and looking deeper into the meaning of everything"
- "I liked how you played the devil's advocate"
- "I learned from this course to not only read a book [the class did not read any books] but really read deep into the thoughts of the writer and try to bring out the message that the writer is trying to bring out"
- "[N]ot understanding something fully until we go over it in class would be a recurring theme for me, personally, in this course"
- "In all our [class] discussions, I always had my own thoughts, or already knew the answer"
- "English was fun"

While comments such as "I always had my own thoughts, or already knew the answer" and "English was fun" indicates a sense of ease, confidence, and lack of challenge in the semester, observations about having "strongly developed my understanding on how people think and what influences their thought," "looking deeper into the meaning of everything," and "really read[ing] deep into the thoughts of the writer" show evidence of critical engagement with the course objectives, although it should be noted that the latter comment was made by a student who also claimed that "I learned from this course to not only read a book, but …" – no books were read; only short stories and articles. The reference to "Socratic questioning" and "devil's advocate" demonstrate an understanding of the teacher's role in extending critical thought, a point also reinforced with one student's claim that she was not able to fully understand concepts "until we go over it in class." Other students reflected on their experiences in exposing "true feelings and emotions," a characteristic indeed apparent in many of the IPJ entries and class discussions where personal opinion was often valorized as unassailable truth.

A similar sense of enjoyment and positivity about the course was also apparent in the OL students' reflections, yet there was an uncomfortable emphasis on the teacher's role in learning. This latter point is somewhat mediated, however, when considering that the online class comprised Dual Credit students and that, unlike college or university, their high school environment was structured and highly controlled, which fostered dependency rather than independence.

- "The questions you asked made me think outside the box"
- "I felt confident [in the class] most of the time because we were never downed. We were always given positive comments which helped build our confidence"
- "I feel as though I have become more of an independent thinker and you as a teacher have never criticized me, just redirected me to where I need to focus on"
- "You MADE me think for myself. You gave me the answer, or a bit of it, yet wanted MORE"

What is problematic about these latter two statements from the online students is the inextricable link to "the teacher" and the integral role she played in what the students perceived as their educational growth. Note, for instance, "[t]he questions *you* [teacher] asked *made me* think outside the box"; that *you* "never criticized me" but "*redirected me*"; "*you MADE me think* for myself"; *you gave me the answer*; and *you wanted* MORE" (emphases added). Here, the teacher is holder of wisdom, giver of knowledge, and the maker of cognitive movement – all of which reflects high student investiture in perceiving education as a conduit of passivity and receipt rather than active knowledge-seeking drawn from the individual student's volition and desire to learn. One online student even revealed a worrying sense of dependency on me as teacher in an email note reflecting concern that an inherently nurturing relationship was at risk when she received a low grade on her first essay: "I really thought I had disappointed you," she wrote. "That's why I sent you that email asking if you were angry with me. I would hate to make you angry or disappointed with any of my work."

6.2 *Decritique*: Fall 2003, Spring 2004, Fall 2004

Over three semesters, a total of 46 eligible students were enrolled in four *Decritique* classrooms between fall 2003 and fall 2004, and of these 23 were Dual Credit

students (English 1301 OL; English 1302 OL). One English 1301 section was taught in the fall 2003 semester (OL), and a second in the fall of 2004 (F2F). Two sections of English 1302 were taught in the spring of 2004 (one OL; one F2F). Respectively, the average age in each semester was 17.2, 21.4, 17.7, and 28.4 years, and the overall mean was 21.2 years. Gender, with an average male:female ratio of 36 to 64 percent was relatively evenly distributed across all semesters (Table 6.17). As for the CCC analysis, a mean of placement test scores was established for the English 1301 students to provide high, average, and low points of comparison (Table 6.18). As none of the DEC students sat the ACT placement test, reference to it is eliminated. In relation to the English 1302 sections, because the only requirement for students enrolling in this course is a passing 1301 grade, a median of those students' English 1301 grade point average (GPA) was calculated for an equivalent comparison between the two classes. As the median English 1301 course grade of 3.0, or a B, was the same for both groups, no significant difference between the two classes was apparent in terms of preparation for English 1302 coursework.

Table 6.17
DEC Age and Gender

Semester	Students	Average Age	Male	Female
1301 OL F03 *[7]	11	17.2	36 %	64 %
1301 F2F F04	10	21.4	45 %	55 %
1302 OL S04 *	12	17.7	33 %	67 %
1302 F2F S04	13	28.4	31 %	69 %
Total:	46			
Averages:		21.2	36 %	64 %

[7] Asterisks denote a Dual Credit class

Table 6.18

Mean Across Semesters DEC English 1301 Placement Tests

Placement Test	High	Average	Low	Minimum Pass
TAAS	2, 566	2, 134	1, 904	1, 259
TASP/THEA	530	509	480	460
SAT	-	550	-	500
COMPASS	181	160	104	166

English 1301 students scored above the minimum pass in all placement tests except for the COMPASS. This anomaly, also apparent in the CCC group, is explained by the test's dismissal of low reading/writing scores if the accompanying essay portion receives a high passing grade. In this study, the essay components of placement tests were not used for analysis. Examination of the test scores from all 21 English 1301 students show that 20 (95.2 %) were above the minimum passing score and only 1 (4.8 %) was below.

6.2.1 Pedagogy in Practice

From the first day of semester, I took a tone of criticality with the DEC students, in both the verbal F2F and text-based OL environments. In the former, the first statement made was: "This is English 1301 [or English 1302] and you are here to learn how to think." I then spoke about the quite marvelous capabilities of the human mind and how it can so easily be dulled into a catatonic acceptance of the status quo. I also said things that, in a setting of social discourse, would be considered rude, or at least unkind:

> I don't care about internet down-time, grandmothers who are dead or dying – sometimes twice in a semester – work schedules, or despotic bosses. Take some initiative and resourcefulness to think your way through these problems. We're not here to have some feel-good chat about books. And, if it occurs to you that you've made a mistake enrolling in the class, this [paused; held up the paper] is what a drop slip looks like.

I was also clear about the course drop policy: "Three absences," I told the students, "and I'll drop you from the class." Such words and tone were, of course, not designed to be hurtful. Instead, they reflected the pedagogy's theory of an acerbic criticality tempered by the tools of humor: satire, irony, and parody. Although references to dying grandmothers or statements such as "I don't care" appear callous and the drop policy as strict authoritarianism, it is important here to anticipate a misperception about *Decritique*: It is not a tyrannical, drill-sergeant pedagogy where obedience is demanded and power is yielded through rule-making and punishment. In practice, it holds a curiously quixotic caliber seeking to transgress what is ordinarily said and thought by, ironically, using the things that are thought and said – reflecting a contextual tension where "the playfulness is serious and the seriousness in the end is only play" (Oakeshott 202, qtd. in Brookfield and Preskill 6). This is apparent in the darkly humorous images of "despotic bosses," "feel good chat[s] about books," and grandmothers who succumb to death, often more than once.

Admittedly, it was a harrowing experience, even with the benefit of non-verbal cues (F2F), creative use of punctuation, and words such as "hmm" (OL) that parodied the perceptual brutality. In both verbal and written communication I was careful to omit references to the second-person pronoun "you" in an effort to separate the act of commentary from the individual student-as-recipient, and in the process model the parameters of the D.I.S. even before students were formally introduced to it. From the start of semester, the objective was to establish a strong sense of criticality in the students' writing and thinking, and that expectations for such were high. Yet, conditioned myself to the mantras of social discourse, I wanted the students to like and respect me as their teacher, and initially their reactions were reserved and cautious, as if they were unsure whether to express amusement or despair. Particularly in those first few weeks, it did indeed feel as though I were walking on the edge of an abyss. I reminded myself that humor is a potentially potent critical tool, and if humor compelled students to move into a more critically reflective state of being, then a reinvention of self – marked by genuine individual growth and learning – is genuinely possible.

Around the third week of semester I noticed something remarkable in the DEC F2F classes: Students were not only attending regularly, but had read the assigned

material and were arguing about points in both verbal and, in the open forums, written discourse. When the topic of abortion was introduced, DEC students cited concern for individual circumstances, issues of poverty and overpopulation, the question of a woman's autonomy over her own body, the potential for birth defects and the long-term effects of this on a community, and a vigorously argued discussion over the need for distinction, or not, between church and state. My deliberately provocative interjections were blunt, delivered with a careful vocabulary that aimed to model accurate shades of meaning and expose students to an array of synonyms and antonyms. In response, the students began incorporating words I often used, such as "voracious," "languid," and "vapid." At this point, I informed them that their vocabularies were "woeful," which gave rise to the Woeful Vocabulary Forum. Here, each week the students and I would post definitions and pronunciations of words taken from the texts we studied, including dystopia/utopia, blithe, iconoclast, catholic/Catholic (English 1301), *fin de siécle*, dulcet, verisimilitude, and nihilism (English 1302). On several occasions throughout the semester, students from the F2F classes referred to this forum with dry humor – reinforcing what had become a sense of critical camaraderie and animation in discussion. Students would even respond to unusual words such as "ouroborous" with posts titled "ourobo-what?"

In contrast, while the OL students showed strong evidence of critical engagement through well-developed written discussion, the playful solidarity apparent in the F2F classroom was lacking. As one example, when I duplicated the Woeful Vocabulary Forum for the OL classes, very few students commented on it and none contributed words. While the F2F students were three times as likely to post collectively in the open forums, OL students tended to reserve their posts for private IPJ writing. A further instance of this reserved sobriety, involving the English 1302 students, occurred during spring break – a week in March when the College is closed and no classes are held. While the OL students logged in to their WebCT environment infrequently, the F2F students continued their posted discussions throughout the week, with five of the students logging on as many as three times a day. By Week 10 of the semester, log-on tallies for the OL students were uniformly in the 400-500 range, but over half the F2F students had registered 800 to 1,000. Although diligent in their studies, there was a

distancing between me and the OL students, and I posit that the online environment was a significant factor. This observation was a surprise. Initially, I thought it would be easier to deliver acerbic comments to "faceless" students, and for them to receive it. Yet, despite attempts to duplicate the verbal and non-verbal cues of humor through text, *Decritique* in the online environment was far more sterile than the face-to-face classroom.

6.2.2 The Individual Portfolio Journals

As for the CCC classes, the first IPJ set comprised twelve questions ranging from initial course impressions, perceived difficulties students thought they may encounter, and writing prompts associated with the course readings. Combined, students from the four DEC groups wrote a total of 155, 179 words (37, 684; 39, 770; 45,434; 32,291) in IPJs 1-3. The highest DEC word count of 45,434 came from the OL S04 class in this first IPJ set; the highest 1301 word count at 39, 770 was recorded by the F2F F04 group (fig. 6.3).

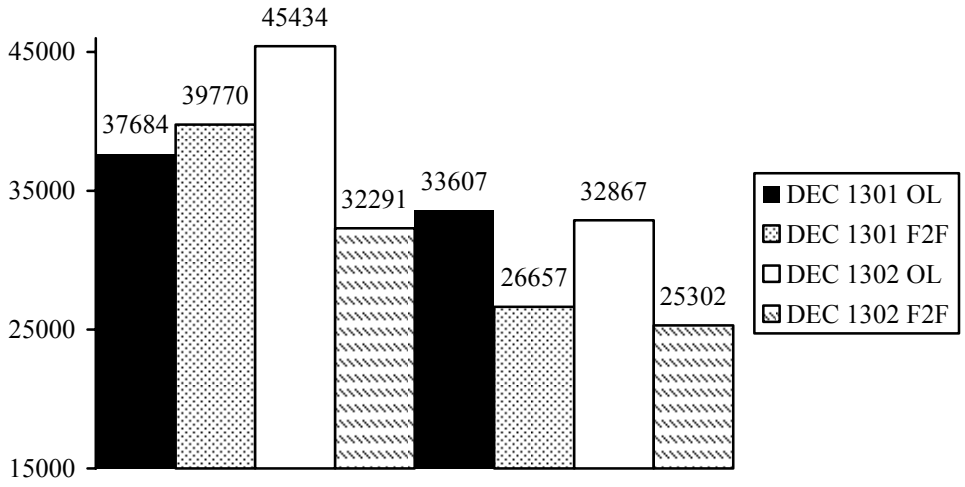


Fig. 6.3: Comparison of IPJ First and Final Word Count: DEC

Comparison of the classes show that in English 1301, the F2F students averaged a higher word count (3, 977) than their OL counterparts (3, 426); it is reversed for English 1302, with OL students averaging more words (3, 786) than the F2F group (2, 484). The final

IPJ set from Weeks 10-12 showed similar results, with the two OL classes recording the highest word counts at 33, 607 (1301) and 32, 867 (1302) respectively, and the two F2F groups the lowest at 26, 657 (1301) and 25, 302 (1302). With a total enrollment of 46 students, the average word count produced across semesters for the first IPJ set was 3, 373 and for the final set 2, 575; a combined word count tally for both IPJ sets from all students resulted in 273, 612 words, giving an overall average of 5, 948 words for each DEC student.

