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The Uses of Binary Thinking

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There is an ancient tradition of binary or dichotomous thinking--of framing issues in terms of opposites such as sun/moon or reason/passion. G. E. R. Lloyd speaks of "the remarkable prevalence of theories based on opposition in so many societies at different stages of technological development." He goes on to give these reasons:

> [M]any prominent phenomena in nature exhibit a certain duality: day alternates with night; the sun rises in one quarter of the sky and sets in the opposite quarter; in most climates the contrast between the seasons (summer and winter, or dry season and rainy season) is marked; in the larger animals male and female are distinct, and the bilateral symmetry of their bodies is obvious. . . . Antithesis is an element in any classification, and the primary form of antithesis, one may say, is division into *two* groups--so that the *simplest* form of classification, by the same token, is a dualist one. (80)

This tradition of binary thinking is still strong and forms a kind of foundation for the many varieties of structuralism. We see this tradition illustrated, for example, in Lévi-Strauss' classic structuralist title, *The Raw and the Cooked*.

But in recent years, especially with the deconstructive reaction against structuralism, we have seen strong criticism of binary thinking. Hélene Cixous is one of many voices arguing that wherever there are polar oppositions, there is dominance: some classic terms are day/night, sun/moon, reason/passion--and of course lurking behind all of these pairs is usually gender: male/female. According to this critique, binary thinking almost always builds in dominance or privilege--sometimes overtly and sometimes covertly. (For a strong example of this critique, see LaCapra 23-24).

Even when people try to overturn or reverse the traditional dominance in a polar opposition--proclaiming for example that dark is better than light, passion than reason, female than male--it just means that the underdog is redefined as overdog, and we are still left with thinking in terms of dominance or hierarchy. One side is privileged. Furthermore (so goes this critique), we don't get away from the problem even when we avoid giving victory to one side and instead work out a compromise or else a Hegelian synthesis into a new, third term. When the Hegelian bulldozer pushes toward "higher" order or unity--even if the compromise is really "fair" and the synthesis doesn't favor either the thesis or antithesis--*difference and diversity are eliminated*. Jonathan Culler neatly pinpoints this large critical position in his summary of Paul de Man's thinking:

Deconstruction seeks to undo all oppositions that, in the name of unity, purity, order, and hierarchy, try to eliminate difference (278).

Even though Culler and de Man are complaining about binary thinking and I am defending it, I want to take this quotation as a kind of foundation for my essay. For I am defending only one *kind* or *mode* of binary thinking. I think I can show that binary thinking, if handled in the right way, will serve as a way to *avoid* the very problems Culler and de Man are troubled by: "purity, order, and hierarchy." That is, binary thinking can serve to encourage difference--indeed encourage nondominance, nontranscendence, instability, disorder.

In making this point, I'm also calling on a venerable tradition. For there are really *two* traditions of binary or dialectical thinking. The better known is the Hegelian tradition. It uses binary thinking as a motor always to press on to a third term or a higher category that represents a transcendent reconciliation or unity: thesis and antithesis are always harnessed to yield synthesis. Since Hegel, the ancient and broad term *dialectic* has tended to be narrowed to connote this three-termed process.

The lesser noted but older tradition of binary thinking that I am calling on used the term "dialectic" long before Hegel. This tradition sees value in accepting, putting up with, indeed seeking the nonresolution of the two terms: not feeling that the opposites must be somehow reconciled, not feeling that the itch must be scratched. This tradition goes as far back as the philosophy of yin/yang. In the West we see it in Socrates, Plato, and Boethius. This tradition of the "coincidence of opposites" was strong the middle ages (Peter Abelard, *Sic et Non*). Perhaps the most common recent champion of this approach is Jung with his emphasis on paired forces in the collective unconscious and the need always to strengthen the weaker in any pairing. Coleridge rides this tradition a bit: how the poet "brings the whole soul of man into activity" with "opposite or discordant qualities" such as sameness/difference, idea/image, general/concrete, manner/matter (II, 12).[*]

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[*]Here are some formulations deriving from this tradition:

> Blake. "Without contraries is no progression." "Opposition is true Friendship."
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> Keats. ". . . capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason." (Letters)
>
> Bakhtin. "Not a dialectical either/or, but a dialogic both/and" (Clark and Holquist 7).
>
> Dewey. "Mankind likes to think in terms of extreme opposites. It is given to formulating its beliefs in terms of *Either-Ors*, between which it recognizes no intermediate possibilities" (17). Dewey could be said to structure his whole philosophy around the rejection of either/or thinking and the development of both/and thinking.
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> Niels Bohr. "The opposite of a correct statement is a false statement. But the opposite of a profound truth may well be another profound truth."
>
> Yeats. "No mind can engender until divided into two."
>
> F. Scott Fitzgerald. "The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in mind at the same time, and still retain the ability to function."

Mary Belenky *et al*: "[Constructed knowers] show a high tolerance for internal contradiction and ambiguity. They abandon completely the either/or thinking . . . [and] recognize the inevitability of conflict and stress . . . " (137). (William Perry's *Intellectual and Ethical Development in the College Years* sounds the same theme.)

Chaucer was deeply indebted to Boethius, and it was during my work on Chaucer that I first became aware of this tradition of binary thinking. Since then I've repeatedly seen the value of this approach: noticing oppositions or conflicts, even seeking them, but leaving them unresolved. Practice with this approach has led me to suspect that when we encounter something that is difficult or complicated or something that tangles people into endless debate, we are often in the presence of an opposition that needs to be made more explicit--and left unreconciled. (See my *Oppositions in Chaucer* and, more recently, Thomas Reed, *Middle English Debate Poetry and the Aesthetics of Irresolution*. I broadened the scope of this theme in my book of essays, *Embracing Contraries: Explorations in Learning and Teaching*.)

Why Dichotomies?

I hear an obvious objection at this point. *"You say you are interested in complexity, but it sounds as though your real goal is to save binary thinking. If you really want complexity, why keep everything in neat pairs?"*

Yes, two is not a very large or complex number. Having three or more options is lovely. Nothing in this paper argues against framing issues in terms of more than two sides. *As long as there's more than one*! Seeing three or five sides is fine, but it is often just a way to talk about one of them as right and the others as wrong. The argument against binaries and for multiplicity is often a cover for letting one side be the real winner--in short for hierarchy and singleness of truth. Thus my deeper goal in this paper is not to preserve pairs or binaries in themselves so much as *to get away from simple, single truth*: to have situations of balance, irresolution, nonclosure, nonconsensus, nonwinning.

So multiplicity may be fine, but I focus this paper on the problem of binary thinking because in fact there is no hope of getting away from it in some form or another. Binary thinking is the path of least resistance for human perceiving, thinking, and for linguistic structures. To perceive is to notice a category over against difference, and the simplest path is in terms of simple opposition. The easiest way to classify complex information is to clump it into two piles. Indeed the most instinctive and tempting clumps to use for complex data are the old favorites: ours/theirs, like/don't like, right/sinister, sheep/goats. This is why dichotomies tend to come packaged with positive and negative poles (see Herrnstein-Smith 122). It may be that the very structure of our bodies and our placement in phenomenal reality invite us to see things in terms of binary

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oppositions, e.g., right/left, up/down, front/back, near/far, male/female (see Lakoff and Johnson). The very same poststructuralists who are so unhappy about too many binary oppositions in structuralism seem to invite far more of them into their very model for how human language and meaning function:

> [E]lements of a text do not have intrinsic meaning as autonomous entities but derive their significance from oppositions which are in turn related to other oppositions in a process of theoretically infinite semiosis.
>
> To speak of the concept of 'brown,' for example, is, according to semiotics, a way of referring to a complex network of oppositions which articulates the spectrum of colors on the one hand and the spectrum of sounds on the other (Culler, *Signs* 29, 41).

