Chapter 4

Rethinking Radical Pedagogy as Movement-Building:

Service-Learning, Counterpublics, and Autonomous Activism

Many of the struggles over schooling I discussed in the last chapter have continued to reassert themselves as U.S. capitalist democracy has reorganized. In his recent book, Stealing Innocence, Henry Giroux reaffirms that progressive educators need to see formal schooling as a contested site of political struggle that is neither free from the influences of the dominant culture, nor a site where hegemony is reproduced mechanistically (130-1). As in his previous writings, Giroux draws upon Antonio Gramsci’s theories of hegemony to situate education as a cultural site of struggle. Even though “Gramsci did not believe that state-sponsored schools alone would provide the conditions for social change,” Giroux argues, “he did suggest they had a role to play in nourishing the tension between the democratic principles of society and the dominating

1Giroux has made this argument throughout his long career. In his first book, Ideology, Culture, and the Process of Schooling, he argued vigorously against prevailing radical educational theorists who saw education as either free from social structures, or that it sole function was to reproduce compliant workers: “Schooling must viewed in non-mechanistic terms as a superstructural agency that has both relative and dependent features which characterize its relationship to the dominant mode of production” (Giroux, Ideology 78). Even as he rejected this explicitly marxist terminology in his later work, he continued to insist on this dynamic approach of analyzing schooling (Giroux, Border Crossings, 151-2; Giroux and McLaren, “Radical Pedagogy” 153-4; Giroux, Impure Acts 143-4).
principles of capitalism and corporate power” (130). Giroux picks up on Gramsci’s argument that “every relation of ‘hegemony’ is necessarily an educative relationship” that exists not only in schools, but in the culture at large (Gramsci 350).

Like all aspects of civil society, Gramsci was not willing to reduce formal schooling solely to reproducing the interests of the dominant classes. Even in traditional schools that were intended for the “new generation of the ruling class,” the mode of teaching in those schools exceeded the needs of training the new ruling classes (40). That is, gaining access to schooling could enable an unskilled worker to become a skilled worker or even a member of the upper classes. But as Gramsci argues, “democracy, by definition, cannot mean merely that an unskilled worker can become skilled. It must mean that every ‘citizen’ can ‘govern’ and that society places him [sic], even if only abstractly, in a general condition to achieve this” (40). Schools are sites of hegemonic struggle that are never complete in their reproductive function within capitalist societies. For Gramsci, schooling was one of many “educative relationships” that maintained hegemony for the ruling classes. Fundamentally challenging the dominant hegemony means building a counter hegemony, new educative relationships, and creating the material conditions for every citizen to govern.

It is for this reason, Martin Carnoy argues, that schools “cannot be a source of developing proletarian hegemony,” in part because of their role in maintaining ruling class hegemony, but also because schools are not the only site where hegemony is maintained (90). Instead, schools “can provide knowledge of a certain intellectual motive, but this knowledge can only be used for the proletariat by being transformed through a process of establishing proletarian culture” (90).²

² Carnoy’s argument is supported by many of Gramsci’s writings. See Prison Notebooks, especially pp. 29-32; 40-42; 246-247.
Gramsci’s notion of hegemony presumed the existence of an extra-institutional, autonomous proletarian movement that could make possible fundamental changes in education. That is, in order to bring about a revolution in schooling there would have to be a revolution in society.

If radical or critical teaching is about helping bring about social change, then an important consideration is how do teachers encourage the development of critical citizens and provide students with skills useful for building political movements and constructing autonomous, counter hegemonic political spaces. Many radical and critical teachers are growing increasingly impatient and frustrated by currents of critical pedagogy that seek to promote pedagogies of “critique and possibility” that contribute to social transformation, but do not make clear how the practice of critical pedagogy is useful in social movements. Jennifer Gore argues that certain tendencies within critical pedagogy, particularly the work of Giroux and McLaren, are limiting in their privileging of theoretical critique and their failure to deal with questions of classroom practice (35). Gore argues that their emphasis on theoretical critique is not merely an oversight, but is reflective of masculinist academic practice. While not explicitly addressing the link between pedagogy and social movements, Gore and other feminists raise important concerns about the difference between institutional critique and the practical skills needed for activist organization.³

³ For example, Elizabeth Ellsworth argues that too often critical pedagogy provides useful language for talking about education, but it often fails when it comes to practices. She suggests that often times when she and her students have tried to put some of the theories of critical pedagogy into practice, “we produced results that were not only unhelpful, but actually exacerbated the very conditions we were trying to work against” (Ellsworth 301). See also, Luke and Gore Feminisms and Critical Pedagogy.
In a slightly different vein of critique, Ellen Cushman argues that critical educators can unwittingly privilege ideology critique as the marker of political struggle and neglect the actual forms of resistance oppressed peoples enact in their daily lives. She argues, “[b]ecause resistance takes place behind the public transpiring of events, most critical theorist [sic] haven’t inroads to the forums in which urban and minority groups develop counter hegemonic attitudes and craft language skills” (Cushman, *Struggle* 25). Cushman argues that literacy educators hoping to contribute to meaningful social change must shift their focus from critiques of representations and texts. Instead, she argues, radical teachers should “locate ourselves within the democratic process of everyday teaching and learning in our neighborhoods” through participatory activism (Cushman, “Rhetorician” 12). Furthermore, Cushman argues that despite critical pedagogy’s counter hegemonic project, it is unclear how its practices actually lead to social change and empowerment (23). Gore’s critique focuses on how particular tendencies of critical pedagogy deal, or fail to deal, with classroom practice, while Cushman’s argues for a shift in the spatial politics of critical teaching from the dominance of the classroom to border spaces between educational institutions and the communities in which they are located. Neither critique addresses how radical teachers can contribute to the work of social movements, but each suggests that activist practice, whether in colleges and universities or in the communities, requires a different kind of orientation toward questions of practice.

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4 See, for example, Peter McLaren’s *Life in Schools*, for a discussion of critical pedagogy’s contribution to empowerment and social transformation, especially pp. 163-164 and 238-242.

5 In fact, Cushman is highly critical of arguments that suggest that all critical teaching should lead to some form of collective action (Cushman, *Struggle* xx; “Rhetorician” 23).
Stressing the need for radical and critical pedagogy to explore the practical literacy needs of social movements should not be construed as a rejection of the university as a site of political struggle or the importance of theoretical critique. What I am suggesting is that radical and critical teachers consider the literacy needs that arise from social movements and the relationship between what we do in the classroom and these social movements.