Many responses in the first IPJ set were, overall, disappointing – especially in the F2F classes. Entries often reflected caution and confusion, with a sense of confessional incertitude, as exemplified in the following excerpt from an English 1302 student: "I'm affraid [sic] that I will not be able to analize [sic] things as others can. I hope I will succeed but just judging from what we did in class the other day, its [sic] hard reading a poem and understand[ing] what the author meant." While the tone of my reply was acerbic, its content sought to extract, or bracket, the student's core articulations then separate them from their subjectivity by re-casting them into a more objective context. The words and ideas on which I focused in this excerpt were "hope," "fear," and "understanding":

> Yet, it's often not enough just to "hope," is it? Instead, do something about it – actively work to overcome it. And, is the problem really analyzing to the alleged depth of colleagues, or fear of looking stupid? Well, what does this word "stupid" really mean? Here's something stupid: Analyzing a grocery receipt from the local HEB [supermarket] – and yet it relates to this comment about "understand[ing] what the author meant." As discussed during lecture yesterday, New Historicists might be concerned about this, but most theories couldn't give a toss as to what the author "meant." Instead, what does the text mean? What does it say? What does an HEB shopping docket reveal about its owner? Choc-chip frosted Ricie Pops, a few dozen glazed donuts, and the irony of a case of Diet Pepsi. Oh, my. One of these days a student is going to catch on to this and bring an HEB shopping docket to class for analysis …

Although I described the OL environment as more sterile than the F2F, this does not mean that OL IPJ posts were not creative, and several made strong use of metaphor. As an example, one student drew an extended comparison between online dialogue and strawberry milk as constituting "breakfast wars," pointing out that the flavored essence of the drink/dialogue could be artificial or natural, then discussing the "digestibility" of such discourse. In both OL and F2F groups, IPJs showed strong development and exemplification, a noted absence of personal truth as veridical evidence, minimal use of slang, and few errors in grammar, punctuation and spelling – the latter suggesting a careful process of drafting, revising, and proofreading before posting.

As a primary objective was to interrogate the validity of student assertions, my critical responses in the IPJs deliberately attempted provocation, and were interwoven with the student writing rather than, as in a CCC class, made at the end of a student's posted message. As for the CCC classes, the momentum of posts was not affected when I decreased my IPJ commentary in the fifth week of semester. Overall, DEC IPJs reflected a good command of vocabulary, including words and phrases such as "fearful," "intimidated" and a "tad overwhelmed" when students were asked about their expectations for the course, and incorporation of words from the Woeful Vocabulary Forum in later IPJs. In contrast to the CCC classes, DEC students did not show a tendency to reproduce the IPJ questions in full before providing a response.

6.2.3 First Essay

As for the CCC classes, all DEC students who had submitted the first essay on or before the due date had the opportunity to rewrite it for a better grade, provided it earned less than an A. Essays evaluated as a "Draft" and that were not rewritten reverted to a failing grade at the end of semester. Like the IPJs, my critical commentary was interspersed within the student's writing, so the act of evaluation through written comments became embedded with the discourse. Rather than the task of grading being, as Pat Belanoff describes it, "the dirty thing we have to do in the dark of our own offices" (61; Huot 166), DEC comments were a form of interactive engagement with the writing produced by the students, who in turn responded to that commentary through the essay rewrite.

The objective of my commentary was to foster rewrites that showed a depth and breadth of critical reflection going far beyond the concept of merely "fixing errors" or giving the teacher "what he or she wants." As such, DEC essay comments were atypical. Nowhere was reference made to "you might want to elaborate more in paragraph two," "the essay doesn't flow quite right," or "overall, you did a great job." In order to effect the possibility of change in students, the kind of change that means not just knowing, but knowing differently (Mezirow), essay commentary was provocative, seeking to instigate Tingle's sense of "narcissistic wounding" (19) with its resistance of anger, outrage, and disconcertion – yet still underscored with the critical tools of humor. What follows is an example of DEC critical commentary on an essay produced by an English 1302 student. My words are in italics and prefaced by an arrow ←:

The two stories that I am choosing to write my paper on are "Harrison Bergeron" by Kurt Vonnegut, and "The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas" by Ursula Le Guin ←*Do we need the preemption? What about critical reflection on themes, symbolism, characterization and interpretation of these? Do we care how or why the writer here went about choosing them?* While using two different methods, both authors send a message of dissatisfaction about society. ←*OK* These two stories are written almost completely opposite of each other; yet, they both have much in common ←*Well, gee, this says a lot, doesn't it ... come on – what's the point being conveyed?* These two stories ← *repetition; we're aware there are two stories – it's hardly going to jump to 15, is it??* also caught and held my attention while relaying their message, which is very hard to do ←*caught and held? While relaying? And, do we care if this is "hard to do?*" "Harrison Bergeron" by Vonngeut is a different story ←*what, and we're to take it that every story is the same? Moreover, who is "Vonngeut"?* because it does not use symbolism to make up its theme, and it does not use characterization. ←*No, not true. It does use characterization, or else there would be no characters. Perhaps the point is that it uses flat characters. If so, this needs to be described and developed to show how these allegedly flat characters reflect/contribute to a theme* The characters in "Harrison Bergeron" are completely flat ←*characters can be marginally flat? Somewhat flat? A great deal flat*? with nothing to interpret from them ←*so, these flat characters have absolutely no purpose? Just how flat are they?* But, Vonnegut sends a strong message about contemporary society through his use of satire. Vonnegut made ←*but not any more?* fun of one of societies ←*how many society(ies) are we addressing here?* huge ←*huge???* beliefs that total equality is something to strive for. He showed ←*the tense shifts are terrible* that, if we were all equal, then that would be holding us back. ←*What does "holding us back" mean? In what sense, specifically?* It would be impossible to advance some people to become smarter or stronger, so instead, we would have to handicap people to be just like everyone else. ←*But isn't this "equality"??? And, according to much contemporary rhetoric, isn't "equality" what everyone should be striving for? If not equality, then what do we have? Inequality? Is that OK? Is that*

good? Doesn't this mean we have to discriminate (in the sense of the word of "choosing carefully")? Vonnegut uses simplicity of the English language to keep the reader reading ←*what?? Only simple English can keep readers reading?? Ah! This must be the problem with an illiterate society!* and humor for the reader to enjoy the reading ←*yes, it's called satire* while underneath, he sends out his message that we are silly *???silly* for striving for equality. I also do not think that Vonnegut thinks equality is a bad thing, but there is a good equality and a bad equality. ←*OK, here's a thought. Let's see if this idea develops* ... While Vonnegut's story had a very strong message, I think the ←*???* Le Guin's was that much stronger. Vonnegut has one message to send, and that message came through loud and clear ←*cliché* while Le Guin's message was heard loud and clear, he ←*Le Guin is a woman* left a lot more to be interpreted, and to make the reader think. ← *Not that we're seeing much of that in this essay* Both authors are dissatisfied with society, and both of those dissatisfactions were ←*were? Are they now based on something else?* based on morals. Both authors were not disappointed with technology, but rather, what our society might become. While both stories could have taken place in the past, I believe that both authors intended them to take place in the future, to impress to the public the need for change. I both saw that need for change, and heard it loud and clear through these two authors. ←*With the exception of the annoying repetition of "loud and clear" there's a point here, somewhere, and the "conclusion" starts to get close to where this essay might be going*

Grade: Draft

The standard caveat placed at the end of all essays receiving less than a grade of A is a reminder that a rewrite needs to show significant initiative from the student in regard to making change on his or her own volition. The student whose excerpt is shown above rewrote his essay, with one section of the final piece presented below to exemplify the considerable changes made to his writing:

> "Harrison Bergeron" by Kurt Vonnegut and "The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas" by Ursula Le Guin are alike in that both authors express dissatisfaction about contemporary society. Both use two different methods to convey their message: Vonnegut uses satire and Le Guin uses a surprise ending. While these methods are different, both authors succeed in showing their frustrations with contemporary society's lack of morals. "Harrison Bergeron" is a non-formulaic story, mainly because the characterization is flat. One example of this is Hazel. She has no complexities about her personality, and everything she thinks she speaks. Vonnegut uses Hazel to show how simplistic everyone would have to be to be equal. Vonnegut not only uses satire throughout his story to make

fun of society's belief that equality is something to strive for, but provides humorous examples of what it would really mean to be equal.

While not the most eloquent essay, nor the most critically sophisticated in the class, for this student it represented not only significant change made on his own initiative, but also showed increased ability to identify a text's theme and discuss how elements of fiction contribute to that theme.

As represented in Tables 6.19 and 6.20, of the 46 first essays submitted from all four DEC classes, 24 passed (52.2 %) with 3 As, 12 Bs, and 9 Cs. Twenty-two essays, or 47.8 percent, received a grade of "Draft." After rewrites, the pass rate increased to 41 essays (89.1 percent), with 13 As, 17 Bs, and 11 Cs. Five essays, or 10.9 percent, failed with a grade of D or F; of these, three students elected not submit a rewrite. With the exception of three students from English 1302 OL, all rewrote the first essay. None provided an explanation as to why no rewrite was submitted, but the low five percent grade value may have been a factor. This, however, did not deter F2F students in this same semester from striving for excellence: Five who initially received a "Draft" earned the A they sought on rewrite; five more achieved a grade of B. In the two 1301 classes, while one from each submitted a rewrite, the changes were so insignificant that the grade of "Draft" only increased to a D. Analysis of the first essays also considered word length, average words per sentence, percent of passive sentences, and Flesch-Kincaid Reading Ease (RE) and Reading Grade Level (RGL).

Table 6.19
Distribution of DEC First Essay Grades

Before Rewrites	#	After Rewrites	#
A	3	A	13
B	12	B	17
C	9	C	11
Draft	22	D/F	5
Total:	46	Total:	46

Table 6.20
Analysis of First DEC Essay After Rewrites

Structural Analysis	1301 OL	1301 F2F	1302 OL	1302 F2F
Word count	670	936	698	701
Average words per sentence	21.0	20.5	20.7	19.8
Passive sentences	17.9 %	16.5 %	11.3 %	12.7 %
Flesch-Kincaid RE	51.5	54.0	57.3	59.9
Flesch-Kincaid RGL	10.9	10.3	10.1	9.3
Average Grade	82.5	79.7	74.2	86.5

There is a significant deviation of 12.3 percent between the two English 1302 classes in relation to the average first essay grade, a phenomenon that is not apparent in the two English 1301 groups with a difference of only 2.8 percent. The explanation is found in the three students from English 1302 OL who did not submit a rewrite and whose "Draft" essays, therefore, reverted to a failing grade of 50. Excluding these three essays, the average grade of 82.2 reflects a comparatively smaller difference of 4.3 (Table 6.21).

Table 6.21
Summative Analysis of DEC First Essays After Rewrites

Structural Analysis	English 1301 Averages	English 1302 Averages	All DEC Averages
Word length	803	700	752
Average words per sentence	20.8	20.3	20.6
Passive sentences	17.2 %	12.0 %	14.6 %
Flesch-Kincaid RE	52.8	58.6	55.7
Flesch-Kincaid RGL	10.6	9.7	10.2
Average Grade	81.1	80.4	80.8

Passive sentence averages across the four classes showed higher use for those in English 1301 (17.9; 16.5 %), compared with English 1302 students (11.3; 12.7 %). The Flesch-Kincaid RE scores ranged from low-to-high fifties across the semesters, with the 1301

OL students recording the lowest – or easiest – average RE score of 51.5 and the 1302 F2F the highest at 59.9. RGL showed less variation from a low of 9.3 (1302 F2F) to a high of 10.9 (1301 OL).

