

BELIEVING CRITICALLY: RE-ENVISIONING STUDENT BELIEF STRUCTURES AS
FOUNDATIONS FOR CRITICAL THINKING

by

Christopher Michael Brown

Copyright © Christopher Michael Brown 2019

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

WITH A MAJOR IN RHETORIC, COMPOSITION, AND THE TEACHING OF
ENGLISH

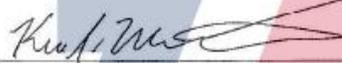
In the Graduate College

THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

2019

THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA
GRADUATE COLLEGE

As members of the Dissertation Committee, we certify that we have read the dissertation prepared by Christopher M. Brown, titled *Believing Critically: Re-Envisioning Student Belief Structures as Foundations for Critical Thinking* and recommend that it be accepted as fulfilling the dissertation requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy.



Ken S. McAllister

Date: 7/29/2019



Susan Miller-Cochran

Date: 7/29/19



Matthew Abraham

Date: 7/29/19



Jeffrey M. Ringer

Date: 7/29/2019

Final approval and acceptance of this dissertation is contingent upon the candidate's submission of the final copies of the dissertation to the Graduate College.

I hereby certify that I have read this dissertation prepared under my direction and recommend that it be accepted as fulfilling the dissertation requirement.



Ken S. McAllister
Dissertation Committee Chair
English Department, RCTE

Date: 7/29/2019



ARIZONA

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my dissertation adviser, Dr. Ken McAllister, for the stimulating conversations that inspired and facilitated this project, as well as for his generous support in all of its stages. I would also like to thank my committee members: Dr. Matthew Abraham, for supporting me as a reader and mentor through the more difficult stages of the writing process; Dr. Susan Miller-Cochran, for giving me valuable feedback on my teaching and helping me to determine the research methods I would use; and Dr. Jeffrey M. Ringer, whose own research was foundational to this project and who provided thoughtful feedback on my writing and ideas. I am also grateful to the late Dr. Theresa Jarnagin Enos for encouraging me to follow my heart in developing a research specialization. Finally, I would like to thank my mother, father, and brother for helping me to perceive the importance of this research and of my work in the classroom.

Table of Contents

Abstract	6
Chapter 1: Reimagining Belief as an Opportunity for Critical Thinking	7
Understanding Belief’s Role in Critical Thinking: Belief as Ideology	12
The Tenacity of Belief in the Face of Critique	17
Re-Envisioning the Relationship Between Belief and Critical Thinking: Belief Structures	23
Chapter Summaries and Methods	28
Chapter 2: Critical Thinking as Career Training: How James Berlin Aligned Critique of Ideology with Students’ Professional Ambitions.....	37
A “Fundamental Conflict”: Obstacles to Transformation in the Socially Conscious Writing Class	38
Ideological Critique as Rhetorical Training: An Alternative Reading of James Berlin’s Pedagogy.....	45
“Burning Visions”: Students’ Career Ambitions as Premises for Critical Thinking.....	52
The “Utopian Moment” Passes: <i>Can</i> Critical Thinking Transform Society?.....	57
Chapter 3: The Conversion Narrative as a Vehicle of Critical Thinking	63
Practicing Critical Thinking Through the Conversion Narrative	64
Responding to Student Narratives: Grounding Critical Feedback in Students’ Beliefs	68
“Easy to Write and Easy to Think About”: Student Perspectives	75
Conclusion	78
Chapter 4: Grounding Critical Thinking in Belief Through Genre Analysis	80
Understanding Genre Analysis as Critical Thinking	83
Critical Thinking in a Genre Analysis of South Korean Makeup Advertising.....	85

Pinpointing the Impetus for Critical Thinking in Alice’s Community Profile	95
Audience Awareness as Self-Awareness	106
Conclusion	109
Chapter 5: Balancing Academic and Political Inquiry (Conclusion).....	111
Works Cited	124

Abstract

This project argues that college writing pedagogy can encourage and facilitate critical thinking by enabling students to pursue inquiries grounded in, and guided by, their own strongly held beliefs. Chapter 1 introduces my definition of critical thinking as the practice of examining received knowledge from a distance necessary to question and, if necessary, revise that knowledge. I proceed to show how beliefs, or ideas taken for granted, can serve as foundations for critical thinking. Extending Jeffrey M. Ringer's notion that belief in the truth of an idea may prompt inquiry into the reality behind that idea, I show how inquiry rooted in belief can entail questioning and revising existing accounts of the realities to which belief lays claim. Chapter 2 shows how James Berlin's writing pedagogy grounds critical thinking in students' beliefs by positioning critique of ideology in the discourses of mass media as a necessary step in students' production of those same discourses. Chapter 3 shows how an assignment called a "conversion narrative" grounds critical thinking in belief by requiring students to explain how their beliefs have changed over time. Working through multiple drafts of their writing, students identify the unstated assumptions on which the logical cohesion of their narratives rest and, based on their findings, revise their narratives to construct a believable and compelling account of conversion. Chapter 4 outlines an assignment called a community profile, in which students analyze a genre of communication used within a community who shares their beliefs, in preparation for creating their own, original document in that genre. Students explain how the rules, conventions, and rhetorical strategies that characterize their chosen genre reflect and reinforce the beliefs of the community who uses that genre. Here, belief is grounded in critical thinking insofar as genre analysis provided students with new insight into their beliefs—specifically, into the ways that fellow believers communicate to achieve shared goals. In Chapter 5, I acknowledge that writing

pedagogy that grounds critical thinking in preexisting student beliefs may become complicit with those beliefs. At the same time, I argue that such complicity is likely an inevitable feature of pedagogies that prioritize the teaching of academic inquiry.

Chapter 1: Reimagining Belief as an Opportunity for Critical Thinking

My interest in student belief structures stems from an experience I had teaching a segment of an honors composition course centered around the documentary film *Manufacturing Consent: Noam Chomsky and the Media*. The film presents Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman's well-known "propaganda model" of news media, which argues that print and electronic journalism in the United States largely serves the shared interests of the state and major corporations by restricting content to material that will generate support for the actions of these institutions on the world stage. The unit concluded with an essay assignment in which students were to use Chomsky and Herman's theory as a framework to analyze US news coverage of a recent world event. While I developed and had started using the assignment the previous year, this semester I started to feel uneasy about the fact that it didn't leave much room for disagreement with Chomsky and Herman's thesis. This feeling came to a head when a student who had until then not participated in class discussion one day openly challenged Chomsky and Herman's assertion that news propaganda unfairly targets the masses. In the film, Chomsky explains that propaganda first indoctrinates the political class, that "20% of the population who is well-educated, more or less articulate," votes, and plays a decision-making role in society as "cultural managers." This group includes professors, teachers and writers. Once the political class is "deeply indoctrinated," the main function of the other 80% of the population is to "follow [its] orders, and not to think, and not to pay attention to anything." Harkening back to Marx and Engels' account of class struggle under capitalism, Chomsky and Herman conclude that the interests of the politically passive masses are ultimately sacrificed to serve those of the elite.

After viewing the documentary featuring these remarks, the student in question asserted that Chomsky was wrong in assigning blame to institutions that control news media rather than

the masses, who were themselves responsible for their indoctrination. Furthermore (in a remark that seemed to take aim at the course) it was not the role of colleges or universities to challenge the public's consensus on controversial issues. When I asked the student why she believed the 80% of the population in question was responsible for its own indoctrination, she suggested that members of this group choose indoctrination when they choose not to aspire to a higher station in society. In response to this remark, I put the question to the class: "Well, what would Chomsky say?" Two or three students then responded in unison: "They never had a choice." I nodded affirmatively as I diverted my glance from the student who had challenged Chomsky—and, by extension, myself—and moved on. I felt a sense of achievement in that I had managed to rein in this dissenting voice "democratically"—by opening the floor to other students. The fact that students were able to anticipate and defend Chomsky's side in this dispute seemed to confirm that they were thinking critically about news media, reading against the grain of dominant ideologies that view socio-economic equalities as the result of individual choice rather than systemic oppression and, as such, an inevitable part of social life.

Alongside this feeling of achievement, however, was the sense that in choosing to respond to the student's objections in this way, I had sent the message that her contribution was unwelcome—as well as participated in the very indoctrinating work described by Chomsky and Herman. This suspicion was confirmed when it became apparent that the student, following our exchange, had stopped participating in class discussion. I had created this situation, it seemed to me, by identifying critical thinking with a willingness to challenge one's *own* beliefs. My response to this student—or, more specifically, the response I elicited from her peers—was an attempt to encourage her to question ideas she had hitherto taken for granted. However, my failure to achieve this outcome suggested that this goal itself was misguided, for it was precisely

the ideas that this student had taken for granted—that is, her beliefs—that were, for her, beyond question. Moreover, it was her commitment to her beliefs that provided the energy for her to engage, however unfavorably, with course content. By encouraging this student to question her belief commitments, I had seemingly stifled the energy that prompted her to engage in our inquiry.

Jeffrey Ringer's concept of dogma—the uncritical acceptance of belief—provides some insight into the nature of this problem. According to Ringer, unquestioned beliefs pose a problem for writing teachers when those beliefs cause students to resist engaging with any perspective that contradicts their own. When belief is held arrogantly, one “dig[s] in one's heels and refus[es] to do anything outside of parroting received knowledge” (3). However, beliefs can also be held humbly, prompting one to ask questions and seek understanding beyond that granted by belief itself. According to Ringer, *humble dogmatism* entails reflection into one's beliefs and engagement with other perspectives. My student's initial response to Chomsky's ideas would seem to lie closer to humble than arrogant dogmatism. While she was far from *questioning* her beliefs, as I hoped to encourage, she was attempting to engage with a view that contradicted hers—even if only to critique that view. Once her beliefs were subjected to scrutiny, however, she appeared to retreat into a more arrogant form of dogma, refusing to engage with other perspectives. The beliefs that initially prompted her to engage with a contradictory perspective then functioned to impede any such engagement. This regression from humble to arrogant dogma, I suggest, illustrates the problem of defining critical thinking as the questioning of one's beliefs. As Ringer explains, to question one's basic beliefs is to question the premises that motivate and guide inquiry. Doing so “would render the process of developing an academic argument based on them impossibly slow, such that achieving any recognizable conclusion

would be impossible” (358). By questioning the premises that prompted my student’s criticism of Chomsky, I had shifted the conversation from one motivated and guided by those premises to one in which the premises themselves were at stake. Whatever direction the conversation might take at that point would either not interest the student or, more likely, make her feel threatened, for, as Ringer observes, belief commitment is often attached to one’s identity (359).

Discovering this flaw in my understanding of critical thinking—an understanding that, I will argue, originated in composition scholarship of the 80s and 90s and persists to the present day—was the impetus for this dissertation, which considers the role of *belief structures* in critical thinking. I use the term *belief* to denote ideas or propositions about reality that act for the believer as premises from which questions arise and which guide and direct her toward answers to those questions. I follow Ringer in assuming that beliefs must remain unquestioned in order to thus guide and direct thinking. I use the longer phrase *belief structures* to indicate the larger apparatus that includes beliefs, questions prompted by belief, and answers generated on the basis of belief, or *received knowledge*. Whereas previous scholarship has regarded belief structures as impediments to critical thinking, I consider whether these structures might serve as foundations for critical thinking: the practice of examining received knowledge from a distance to question and, if necessary, to revise that knowledge.

If beliefs have the potential to motivate critical thinking, then it may be possible for writing pedagogy to encourage and facilitate critical thinking on the basis of the belief structures that students bring to writing. To test this theory, I conducted a year-long teacher-research study of 38 students in two sections of first-year composition. In both sections, I employed writing assignments that were designed to encourage and facilitate critical thinking by grounding inquiry in students’ own belief structures. In each of these assignments, critical thinking was oriented to

the production of texts, such as conversion narratives and profiles of belief communities and their communication practices, that might enhance students' understanding of their own belief structures. Following Ringer's contention that belief commitments may draw one to seek a greater understanding of what one believes, I speculated that assignments that encouraged reflection, for instance, on *why* students believe what they do, might motivate students to employ critical thinking in order to answer this or similar questions. At the end of both semesters, I interviewed students to gain insight into their experiences completing these assignments and their assessments of the writing they had produced. In the chapters that follow I analyze this data to determine the effectiveness of my pedagogy in encouraging and facilitating critical thinking rooted in students' belief structures.