The radical education experiments I discussed in the last chapter saw it necessary to construct autonomous institutions that directly addressed the needs of social movements in different ways. I think that a re-consideration and re-working of the “autonomy argument” can be an important step toward a radical pedagogy of movement-building today. I have no illusions that the present social context somehow mirrors that of the early 20th century. I do however recognize that both periods were marked by major reorganizations of capitalist modes of production (industrialization and “digital” capitalism) and that in both instances, social movements draw upon the discourse and practice of autonomy as part of their political strategy. Likewise, critical educators in composition studies have again begun to grapple with questions of autonomy. In the February 2000 issue of CCC, for example, Scott Lyons has issued a manifesto for what he calls “rhetorical sovereignty.” Rhetorical sovereignty refers to “inherent right and ability of peoples to determine their own communicative needs and desires…to decide for themselves the goals, modes, styles, and languages of public discourse” (Lyons 449-50). Lyons is arguing specifically for rhetorical sovereignty of American Indians in relation to the “colonized scene of writing,” but the implications of his argument extend to the emerging anti-corporate globalization movements. As he argues, “[i]ndigenous people, who in some senses are now forming a global movement…may constitute the world’s most adamant refusal of current expansions of global capitalism and imperialism” (462). In fact, indigenous movements—
particularly the Zapatista’s struggle for autonomy in Chiapas, Mexico—have had a crucial influence on the discourse, organizational strategies, and cultural politics of anti-corporate globalization movements. Composition studies is well suited to take up issues of autonomy having struggled for years for disciplinary recognition and, in some cases, “autonomy” from English departments. I will turn now to some recent work in composition that can contribute to a rethinking of radical teaching, highlighting the need for movement building and autonomy.

Composition and Social Action: Contributions Toward a Pedagogy for Movement-Building

Composition has a strong tradition of linking literacy instruction to questions of democratic participation. While most critical educators in composition studies have not explicitly argued for a pedagogy for movement-building, there have been some interesting developments over the past couple of decades that lay some of the groundwork for developing such a pedagogical project. In particular, the recent work focusing on service-learning and public and counterpublic sphere theory can contribute to gearing literacy education toward

6 As I will argue below, the Zapatistas helped inaugurate the anti-corporate globalization movement in their resistance to the North American Free Trade Agreement. It is important, however, for radical teachers and activists not to overlook the specificity of the Zapatista movement or the sovereignty struggles of American Indians. To do so would reenact the very patterns of colonialism that these movements seek to contest. I do not see indigenous peoples’ arguments for autonomy or sovereignty to be the same as radical anti-corporate globalization activists. Rather, there has been a confluence of historically distinct, but linked, theories of autonomy.
today’s anti-corporate globalization movements. Recent work in autonomist marxist theory as well as the strategies of anti-corporate globalization activists can help further flesh out how communication networks have become a central site of political struggle.

*Service-Learning: From “Real World” Experience to Activist Literacy*

In the 1990s, composition studies has seen a growing interests in service-learning among literacy teachers and scholars. In their introduction to *Writing the Community: Concepts and Models for Service-Learning in Composition*, Linda Adler-Kassner, Robert Crooks, and Ann Watters note that in 1991 only a single paper on service-learning was presented at the Conference on College Composition and Communication (1). Even though that number has grown in recent years, service-learning still remains a relatively small movement within composition studies as a whole. Service-learning is part of a long tradition in rhetorical instruction that emphasizes the “relationship between civic consideration and civic action” (Kates 122). I should be clear from the start that the impetus for service-learning does not always come from those interested in social transformation. Several service learning proponents suggest that universities are often willing to back service-learning programs to improve relations with the community (Reardon 57; Flower 95-6; Bridwell-Bowles 19), to respond to perceived crises in citizenship involvement or student apathy (Dorman and Dorman 119; Cooper and Julier

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In the case of Bentley College, Bruce Herzberg reports that the administration’s investment in supporting service-learning was due in part to its belief that service-learning would help business students by putting a human face on capitalism (Herzberg 57). While I will not go into the history of service-learning, I want to discuss some of its principles that can contribute to a reorientation of radical teaching.

In his article, “Rhetoric Made Real: Civic Discourse and Writing Beyond the Curriculum,” Paul Heilker identifies five ways in which service-learning has been used in composition courses: 1) as a experience that students use as the “content” of their course writing; 2) as a form of community research to complement, supplement, or critique course texts; 3) as experiential learning tied to course work that “critiques the systemic inequities and injustices that make service work necessary in the first place”; 4) as a way to mediate students’ initiation into academic discourse; and, 5) as “writing as social action” by having students “complete writing tasks for the non-profit agencies in which they are placed” (Heilker 73-4). Other advocates of service-learning do not use such a broad definition. For example, Jeffrey Howard argues that “academic service learning is not merely the addition of a community service option or a requirement to an academic course” (21). Rather, service-learning is about “the integration of service with learning…the students’ community service experiences are compatible and integrated with the academic learning objectives of the course, in a manner similar to traditional course requirements” (21). I find the range of tendencies laid out in Heilker’s text more useful in that the tensions within service-learning programs are not overlooked. Each of these strands of service-learning brings students and faculty in contact with members of community. However, not all of these approaches are useful for a radical political agenda.
Bruce Herzberg’s approach to service-learning is suggestive of a service learning course consciously linked to a progressive political agenda. Herzberg argues that a service-learning course in composition linked to struggles for social justice seeks to “make schools function…as radically democratic institutions, with the goal not only of making individual students more successful, but also of making better citizens, citizens in the strongest sense of those who take responsibility for communal welfare” (317). In his essay, “Community Service and Critical Teaching,” Herzberg discusses a service-learning course he teaches at Bentley College. Herzberg notes that while involving students in community service projects exposes students to people’s everyday struggles against inequality and injustice, he does not believe that “questions about social structures, ideology, and social justice are automatically raised by community service” (309). Instead, students are likely to understand the causes of social inequality as brought on by the individuals with which they work. This is not an issue of students being cold or unfeeling, but of hegemonic ideologies of individualism, meritocracy, and equality in American culture (313-4).

Service-learning programs and classes that foreground social transformation tend to argue for a multidisciplinary and critical approach. For example, Herzberg teaches a service-learning course in which students volunteer as adult literacy tutors at a local shelter. While examining theories of literacy acquisition in their composition classes (310), students also analyze the “effects of institutional forces on the formation of identity” in a linked introductory sociology course (Herzberg 318n7). In class, students write summaries and short papers drawing on course readings that include literacy narratives and theories of literacy. Students’ experience as literacy tutors is brought in tension with the readings and with their own presumptions regarding class, race, individualism, equality, and liberal humanism. Another example is the Service-Learning
Writing Project (SWLP) at Michigan State University. David Cooper and Laura Julier represent the SWLP writing course as “moral and civic venue, a place where moral sensibility, critical literacy, and the arts of public discourse, leavened by reflective and connected learning go hand in hand” (83). Their courses attempt to combine critical study of how public opinion is formed through close analysis of on-going issues in their community, readings on the media, and theories of democratic practice (86-88). As their community service component, students are placed in nonprofit agencies in which they practice public discourse both by writing for the agencies and learning the discursive strategies of persuasion they enact (91). In these classes, the goal is to put students in situations in which they have to practice public discourse.