The question, then, is not *whether* to deal with dichotomies but *how* to deal with them. We have five basic options:

1. Choose one side as right or better. This is "either/or" thinking.

2. Work out a compromise or a dialectical synthesis, i.e., find a third term.

3. Deny there is any conflict (e.g., "There is no difference between form and content" or "There is no conflict between teaching and research").

4. Affirm both sides of the dichotomy as equally true or necessary or important or correct. This is the approach I argue in this essay.

    4a. Same approach with an emphasis on mystical unity in the duality.

5. Reframe the conflict or analyze it in more detail so there are more than two sides. This, is of course another good path. It is not the focus of this essay, but it is exactly the method I use in making this list. And it is the central intellectual tool I use in my two most ambitious pieces here: my essay about voice (10 in Part III of this volume) and my essay about private writing (12 in Part IV).

The first three options are the most common and habitual ways we deal with dichotomy or conflict because humans seem to be uncomfortable with what is unreconciled or incompatible. When we are presented with conflicting data, our organism itself seems to want somehow to find *some* kind of harmony or unity. Psychologists can explain the most diverse range of human thinking, feeling, and behavior in terms of our instinctive resistance to "cognitive dissonance." Even in the simplest act of visual perception, the retina and brain are both presented with swiftly, constantly shifting inputs or data, but what we "see" is virtually always a stable object or category (see Peckham).

In short, even though binary oppositions tempt people to oversimple, black/white thinking, binary oppositions also present us with uniquely valuable occasions for balance, irresolution, nonclosure, nonconsensus, nonwinning. So I will celebrate and explore here the approach to binary oppositions that seems to go against the human grain and that requires some conscious discipline:

affirming both sides of a dichotomy as equally true or important--even if they are contradictory.

I'm not going so far as to say that we should balance *every* dichotomy we encounter. Sometimes one side is right and the other one wrong. Indeed when we *need* to make difficult value judgments or sort out slippery distinctions, pairings are an enormous help. Opticians harness this process to help us figure out which lens is best when there is a multiplicity of lenses to choose among. You could sum up this whole essay as an exercise in saying, "There are two kinds of binary thinking, the good kind and the bad kind." In truth *all five* ways of dealing with oppositions that I just listed above are valid and useful methods in one situation or another. But I write this essay because I see a need for more effort in noticing the many situations where the easy, good/bad distinction gets us in trouble and where the multiplicity of options is a cover for simply trying to win--and where instead we need balance and nonresolution.

Binary Thinking in Action: Seven Cases

I will apply this balancing kind of binary thinking to a diverse set of cases: writing, teaching, thinking/learning, teaching/research, form/content, reading/writing, private/social. I hope to show that this kind of thinking will have useful explanatory power.

(1) Writing

To write well we need to call on two opposite abilities or activities: generating and criticizing. That is, on the one hand we need to come up with lots of words and thoughts--something that is easiest if we adopt a noncritical, nonevaluative mentality of welcoming yea-saying. But on the other hand, we can't write well unless we evaluate, criticize and reject--something that is easiest if we adopt a mentality of tough-minded, skeptical, nay-saying.

In recent years, some people have called this view an outmoded piece of dichotomous thinking, arguing that the opposition between generating and criticizing breaks down: *There is no difference between generating and criticizing or rejecting. To generate one word is to reject a host of other words we could have put down. Every piece of generating is by the same token also a piece of criticizing. The dichotomy between generating and criticizing is an accident of words--a case of being fooled by our categories.*

This objection is a logical quibble. Even though generating X may seem the same as rejecting Y and Z in the realm of *logic*, the two acts are crucially different in the realm of human *experience*. It *can* happen that in generating X I also rejected or criticized Y and Z, but if so, it means that I actually *generated* all three--X, Y, and Z all came to mind. But often enough when we generate X, it's the only thing that comes to mind; Y and Z are nowhere in mind to be rejected or criticized. The point of the dichotomy is to distinguish between the

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experience of writing down X when it's the only thing in mind and the very different experience of writing it down when you also have Y and Z in mind. What I'm pursuing here is the difference between two different experiences or abilities, generating and criticizing. What's important about them is that they are both *variables*. At any moment of writing, we may be generating a great deal or not very much; at any moment we may be *criticizing* a great deal or not very much.

The same criticism can be framed in terms of *criticizing*: *Every act of criticism is simultaneously an act of generating or creating.* Here again, this can happen: the act of criticizing X causes Y to pop into mind. And here again my model insists that both mental events occurred: criticizing and generating. Excellent. But far too often it works the other way: criticizing X makes nothing at all pop into mind. Generating and criticizing are variables that can occur together, but they often occur apart. Most commonly, they occur more vigorously in each others' absence because they tend to get in each other's way.

If we honor the binary opposition between generating and criticizing, we get a model with considerable explanatory power. By noticing how generating and criticizing get in each other's way, we can see some of the difficulties of writing more clearly, and understand why the scenarios often play out as they do. People's characteristic way of getting things written often represents their way of negotiating the conflict between generating and criticizing.

- When writing goes very badly, we are stuck or blocked. It's a case of being tied in knots by trying to be generative and critical at the same time. Some writers are characteristically blocked. Their writing method is the famous one of staring at the paper till blood breaks out on their foreheads.

- When writing goes passably but not very well, it is usually because we are having to *negotiate a compromise* between these conflicting mentalities. Sometimes *generating* gets the upper hand. We manage to pour out a lot of material but we cannot prune and shape it well for lack of cogent criticism. Writers who habitually fall into this path tend to produce work that is rich but undisciplined. In contrast, sometimes *criticizing* gets the upper hand. Then we end up a with good result but very little of it, because we saw so many faults in every thought and sentence as we were engaged in trying to write it. Writers with this habit produce work that is cramped or tight. (Because *editors* specialize in vigilant criticism, many of them have difficulty writing themselves. Teachers often have the same problem since they spend so much time criticizing student writing.)

- When writing goes *very* well (as it occasionally does), we seem able to reach out for just the right word and yet at the same moment (seemingly without effort or even awareness), we put aside countless possibilities that aren't just right. Generating and criticizing are going on

simultaneously. A few excellent writers have learned to operate this way consistently; they have learned magic integration.

Commentators have always had a hard time explaining what it is that wonderful writers do--ascribing it to genius or magic or the muses or whatever. Writers themselves give remarkably contradictory accounts of what they're doing: "It's all inspiration!" "It's all perspiration!" "It's all system!" "It's all magic and serendipity!" This is just what we can expect if people are trying to explain a complex skill which they happened to have learned, but which violates normal patterns of thinking. Their skill represents the ability to be magically extreme at both skills. Transcendence is probably the right word and it is a worthy goal to keep in mind. But somehow it's not very helpful advice to say, "If you want to write well, just transcend opposites." Note, however, that many odd but in fact traditional pieces of advice for writing are really aids in transcendence--e.g., take walks, wait humbly, abnegate the self, pay homage to the muses, relinquish agency and control, meditate--or drink!

Note the social dimension that often lies behind these patterns. When we are more critical, it is often because we have a particularly critical audience in mind. When we are particularly generative or even magically integrated, it is often because of a particularly inviting or facilitative audience (see my *Writing with Power*, Section IV).

The path to really good writing, then, is seldom the path of compromise or the golden mean. If we are only *sort of* generative and *sort of* critical, we write mediocre stuff: we don't have enough to choose from, and we don't reject ideas and words we ought to reject. We need extremity in both directions. Instead of finding one point on the continuum between two extremes, we need as it were to occupy two points near both ends.