As the essay assignments for English 1301 and 1302 differed, the summation of averages were not only calculated across all semesters, but divided between the two class groups. The summative structural analysis of the first essay, as represented in Table 6.21, shows a close correlation in average grade at 81.1 (1301) and 80.4 (1302), or an overall average grade of 80.8. Passive sentence averages remain higher in the English 1301 groups at 17.5 percent compared to 12.0 for English 1302. Difference in the average words per sentence is minimal across semesters at 0.5. The average RE level ranges from 52.8 (1301) to 58.6 (1302), while the 0.9 RGL difference between the two groups is slightly less than one grade level at 10.6 (1301) and 9.7 (1302).

6.2.4 Deracination

To prepare for deracination, all DEC students were assigned a reading entitled "Deracination and the D.I.S" (see Appendix D). The text discussed characteristics of deracination and the objective, distanced nature of a detached intellectualized space, providing specific comparative examples between a deracination and peer critique as a model:

Example of Deracination	Example of Peer Critique
Although Marcus Wildblood asserts why people should vote against gun control, his arguments fall flat because readers are merely left with Wildblood's "personal opinion" on the issue, and this hardly gives credibility to his position. Consider, as an example, Wildblood's statement that "[quote from essay]." Moreover, poor spelling and mechanics compound the lack of credibility in this piece.	You had some great ideas in the first paragraph, Marcus, and I really liked the flow of your writing when you talked about how people should vote against gun control. You might want to use more examples, though. You also need to check your grammar and spelling, because there were a few mistakes and that made it hard to read. Overall, you did an excellent job and I enjoyed reading the piece.

Deracinations were tied to the drafting of the final course essay. No word length was given for this assignment, and students were advised that part of the task was determining the parameters of their criticisms for themselves. DEC students were randomly assigned a colleague's essay to deracinate; in turn, and in keeping with the reciprocity of a "deracination set," each student had opportunity to respond to the critique by way of a counter-deracination.

While the students were prepared for written critical commentary in that they had received it from me on their first essays and IPJs, many in the F2F classes expressed concern about their ability to comment critically on their colleagues' drafts, a point not apparent for the OL students until they wrote later IPJ reflections about their experiences with deracination. Still, despite initial reticence in the F2F classes, a high degree of anticipation was evident when the deracination assignments were given out. Moreover, several F2F students were disconcerted by the deracinators assigned to their drafts, arguing that those colleagues were not capable of producing thorough, critical commentary. My response was remonstrative: The deracinating students, although not confident writers, stood to gain a great deal from the counter-deracinations, and the objecting students would, moreover, have the greater challenge of countering a weak critique.

Overall, the standard of deracination was high in both the OL and F2F classes, with most students producing well-developed and critically focused responses and counters to the drafts of their colleagues. One F2F English 1302 student wrote an inappropriate deracination, producing – as her deracinator took some critical pleasure pointing out in the counter – what effectively constituted a parody of peer critique, replete with phrases such as "needs more elaboration" and "did an excellent job." In my summative "deracination of the deracinations," a substantial reflection on the assignment that was posted in WebCT for all to read, I deliberated over whether the apparent faux pas was intentional, even though I knew it was not. To her credit, the student took the initiative to rewrite her deracination, and although the revised piece was under-developed in terms of discussing and exemplifying the points of her critique, it was far better than the first.

Similar to the CCC groups, analysis of deracinations used word count averages, passive sentence percentages, Flesch-Kincaid RE and RGL levels, and an examination of positive/negative correlations. The total word count of deracinations across the four DEC classes was 51, 913, or an average of 1, 129 words for each of the 46 students. The 1302 OL class recorded the highest word count at 15, 340, next was 1302 F2F at 14, 666, then 1301 F2F at 11, 982, and the lowest, at 9, 925 was the 1301 OL group. The lowest RE level at 48.2 was recorded in the 1301 OL class, and the highest of 57.6 in the 1301 F2F. Average words per sentence were nearly identical in the 1301 F2F (18.3) and 1302 OL (18.4) classes, and for the 1301 OL (20.1) and 1302 F2F (21.7) groups. Use of passive sentences was highest for 1301 OL students at 16 percent, while both 1302 classes recorded an interesting passive sentence average of 13.0 (OL) and 12.0 (F2F) percent – the same figures recorded for their first essay. RGL was broadly distributed: The lowest at 9.7 was in the 1301 F2F group; the highest of 11.3 for the 1301 OL students. This data is provided in Table 6.22.

Table 6.22
Comparison of Deracination Across Semesters

Category of Analysis	1301 OL	1301 F2F	1302 OL	1302 F2F
Average words per sentence	20.1	18.3	18.4	21.7
Passive sentences	16.0 %	13.0 %	13.0 %	12.0 %
Flesch-Kincaid RE	48.2	57.6	50.4	53.8
Flesch-Kincaid RGL	11.3	9.7	10.7	11.0
Word count	9, 925	11, 982	15, 340	14, 666

Comparison of the positive/negative correlatives in the two English 1301 classes[8] (OL F03; F2F F04) showed that, on average, 86.7 percent of the deracinations comprised positive correlations of specific or summative criticism, developed contradictions or objections, or stand-alone critical comments (89.9 %; 83.5 %). Negative correlatives of personal communication, token niceties, vague or generalized

[8] Note that English 1302 was excluded from the positive/negative correlative analysis in order to compare the five English 1301 courses (3 for CCC; 2 for DEC).

finalities, and sandwiching of critical comments averaged 13.3 percent (10.1%; 16.5 %). Both English 1301 groups displayed a very strong tendency for the negative correlatives of critical commentary, with the F2F class recording a slightly higher percentage (16.5%) than their OL counterparts (10.1 %). Positive correlatives, as expected, were high at 89.9 percent (OL) and 83.5 percent (F2F). This data is shown in Table 6.23.

Table 6.23
Positive and Negative Correlations Across Semesters: DEC English 1301

Positive/Negative Correlation	+/-	1301 OL F03	1301 F2F F04
Personal Communication	-	0.2 %	0.0 %
Token Niceties	-	2.4 %	1.1 %
Vague, Generalized Finalities	-	2.6 %	8.7 %
Sandwiching Critical Comments	-	4.9 %	6.7 %
Specific or Summative Criticism	+	38.6 %	13.2 %
Contradictions/Objections	+	46.2 %	67.2 %
Stand-Alone Critical Comments	+	5.1 %	3.1 %

6.2.5 Positive Correlations

The OL class recorded higher percentages of *specific or summative criticism* – critique that identifies perceived deficits, yet is unsupported by convincing counter-arguments – at 38.6 percent compared with 13.2 percent in the F2F group. Examples from this category include the following: "[P] claims that this piece is an anti-feminist manifesto because the woman 'used to play the violin,' relating to the confusion [the writer displays] of feminism and anti-feminism"; "in [W's] description of feminists, a certain subtle hostility towards feminism is detected"; and "[t]he paper showed every sign of a lack of effort, focus, dedication, and resolve." On the inverse, the development of *contradictions and objections* to incongruity was 18.1 percent higher for the F2F students (67.2 %) than those in the OL class (46.2 %), with excerpts including "[M,] although declaring this is an anti-feminist manifesto, has just stated that it is a feminist interpretation. Is the father not there supporting this woman [in the text]? How does this

make it an anti-feminist manifesto?; "[G] claims that the pregnant woman separates herself from the woman outside the clinic; clearly, an anti-feminist action. However, if feminists and anti-feminists are going to be judged by stereotypical roles, why not discuss independence?"; and "[W] tries to convince the now-hesitant reader that anti-feminists are NOT united by saying weakly that anti-feminists 'support the same ideas but do not necessarily bond with each other'." Finally, *stand-alone critical commentary*, such as "[u]ltimately, [W's] essay does not illustrate, even remotely, how the text is an anti-feminist manifesto" was more closely aligned between the two classes at 5.1 (OL) and 3.1 (F2F) percent.

6.2.6 Negative Correlations

Personal communication was absent entirely from the F2F group, and only minimally evident in the OL class at 0.2 percent. For the latter group, it occurred where two students made specific reference to the recipients' first names, and one added a short personalized note at the end of the deracination. *Token niceties*, or conveying a positive message without criticism, were also minimal at 2.4 percent (OL) and 1.1 percent (F2F) – and, where they did occur, they focused on the text produced by the student writer rather than that individual him or herself: "The many examples [in this essay] are convincing" and "[t]hroughout the essay there are some very strong arguments that attempt to link the story with anti-feminism." *Vague generalized finalities* were very low in the OL class at 2.6 percent, with the F2F students recording more instances at 8.7 percent. Examples include: "The next point about anti-feminism attempts to make a good argument [no elaboration was provided]" and – in what surely must qualify for a near-perfect example of a vague generalization – "the conclusion needs some significance that is related to the thesis; however, it is not just a restatement of the thesis."

In regard to the *sandwiching of critical comments*, F2F students showed a slightly higher percentage (6.7 %) than the OL (4.9 %). The following excerpts exemplify the characteristics of this category; that is, an attempt to pass critical observation, but one that ultimately only conveys empty ideas: "Although [B] makes strong points in his essay, *the weak links to theme will need more work* if it [the essay] is

going to reach its good potential," and "[L's claim about independence] is right because it does go against the idea of feminist bonding. *But perhaps the woman is not exercising feminist independence at all*. Instead, she is being precisely the way [L] states a feminist should be – a woman making her own choices."

6.2.7 Final Essay

While no rewrite was offered on this assignment, all DEC students had participated in deracination of their drafts for the final essay. The English 1301 students wrote an analysis of an anti-feminist theme and symbolism in Sappho Scott's "Letter to You," as their CCC counterparts had done. English 1302 students presented a Marxist or Feminist interpretation of Arthur Miller's play *Death of a Salesman*. Essays were evaluated blind and holistically, following Del Mar College's style and content criteria, then assigned a letter grade. Analysis included word length, average words per sentence, passive sentence percentages, RE and RGL levels. As the English 1301 and 1302 students received different assignments, the comparative examination between first and final essays was separated between the two class groups.

There was a marked difference in average word counts between the OL and F2F English 1301 students, with the latter group producing longer first and final essays than the former (see Table 6.24). Both groups, however, increased the average word count

Table 6.24

Analysis of Averages DEC English 1301 Final Essays with First Essays

Structural Analysis	1301 OL F03		1301 F2F F04	
	First	Final	First	Final
Word length	670	762	936	970
Words per sentence	21.0	21.6	20.5	17.1
Passive sentences	17.9 %	14.9 %	16.5 %	16.1 %
Reading Ease	51.5	51.0	54.0	56.2
Reading Grade Level	10.9	11.0	10.3	9.5
Average Grade	82.5	86.3	79.7	86.9

between first and final essay submissions by an average of 92 (OL) and 34 (F2F) words. Passive sentence percentages decreased by 3.0 percent for the OL students and 0.4 percent for the F2F. While the average words per sentence increased by a modest 0.6 for the OL group, the F2F class showed a comparatively significant decrease of 3.4. RE (51.5; 51.0) and RGL (10.9; 11.0) remained steady for the OL class, but the F2F group increased the RE score by 2.2 and the RGL dropped by 0.8 from 10.3 to 9.5. Average grade increased by 3.8 percent (OL) and 7.2 percent (F2F).

The English 1302 classes also showed an increase in the average number of words produced between the first and final essays, at 273 (OL) and 320 (F2F) words. Although the average words per sentence decreased by 0.8 for the OL class, the F2F group showed an increase of 1.5. The inverse was apparent for the percent of passive sentences, with an increase of 1.7 percent (OL) and a decrease of 0.7 (F2F). RE levels fell in both groups by 7.0 (OL) and 5.6 (F2F), but RGL increased – up from 10.1 to 11.0 (OL) and 9.3 to 10.0 (F2F). Average grade increased for OL students by 7.2 percent, but decreased for F2F by 4.8 percent. This data is presented in Table 6.25.