Service-learning courses that are consciously linked to a progressive political agenda foreground two kinds of learning that enable critical consciousness among students. First, in the spirit of critical educators such as Paulo Freire, these service-learning courses emphasize experiential learning paired with critical reflection. In her article, “A Pedagogy for Citizenship: Service-Learning and Democratic Education,” Meta Mendel-Reyes suggests that service learning supports one of tenets of radical democracy: that the most effective democratic education is participation in democratic action (34).8 Paulo Freire made similar arguments early in his career.

8 This has also been suggested by Susan Jarratt’s work on the sophists. Jarratt argues that the practice of isegoria, which enabled any citizen to speak before the assembly, created an educative context. That is, “[n]ot only was rhetoric a democratizing agent, democracy itself was an education in language use and political decision-making. This extension of sophistic education was available to all Athenian citizens through participation in the democracy, regardless of whether they had purchased sophistic instruction or spoke frequently in front of the assembly” (Jarratt 102). This suggests that not only are there participatory skills gained through
In *Education for Critical Consciousness*, Freire writes that he was convinced that “the Brazilian people could learn social and political responsibility only by *experiencing* that responsibility…They could be helped to learn democracy through the *exercise* of democracy; for that knowledge, above all others, can only be assimilated experientially” (Freire, *Education* 36).

Participatory education departs from more traditional circuits of knowledge flow and legitimization insofar as it recognizes there are certain things you can’t get from “book learning” and that the kinds of knowledge one gets from academic study are significantly different from the knowledge one acquires in the *process* of democratic participation. This does not mean that experiential knowledge is superior to academic study. Rather, it suggests that the dynamic relations of democratic struggle are made up of different kinds of skills than one acquires through academic study.

Secondly, service-learning pairs experiential learning with critical analysis and culture critique in the academic setting. In the classroom, students read scholarly and theoretical work that situates their community service work within a broader social context. In the best cases, students are asked to examine hegemonic discourses to see how these are constructed and maintained; to work through feminist, materialist, postcolonial, and other counterhegemonic critiques of American society; and to examine their own subject positions and agency in conserving, reforming, or transforming hegemonic discourses. By encouraging a dialogic relationship between more traditionally academic and experiential modes of learning, teachers lead students to occupy a kind of transitional subject position that recognizes the presence of historical and institutional divisions which limit access to, and selectively legitimize, diverse and experiential learning, but also that participation also democratizes the *process* of knowledge acquisition by making it available to a maximum number of people.
counterhegemonic knowledge and practice. This is similar to what Giroux, building on the work of feminist border theorists, calls a “border pedagogy” (Giroux, Border 28-9). However, unlike Giroux’s border pedagogy, the borders that are challenged and that students “cross” include spatial and institutional structures and not only discourses.

An additional aspect of service-learning is equally important for a radical pedagogy: educating teachers and researchers. Composition’s focus on teaching has led to a wealth of scholarship on classroom practices and reform of literacy instruction, of which service-learning is part. Less frequently is the gaze shifted in a “horizontal” direction to inquire into the kinds of knowledges writing teachers need and how their institutional location walls them off from activists practices. There are, of course, examples to the contrary. For example, Patricia Harkin argues that it is necessary to recognize the role of “lore” in constructing teacher knowledge (135), Nedra Reynolds suggest that interruption can be rearticulated by feminists as a political tool.

9 Giroux defines a border pedagogy as “a pedagogical process intent on challenging existing boundaries of knowledge and creating new ones” (Borders 29). A border pedagogy “offers the opportunity for students to engage the multiple references that constitute different cultural codes, experiences, and languages. This means educating students to both read those codes historically and critically while simultaneously learning the limits of such codes, including the ones they use to construct their own narratives and histories. In this case, partiality becomes the basis for recognizing the limits built into all discourses and necessitates taking a critical view of authority as it is used to secure all regimes of truth that deny gaps, limits, specificity, and counternarratives. Within this discourse, students should engage knowledge as border-crossers, as people moving in and out of borders constructed around coordinates of difference and power” (29).
strategy (71), and Roxana Ng argues that it is as important for feminist educators to utilize the strategies of critique and intervention to contest racism and sexism in university administrations as it is to ask this of students (40). But as Ellen Cushman suggests, unless critical teachers are directly involved in the community and community movements they will not have “access to the private ideologies that inform residents’ cunning language use and strategies of resistance” (Struggle 25). It is crucial that activist teachers do not approach community involvement from a traditional “researcher” who mines the community for its knowledge, but as one who actively partakes in their struggle through “activist research” (28-9).

Activist research seeks to create reciprocal relations between the researcher and the community in such a way that disrupts historical legacies of charity, with which communities are all too familiar, as well as the pretense that the community is the only one getting something out of the exchange (Cushman, “Rhetorician” 17).10 But even more, activist research confronts

10 Cushman resists readers who would suggest that activist pedagogy amounts to a one-sided altruistic exchange. She writes, “these people empower me in many ways…they’ve enabled me to achieve a primary goal in my life: getting my PhD. They’ve let me photocopy their letters, personal journals, essays, and applications. They’ve granted me interviews and allowed me to listen to their interactions with social workers, admissions counselors, and DSS [Department of Social Service] representatives…They have given me the right to represent them to you and have facilitated my work in doing so. They’ve also lent me their status. They’ve legitimized my presence in their neighborhood, in masque, and in some institutions simply by associating with me” (Cushman, “Rhetorician” 17). Cushman’s argument also underscores the power dynamic at work between researchers and the community. Foregrounding the fact that
educators with the limits of academic forms of knowledge. As I noted in the last chapter, Highlander’s staff quickly realized the ineffectivity of their formal schooling when it came to liberatory teaching practices in Appalachia (M. Horton, Long Haul 68). The fact that college and university teachers, including critical teachers, have not privileged involvement in social movements as part of their pedagogical strategy limits to whom their language and practices can be useful.

Involvement in activist research as a practical matter then can begin to reconnect discourses of radical teaching and those of communities of struggle. However, to be useful for a radical pedagogy, it is necessary to go a step further. In Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Paulo Freire discusses the preparation he and his team of literacy educators made before they actually began literacy courses. His literacy teams spent quite a bit of time researching the communities and building a set of “generative words” meaningful to members of the community both in their linguistic make-up and in their connection to social and cultural issues. Freire was recognizing the need for radical education to be rooted in the everyday language and practices of the community within which he worked.\footnote{See Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, especially pages 102-118.} Researchers invested in social transformation and service-learning, should, and often do, conduct community research well before any service-learning course takes place. Conducting community research serves a dual purpose. First, the researcher has an opportunity to know the community and begin to get a sense of what its needs and existing struggles are. Secondly, community research is an opportunity to identify those organizations, groups, and associations that may have the potential to develop into effective researchers do get something out of the exchange can help disrupt notion of the researcher as an isolated individual.
political organizations. Highlander’s approach of building relations to communities and identifying how the school would use its resources most effectively to contribute to building movements can be a useful tradition for service-learning to draw upon.

