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# Critical Communication Pedagogy in the Classroom

L anguage names our reality—even where our most introductory textbooks fall prey to representational understandings of language (the old saw, "language is abstract, arbitrary, and ambiguous"), we can recognize instances where language isn't simply representational. We bristle when we hear our students retort "But that's just a word" or "If the author means 'teaching,' then why not just say that?" or "'Handicapped' or 'person with a disability'—same difference—one's just more 'PC' than the other." Sometimes it's their tone that makes us bristle—our felt sense that they think we're wasting their time or playing games—but more to the point, it's that the words we use really do matter. Words do more than state fact, do more than engender meaning; words make experiences real. They may do this in revelation or obfuscation, by clarifying the truth or by masking it. Most upsetting to hear from students and colleagues is "the real world," as in, "When I get out into the real world, what will this mean for me?" or "This would never work in the real world" or "There are a lot of real world appli-cations for this theory." Implicit in this talk is the suggestion that what happens in the classroom, even that what we do as researchers, is a "false world," a world without import or consequence. Perhaps this is the result of educators' own efforts to create "safe" places for dialogue and sharing; per-haps students feel these spaces are a "time-out" from more competitive or divisive arenas. But a "time-out" is not the same thing as a "false world."

The notion that what happens in the classroom isn't real is intriguing, especially given how often we cite former teachers or classroom experiences

as central to our growth as individuals or leaders or community members. One of our earliest means of socialization is the classroom; it is one of the first places where we confront difference in all its forms. In this space we are judged, by teachers and peers, on our effort, our citizenship, and our competence. We "raise" egg babies and drop them from the roof of the school to see whether the shelters we've built can withstand the landing. We make or purchase valentines for the entire class, slotting each into "mailboxes" we make carefully from shoeboxes and Elmer's glue and glitter. We learn how to spin the dreydel, how a four-square court can teach fractions, and how to say the days of the week in Spanish. But we learn so much more . . . . We learn about envy and pride, deception and defiance, the competitive edge and sour grapes, violence and growth, disappointment and inspiration. The world of the classroom is not a false world, but rather a microcosm of all the worlds we know, intersecting and interlocking in metonymic relationship to one another. This is to say, any attempt to cast the classroom as a false world ignores the classroom as a site of violence, tension, social justice, and change.

Perhaps the easiest way to put this is to consider your own experiences in college. Was your life on hold? Your "real life" on "time-out" so you could be in school? We all want to achieve our educational goals, and sometimes that causes us to feel like we're waiting for our "real lives" to begin. But, are all those friends you made in school "false friends"? Is what you learned useless, without value? Were you never embarrassed, called out, frightened, harassed, abused, celebrated, challenged, loved? Did you only study, all the time, forsaking relationships with partners or children or parents? Did time stop? In school, each of us found love and lost it, made and ended relationships, felt the ever-present squeezing of our time and resources in the face of state legislation, found vision and power and lost it . . . time and again, saw our families grow and watched loved ones die. Even though a pervasive cultural emphasis on degrees and diplomas foregrounds the destination rather than the journey of education, schools are not holding pens where we spend time waiting for our lives to begin. We are always already living our lives, whether we realize it or not.

In making reference to "the real world," we neglect something very important about communication. Communication creates all possible worlds; we render our experiences sensible through language. Words aren't "just words," but rather our means to interpret and act on our experiences. What is most dangerous about drawing distinctions between a "real" and some other world is that it dulls our sense of justice, our need to be active, to resist, to effect change. What advantage is there to us to change a "false world"? If we're waiting to emerge into "the real world," then might we just bide our time a little longer until we get there?

If the classroom is a microcosm of worlds, a metonym of the cultures we'll encounter throughout our lives, then it is also a site of social change. It is a meaningful environment for engaging difference, for creating community, and for envisioning the kinds of social organization we want for ourselves. We don't forget the ideological lessons we learn in school, and if we presume that, in the classroom, we cannot build a more just society, then we have already abdicated our agency; we have lost ourselves to a series of false worlds by never knowing how to make them real.

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An education professor once asked me why I was engaged in communication research and not education research. My answer was at once simple and complex. Simple because I replied that I was already doing education research—I was publishing in education journals and attending education conferences. That is, how was I not already doing education research? How could I see myself as doing anything other than that? However, embedded in her question was an important distinction that, while perhaps not obvious, was undergirding the complexity that did in fact mark me as communication and not education. This very moment—this question between us—signaled why I research and teach communication; it is for the careful ability to unpack this discursive moment that I sought a set of degrees in communication and not in education. That I'm interested in how we draw these distinctions in such a small, everyday sort of question indicates why, when I seek a community of scholars, I look first to communication. And while her question marks my choices, this is not to say I don't appreciate education research, scholars, or departments. It is that the questions I ask, the ideas that spark my interest, the concepts that guide my thinking, and the perspectives I think and work from are solidly and completely communication oriented. This is never more obvious than when I'm working with education scholars who note the way I "think everything is communication." And indeed, I do. It is the focus that marks my sense of optimism and critical point of view.

Though it is difficult for critical communication scholars to draw distinctions between critical communication pedagogy as grounds for our research and for our teaching (more to the point, we resist this distinction throughout this book), we will focus in this chapter on what critical communication pedagogy means for our efforts as teachers and students. In what follows, we will explore the relationship between pedagogical moments and the critical theories that inform our understanding of the communication in those moments. In doing so, we show how critical perspectives (i.e.,

Foucault, Butler, and de Certeau) inform our understanding of classroom communication (and communication classrooms). Our efforts as critical communication educators center on illuminating how, in our communication, we work to produce knowledge and power; while an analysis of communication as constitutive of power (and so, too, oppression) might seem, at first, to be the equivalent of an academic postmortem, we find that critical understandings of communication as constitutive reveal hope for our collective ability to enter the conversation of educational process and seek change, justice, and social accountability.

## Shaping and Taping: Reading Critical Communication Pedagogy Through Foucault

This was the worst—the worst semester of my life. I was in graduate school—a master's student just struggling to keep my head above water, trying to make it to the end of the semester and the sigh that happens when you turn in your work and your calendar is, blissfully, blank. And at the worst possible time—at midterm—my body gave out, was overtaken and left in ruin. In all my life, I had never before had a sinus infection; I didn't even know what they were. Of course I had heard others say they had them, but without the sensation, I was left without the bodily knowledge of the experience. And so, when it happened to my body, I was clueless as to what it all meant.