This first chapter aims to outline the concept of belief structures and establish this concept as a methodological lens for studying the foundational role of belief in critical thinking. To that end, I begin with an account of belief's role in critical thinking as formulated in scholarship on ideology in the writing class, beginning with James Berlin. I show how the understanding of belief's role in critical thinking initially advanced by Berlin and his contemporaries, and upheld in recent critiques of their work, may give rise to pedagogical approaches in which students are positioned in an adversarial relationship to their beliefs. As a result, students' belief structures are less able to serve as an impetus or guide to critical thinking. As these scholars attest, such pedagogies often provoke resistance from students, not unlike that described at the beginning of this chapter. I proceed to distinguish understandings of belief's role in critical thinking advanced by scholarship on ideology in the writing class from the understanding of this role provided by the concept of belief structures, which I derive from Jeffrey Ringer's understanding of dogma. Here belief is understood as a resource to writing

teachers insofar as belief prompts reflection into belief, engagement with different points of view, and other modes of inquiry valued by compositionists (350). Building on Ringer's arguments, I suggest that the kinds of inquiry promoted by belief often entail critical thinking, a process in which students question and revise understandings they have reached on the basis of belief—without, however, questioning belief itself. Thus, as Michael DePalma has suggested, beliefs may function as “resources that have the potential to contribute to knowledge making” (225).

Understanding Belief's Role in Critical Thinking: Belief as Ideology

Berlin's understanding of ideology has been especially formative in shaping the way composition understands the role of belief in critical thinking and, consequently, the ways that writing teachers interact with student belief structures in their efforts to encourage and facilitate critical thinking. According to Berlin, ideology offers “directives about three important domains of experience: what exists, what is good, and what is possible” (*Rhetorics* 84). These directives correspond to beliefs in that they originate from specific historical and material circumstances. As such, their truth status cannot be verified according to any objective criteria: one simply takes for granted that a major league athlete is worthy of praise and adulation, or that a particular brand of designer clothing is worth the cost. In assenting to ideology's directives, individuals become “subjects” of ideology, which henceforth—like belief—plays a constitutive role in the way they understand themselves and their world. This process of *interpellation* often has negative consequences for individuals when ideology supports unequal distributions of power and resources. According to Berlin, it is therefore necessary to challenge ideology by asking questions that reveal its social and historical contexts and implications for individuals living in

those contexts. This process of making ideology and its effects visible leads in turn to positive historical change and promotes democracy, presumably by countering the negative effects of ideology. It is critique of ideology—especially those ideologies that the critic accepts and supports—that Berlin describes as “critical thought” (*Rhetorics* 490).

Berlin’s emphasis on the negative social effects of ideology and the need to identify and resist those effects through critical thinking forms the basis of a pedagogy that, in Berlin’s early scholarship, places students in a largely adversarial relation to their ideological commitments. This is especially evident in Berlin’s account in “Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class” (1988) of Ira Shor’s pedagogy, which he presents approvingly as a model of teaching resistance to ideology through critical thinking. He explains that, for Shor, “students . . . see the social and economic system that renders them powerless as an innate and unchangeable feature of the natural order. They become convinced that change is impossible, and they support the very practices that victimize them” (490). Here Berlin, following Shor, frames students’ commitment to ideology as a kind of passive victimization *by* ideology, which offers false directives about students’ relation to the socio-economic conditions: namely, that those conditions are “innate” and that “change is impossible” (490). Within Shor’s pedagogy, critical thinking becomes a means of overcoming or ameliorating this process of victimization. Students come to observe that various social influences shape their self-understanding in ways that “alienate and disempower” them: that is, they discover that social and economic change *is* possible. The lesson of critical thinking, thus defined, appears to be that the ideologies to which students are committed are *unworthy* of belief. This discovery enables students to resist, and thereby attain a measure of autonomy from, ideologies perceived as harmful (491).

Berlin’s account of Shor’s pedagogy raises many of the same questions I encountered

when teaching Chomsky's propaganda model of news media. Here, Shor initiates a line of inquiry that concludes in students' realization that their understanding of inequality as an inevitable feature of social life is not only false but harmful. If students are to follow Shor to this conclusion, they must do so—as Ringer suggests—on the basis of some belief that will serve as premises for this line of inquiry. However, what if it is precisely the false understanding of inequality that Shor's pedagogy targets that might have motivated students to engage in a conversation about their socio-economic conditions? In that case, it is unlikely that the inquiry will conclude in students' realization that their understanding of inequality is false. It is more likely that Shor's attempts to guide students toward this conclusion will be met with resistance, as students attempt to steer the conversation in directions suggested by the very premises that Shor hopes to debunk. One is then confronted with the question that I introduced at the beginning of this chapter: how to ground inquiry in students' own commitments to encourage and facilitate critical thinking.

In addition to the practical problems posed by Shor's pedagogical proposals, Stanley Fish helps to clarify the theoretical inconsistency in Berlin's assumption, via Shor, that *awareness* of the social and historical contexts of ideology will empower individuals to counteract the negative effects of ideology. In "Anti-Foundationalism, Theory Hope, and the Teaching of Composition," Fish explains how this view makes "self-conscious knowledge a knowledge more firm and 'true' than the knowledge we have without reflection" (348). That is, to claim that critical analysis of ideology will grant the critic some purchase on ideology itself is to assume that such analysis, or the insight it yields, exists on a plane that transcends ideology's historical situatedness. But, as Fish points out, even awareness that one's knowledge is historically situated can only occur within specific historical circumstances. Berlin and Shor's shared assumption that knowledge of

one's historical situation empowers individuals to enact change more effectively than any other knowledge would thus seem to contradict their premise that knowledge which is historically situated should not be accorded the status of objective, or "innate," truth.

Drawing on some of the same poststructuralist theorists that inform Berlin's understanding of ideology—in particular Michel Foucault—Linda Brodkey's account of belief's role in critical thinking places less emphasis on the critique of ideology as a means of social transformation and thus lays the foundation of a pedagogy that is more amenable to differences among students' beliefs. At the same time, Brodkey leaves untapped the full potential of student beliefs as a resource for critical thinking. Like Berlin, she subscribes to a "poststructuralist theory" which argues that our attitudes toward the world, ourselves, and others are mediated by "ideologies or worldviews or discourses" (Brodkey uses these three terms interchangeably) (12). Brodkey stresses the multiplicity of ideologies which, like the historicity that Berlin emphasizes, prevent—in principle, if not in practice—any one ideology from claiming a dominant position over all others (17). Also like Berlin, Brodkey emphasizes that ideologies represent people in terms that have either positive or negative consequences: for instance, when medical discourses place individuals in either the role of an "unknowing" patient or a "knowing" doctor, these designations confer on the latter particular benefits and privileges that the former is denied (18). Thus, Brodkey attributes her interest in a poststructuralist analysis of ideology to the possibilities it offers for resisting damaging representations and replacing them with representations articulated by those individuals being represented. She calls this twofold approach of critiquing negative representations and learning practices of self-representation "critical literacy" (23, 24).

While Brodkey follows Berlin in emphasizing the negative effects of ideology and values critique as a way of counteracting those effects, the pedagogy she develops on this basis makes

considerably more room for commitments that students bring to their reading and writing of texts. A “poststructural pedagogy of difference,” explains Brodkey, “presumes that a writer must stand somewhere in order to write at all, and that the issue is not whether a writer is biased, for all writing is biased by definition, but whether the bias can withstand *academic* scrutiny, that is, whether the bias produces simple representations that effectively say there is nothing to talk about or complex representations that invite argumentation” (201). Here Brodkey parallels Berlin in understanding critical thinking as a means of scrutinizing and resisting ideologies that are perceived as harmful. In a departure from Berlin, however, Brodkey’s version of critical thinking does not entail resistance of ideology *as such*, but eschewing simplistic representations produced by ideology in favor of complex representations—specifically, by “laying out a case in support of [one’s] opinions” (200). Here Brodkey introduces a criterion for critical thinking that is likely to be compatible with students’ belief structures, insofar as many belief structures favor—at least, in principle—complex arguments over simplistic ones. Thus there is room within this pedagogy for teachers to harness students’ belief structures to encourage critical thinking. Indeed, to the extent that Brodkey acknowledges that it is ideology (“bias”) that produces complex representations, she acknowledges belief as foundational to critical thinking. At the same time, this statement remains at the level of acknowledgment: Brodkey does not consider *how* or *why* belief enables or motivates writers to produce complex representations rather than simple ones. As with Berlin, then, an emphasis negating or curtailing the harmful effects of ideology prevents Brodkey from articulating a pedagogy that would fully harness students’ belief structures in the teaching of critical thinking.

The Tenacity of Belief in the Face of Critique

Thus far I have argued that composition's emphasis on the negative social effects of ideology produced a model of critical thinking that entailed identifying and resisting ideology through critique. I argued, further, that pedagogies articulated on the basis of this model failed to harness students' beliefs to motivate critical thinking, either because the pedagogy aimed to distance students from their beliefs (Berlin) or because an emphasis on curtailing the negative effects of ideology obscured the potential for belief to encourage critical thinking (Brodkey). Given that pedagogies which position students' beliefs as the object of ideological critique fail to harness those beliefs toward the ends of critical thinking, a study of belief's capacity to motivate critical thinking among writing students would seem to call for a different formulation of the relationship between critical thinking and belief. Prompted in part by the failure of ideology critique to inspire meaningful resistance to ideology, scholars began this work in the mid-2000s, questioning the long-standing assumption that critical thinking—as practiced by first-year writing students—should produce resistance to ideology. By showing that ideology critique may function—paradoxically—to strengthen and reinforce deeply held beliefs, these scholars illustrated the difficulty of uprooting beliefs from those committed to them. In this way, they made the first gestures toward an understanding that belief plays a necessary role in critical thinking. At the same time, however, their work maintained previous scholars' emphasis on the negative effects of ideology and, consequently, continued to define belief in opposition to critical thinking. Thus their work did not formulate the relationship between belief and critical thinking to account sufficiently for belief's capacity to encourage and facilitate critical thinking.

Among the more influential works to posit an alternative understanding of the relationship between critical thinking and belief was Thomas Rickert's *Acts of Enjoyment*:

Rhetoric, Žižek, and the Return of the Subject (2007). Here Rickert counters the understanding of belief as ideology advanced by Berlin with a psychoanalytic understanding of ideology in order to challenge claims that ideological critique might serve as a corrective to ideology and its harmful effects in culture and society. For Rickert, the emphasis that writing programs place on “critical thinking” as an outcome for composition classes results from an assumption that analyzing and describing the ways that certain cultural artifacts construct human understanding will render the ideologies embodied in those artifacts less persuasive, thereby enabling students to work toward a better future (137, 14). Rickert attributes this assumption to a misreading of Foucault, Derrida, and other poststructuralists that regards human subjectivity as a nexus of competing ideological claims that can be expressed in language and negotiated among according to moral and political exigencies.

Against this view, Rickert presents a psychoanalytic theory of subjectivity, rooted in the work of Slavoj Žižek, as a combination of social *and* psychic factors that “cannot be pinned down and made determinate through signification” (69). From this perspective, the connection between critical thinking and ideological critique favored by the social turn falls apart. Participating in such critique, students discover that their enjoyment of film, television, and other “neutral” products of consumer culture is rooted in ideologies that promote conditions of social and political injustice—without, however, understanding how or why they find those ideologies attractive. In this way, critique ultimately *reinforces* ideological commitment by generating a kind of “cynical accommodation” to ideology: Students accept that their enjoyment of consumer culture perpetuates social and political injustice while remaining nonetheless committed to it.

By demonstrating that belief’s hold on the subject extends into the unconscious psyche, Rickert’s psychoanalytic account of ideology reveals the constitutive role of belief in human

thought processes. Thus, even students who acknowledge that their beliefs may be harmful do not renounce those beliefs but, instead, find new ways to rationalize their commitments. I would further speculate that the foundational role of belief in human thought extends even to *critical* thought processes. For Rickert, however, the failure of ideological critique to produce effective resistance to ideology renders the meaning of the term “critical thinking” uncertain (137, 216). Thus, while his work acknowledges the importance of belief to cognition, on this point he seems to maintain Berlin’s supposition that the work done in composition must exist in an adversarial relationship to students’ beliefs in order to fall under the rubric of “critical thinking.” In this respect, Rickert’s work is characteristic of much of the scholarship that interrogates understandings of critical thinking ushered in by the social turn.

The same year that *Acts of Enjoyment* was published, for instance, another critique of Berlin’s pedagogy appeared in Byron Hawk’s *A Counter-History of Composition: Towards Methodologies of Complexity* (2007). Hawk focuses in particular on Berlin’s claims that social-epistemic rhetoric offers a more reflective and ethically responsible pedagogical approach than expressivist or cognitive psychological rhetorics. He frames social-epistemic rhetoric as an effort to correct the “mystifications,” or false beliefs, imposed by capitalist ideology and the “sensory bombardment of urban life and popular entertainment [that] disrupts critical thinking” (78). Berlin views cognitive psychological and expressivist pedagogies as complicit in this suppression of critical thinking, the one in its claims to scientific objectivity and the other in its emphasis on individual agency. Social-epistemic pedagogy, on the other hand, sets out to enable students to resist disempowering social forces by making ideology itself the center of classroom discussion. In this way, it acts as a corrective to capitalist mystification that restores the possibility of critical thinking in the form of “liberated consciousness” (78).