I fully recognize the gap between what I am suggesting here and the way that many, if not most, service-learning programs and classes work. That is, most of reports of service-learning courses I have reviewed describe courses that work with organizations that already exist in ways that reproduce the needs of both the academic and the community-based institutions. So, for example, in describing his classroom in which students are engaged in writing projects for particular organizations, Paul Heilker writes that his students learn to “enter into, assimilate, and effectively ‘master’ and elaborate, community-specific normal discourse and ethos” (75). While I can imagine that students and the non-profits they work for benefit greatly from such work, there are problems posed from the perspective of radical or critical teaching. That is, while acquiring discursive skills useful in civic participation, the community organizations determine the boundaries of acceptable discourse. There is no sense, in Heilker’s account, of students or teachers entering into a relationship with organizations in a way that would allow for critique of the organization. This is precisely the point that Myles Horton underscored by marking a distinction between education and goals of an organization that I discussed in chapter two (Horton and Freire 116). Heilker’s example threatens to reproduce the same kind of top-down form of knowledge acquisition as the traditional university.

Radical and critical teachers can learn a tremendous amount through service-learning and activist research. But, I argue, service-learning as it is generally practiced can only be a transitional practice. Faculty and students can gain experience in democratic actions and political organization in the course of their community work. The classroom also affords the
opportunity to examine social, political, and economic causes of community problems. Further, remapping the composition classroom in a transdisciplinary and university/community space helps to disrupt the hierarchical and parochial structures of knowledge production in the academy. Yet, present service-learning programs still remain firmly tied to colleges and universities. Without a countervailing, autonomous site from which to act, the possibilities for present service-learning programs to contribute to radical social transformation and not just progressive reform are more ambiguous.

This does not mean, that service-learning courses and programs will not under any circumstances lead to autonomous action, or can not assist students in rethinking there relationship to academic study and social movements. The question is how to make use of the openings to political movements service-learning can make possible. Teaching students to master and navigate community- and institutionally-specific discourse was also one of the goals of the labor colleges. The difference is that the labor colleges trained students in community- and institutionally-specific discourse in order to better struggle for fundamental social change. Service-learning courses of the kind that Heilker discusses are not necessarily committed to fundamental social change. Students participating in such a course could just as well go on to be more effective corporate managers, as they could become political activists.

Harnessing the possibilities for service-learning to contribute to radical social transformation and to build on its ties to community-based organization and facilitate autonomous organization are nonetheless quite promising. The fact is that service-learning is one of the few institutionally sanctioned spaces that promotes direct involvement of students and faculty in community organizations. If critical and radical educators are to begin responding to the literacy needs of social movements, building networks in communities—the site where social
movements take root—is a step toward that goal. I will turn now to some other work in composition that can be helpful for building on present models of service-learning to construct border spaces to link teaching more directly to movement building.

**Public and Counterpublic Spheres**

Along with the service-learning movement’s desire to become active in community organizations, some composition scholars have been arguing for a “public” orientation of both composition teaching and scholarship. Peter Mortenson has argued that academics have public duties as part of the role of higher education in a democratic culture, and that compositionists “can discharge these duties by writing for communities we live in, communities likely much larger and more complex that the institutional ones in which we work” (195). While praising the work of cultural critique in the classroom setting, Edward Shiappa cautions that it “has a limited audience and its influence is indirect at best. We should not allow ourselves the easy out of believing that being ‘political’ in the classroom is a substitute for our direct civic participation” (22). Yet, as Susan Wells argues, it is difficult to locate the “public” and the kinds of writing that students and literacy educators should be enacting (326). Wells suggests that too

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12 Mortenson suggests that “we might provide background information and testimony for lawmakers considering legislation relevant to our professional concerns. We might also write reports for school districts or state government agencies that are considering questions germane to our field…Unfortunately, there are few institutional rewards for writing in the public interest…And there are always dangers, chief among them making intellectually dishonest concessions to audiences not attuned to nuanced argumentation” (195).
often, public writing is reduced to a *genre* of writing—e.g. letters to the editor, writing for a “general” audience, or position papers debating an issue in a pro-con format—and that the existence of a “public” is already assumed (328). Drawing on the work of public sphere theorists Jürgen Habermas, Oskar Negt, Alexander Kluge, and Nancy Fraser, Wells argues that publics are multiple, contain complex discursive practices, and, above all, have to be actively constructed.

I believe that public sphere theory, in particular more recent critiques of Habermas’s notion of a bourgeois public sphere, offer important contributions for a radical pedagogy linked to emerging social movements. In particular, I am encouraged by Nancy Fraser’s and Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge’s writings on counter or alternative publics as counterhegemonic spaces. Nancy Fraser defines counterpublics as “parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs” (Fraser 123). Fraser cites the example of U.S. feminists who created a “variegated array of journals, bookstores, publishing companies, film and video distribution networks, lecture series, research centers, academic programs, conferences, conventions, festivities, and local meeting places” (123). Within these sites and in conscious-raising groups, feminists developed new “struggle concepts” that named aspects of women’s social realities that had, until then, remained marginalized within public discourse (123). Fraser distinguishes counterpublics from separatist organizations—e.g. utopian colonies

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13 I use the term “struggle concepts” as defined by Maria Mies. In *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale* she argues that concepts developed within feminist movements were not “worked out by an ideological mastermind of the movement…They [were] derived
in the U.S. during the first part of the century—by suggesting they are oriented toward wider publics; that is, they seek to widen the discursive space. She argues that on the one hand, counterpublics “function as spaces of withdrawal and regroupment; on the other hand, they also function as bases and training grounds for agitational activities directed toward wider publics” (124).

Fraser offers both a critique and an extension of Habermas’s notion of the public sphere. In historical terms, Fraser points to the work of several scholars who have taken Habermas’s study of the public sphere to task on the grounds that it is defined solely in masculinist terms, that the public sphere was made possible only through mechanisms of exclusion, and that the rise of the bourgeois public sphere in Habermas’s study does not take account of the multiple, competing public spheres that were emerging at the same time (Fraser 113-116). A central issue for Fraser is how subordinate social groups were/are able to organize counterhegemonic resistance in the face of a dominant public sphere that was/is supported by unequal distribution of resources. In particular, if publics are to be spaces where democratic deliberation can take place and where “public opinion” is formed, how can socially subordinate groups gain influence when the very terms of acceptable “public” discourse and the material means of communication are controlled by ruling classes?