There's a second way to argue against the dichotomy between generating and criticizing: *Sure, of course there's a difference between them, but spare us all your advice about separating them. That puts us back to the dark ages--back to the rigid 'stage' theory of writing: prewriting / writing / rewriting. No writers do that. Haven't you heard of all the research showing that writing is recursive?*

I'm not trying to deny that writing is often recursive--or even usually so. Of course generating and criticizing are often going on more or less together, all mixed up; that's the default mode for lots of people. My point is that they don't *always* go on at the same time: they don't have to go on at the same time, and in fact it's helpful sometimes consciously to separate them since they get in each other's way. In short it can pay to learn to make writing less recursive.

Notice that I am introducing the dimension of time. What is paradoxical in logic--"being both generative and critical--occupying two spots on a single continuum"--is ordinary in the realm of time. Thus the easiest and most practical way to negotiate the conflict between generating and criticizing is temporally to separate them and engage in them one at a time. It may seem natural to try to *find* words and thoughts and *scrutinize* them at the same time to see if they are

the right ones; but we can get skilled at doing these two things one at a time--thus separating the two mentalities. (Notice, for example, how in most speaking situations, we don't put much energy into scrutinizing the words as they come to mind or to mouth. And on those occasions when we do scrutinize our words as we speak, our speaking tends to be more halting and tangled.) And in fact many writers have gradually learned to pour down words and thoughts helter-skelter and then come back to work on them later in a specially vigilant, detached, and critical frame of mind--that is, to hold off revising and editing till the end. The time dimension helps us *heighten* the conflict, not minimize it--permitting us to clear an arena in which each side can operate unhampered to an extreme.

This, then, is the approach to heightening and separating opposites that I gradually learned--and I find I can teach it to students and teachers with helpful results. It is a skill. People often have an easier time taking risks, turning off all criticism, and thereby coming up with words and thoughts they didn't know they had, when they know they will have a time later to be wholeheartedly critical and get rid of foolishness. And people often have an easier time being fiercely critical if they have first had a chance to generate too many ideas and hypotheses. (I have found it helpful, by the way, to notice a link between this generating/criticizing dichotomy and two others: planning/not planning, and controlling/relinquishing control. Writers commonly talk about the need for periods of relaxed planning or control.)

(2) Teaching

The same kind of conflict lies at the heart of the teaching process. Good teaching calls on two conflicting abilities or stances: positively affirming and critically judging. That is, on the one hand we benefit if we can function as allies and supporters to students--welcoming them and all their thinking--assuming they *can* learn, that they *are* intelligent, that they *have* what it takes. (Teachers' expectations about student abilities, positive or negative, probably have more influence on how well students learn than actual differences in teaching techniques. See Rosenthal and Jacobson.) Yet on the other hand, we also need to be on guard--to judge, scrutinize, evaluate, examine, and test. We have a loyalty not just to students but to the body of knowledge we are teaching and to society. We have to evaluate and to criticize what is wrong, reject what is unsatisfactory. In short, to teach well we need skill as host and bouncer, as ally and adversary. Teaching, like writing, may often be recursive, but it is a recursive blending or alternation of two conflicting dimensions: opening the gate wide and keeping the gate narrow.

This conflict explains some of the difficulty most of us experience in teaching, but the difficulty is unavoidable because, again, compromise or reconciliation is not the answer. Look at the options. A happy medium is pretty sad: being only *sort of* helpful or inviting to students and only *sort of* vigilant as to whether they do decent work. Similarly, it's no good *only* welcoming students and never critically examining their work; nor *only* criticizing wrong answers

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and never praising their weak starts or welcoming their risk taking. Thus most teachers are stuck at one point along a continuum that students know so well: at one end are the "tough teachers" and at the other end are the "easy teachers"; in the middle are "so-so teachers" and "inconsistent teachers." Inconsistency is understandable since any single position is so unsatisfactory: most teachers find themselves muttering these two different phrases to themselves at different times: "Oh, dear, I must have been too harsh" and "From now on, no more Mr. Nice Guy."

This conflict between contrary teaching roles or mentalities is illustrated in the way students often skitter ungracefully between confiding in us as allies and guarding against us as adversaries. And they are right; we are usually both. And these two teaching roles are sometimes institutionalized into separate people. The tutor's function, for example in a writing center, is to be wholly ally, and the examiner's function is to be wholly judge or adversary. Since the middle ages, Oxford and Cambridge, like many European universities, have institutionalized the roles of teacher/tutor and examiner.

But really skilled teachers somehow find ways to do justice to these opposed binaries in all their irreconcilability. Again we see two ways to do this. The harder and rarer path is one of mysterious finesse or transcendence. That is, a few remarkable teachers are extremely tough and inviting *at the same time*--remarkably welcoming to students yet remarkably discriminating in saying, "I won't take anything but the best."

The easier and more ordinary path to good teaching involves finding ways to separate the two stances: choosing certain times to be inviting and encouraging and choosing other times to be especially discriminatory and vigilant. We tend to be more inviting at the beginning of a course or in our opening explorations and explanations of something, and more vigilant at the ends of courses and as we test. Somewhere toward the middle or end of a course, students often feel, "Hey, what happened? I thought this teacher was my friend." Individual conferences can function as a time for being particularly supportive--though also, occasionally, a time for reading the riot act. (More on this whole issue in my "Embracing Contraries in the Teaching Process.")

(3) Thinking and learning--doubting and believing

We see the same contradiction at the heart of the intellectual process itself: a conflict between doubting and believing. The centrality of doubting is obvious. The ability to find flaws or contradictions has been foundational in the development of logic and in the critical tradition running from Socrates through Descartes and undiminished to the present. Criticism and skepticism are usually identified with intelligence itself. People tend to assume that real thinking or good thinking is critical thinking.

Less noticed, however, is the central need in the intellectual process for skill in believing: the ability to enter into, experience, or try on ideas or points of

view different from the ones we presently hold. Since "credulity," the tendency just to go along with whatever seems attractive or appealing or persuasive, is often a *problem* in the thinking of children or unsophisticated adults--and since schooling and careful thinking seem to consist of the process of *giving up* credulity in favor being more critical minded or skeptical--people have tended to see belief as a problem in the intellectual life. Intellectuals and academics often overlook the fact that few people are genuinely skilled at thinking and learning unless they are also skilled at entering into and even believing ideas and points of view that are different from what they are used to and difficult to take on. In short, we need skill both at doubting even what looks right, and at believing even what looks crazy or alien. This is one reason why good thinking and learning are so hard.

Of course most thinking involves some kind of combination or recursive intertwining of these mental activities, and it feels artificial to most people to try to separate them. But that feeling is misleading. It stems from the dominance of criticism in our culture's model of thinking and learning. In fact we are all perfectly accustomed to *one* form of trying to separate doubting and believing: trying to remove all credulity or believing in order to clear a space for unimpeded, dispassionate criticism or doubting. Intellectuals are not accustomed, however, to trying to remove all doubting and criticism in order to clear a space for unimpeded, focused entering in or believing.

So here is the same kind of dichotomy I've applied to the activities of writing and teaching. Intellectual skill represents skill at opposites: both accepting and rejecting, both swallowing and spitting out, both letting oneself be invaded and keeping oneself intact. And similarly, at moments of consummate skill in thinking, we seem to be able to manage what is paradoxical: we can take on what is alien, odd, and unknown--yet we are acute in our discriminating rejections.

Let me summarize these three cases before going on to others. I'm arguing the benefits of one *kind* of binary thinking for a better understanding of writing, teaching, and thinking: the process of heightening opposites but holding them unresolved--giving equal affirmation to both sides. This model explains much of the difficulty of these three activities, and the natural patterns of distribution of skills in them. Most commonly, people negotiate a kind of zero-sum compromise between conflicting skills or mentalities: they are strong at generating, being open, and believing and correspondingly weak at the opposite side; or strong at criticizing, being on guard, judging, and doubting, and weak at the opposite side; or else middling at both. Excellence is difficult because it requires doing justice to conflicting demands--somehow getting out of the zero-sum economy. Meeting those demands *simultaneously* is especially rare--and mysterious. What's easier and more feasible is to meet the conflicting demands one at a time, though this leads to a process that is less seamless and graceful--more bumpy, back and forth, and artificial. It is thus a recursive process. However, if

we switch back and forth too rapidly, we often find it harder to become productively extreme at one mentality or the other.