Hawk questions the position above ideological co-optation that Berlin claims for social-epistemic rhetoric by pointing to the latter's statement in a 1992 response article in *JAC* that the ideological formations that render the capitalist subject a "helpless cipher" can be replaced by narratives that promote more equitable social arrangements. "Here," says Hawk, "Berlin exposes his desire to interpellate students into his own ideology" (79). Specifically, he wants to inculcate the belief that change is possible and desirable, and this belief is no less a product of historical circumstances than the capitalist myth that success depends on hard work or luck (78). Here Dobrin, like Rickert, illustrates the difficulty of producing a critique of ideology that is not itself rooted in unquestioned belief. If Berlin's desire to replace the capitalist ideological formations that his pedagogy targets with narratives that promote greater equity in social and economic spheres, then it can be inferred that it is Berlin's commitment to social and economic equity that guides and directs his critique of capitalist ideology. In that case, participation in such critique would require students' a priori assent to Berlin's belief that the inequalities produced by capitalism are a problem in need of remedy.

If Berlin's approach to critical thinking was rooted in his own commitment to progressivist politics, it is possible to conclude that all critical thought is rooted in beliefs held unquestioningly. Dobrin, however, does not follow this line of reasoning, asserting that Berlin, in neglecting to submit his own ideology to the critique he levels against other ideologies, exhibits an "uncritical progressivism" (79). This statement seems to extend Berlin's supposition that being "critical" entails submitting one's own position to critique—acknowledging the extent to which that position is situated in a specific time and place and, as such, no worthier of adoption than any other position (80). For Hawk, social-epistemic rhetoric does the opposite, "telling students . . . here are your positions, and here is my position, and I am going to persuade you to

adopt my position” (80). The burden of “critical thinking” that social-epistemic pedagogy places on students’ shoulders—that is, to be “critical” without ideology as a guide—Hawk now places on the shoulders of social-epistemic pedagogy. In so doing he acknowledges the constitutive role of belief in human thought processes—while maintaining Berlin’s understanding that “critical thinking” means thinking *against* belief.

Whereas Rickert and Hawk regard students’ and instructors’ ideological commitments, respectively, as impediments to critical thinking, Sidney Dobrin questions the extent to which critical thinking is possible—or the extent to which thinking is truly “critical”—within the ideological bounds of academic institutions. Like Rickert and Hawk, he draws particular attention to strategies of interpretation that compositionists value as means of empowering students to react to culture, ideology, and discourse. Despite claims that such practices lead to “critical consciousness” or “liberatory learning,” Dobrin observes that these strategies are endorsed by the institution—specifically, the writing program—as methods of “initiating students into institutional discourses” (12). As such, they do not serve to emancipate students from ideology, culture, or the like but to produce and manage student subjects along institutionally recognized parameters. For Dobrin, this administrative imperative also limits the critical potential of scholarship within the discipline, which by restricting theoretical speculation to work that contributes directly and tangibly to the improvement of student writing, “grind[s] radical thinking and unprecedented thinking into impotent versions that safely fit within composition studies’ established posts” (20). Here Dobrin delineates the ideological boundaries that guide and direct the kinds of thinking that take place in the writing class, showing that even thinking that compositions value as “critical” proceeds from—and moves toward—a place of commitment. At the same time, Dobrin follows Hawk and Rickert in identifying critical

(“radical,” “unprecedented”) thinking with work that challenges, disrupts, and/or takes place outside of those boundaries.

Dobrin’s desire to move beyond the current ideological boundaries of composition is driven by a belief that theoretical work that is tethered to classroom practice is, by definition, uncritical. Thus his concern is not with how writing teachers might facilitate critical thinking but, rather, formulating theories of writing that are not dependent on their applicability to the teaching of writing. Within the psychoanalytic model of subjectivity presented by Rickert, on the other hand, the tendency of ideology to co-opt any thinking that is deployed to resist it seems to preclude any positive recommendations for more effective methods of teaching critical thinking (207). In a slight departure from this tendency to eschew considerations of practice, Raul Sanchez’s critique of composition’s engagement with problem of ideology, which he also finds to be insufficiently critical (49), forms the basis for an alternative approach to critical thinking modeled on deconstruction. Like Rickert and Dobrin, whose work he anticipates, Sanchez takes aim particularly at Berlin’s “nondiscursive” theory of ideology as “motives outside and independent of language that manifest in and can be apprehended through the medium of language” (44). While Berlin repeatedly emphasizes that rhetoric is never neutral and so cannot be relied upon as a “disinterested arbiter of . . . ideological claims,” he assumes that the meaning it does contain—the interested, or ideological, meaning—can be apprehended by the correct hermeneutic strategy. The subject who apprehends the true ideological meaning of a text can then measure the claims that meaning makes against her own experience in order to arrive at “better interpretations that misrepresent less perniciously” (47).

Here, Sanchez shows how Berlin’s assertion that rhetoric is never neutral—never free from ideological commitment—is itself premised on an unquestioned belief in *ideology’s* reality.

It is possible to conclude on this basis that all thought, even the most “critical,” begins from a place of belief. However, this assertion runs counter to Sanchez’s view that any reality that is believed to exist prior to writing—whether, ideology, experience, or something else—is merely an effect of writing. Thus, Sanchez asserts that Berlin, who understands ideology as containing a “preexisting reality content” fails to “engage with the idea of ideology critically” (49). One again, critical thinking is framed as incompatible with belief.

How, then, can the writer always already circumscribed by belief exercise his or her critical faculties? In a departure from the scholars surveyed above, Sanchez presents a solution to this predicament, in two parts: “First is the understanding that to write is to act on a kind of faith, to act on the belief that ‘meaning’ will issue at the supposed end of a signification process (i.e. when one’s work is read) . . . The second . . . is the understanding that the end of signification never happens, that there is no end of writing, no payoff of meaning or value that is not itself writing” (57). Such a solution to the apparent incompatibility of critical thinking and belief commitment seems to be a false one: The writer can only remain within the boundaries of belief that Sanchez regards as a necessary basis for critical thinking and writing if he simultaneously stands outside of them, perpetually calling them into question. In this respect Sanchez seems to fall into the “dubious position” that Rickert attributes to Brodkey and Susan Miller, who “acknowledge the constructed and artificial nature of discourse and theory while simultaneously attempting to make truth claims from such fictions” (Rickert 52).

Re-Envisioning the Relationship Between Belief and Critical Thinking: Belief Structures

That the relationship between critical thinking and belief continues to be framed in antagonistic terms presents a problem for writing pedagogy where, as I have shown, this framing

can make the very beliefs that might prompt students' engagement with course material impediments to critical thinking. For this reason, I suggest that engaging with student beliefs in a way that encourages and facilitates critical thinking requires an understanding of critical thinking that accounts for its occurrence *within* and *because of* the boundaries of belief. Jeffrey Ringer begins this process in his 2013 article, "The Dogma of Inquiry" (2013). Ringer shows how religious belief, while placing certain limitations on thought, may cause believers to ask questions and seek understanding beyond that granted by belief itself. He derives this insight in part from the life and writings of Augustine. For Ringer, Augustine's account of his conversion to Christianity in the *Confessions* reveals a thinker who, though deeply religious, is not content to accept received knowledge. Rather, Augustine is continually prompted to ask questions about the nature of "reality, language, knowledge, human existence and, of course, the divine" (352). According to Ringer, this passion for inquiry did not continue in spite of Augustine's Christian faith but because of it, for asking questions was a way to better understand the truths in which he believed. Though Augustine's questions, emerging from the context of his faith, narrowed the range of answers he might reach, he did not confuse his answers to these questions with the realities he investigated. Rather, he acknowledged the "radically imperfect" nature of human knowledge—especially knowledge of God (352). Indeed, Augustine's confidence that behind his interpretations was a reality that he could never fully grasp caused him to inquire *unceasingly* into that reality, each "answer" he discovered prompting further questions.

The mode of inquiry that Ringer delineates in Augustine suggests a different relationship between belief and critical thinking than the one typically assumed by composition studies. As I have shown, composition has often distinguished critical thinking from the process whereby core beliefs guide and direct thinking. Thus Hawk finds "troubling" Berlin's suggestion that teachers

of “critical inquiry” should not guide their students toward predetermined conclusions, because even teachers who are transparent about their ideological commitments inevitably “prefigur[e] the types of conclusions they can expect their students to reach” (80). Hawk’s implication seems to be that the word “critical” does not accurately describe modes of inquiry in which ideology, whether concealed or transparent, narrows the range of conclusions that students may reach. For Ringer, however, Augustine’s belief in the realities he investigated prompted him to persist in asking questions even after his initial questions had been answered. This suggests that belief may guide and focus inquiry in a way that not only limits what can be known but, presumably—in doing so—generates new knowledge that undermines the authority of received knowledge. In that case, it is beliefs that remain unquestioned at the moment of inquiry (Ringer 356) that cause the believer to question and revise what she previously accepted as true. It is this process of questioning and revising knowledge, prompted and enabled by belief, that I call “critical thinking.”

The revised definition of “critical thinking” that I am presenting calls for a distinction between *received knowledge* and *belief*. In making this distinction, I do not mean to invoke an opposition between knowledge as definitive and unalterable fact, existing “independent[ly] of the conditions of perception and linguistic expression,” and belief as socially and historically contingent and thus up for debate (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1375). For Ringer, beliefs are ideas that one takes for granted as being true—that, for the purposes of inquiry, one does not question (356). Here Ringer’s use of the term “belief” corresponds roughly to the concept of ideology as this term is used by many compositionists. Like ideology, belief does not consist of truths one has reached on the basis of reason or some other “objective” criteria. Rather, it is belief that guides, focuses, and directs inquiry by providing the *premises* that make reasoning

possible (354). Such beliefs must—with respect to inquiry—be held uncritically, because doubting the premises that guide and direct inquiry would preclude one’s progress toward any recognizable conclusion (358).

It is possible, following Hawk or Dobrin, to characterize inquiry’s reliance on unquestioned belief as “uncritical,” for when core beliefs guide and direct inquiry, they also limit its scope (Ringer 354). One then arrives at answers that are not disinterested or neutral but, in many cases, affirm and strengthen belief. This explains in part *why* belief may prompt inquiry: Simply put, inquiry is a means through which belief itself is propagated. I call the answers one reaches when guided and directed by belief *received knowledge*. Received knowledge possesses no authority outside the context of belief; one must already hold or assent to the beliefs that guided and directed a given inquiry to perceive the answers generated in this process *as* knowledge. Yet, as the example of Augustine demonstrates, the authority of received knowledge is also uncertain *within* the boundaries established by belief, as there is always the possibility that further inquiry will reveal previously established knowledge to be incomplete or unreliable. That is to say, inquiry may reveal new information regarding the realities that belief postulates, which changes existing understandings of those realities.

An example of critical thinking as I am defining it can be found in Ringer’s discussion of an assignment he used in his first-year writing courses at Lee University, a Christian college with a largely evangelical population. This assignment, a personal reflection essay, called for students to compare their beliefs as evangelical Christians with those of other evangelicals. A response to this assignment by one student, “Chris,” explores his reaction to the faith journey of the main character in Yann Martel’s *The Life of Pi*. At first, Chris struggles to understand how Pi could embrace Christianity while retaining his belief in Hindu gods. This situation conflicts with Chris’

view that in order to be “saved,” one must renounce his or her former life (361-62). His view of salvation changes by the end of the essay, however. Here Chris recognizes the continued allure of money, power, and other “false idols” in his own life (362). This causes him to consider that Pi may have been saved after all.

Chris’ line of reasoning demonstrates how core beliefs may prompt writers to question and revise received knowledge. The question Chris sets out to answer—Would the character of Pi have attained Christian salvation?—speaks to his core belief in Christian salvation: the idea that Christ’s life, death and resurrection removed sin and its effects for the Christian faithful. In the course of answering this question he is compelled to critique and, eventually, refine his understanding of *who* receives the benefits of salvation: Whereas previously Chris thought that maintaining one’s former way of life after conversion barred one from receiving the benefits of salvation, he later revised this view to account for his own perceived failure to live in perfect accordance with the dictates of his faith. Significantly, he carries out this inquiry *because* he believes in the Christian concept salvation and wants to improve his understanding of the concept. Pursuing this line of inquiry doesn’t call for Chris to contradict or doubt faith as an evangelical. Yet, as Ringer observes, the essay evinces growth in Chris’ understanding of his beliefs and his ability to articulate them. More to the point that I’m making here, Chris’ essay suggests that when belief prompts inquiry, the result may be that received knowledge is questioned and revised. The emphasis of Hawk, Dobrin, and others on the extent to which unquestioned belief narrows the range of conclusions one may reach obscures this practice—prompted and guided by belief—of questioning and revising received knowledge, which I call critical thinking.