Table 6.25
Analysis of Averages DEC English 1302 Final Essays with First Essays

Structural Analysis	1302 OL S04		1302 F2F S04	
	First	Final	First	Final
Word length	698	971	701	1, 021
Words per sentence	20.7	19.9	19.8	21.3
Passive sentences	11.3 %	13.0 %	12.7 %	12.0 %
Reading Ease	57.3	50.3	59.9	54.3
Reading Grade Level	10.1	11.0	9.3	10.0
Average Grade	74.2	81.4	86.5	81.7

Summative averages of the first and final 1301 essays across semesters showed decreases in average words per sentence (down 1.4), passive sentences (down 1.7 %), and RGL (down 0.3). Increases were evident in average word length from 803 to 866

words, RE levels marginally increased by 0.8, and average grade was up by 5.6 percent. For 1302 students, average words per sentence and passive sentence percentage remained consistent, with only marginal increases of 0.3 word average and 0.5 percent. Average word count was significantly higher, however, with a difference of nearly 300 words between the first and final essays, and while the RE level dropped by 6.3, the RGL increased by 0.8. Grade averages were close at 80.4 and 81.6, a difference of 1.2 percent. This data is presented in Table 6.26.

Table 6.26
Summative Analysis of DEC First and Final Essays Across Semesters

Structural Analysis	English 1301		English 1302	
	First	Final	First	Final
Word length	803	866	700	996
Words per sentence	20.8	19.4	20.3	20.6
Passive sentences	17.2 %	15.5 %	12.0	12.5
Reading Ease	52.8	53.6	58.6	52.3
Reading Grade Level	10.6	10.3	9.7	10.5
Average Grade	81.1	86.6	80.4	81.6

6.2.8 Retention, Attendance, and Participation

As DEC students, regardless of whether OL or F2F, had access to equivalent electronic course environments (WebCT), attendance and participation of all students eligible for the study was measured by WebCT's tracking feature, including the number of respective class log-ins and posted discussion messages – in both open forums and IPJs. As presented in Table 6.27, of the 65 students initially enrolled in all four DEC classes (12 in 1301 OL F03; 22 in 1301 F2F F04; 12 in 1302 OL S04; 19 in 1302 F2F S04), 50 (76.9 %) were retained; that is, these students did not withdraw from the courses. Of this retained group, 46 (92.0 %) passed the classes and 4 (8.0 %) failed. From these students, 46 were considered eligible for research inclusion as, regardless of

a passing or failing course grade, all had submitted the assignments used for analysis in this study.

Table 6.27
Overview of DEC Enrolment, Retention, and Pass/Fail

Category	1301 OL	1301 F2F	1302 OL	1302 F2F	All Classes
Initial Enrolment	12	22	12	19	65
Withdraw	1 (8.3 %)	9 (40.9 %)	0	5 (26.3 %)	15 (23.1 %)
Retained	11 (91.7 %)	13 (59.1 %)	12 (100 %)	14 (73.7 %)	50 (76.9 %)
Passed Course	11 (100 %)	10 (76.9 %)	12 (100 %)	13 (92.9 %)	46 (92.0 %)
Failed Course	0	3 (23.1 %)	0	1 (7.1 %)	4 (8.0 %)
Eligible Students	15 (100 %)	10 (83.3 %)	9 (100 %)	13 (92.9 %)	34 (94.4 %)

Analysis of retention, an incidental and auxiliary component of the study, drew on data from all students, whether eligible or not. Percentages are high in the two OL class groups (1301 F03; 1302 S04) at 91.7 and 100 percent. However, while only one student withdrew from the online DEC courses, both class groups comprised Dual Credit students, whose retention statistics are generally excellent given the mandated high-school attendance regulations. The two F2F classes, both non-Dual Credit, showed retention rates of 59.1 percent (1301 F04) and 73.7 percent (1302 S04). Of the retained students, pass rates stood at 100 percent for the two OL classes, with 76.9 and 92.9 percent for the 1301 and 1302 F2F classes respectively. Of the retained students from all DEC classes, four were ineligible for the study as they had not submitted one or more of the assignments used in the analysis.

Reasons for withdrawal were mostly due to non-attendance/participation and a resulting lack of assignment submissions. The one student who withdrew from the 1301 OL class consistently struggled with the coursework and I counseled her to drop the course. No students withdrew from 1302 OL. Of the 14 withdrawals from the F2F classes (9 in 1301; 5 in 1302), 12 were prompted by the course attendance policy, which allowed students no more than three class absences before being dropped from the

course. Of note, however, is that for both F2F groups, those students who accrued class absences did so in the first half of semester. Although two students, both from the 1302 F2F course, remained in the class until Week 15, one dropped on his own volition and the other received a failing grade due to non-submission of assigned work. These latter two students present an anomaly. For the first time in three semesters of teaching with *Decritique*, I noticed resistance from both. Apparent from the start of the course, they exhibited characteristics of a self-imposed physical and mental exile from perceived authority – or what Ira Shor has described as a "Siberian syndrome." Anecdotal evidence, however, indicated that their behavior was related to external influences outside the scope of the class.

Participation from the 46 eligible students indicated that while the two OL groups showed similar log-in averages per student at 698 (1301) and 760 (1302), the two F2F class groups recorded significantly higher averages of 1, 036 (1301) and 933 (1302). This disparity was again apparent in the total number of posted messages and the average number of posts per student: The 1301 and 1302 OL classes respectively showed 547 and 569 posts, with averages of 49.7 and 47.4 per student; the 1301 and 1302 F2F classes, in contrast, recorded 894 and 1, 249 total posts and per-student average posts of 89.4 and 96.1. This data is presented in Table 6.28.

Table 6.28
DEC Participation of Eligible Students

Category	1301 OL	1301 F2F	1302 OL	1302 F2F	All Classes
Log-in Averages	698	1, 036	760	933	856.8
Total Posts	547	894	569	1, 249	814.8
Average Post/Student	49.7	89.4	47.4	96.1	70.7

6.2.9 Student Observations

The perceptions of DEC students were collected by way of the last week's set of IPJ questions that asked about their experiences with deracination and the D.I.S. and its relationship to critically reflective thinking, as well as their reflections on the course

itself. Interwoven throughout their responses, deracination – as a process and outcome – dominated the students' responses. A common theme, however, demonstrated awareness of the way deracination had affected the students' own thinking and writing: "It taught me about who I am and who I might want to be. … I can say that I think more critically about myself" and "it encouraged my ability to go off on a tangent and suddenly get back on the subject at the end of whatever is it I'm writing about. It's through this system of trial and error that I extend the boundaries of my own knowledge in search of something relative." Of note are the references to the students' thoughts about themselves and their actions: Consideration of "who I am and who I might want to be" in a "system of trial and error" that seeks to extend the boundaries of knowing to make new connections with existing understanding. What these comments share is an inherent rejection of conformity to the expectation of an ideal, whether that belongs to the social group or to the assignment, and to shift attention to the individual's place as an auxiliary component of the whole.

Other students sought to construct some defining parameters for deracination in that it "pulls apart the ideas encompassed in the paper," to "make a case out of nothing," to "critique with an open and unbiased mind" in a "learning opportunity to reflect, analyze, and to challenge the basic essence of an essay." It was also seen as a way "for anyone to express how they feel without using emotions, a paradox in itself." Then, there were those who admitted a curious ambivalence about the process, describing it as "one that at first can seem appealing with the idea of gaining a whole new perspective on your own work," but then admitting that "what one who has never done this [process of deracination] does not take into account is how brutal some of the writing can be." Interestingly, one of the students in the OL class drew parallels between deracination and her own deaf culture, writing that "[w]e [those who are deaf] just like to say what is there instead of covering up the truth. We just don't do white lies." This student then conceded, however, that "[c]riticizing is not as easy as it sounds. It truly requires concentration and knowledge of the materials used to make a good critique," a point supported by another student who wrote that "[d]eracinating has to be the most difficult form of essay writing ... [and] takes much concentration and devotion to do so." Yet, one of the most consistent observations about deracination was a sense of authentication –

one that reinforced the students' own writing as worthy of close, critical analysis: "I was expecting a harsh deracination because quite frankly the draft that I turned in was absolute rubbish. What I did not expect was a deracination that was a thousand words plus over an essay that was only three hundred eighty seven words."

Many of the students wrote, too, of the frustrations they encountered in writing their deracinations and counter-deracinations: "I was blinded by my own passions for my writing ... [and] needed to mature as a writer in order for me to survive"; or "they [deracinations] required the most amount of critical analysis and thought that I have ever put myself through." Others pointed to a sense of confusion and uncertainty in being given an assignment with so few parameters.

> Writing a deracination can be a very frustrating assignment. It wasn't until after a few read-throughs that I started to gain a clearer picture of what I was supposed to be doing. ... I started to write using the little notes I had written along the side of the paper ... [and] using the little things I pointed out led to bigger and bigger ideas until I had a reasonably solid critique.

Students also reflected on the challenge of deracination, remarking that it was "harder to read and criticize another's work than to write my own draft. The difficulty comes in having to really think critically, more so than in the past, and then critically think on behalf of a colleague." Others questioned their ability "to write not so pleasant ideas about another student's work" or acknowledged a desire not to hurt feelings: "It's hard to tell someone that they need to improve here or there without being too judgmental. It's also hard to tell someone that their writing needs work when you're not sure your writing is any better." This latter point was reinforced by a student who, asserting that the "deracination was not my favorite paper to write," admitted to the difficulty of being critical of another's essay "when I kept thinking that I was not a good judge to objectively criticize someone else."

In contrast, however, other students saw deracination as an opportunity to think for themselves: "When we began deracinating is when we actually began to critically analyze"; "[t]he level of thought that goes into a deracination is high. It crawls into the mind [of the student writer] and requires a much deeper and more objective examination

of what is being thought" and "[d]eracinations are truly the best way, I think, for a writer to expand one's mind and reach deeper in to their [sic] thoughts than ever before." Other students found the process of deracinating another's work illuminated problems in their own writing: "In my deracination of [F's] essay, I spoke of his retelling the story. The problem was one that I too found myself guilty of because it seemed an easy way to provide the evidence to enforce the claim." Similarly, "without a deracination I would not have been able to see my own mistakes. As a writer we are always going to think our work is good ... . I not only learned how to take corrective criticism [with deracination] but how to give the criticism as well."

With many of the students recognizing that the giving and receiving of criticism can be a painful act, the importance of agreeing to work within the parameters of the D.I.S. was enforced in many of the IPJ responses. Of her deracinator, one student wrote that "she just literally had me dangling from a string as if I were a ball of yarn and she a cat just toying with my thoughts. But as I read my deracination paper back to myself I just could not believe that there were so many problems"; another claimed that deracination "is like falling from a skyscraper to my inevitable doom on the concrete sidewalk" and yet "after a while, I would calm down and consider the critical thought that had been put into analyzing my work." For still another student, working in the D.I.S. meant understanding "that the comments and analysis were not personal" and to "go beyond my own feelings and think about the benefits of a critical analysis." Many conceded that it is possible to detach: "Although I felt bad I knew that I was working in the DIS and so was she [the deracinatee]. In the end, I could pull out the bad points because I was under the umbrella of the DIS. The trick is to separate ourselves from the reality of a criticism. Truly, one can disconnect from reality and look at the words for what they are."

The results of working with what many students saw as the negative aspects of deracination within the D.I.S., however, were positive. Many took the opportunity to completely revise their original drafts after deracination: "Instead of correcting the problems that [P] criticized, I wrote a whole new paper, with a different thesis and many new resources. I even took a whole new approach. Once I started writing, everything just came at once." Another student wrote that she was "able to make the most out of the

corrective criticism that came out of the deracination ... . I feel that this [final essay] is perhaps the best paper I have written all year, or even possibly ever written." This final observation is an important one: Indeed, after spending most of the semester with a C average for her essays, the student produced one of the highest-scored assignments of both the OL and F2F groups combined for the final essay.

Again, discussion about deracinations featured prominently in the students' overall reflections on the courses, with many indicating their own sense of accomplishment or progress: "I find myself amazed at just how far not only I, but my peers have come. Much of this is due to practice and guidance, but some of the skill I have developed is thanks to deracination"; "the class demanded more from my brain than I thought I was capable of producing. It made my mind scramble around for something to cling onto for survival, until I finally got the hang of writing something worth reading"; "many times I was stumped [in this class] and once or twice I learned that my writing, though praised endlessly before, has quite a way to go"; "I have learned, if nothing else in this course, how to think better for myself and that disagreeing with someone else isn't always a bad thing"; and "I remember when we had our first glimpse of the first essay topic. We all dropped our jaws in shock, overwhelmed at what the prompt was asking for and astonished when we realized we knew exactly what it meant." Other comments related to the amount of writing the students found they had produced: "I found it ironic that I was in an English class, yet we didn't read a single book. However, I didn't expect that I would write the equivalent length of a short story" and "I only have a few things to say. One of them is that I might as well have written a book."