The body remembers and, I'm sure, had I ever had this mythical condition in the past, I would have known to take care of it early; yet, here I was, not sure of what was happening to me, and it was only getting worse. The Dayquil didn't work; the Afrin only teased my nose, providing me only hints of relief. It was when I woke up in the morning and smelled what can only be described as infection—that rotting smell that makes you cringe—that I began to think that something was profoundly wrong. I called the student health center: "We have an available appointment on Tuesday." Four days away, but what could I do? I waited. Those days, as I waited, were among the worst of my life: the smell, the aching in my head, my face, and my eyes, the constant effort to blow my nose to no avail, the inability to concentrate on anything. It was, in a word, terrible.

I took antibiotics (two doses to find comfort), and time did pass, if unbearably slowly. In the meantime, I walked through the halls of the communications building with my box of tissues and a plastic grocery bag tied to my belt loop to collect my waste. I was miserable and the members of my departmental community would meet me with sad eyes and kind words. In class, I would blow my nose, so sore, and the room would fill with a loud noise as I struggled to find air. Those weeks, I called attention to myself,

I disrupted and irritated every class I stepped into, causing many to begin to comment on the dysfunction of my body. I began to see people look upon me with disdain, angry with me for allowing my body to disrupt their quiet class-room contemplation. I began to imagine conspiracies—were people plotting against me, avoiding me, trying to find excuses to escape my presence?

Toward the end of the semester, my nose finally disappeared into the background of our social setting. As the final project for a course, I was asked by my group members to allow my nose, my body, to be a point of focus for our final group performance project. The idea was to address the idea of the body in the classroom—to conceive of how we are to understand the nature of the body in the site/sight of others. The performance would go like this: We would perform a classroom, one where the teacher abuses his power in managing the classroom, in keeping students in order, in main-taining the kind of civility that produces knowledge—the knowledge edu-cational systems desire. My body, the body of the dysfunctional student, would be too much for this moment, this space. The teacher (as teachers are wont to do) would discipline me, ask me to adhere to the limits of this social-ized, regulated space, this classroom. When I failed (my nose too loud, my body too active, my presence too much), the teacher would finally react and duct tape my body to the small student desk, forcing my body to adhere. This was not only a metaphor of what "normally" happens in classroom—we do discipline bodies in order to achieve certain, desired effects; this performance would help us see that process in vivid detail. And it did: The tape on my arms, the eyes on my body, the desk top in front of me, this performance, while admittedly heavy-handed, worked to put on display the mechanisms that mark, shape, and direct who we are and how we act within the lived spaces of our classrooms.

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Foucault (1977) reminds us that power is never a one-to-one relation-ship—that power is never housed easily in one site; rather, power is fluid, flowing through all of us all the time. Indeed, it is because power is so slip-pery that it makes it hard to pin point, hard to undermine. As Foucault's work so carefully illuminates, power's greatest effect on bodies is to make them conform even when no one is watching; power works not because we are being watched—but because even when the powerful aren't watching, we, as educational subjects, still perform on cue. Foucault calls this effect of power a disciplining of the body—a type of social control whereby, over time, we craft ourselves in the image of the oppressor. The effect is the mak-ing of bodies that conform, that are docile and complacent in the production of culture: "These methods, which made possible the meticulous control of

the operations of the body, which assured the constant subjection of its forces and imposed upon them a relation of docility-utility, might be called 'disciplines'" (Foucault, 1977, p. 137).

Foucault (1977) argues that power consists of an uninterrupted exercise of control, the sort of constant authority a lone individual is unable to inflict. Thus, the social norms that we share with others and are shared with us over time, our fears of being caught or scrutinized and the mechanisms of punishment (both physical and social), are what mark our bodies and affect how we move through our surroundings. Foucault makes clear that our bodies must conform: "A disciplined body is the prerequisite for an efficient gesture" (p. 152). Like invisible tape that binds students to classroom desks, the body must be controlled in the classroom, must be kept under wraps, must be trained in order to serve educational needs (Corrigan, 1991; McLaren, 1999; Warren, 2003).

Foucault notes that power functions along several different axes. First, he articulates "the art of distributions," which he describes as the "distribution of individuals in space" (1977, p. 141). Here, space—how it is organized, who is in it (and in what manner they position themselves), and what they can do there—becomes the object of analysis. Space, argues Foucault, is one of the ways we control individuals. Consider, for example, the spatial arrangement of desks in a typical classroom. In most traditional classrooms, desks are organized in rows, aimed toward the chalkboard and/or a larger teacherly desk, and students perform certain kinds of communicative rituals while in this configuration (i.e., raising hands to ask questions, not talking with neighbors, taking notes on what the teacher says). The arrangement of space is one of the ways that schools discipline students so as to control them with greater ease and efficiency. Desks themselves are rife with spatial significance—the small amount of space and the molded chairs position students, regulating and marking their experiences in class. In the case of students who find that kind of bodily encasement restrictive, the system of education connotes their performance as out of order, as irregular. The act of confining the body through institutional space is one of the ways bodies are marked in and through education.

Second, Foucault notes that power can be generated through "the control of activity" (1977, p. 148). For instance, timetables that regulate student movement or posture or gesture control that regulates student speech are examples of how schools manage students' and teachers' activity. In explaining the power of setting time schedules, Foucault notes: Power's "three great methods—establish rhythms, impose particular occupations, regulate the cycles of repetition—were soon to be found in schools, workshops and hospitals" (p. 149). Reading Foucault suggests understanding time in school in the following way:

> The entire school day is structured in such a way as to keep the mass of students where they are supposed to be. Students are "slotted" into hard plastic chairs (McLaren, 1993, p. 101), shuffled into rows, stacked in levels, and directed toward the front of the room where a teacher stands lecturing knowledge to note-taking students. Movement is highly regulated: bells dictate the beginning and ending of the class session, students must rapidly gather their possessions at the end of the hour and rush to the next subject, teachers stand in the halls to ensure safe and efficient use of "free" time, and so on. Even the ability to use the restroom depends on the student's request, hopefully leading to the willingness of an instructor to allow passage to the restroom, legitimized by a hall pass that narrates permission to be 'out of place' when caught by a school official. (Warren, 2005, p. 89)

The control of time, as a way of marking the body's activity in schooling, is one of the major ways of seeing how disciplinary systems work upon and within educational subjects. Such control marks educational environments, as it disciplines inappropriate uses of time (i.e., the right or wrong time to be sick, pregnant, or uncomfortable) and is one way to ensure institutional processes proceed without interruption.