In these three examples I have been emphasizing oppositions or conflicts that are often *unnoticed* or overlooked. I turn now to dichotomies that are *much-noticed*--binaries that are traditional and prominent.

(4) Teaching vs. research

"No problem. Teaching and research reinforce each other." This is the latest doctrine--and a prime case of unclear, wishful thinking. Of course research *can* help teaching and vice-versa--just as generating *can* reinforce criticizing if handled well. Research can improve teachers by making them more intellectually lively. (But what about the deadly dull teachers who loved research?) Teaching can improve researchers (this is a bit of a stretch) by helping them be more aware of the relationships between what they are investigating and how most people see and learn things. But it is weak thinking to slide from there into the ever-recurring pious doctrine that there is no conflict between teaching and research.

The two activities conflict in the most obvious and concrete way by competing for our time, attention and loyalty. The extensive time I'm spending on this essay is time I cannot spend on my teaching. I get completely preoccupied as I am writing it and find myself putting off the preparation or reading I ought to do for my classes. When I'm engaged in a piece of writing and research, I tend to think about it in my free time. When I'm not so engaged, I tend to think about my students and my teaching in my free time. What I do in my research may make me a smarter more thoughtful teacher, but I can scarcely *apply* this work to my teaching--even though this essay has remarkably strong links to teaching. Few faculty members can bring their research directly into their undergraduate teaching.

But it's not just a matter of wishful thinking. When people claim that there is no conflict between teaching and research, they are usually, consciously or not, papering over a deeply entrenched hierarchy or dominance of research over teaching at universities and most four-year colleges. Teachers and administrators at two-year colleges and in the schools don't seem so tempted to proclaim that there is no conflict between teaching and research.

Because this has become a political matter, it's particularly important to try to think carefully about it. Yes, it is a benefit if teachers also research and researchers also teach. But it is simply wrong to say that people can't do one well without doing the other. However, this is no argument that people can teach well without *relief*--without time for reading, thinking, and discussion with colleagues. Teaching is an intellectually and personally draining process of *putting out*. To teach well requires time for *taking in* and reflecting. But it's sloppy thinking to assume that research is the only way for teachers to think and reflect and intellectually renew themselves.

The important point illuminated by my model is this: teaching and research don't *need* each other. It's only *a certain model of being an academic* that needs both teaching and research. Let me illustrate this structural point from the previous topics I've treated.

- PTo write well requires skill in both generating and criticizing; but generating and criticizing in themselves have no need of each other.
- PTo teach well requires skill in both supportively affirming and critically judging; but affirming and judging have no need of each other.
- PTo think well requires skill in both doubting and believing, but those two activities do fine on their own.

Thus teachers can be outstanding without doing research--just as researchers can be outstanding without teaching. Before World War II, few academics did much writing or research, nor was it expected of most. Only the few research universities of the era demanded research. Since then, the university model has been spreading throughout all of higher education.

So what does this model of binary thinking tell us about how to improve the relationship between teaching and research? We can follow the same principles here as above. A few really gifted people can make teaching and research work together simultaneously. But most people need to take steps to keep the two from getting in each others' way--which usually means finding times to give *full* attention and commitment to each one separately. Full attention is important because what we want is extremity in both sides. We don't want half-hearted teaching and half-hearted research, we want deeply committed teaching and research. Some people can give full attention to research for a few hours each day and switch their full attention to teaching for the rest of the day. Most people can't switch back and forth so quickly and need longer periods to commit themselves to one or the other. The most pressing question now is how to nurture what is usually the weaker or shadow side of the dichotomy, teaching. We'll never improve it by blithely proclaiming that there is no conflict and that research always helps teaching--meanwhile continuing to give most incentives to research and few to teaching. We have to decide whether we are willing to give the incentives to teaching without which it can never thrive.

But there is a larger and trickier question lurking here. Should we preserve and enshrine the research university model for all academics? Should we insist that people cannot be academics unless they teach *and* do research? The model of binary thinking does not give an answer to this essentially political question. A promising suggestion, however, comes from the Carnegie Commission (Boyer): a conception of "research" that isn't so much at odds with teaching because it doesn't necessarily involve conventional competitive publication. The essential point here is to allow "research" to involve input and reflection, and not require it always to mean output in the form of competitive publication.

(5) Form vs. content

"Form and content are indissoluble. We can't distinguish them or judge one apart from the other. Surely you don't want to be associated with old fashioned school teachers who give split grades!"

This view is intriguing in light of the history of fashion in English studies. In recent years, there's been a kind of bandwagon attempt to disown everything connected with New Criticism, yet here's a New Critical doctrine that has somehow stayed enshrined.

Of course form and content are *linked*--indeed they are often *functions* of each other. Change in one requires change in the other--at least to some degree. But mathematicians would be startled to hear anyone claiming that we cannot distinguish between entities that are functions of each other. The idea that we cannot distinguish or even evaluate form and content separately also flies in the face of careful thought--not to mention common sense and common practice.

It's the same here as with the other contraries: opposites *do* fuse or magically interact when everything is going perfectly. That is, in the ideal poem, form and content function just as the doctrine proclaims they should: we *can't* tell the dancer from the dance. But in ordinary sublunary texts, we have no trouble telling which is the dancer. The reason the text is not magical is that dancer and dance *don't* perfectly realize each other. When we look at imperfect texts or texts in progress or nonliterary texts--e.g., student texts and our own texts and most published texts as opposed to Keats' best poems--we can usually tell that the content is working better than the form, or vice versa. Most of what we say about texts implies a recognition of the difference between form and content, and most of the changes we make in any text are changes we make *because* we can palpably feel how the form and content don't work as well together as they should.

When people deny an opposition or distinction that exists, we need to ask if the denial serves to mystify something. In the realm of grading, when people say, "I can't distinguish between content and form," they are often refusing to name or figure out--or be consistent in--the hidden criteria that determine their grades. In the realm of literary studies, the doctrine that form and content are indistinguishable has often served to give special honor to *form*--to enshrine the superiority of poetry over prose, and the inferiority of texts that are easily paraphrased or summarized compared to those that are not.

(6) Reading vs. writing

Reading and writing would seem marry nicely and reinforce each other without conflict. And this is exactly the case when all is going optimally--just as teaching and research *can* reinforce each other. Input can serve output, and vice-versa. We want our readers to be writers and our writers to be readers. But the idea that there is no conflict here is a classic case of doctrine shielding

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the privilege of one spouse over the other. (This is a large subject that I have treated at length in my "War Between Reading and Writing," printed in this volume.) What could be more different than the two root processes: trying to fit your mind around and take in words someone else chose, and trying to choose your own words and put them out and get others to fit their minds around them? What interests me are the differences in agency and control for the learner in both processes.

Between readers and writer, there is an obvious conflict of interest about who gets to decide the meaning and interpretation of a text. It's in the interest of writers that they should decide what their own text means; it's in the interest of readers to say that only they can decide. There's no right answer. Either/or, zero-sum arguments are a trap. Both points of view must be given full or even extreme validity. At the present critical moment (a moment that has lasted rather a long time), dominance rests more with readers than writers. Most critical work assumes that readers get the last word about the meaning of texts-- and indeed that writers must not be trusted on the matter.

At the most material and political level, we see the dominance of readers in the vastly superior working conditions given to teachers of reading or literature in higher education compared to conditions for teachers of writing (Slevin). As a writing program director, most of the talk I hear about the harmony between reading and writing and their mutual need for each other is used to support proposals for scrapping what is virtually the only writing course in college (first year writing), in order to change it into a reading-and-writing course. Meanwhile, virtually all the other courses in the curriculum are tacitly invited to remain as they are, namely, committed primarily to reading. In sum, reading and writing can and should reinforce each other from a position of parity, but talk about happy harmony can be viewed with suspicion if it masks the current dominance of reading.