Understanding critical thinking as the questioning and revision of received knowledge, as

opposed to the interrogation of one's own beliefs, offers a way around the obstacles that writing teachers encounter when encouraging students to read grain of their belief commitments. As the story I introduced at the beginning of this chapter illustrates, students struggle to conduct inquiries on the premises of beliefs that contradict their own because doing so leads them toward conclusions that also contradict their beliefs. As Michael-John DePalma explains, these students are "given the impression that they must become different 'selves'" when they enter the writing class (223). However, I suggest that students *are* willing to participate in inquiry that calls for them to question received knowledge, which does not put students' beliefs at stake but the understandings or conclusions that they have reached on the basis of those beliefs. This is not to deny that a change in one's understanding of his or her beliefs constitutes a change in belief itself. At the same time, I would argue that students are more likely to engage with a pedagogy that encourages this type of incremental growth than one that requires them to reject or contradict their existing beliefs at the outset. The growth or change that may take place when students question received knowledge is the attainment of greater insight into the truths to which their beliefs lay claim. Such an inquiry is thus grounded in students' own beliefs commitments, which can then provide the necessary impetus for critical thinking. But *how* can writing pedagogy ground inquiry in students' commitments? And will doing so *actually* encourage students to practice critical thinking?

Chapter Summaries and Methods

In the following chapters, I argue that it is possible for writing pedagogy to encourage and facilitate critical thinking by enabling students to pursue inquiries grounded in their own beliefs. To that end, I present three possible approaches for grounding critical thinking in belief,

one that I piece together from Berlin's account of his pedagogy in his final book, *Rhetorics, Poetics, and Cultures*, and two other approaches that I designed and I piloted in my own classes. Chapter 2 shows how Berlin grounded critical thinking in students' beliefs by orienting the critique of ideology in mass media discourses to students' own production of these discourses. I frame this chapter in response to Rickert's critique of Berlin's pedagogy in *Acts of Enjoyment*. I begin with a close reading of Rickert's critique, which argues that Berlin hoped to promote positive social change through writing pedagogy that would remove students' investments in capitalist ideology. Rickert casts doubt on the plausibility of Berlin's aspirations for his pedagogy by arguing that the form of critical thinking that Berlin taught, in which students located the ideologically coded assumptions that film and television use to create stories that appeal to viewers, was grounded in Berlin's own commitment to progressive politics. Students who did not share this commitment would have resisted engaging in Berlin's line of inquiry, Rickert argues, thus impeding the social change that he desired.

Following detailed explication of Rickert's argument, I revisit the text that forms the basis of his critique: Berlin's account of his pedagogy in Chapter 5 of *Rhetorics*, "Into the Classroom." Based on my reading of Berlin's text, I claim that Rickert is incorrect in attributing to Berlin the assumption that students' awareness of the ways that film and television inculcate particular ideologies in viewers would remove students' commitment to these ideologies. To make this case, I reread Berlin's account of his pedagogy in light of Ringer's proposition that all inquiry is grounded in belief. I show how Berlin guided students in critiquing the ways that film and television narratives were constructed and assessing their effectiveness for a target audience in preparation for producing their own filmed productions in the style of film and television. I reason that, if students understood that Berlin's model of critique would equip them with the

skills needed to create their own film and television shows, then Berlin's students' own commitment to achieving successful corporate careers—such as those of a TV writers or producer—would have provided ample motivation for them to engage in this line of inquiry. In this way, Berlin's practice of orienting critique of mass media to the production of mass media texts stands as one example of writing pedagogy that promotes critical thinking by grounding inquiry in students' beliefs.

In Chapter 3, I show how an assignment called a “conversion narrative” grounds critical thinking in belief by requiring students to explain how their beliefs have changed over time. Reading photographer and blogger Idil Sukan's narrative “How I Became a Feminist” from the standpoint of Kenneth Burke's concept of narrative development, *sylogistic form*, I show how writing a conversion narrative entails reconstructing the series of events that led to changes in one's thinking and explaining how each event shaped one's developing perspective. I explain that this process involves critical thinking insofar as writers, seeking to construct believable and compelling accounts of their conversions, must reflect on the unstated assumptions that connect the various stages of their narratives and consider whether readers would share these assumptions. At the same time, this line of inquiry is grounded in students' beliefs because it helps students obtain greater insight into what they believe and why. Applying Burke's theory of narrative development to discussions of conversion narratives by two students, I show how focusing on the sylogistic form of these narratives enabled me to provide critiques of their writing that was grounded in the belief commitments of their authors. Comparing initial and revised drafts of both students' narratives, I show how the feedback that I provided during the revision process enabled students to examine the underlying assumptions that held together the various stages of their narratives and to identify assumptions that needed to be in place for the

narrative to follow through to its conclusion. In this way, the process of writing and revising their conversion narratives encouraged students to think critically about those narratives, as arguments supporting their beliefs.

Chapter 4 centers around an assignment called a community profile that I designed to encourage and facilitate critical thinking by orienting genre analysis to text production. Here students extend the line of inquiry they began with their conversion narratives by studying the communication practices of a group or organization who shares the beliefs to which they converted. Students first analyze a genre of communication used by this group, identifying the rules, conventions, and rhetorical strategies that enable users of this genre to communicate effectively, and then compose their own original document in the genre that they analyzed. Drawing on Amy Devitt's understanding of genre, which postulates that the rules and conventions that make up a genre reflect and reinforce the values and beliefs of those who use it, I explain how the genre analysis students practice in their community profile constitutes another form of critical thinking. I argue that analysis of the ways that genre rules and conventions appeal to readers based on their beliefs places the reader at a distance from genres necessary to question and revise texts in those genres. Applying Devitt's theory to analysis of a community profile by a student named Alice, I show how Alice's awareness of the ways that rules and conventions in South Korean makeup advertising reflect and reinforce consumers' commitment to a rigid and unrealistic ideal of beauty enabled her to stand at a critical distance from the claims made in such advertising.

Following this analysis of critical thinking in Alice's project, I attempt to pinpoint the belief commitments that motivated her to practice critical thinking. I read Alice's genre analysis against the backdrop of her conversion narrative, in which she describes the negative

psychological and physical impact these ads had on her as a young Filipina and her consequent struggle to embrace her natural appearance. Identifying parallels between, on the one hand, the meticulous analysis of cultural messaging regarding physical beauty that the young Alice practiced out of apparent insecurity and, on the other, her analysis of the ways that South Korean makeup advertisements reinforce a particular ideal of beauty, I speculate that the critical thinking Alice practices in her community profile is rooted in a still lingering commitment to this beauty ideal. I suggest that this pattern of thinking afforded Alice a distance from messaging regarding physical beauty that, in addition to making her skeptical of this messaging, has aided Alice in her efforts to understand and fulfill the criteria that define beauty in her cultural context. While such thinking may have reinforced problematical commitments, it can still be called “critical,” however, because it gave Alice distance from received knowledge and, as a result, led to greater self-awareness. Thus, Alice’s community profile project demonstrates once more that it possible for writing pedagogy to ground critical thinking in students’ beliefs.

In the fifth and final chapter I address an objection that I anticipate some scholars making to my rationale for a pedagogy that grounds critical thinking in student beliefs. Throughout this project I take for granted that students must be able to practice critical thinking in order to participate in academic inquiry. But is initiating first-year writing students in academic inquiry a worthy or sufficient goal for composition, especially if it leads to pedagogical approaches that perpetuate problematical belief structures? In answer to this question, I clarify that writing pedagogy that prioritizes the teaching of academic inquiry can become entangled in harmful beliefs for two reasons: 1) an inquiry grounded in a particular set of beliefs tends to reinforce those beliefs, and 2) the beliefs that guide inquiry always have implications for social, political, and economic arrangements. Consequently, pedagogies that encourage students to pursue

inquiries rooted in their own beliefs can, in the name of teaching academic inquiry, strengthen students' commitment to beliefs that have negative consequences in students' own lives and the life of society. I attribute this tendency for pedagogy that prioritizes academic inquiry to become entangled in harmful belief structures to the difference, which Stanley Fish articulates, between academic and political inquiry. Whereas academic inquiry seeks to contribute to existing traditions of inquiry through research, political inquiry aims to promote just courses of action outside the limited contexts of academic teaching and research. Allowing students the freedom to pursue inquiries grounded in their own beliefs furthers the goal of academic inquiry insofar as one can contribute to existing traditions of inquiry on the basis of any number of beliefs. At the same time, this freedom can impede political inquiry's goal of recommending just courses of action, insofar as the inquiries that students choose to pursue may be grounded in beliefs that perpetuate certain forms of injustice. I suggest that a solution to this problem is not for composition to de-prioritize academic inquiry or, as Fish recommends, to refrain from involvement in moral and political issues, but to find ways that pedagogy can balance the competing demands of initiating students in academic inquiry and advocating for social justice.

The pedagogical approach outlined in the following chapters, which engages with a wide variety of student beliefs as premises for critical thinking, is likely to raise questions about my positionality as a teacher. As Shirley Wilson Logan observes, the mere presence of a woman of color teacher in a mostly white classroom is often "read as a signal that now oral and written expression need to be suppressed lest they offend the person who will evaluate them" (Logan qtd. in Kopelson 126). Along these lines, my pedagogical openness to a variety of beliefs may be symptomatic of my positionality as a white, male, cis-gendered, able-bodied professor, whom students may be less fearful of offending and less inclined to resist on the basis of my identity

alone. My positionality may also empower me to listen to student beliefs—for instance, beliefs with racist or misogynistic implications—that for a differently embodied teacher could arouse memories of traumatic experience. At the same time, the pedagogy that I am proposing could offer teachers of marginalized identities a position from which to “increase students’ critical involvement with difficult issues by decreasing their preoccupation with the teacher’s identity position” (Kopelson 126). By taking an apparently open or “neutral” stance toward student beliefs, these teachers would be performing the role of “objective, impartial purveyors of truth” and, in so doing, acquiring some of the power associated with this role. As Karen Kopelson argues, such power need not serve “reigning ideologies”—as claims of neutrality usually do—but could be made to serve “progressive political/ethical concerns” (122). If students perceive that a teacher is disinterested or objective with regard to issues of racial, gender, or other forms of difference, students may be more likely to engage with these issues sincerely. Thus, teachers who do not enjoy the privileges associated with a white, male, cis-gendered positionality might see this pedagogy as a way to emulate the position of distance from subject matter that many students expect from college professors and, in turn, to strategically repurpose the power afforded to teachers perceived to possess such distance.

It is also important to acknowledge that, as a teacher and scholar, *I* do not claim to be disinterested or neutral with regard to student beliefs. My desire, in Thomas Newkirk’s words, to widen the ideological space of the composition classroom, arises from my own history with belief (107). While I was baptized and raised as a Catholic, I left the Church as a young adult. When I was later confronted with some common trials of adulthood, I began to perceive value in the beliefs with which I was raised. Eventually I returned to the Catholic Church and have since become involved in various Catholic ministries. Because of my particular history of rejecting and

later returning to the religious beliefs with which I was raised, I am inclined to perceive both the good and bad in the beliefs that students bring to college from their home cultures. Indeed, some readers may perceive that I place too much emphasis on what is good, or at least pedagogically useful, in student beliefs, reserving discussion of the harmful implications of certain beliefs for my concluding chapter. I acknowledge that this choice of emphasis may be a reflection of my positionality, not only as a Catholic “revert” but also as a white male.