Fraser is also critical of Habermas on the grounds that his view of public deliberation “consists exclusively of opinion formation”; she calls groups engaged in such processes “weak publics” (134). In order to move in the direction of a more participatory democracy, it is necessary for there to be multiple “strong publics” that are invested with binding decision-

from our struggle experiences and the reflection on those experiences, and have thus a certain explanatory value” (Mies 36).
making authority and not just the ability to “influence” those who make the decisions (134-5). Fraser’s notion of strong publics approaches the kind of institutional forms that would be required to ensure radical democracy in practice and not just in name. The concept of counterpublics is useful for rethinking radical pedagogies in at least two ways. The first has to do with constructing counterpublics within academic institutions to gain control over educational decision-making processes. Academic institutions are sites of struggle over the kinds of

14 Fraser give the example of a network of self-managing institutions to illustrate what a society based on multiple, strong publics might look like. She says that in “self-managed workplaces, child-care centers, or residential communities…internal institutional public spheres could be arenas of both of opinion formation and decision making. This would be tantamount to constituting sites of direct or quasi-direct democracy, wherein all those engaged in a collective undertaking would participate in deliberations to determine its design and operation” (135). She goes on to suggest that one of the central questions then becomes: “What institutional arrangements best ensure the accountability of democratic decision-making bodies (strong publics) to their external, weak, or, given the possibility of hybrid cases, weaker publics?” (135). Thus, Fraser leaves open the possibility that strong publics, or self-managed institutions would not be limited to “workplaces” in the dominant Marxist paradigm, but would depend on networks of accountability. That is, a school may have networks of accountability that include the immediate community, publishers, transportation engineers, domestic violence shelters, and enviromentalists. I think Fraser is correct not to delineate the precise form these institutional relationships would take. To posit the institutional form of a future society a priori would be to give up the principle of democratic deliberation. That is, it is necessary for the precise structure of a future society to be formed through democratic deliberative processes.
subjectivities and knowledges necessary for social change. Furthermore, they are also sites of labor—both academic labor and service labor—and sites of living—especially for residential students. Colleges and universities are also directly involved in networks of accountability. In this regard, composition courses and radical teachers can see the institution itself as a site of struggle. I will discuss this in greater detail in chapter five. In terms of linking radical teaching to social movements, counterpublics suggest that composition courses can focus on the kinds of literacy skills necessary for building social movements.

Susan Wells identifies at least four directions that radical teachers in composition might pursue that contribute to such a project. First, the “classroom itself can be seen as a version of the public sphere” that could “value such skills as focusing discussion, organizing work, tolerating and enjoying difficulty, and renunciation of safety and comfort” (338). By renouncing “safety and comfort” Wells is not advocating brutality. Rather, she is recognizing that “public spaces are difficult spaces, and they become more difficult as they become more inclusive” (336). Abandoning “safety and comfort” means classrooms in which “agreement…can be sustained through difficulty, that will last out the inevitable day when reliable speakers hold contradictory positions, for good and honest reasons, and decisions must be made” (337).15

15 For example, Susan Jarratt argues that “for pedagogical purposes—that is, as a model for the language of the classroom—it is more productive to bring out and examine the contradictions and conflicts being resolved in that space than to overlook them or minimize their significance” (Jarratt, “Feminism” 116). Drawing on Kathleen Weiler’s description of the pedagogy of feminist high school teachers, Jarratt argues that feminist teachers can create classrooms in which “personal experience is important” but also “openly acknowledge that differences exist and cause conflicts. The negotiation of those conflicts becomes the subject of
Wells’s second suggestion is to teach public writing beginning with an “analysis of public discourse, including the texts produced in alternative and counter publics” (338). In this kind of classroom, teachers and students would cultivate skills including “an orientation to performance rather than disclosure, and a broadened appreciation of performance inside and outside of texts; such a classroom would search for forms of public advocacy that are not immediately reducible to brutal rhetorical advantage” (339). This strategy would help cultivate the kinds of counter-hegemonic practices typical of the labor colleges and Highlander Folk School I discussed in chapter 2.

Thirdly, Wells suggests having students produce “writing that will enter some form of public space” (339). Here some of the models of service-learning that require students to produce texts for nonprofit or advocacy organizations come to mind, although such a practice might also include some of the more generic forms of public writing that Wells resists. Finally, Wells suggests “work[ing] with the discourses of the disciplines as they intervene in the public”

the dialogue” (119). Likewise, Mary Louise Pratt argues that if a “classroom is analyzed as a social world unified and homogenized with respect to the teacher, whatever students do other than what the teacher specifies is invisible or anomalous to the analysis” (38). Pratt instead proposes a model of the classroom as a “contact zone”: “social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power” (34). Such a classroom is meant to foreground the differentiated ways that students experience the world that is fraught with inequality and exploitation. Finally, bell hooks argues that teachers who ask students to take risks in the classroom must be willing to take the same risks themselves (21).
This could take the form of translating disciplinary language into forms more useful to public debate or through writing *across* disciplines in addressing issues of public concern.

Each of Wells’s suggestions could go a long way toward a pedagogy that connects the first year writing course with questions and practices of public deliberation. In fact, she is advocating practices similar to those instituted in all of the radical educational experiments I discussed in the last chapter. However, there are problems with promoting public writing that are similar to those posed by service learning. In particular, how can such writing classrooms literacy practices for constructing *strong publics*? Wells’s suggestions continually point to the tensions critical and radical writing teachers face in the classroom. Students who enter the classroom are not generally there to create a counter-hegemony. The kind of practices Wells suggests *may* eventually lead students and teachers toward forming strong counterpublics; however, I am resistant to the notion that the classroom can or should be a thought of as a counterpublic space. Rather than being a counterpublic space, the classroom has more characteristics of a public in so far as students come to writing classes with multiple and conflicting personal and political interests. I will have more to say about this in chapter 6.

Wells’s suggestions are full of possibilities for linking classrooms with social movements. But I think it is important to think through some of the pitfalls of advocating for public writing if the goal is to help build counter hegemonic spaces. That is, in order to make the most use out of Well’s suggestions, it is important to think through how the classroom and public writing are oriented toward the wider public. For example, through public writing projects students could successfully influence the broader public and help instigate social reform. However, students would still be approaching the public on its terms. In *Public Sphere and Experience*, Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge argue this approach will necessarily fail to
produce social transformation even while it may help to improve certain aspects of society. Negt and Kluge are interested in the ways in which workers and others can intervene in the dominant public sphere to resist exploitation and oppression. They write,

as soon as the worker participates in the bourgeois public sphere, once he has won elections, taken up union initiatives, he is confronted by a dilemma. He can make only ‘private’ use of a public sphere that has disintegrated into a mere intermediatry sphere. The public sphere operates according to this rule of private use, not according to the rules whereby the experiences and class interests of workers are organized. The interests of workers appear in the bourgeois public sphere as nothing more than a gigantic, cumulative ‘private interest,’ not as a collective mode of production for qualitatively new forms of public sphere and public consciousness. To the extent that the interests of the working class are no longer formulated and represented as genuine and autonomous vis-
à-vis the bourgeois public sphere, betrayal by individual representatives of the labor movement ceases to be an individual problem…**In wanting to use the mechanisms of the bourgeois public sphere for their cause, such representatives become, objectively, traitors to the cause they are representing** (Negt and Kluge 7, bold in original).