If we look back at the earlier dichotomies I explored, we can see the same dynamic. When people claim that there is no real conflict between teaching and research, they are reinforcing an imbalanced status quo. When people say there is no dichotomy between generating and criticizing in writing, or between believing and doubting in thinking and learning, they are reinforcing the present dominance of criticism and critical thinking in the academic or intellectual realm. They are reinforcing the prevailing set of assumptions that tell us that it is a good thing to clear space for nonstop, unrelieved criticism or doubting while people write or think; but it is a bad thing to clear space for nonstop, unrelieved generating or believing or making a mess. Periods of extreme planning and control are currently felt to be fine, but not periods of nonplanning or relinquishing control. Extremity in doubting is fine, but extremity in believing is bad. This attitude toward belief is so ingrained in our academic and intellectual culture that people don't realize that what they are afraid of--namely, fanaticism or closed-mindedness--represents not extremity of belief but poverty of belief: the ability to believe only one thing.

7. Private vs. social

My theme here--and throughout this essay--is to beware happy harmonies and mystical unions; look out for declarations of no conflict. For my last case or example, however, I turn to an opposition that the field of rhetoric and composition has highlighted or foregrounded--almost to the point of hypnosis. Yet this too is a case of a binary that tends to enshrine hierarchy--in this case the dominance of the social. The problem again is either/or thinking.

Clearly humans are both inherently connected and intertwined with others and also inherently separate. We can focus on either dimension of human existence. When we look from a distance we can see that everything we say or write comes from outside--we don't make up words. But when we look from close up, we can see that every word we speak and write comes to our lips and our pens from the inside.

If we take the trouble to step outside the doctrinal bickering, we can easily see that it is a good thing to be *more than usually social*--but also to be *more than usually private*. The more we connect and communicate with others, the more . . . well, who needs to argue this point these days? But a moment's thought will also show us that we are clearly better off the more we can hold commerce with ourselves, pursue trains of thought through inner dialogues even if no one else is interested, resist or tune out the pressures of others, keep our selves separate. (Pascal: ". . . all the unhappiness of men arises from one single fact, that they cannot stay quietly in their own chamber" *Pensee* 139.) We have good reason to value social discourse--and see social interrelatedness everywhere, even where we don't notice it at first; but we have equally good reason to value the cultivation of private, desert-island discourse and individuation.

So again, my argument is for affirming both sides equally--not a compromise but a push for extremity in both directions--*and* to resist attempts at priority or hegemony by either side. The best way to achieve this goal, to fight clear of the trap of partisans on each side fighting to stamp out the other, is to remember what rhetoricians sometimes forget though it was Aristotle's favorite phrase (not so much in the *Rhetoric*, however): "*There is a sense in which* . . . ." There is a sense, currently much emphasized, in which all language is social. This was part of what Aristotle meant in saying humans are "social animals": an entirely unconnected human is not a human; an entirely solipsistic mind is not a mind. But just as clearly, there's another sense in which all language is private. Nothing that anyone says or writes can ever be understood by others in the full senses in which it is experienced or intended. Language is the tapping on prison walls by individuals in solitary confinement, with only slight chances of being heard much less understood. Not either/or but both/and. (For more on this issue, and on the implications for theory of "in a sense," see my "In Defense of Private Writing.")

When both/and is the goal, it follows that the weaker or neglected dimension needs to be strengthened. Thus, it's obviously a problem when persons are *only* private and always hold themselves apart and unrelated to others and don't know how to connect or function socially. But it's equally problematic when people are *only* social and can only think and use language when there are others around to interact with, and can only think thoughts that others are interested in or agree with. Such people are too subject to peer pressure; we use the expression, they "have no mind of their own."

As with the other binary oppositions I've considered, when all goes well the opposed sides *can* work together and reinforce each other. The more of a social life one has, the richer one's private life can be. As Vygotsky and others point out, our private life is often a folding in of what was first social. But it goes the other way too: the more private life one has, that is, the more one is able to have conversations with oneself and follow thoughts and feelings in different directions from those of people around one, the more richly *social* a life one can have. Putting it yet another way: someone with no private life at all is in one sense completely social--is *nothing but* social; but in another sense this person is *less richly* social for bringing less of her own mental amalgam to the colloquy. As Dewey puts it: "The very idea of education is a freeing of *individual* capacity in a progressive growth directed to *social* aims" (98). Interpreting Bakhtin, Clark and Holquist write: "And unlike other philosophies that oppose radical individualism in the name of the greater primacy of socially organized groups, Bakhtin's philosophy never undercuts the dignity of persons. . . . Inasfar as we are all involved in the architectonics of answerability for ourselves and thus for each other, we are all authors, creators of whatever order and sense our world can have" (348).

The Epistemology of Experience vs. The Epistemology of Propositions

The *kind* of binary thinking I'm advocating here--an approach that tries to heighten dichotomies yet maintain the balance and affirm both sides equally-- involves, it seems to me, a special link or even commitment to experience. There is a phenomenological bias; perhaps even a bias toward narrative.

My own story is paradigmatic. That is, I came to this approach through my *experience* of writing--primarily an experience of perplexity or even bafflement. I quit graduate school when I got so blocked I couldn't write. When I finally came back five years later I was scared and self-conscious about writing, so for four years I scribbled notes to myself--short ones and long ones--about what was happening to me as I wrote--especially when things went particularly badly or well. It was from these experiential, often narrative notes that I developed the hypothesis that writing was hard because of the conflicting needs to generate- yet-criticize, control-yet-relinquish-control, say yes-and-no. My thinking grew out of a process of trying to be true to my experience and to find a theory that didn't violate it.

I've come to think that this approach to dichotomies honors the complexity of experience and the wandering narrative of events. The approach invites experience to precede logic. And here too of course there is a tradition: an empirical, inductive, pragmatic tradition that favors Aristotle's science over Plato's, Bacon over Descartes--and that we see in William James and John Dewey.

You can't say what I've just said, however, without someone quickly objecting, *"But there is no such thing as experience without theory. That's naive American Romanticism. Theory is always already in everything we do. No act can be innocent of theory."* But here again this claim--and it has become a doctrinal chant--papers over a another binary distinction: theory vs. practice. (Boethius pictures Dame Philosophy with two prominent letters embroidered on her robe, Theta and Pi.) The claim that there is no dichotomy or conflict between theory and practice is sloppy thinking and tends to champion theory over practice.

Of course it's true that no act is innocent of premises and implications. But it is a failure of clear thinking to let that fact blind us to a crucial difference-- especially in the realm of experience: the difference between coming at a piece of experience with a conscious and explicit theory in mind vs. coming at it as openly as possible--making an effort to try to hold theory at bay and trying to notice and articulate what happens.

It is true that we open ourselves to self-deception when we try to hold theory at bay and not articulate our tacit theories: the theories we "find" are liable to be the ones we are already pre-disposed to believe. But when people spend all their time wagging their finger at this danger, they tend to miss a crucial experience. We increase our chances of seeing more *complexity* and contradiction in our experience--and finding *new* theories or theories that surprise us--if we make an effort to honor and attend to experience as closely as possible and hold off theorizing for a while. This process can even lead us to theories we are predisposed *not* to believe--theories we don't like. We can notice these two approaches in two textures of research. In classroom research, for example, one can start with a position or hypothesis and consciously look at everything through that lens; or one can try to take notes about what one is seeing and feeling from moment to moment, and wait to see what concepts or gestalts emerge.