Ultimately, my goal for this project was to discover ways to inspire enthusiasm for writing among students in first-year composition. I found that approaches in the critical pedagogy tradition, like the one I described in this chapter’s introductory anecdote, energized many students but had the potential to leave others feeling alienated from class discussion and even from their own writing. After encountering Jeffrey M. Ringer’s scholarship on the foundational role of belief in inquiry, I began to suspect that the resistance that I encountered from these students was a manifestation of their desire to pursue inquiries on the basis of their own beliefs. Consequently, I began to look for ways to develop writing assignments in which students’ own beliefs could serve as the premises and impetus for inquiry. Chapter 2 shows how James Berlin inspired enthusiasm among students from upper-middle class backgrounds through pedagogy that tapped into their aspirations to the “good life” depicted in popular movies and television shows of the late 1980s and early 1990s. Chapter 3 represents my attempt to tap into students’ motivations for writing through an assignment that invited them to explore the connections between their strongly held beliefs and lived experience. Chapters 4 complicates my ambition to motivate students by grounding inquiry in belief, showing how one student’s decision to conduct a genre analysis of makeup advertising—while generating enthusiasm for writing—may have been rooted in insecurities related to race and body image. Finally, Chapter 5

responds to the objection that grounding inquiry in students' beliefs may perpetuate ideologies perceived as harmful, concluding that writing pedagogy must struggle to balance the often conflicting demands of inspiring students' participation in academic inquiry and fighting for justice in social, political, and economic arrangements. In addition to illustrating the importance of aligning writing pedagogy with students' concerns and interests, I hope that the following chapters convey the enthusiasm for writing that I observed among the students who generously agreed to participate in this study.

Chapter 2: Critical Thinking as Career Training: How James Berlin
Aligned Critique of Ideology with Students' Professional Ambitions

In the previous chapter, I introduced my definition of critical thinking as the practice of examining received knowledge from a distance necessary to question and, if necessary, revise that knowledge. I also argued that composition scholarship has often framed ideological commitment as an obstacle to critical thinking. Against this view, I claimed that strongly held beliefs enables one to question and revise knowledge generated on the basis of that commitment. Extending Jeffrey M. Ringer's notion that belief in the truth of an idea prompts inquiry into the reality behind it, I showed that inquiry rooted in belief can entail questioning and revising existing accounts of the realities to which belief lays claim. Finally, I introduced the argument of my dissertation: that writing teachers can encourage and facilitate critical thinking by grounding inquiry in students' belief commitments.

In this chapter, I show how James Berlin's writing pedagogy, as set forth in his final book *Rhetorics, Poetics, and Cultures*, grounds critical thinking in students' beliefs by wedding critique of ideology to the production of texts. In making this argument, I go against the grain of recent commentary on Berlin, in particular that of Thomas Rickert, who argues that Berlin's attempts to teach critical thinking aimed to *change* students' belief orientations, an outcome that Berlin ostensibly believed would promote more just and equitable social relations. Rickert finds this project untenable on the grounds that Berlin's method of ideological critique, being rooted in his commitment to a particular vision of social justice, would have provoked resistance from students whose commitments differed from Berlin's. I lay out Rickert's argument in detail in order to call into question its key premise, wherein Rickert attributes to Berlin the assumption that the "truths" which students discover through ideological critique will effectively remove

their investment in ideologies that promote injustice. Against Rickert, I argue that Berlin does not present ideological critique as a means of transforming students along ideological lines but, rather, as a preliminary stage in the production of texts that meet the demands of audience and purpose. To the extent that students' production of texts, including filmed productions in the style of TV sitcoms and news segments, was Berlin's immediate goal, his students' aspirations to an upper-middle class lifestyle would have provided the means and impetus for examining how these texts were constructed. In this way, Berlin's strategy of orienting ideological critique toward text production demonstrates that it is possible for writing pedagogy to encourage and facilitate critical thinking by grounding inquiry in students' belief commitments.

A "Fundamental Conflict": Obstacles to Transformation in the Socially Conscious Writing Class

The pedagogical approach Berlin sets forth in Chapter 5 of *Rhetorics*, "Into the Classroom," is premised on his "social-epistemic" theory of rhetoric. In this view, language is not a neutral vehicle of information about the world but a discourse: a vehicle of ideology that shapes human perceptions of what exists, what is good, and what is possible. The individual whose perceptions are thus constituted by discourse is a "subject," a term designating that the speaker of language does simply use but is constructed by discourse, which "tells us who we are, and how we should behave in terms of such categories as race, class, gender, ethnicity, and the like" (66). In this way, discourses determine, in part, how subjects relate to the world and to other subjects, and these relations in turn giving rise to social, political, and economic arrangements that favor the interests of certain groups over others. At the same time, because the

subject is a unique locus of multiple, competing discourses, with a specific history, opportunities for subjects, acting within discursive constraints, to shape discourse itself (74).

Within Berlin's pedagogy, the notion that all language is ideological gives rise to a method of critical thinking that students can apply to uncover the ideological commitments of the discourses that shape *their* perceptions of the good, the existent, and the possible. This includes the discourses of mass culture that students have come to know as consumers, such as film and television, and the discourses that students are expected to produce at the university, such as academic essays. As students learn how to identify the ideological "codes," or tacit assumptions, that these texts deploy to produce accounts of reality that will appeal to the values and beliefs of target audiences, they become aware of how these texts are constructed. According to Berlin, the process is "designed to make students suspicious of easy resolutions of complex social, economic, and political problems. . ." (137). In other words, students achieve a distance from these discourses necessary to question the accounts of reality that they present, or received knowledge. Berlin hoped that thinking critically about the discourses that structure their understanding would encourage students to promote more just and equitable social relations (*Rhetorics* 124).

According to Rickert, Berlin's faith that critique of ideology would encourage broader social change was predicated on a belief that the knowledge students acquired through critique would lead to changes in their beliefs. In this reading, critical thinking in Berlin's classes was not rooted in students' commitments but Berlin's own. In the paragraphs that follow, I lay out Rickert's argument in detail in order to show that, by reading Berlin's practice of ideological critique in light of the latter's hope that students' participation in critique might lead to broader socio-political change, Rickert wrongly attributes to Berlin the belief that such change would

occur in response to the insights that students acquired through critique. In so doing, he misinterprets Berlin's approach to critical thinking as an attempt to change students' beliefs to reflect his own. I then proceed to show, contra Rickert, that Berlin rooted the practice of critique in students' own beliefs, which then formed the premises and motivation for their inquiries.

For Rickert, Berlin's interpretation of various thinkers associated with poststructuralism, such as Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault, led him to view the critical analysis of discourse as a means of arriving at a kind of truth (Rickert acknowledges the irony of this position, which is inconsistent with a poststructuralist understanding of truth as discursively constructed). Rickert finds this understanding exemplified in "Contemporary Composition: Four Major Theories" where Berlin sets out to correct the perception that the four elements of Kinneavy's communications triangle—speaker, listener, reality, and message—name universal and unchanging realities present in any discursive act. Against this view, Berlin argues that these four units and the relations among them are defined differently by various rhetorical theories. The particular understanding of these terms and the relations among them that characterize each theory constitute an "epistemic complex" that itself constructs their adherents' perceptions of reality. Understanding the various theories of composition in this way raises the ethical stakes of teaching writing, in which instructors are not simply conveying a mechanical skill but constructing *students'* perceptions of reality—including socio-political reality—and their place in it. Here Berlin updates positivistic interpretations of Kinneavy's schema with the basic insight that Rickert identifies with poststructuralism: namely, that the "world is always mediated through discourse and thereby accords us with particular ways of being and acting in the world" (35).

Rickert questions Berlin's argument on the grounds that it seeks to correct the

“essentialist” understanding that the triangle’s elements represent pre-discursive realities while falling back on a correspondence theory of meaning, which assumes that language can be deployed to adequately map a reality that is discursively constructed—an assumption that runs counter to the psychoanalytic theory of discourse that Rickert favors. In arguing that the terms “speaker,” “listener,” “reality,” and “message” do not possess stable and permanent meanings, but, rather, that “meaning” itself is constructed by how one defines these four terms, Berlin appears to move beyond a simple correspondence theory of language, in which words refer to realities existing independently from language. At the same time, however, he erects his own account of composition’s “reality”: an assortment of competing and contradictory epistemic complexes arising from the definitions that each provides of speaker, audience, message, and world. While Berlin acknowledges that none of these theories provides an objectively “true” picture of the communicative process, he remains nonetheless dependent on Kinneavy’s triangle in assuming that composition itself can be faithfully delineated according to how competing theoretical schools define these terms. It is to this point that Rickert raises an objection, asking “from what position can Berlin assert that all conceptions of reality are contested fabrications? Implicit in Berlin’s very argument is the position of objectivity that would discern the truth about how discourse really functions for us” (54).

Rickert seems to push Berlin’s assertion that all conceptions of reality are discursively constructed, and therefore untrue, to its inevitable conclusion, in which this very assertion is dismissed as a discursive construct. Rickert complicates this picture, however, by explaining that Berlin’s statement is not simply self-contradictory and therefore false but, in its contradiction, points to a more fundamental truth than the one to which it lays claim. Drawing largely from Slavoj Žižek, Rickert argues that discourse is not a whole composed of competing conceptions of

reality, about which one can say “None is true.” Rather, discourse is better understood as constituted by a “fundamental conflict” that prevents any statement from giving final, determined expression to realities outside of discourse—what Žižek, following Jacques Lacan, terms the “Real”—as well as to realities internal to discourse that discourse itself cannot adequately represent (a point I return to). Thus, even the “metalinguistic” attempt to escape this bind—in which no statement adequately represents the object to which it lays claim—by asserting that all “objects” are constructed by discourse, fails, insofar as this statement lays claim to the “object” of discourse. According to Rickert, the contradictory nature of this assertion invokes (but does not represent) the “truth” of a fundamental conflict within discourse that always impedes its representational aims.

For Rickert, Berlin assumes that a poststructuralist perspective, by acknowledging the role of language in mediating reality, grants social-epistemic rhetoric an unmediated or less mediated access to that reality. This assumption in turn leads Berlin to believe that a social-epistemic writing pedagogy can produce substantive change in students’ thinking and behavior. To make this point, Rickert first shows how the poststructuralist assumption guiding Berlin’s update of Kinneavy’s triangle—that attention to the ways discourse constructs reality can provide attentive readers with insight into that reality—remains operative in his pedagogy, pointing to Berlin’s description of an activity wherein students analyze the 1980s television sitcom *Family Ties* (Rickert 123). Here Berlin guides students in uncovering the conflicts and contradictions that various episodes present and identifying the ideological assumptions, or “cultural codes,” that the show deploys in order resolve those contradictions (Berlin 140). Students observe that the character of Alex Keaton “rebels, but he does so in a socially approved manner, working hard to be rich. The adverse consequences of [Alex’s] extreme selfishness are

never addressed; indeed, in the ingratiating actor Michael J. Fox's hands, ruthlessness is made charming" (*Rhetorics* 131). Fox's charisma, a vehicle for free market ideologies that frame ruthless ambition as a virtue, resolves the contradiction between "socially approved" selfishness and its adverse consequences. The lesson of such critique, Rickert explains, is that such codes satisfy the viewer's desire by providing imaginary resolutions to conflict. These resolutions in turn function to construct viewers' subjectivities and shape their desires—just as epistemic complexes structure writing teachers' and students' perceptions of reality. In this way, critical analysis of the ways that discourse structures viewers' understanding becomes an activity whereby "what is only fantasy—what is only imagined and therefore to some degree false—can be unmasked for the achievement of a deeper truth" (123).

According to Rickert, Berlin believed that the truth of the insights students gathered through such analyses would lead to changes in their thinking and behavior. To make this point Rickert quotes Berlin's statement, following his aforementioned account of his class' critique of television shows, that the goal of his pedagogy is for students to become "reflective agents actively involved in shaping their own consciousness as well as the democratic society of which they are a part" (Berlin qtd. in Rickert 136). Rickert objects to this claim, stating: "But the crucial aspect of this process of becoming a reflective agent is Berlin's assumption that students will share the same valuations concerning what is true or real versus what is false or imaginary and will act in the same way as he does concerning these valuations" (137). Here Rickert appears to combine Berlin's account of the insights that his students acquire through ideological critique with Berlin's statement that the goal of this exercise is to produce reflective agents, constructing a causal argument wherein the truths discovered via ideological critique *induce* students to believe and act in a predetermined way. He echoes this point a few pages later, stating that once

Berlin's students finish identifying "what is imaginary and what is true, they [from Berlin's perspective] can and presumably will act on their newfound knowledge, not just because it is logically so but because they have investments in what is true and good" (125). For Rickert, the missing link connecting, on the one hand, Berlin's assumption that ideological critique uncovers a hidden truth about discourse and, on the other, his desire that students who practice ideological critique will become reflective participants in democracy, is a belief that the "truths" that students discover through critique will compel them to believe and act in the same way he does. From this perspective, the line of inquiry in which Berlin leads students in the guise of ideological critique is grounded firmly in his own commitments, which thus guide and direct students toward conclusions that affirm those commitments.