The reflections also showed evidence that the students perceived their English class, and their places in it, as unique: "I'm so used to the standardization of class and regulations that I have almost forgotten what it feels like to participate in uninhibited brainstorming and learning"; "[t]his is the only class I have experienced where everyone converses together, even outside of the class. There have been many hallway discussions about what was taking place"; "[t]he first day of class I arrived an hour early, listening to this old professor going over his syllabus and thinking 'if this is my teacher, I'm in trouble.' Then you came walking [down] the hall and I knew this class was going to be

great" and "[w]hat has a man become when he can deconstruct a Godzilla movie? Is he a monster, much like the big green one himself? No, he is not a monster; he is a student of Becky Flores' English class, a class like no other I've ever taken." Yet, the most surprising element of the students' reflections on the course came from the F2F classes, and it was a characteristic not evident in the OL class groups:

- "Thank you for believing in me"
- "You spoke to us as adults and did not talk down to us. I appreciated that"
- "The first thing I wrote [in the IPJ] I said 'there is more to [W].' And I don't think I will ever forget you actually wanting to know what that 'more' is"
- "Your words gave me the incentive to continue even when it was difficult. Today, I am glad I did not drop the course. I have few people who have influenced me as much, and for that I am grateful"
- "You showed me that you were interested in the student, not the paycheck. It truly shows that you love your work and want to reach the student. Thank you for being there for us"
- "I liked the way that you would call on names that were a little quiet or shy so that they too could voice their opinion"
- "My instructor, she is the most important of all. When I felt that I was in doubt or unsure of myself she was there to pick up my self esteem and encourage me to go on. You made us feel comfortable around you"
- "Most of all, the difference is you! My first impression of you was 'she knows what she's talking about'"
- "I never thought that a Ph.D. candidate would have anything good to say about my thoughts and writings. I really do appreciate the honest comments you have made in response. You have a good thing going here, Becky"

6.3 Observations: Concept of Critical Care and *Decritique*

From the 80 students considered eligible for this study, 34 were instructed with the pedagogy of Critical Care (3 class sections) and 46 with *Decritique* (4 class sections). Of these, 55 were enrolled in English 1301 and 25 in English 1302. While 48 studied in a face-to-face computer supported classroom, 32 studied online; similarly, 32

were Dual Credit students and 48 were non Dual-Credit. The average student age was slightly higher in DEC classes (20.2 years) than in CCC (19.5) and there were, on average, two-thirds more females than males. Placement reading/writing scores for English 1301 showed a higher percentage of DEC students (95.2 %) above the minimum passing level than CCC (73.5 %), yet these results excluded the essay portion results of the standardized entrance tests. English 1302 students, having all passed 1301 as a pre-requisite for enrollment, showed a median 1301 course grade of 3.0, or a B.

The IPJ assignments showed that DEC students consistently wrote more than those in the CCC classes, with a total of 273, 612 words produced, or an average of 5, 948 words per student. Word count between the DEC OL and F2F environments was close, with an average of 6, 504 words per student in the OL classes and 5, 392 in the F2F. Conversely, CCC students wrote less, with a total word count of 108, 208 and an average of 3, 183 words per student. A major difference, however, was apparent between the OL and F2F CCC classes. While the OL groups averaged 5, 255 words per student in their IPJs – comparable to the DEC OL results – CCC F2F students averaged only 2, 436 words per student. This data, presented in Figure 6.4, indicates that DEC F2F students wrote 2.2 times as many words over their CCC F2F counterparts.

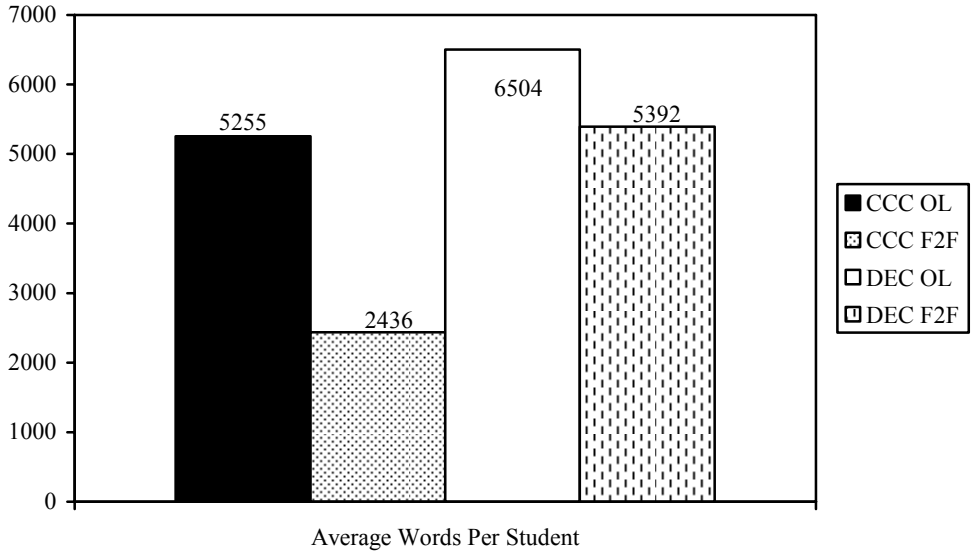


Fig. 6.4: IPJ Word Count Averages Per Student: CCC and DEC; OL and F2F

Development and exemplification of IPJ writing was problematic in the CCC groups. Whether in the OL or F2F environment, the majority of students showed a preference for my initiation and development of discussion and many framed their writing in terms of "answering the question," with enumerated responses often prefaced with tentative exclamations of "this is only my opinion, but …" or "I hope I've got this right." Exemplification was frequently clichéd and drawn on lived experience as veridical evidence, spelling was often phonetic or abbreviated, and word choice reflected the vernacular. When the outcome of verbal (F2F) or open forum (OL) discussion was recorded in IPJs, it nearly always validated the consensual opinion of the group. The DEC IPJs, despite initial caution, showed strong overall development, particularly in regard to critical reflection on vigorous argument in both verbal and open forum discussion, though group engagement was more marked for the F2F students than the OL. Vocabulary in both groups, however, showed extensive variety, often incorporating words introduced through text readings.

Grade differences between English 1301 CCC and DEC students for the first essay was greater in the DEC class by 2.2 percent (81.1; CCC 78.9), although it should be noted that while all DEC 1301 students earning a non-passing grade of Draft submitted a rewrite, four CCC students did not. Excluding those four non-rewritten essays, which ultimately earned a failing grade of 50, results in a higher average of first essay grades for the CCC classes at 84.7. Final essays did not qualify for rewrites, but were tied to peer critique (CCC) and deracination (DEC) assignments. Evaluated blind and holistically, there was a difference of 4.9 percent between the CCC (81.7) and DEC (86.6) classes, representing nearly half a letter grade in favor of the DEC students. The two English 1302 class groups, both instructed with *Decritique*, showed a deviation of only 0.3 percent at 81.4 (OL and 81.7 (DEC). Although based on a very small population and the outcome of the final essay assignment, this data for English 1302 indicates that there is no significant difference between the OL (DEC) and F2F (DEC) modes of delivery. For English 1301 (CCC and DEC), the data shows that DEC students scored nearly five percent higher on their final essays than CCC.

For all classes, English 1301 and English 1302, average words per sentence did not show significant statistical differences with both CCC and DEC students recording a

slight decrease of 0.4 (CCC) and 0.6 (DEC) over the first and final essay assignments. Average passive sentence percentages in 1301 CCC increased by 3.5 percent, decreased for 1301 DEC by 1.7 percent, and 1302 DEC students showed a small increase in the final essay of 0.5 percent. Of interest, however, is that despite the CCC increase and overall DEC decrease in passive sentence averages, the percentage for the final essay is very close between the two class groups at 15.3 (CCC) and 15.5 (DEC) – a difference of just 0.2 percent. Results for the Flesch-Kincaid Reading Ease (RE) and Reading Grade Level (RGL) were mixed. Both CCC and DEC 1301 students recorded a slightly disappointing average RE increase of 1.3 (CCC) and 0.8 (DEC); the English 1302 DEC students, however, showed a significant RE decrease of 6.3. The results are similar for RGL. While an increased level is desirable, both 1301 groups showed a decrease of 0.5 (CCC) and 0.3 (DEC). The 1302 DEC classes recorded an increased average RGL of 0.8. These results suggest that while there was no significant difference in RE or RGL between DEC and CCC in English 1301, the DEC 1302 students improved both the ease of reading and the sophistication in expression in their final essays of the course.

There were, however, clearer distinctions between CCC and DEC students in relation to the depth and scope of revision in the first essay rewrites. Of the 30 CCC and 43 DEC students who qualified for a rewrite, 21 CCC (70.0 %) and 24 DEC (55.8 %) submitted a revised essay. Of these, 12 CCC (57.1 %) and 19 DEC (79.2 %) were originally Drafts, while 9 CCC (42.9 %) and 5 DEC (20.8 %) had passed with a C or B. Therefore, while 14 percent more CCC students submitted a rewrite than DEC, a greater proportion of DEC essays (22.1 %) had received an ostensibly failing grade of Draft. The data suggests that a Draft status does not necessarily provide greater impetus for students to rewrite or revise their essays, and neither does the pedagogy of CCC or DEC. This latter point is further reinforced by the fact that four CCC and three DEC students submitted no rewrite at all. Grade distribution after rewrites, however, showed a curious anomaly between the CCC and DEC groups. From all essays that initially received a Draft, ten DEC students increased their grade to an A (5) or B (10); none from the CCC classes earned an A on rewrite. What this indicates is that DEC students were more likely to make significant and effective changes to their essays in the rewriting process – as measured by a high passing grade – than those in the CCC classes. By extension,

CCC rewrites, based on the grade received, were more likely to contain less significant revision, resulting in only a minimal grade increase.

As observed in the IPJ assignments, the word count produced in the DEC deracinations were significantly higher than the CCC peer critiques. DEC students wrote a total of 51, 913 words, or an average of 1, 129 words per student in this assignment. For peer critique, CCC students produced 11, 844 words, with a far lower per-student average of 348. Moreover, while in the IPJ assignments CCC OL students recorded a comparative average word count as their DEC F2F and OL counterparts, this was not observed in the peer critiques. CCC OL students averaged only 560 words per peer critique compared with the 1, 098 average of their DEC OL colleagues doing deracination. The anomaly is even more startling when CCC F2F results are compared with DEC F2F: Here, the CCC peer critique average per student was 272 words; the DEC F2F deracination average was 1, 159 words per student – the highest average recorded of all classes. Anomalous results were also evident in the percentage of passive sentences when comparing the essays with the peer critiques/deracinations. While essays showed no significant difference, CCC peer critiques averaged 5.3 percent passive sentence use, whereas DEC deracinations averaged 13.5 percent. The average words used per sentence was also higher in the DEC classes (19.6) than CCC (14.6). The most remarkable distinction, however, was in RE and RGL scores. CCC peer critiques averaged an RE of 64.6 (high) and RGL of 7.8 (low), while results for DEC deracinations were a low RE of 52.5 and a comparatively far higher RGL of 10.7. Drawn from this data, conclusions about the differences between peer critique and deracination are as follows: Deracinations were 4.3 times lengthier than peer critiques, showed 8.2 percent more use of passive sentences, an average of 5 more words per sentence, an 11.9 difference in ease of reading, and nearly a 3-grade level increase in RGL. In short, deracinations were more developed and expressed more complex ideas in a more sophisticated style than peer critiques.

In this regard, it is also important to consider the positive/negative correlation analysis of the peer critiques and deracinations, and the distinct differences between the two. CCC students recorded a positive:negative ratio of 12:88, meaning that 88 percent of the peer critiques comprised personalized comments, token niceties, vague and

generalized finalities, and the sandwiching of criticism between praise. DEC students, on the inverse, achieved a correlation of 87:13, where 87 percent of the deracinations were characterized by specific and summative criticism, contradictions and objections, and stand-alone critical commentary. As English 1301 final essay grades were a product of peer critique for CCC and deracination for DEC, the 4.9 percent higher score in the latter group suggests that further investigation of deracination as a specific application of critical pedagogy is warranted.