The third way power marks our everyday life is through "the organization of geneses" (Foucault, 1977, p. 156). Here, we see how social systems work to segregate and classify people, establishing relationships and hierarchies. Foucault's (1970) *The Order of Things* deconstructs the idea of classification as a systematic formulation of ideology and power; his understanding of disciplinary mechanisms also addresses the effects of creating classification markings as a way to establish social control, especially as it marks individuals' progression through institutionalized spaces. In education, this kind of progression is highly regulated: "It is this disciplinary time that was gradually imposed on pedagogical practice—specializing the time of training and detaching it from the adult time, from the time of mastery; arranging different stages, separated from one another by graded examinations . . ." (Foucault, 1977, p. 159). One need only to think of moving from sixth grade to seventh, or from the last week of classes into finals week, to see this at work. When the body suffers dysfunction (is sick, is hyperactive, or can't be otherwise contained by the institution), it is the location of the student body, and the location of the body within an institutional ordering, that gives rise to discipline. Indeed, even when the teacherly body is itself excessively present, its erasure occurs, moving that body in line with expectation—for it is not an actual or specific teacher body that owns that space, but the idealized constructions that precede and supercede the location of particular bodies in particular classrooms.

Finally, Foucault (1977) examines what he calls "the composition of forces" (p. 162). While the point of this section of his text is an exploration

of the changes that have occurred in the military to accommodate the changing nature of conflict, the impact of composing and configuring bodies of institutional members into the most efficient force relates to other systems of power as well. The central thrust behind "composing forces" is to move from individualistic thinking to a more institutional mindset. That is, how can the members of a given system move and function in the most efficient way possible? In large part by having members within each classification help form and mold others to the institution's desire. Foucault argues:

> the complex clockwork of the mutual improvement school was build up cog by cog; first, the oldest pupils were entrusted with tasks involving simple supervision, then of checking work, then of teaching, in the end, all the time of all the pupils was occupied either with teaching or with being taught." (p. 165)

In the end, we have what Foucault (1977) calls "tactics": "mechanisms, in which the product of the various forces is increased by their calculated combination, are no doubt the highest form of disciplinary practice" (p. 167). Control then, is about making institutional members function as a machine—a well-organized and precisely fluent process that repeats and regenerates itself. To have the institution recreate itself in its own disciplined image is a powerful way of maintaining order. A specific example of this might be the process of schooling itself: Imagine bodies in schools when they arrive, young bodies in kindergarten running and playing. It is in the process of schooling that we train bodies to sit still, to become the docile bodies we need in order to be productive; we regulate bodies, regulate their access to "free" time (i.e., recess) and slowly mold them into figures that can sustain long times in sedentary positions. To have bodies that can sit in a night class for hours or that can survive in an office cubicle, we must train those bodies. Further, we are participants in, parts of, a seemingly well-wrought and balanced machine; as such, we require and desire docile bodies, (re)creating ourselves as products for consumption. Educational subjects, like the bodies metaphorically taped and shaped in the classroom by social and pedagogical pressures, are the products of these institutionalized practices. Indeed, for consumption to occur without question, our finely disciplined and organized bodies must enter the world ready to be sold.

Given this synthesis of how power works in/through us as members of cultures and systems, how are critical communication educators, situated in the nexus of communication and critical pedagogy, ideally suited to the task of understanding power in the classroom? Foucault's four characteristics are not only communicative, but it is in and through communication that we come to see how they function and to what end. It is this that signals the "Why communication?" when seeking to understand power in the context of education. As in any classroom performance (from a project on the body

in the classroom in which a student is literally taped to his or her chair, to everyday, mundane classroom performances like raising a hand, taking notes, or appearing in a professor's office with an add/drop form), it is communication—the repeated and sedimented set of carefully scripted acts—that serves as education's most enduring lesson.

## Just A(nother) Rehearsal: Reading Critical Communication Pedagogy Through Butler

The thing about a rehearsal is that many believe it is just preparation for the show—the real run before an audience. That is, the rehearsal is how you learn the show—how you practice in order to get it right . . . later. As a performer, I've discovered this is often how directors and teachers ask me to think about the nature and substance of rehearsal—I'm asked to try things out, to pretend in order to be ready for the opening night. In many ways, this is how we've asked teachers and students to think about the classroom—to imagine that it is the classroom that is our play practice—the opportunity to try out our roles without any threat that what happens there is real, has consequences, or has effects. So many times students offer the pithy "What does this have to do with the real world." It is, of course, always a sentence—it is never a genuine question; already they've shown their hand, already they've told me that the critique has little to do with asking me my opinion or rationale. It is commentary on my choices, on my pedagogy, on my rehearsal process. And, in the moment of their statement—the antitheatrical bias against my educational process—my educational goals are actualized. Indeed, their remarks call into question the nature of the classroom space—revealing it (or, rather, naming it in the moment) to be a site of pretense.

But then there are those who talk back to this critique—who say, "Wait, it is not fake or make-believe. It is real, my life and my work is real, my efforts matter." These are the voices of teachers usually. Those of us who desperately cling to the idea that our efforts are important, that they matter, that we matter.

A bit of an aside: I was once in a production where I played a college student. He was the best friend—there is always a best friend, every play has one. In this one, I served as a foil for the lead—a woman who was recovering from an assault. She was hurt—more emotionally at this point than physically. My role was to represent the problem she faces—to be the guy who believes he can solve all the problems. Here, I was to be the traditional guy, to represent all things oppressive about men, about masculinity, and about the nature of misogyny. To be this guy, to embody this figure on stage, I had to learn how to be him, to embody him, to take up his actions in order for her to be who she had to be.