Donald Schön has recently articulated and celebrated the tradition of research that starts by trying to pay as close attention as possible to one's experience. He talks about "reflective practice" in a movement from practice to theory--an approach with a debt to Dewey and Lewin. Developed even more carefully, this tradition has become the discipline of phenomenology, involving the attempt to "bracket" or hold to one side the preconceptions derived from language or theory. One can never fully succeed in this attempt, but one can get better at it. Like the discipline of holding off critical thinking or holding off awareness of audience, people mustn't say it can't be done just because they

haven't learned how to do it. If we want to get better at attending to experience, it helps to notice the competing demands of theory and logic.

Let me stress again that my enthusiasm for experience and induction is not a claim that they are superior or prior or privileged. I don't claim that induction is better than deduction, Aristotle than Plato, Bacon than Descartes, Dewey than Derrida. I am simply resisting a *counter* claim of priority, an assumption of privilege. I'm simply jostling for fifty percent of the bed. I am trying to maintain a balanced and unresolved opposition in order to prevent *either* side from being slipped into the margin by means of a haughty denial of oppositional thinking.

In fact I acknowledge that the very position I am arguing for in this paper has attained such a degree of generality as to become a theoretical bulldozer itself. To the degree that I fall in love with my theory of opposites, I'm liable to use it to bludgeon experience. But I don't shrink from this recognition. I have no hesitation about turning around and celebrating theory too. Sometimes it is only by bludgeoning experience--for example through being obsessed with something--that we can make experience give up secrets that we don't get by innocent observation. (See Burtt for the classic account of how the advances of modern science depended on the ability to bludgeon experience.) Therefore, to the degree that I am committed to experience, then I will struggle *sometimes* to hold off my preoccupation with binary thinking and try to keep my eyes and pores open to experience that doesn't fit on the saddle of my hobby-horse.

I want to call attention to a connection between this emphasis on experience and the work of some of the earlier figures in the field of composition: Macrorie, Britton, Murray, myself, and others. What these figures had in common--and what seems to me to characterize that moment in the history of composition--was a burgeoning interest in the *experience* of writing. There was a mood of excitement about talking about what actually *happens* as we and our students write. Thus, there was lots of first person writing and informal discourse. And thus the overused term for the movement: the "process approach." People wanted to talk about their experience of the process of writing--not just about the resultant text or product. "Process" means experience.[*]

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[*]It had become more or less commonplace in rhetoric of the 18th and 19th centuries to say, "We can't really teach invention. We can't fathom the mystery of where words and ideas come from. We must remain tacit about that. But we can teach about the other dimensions of rhetoric." These latter were matters of product (e.g., style and arrangement). But starting in the nineteen sixties people began to say, "Well let's *do* talk more about invention. We *can* say something about the experience of finding words and ideas and what it's like when we write."

More recently those figures in composition (Britton et al) have begun to be referred to as "expressive" or "expressionists." That term seems to me a problem and I sometimes wonder if it is not hostilely motivated. For the prime originators and theorists who use the term (e.g., James Berlin and Jeanette Harris) have tended to use it as a term of disapproval. None of the "expressionists" use the term "expressive" with any centrality, except Britton--and the term does not well describe or sum up his views or his work. I rarely see the term used except by

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people who identify themselves as *not* expressive. I don't recall using the term, and I'm not comfortable with it--partly because of its negative connotations, but especially because I can't get it to stand still and mean something definite and useful. If we define it narrowly--"writing that expresses how I feel"--it's fairly clear, but no one seems to use it that narrowly any more. If we define it more broadly to mean "writing that expresses what I feel--and see and think," then suddenly it is indistinguishable from any other kind of writing. Thus it seems thankless to try to defend "expressive writing." Chris Burnham is one of the few scholars who has shown himself willing to take on the job. See his "Expressive Rhetoric: A Source Study."

I see a correlation between this emphasis on the experience or process of writing and a willingness to articulate contraries and leave them unresolved. To be open and honest about experience leads to unresolved and conflicting propositions. This opening period of the "process" movement in composition corresponds, I'd say, to the moment when literary critics were interested in reader response criticism: "Let's try to tell what actually happens to us as we read." (I called this "giving movies of the reader's mind" in *Writing without Teachers* in 1973). But since then, scholars in both literature and composition (with the notable exception of some feminists) have tended to back away from this interest in talking honestly and personally about their own experience. An autobiographical openness about one's own experience doesn't seem to fit comfortably with our current model of academic scholarship.

Thus I call the approach to binaries that I'm talking about an epistemology of experience--whereas an insistence on logical coherence is more an epistemology of propositions.

Epistemology and Rhetoric

The kind of binary thinking I am celebrating here seems to suggest an epistemological skepticism: a distrust of language and of the possibilities of knowing (see Gibson for a good collection of pieces about the limitations of language). But actually, I think the epistemological picture is a bit more sunny. For this tradition of binary thinking actually suggests a world of things outside us and our language that we can have a *kind* of commerce with--even though our minds and language and our system of logic are not ideally fitted to them. If we can learn to balance irreconcilable propositions in our minds (at least if they are helpful propositions), and not rush for closure, dominance, or hierarchy, we can make some sort of *approach* to knowledge of a complex world that exists outside our minds.

There is an important link here between binary thinking and metaphor. Just as new metaphors are always created out of a conflict or contradiction (a contradiction between how the word or phrase is being used and the right or literal meaning of the word or phrase), and just as new metaphors often *point at* something which is not yet signified by words (see my "Nondisciplinary Courses" 22-32), so too a well-maintained, unresolved opposition can point at

something that cannot be or has not yet been otherwise articulated. The physicists have gotten used to this sort of thing with their conclusion that light must unavoidably be described as *both* wave and particle. Both models or descriptions must be upheld despite their mutual contradiction.

What interests me for this essay is the paradoxical relationship between this epistemology of contradiction and *rhetoric*. Even though I'm arguing throughout for more difference, more contradiction--more of what Boethius called "war" between truths--I think I'm opening a door to a rhetoric that is less warlike or adversarial.

Look at how rhetoric and persuasion and argument usually work. When people argue and call each other wrong, they tend to assume that only one side can be right. Or putting this the other way around (as Graff does), when people assume that only one answer can be right, they tend to engage in more conflict: they are struggling for a single prize in a win/lose arena.

But if we celebrate binary thinking of the sort I've been describing, there's every chance of discovering that *both parties to the argument are right*--despite their disagreement. Their two claims, even though completely contradictory, might *both* be accurate and useful views of the complex phenomena they are fighting about. If they were more open to the epistemology of contradiction, they might come closer to a full description and understanding of the complex issue by affirming and entering into each others' propositions (without having to give up allegiance to their own). After all, none of the blind men in the fable were wrong when they gave contradictory descriptions of the elephant. But their views were seriously flawed by narrowness of perspective. In the tradition of binary thinking, there is less need to try to force people to agree. Thus John Trimbur's essay celebrating dissensus or the limits of consensus has been extremely fruitful and influential in the profession--coming as it does out of the tradition of Bruffee and his consensus-based model of social construction.

My interest in affirming oppositions, then, connects with my interest in nonadversarial, nonviolent, nonoppositional rhetoric: rhetoric as believing game (see my "Methodological Believing"). More and more people are noticing the problems with either/or rhetoric: the assumption that in order to argue *for* a position, we must argue *against* the contrary position as wrong. Conventional argumentative and persuasive discourses so often start out by trying to show that the other view is wrong. Lakoff and Johnson, in their exploration of the tacit "metaphors we live by," show how deeply enmeshed our culture is in the assumption that "argument equals war."

Apart from any epistemological considerations, this conventional warfare approach tends to backfire on psychological grounds. If I want you to consider my point of view, I will have a harder time if I first try to get you to confess you are stupid or mistaken for holding yours. And I'll increase my chances of success if I, in turn, am able to see the truth of your view.