Negt and Kluge are arguing that revolutionary working class activity is necessarily compromised when articulated in terms of the dominant public sphere. This public sphere is predicated on participants acting as individuals. That is, collective experience is *unthinkable* within in the context of the dominant public sphere. What is more, any notion of a unitary collective subjectivity is a fiction, for the collective experiences of the working class cannot be reduced to a singular unity (44). Working class experience is marked by its specificity, differentiation, and
localized contextualization (43). In other words, entering the dominant public means being caught between two inadequate modes of representation: a collection of individuals or as a fictive collectivity.

Negt and Kluge are not suggesting that collective politics are impossible. What they argue is that a collective subject cannot be articulated within the terms of the dominant public sphere. Take for example the experience of feminist consciousness raising groups in the 1960s and 70s. When women came together in autonomous spaces to discuss their experiences, what emerged was a sense of a shared, collective experience as women, but at the same time this shared experience was marked simultaneously by differentiation. When white women began to publicly articulate a feminism that sought to speak for all women, black feminists, lesbian feminists, working-class feminists, and others sharply critiqued that specific public articulation of feminism. It would be fundamentally wrong to suggest that the oppression of women was then a fiction, or that feminism is a flawed project because all women do not inhabit the same experiential space within patriarchy. Negt and Kluge would argue, I believe, that the limits of particular forms of feminism are in part a result of the inability, indeed the impossibility, to articulate collective subjectivities within the dominant public sphere. To articulate a collectivity in the public sphere means that one must be a traitor to that collectivity—not because of a defect

\[16\] In her text, Beyond a Feminist Aesthetics, Rita Felski argues, “[u]nlike the bourgeois public sphere, then, the feminist public sphere does not claim a representative universality but rather offers a critique of cultural values from the standpoint of women as a marginalized group within society. In this sense it constitutes a partial or counterpublic sphere…Yet insofar as it is a public sphere, its arguments are also directed outward, toward a dissemination of feminist ideas and values throughout society as a whole” (Felski 167).
of character, but because of the material conditions of communication and intelligibility in the dominant public sphere (7).

Negt and Kluge offer a second, equally problematic, reading of a politics oriented toward the dominant public sphere. They argue that the public sphere itself is not static, but radically dynamic and in a constant state of reformation. Negt and Kluge write that “[w]hile critiques of individual manifestations of the existing public sphere are still being performed and disseminated, the public sphere has already changed its identity” (79). This poses a serious dilemma for radical politics based on a specific theory of social change:

A counterpublic sphere that is based on ideas and discourses with progressive content cannot develop effective weapons against the combined elements of illusion, the public sphere, and public power. In this situation, the compensations that the classical bourgeois public sphere possessed, as compared with the public power relations, become increasingly ineffective. The only antidotes to the production of the illusory public sphere are the counter-products of a proletarian public sphere: idea against idea, product against product, production sector against production sector. It is impossible to grasp in any other way the permanently changing forms that social power takes on in its fluctuations between capitalist production, illusory public sphere and public power monopoly (Negt and Kluge 79-80, bold in original).

Negt and Kluge are suggesting that given existing power relations and the domination of the public sphere by ruling classes, political struggle must take place through particular productions of a proletarian public sphere. Counter-productions from autonomous counterpublic spheres are the basis for bringing about a radically democratic society and changing the material bases of society (28).
The role of counterpublics in this struggle can be thought of as a process without closure that is constantly rearticulating the specificity of experience and gaining experience in articulating collective subjectivities that remain, in many ways, beyond signification. Derrida’s notion of *differénciation* captures the dynamic of articulating collective subjectivities within a context of unequal power relations that limit signification processes to reproducing continually updated forms of hegemony. Collective subjectivities are constantly rearticulated in oppositional spaces, but they cannot “hold” without the ability of social groups to transform articulations into material practices. That is, as Gramsci argues, unless a society supports the conditions in which all citizens can govern themselves. Radical politics that seek to ever increase the level of abstraction do not help this process. Negt and Kluge argue that “[I]t is a bourgeois reflex to process it upward, toward ideas, platforms, and authorities,” and, following Marx, “it becomes clear that radicalism in analysis and struggle can only be intensified downward” (45). The fact that radical theory and working-class experience are alienated from one another has its roots, they argue, in the division between mental and manual labor that characterizes capitalist culture. If working-class people find academic language impenetrable, it is equally true that working class experience is beyond the abilities of intellectuals to comprehend within the dominant forms of knowledge production.17

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17 This does not mean, however, that Negt and Kluge reject theory. They argue that “*only to the extent that workers can have experiences of their own behavior and consciousness are they in a position to develop their own forms of experience.*" It is of no use to the workers that these experiences have been formulated on a scholarly and scientific level by, for instance, Hegel and Marx. In such a theoretical formulation, in other words as mediated experience, workers can appropriate experience only when they have already organized some of
Negt and Kluge do not reject participation in the dominant public sphere as part of political struggle. They see it as necessary. But they do argue that it is impossible to achieve anything resembling a radical democracy through participation in the dominant public sphere. Only when the collective experiences of workers—differentiated, complex, and multiple—form the basis for the social organization of production can anything resembling a radical, deliberative, public sphere be possible. I do not believe that Negt and Kluge are suggesting that one needs to wait until “after the revolution” to engage in radically democratic politics. In fact, one of the things I find most encouraging about their reworking of public sphere theory is that they seem to suggest that it is essential to exercise radically democratic politics as part of constructing counterpublic spheres. Counterpublics become sites for experiencing democracy. Further, in arguing that the only antidote to the “illusory” public sphere18 is the counter-products it themselves. This is the meaning of Marx’s assertion that it is not sufficient that the thought presses toward reality, but reality must press toward the thought, as well as his assertion that the liberation of the workers can only be the task of the workers themselves. They must recapitulate, in the forms of their own specific mode of expression and experience, the highly differentiated process of organization of social experience that is accumulated in the handful of successful forms of social theory” (Negt and Kluge 27-8, bold in original). Experience and theory should be in a dialectical relation and their valences reoriented toward praxis.

18 By “illusory” Negt and Kluge mean that “the public sphere is bound to a rule: it must sustain the claim that it represents the totality of society” (79). The more it explicitly articulates the exclusions it is based upon, the more its legitimacy is called into question. As Miriam Hansen argues, “[w]ithout using the Gramscian term, they describe the mechanisms of exclusion and silencing as hegemonic principles and, conversely, formulate the contestation of those
of a proletarian public sphere, Negt and Kluge suggest the necessity of political struggle within the dominant public sphere. It is necessary, for example, to engage in the dominant public sphere in struggles over abortion rights and the privatization of public services. It is crucial to secure and defend abortion rights and guaranteed access to public services. However, what Negt and Kluge are suggesting is that winning that battle over abortion rights and access to public services within the dominant public sphere compromises feminist and socialist collective subjectivities. In this light, Negt and Kluge’s argument that articulating the interest of the working class within the dominant public sphere is an act of betrayal and failure is not a defeatist position, nor does it reflect moral bankruptcy. On the contrary, I find their argument hopeful.