In rehearsals, I struggled. I understood how to speak the way the script called for, but my body struggled to accommodate, to become the person the director wanted me to be. I sat wrong: my legs crossed, my arms folded. My everyday gender performance was not quite what they expected, not quite correct for the part. In one scene, I sat at a bar, my body occupying that space, attempting to play it right (straight?). To correct me, the director would call from the darkened theatre, "this character . . . how should I put it . . . is a real guy, you know? He doesn't sit, walk, stand, or move like you—can you try to be more of a guy here?" I would nod, trying to force my body to adhere to expectation. In once particular moment, the director crawled on stage and shifted my body, crafting my existence according to her desires, her needs, her expectations. My legs felt the touch of her hands, moving my knees apart and exposing me, making me the "guy" she desired in this moment. But these are rehearsals, right? The performance is just for now, just show, just something for an effect with no real consequences, right?

I think I was at the bar on campus when I realized what had happened to me. I was sitting there with my friends—the show long over, but the production still in effect. I was sitting there and I noticed myself shifting, turning my body into the shape of that character, assuming the requisite position. I began to feel the director's touch, the pressure of her fingertips on my legs, moving me into place. I had begun to embody the image I had struggled against. It would take a new set of rehearsals to remember—to re-member my own body and my own sense of who I was.

Back to my classroom. Like a rehearsal, my classroom is a place for imagining, for searching for possibility, for refiguring our lives toward some kind of future. It is play, but it is not simple, in as much as the classroom is a site for placing our bodies and minds, our theories and our actions in tension; the classroom, like the rehearsals that (re)made and (re)figured my body, stands as a site where we (re)make and (re)figure our own minds and bodies. Just as the power of the play rehearsals changed my own sense of self, repositioning how I understand the nature of my gender, my ways of being, my ways of thinking about my own everyday life performances, the site of the classroom has effects. The classroom can be a site of profound oppression. I see this in the life of each student who enters my classroom or my office marred by other classrooms, other students, other teachers. This teacher told her she was stupid, this student called him fat or lazy, this teacher touched her, this moment changed his life forever. The classroom, like the theatre space, has consequences. To accept the notion of the classroom as "just" anything (just academic playtime, just intellectual masturbation) is to deny that the effects of the classroom are real. But the classrooms in our lives are not play—teachers and students leave fingerprints on the lives they touch in pedagogical settings, perceptible impressions that will have lasting effects on us. We

are fooling ourselves to imagine them happening in any other way. The theatre is a space that makes things happen—call it magic, call it play, call it imagination, call it what you will—the point remains: The theatre produces . . . produces identity, produces norms, and, as a result, produces possibility. So, too, does the classroom. In rehearsing for social change, we are not practicing for the performance, we are already performing.

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Critical communication pedagogy is about identity, about subjectivity, about who we are as people, people who are invested and produced in the process of education. To help us clarify a processual, reiterative sense of identity, we turn to gender philosopher and cultural critic Judith Butler. We choose Butler for a number of reasons (her body of work, her critical view of identity production, her common association with communication studies, etc.). In the end, Butler's vibrant theory allows a reader to see culture as processual, as a constant set of doings, and in that move, that theoretical vision of who we are, we can see a glimmer of hope, a possibility for change.

Butler succinctly states her theory of gender: "Gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts precede; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time—an identity instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts*" (1990b, p. 270, emphasis hers). Butler, in asserting that gender is a performative accomplishment, illuminates identity as created in communication (rather than as the origin of our communication). We will take her claim in separate steps to clarify.

*Gender is in no way a stable identity* . . . . This first assertion seems simple enough: Gender is not stable, gender is in flux. On the surface, this can seem apparent—people each perform or enact their genders in a variety of ways, demonstrating that what counts as "woman" or "man" is subject to interpretation. Applied to a performing body on a stage, this kind of critique can be quick and have profound consequences. However, Butler's logic is much more complex than this notion of variation on a theme—it is to say that gender is the effect of communication, not its origin. To clarify, I'll invoke a common student argument: "Well, gender may be social, but at least sex is fixed—a matter of chromosomes and such." Not so; Butler argues that sex, too, is fluid, a social matter: "'Sex' is an ideal construct which is forcibly materialized through time" (1993, p. 1).

When we ask students which came first, gender or sex—the social or the biological?—they frequently argue that biology precedes gender, the social effects of our bodies. However, this presumes we had microscopes before dresses and pants, prior to social understandings of and sanctions regarding gender. We didn't; we had gender long before we had the technology to

"discover" the biological components that guide our science. As Anne Fausto-Sterling (1987) notes, science began with assumptions about the bodies of men and women when the study of genes began. Society constructed gender—it is gender that writes the premise for the study of sex; to begin with gender as a concept to investigate means gender is the decontextualized variable that preceded analysis. Nowhere is this clearer than the new desire to find the "gay-gene"—that biological marker that some claim determines sexuality. The problem, in both the biological study of sex and such studies of sexuality, is that causal assumptions precede and therefore dictate the findings of the study, continuing to reify gender and sex categories. Here, we see the import of asserting that gender is not a stable identity—such reframing is a radical reconsideration of how we see and understand ourselves. Reading common identity markers as contingent and shifting is a radical departure in how we understand the self; this departure informs critical communication pedagogy (Nainby & Pea, 2003; Warren, 2003). It means that the rehearsals of our life, just as the moments before a production opens on a stage, are informative and, indeed, formative.

*Gender is in no way a . . . locus of agency from which various acts precede. . . .* This, too, is a radical departure from our expectations. As a scholar invested in feminism, Judith Butler focuses on agency as a way of understanding the (gendered) body within culture. For her, a locus of agency is the place or location from which we are able to act; to say that gender is no longer a place from which we act is to deny that gender causes us to act/perform/ live in certain ways. Most unsettling to students is that what they once believed to be the basis of their actions is an illusion; consider this from Butler:

> The distinction between expression and performativeness is quite crucial, for if gender attributes and acts, the various ways in which a body shows or produces its cultural signification, are performative then there is no preexisting identity by which an act or attribute might be measured; there would be no true or false, real or distorted acts of gender, and the postulation of a true gender identity would be revealed as a regulatory fiction. (1990b, p. 279)

Here, Butler asks us to not assume that it is gender that causes us to act; instead, by examining our lived experiences, we might learn how we use and construct gender in and through our communicative acts. Like the voice from the theatre that announces the failure to adhere to expectation, it is only from within the logic of gender that her expectation and ultimate critique can even be articulated.