Many conditions in the world have conspired to help us see more clearly than ever the limits of an either/or model for dealing with conflict. Even in the highly adversarial realms of warfare and litigation, it turns out that mediation and negotiation are more and more sought out. In rhetoric itself then, we should not be surprised to find more explorations of alternative models for handling conflict. (See the extensive exploration of "Rogerian rhetoric," for example in Brent and Teich. For feminist explorations of non-adversarial rhetoric, see Frey and Lamb. Also Ong has a fascinating exploration of the long history of the adversarial and irenic traditions in our culture.) It's my contention, then, that the kind of binary thinking I describe here--an epistemology of contradiction--will help people get unstuck from either/or, zero-sum, adversarial models of rhetoric.

At this point, some readers will be itching to accuse me of not practicing what I preach. For if I am so interested in nonadversarial rhetoric and the believing game, why am I *fighting* so hard in this essay--using the very kind of good/bad binary thinking that I profess to be against? And why in my career have I so often seemed to take partisan stands?

For I have certainly been partisan. I've always written more excitedly about generating than revising, and been preoccupied if not obsessed with freewriting. I've certainly celebrated private writing and the ability to turn off awareness of audience during certain points in the writing process. I've made more noise about teachers as allies than as critical, evaluative adversaries. And I've campaigned my whole career for the believing game.

But there are two goals for fighting: fighting for the sake of being heard vs. fighting for the sake of keeping the other person from being heard; fighting to create dialogue vs. fighting to insist on monologue. I am fighting here to make a case for binary thinking in a climate that considers it a cardinal sin. I'm not fighting to wipe out the sometimes necessary practice of good/bad binary thinking, or to prevent the often useful practice of framing issues in terms of *multiple* positions. And as for the practice of fighting itself, here is a case where I want to break out of binary thinking. That is, it's not an either/or choice between fighting and not fighting--between trying to exterminate the enemy or her position or else going into a kind of nonviolent limpness. There is an important third option. We can fight with someone to try to get them to listen to us to or to consider our view--fight hard--and yet nevertheless not press them at all to give up their view. (Of course it sometimes seems as though the enemy's only "view" is that *our view* must be stamped out--and so we feel we have no choice but to try to stamp out theirs. But mediators and negotiators have learned to be skilled in this situation: helping people to articulate the *positive* goals or views or needs that lie behind their merely negative goal of wiping out the enemy's goal.)

I've always made it clear that my partisan behavior was grounded in my epistemological commitment to binary thinking. Because there has been such a one-sided tradition in the teaching of writing--a tradition that says, "Always plan,

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maintain vigilance, use critical thinking"--I've seen a clear need to make a louder noise in favor of clearing away time for non-planning, generating, freewriting, and holding off critical consciousness. But in all of my fighting for the generative, I've never argued against critical consciousness, doubting, criticism, or radical cutting--only for an equal emphasis on both sides--a stronger contradiction--what D. H. Lawrence called the "trembling instability of the balance" (172). I've always been explicit about my commitment to subject matter and even evaluation in teaching; and to doubting in thinking and learning. And when it comes to the opposition between the private vs. the social dimension in writing, I would claim some credit (with my *Writing Without Teachers* in 1973) for helping the profession become interested in the social and collaborative dimension of writing in the first place.

Thus I would invite readers to compare the rhetorical shape of my writing with that of people who are extremely critical of my work (e.g., James Berlin and Jeanette Harris). I may permit myself unabashed enthusiasm and open partisanship; they use more modulated tones of alleged judiciousness. But compare the rhetorical goals to see who is trying to silence and who is trying to sustain a dialogue.

In fact, what really needs explaining is why there has been such a tendency to see me as one-sided and extreme--to see me as someone only interested in generating, making a mess, and the private dimension--to be blind to my support for critical thinking, revising, doubting, and the social dimension in writing-- when I preach over and over this theme of embracing contraries and of trying to get opposites into unresolved tension with each other. That is, I'm criticized for being narrow or one-sided, sometimes on epistemological grounds, but really the criticism itself represents an epistemological poverty of thinking. It is fashionable now to celebrate indeterminacy and epistemological doubt, yet even radical theorists often fall into assuming that if anyone argues in favor of feelings, private discourse, or the relinquishing of control, she must by definition be against thinking, analysis, logic, and the social dimension--whatever they say to the contrary. I can't help believing, then, that an epistemology grounded in the tradition of binary thinking highlighted here can lead to more large mindedness.

So how do we learn or develop this kind of epistemology or this habit of dialectical thinking? One important way we learn it is through interaction with others: through dialogue. After all, that's the original link that Socrates and Plato had in mind in their original conception of "dialectic": bring people into conversation in order to create conflict among ideas. Dialogue leads to dialectic.

So just as we learn to talk privately to ourselves by internalizing social conversation with others (as Mead and Vygotsky tell us), so we can learn this useful kind of binary or dialectical thinking from conversation. That is, our greatest source of difference and dichotomy is when people of different minds come together. So in addition to calling for an "epistemology of contradiction," I

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could also call it an "epistemology of dialogue" or (to be fashionable) a "dialogic epistemology." But it's not enough to have dialogue between opposing views if the dialogue is completely adversarial. The dialogue we need comes when participants can internalize *both* views--can enlarge their minds and their assumptions--instead of just digging in and fighting harder for their own view. So it's a question of what kind of dialogue we have. The views may clash, but can the parties cooperate or collaborate in the dialogue? We learn rhetorical warfare from dialogue with rhetorical warriors, but we learn dialectical large mindedness from dialogue with people who have learned an epistemology of dialogue or contradiction.

The epistemology that tends to be dominant today among scholars and academics in the humanities is dialectical in one sense: It says, in effect, "I believe X and you believe Y, and there is no real truth or right answer in the back of the book to tell us who is right. So we can keep on fighting." What I'm looking for is a dialectical epistemology that is more generous and hopeful--an epistemology that says, "I believe X and you believe Y, yet by gum we may well *both* be right--absolutely right. If we work together we might well get a richer understanding than either of us so far has."

Notice finally, then, two different relationships here between epistemology and rhetoric. In the dominant tradition, we have eternal warfare between *people* (rhetoric) because the people don't maintain eternal warfare between *concepts* inside their heads (epistemology). It's possible to have it the other way around: eternal warfare between concepts in the head, resulting in more cooperation and less zero-sum warfare between people. (Readers not interested in theoretical issues in the fields of rhetoric and composition might skip to my concluding paragraph.)

Dialectic and Rhetoric

In the previous section, I focused on the role of people and rhetorical structures. In this final section I will focus on language. I will suggest that there is a realm of language use or discourse that is a particularly useful site for encouraging the kind of binary thinking that helps concepts and ideas to live in fruitful tension. I see this realm as different from rhetoric and I suggest that we might call it *dialectic*. Dialectic and rhetoric represent contrasting if not absolutely conflicting uses of language.

The dichotomy between dialectic and rhetoric was central to Plato and Aristotle, but now it is widely neglected or denied--mostly because dialectic is enormously unfashionable and rhetoric is the dominant term. Some say indeed that rhetoric covers *all language use* (see Eagleton for a prominent instance). I wonder if there might be a link between three current attitudes I am seeing in many rhetoricians and literary critics: a neglect of dialectic as a realm or category of language use, a knee-jerk criticism of dichotomies and dichotomous thinking, and an attraction to rhetoric as the master term.

To deny the dichotomy between rhetoric and dialectic represents yet again the papering over of a power imbalance--an aggrandizing move by rhetoric. When people say everything is X (e.g., all language use is rhetoric) they are making a move to push difference and opposition off the map: no conflict. I would sound the warning again: beware proclamations of no conflict. My aim is to show the fruitfulness of a conflict between dialectic and rhetoric as two uses of language.