Retention results were surprising. Given the nurturing and caring nature of CCC, I would have expected less attrition in those classes, but it was the DEC students who showed higher overall retention at 76.9 percent compared with 62.1 percent for CCC. Pass rates were also higher for DEC at 92.0 percent compared with CCC at 83.3 percent. This data, however, relates to all students enrolled in the seven classes, both eligible and non-eligible. It also includes the 32 Dual Credit students for whom retention is significantly stronger due to mandated high-school attendance policies. The following observations, therefore, reflect a distinction between OL and F2F modes of delivery, and draws only from the study's eligible population. Retention for the F2F classes showed a significant 8.5 percent increase for DEC students (65.9 %) compared with CCC (57.4 %), and a higher pass rate at 85.2 percent (DEC) over 77.8 percent (CCC). For the OL students, all of whom were Dual Credit, the anomaly is maintained between DEC and CCC. Despite historically excellent retention in Dual Credit, only 81.8 percent of the CCC students were retained compared with 95.8 percent for DEC OL – a retention difference of 14 percent. Again, however, these results are tempered by the population's small size.

Participation in the courses, measured by average number of WebCT log-ins and forum messages produced by each student showed differences in favor of DEC, and remarkably little variation between OL and F2F DEC modes. CCC students recorded an overall average of 575 log-ins and 30.7 posts per student. Average OL and F2F CCC log-ins were similar at 652 and 536, as were average posts per CCC student at 35.2 (OL) and 28.5 (F2F). The DEC classes, however, showed total averages of 857 log-ins and 70.7 posts per student. Surprisingly, while the OL and F2F DEC students recorded relatively close comparative log-in averages at 729 and 985 respectively, the average

posts per student showed remarkable disparity. While the DEC OL result averaged 48.6 posts per student, for DEC F2F it was nearly double at 92.8. The DEC F2F results here are of particular interest because, given the entirely text-based nature of communication in an online environment, it would be reasonable to expect the OL students to log-in and post more frequently than those in an F2F class, yet the opposite was shown.

From the start of semester in the CCC classrooms I sought to establish a community of learners bound by a sense of sharing, tolerance, trust, and respect; overall, I succeeded. By the end of their courses, students demonstrated an acute recognition of the collective and how to contribute to the maintenance of the status quo, actively seeking to reconcile potentially unsettling deviations from the norm, underscored by the articulation of generalities and endorsement of mainstream assumptions. They also felt at ease enough to frequently contribute personal observations and lived experiences to illustrate their ideas, and tenaciously hold those beliefs as veridical and unassailable truth. Dissent, whether by way of discourse or even transgressing acceptable standards of essay or journal writing, was an abnormality – something that needed to be "fixed." While many claimed an increased ability to look more deeply into things, ironically this was not apparent in their own reflections on the course. Although there was evidence that students could make abstract concepts like "critically reflective thinking" tangible, it was often tied to a conceptual framework of respectful tolerance – one that showed awareness of alternative perspectives, but with little indication of internalized change. There was also an uncomfortable emphasis on the teacher's inextricable role in learning: Revered as the holder of wisdom and giver of knowledge, it is from her that approval must be sought. This sense of dependent trust was concerning, for at times it illuminated that the students perceived their success rested on the moves I made, or did not make.

While the DEC students also showed awareness of alternative perspectives, it was characterized by recognition of their own relationship to multiple viewpoints, demonstrating an attempt to extend the boundaries of knowing to make new connections with existing understanding. Inherently, DEC students tended to reject conformity to ideal expectations, particularly in relation to exceeding the parameters of an assigned topic for discourse. Initially, many students showed a curious ambivalence towards their studies, yet one of the most consistent observations made was a growing sense of

authentication that reinforced their own writing and thinking as worthy of close, critical analysis. Moreover, many conceded the possibility of being able to detach and separate their own selves from a contextual reality. Particularly in the deracinations, DEC students showed a strong ability to engage in cognitive possibilities by arguing with points or issues over which they might ordinarily agree, reflecting a deconstructive commitment to the text. One of the most surprising aspects of the study, however, was a distinction between the OL and F2F DEC classrooms. In the former, although students were diligent and articulate, the discursive environment was formal and sterile; the latter, in contrast, imbued a critical camaraderie that endorsed cohesion and solidarity despite the dissent. At the start of the project I thought *Decritique* would be easier to deliver in the online environment where I did not see the students face-to-face and they did not see me, but this was not the case. Moreover, while in their course reflections the F2F students initially related impressions of shock and disconcertion, their final comments almost uniformly expressed sincere, emotional engagement with the course and their instructor. From a pedagogy that many consider too blunt, too critical, and too potentially hurtful, students in the DEC F2F classes ironically perceived the class as one expressing an unexpected essence of critical care.

7. Conclusion

At the start of the study, I proposed a null hypothesis that, when compared with a pedagogy of Critical Care (CCC), application of *Decritique* (DEC) in the teaching of first-year college English makes no significant difference in students' ability to write analytical essays characterized by depth and sophistication of argument and marked by evidence of critically reflective thought. Anticipating a rejection of the null hypothesis, initially I expected to find that:

- Essays written in the DEC classes would be more complex, more sophisticated, and showing greater analytical depth than CCC – particularly the final course essay;
- DEC students would produce deeper, broader revisions of their essays than CCC;
- Informal writing in journals and text-based discussion in DEC classes would be more significantly developed than CCC;
- There would be significant differences between online (OL) and face-to-face (F2F) modes of delivery; and
- Due to the nature of "caring," CCC students would be "happier" or "more satisfied" than DEC and, as a result, retention would be higher in the CCC classes.

The research process, focusing on the concepts of critical thinking, critical pedagogy, critical literacy, and critical care, showed a recognized need that students in first-year college English classrooms develop a cognitive repertoire of tools and skill in regard to disrupting or disturbing the barriers of their own ideological tropes; in short, it's not so much a question of teaching writing as it is teaching thinking. What remains unaddressed in recent scholarship is the question of how this can be achieved in measurable, tangible, and effective ways. I posit that *Decritique* offers a response to this question, and frame my justification on the expectations established at the beginning of this project under four subheadings that summarize the study's findings.

7.1 Essays: Complexity, Depth, Sophistication, Revision

Final essays of each course were evaluated primarily in terms of degrees of complexity, depth, and sophistication of thesis and argument. Comparison of final essay grades over the semesters shows that DEC students averaged nearly a five percent, or half a letter grade, increase over their CCC colleagues in English 1301. In contrast, the two English 1302 DEC classes, one OL and one F2F, recorded a difference of only 0.3 percent for the final essays. While a five percent grade difference may not be phenomenally large, the significance is that it is a tangible gain, suggesting that *Decritique* pedagogy had some measurable influence on student outcomes. Conversely, the very close correlation for the two DEC English 1302 classes provides support to this claim with an *absence* of difference of less than half a percent. Although researcher bias was minimized with the blind and holistic grading of these essays by two instructors of English 1301/1302, one of whom was the researcher, staking a claim of validity for these results would require a larger population over a sustained period and a formal process of evaluation by normed third parties.

In terms of revision, DEC essays showed a marked degree of depth when compared with those of the CCC classes. While more CCC students submitted rewrites, revision was greater in those from DEC students, indicating that critical commentary embedded within the text – of responding to the students' ideas and assertions as "the things themselves" – may play a significant role in relation to the depth of revision and, moreover, that a non-failing grade of "Draft" is not necessarily motivation for students to undertake significant revisions to their work. In their deracinations, assignments that were tied directly to the production of essays, DEC students tended to validate the possibility of abnormality by actively working to identify incongruity, even when it was not initially apparent, therefore opening the opportunity for re-cognition and transgression of ideas – not only for the student whose work was being deracinated, but for the deracinating students themselves. This capability of being consciously aware of critically reflecting on their own ideas reflects the phenomenological process of eidetic reduction and also Bakhtin's *vnenakhodimost*, of placing oneself outside of oneself in order to construct an authentic internalized dialogic relation. In contrast, the CCC peer critiques revealed identification, or recognition, of the established collective norm in

terms of what constituted a "good essay," and sought instead to align the ideas produced in student writing with perceived acceptable standards.

The time it took to write interwoven, critical commentary into the DEC students' essays is worth consideration. Patently, the practice of commenting only at the end of paragraphs with a summative statement at the conclusion of the essay requires less time for the instructor – a method used for CCC classes. Yet, in the course of this study I discovered that it took almost twice as long to carefully re-phrase and translate honest, critical commentary into something more palatable, positive, and encouraging for the CCC essays. Moreover, the writing of DEC commentary, inherently integrated with the students' writing, became part of the pedagogy. In this way, the task of evaluation was not separated from the act of teaching. Finally, rather than responding to a pre-determined rubric as a measurement of evaluation, DEC commentary instead responded to the ideas of the students and what they brought to their learning.

7.2 Informal Writing: Journals and Written Discourse

The 2003 *Neglected "R"* report from the National Commission on Writing in America's Schools and Colleges (NCWASC), advises that students need to double the time they spend writing and, moreover, that writing is a complex intellectual endeavor that should serve to stretch the minds of students and sharpen their ability in analysis (13). The informal journal and open forum discussion writing produced by the DEC students met these goals outlined in the NCWASC report: Their word count, on average, was 2.5 times more than in the CCC classes, and the development and exemplification of DEC journal entries and forum discussion was far greater than CCC, with the latter group endorsing personal truth as veridical evidence and being far less likely to examine their own thinking to go beyond what they knew. Although it is not unreasonable to expect more developed writing and communication in an entirely text-based online environment, as was the case with similar word counts for DEC and CCC online students, of particular note in this study is the significant difference in the F2F classroom in favor of the DEC groups over the CCC.

7.3 Delivery Mode: OL and F2F

While there is some indication that the pedagogy of *Decritique* may positively affect student outcomes, this study suggests that there is no overall discrepancy between OL and F2F delivery modes. However, there was a surprising distinction in terms of implementing *Decritique*. Although the initial reaction of students to receipt of critical commentary was one of dismay and disconcertion in both modes, I had thought it would be easier to deliver it in an online environment where the students were unknown to me. Conversely, I envisaged it would be more difficult to engage criticality in the F2F classroom. This, however, was not the case. Overwhelmingly, while a strong sense of critical camaraderie and solidarity developed in all the DEC F2F classrooms, the DEC OL environments retained a sense of formal sterility, lacking the dichotomous elements of playful seriousness that is an integral part of *Decritique*. Interestingly, the OL DEC classes retained a very serious nature without the play, while the CCC OL and F2F classes focused more on the play than the serious. The characteristic feature of the DEC F2F classrooms, therefore, was that they successfully integrated both elements.

7.4 Student Observations and Retention

The final expectation of the study was that due to the caring, nurturing nature of critical care pedagogy, CCC students would be "happier" or "more satisfied" with their coursework than their DEC counterparts, and that this would be measured in terms of student observations on the class and higher CCC retention statistics. The expectation was proven wrong. Despite a conscious commitment to present myself in the CCC classroom as warm, positive, nurturing, and enthusiastic – aspects that frequently rank highly on student evaluations as very important and desirable characteristics in a teacher, this did not translate into higher levels of retention, attendance, degree of course engagement, or student satisfaction. Retention was not only higher in DEC classes across the three semesters, but the degree of investiture in their learning and engagement with the course materials was greater for DEC students. Further, while a characteristic of the DEC classroom was a developed sense of self-initiative and independence, the CCC showed a worrisome dependence on the teacher, endorsing the concerns raised by critics of Critical Care.