*Rather, [gender] is an identity tenuously constituted in time . . . .* We begin our analysis of this segment by pausing, if for just a moment, halfway through her thought to consider the nature of the word "tenuously." This one word says much about the importance of Butler's theory for

communication studies scholars in general, and for critical communication educators in particular. When identifying gender as a performative accomplishment, she notes that gender is a highly crafted enactment with clear consequences for failure: "Performing one's gender wrong invites a set of punishments both obvious and indirect, and performing it well provides the reassurance that there is an essentialism of gender identity after all" (1990b, p. 279). The idea of tenuous, of being in a moment of tension, of existing within, ultimately demonstrates that gender—that identity—never finds stability nor rest. The success and failure of these seemingly "natural" categories shows that one's performance is contrived, put on for/because of a public, established to generate perception and cultural knowledge. It is always contextual and under a particular amount and kind of social and cultural expectation. And of course, as a result of this contextual frame, such tenuousness is, in the end, subject to time—the use of time, of time in history, and the reiteration (and habituation) of acts over time. Butler argues that body is a historical artifact: "a manner of doing, dramatizing, and *reproducing* a historical situation" (1990b, p. 272). In other words, the very taken-for-grantedness of the body as a site of gender, of identity, is situated in time, in context, in a moment of larger systems. The body, alone on the stage, is never ever really alone—s/he exists within traditions, patterns, situated and contextualized practices, the history preceding this moment, and the futures we anticipate to follow. As one reiteration, this performance will have effects, will have consequences, and will regulate the body within and against expectation.

*[Gender is] an identity instituted . . . .* The idea of institutionalization demands attention—to be institutionalized, to be grounded within systems of authority, power, and influence, is to be subject to the processes of regulatory practice. Butler (1990b) contends:

> The act that gender is, the act that embodied agents *are* inasmuch as they dramatically and actively embody and, indeed, *wear* certain cultural significations, is clearly not one's act alone. Surely, there are nuanced and individual ways of *doing* one's gender, but *that* one does it, and does it *in accord with* certain sanctions and proscriptions, is clearly not an individual matter. (p. 276)

Of course, the premise behind such a statement, complex as it is, is that while one may do gender with variation, that one does it within a repeated and rehearsed manner demonstrates the degree to which the pattern is, itself, markedly institutionalized. And while one might easily remark that such processes exist, it is the added component of, the verbed nature of "instituted" that illuminates this power—put into play and taken on by members of a given culture. Turning to a schooling example, we might consider the student who arrives in my night class, ready for the 3 to 4 hours of advanced

communication theory. In order to be a student who can sit still and learn for that duration, to have *that* kind of studenting identity, s/he must undergo, must take up that subjectivity. This behavior of sitting in this way, in these chairs, in this florescent lighting, in this attentive and alert manner is not natural—rather, it is an identity one practices and prepares. Like the moment of training little boys how to use the restroom or little girls to sit with their legs closed, schooling makes, institutes, and inducts bodies into model educational subjects. In these ways, identities, through the ongoing (re)production of their norms and patterns, become naturalized, made mundane through the consistent and reiterative enactment of them. Like layers of sand that become rock, our identities are sedimented—they look like rock only if we secret them from time, failing to imagine how they were formed in the first place. There are various ways one rehearses for any show—one can be the class clown or the honors student—but identities (like a show's cast) are all prescribed prior to our arrival. Typecasting is a learned process, instituted through time and within systems of punishment and reward, but nevertheless categories constructed in and instituted through time.

*[Gender is] instituted through a stylized repetition of acts.* To say that gender is instituted through a highly regulated and systemic process is to say that it is stylized, that it is crafted, that we practice it—over and over— in both overt and covert and mundane ways. How I do my gender is crafted, taught to me by my mother as she pulled up a dress or straightened a tie; the acts of gender are products of carefully maintained productions:

> Gender is not passively scripted on the body, and neither is it determined by nature, language, the symbolic, or the overwhelming history of patriarchy. Gender is what is put on, invariably, under constraint, daily and incessantly, with anxiety and pleasure. (Butler, 1990b, p. 282)

Gender, like the location of a knee or the swoop of a gesture, is a series of choreographed maneuvers that hide and obscure their rehearsal, masking the sweat taken in making it just so. I see this stylized production when my graduate students perform the "Will you be my advisor/major professor/ committee member?" dance, mixing careful (and, often, scripted) compliment with serious (and, again, crafted) scholarly care. This moment is not natural, even if predictable. And this stylized performance is predictable, as suggested throughout this section on Judith Butler's work, because it is repeated—to such a degree that it becomes sediment, becomes the natural(ized) foundation that we assume has always been there. The key to a good play in the theater lies in its ability to look natural—even as we recognize

the mechanisms of production made visible because of the stage, the lights, the bow to the audience in the end. Because the student does not bow at the end of a performance (an act that is no less contrived), we have been taught to assume this moment—this moment of her or his risk and my professorial power—is *just* the way things are.

What could looking at the practices, the everyday communicative moments of the classroom through performativity, do to/for us as critical communication pedagogy researchers and educators? Giroux and Shannon (1997), in discussing the value of the performative in educational theory, note:

> the performative becomes a site of memory, a location and critical enactment of the stories we tell in assuming our roles as public intellectuals willing to make visible and challenge the grotesque inequalities and intolerable oppressions of the present moment. (p. 7)

In the end, the reason performative theories are valuable in education is because they help us see the stable, the taken-for-granted, the assumed as enactments, as processual, as historical, and as contextual. Such a way of seeing the world affords infinite possibilities to the critical communication educator/intellectual; such a way of seeing means that is if identities and educational subjectivities are constituted in and through our communication, we might be able to change them. If we think education can harm, then with this theoretical frame, we have a vehicle for change. Paulo Freire (1992) knew this—he argued that "changing language is part of the process of changing the world" (pp. 67–68). Language, that communicative moment that brings discourse in and through the body, shapes and fills us as educational subjects. Change in this way, if we know the modes of production, is a new rehearsal for hope.

## Caught in the Current: Reading Critical Communication Pedagogy Through de Certeau

This writer is drowning, and it's very difficult to watch.

I'm at a thesis defense; it's an interesting project—something to do with relational dialectics in interactions between strangers. It's not something I would do, but it's clever enough, and the author, when he's not choking, seems to enjoy what he's doing.

But he is choking, swallowing "scholarly" discourse, word by word, until his throat is full and the slightest motion sends words spilling across the conference table in a gush. And still he tries to swallow more.