Rickert questions this line of reasoning, once again, on psychoanalytic grounds, arguing that discourse does not "capture our desire" by being true but by integrating the subject into social "reality." Rickert explains that confrontation with the conflict in discourse can be traumatic, causing the subject to perceive her "reality" as an "'irreal' nightmarish universe with no firm ontological foundation" (46). Consequently, "non-discursive" forces operating *within* discourse function to shield the subject from conscious awareness of this fundamental conflict. One such force is fantasy, which Rickert describes as "our largely unconscious projections and constructions of other people and the world, [which underpin] how we come to see ourselves in the world" (2). Against the truth of fundamental conflict, fantasy constitutes the subject's sense of the world as ordered and meaningful, thereby integrating her into social reality (59). According to Rickert, Berlin's belief that critique of the ways a particular discourse constructs our perceptions will produce changes in students' ideological orientations fails to take into account the extent to which such orientations depend on the operations of fantasy, which,

although they “are caught up with and suffuse discourse . . . evade direct or easy translation into discourse” (46). Consequently, critique that explains how and why a discourse appeals, at a rational level, to those committed to it may succeed in challenging one’s rational assent to that discourse. But it is possible that she will remain committed to the discourse at the level of fantasy—not because it is true but because it supports her perception of society as a stable whole.

Applying Rickert’s argument to Berlin’s analysis of *Family Ties*, we might say that Berlin succeeds in pinpointing the ideological assumptions that viewers must hold in order to find the character of Alex Keaton believable and explaining how the show reinforces viewers’ commitments to those assumptions by deploying them to resolve conflicts within the character. It does not, however, account for why those assumptions hold sway over those who are committed to them. It follows, for Rickert, that Berlin is misguided in assuming that the insights generated by such a critique of discourse will become a catalyst for change in students’ commitments. Yet, as I argue in the following section, Berlin did not view ideological critique as a means of inducing change in students but as preparing them to produce texts like those they had critiqued—texts that reflected students’ own aspirations to financial success. In this respect, it is possible to speculate that the form of critical thinking in which Berlin led students was grounded in their own commitments.

Ideological Critique as Rhetorical Training: An Alternative Reading of James Berlin’s Pedagogy

It is understandable that Rickert attributes this line of reasoning to Berlin, who does not clearly explain in *Rhetorics* how the pedagogy he practices might lead to the social progress he sees as its larger purpose. Indeed, Berlin made statements in his prior work that could lead one to believe that he saw the writing class as means of converting students to the cause of progressive

politics—a point I return to in this chapter’s conclusion. Nevertheless, it is possible that Berlin was reluctant to speculate on the exact connection between his pedagogical practice and his desire for social progress because he was not sure precisely how the knowledge that students acquired in his classes would enable their participation in democratic politics, or what that participation might look like. Indeed, I would argue that Berlin presents the knowledge that students attain through critique of ideology less as an inducement to a particular form of political engagement or belief and more as a tool kit that would enable them to effectively produce texts in the genres they had learned to critique. Drawing on Jeffrey M. Ringer’s notion that commitment to belief may serve as an impetus for inquiry into belief, I argue that converting students to different beliefs would actually have posed an obstacle to Berlin’s pedagogical goal of text production, insofar as students’ commitment to consumerism would have provided the premises and motivation for examining how these discourses were constructed and assessing their effectiveness for a target audience. I interpret Berlin’s reticence regarding the eventual outcome of this pedagogy as an indication that he was aware of its reliance on students’ belief commitments, which made the social and political implications of that pedagogy difficult to predict.

Whereas Rickert faults Berlin for assuming that knowledge generated by a poststructuralist critique of discourse would produce social change, a closer look at *Rhetorics* shows that the methods of analysis in which Berlin guided students were modeled on a synthesis of poststructuralism and social-epistemic rhetoric that harnessed the interpretation of texts, first and foremost, to the end of textual production. Published in 1996, Berlin’s final book represented a then-ongoing effort by rhetoric and composition scholars to establish the discipline’s independence from literary studies, which had traditionally taken as its province the disinterested

appreciation of literature (91-2). In *Rhetorics*, Berlin takes this project a step further by arguing for a reformation of English studies, including the study of literature, along rhetorical lines. Berlin argues that the disinterested study of literary texts—as acts of creative imagination that transcend any consideration of their means of production—represents an impoverished model of textual interpretation. He contrasts this approach with that of historical rhetoric, which took the interpretation *and* production of texts as its province. This dual emphasis, he explains, was necessary to the ruling groups whose participation in politics and trade required them to communicate extensively in the oral and written discourses of these professions. Berlin associates his own approach with the movement of social constructionist rhetoric, which retained historical rhetoric's emphasis on the production of texts while seeking to wrest knowledge of rhetoric from the meritocratic class and redeploy this knowledge to serve the common good. It is out of this tradition, wherein text interpretation serves the purposes of production (and vice versa), that Berlin proposes an alternative to traditional literary criticism, modeled on a synthesis of social-epistemic rhetoric and poststructuralism.

Berlin does not conceive of the poststructuralist critique of ideology as having direct political consequences but, in keeping with the rhetorical tradition, values the insights it yields for how texts are consumed and produced. To that end, he observes that “Poststructuralism provides a way to more adequately discuss fully operative elements of social-epistemic rhetoric. At the same time, social-epistemic rhetoric offers poststructuralism devices for studying the production as well as the reception of texts” (87). In accordance with this dual emphasis on text reception and production, Berlin presents the insights that poststructuralism offers social-epistemic rhetoric in the context of an updated model of the rhetorical situation, containing four elements: interlocutor, audience, “conceptions of the existent,” and signification.

Regarding the first of these elements, Berlin notes that the interlocutor or subject of communication is not unified, coherent, or transcendent (an “author”) but a construction of conflicting signifying practices. He considers the relevance of this insight to text production by likening it to the concept of *ethos*, wherein a speaker must consider “his or her presentation of the appropriate image of his or her character through language, voice, bearing and the like” (88). That the interlocutor is a construct of discourse means that, as in historical rhetoric, “great care must be taken in choosing and constructing the subject position that [he or she] wishes to present,” and, furthermore, that “Equally great care must be taken in teaching students the way this is accomplished” (88). Here, Berlin assimilates the poststructuralist insight that subjectivity is composed of competing discursive formations to classical rhetoric, suggesting how this knowledge can be deployed in the production of texts and the teaching of text production to students. He concludes that “in composing or interpreting a text, a person engages in an analysis of the cultural codes operating in defining his or her subject position, the positions of the audience, and the construction of the matter to be considered” (90).

A relationship between rhetorical production and political change is indicated in Berlin’s consideration of the remaining three elements of the rhetorical situation as inflected by the insights of poststructuralism. He observes that conceptions of the existent or material conditions are, like subjectivity, discursively constructed: “Only through language do we know and act upon the conditions of our experience” (89). It follows that the discourses available at a given historical moment provide a means of comprehending and meaningfully influencing social, political, and economic conditions. He brings Stuart Hall’s notion that signifying practices are a site of contention into the province of social-epistemic rhetoric by noting that rhetoric was invented “because people wanted to make their positions prevail in the conflict of politics” (89).

Finally, he notes that the interests and desires of audiences are often conflicted, “so that a completely reliable prediction of an audience’s response is never possible” (90). In all of these cases, Berlin emphasizes the resources afforded and the limitations posed by the rhetorical situation as writers attempt to produce discourse that will meaningfully impact their social, political, and economic conditions.

This emphasis on the interpretation *and* production of texts is central to Berlin’s pedagogy, a point that is made explicit in a statement from the introduction to the chapter (“Into The Classroom”) that is the focus of Rickert’s critique: “The two courses [I am proposing] are intended to challenge the old disciplinary binaries that privilege consumption over production and the aesthetic over the rhetorical . . . My proposals for English studies thus encourage a professoriate as confident in teaching the ways of text production as it now is in dealing with certain forms of textual interpretation” (123). Thus, whereas Rickert’s critique gives the impression that Berlin’s pedagogy terminates in the analysis of ideological codes, on the presumption that students would take this knowledge and use it to solve real-world problems, Berlin saw this activity as part of a communicative process that culminated in the production of texts like those students had interpreted. Without this larger context, the critique of ideology would, from Berlin’s perspective in *Rhetorics*, have repeated the shortcomings of traditional English studies that his project set out to correct.

This wider context of textual production gave students’ interpretation of texts an immediate, practical purpose that set this activity apart from the aesthetic appreciation of texts that Berlin associated with literary criticism. Here the knowledge generated through the critique of discourses of television, film, and other media would enable students to produce texts like the ones they were critiquing. Whereas Berlin is ambiguous regarding the causal connection between

the critique of cultural codes and the course's "larger" purpose of social change, the reader of Berlin's description of his classroom activities can easily discern how his approach to textual interpretation would have fulfilled the more immediate goal of text production. An emphasis on production is evident in Berlin's consideration, first, of the ways that the ideologies dominating the historical moment in which texts are produced shape the expectations of their audiences and, second, how the texts deployed assumptions rooted in those ideologies to construct narratives that satisfied their audiences' expectations.

In their critiques of television sitcoms, for example, students first undertake an analysis of the values and expectations that a show's original audiences would have brought to their viewing of these shows. Comparing the sets, costumes, and characters of *Family Ties* with those of the 90s television sitcom *Roseanne*, students observe differences in the size of the families' kitchens, in the apparent cost of their appliances, in their home décor, and in the characters' "manners, dress, and general behavior" (129). Berlin emphasizes that these auditory and visual cues do not signify economic differences only but class-based valuations of what constitutes good taste. So too the narrative arcs of the two shows indicate differences in the class-standing of the two families, with college education being the expectation for the Keatons' daughter Mallory and out of reach for the Connors' daughter Becky. Students conclude that the former show's depiction of family life was a product of the 1980s—a period of economic stability for Americans with high-level incomes—while the latter reflected the growing economic disparities of the following decade. It follows that the differences in the shows' set designs and character depictions reflect different, if overlapping, ideological accounts of the "reality" of family life between the two decades, one stressing the comfort, stability, and taste of an upper-middle class lifestyle and the other acknowledging the harsher realities faced by families in the lower-middle

class. It follows that the two shows would have appealed to different audiences depending on their own socio-economic standing and the period of time in which they were viewing, factors that would have shaped these audiences' expectations for what constituted a realistic and satisfying portrait of family life. Thus Berlin notes that students in his classes prefer *Family Ties*' depiction of family life because it invites viewers to adopt subject positions that closely align with their own aspirations for themselves.

This consideration of expectations that viewers, depending on their ideological commitments, bring to the two shows forms the basis for students' examination of the ways that the shows deploy ideology-based assumptions to construct narrative arcs that will satisfy target audiences. It is these assumptions, or "cultural codes," that come into play in resolving narrative conflicts, which arise from disagreements about issues like marriage, education, and careers as well as conflicts in the workplace. In the case of *Family Ties*, these problems are usually resolved by conversations between family members. In this way, Berlin notes, "the program tended to present the upper-middle-class professional nuclear family as in itself the answer to all of life's problems" (132). In each of these cases, the narrative trajectory of the show appeals to its target audience because it rests on basic assumptions that they hold about the importance of the upper-middle-class family in the life of a society. It is evident how students might use this insight to complete an exercise that follows, in which they produce their own videotaped productions in the style of the television programs and films they have watched. Once students have identified the ideologically mediated expectations of television audiences and discovered the ways that shows deploy ideological codes to construct narratives of family life that are believable and compelling, they presumably will be able to deploy those strategies to construct similarly believable and compelling narratives. Indeed, Berlin notes that the point of students

videotaping their own productions is for them to “perceiv[e] television from the point of view of the producer” and thereby to appreciate the “immensely complex coding system involved in producing the . . . effects of the real found in a professional television event” (137). Here Berlin makes explicit that an awareness of cultural codes is not an end in itself but—in both his classroom and the world outside—part of a larger process that culminates in the production of texts.

“Burning Visions”: Students’ Career Ambitions as Premises for Critical Thinking

It is important to acknowledge that Berlin devotes only one paragraph to discussion of these videotaped productions in his chapter on pedagogy. As such, it is understandable that Rickert does not address this activity in his account of Berlin’s use of ideological critique in teaching. However, if the critique of ideology in which Berlin led students was, as I am suggesting, directed to the production of texts, then—contrary to Rickert’s account—it is unlikely that Berlin intended for this exercise to induce changes in students’ beliefs. Instead, I would argue that, in orienting students’ critique of the discourses of mass culture to the production of those same discourses, Berlin grounded this exercise in students’ commitment to free market capitalism, which would have then provided the impetus and means for students to engage in this line of inquiry.