Towards the end of each semester at Del Mar College, students complete course evaluations independently of their instructors through a third party data gathering and analysis organization called the IDEA Center, the results of which I analyzed as a means to impartially gauge levels of student satisfaction. Statistical reports are generated that rank each class, drawn on student ratings in areas such as teaching effectiveness, course satisfaction, and perceptions of progress on three core objectives, pre-determined by the instructor. Each semester of the study, the three objectives I nominated were:

1. Learning to analyze and critically evaluate ideas, arguments, and points of view
2. Gaining a broader understanding and appreciation of intellectual/cultural activity through the study of literature
3. Acquiring an interest in learning more by students asking their own questions and seeking their own answers

Analysis of these evaluations, represented in Figure 7.1, indicates some statistical support for the empirical observations I made here as well as the students' own reflective commentaries on their course experience. The rankings are based on a scale of 1 through 5, with 5 the highest, and although students are generally reluctant to rank such surveys at either extreme, the average results for all the classes in this study show that students in the two DEC F2F classes were the most positive about their course experience at 4.69 and 4.55 respectively. The CCC F2F group averaged the third highest result at 4.53, followed by the first appearance of a DEC OL class at 4.41. The last three rankings, in order, were CCC OL at 4.32, CCC F2F at 4.11, and a low of 4.0 from the DEC OL class. Of interest in this data set is the two extremes: DEC F2F (4.69) and DEC OL (4.0), supporting the claim that *Decritique* fares better in the F2F classroom, although it should be noted that the other DEC OL class falls in the middle of these two results at 4.41. A median of 4.37 for all seven classes also indicates that two of the CCC groups fell below the average at 4.32 and 4.11. Overall, therefore, the tentative conclusion that can be drawn from observational, empirical, and statistical data is that DEC F2F students are more likely to be retained, have a higher pass rate, and be more satisfied with their learning experience than those in CCC classes.

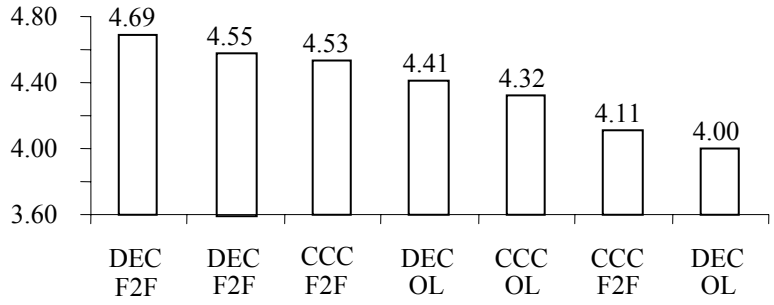


Fig. 7.1: Averages of Course Evaluation Rankings from All Semesters

7.5 Reflections

Decritique is a radical critical pedagogy underscored by a philosophy of language designed for the first-year college English classroom that offers an alternative to contemporary applications of critical theory; namely, critical thinking, critical pedagogy, critical literacy, and critical care. One of its strongest characteristics is an inherent delineation between re-cognition and recognition; the former actively seeking ways to re-position one's own thinking in relation to perceptions of the world, and the latter endorsing existing perception. Initially, students show a tendency of resistance to the pedagogy, exhibiting signs of discomfort, disconcertion, and confusion. Typically, however, this is replaced by rapid engagement and advancement, often three to four weeks into the course. In contrast, CCC students initially engage very quickly with the course, yet reach an early plateau that is sustained throughout the semester.

As a reinscribed application of critically caring, the *Decritique* classroom can be a contentious one, and this has ramifications for teachers who may wish to use the pedagogy. It is not only students who experience confusion and disconcertion, but the instructor as well – from whom there needs to be a willingness to walk on what seems to be at times the edge of an abyss and a commitment to detach from one's own personal beliefs in order to examine the students' ideas as "the things themselves." The concepts of respect and tolerance – or Burbules' "hegemony of reasonableness" (257) – are anathema to *Decritique*, and teachers can expect to find students who struggle tenaciously to articulate a point, who may argue vehemently with others, whose

confusion and even agitation is genuine; in short, students who show evidence of what Tingle describes as "narcissistic wounding" (19). And yet, this is also evidence of critical interaction, animation, and engagement that opens the door to the possibility of change.

It is not an easy thing to work against established social and educational norms, and teaching with *Decritique* can be as disconcerting and challenging as it undoubtedly has been for my students. Yet, Paulo Freire, envisioning a critical and liberatory pedagogy, calls for courage on the part of educators and their students – courage to transgress what is accepted, what is standardized, and what is frequently unchallenged and unquestioned – to venture past the ideological borders that can so effectively bar us from engaging in the very real possibilities of transformational change. *Decritique* aims to take the best aspects of critical thinking, critical pedagogy, critical literacy, and critical care. It involves a radical revisioning of the critical pedagogue: one who cares deeply for her students, yet does not seek harmony or consensus, nor endorses tolerance as authentic critical discourse. Rather, he exhibits characteristics of what Václav Havel defines as an intellectual – one who should:

> [C]onstantly disturb, bear witness to the misery of the world, be provocative by being independent, be the chief doubter of systems and bear witness to their mendacity. … An intellectual essentially doesn't belong anywhere; [s]he stands out as an irritant wherever [s]he is … [and] to a certain extent an intellectual is always condemned to defeat. And yet, in another, more profound sense the intellectual remains, despite all his defeats, undefeated … like Sisyphus. He is in fact victorious through his defeats. (167; Lifton 118)[9]

Certainly, there is a strong component of intellectualization in Havel's defining parameters, and a sense of negativity in terms of actively looking for commentary on the world's miseries, the manipulation of power, and the concept of defeat as opposed to the more positivistic idea of winning. Intrinsically, Havel's call of the intellectual is one grounded in passion and emotive acknowledgment of things that are inherently wrong,

[9] I have taken some liberties with Havel's quote to more equitably balance the gender pronouns

or of caring enough to become emotionally involved in critique of a moral, ethical, or social transgression.

Although this study suggests that *Decritique* is more effective with older, more mature college or university students, overall it did reveal a surprisingly high level of resiliency from students in their ability to cope with criticism. This, in turn, leads to a series of questions for teachers: Are we underestimating the capabilities of our students? Are we positioning them as fragile, dependent recipients – and, if so, whether such a positioning constructs a self-justifying response; that is, if we see our students that way, will they see themselves that way, too?

On the proviso that conclusions from this research are drawn tentatively, with acknowledgment of the small population and contextual variables, I posit that *Decritique* has the potential to impact the way students and teachers of first-year undergraduate English courses approach and engage in text analysis, and has possible tangible gain in regard to the depth of reflective, critical thinking and the subsequent analysis of collective and individual thought. I can, therefore, neither accept nor reject the null hypothesis. This indicates that further research into *Decritique* as a critical pedagogy is warranted, particularly in the following six areas:

1. The process of deracination as a more effective critical revision strategy than peer critique or peer review;
2. The use of embedded commentary on student-produced writing to foster deeper, broader revision;
3. As a reconceptualized concept of what it means to "care";
4. As a method to increase the amount of student writing;
5. The potential effects on improved retention; and
6. Emphasis on its value in the face-to-face classroom

Ideally, such a study needs to be undertaken on a longitudinal basis with a larger population of both students and instructors working with the principles of CCC and DEC, perhaps cross-institutionally, and testing against key sociological and psychological markers.

If critically reflective learning is to take place, we first have to concretely imagine ourselves in a series of positions that serve to interrogate each other; to seriously consider alternative truths *as* momentary tangible truths; to be willing to detach ourselves from our own privileged belief systems long enough to reflect on them, to analyze their validity in light of what we learn, and to consider that we may be wrong. How can students reach a desirable point of cognitive struggle and confusion that can lead to genuine discovery and learning without feeling the pain that criticism undoubtedly delivers? This is a question that *Decritique* seeks to address, and I hope – at least in some ways – that my students were able to experience this in their semesters with me.

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Appendix A: Glossary of Terms

CCC	Concept of Critical Care: A pedagogy framed by concepts of respect, tolerance, care, and nurturing; a student group taught using these principles (cf. DEC)
critical commentary	Detailed, critical comments provided by instructor in response to student writing, or by students engaging in deracination, the aim of which is to engage critical dialogue and assist in the depth of revision to writing and thinking
critical thinking rubric	A set of questions or statements designed to guide a student's critical review of another's writing as well as their own (see WSUCTR)
DEC	Decritique: A collection of approaches underscored by the concepts of Deracination and the D.I.S. as a radical reconceptualization of critical pedagogy designed for teaching and learning in the first-year college English classroom; a student group taught using these principles (cf. CCC)
Deracination	From the French *déraciner*; to uproot geographically or socially, but in the context of *Decritique* to uproot cognitively. Deracination involves writers taking a consciously critical stance and acting as deracinator, whose task as agent provocateur is to actively seek to undermine the stability of meaning within a text or discourse
D.I.S.	Detached Intellectualized Space: An agreement made to work in a cognitive frame of mind that focuses on seeing oneself as an active critic of ideas rather than as the individual who owns/produces those ideas
Dual Credit student	An advanced high-school student, studying either the eleventh or twelfth grade in secondary education, who is concurrently enrolled in and gaining college-credit hours by studying first-year, accredited college coursework. College credit is transferable to two- and four-year institutions and simultaneously counts as high school credit.

English 1301 and English 1302	English 1301 (first semester, first year) and English 1302 (second semester, first year) are mandated courses comprising part of the core curriculum for both Associate and Baccalaureate degree programs in most colleges and universities in Texas. Students cannot enroll in English 1301 without passing a Texas state-administered placement examination. Testing is conducted in the senior year of secondary schooling or provided at alternative sites for mature age or special-entry students. Enrolment in English 1302 depends on students passing English 1301 with a grade of C (70 percent) or higher. English 1301 and 1302 emphasize skill in composition, expository and analytical prose; that is, the reading, evaluation and analysis of articles, short stories, plays, novellas, poetry, and/or novels and completing written assignments in relation to those readings and analyses, most often in the form of essays but also through less formal in-class writing and discussion
fall semester	Sixteen week college/university semester from approximately September to December
forum	An electronic bulletin board for text-based discussion within a password-protected WebCT environment; forums can be accessible to all students (open forums) or to select participants (private forums)
IPJ	Individual Portfolio Journal: Weekly writing assignments in private forums, requiring students to critically reflect on questions relating to readings and/or coursework. IPJ forums are accessible only by the instructor and each individual student, and promote individualized dialogue and revision through the exchange of critical discourse
open discussion	Written discussion taking place in open electronic discussion forums where all are encouraged to participate, or whole class verbal discussion in the face-to-face classroom
spring semester	Sixteen week college/university semester from approximately January to May
WebCT	An institutionally supported, password-protected, integrated

	educational software package containing numerous tools for teaching, including discussion forums and file sharing capabilities
WSUCTR	*Washington State University Critical Thinking Rubric*: Implemented widely as part of Washington State University's Critical Thinking Initiative project, this rubric provides instructors with modifiable guidelines for the purpose of peer revision/critique

Appendix B: Excerpt from Expectations for Formal Written Work in College-Level Courses

A: A paper that receives an *A* is an outstanding essay that makes a perceptive and thoughtful response to the assignment. Perhaps the principal characteristic of the *A* paper is its rich content. Some describe that content as "dense," others as "packed," because the information delivered is such that one feels significantly taught by the author. The *A* paper is also marked by stylistic fitness: the title [if used] and opening paragraph are engaging; the transitions are artful; the phrasing is tight, fresh, and highly specific; the sentence structure is varied; the tone enhances the purpose of the paper. Finally, the *A* paper, because of its careful organization and development, imparts a feeling of wholeness and unusual clarity. It is not marred by errors of grammar, punctuation or spelling, nor is it hindered by weak sentence structure. The writing is smooth, vigorous, fresh. The *A* paper is also neat in appearance.

B: A *B* paper fulfills the assignment but goes beyond a routine response and shows evidence of thought and planning that makes it significantly better than competent. The *B* paper delivers substantial information; its specific points are logically ordered, well-developed, and unified around a clear organizing principle that is apparent early in the paper. The opening paragraph draws the reader in, the supporting paragraphs are convincing, and the sentence structure is correct, if not original. Finally, the paper contains no major distracting grammatical errors. It is neat in appearance.

C: A *C* paper carries out the assignment in a routine but adequate way, makes a commitment to the topic, and provides at least a satisfactory response to it. The paper demonstrates clear and logical organization, though perhaps not consistently or completely. The introduction, body, or conclusion may not be well-developed. The actual information usually seems thin and common- place. One reason for this impression is that ideas are typically cast in the form of

vague generalities. The *C* paper often fails to demonstrate maturity of thought, depth of development, or sufficient attention to organization. The transitions between paragraphs are logical but often unimaginative; the sentences, besides being a bit choppy, tend to follow a predictable (hence monotonous) subject-verb-object pattern, and word choice is occasionally marred by unconscious repetition, redundancy, or imprecision. The paper contains only occasional mistakes in grammar, usage, and mechanics. It is easily read and neat in appearance.