The thesis is appropriately succinct. I read it quickly, marveling at the number of sources and few grammar errors. I read it slowly, looking for traces of the writer. And though it's clear as water, I can't find the bottom, it's like reading for detail beneath waves.

\*  \*  \*

The writing is characterized by its own dialectical tension, situated between claiming to value plurivocity and yet following a dispassioned, passively voiced positivistic voice.

I ask: "Why write this in the third person, in a passive voice?"

He burbles, but there are no words at first.

I say: "We always ask critical scholars to explain their use of first person, but we don't usually ask the same of scholars with other choices."

He pauses and answers honestly: "You know, that's a good question. I hadn't thought of that. You think the writing's passive? I know when I started it was 'I this' and 'we that,' so it seemed like a good idea to make it consistent."

The colleague to my left offers: "You know, I didn't think of it in those terms either. I had the sense that this was you trying on a scholarly voice . . . . You being scholarly . . . ."

This doesn't get at the depths enough for me, so I continue: "You know, that's really interesting to me in light of this thesis. Your work is characterized by its own dialectical tension between what I think may be two paradigms. You have the emphasis on heteroglossia, on this postmodern understanding of multiple voices situated against each other, and this writing style that casts you apart from the study. So, let me ask: Why not create this as a critical study?"

He burbles, but there are no words at first.

And after a long pause, he answers: "I didn't really think of that, and I've had some bad experiences with critical work in this department."

I know who he means, I know what he means, but he doesn't get to have that. Even if I want for him to have that, that moment, that fissure in the defense, that place that calls out the experience, the structure of being a part of this particular department. We've all known hypocritical critical theorists (or, as my colleague Keith Nainby would call them, "venture criticalists"); we must learn from those experiences, to name them and make them our own, but to temper our response with compassion, to understand that no one ever becomes any way without reason. Our challenge is to throw out the lifeline, to avoid becoming the people we criticize, the people who are quick to call out hypocrisies in others even as they offer another glass of water to someone who's drowning.

\*  \*  \*

The academic defense has the potential to be a pedagogical moment, and, perhaps in its finest hour, it is. But more often it is a rite of passage—a place to demonstrate one's mastery of "good scholar" . . . whether student or faculty member, writer or advisor.

"On page blah-blah, where you blah-blah, did you use the word 'blah-blah' intentionally? Yes? Did you notice how that undercuts your claim about blah-blah?"

"I notice you're using So-and-So's definition of blah-blah here . . . that's an unusual definition . . . . What would happen to your study if you used a definition of blah-blah like So-and-So's?"

"Blah, blah, blah, blah . . . relativism . . . blah, blah. How do you know you're not just seeing what you want to see?"

"Blah, blah, blah, blah . . . might . . . blah . . . need . . . blah . . . major . . . blah . . . revisions . . . blah . . . no . . . blah . . . graduation . . . blah."

"Yes Dr. So-and-So, you raise an excellent question. I attempt to address that on page blah-blah where I blah-blah . . . ."

Perhaps this is not entirely fair. But we are, as scholars, constituted in our discourse, constituted in our moments of praise and confusion and candor. Constituted as (un)scholarly as we define what counts as scholarly.

\* \* \*

My first instinct is to say,

"You don't get to have that as your answer."

"That's doesn't tell me what you think 'critical' means."

"Yeah, I know that 'scholar' too, and I can't even begin to talk about what a hypocrite s/he is."

"It's okay to let your experiences shape the work you do if you think carefully about those choices."

"You should have done this as a critical study."

"But didn't I also introduce you to critical work? Wasn't that meaningful?"

"The defense is not the place to get defensive."

"I don't care who or what told you to do or not do critical work, you have to act like that was always a careful decision on your part . . . like this was the best possible way to do your study."

"Let's talk about those negative experiences . . . what happened there?"

"This writing isn't who you are. Please use your voice, let us hear you in this document."

"Can you breathe? Do you need help?"

"I'll expect a silkier response next time."

\* \* \*

de Certeau makes much of cooking metaphors, poaching metaphors, wandering and window shopping metaphors, ocean metaphors. None of these gets at the experience of drowning in strategies, of seeing tactics in the mirror of the sun—as collage, chimera, mirage. Desperate to stay afloat, we cleave apart strategies, lashing them together to form an intellectual life raft—engaging in the important scholarly work of identifying how institutions seep into and permeate the self, the selves that matter to us. But a tactic is the stroke against the wave; the wave is forever altered, but the ocean reclaims both all the same.

This student, drowning, choking, swallowing throws water in our faces. He finds a moment in the structure of the defense and offers up something unexpected, or, if expected, easily cast as immaturity or nervousness or some other performance of "bad prospectus defense student." It is a moment, an interruption or fissure in the motion of the meeting, a statement that illuminates, calls forth the structure of that meeting, calls forth the question of particular someones who serve as arbiters of "good" or "bad" answers. It is a vulnerable moment, characterized by the sort of personal and political experience we've carefully crafted academic defenses and scholarly writing to protect ourselves against. He says what I have never been able to say; he calls out a negative experience with a particular someone. We have all had negative experiences with particular someones, with people we meet every day, with people who hurt us and who hurt students.

And in that defense, I immediately rush to calm the waters: "It's okay to not have an answer yet; it's a complicated question; we can talk more about your theoretical and methodological commitments later." The moment is gone, the meeting continues, and it's as though I'd never asked my question in the first place.

But I am forever altered. My own bloated discomfort may have helped to wash over the shoreline, but for that instant I could feel it, could perceive the sand beneath my feet, however briefly. What counts as scholarly, what counts as true, what matters in those moments is fluid, it slips and slides in and through and around people, tossing them about, against each other. But in this ocean, am I the swimmer? Or, am I the wave?

\* \* \*

In wax and wane, ebb and flow, I drink deeply, drawing the transparent, clear fluid into my eyes and ears, into my lungs and through my pores. This writer is drowning, and it's very difficult to watch.