In making this claim I am relying once again on Jeffrey M. Ringer’s argument that any act of inquiry is grounded in beliefs one takes for granted, which provide the premises from which he or she formulates questions and seeks answers to them. Ringer derives this insight in part from the Augustinian formulation, *faith precedes understanding*. He notes that, whereas the philosophical tradition had typically upheld reason and inquiry as path to knowledge, Augustine

claimed that one could only attain understanding of divine realities if she first possessed faith in the God of Christian revelation. For Ringer, this insight extends beyond the context of religious belief to any act of inquiry: “In order to arrive at an understanding of a text, artifact, or phenomenon, one first needs to hold a set of beliefs that will guide the inquiry” (354). Ringer demonstrates this process of inquiry at work in an academic context in his analysis of Amy Goodburn’s (2007) article, “It’s A Question of Faith: Discourses of Fundamentalism and Critical Pedagogy in the Writing Classroom.” Goodburn initiates her inquiry by outlining the tenets of critical pedagogy, which here entails an examination of the ways that social constructs like race, class, and gender influence students’ reading and writing practices. Acknowledging her commitment to these principles, Goodburn observes that critical pedagogy has not given sufficient attention to another form of difference: religion. She proceeds to explore the interaction of students’ religious identities with her attempts to implement critical pedagogy in the classroom (Ringer 355). Here, Goodburn’s commitment to a particular ideology—critical pedagogy—prompts her to observe an omission in the areas where this ideology has traditionally focused its attention, to extend the insights of critical pedagogy to this new context, and finally to revise common understandings of critical pedagogy itself. As Ringer observes, it is Goodburn’s commitment to critical pedagogy that enabled this line of inquiry by generating her interest in the question of religious difference and providing her method for exploring this question (Ringer 355).

If we understand Berlin’s critique of ideology as oriented to the production of texts, then this changes how we understand both the *inquiry* that students were pursuing through this activity and the set of beliefs from which, on their part, such an inquiry would have proceeded. In Rickert’s account, the aim of Berlin’s pedagogy is for students to discover that the ways

television shows resolve conflicts is false or imaginary—that is, dependent on ideological presuppositions. When students discover the operations of ideology in these narratives, those ideologies lose their hold on students' consciousness. The conflicts these narratives present as easily solvable then take on a renewed exigency that motivates students to address those conflicts in more socially and politically conscious ways. The guiding question of this inquiry might be phrased as, "What is false or imaginary in the ways that television shows resolve conflict?" As Rickert indicates, the commitments driving this inquiry are Berlin's own "valuations concerning what is true or real versus what is false or imaginary" (124). If students do not share these valuations, then they may resist participating in this line of inquiry, or at least arrive at different answers than Berlin intends. In the alternative reading of Berlin's pedagogy that I have offered, however, the discovery of how the discourses of mass culture construct the viewer's perception of reality is not an end in itself but enables students to create texts that produce the same or similar effects. The guiding question of *this* inquiry might be phrased as: "How are TV shows produced?" Rather than asking students to identify with Berlin, this question—as we have seen—puts students in the imaginary position of the show's *producers*: upper-middle class professionals.

Significantly, it is to this group that Berlin perceives students in his writing classes as belonging, or aspiring to belong. For instance, he notes that students prefer *Family Ties* to *Roseanne* because the characters Stephen and Elise are "professionals who approach work, parenting, and play in the successful manner that most beginning students at my institution find worthy of emulation" (*Rhetorics* 131). In this way, the program "offers a fulfillment of most of my students' dreams for themselves as college graduates and professionals" (131). Elsewhere, Berlin refers to his students' pursuit of "burning visions of the unique, independent, and self-

directed individual in the corporate fast lane” (“James” 777). If Berlin’s students aspire to successful corporate careers, then an inquiry that places them in the role of a popular television sitcom’s producers, rather than discouraging their commitment to corporate capitalism, enables them to participate in the inquiry on the basis of this commitment. By investigating the ways that television producers construct believable stories, students gain a deeper understanding of the work involved in creating a television show. In that sense, they delve further into the “reality” behind their visions of life in the corporate fast line.

It is understandable that Berlin would have sought to harness students’ commitment to corporate careerism and a professional middle class lifestyle if he wanted students to learn the procedures of text interpretation and production employed by this class, for he notes that an upper-middle class standing grants one privileged access to these methods: “[T]he triumph of the professional middle class in discourse studies has been to naturalize its own rhetorical practices, concealing ideology by denying the role of language in structuring experience” (*Rhetorics* 120). As a consequence, “both text interpretation and production are effaced, made invisible, their procedures readily accessible [only] to those of the right class, gender, and racial background” (*Rhetorics* 121). While Berlin does not specify *how* a professional middle class background grants one access to these procedures, one can infer that belonging to this class would grant one the opportunities of education and experience necessary to acquire knowledge of text interpretation and production. More to the point I am making, however, is Berlin’s implication that the professional middle class limits access to their rhetorical practices in order to “naturalize” an ideology to which they are committed by virtue of their socioeconomic positioning. If these rhetorical practices were the means by which the professional middle class advanced their ideological commitments, one may infer that commitment to that ideology serves

as this group's *impetus* for learning those rhetorical practices. Berlin may have then assumed that, like the professional middle class that they aspired to join, students' own commitments to achieving an upper-middle class lifestyle would provide the necessary impetus for them to inquire into the means of text production employed by this class.

Indeed, Berlin's descriptions of the ways that textual analysis plays out in his classroom suggests that the belief commitments students bring to his class are one of the driving forces behind their inquiries into text production. This is evident in his description of an activity in which students examine the ideological codes in a *Wall Street Journal* article about the working conditions of cowboys. Specifically, students identify the narratives that the article invokes in its depiction of the cowboy in order to uncover the ideological assumptions about appropriate social roles made by such narratives. On the one hand, this line of inquiry necessarily proceeds from Berlin's ideological commitments, insofar as he chooses the article students will analyze and the methods of analysis they will apply. Once the inquiry has begun, however, "considerable debate results, as students disagree about the narratives that ought to be invoked in interpreting the text, their relative worth as models for emulation, and the degree to which these narratives are conflicted" (*Rhetorics* 127). If we assume, with Ringer, that the direction a given line of inquiry takes is determined by the inquirer's commitments, then the fact that students disagree at these various levels of analysis would suggest that the inquiry is being pulled in different directions by the range of commitments that students bring to the classroom.

Again, this is not to deny the role that Berlin's own pedagogical choices make, for instance, in initiating this inquiry and limiting its scope, factors which may exclude certain students' voices from the conversation. The student who simply refused to participate in this line of analysis, for instance, might not fare well in Berlin's class. One should also take into account

that students themselves, whether through charisma or sheer assertiveness, may lead the analysis in directions that contradict or neglect consideration for their peers' commitments. Thus, I do not mean to suggest that Berlin created a pedagogical utopia in which learning was entirely self-directed. What is clear, however, is that Berlin took measures to ensure that students' commitments would be one of the driving forces behind their inquiries and influence the directions it would take. Indeed, Berlin notes that this "hermeneutic process is open-ended, leading in diverse and unpredictable directions in the classroom Students arrive at widely variant readings, and these become the center of discussion" (*Rhetoric* 127). Berlin's intention, then, was not to steer students away from their belief commitments but to develop pedagogy in dialogue with those commitments.

The "Utopian Moment" Passes: Can Critical Thinking Transform Society?

If inquiry in Berlin's classes is driven by students' own commitments, then it is difficult to argue—as Rickert does—that Berlin desires to induce political participation in students by changing those commitments. At the same time, one might inquire as to how this interpretation of Berlin's pedagogy should be reconciled with his suggestion that his pedagogy would students become agents of social and political change. If, as Berlin suggests, the discourses to which students are committed perpetuate unjust or anti-democratic social and economic arrangements (*Rhetorics* 121), then how would studying the production of those discourses enable them to change those arrangements to better reflect democratic values? In answer to this question, I would argue that, by the time of *Rhetorics*, Berlin had grown less confident that his pedagogy *would* result in students' participation in social or political change, so that the conflict between his grounding of ideological critique in students' commitments and his desire to promote change

is ultimately left unresolved.

The formula that Rickert attributes to the Berlin of *Rhetorics*, in which the knowledge students acquire through ideological critique becomes an impetus to social change by transforming students' ideological commitments, is readily apparent in Berlin's article "Poststructuralism, Cultural Studies, and the Composition." Yet, while the majority of this earlier article appears in revised form in *Rhetorics*, three revisions that Berlin made to the original manuscript suggest that he gradually became less confident in the model of direct causation that Rickert attributes to him. The first of these changes is the addition of a paragraph to the subsection entitled "Social-Epistemic Rhetoric" in both the original source and Chapter 5 of *Rhetorics*. Here Berlin makes the following qualifications to his claims for social-epistemic rhetoric:

Social-epistemic rhetoric . . . does not claim to be above ideology, a transcendent discourse that objectively adjudicates competing ideological claims . . . Significantly, it contains within it a utopian moment, a conception of the good democratic society for all of its members. At the same time, it is aware of its historical contingency, of its limitations and incompleteness, remaining open to change and revision (*Rhetorics* 88).

In a passage that was likely composed in response to criticism of his theories, Berlin here emphasizes that the insights a social-epistemic rhetoric yields into discourse are no "truer"—no less rooted in presuppositions—than other ideologically mediated accounts of social reality, such as those of film and television. This admission of social-epistemic rhetoric's historical contingency qualifies the connection Berlin makes elsewhere between social-epistemic pedagogy and social betterment. The statement is in stark contrast, for instance, to Berlin's earlier claim that "[S]ocial epistemic rhetoric views knowledge as an arena of ideological conflict: there are

no arguments from transcendent truth since all arguments arise in ideology. It thus inevitably supports economic, social, political and cultural democracy” (“Rhetoric and Ideology” 489). Far from an inevitability, the “good democratic society” for which Berlin hopes becomes, in *Rhetorics*, a “moment, a conception,” the materialization of which is rendered uncertain to the extent that it too is ideologically situated.

Rickert acknowledges this tendency toward self-reflexivity in Berlin’s thought but finds it to be inconsistent with his assumption that ideological critique provides methodologically viable insights into the nature of discourse, saying that, for Berlin and his peers, “The knowledge produced through cultural critique palliates its potentially corrosive self-reflexivity by acknowledging its partiality or fictionality, even while it continues to operate from a privileged metalinguistic position” (55). Yet further comparison between *Rhetorics* and the article on which it is based suggest that not only Berlin’s articulated theory but the way he applies that theory in the context of pedagogy is more aware of its limitations than Rickert acknowledges. Thus, it is no longer tenable by the time of Berlin’s final book to attribute to him the position that the insights students uncover through ideological critique would result in contributions to social and cultural democracy.

Consider the change made to the following passage, which appeared first in “Poststructuralism” and later in *Rhetorics*:

We thus guide students to locate in their experience the points at which they are now engaging in resistance and negotiation with the cultural codes they daily encounter. These are then used as avenues of departure for a dialogue. ~~It is our hope that students who can demystify the subtle devices of persuasion in these cultural codes will be motivated to begin the re-forming of subjectivities and social arrangements, a re-forming which is a~~

~~normal part of democratic political arrangements~~ (“Poststructuralism” 27, *Rhetorics* 124).

The sentence excised in the transition from “Poststructuralism” to *Rhetorics* articulates quite clearly how cultural critique might produce social change in a way that is consistent with Rickert’s account: Through critique, students come to a new understanding of discourse that *motivates* them to “re-form subjectivities and social arrangements.” Berlin has made clear at this point in both the article and book that it is ideology that constitutes subjectivity, so that a reconstituting of subjectivity would certainly seem to denote a change in the subject’s ideological commitments. Furthermore, Berlin’s use of the word “motivates” suggests a (potential) causal relationship between the understanding that students achieve through critique and social change as the outcome of students acquiring that understanding. That Berlin chose to exclude this sentence from *Rhetorics*, however, would seem to suggest that he was less confident at that point that the insights students gained through critique would produce such an outcome.

This conclusion seems to be supported by another revision Berlin made to the original text, in which Berlin describes in more detail the understanding that students discover through critique:

After all, despite the inevitable slippages that appear in the production and interpretation of codes, people do in fact communicate with each other daily to get all sorts of work done effectively. At the same time, even these "effective" exchanges can be seen to harbor contradictions that are concealed or ignored. These contradictions are important to discover for the reader and writer because they foreground the political unconscious of decision making, a level of unspoken assumptions that are often repressed in ordinary discourse. ~~It is here that the betrayals of democracy and the value of the individual are discovered despite the more obvious claims to the contrary.~~ (“Poststructuralism” 140,

Rhetorics 140)

The final sentence, which Berlin removed from the text of *Rhetorics*, seems to prod the reader toward a conclusion with politically charged implications: Discourse not only contains unspoken assumptions, but the content of those assumptions betrays—is disloyal to—particular values to which Berlin is committed, a betrayal that its authors refuse to acknowledge. Here it would seem reasonable to say, with Rickert, that Berlin expects students to agree with his valuations regarding the value of democracy and the “individual”: How else could they follow Berlin to this conclusion? Again, however, Berlin removed this sentence from the text of *Rhetorics*, a change that—like the previous one—suggests that, not only in articulating a social-epistemic theory of discourse but in applying that theory, the Berlin of *Rhetorics* observed the “limitations” and “incompleteness” of the insights that such a theory might yield into the “reality” of language. Such an awareness would likely have prevented him from assuming, according to his earlier logic in “Poststructuralism,” that students who engaged in critique of ideology would experience a change in their commitments that would motivate them to enact political change.