The easiest way to dismiss dialectic and claim that everything is rhetoric is to deny the very grounds given by Plato and Aristotle for the distinction between the two realms of discourse. Plato saw dialectic as the realm of truth and correct reasoning, and rhetoric as the realm of deception. Aristotle saw dialectic as the realm of certain knowledge, and rhetoric as the realm of probable knowledge. (They too, of course, were making a power play and claiming superiority for dialectic.) But now, since "everyone" agrees that there is no such thing as truth or certain knowledge (do we have certainty about the lack of certainty?), it would seem obvious that there is nothing left but rhetoric. All language use is interested or partisan--and thus ultimately an act of persuasion.

It's not easy to fight this claim; in a sense I agree with it. Yet I think I can argue usefully, if speculatively, for a realm of language use called dialectic that differs from rhetoric. What is "rhetoric"? The term is rubbery, but I think it's fair to define it as language designed to have an effect on an audience. More traditionally and narrowly, it has been defined as language to persuade. And "dialectic"? I am not defining it as the realm of truth or certain knowledge, but rather as the realm of language whose goal is *not* to persuade or not even for the sake of having an effect on audience. Putting it positively, dialectic is the use of language where the prime goal is to make meaning rather than deploy that meaning toward an effect: to get meanings, concepts, and words to interact with each other in order to see where they go; to "figure out" or "figure." (With the term "figure" I am thinking of the activity of doing calculations with numbers. Would aggrandizers for rhetoric claim that all mathematical calculations are rhetoric?) We might even think of dialectic as the realm of language as play--language for its own sake rather than for effect. The central thing, then, is that we are using language in such a way that there is not the *pressure* of trying for an effect on an audience--the pressure of rhetoric.

In the present critical climate, this is a slippery and controversial notion. And there is overlap between the categories (more about that below). So it will help to give some examples:

(a) There is a clear contrast in the realm of law between a legal *brief* and a legal memorandum (or more precisely an *office memorandum*). A brief lies squarely in the realm of rhetoric: its goal is to persuade the court; to win. In contrast, an office memorandum sits squarely in the realm of language use that I call dialectic. A legal dictionary defines the office memorandum as "an informal discussion of the merits of a matter pending in a lawyer's

office; usually written by a law clerk or junior associate for the benefit of a senior associate or partner" (Gifis 296). The "benefit" spoken of here is *not* to argue or persuade or plead for one side, but rather to figure out everything that can be said on *both* sides or--as some people put it, to figure out how a perfect judge or a legal God would rule. The difference between rhetoric and dialectic is intriguingly highlighted by material or procedural ruling: under the law, an office memorandum is legally "*protected* from discovery" (296) so that the other team cannot see it. The fact that the memorandum is legally "private" helps it be an act of figuring out rather than an act of rhetoric.

(b) I think we most often use language for dialectic in a more private way--writing or talking or verbally thinking *for ourselves*. I'm not claiming that all private discourse is dialectic. As Burke and others point out, we often address language to ourselves for the sake of having an effect or being winning towards that audience of "me." Still, privacy is a realm that at least *invites* dialectic: not trying to have an effect on ourselves but to explore or follow a train of thought.

For example, when I am dealing with an issue where I have a position and disagree with others, I find I have a better chance of understanding the issue if I leave the rhetorical realm, stop addressing them, take myself out of their hearing, and speak to myself in private. ("What if I'm wrong? Let's see what happens if I consider such and such evidence more seriously. Could I admit that I'm wrong?") Someone might object that this kind of private language for making meaning or figuring something out is nevertheless language designed to have "an effect" on my audience of self--namely the effect of clarifying my thinking or my position. But this is clearly not what Burke or most of us mean when we talk about "language designed to have an effect on an audience." To stretch the word rhetoric to cover all discourse--by definition--is to lose the word.

When I am engaged in the rhetorical task of writing to persuade and I get confused or stuck, I've learned sometimes to take a fresh sheet or open a temporary file and start exploring my perplexity for myself. "What am I really trying to say here? I think X but I feel Y" and so on. Up till that point I had been addressing my language to readers for the sake of making a point or having an effect. But in order to make this move into the realm of dialectic, a crucial internal event must happen. I have to make a little act of letting go and giving up full commitment to my position--to my hunger to persuade. Of course I reserve to myself the right to go back afterwards and battle for X--no matter what I discover in my little fishing trip. Indeed, as an incentive to practice dialectic or binary thinking, I can even console myself on pragmatic or rhetorical grounds: "I'll probably do better at fighting for X and increase my chances of 'winning' if I take this detour into the realm of dialectic and figure out whether the position I want to win with is right or wrong." I've got to write myself a little office memorandum.

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(c) When naive scientists say they stay objective and write nothing but facts, current critics and theorists reply, "Haven't you read Thomas Kuhn? There *is* no objectivity or factuality--even in science. All language is interested and biased." But that reply again papers over an important distinction in the interests of a power play, and it is a move that explains why so many scientists, even very sophisticated ones, resist the uses that many humanists and social scientists make of Kuhn. Of course most scientists know that genuine objectivity, truth, or factuality is *not* attainable: certainty cannot be had. Yet for some pieces of discourse--even some very public pieces--they nevertheless and unabashedly measure their success by how *close* they come to exactly those goals: objectivity, truth, factuality, even certainty! Even though the goal is unattainable, it is still possible to measure the value of discourse by how close it comes. In short, there is a crucial difference between using language to have an effect or make a case and using language to try to *come as close as possible* to objectivity or facts.

This is a complex and controversial issue, and I don't mind admitting that I am trying to work it out for the first time here. It seems to me that this is a issue where we need to be smart enough to use Aristotle's formulation, "In a sense, . . ." That is, in one sense--or through one lens or to some degree or another--all language is addressed and for an effect: all language has a rhetorical dimension. But in another sense, all language is meaning-making, figuring out, or the play of meaning: all language has a dialectical dimension. This way of talking helps us call attention to a *spectrum* of language uses. At one end are discourses in which the rhetorical use predominates. Rhetoric was developed in response to speech making and public writing--language uses where there is a natural emphasis on having an effect on an audience. But there is another end to this spectrum where we find discourses in which the dialectical use predominates. Much of our private writing and verbal thinking is discourse of this sort.

Therefore it is not only helpful to use both terms; it would be a distortion and an oversimplification (and a power play) to restrict ourselves to just one term or "sense" or lens for observing and describing the whole spectrum of language use. At this cultural moment when the rhetorical lens is in the ascendant, I see a need to pay attention to those times when we use language with more open curiosity, more interest in mere figuring out, more willingness to let things turn out any which way. It might be that most of our language use is heavily rhetorical--addressed and for effect; it might be that the rhetorical is the path of habit. But it makes no sense to call all language rhetorical just because there's always a trace of pressure or effect, or because one hasn't learned to use (or notice using) language in a more dialectical fashion.

And course these pieces of discourse produced under the goals of dialectic--figuring-outs--can slide into or be developed into or indeed be used as they are for rhetorical goals: as address to audience for an effect. It seems to

me that some of my forays into the dialectic uses of language in the process of writing this paper have helped me create--and sometimes even been used--in the rhetoric here.

<div align="center">*   *   *</div>

Let me close by trying for a quick summary overview of this ambitious essay. I am exploring and celebrating one kind of binary thinking: the affirmation or nonresolution of opposed ideas. I'm arguing that this kind of thinking often yields a better model for understanding complex activities like writing and vexed oppositions like teaching/research. If we sophisticate our epistemology by recognizing that contrary claims can both be right or accurate, we can encourage a less adversarial rhetoric. We can invite people to emphasize positive arguments for their position and de-emphasize negative arguments against the opposed position--since it may also be valid or correct. In short we can encourage more productive warfare in our heads and less destructive warfare between people. Finally (maintaining yet another dichotomy that people tend to run away from), we will probably do better at encouraging productive binary thinking if we acknowledge a realm or motive of language use that particularly invites it, namely dialectic as opposed to rhetoric.*

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