\* \* \*

It's relatively common for people to strategize for an important meeting (say, an academic defense), to use strategies in approaching a professor or an employer for a better evaluation, or, as a number of universities do, to engage in strategic planning; similarly, we might try to locate the tactical advantage in a game of chess, or worry about whether someone will use dismissive tactics against us in an argument. In these senses, strategies and tactics are tools, something we can consciously and handily identify, deploy, and resist. French philosopher Michel de Certeau (1984) offers us an important revision and reconsideration—a respecification, in the ethnomethodological sense (Garfinkel, 1967)—of strategies and tactics in his germinal text *The Practice of Everyday Life.*

A strategy, in de Certeau's sense, is "the calculation (or manipulation) of power relationships that becomes possible as soon as a subject with will and power (a business, an army, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated. It postulates a *place* that can be delimited as its *own* and serve as the base from which relations with an *exteriority* composed of targets or threats (customers or competitors, enemies, the country surrounding the city, objectives and objects of research, etc.) can be managed" (1984, pp. 35–36). In other words, a school, as a site of organized will and power, may delimit and define its territory; students and teachers, though they move through this site, are the targets (or threats?) to the school's authority. There are a number of mechanisms the school, as a site, can engage to manage those targets: school uniforms; structuring the school day as a series of periods of time (often idiosyncratically named—e.g., 2:06–2:58), with small, highly regulated and policed breaks in between; the location of classes in bland, smooth, institutional spaces with equally bland, smooth, institutional (read: interchangeable) desks. Of great interest to communication scholars are the ways targets or subjects (in this example, students, but really anyone) will absorb and enact these strategies themselves, often in unreflective ways.

Nakayama and Krizek (1995), as communication scholars, bring a distinct focus to de Certeau's articulation of strategies and influence our own exploration of his work (Fassett & Warren, 2004, 2005). In locating their analysis of whiteness in strategic rhetoric, these authors underscore the role of communication in creating and sustaining racist social structures. This is an important pedagogical shift, as scholars like McIntosh (1988) and McIntyre (1997) have argued, because conversations about racism must move from identifying particular racist individuals and asking them to change their ways (or prove their innocence, or purge their guilt) to a discussion of how well-intentioned people (of all social groups, classes, and cultures) participate in social systems that privilege some (i.e., whites and other light-skinned people) at the expense of others (i.e., people of color). And though the emphasis, in

this example, is on whiteness and racism, we might raise the same analogy with respect to classism, sexism, and heteronormativity or homophobia.

The academic defense is a rich site for analysis of this process; for those who participate in it, the defense is highly ordered, rife with traditions (though these vary somewhat from campus to campus and department to department) and often linked, usually outside of the defense itself, to initiation, to a rite of passage, or to hazing. The defense, though it might not seem so at first because it is located outside the classroom, is overtly pedagogical; it is most certainly about the reproduction of certain values, behaviors, and discourses. If we view the defense from de Certeau's perspective, strategies are not tools or plots for faculty or students to deploy or deflect, but rather the everyday instances of communication that render an institution—a department, a university, an academic community—stable, that help that institution manage its participants; in the defense, this may involve the tradition of asking the student to leave the room while the committee deliberates (the student, in this case, is not considered part of that committee, but rather an object of their evaluation), particular questioning practices (for example, the effort of a faculty member to ask questions that attempt to undermine the student's project—and her or his confidence—precisely to see how s/he will react), or perhaps even practices meant to prepare the student for a successful defense (for example, an advisor may spend hours with an advisee, drilling her or him with questions so s/he will remain calm, "objective," and "clear" in the defense itself).

Moreover, Nakayama and Krizek's shift from strategy to strategic rhetoric is powerful precisely because it offers a more nuanced understanding of the interdependence between individuals and social systems. It is difficult for many of us, in our day-to-day communication, to explore this interdependence; our tendency is to reify, to render social systems as fixed, when they are fluid, pervasive, and constituted and stabilized through our mundane communication. For example, when a student notes that she does not want to become a teacher because "It won't be long until you get beat down by the system," her use of passive voice (i.e., "get beat down") and her personification of a social system (as though the system is an agent itself, capable of physical and emotional punishment) help to elide her participation in the very social system she critiques. Admittedly, it feels awkward to say "Choreographed relationships between well-meaning people (who have pets and drink coffee and go to the movies) help (re)affirm and (re)constitute processes, discourses, and movements that will make it hard for me to feel good about what I'm doing in the classroom." And perhaps it feels even more awkward to say, "I'm one of those well-meaning people." De Certeau's notion of strategy helps us understand that it is the day-to-day interdependence of people that helps to create and solidify structures (that,

at different times and in different ways, both enable and disable us). Nakayama and Krizek further illuminate that it is our own discourse (the words we say, our gestures and movements) that recreates those structures (whether of whiteness, of heteronormativity, of capitalism, etc.) and renders them seemingly natural, inevitable, and apart from ourselves.

To further clarify: It is tempting to suggest that we are a part of a social system in as much as we recognize our participation in that system. For example, we are a part of an educational system when we are students or teachers, when our children are in schools, and so forth. Or, we are part of an economic system when we work in finance, or when we choose a mutual fund for our retirement plan, or when we make a choice to purchase coffee at an independently owned shop. Though tempting, such language is misleading; it suggests that we are not part of those social systems when we are not participating in those ways. It is misleading because it suggests we can escape the inescapable: that we can break with systems, choose to opt out or refuse to play the game, so to speak. Instead, as this analysis suggests, the ideological lessons we learn, we never forget. This is to say, as Nakayama and Krizek assert, "strategic rhetoric is not itself a place, but it functions to re-secure the center" (1995, p. 295); if strategic rhetoric can be said to have a place at all, it is in discourse, in our day-to-day communication. If what builds and affirms a social system is discursive, then we cannot opt out; a strategic rhetoric of whiteness (or heteronormativity or capitalism or . . . ) is always already a part of our language, whether or not we're in the classroom or boardroom or coffee shop or outside in the sun. As de Certeau (1984) challenges,

> since one does not 'leave' this language, since one cannot find another place from which to interpret it, since there are therefore no separate groups of false interpretations and true interpretations, but only illusory interpretations, since in short there is no *way out,* the fact remains that we are *foreigners* on the inside—*but there is no outside.* (pp. 13–14)

One of the greatest assets of a communication studies approach to critical theory is that the notion of language as a tie that binds needn't discourage or feel disheartening. Equally important to de Certeau's analysis of power is the notion of a tactic, a means to interrupt or challenge strategies, however briefly. A tactic, in de Certeau's sense, is

> the space of the other . . . . It operates in isolated actions, blow by blow. It takes advantage of "opportunities" and depends on them, being without any base where it could stockpile its winnings, build up its own position and plan raids. What it wins it cannot keep . . . . It must vigilantly make use of the cracks that particular conjunctions open in the surveillance of the proprietary

powers. It poaches in them. It creates surprise in them. It can be where it is
least expected. (1984, p. 37)

Particularly concerned with consumption, de Certeau explores how
everyday practices are active efforts at meaning making; this is to say
activities, like reading, listening, sightseeing, and so forth, are not passive
processes of absorption, but rather characterized by subjects' own work to
author their experiences, to make these experiences their own. We are not,
therefore, dominated by strategy or strategic rhetorics; though those forces
move in and through us, we are capable of pushing back, of naming those
strategies for what they are and authoring a response.