D: A *D* paper is weak and inadequate. Its content relates to the assignment but normally does not clarify a purpose or support a commitment to the topic. Its treatment and development of the subject are not only rudimentary but also needlessly repetitious. While some organization may be present, it is neither clear nor effective. Sentences are frequently awkward, ambiguous, and marred by grammatical errors. Evidence of careful proofreading is scanty, and the phrasing makes it difficult for the reader to understand the content. Words are often misused, and sentences fail to conform to conventions of edited American English. The paper is characterized by awkwardness throughout. It gives the reader the impression that the writer lacks adequate control or assurance; the reader has to work to understand what the writer intends. The overall lack of control in the *D* paper reveals writing that has missed the mark. The visual presentation often needs improvement.

F: An *F* paper is poorly constructed, carelessly written, and marred by grammatical errors so that the reader cannot follow the ideas easily. Some errors indicate a failure to understand the basic grammar of sentences. In short, the ideas, organization, style, and presentation fall far below what is acceptable in college writing. The information is inadequate. The paper lacks specific illustrations or examples or belabors the obvious. The paper also lacks organization. It may make some sense but only when the reader struggles to find the sense. Most sentences are faulty, either too short and choppy or too long and ill-constructed.

> Word choices are poor. Usually, there are multiple grammar, punctuation, and spelling errors. The visual appearance is often sloppy.
>
> A plagiarized paper falls into the category of the *F* paper, and so does a stylistically adequate paper that does not adhere to the assignment. The *D* and *F* differ only in degree. Neither can be regarded as successful.
>
> (*Expectations* 4).

Appendix C: *WSUCTR* Adaptation for the CCC Classroom

Please use this guide when you are reviewing one of your colleague's essays. You might like to print it and refer to it as you draft your view. The guide provides you with the language and the framework for working up your peer evaluation. You will notice that there is a "scale" on which you are asked to evaluate your colleague's work:

Lowest = Scant: Needs a lot of work

Highest = Substantial: Excellent

As you review your colleague's writing, let the following questions guide your responses. Because "Scant" and "Substantial" are at opposite ends of the evaluation criteria, "Marginal" and "Acceptable" are appropriate when the work doesn't quite fit either extremes. Once you have evaluated your colleague's draft, write a Peer Evaluation Response. Frame up your response using the language of this guide. The length of your review depends on what you have to say about the draft, but you should aim to address each of the six categories below, and provide evidence to support your own assertions.

Area of Paper and Criteria	SCANT Needs a lot of work	MARGINAL Passable, but needs some work	ACCEPTABLE Overall, well done; lacks polish	SUBSTANTIAL Excellent; displays style and polish
Introduction	Does not identify or summarize prompt; is confused or identifies a different and/or inappropriate response; seems confused by the issue or represents it inaccurately	Characteristics of "Scant" work, but not so poorly done as to reflect "Scant" entirely	Characteristics of "Substantial" work, but not so developed as to reflect "Substantial" entirely	Identifies and summarizes prompt; sees implicit aspects of the prompt and identifies them; these aspects are evident in the thesis statement
Body Paragraphs	Takes a single point of view or argument that is based almost entirely on personal opinion without offering any input other than what "I think" or "I believe"	As above	As above	Identifies a thoughtful, reflective position on the issue and argues the point convincingly, drawing support from observation, experience, and/or information not provided in the assigned sources
	Does not identify key assumptions and arguments that underlie the prompt	As above	As above	Identifies/addresses key assumptions, arguments, and dimensions that underlie the prompt

Body paragraphs cont …	Merely repeats information as truth, or posits points without justification or evidence; quote dumps; does not distinguish between fact, opinion, and value judgment	As above	As above	Examines the evidence and source of evidence, questions its accuracy, precision, relevance and completeness; incorporates into argument skillfully and seamlessly
	Discusses the issue in egocentric terms that reflect only what is true for that individual (whether socially or culturally). Does not present the issue as having any connection to other contexts such as cultural, political, or social	As above	As above	Analyzes the issue with a clear sense of context and scope; that is, the argument presented goes beyond the immediate truth of the individual and shows clear and thoughtful connection to other contexts such as cultural, political, or social
Conclusion	Fails to identify conclusions, implications, and/or consequences of issues discussed; conclusion likely reflects a re-hash of the introduction with little evidence of trying to reflect on and tie-together the points raised	As above	As above	Identifies and discusses conclusions, implications, and consequences that consider context, evidence, and judicious reflection on the assertions made. The conclusion contains a thoughtful, reflective commentary on the points raised and discussed

Appendix D: Deracination and the D.I.S.

Deracination and the D.I.S. (Detached Intellectualized Space) is essentially about the conflict of ideas. The word "deracination" comes from the French déraciner, which means to uproot from an environment geographically or socially. You might think of immigrants here; people who move away from everything they know to a new land where nothing is familiar – they are, quite literally, "tearing up their roots." In our class environment, however, deracination refers specifically to the tearing up of ideas or points that a writer posits from its comfortable, familiar surroundings (what the writer already "knows") to examine it in a new, unfamiliar and perhaps even uncomfortable light.

Deracination is a form of written criticism that is very critical and attempts a degree of objectivity to the point where both the deracinator and deracinatee detach from the writing in order to separate it from "personal ownership." Writing, and the ideas expressed in that writing, are merely words and ideas that appear as text rather than something some*one* has taken time, effort, and personal investment to construct. In a deracination, it is your job to be critical of everything – to examine every point with what we might term "studied skepticism" and be suspicious of everything in terms of inconsistency and illogicity. The aim is to tear up the argument, point by point, root by root, especially small and seemingly insignificant points that may appear not to matter.

Because of its rather obsessive focus on finding the small incongruities that, when untangled, lead to identifying bigger issues and problems, deracination is a form of applied critical thinking: It doesn't seek so much to "problem solve" but to "problem posit" – it's looking for something to argue about, often when it appears that nothing is there to argue at all. It's because of this that deracination can be confusing, disconcerting, uncomfortable, and difficult. At its core is a sense of discomfort and skepticism – a refusal to take anything for granted. Whereas when we are asked to evaluate a piece of writing we often feel we need to say something "positive" in order to make the writer feel good about him or herself or to gain confidence, in deracination this is not a consideration. When we do deracination, we can afford to ignore the old adage that "if you can't say something nice about someone, don't say anything at all."

While there is certainly passion in writing a deracination (if only to get ourselves worked up to the point where we care about studying a text closely in order to identify the small incongruities), it is NOT concerned with subjectivity and emotional responses. This is why it's inappropriate in a deracination to write personal remarks or commentary about the author, such as: "Where did she learn the alphabet?" or "He must be really stupid to come up with something like this." Deracinations are not concerned about where authors went to school, nor if they are stupid or not. It is only the ideas and the expression of those ideas that interest the deracinator.

If we are to critically think about evaluating a piece of writing, we should similarly not concern ourselves with the social manners of "not rocking the boat" or "only saying something positive." In contrast, we must approach the text with a strong conscious effort to find fault. Of course, this is not to say that we shouldn't state when something is good – if a point is well made and stands up to scrutiny, then say so. However, what we must try to move away from when we deracinate is the obligation that we *must* say "something nice."

The Detached Intellectualized Space

Despite its long title, the D.I.S. is essentially an agreement: When doing deracinations, we agree to move into a space for our minds to work and think – a space that is detached or removed from whatever we may happen to "personally" believe. Once the deracinations have been completed, we are quite free to step back into the patterns of our old belief systems, or perhaps to adapt new ones in light of the critical reflections we sought while working in the D.I.S. The D.I.S. becomes a space where genuine and sincere effort is made to think from alternative positions. Ideally, it is a place where it is possible for, as an example, a religious person to think and reason as someone who is not religious, or vice versa; a liberal conservative to think as a radical democrat or vice versa; a committed socialist to think as a dedicated capitalist, and so on. In short, it's an opportunity to sincerely engage in being someone we are not ordinarily. It's not necessarily "real," and we should even aim to create a paradoxical sense of "serious playfulness" through the use of irony, parody, and skeptical reflection.

These latter points are ones you will have noted in comments made on your own essays in this class.

It's Hard Work

Critically reflective thinking is not easy, and initially you may find the concept of "doing deracination" quite difficult. Likely, it's a very different way of writing and critiquing than what you've done in the past. Many of you have probably been asked to review the writing of your colleagues at some point, and some students confuse Deracination with this type of writing – often ubiquitously known as The Peer Review.

Deracination is Not Peer Review

Peer reviews, sometimes called peer critiques, are frequently addressed directly to the writer and seek to offer "constructive criticism" about how to improve an essay. A fairly typical example runs something like this:

> You had some great ideas in the first paragraph, Angus, and I really liked the part where you talked about how people should vote against gun control. It flowed really well. You need to check your grammar and spelling, though, because you made a few mistakes and that made it hard to read. Overall, I really enjoyed reading this paper. Great job!

Let's compare this sample from a peer review with the way an excerpt from a Deracination might read:

> Although Holloway [student's last name] asserts why people should vote against gun control, the argument falls flat because the evidence provided is so shallow and superficial. Readers are merely left with Holloway's "personal opinion" on the issue, such as [example taken from Holloway's essay to reinforce the point], and this hardly convinces the reader to adopt that point of view. Also consider Holloway's statement that, [quote from Holloway's piece], an assertion that not only lacks conviction but is simply incorrect [the deracinator may cite research here to show just how "wrong" Holloway's point is]. Moreover, poor spelling and mechanics only compound the problem of a lack of credibility in this piece.

Notice that the Deracination is not directed at the writer – in this case, someone by the name of Holloway. No reference is made to "you" as in the peer review. Also note that the deracinator has *not* written about the essay AS an essay, or A Paper That Will Receive a Grade in a College English Course, but detaches from that context to instead comment only on the ideas posited and the way they are defended. Moreover, the deracinator has done some research on her own, which has the dual-edged advantage of making her appear more credible at the same time as pointing out serious flaws in the original writer's argument.

The peer review comments above are friendly, personable, and they tread very carefully in terms of criticism. The writer takes considerable effort to reinforce positive remarks, such as "great ideas," "flowed really well," "great job," and "really enjoyed reading this paper." Where's the critical analysis, though? All that's really mentioned is that Angus made a "few mistakes" in spelling and grammar. Such editing-level commentary does not provide any assistance to Angus in terms of critically and objectively evaluating his work, which is the objective of a deracination. Note, though, in the Deracination that although the writer mentions "poor spelling and mechanics," it is in the context of an overall theme of the critical commentary; that is, Holloway's argument doesn't hold water because it lacks author credibility of support and evidence. The deracination attacks the argument Holloway has built (rather than writing *to* Holloway, he or she has written *about* Holloway's writing), and gives specific examples to illustrate or show *why* and *how* the argument is weak.

Deracination is Not Debating

Unlike a debate where there are two sides and each argues until a winner is declared, a deracinator does not necessarily have to take an opposing point of view. It might be a slightly different viewpoint that is put forward. Alternatively, the deracinator might agree with the point of view, but indicate a problem with its presentation or defense. There is also no "winner" in deracination. It is not so much a point scoring or persuasion as it is about alternative perspectives and a skeptical refusal to take anything at face value – even to the point of contradicting oneself.

Detachment

Doing deracinations brings with it a sense of ruthless skepticism, and it's because of this that you'll be asked to *detach from the personal* for this assignment; that is, to agree to work within the D.I.S. This means separating ourselves from taking criticism personally. Deracinations can, and should, be rather blunt. There's no time to wade through social niceties, apologies, or comments that you know "this is only a draft" when your only objective is to examine an argument and the points that embellish it. Forget about being "nice" in your deracinations; forget about taking criticism personally when you receive it. This emphasis on detachment is the reason why I ask you not to use phrases like "this is only my opinion" or "don't take offense," and why I will also ask you to refer to your colleagues by last names only when deracinating an essay. It takes away the personalized, subjective nature of your writing when you don't "apologize" for possibly hurting feelings, and it's easier to detach from seeing the writer as a living human being with feelings when we speak of, as in the example above, Holloway instead of Angus.

It takes practice to be critical, and it takes practice to take criticism. What I want you to keep foremost in mind, though, is that deracination is an exercise in critical thinking. If practiced well, it can sharpen your intellectual acuity in terms of the way you think about and evaluate not only the words and ideas of others, but your own words and ideas as well.