Negt and Kluge help situate the suggestions Wells’s makes for a public orientation of the writing classroom within a broader struggle for social transformation. Each of her suggestions can be part of a longer process of building connections with social movements and creating educative environments in which students are gaining skills in public discourse. At the same time, Negt and Kluge should be a caution to radical and critical teachers. That is, like service-learning, under existing conditions the public sphere is dominated by the interests of the ruling classes. Intervening in the public sphere can help bring about important reforms, but without connections with counter hegemonic social movements the underlying terms of the dominant public sphere co-opt more fundamental social transformations. However, a public orientation of the writing classroom further strengthens moves toward engaging social movements.

principles from the position of the subaltern” (xxx). In this sense, Negt and Kluge are replicating Gramsci’s theory of “consent” through the discourse of the public sphere.
I find it quite interesting that Negt and Kluge’s text has become available in English during the same time that another form of radical theory—autonomous marxism—has begun to (re)emerge in radical political communities. In particular, autonomous marxist theory complements and adds a broader social analysis to Negt and Kluge’s argument. While Negt and Kluge demonstrate the need to construct counterhegemonic spaces of struggle, autonomous theory situates such a strategy within an analysis of capitalism that builds from, and extends, a particular tendency of marxism that is generally overlooked, if not completely ignored, by critics of marxism—even those that come from radically democratic positions.19 The autonomous

19 For example, in their text, Hegemony and Socialist Strategy, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe argue that marxism is fundamentally flawed due to its insistence that “the working class represents the privileged agent in which the fundamental impulse of social change resides” (177). They suggest that this results from marxists’ reliance upon the notion that the “superstructure” (even if it’s in the last instance) is determined by the economic base (76). Laclau and Mouffe give great credit to Gramsci for reworking the concept of hegemony that resisted such a strict determination, but, they argue, Gramsci still holds on to economic determinism. Laclau and Mouffe’s arguments are quite useful insofar as they reject a reductive economism that has pervaded so much of the marxist tradition. However, they are ultimately battling dominant articulations of Marxism and do not give credence to the traditions of marxism that I will discuss here. Laclau and Mouffe’s solution to “economism” is to argue for indeterminancy, rejecting marxists’ analysis of class in favor of a “field of discursivity” (111). Laclau and Mouffe have argued for giving up marxist strategies for social transformation in
marxist tradition is deeply critical of readings of Marx as “political economy” or as “philosophy”. Harry Cleaver argues that marxists who have focused on the work of Marx as within the tradition of political economy have reified marxism by focusing solely on factory production (Reading 27). The myopic focus on factory production has excluded the rest of society from the analysis—not only the state and party but also the unemployed, the family, the school, health care, the media, art, and so on. As a result, political economists who would try to take these things into account find themselves rummaging through Marx’s writings looking for suggestive tidbits of ‘other’ theories. Yet it is precisely in these ‘other’ social spheres that many of the major social conflicts of today are occurring (26).

As a result, revolts and political struggles that were not strictly “economic” are seen as “by products of the general rationality of the system” and not as instances of working class revolutionary activity (27). Furthermore, reading Marx as political economy has resulted in a rich analysis of the structures of capitalism, but has reduced the working class to a “spectator to favor of “radical democracy,” which seeks not to “renounce liberal-democratic ideology, but on the contrary, to deepen and expand it in the direction of a radical and plural democracy” (176, emphasis in original). Laclau and Mouffe provide very powerful and useful critiques of marxist theories of determinism, but I do not believe their social analysis is accurate. Their reasons for rejecting Marx have to do with what they take “Marxism” to be. Their critique of marxism is rooted in dominant readings of the Second International and Eurocommunist doctrine. The autonomist marxist tradition is nowhere to be found. For an excellent analysis and critique of Laclau and Mouffe’s reading of marxism, see Ellen Meiksins Wood’s Retreat from Class.
the global waltz of capital’s autonomous self-activating development” (27). In other words, the working class can only be seen as reacting to capital’s initiative or as powerless victims.

In addition to a critique of reading Marx as political economy, autonomist theory is equally critical of reading Marx philosophically. Cleaver argues that reading Marx philosophically has its roots in economistic readings of culture and the political sphere. This tradition ranges from Althusser’s assigning a certain level of autonomy to theoretical practice (34) to the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School that argued capital has succeeded in colonizing the whole of the cultural sphere (38). Cleaver suggests that this approach leads either to justifying the need for a “specialized party of professional revolutionaries”—vanguard or otherwise—who alone can see the totality of society and thus bring the working class into the light (36), or in offering such a complete theory of domination that the working class is once again relegated to victims without agency (42).

In either case, these two tendencies of marxism have been one-sided insofar as they rely upon an analysis of capital’s progress and systematically ignore actual working class autonomous organization and initiative. Autonomous traditions, by contrast, insist on reading Marx’s work politically. That is, not as sacred texts to be hermeneutically interpreted, or as instances of ideology critique, but as tools for class struggle. As Cleaver argues, the alternative is to “begin from a strategic analysis of the pattern of development of working-class power as the only possible ground for answering the question of how that power can be increased” (43). This suggests that one cannot posit, a priori, a “correct” path for revolutionary political activity. To fundamentally transform capitalism and to bring about a radically democratic society, radicals need to take their cues from actually existing struggles as the basis for radical theory. This is
precisely what I take Negt and Kluge to mean when they argue that “radicalism in analysis and struggle can only be intensified downward” (45).

The term “autonomy” here refers to the central concept of this tradition that differs markedly from other traditions of marxism that analyze capitalism from the vantage point of capital. That is, autonomist marxists argue that the working class is autonomous from capital and from the organizations that “officially” represent the working class such as a Labor Party or unions (45). This does not mean that the working class is “free” from capital or somehow outside it. Rather, autonomists rely upon Marx’s insistence that “capital” is not a “thing” but is a social relation: class struggle. In other words, “capital cannot be understood as an outside force independent of the working class. It must be understood as the class relation itself” (53). In fact, autonomists argue, it is the creativity and initiative of the working class that causes changes and development in capital. Dominant marxist theories tend to give the initiative to capital—whether through reductionist accounts of the “laws” of capitalist development, or through developing a “dominant ideology” in which workers are controlled—and have relegated the working class to reactive politics. By foregrounding the working class as the creative agent in capital, autonomists have reclaimed agency and have asserted that it is capital, not the working class, that is reactive. For example, under dominant marxist paradigms, technological development is generally seen as a “natural” process of capital itself. From an autonomist position, technological development is always a result of and response to working class initiative. Capital then has to wage a class struggle to regain control of particular technological developments and bring them under the logic of its own self-valorization.