However structured the academic defense (and, more to the point,
*because* of the structure of an academic defense, because of the way that dis-
course structures participants' actions to affirm particular institutions), there
are a number of opportunities to push back, to resist strategic rhetorics. So,
for example, the student in the defense might attempt to make that space
her or his own (e.g., using clothesline and pins to hang relevant artwork
throughout a conference room, arriving early to the defense and praying in
the room beforehand, or selecting a seat s/he finds comfortable, irrespec-
tive of—or perhaps because of—traditional seating arrangements). Or, this
student might subvert the discourse of the meeting (e.g., asking an overt
question about how s/he should behave, creating uncomfortable silences, or
framing her or his opening remarks so as to anticipate, and perhaps co-opt,
faculty critique). Moreover, as no one can exist outside the discursive con-
struction of the institution, the faculty members may engage in tactical
rhetorics as well. For example, they might challenge the nature of the defense
process (e.g., by posing scheduling dilemmas and "dragging their feet," by
arriving late or leaving early, or by offering their questions to the student
in advance of the meeting). In any event, what de Certeau teaches us is
that strategies and tactics are not readily located in particular groups of
individuals—for example, strategies with professors and tactics with students—
but rather, that strategic and tactical rhetorics permeate all human commu-
nication. A tactic is always contingent, always reliant on a strategy for its
success; tactics are always in relation to some discourse. For example, while
a student might respond tactically to a professor's discourse, both professor
and student might respond tactically, together, to institutional—departmen-
tal, university, or disciplinary—discourse.

One of the central difficulties in exploring de Certeau's theory for peda-
gogical practice lies in the language of strategies and tactics; not only do we
commonly use these terms in many other casual senses, but the very lan-
guage of describing the two in relation to each other is binaristic. This is to

say, we are drawn to writing that a tactic is a response to a strategy, or that strategies give rise to tactics, when it is more accurate to say that tactics and strategies exist in tension with one another: One cannot exist without the other. Just as there is no freedom without constraint, or liberation without oppression, there is no tactic apart from a strategy. It is not possible to ignore strategies, or to excise them from our lives; nor is it possible for us to purposefully sustain a tactical response indefinitely (in so doing, the tactic is co-opted, normed, and rendered strategic). For example, critical approaches to pedagogy must, by necessity, exist in relation to traditional or conservative approaches to pedagogy; we argue that critical pedagogies are most effective as means to interrupt, to call out and call into question the traditional. Most important to remember in discussions of this sort is that strategies are not, by their very nature, immoral, oppressive, painful, or unjust; strategies, in and of themselves, are not always "bad." (Again, what would freedom mean if we did not also understand and appreciate constraint?) Similarly, tactics are not always liberating, meaningful, or comforting.

One of our professors in graduate school, Kathy Hytten, lectures compellingly about what she calls a "survive and subvert" pedagogy; for us, this is a pedagogy that appreciates and draws strength from the co-presence of strategies and tactics. As Heidegger (1962) observed, we are thrown into circumstances not of our own making, but that we must negotiate nonetheless. We are born into social worlds of expectations and values, worlds that are not natural or inevitable but rather (re)created in our movements through and talk in/about these worlds. We do what we need to survive, but there are many, many opportunities for us to subvert, to read our experiences critically. This is to say, the defense candidate may see that academic context for what it is— a site of ideological reproduction—but s/he will often engage those rhetorics that will achieve success, and then later, in discussions with her or his advisor or peers or family, complicate or critically frame those rhetorics, that success.

## Reading Critical Communication Pedagogy

Our use of Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, and Michel de Certeau to read critical communication pedagogy is, on some level, arbitrary. We could have traced the works of Pierre Bourdieu (1991), bell hooks (1994), or Jean Baudrillard (1981/1994). We could have called upon many others who have critical theories regarding the nature of social process or power. The issue is not that these intellectuals have magical powers that make their perspectives better than others. Rather, they represent ways of seeing that we have found productive for critical communication pedagogy. The key is not that one takes

up theory (how can we ever do otherwise?)—it is that one struggles to occupy positions that are *in relation* to power, that demand that social actors (including teachers and researchers) place themselves within cultural and social contexts, reread the natural and inevitable as inescapably social and coauthored.

We care about seeing lives, behaviors, and ways of being as residue of reiterative and regulated practices (Butler). We care about seeing our normed subjectivities as products of institutional memberships derived from ongoing disciplinary mechanisms (Foucault). We care about seeing our choices as always already located in the inevitable tensive relationship between resistance and persistence of power (de Certeau). And, as we have argued here, such ways of imagining our social world consistently and powerfully locate identity in relation to (an)other, who is always already a participant in (re)assertions of power, who is both framed within and a framer of institutional norms and patterns. Research that strips subjects from contexts, that reduces lived bodies and experiences to soulless, apparently culture-free variables, sustains power(ful) relationships, keeps them in place by measuring emotions without feeling (i.e., "fear appeals," "communication apprehension," "efficacy"), power without consequence (i.e., "compliance gaining" or "teacher misbehaviors"), and bodies without life (i.e., "verbal aggression" or "immediacy").

Critical communication pedagogy asks that we acknowledge that real people, with complicated and difficult lives, risk carrying the weight of our research only work to reaffirm our own location within and as subject to institutions of power. A commitment to critical communication pedagogy means no longer knowingly using these lives for intellectual profit, no longer knowingly writing violence into flesh in our classrooms. Critical communication pedagogy, in any language, always works against these tendencies. And where it fails, where we fail, we must hold ourselves accountable.