Take for example how people have made use of the Internet. As is well known, the Internet began as a Department of Defense project to link scientists working on military research.
As more and more people gained access they used the Internet to set up listserves, discussion groups, and message boards on a wide variety issues including issues of importance to political activists. Organizations such as the Electronic Frontier Foundation began to argue that the Internet should be a democratic space that belonged to all people equally and should remain free of corporate ownership. By the 1980’s, activists were learning to use the Internet to organize political campaigns, distribute alternative news, network political action nationally and globally, and stage mass email lobbying campaigns. In the early 1990’s, institutions such as the RAND corporation, a private think-tank, began to issue reports on the growing threat of what they called “netwar” and “cyber-activism” (Ronfeldt, et.al 7-10). Instead of simply stopping people from self-organizing on the Internet, the U.S. government decided to use the very same organizational tactics to undermine the use of the Internet for purposes that posed a threat to its interests.20

While these aspects of autonomous theory alone are important, the most crucial aspect of autonomist theory is how the category of “the working class” is understood. Again, rejecting a notion of the working class as confined to the factory and workplace, autonomists argue that class is a political category that is determined through struggle. Autonomous theory argues that the “‘factory’ where the working class worked [is] the society as a whole, a social factory” (57). That is, capitalism is not simply an economic system; it is a social system encompassing both waged and unwaged labor. As capitalism extends its domain and colonizes more and more of

20 It should be noted that not all forms of self-organization or working class initiative are “progressive.” For example, white neo-fascist militias also used the Internet to organize racist attacks and radical anti-abortion groups used the internet to lobby against abortion rights and stage harassing protests in front of women’s health clinics. The issue at stake here is that the strategies and tactics of using the Internet for self-organization did not originate from capital.
social life, it creates novel sites of resistance. For example, in England and the U.S. during the 1970’s, feminists organized a campaign called “Wages for Housework” that argued that domestic labor was not external to, or parallel to, the capitalist wage relation. Rather, housework was a central characteristic of the capitalist division of labor. While orthodox marxists argued that housework should be seen as ancillary to the wage relation, autonomous marxist feminists argued that housework was an integral component of actually existing capitalist social organization. Autonomous theory argues that the logic of capitalism is to bring more and more of social relations into the service of the market. Thus, as Italian autonomist Antonio Negri argues, the “social” has become integrated into the logic of the market creating a “socialized worker” (Revolution 209). In late capitalism, liberation struggles do not take place only on the shop floor (nor have they ever been limited to the factory floor). Rather, they take place in all social spaces in which capital tries to circumscribe social space, recruit consumers to be active market researchers, and to shift the responsibility for most reproductive labor from the state to the “private” spaces of home and community. As Nick Dyer-Witheford explains,

Negri observes that struggles by multifarious subjects at the many sites of the factory without walls—factory workers, welfare mothers, students—manifest their own specificity, their own ‘concrete autonomy’…Yet all encounter a barrier in capitalism’s subordination of every use value to the universal logic of the market…For Negri, the experimentation with coalitions, ‘coordinations,’ ‘rainbows,’ ‘rhizomes,’ ‘networks,’ ‘hammocks,’ and ‘webs’ that has been a salient feature of the anticapitalist movements in the last decade denotes the search for a politics adequate to ‘the specific form of existence of the socialized worker,’” which ‘is not something unitary, but something
manifold, not solitary, but polyvalent,’ and where ‘the productive nucleus of the antagonism consists in multiplicity’” (Dyer-Witheford 82).

The homeless, the unemployed, housewives, students, tenants, are all subjects within in capitalism that take part in the struggle to affirm, to “self-valorize” their experience in terms not in line with how capital seeks to organize or recognize them. In short, if the factory is a “social factory” then the working class is a “social” class not strictly an “economic” class whose specific composition had to be determined in the course of struggle.

There is one final aspect of autonomist theory that is important for my argument. Since the working class is not restricted to the factory but experiences capitalism in highly differentiated form, the working class can not be articulated as a “unitary subject.” That is, autonomists from C.L.R. James to Mariarosa Dalla Costa insist on the autonomy of the working class from capitalists and State officials (Cleaver, Reading 59). The kind of unity that Communist and Socialist parties demanded from all sectors of the working class amounts to, from the autonomous marxist perspective, a repression of working class initiative.

Placing the work of Negt and Kluge in dialogue with this autonomist marxist tradition helps to mediate between cultural or communicative politics and struggles against capitalism that have wrongfully been limited to the economic sphere. On the one hand, Negt and Kluge’s argument for the necessity of a “proletarian” public sphere can be rearticulated in such a way as to reject “proletarian” as an “economic” category. On the other hand, suggesting that the working class is autonomous from capital in the ways I have outlined above affirms a commitment to the actual practices of the working class as the basis for radical agency. Furthermore, since an autonomous working class constitutes a diversity of experience, political struggle can take the form of multiple, autonomous counterpublics each resisting capital from its
specific social position and refusing to be falsely articulated as an extension of, or subordinate to, any other articulation of “working class.” Universalizing articulations of publics from the right and the left can then both be understood as assaults on revolutionary social change.

From Negt and Kluge’s analysis of bourgeois and proletarian public sphere, the classroom can be understood as currently institutionalized along the lines of the bourgeois public. In this sense, the writing classroom is, by necessity, geared toward training for participation in the dominant public sphere. This does not mean, however, that the classroom is a completely determined space. Process pedagogy, collaborative writing, and the influence of feminist politics of difference make working toward a more collective process of knowledge production possible. However, radical teachers need to be constantly vigilant not to imagine the writing classroom as a possible counterpublic space, even as they work in that direction. This seems particularly the case when students in most first-year writing courses in colleges and universities do not self-select into courses; they are placed into or choose course sections randomly. Even in writing programs that allow students to view syllabi, course descriptions, and student evaluations of different instructors, students choose their schedules primarily on individual criteria; there is no necessary pre-existing, historically grounding solidarity.

This does not mean that writing classrooms make a pedagogy for movement building impossible. Rather, the specificity of the writing classroom at this moment must be situated within a broader context and must develop teaching practices geared toward critical teaching within a “public.” Thus, my argument that radical teaching should begin to build links with social movements is, necessarily, more of a long-term strategy that includes, but also exceeds, the limits of the classroom. In other words, radical teaching that seeks to link with social
movements has to begin to develop transitional autonomous spaces both within and outside of academe.

In the next chapter, I will discuss another recent area of interest in composition that is of particular interest in light of current anti-corporate globalization movements: critical technological literacy. Anti-corporate globalization movements have made unprecedented use of new technologies in organizing against neoliberalism. Considering political, ideological, and social issues connected to technological literacy converges with some of uses these movements are making of new technologies.