That Berlin’s confidence in his pedagogy as a vehicle of social change seemed to wane over time suggests that a pedagogy grounded in students’ commitments to consumerism and the free market was not conducive to such ends. This pedagogy was conducive to critical thinking, however, insofar as it enabled students to uncover the tacit ideological assumptions that television, film, and other texts deploy to construct believable accounts of reality—knowledge that they can use to question and revise the accounts of reality constructed by these and other discourses. In that sense, Berlin’s pedagogy demonstrates that it is possible for writing teachers to engage students in critical thinking on the basis of their own belief commitments. In the following chapter, I will offer further evidence for this claim by considering an assignment I

have used in my classes to ground critical thinking in students' commitments: the conversion narrative. Rather than seeking to convert students from or toward a particular position, this assignment allows critical thinking to emerge from students' inquiries into a time when they experienced a change of perspective or belief.

Chapter 3: The Conversion Narrative as a Vehicle of Critical Thinking

Thus far I have argued that writing teachers can facilitate critical thinking on the basis of students' beliefs by grounding students' inquiries in their own commitments. In the previous chapter, I showed that James Berlin led students to uncover the ideological assumptions deployed by the discourses of mass culture—television, film, etc.—in order to construct believable accounts of reality by orienting this activity to students' production of those same discourses. In this way, Berlin's students' commitment to mass culture enabled them to examine the discourses of mass culture from a distance; such cognitive space is often necessary when students are learning to question their understandings of the social and political realities endorsed by these discourses. Berlin's students thereby fulfilled, on the basis of their belief commitments, one of the two aspects of critical thinking I outlined in Chapter 1. At this point, a question remains as to whether or not students can apply such thinking to fulfill the second aspect of critical thinking as I have defined it, in which students not only question but also revise understandings that they have reached on the basis of belief.

In this chapter, I show how an assignment that I call the "conversion narrative," rather than seeking to convert students from or toward a particular position, allows both aspects of critical thinking to emerge from students' inquiries into their own experiences of conversion. In this assignment, students write about a time when they experienced a change of perspective or belief. Applying Kenneth Burke's principle of syllogistic form to blogger Idil Sukan's account of her conversion to feminism, I show how the author of a conversion narrative, in order to believably account for how she came to hold a certain value or belief, must reconstruct the sequence of events that led her to adopt that perspective, clearly delineating how each event impacted her developing views. Through this process, students examine the assumptions that

hold the various stages of Sukan's narrative together, identifying along the way the assumptions that must be in place for the narrative to follow through to its conclusion. I then show how applying this reading strategy to their own conversion narratives enabled two students in one of my FYC courses to establish greater logical coherence between the different stages of their narratives. In this way, the process of writing a conversion narrative encouraged each student to think critically about that narrative, examining it from the distance necessary to question *and* revise the account of the presented experience. As a necessary step in answering the question that guided their inquiries—How, and why, have my beliefs changed over time?—the assignment provided an incentive for critical thinking that was rooted in students' own commitments.

Practicing Critical Thinking through the Conversion Narrative

This assignment asks students to write about a time in their lives when they experienced a change of belief, an alteration in their thinking about what is true or real. As Faith Kurtyka has shown, compositionists have often framed such narratives in opposition to critical thinking. Narratives of personal transformation may simplify complex human experience, tend toward melodrama, and—in the case of religious narratives—offend readers whose beliefs differ from the author's (Kurtyka 100-101). Newkirk casts doubt on the value of the narrative of personal transformation as a first-year writing (FYW) assignment, which may limit students to writing about a narrow subset of their experiences and cause them to exaggerate the impact “of those experiences in their lives (Newkirk 264-5; Newkirk 22-3). Without discounting the potential problems of the genre, I would also emphasize the value of the conversion narrative as an assignment that grounds inquiry in the writer's own commitments. As Ringer argues, commitment to a system of belief, rather than bestowing certainty on the believer, may function

as a starting point for inquiry, drawing her to seek a greater understanding of what she believes. The guiding question of the conversion narrative—How, and why, have my beliefs changed over time?—functions as a vehicle for this search, inviting writers to investigate the experiences that helped to shape their commitments.

Through this process of investigation, writers of conversion narratives obtain the distance from their narratives necessary for them to question and revise those narratives. This occurs as a result of what Kenneth Burke terms *sylogistic form*. Describing the effect of form in literature, Burke writes “A work has form insofar as one part of it leads the reader to anticipate another part, to be gratified by the sequence” (*Counter-Statement* 124). It is possible to expand on Burke’s explanation by saying that every piece of information, or “premise,” a story introduces sets certain parameters regarding what *can* happen in the course of the narrative. In the movement from one premise to the next, the story raises questions in the reader’s mind about what, given those parameters, *will* happen. The story achieves believability to the extent that its answers to these questions thoroughly acknowledge the boundaries set by the premises. Within the genre of the conversion narrative, sylogistic form is not simply a matter of establishing verisimilitude but convincing readers that, placed in the author’s shoes, they might have followed a similar path. If readers are to believe in the sincerity of the author’s conversion, the information that she introduces regarding characters or plot must work collectively to convince readers that conversion was a plausible response to the circumstances of her experience (Griffin 153). This means that readers, according to their own understanding of human motivation, should be able to follow the complete sequence of premises to their conclusion in the author’s conversion. Of every premise, the reader may ask: Given these circumstances, how might a reasonable person respond? The premise that follows must answer this question in a way that

satisfies readers' expectations if they are to believe in the authenticity of the author's conversion. Thus, although the assignment allows students' inquiries to proceed from their own commitments, it does not thereby *endorse* those commitments. To the extent that the author must take into account readers' expectations as she develops her answer to the narrative's guiding question ("How, and why, have my beliefs changed over time?"), she is challenged to examine the assumptions that hold the narrative together—indeed, to question those assumptions.

Naturally, the expectations of readers for a narrative's syllogistic form vary based on their particular values, beliefs, and experiences. Yet, in most stories that can be classified as "conversion narratives," one finds evidence that the author has attempted to answer two questions in order to meet expectations for logical development. The first asks, "What conflict or problem acted as a catalyst for the writer's conversion?" This question reasonably assumes that a change of perspective does not occur spontaneously but in response to particular circumstances. Many writers meet this expectation through a description that paints the circumstances of their lives prior to conversion in a negative light (Kurtyka 110). For instance, the protagonist may experience a conflict in perspective that conversion resolves or a problem that conversion enables her to overcome. One of the conversion accounts that I ask students to read, celebrity photographer Idil Sukan's "How I Became a Feminist: My Origin Story and the Importance of Meltdowns," begins with an account of the author's relationships with two romantic partners: "Something pretty great happened a few years ago. I finally got out of two awful, endless back-to-back fuck-buddy relationships, stretched over three and a half years, which left me with roughly the same self-esteem as a stain on a toilet seat" (par. 1). Harsh adjectives ("awful," "endless," "fuck-buddy") and a scatological metaphor convey the feelings of humiliation and self-loathing that led her to seek change. In this way Sukan begins to delineate the motivation behind

her subsequent conversion, though it remains for her to explain why she converted specifically to feminism. Using Burke's terminology, this passage acts as a "premise" that causes readers to anticipate the shape that Sukan's narrative might take.

Of course, the introduction of conflict builds anticipation for its resolution. Thus the second question that a conversion narrative attempts to answer, in order to provide a logically compelling account of its author's experience asks, "How did converting resolve, either fully or partially, the problem or conflict that the author faced prior to conversion?" According to Griffin, this resolution often begins in a moment of insight that enables the writer to discern what is wrong in his or her circumstances while also illuminating a path forward (102). To that end, Sukan's narrative explains how applying a feminist lens to popular media gave her a framework for understanding what was unhealthy in the two aforementioned relationships. After ending those relationships, she takes a "self-absorbed, much-needed time out" in which she withdraws from television and social media, stops watching pornography (to which she became "addicted" in these relationships), and spends most of her time at home alone (par. 1). When she once again begins to watch the film and television shows she used to enjoy, she begins to see parallels between the entrenched sexism that pervade media representations of women and her own objectification by her ex-partners. The realization that she too had been treated as an object validates her decision to end those relationships, demonstrating the value of Sukan's newly acquired perspective and further clarifying her motive for conversion to that perspective.

These two questions do not account for all of the assumptions that readers must apply to follow the syllogistic progression of a conversion narrative. As an author introduces information, or "premises," into his or her narrative to answer these questions, further questions will arise—shaped in part by the particular values, beliefs, and experiences that the author can expect readers

to bring to the text. Such questions may reveal gaps in the narrative’s reasoning—places where movement from one premise to the next requires an unstated assumption that readers cannot reasonably attribute to the protagonist. At that point, the author may need to reconsider the reasoning she has applied to account for her beliefs. One may constructively critique Sukan’s narrative, for instance, on the grounds that it moves too quickly from the author’s “time out” from electronic media to her subsequent feminist awakening. Where, exactly, did Sukan acquire the feminist lens that she applies upon returning to these media? Is this conversion to a *new* perspective, as the narrative’s title implies, or “conversion . . . to a more exacting attitude toward the faith [she] had already believed in. . .”? (*Rhetoric of Religion* 104). Such questions challenge the author to flesh out the relationship among the narrative’s different stages and, in doing so, answer its guiding question: “How, and why, have my beliefs changed over time?” In this way, the questions—though critical—are rooted firmly in Sukan’s commitment to feminism, pushing her toward a deeper understanding of that commitment.

Responding to Student Narratives: Grounding Critical Feedback in Students’ Beliefs

Focusing on syllogistic form—specifically, the logical development of plot and character—enabled me to provide feedback on student drafts that was grounded in the authors’ commitments. While the details that I focus on are inevitably colored by commitments I bring to my readings of these narratives, focusing on the logical relationship among the narrative’s different stages enables me to ask questions that facilitate the process of inquiry already begun by the author. These questions, though grounded in students’ commitments, challenge students to recognize the unstated assumptions that their narratives deploy in order to account for their conversions and, consequently to revise their drafts to better account for expectations that readers

might have for the narratives' logical progression.

A narrative by one student, "Vishal," explored the reasons why the author—a Hindu from birth—converted from a vegetarian to a non-vegetarian diet ("Vishal" 2017). The first draft of the narrative framed this period of Vishal's life as painful and conflicted. He notes at the beginning of the narrative that he was raised by a Hindu family "that was strictly about religion and enforcing all the rules of the religion." He then describes the difficulty of growing up as a vegetarian among friends who ate meat, which caused him to feel out of place. After eating a piece of chicken for the first time in high school, he was "haunted" by the knowledge that he had "crossed the line with my religion"—a feeling that he notices especially when he prays at the local temple. At the same time, he is so drawn to the flavor of meat that he begins to consider incorporating it into his diet. He seeks advice from his mother and a priest, both of whom remind him of Hindu beliefs regarding eating meat while emphasizing that this is a decision he must make for himself. Within a week of the latter conversation he resolves to give up his vegetarian diet, a decision that he says greatly improved his life by opening up a range of new foods and restaurants to him and giving him new opportunities to socialize and make new friends.

Because this story seeks to explain how Vishal overcame the struggle to give up vegetarianism, this draft left with me questions about the nature of this struggle. In conversation with Vishal, I explained that the only information he provides about his motivation for eating a vegetarian diet in the early part of his life comes from his statement that his parents strictly enforced the rules of Hinduism. Consequently, it is difficult to pin down the reason for the conflict he feels in giving up this diet. For instance, is he afraid of displeasing his parents? Are there spiritual reasons behind this struggle? These questions also hover over the resolution of the story, which claims that the enjoyment Vishal experiences as a meat-eater resolved his initial

doubts about giving up vegetarianism. This statement remains silent on the spiritual dimension of Vishal's conflict mentioned earlier, leaving readers to wonder if those feelings were indeed put to rest. In response to these questions, Vishal at first expressed concern about going into the "complexities" of Hindu beliefs about eating meat. I explained that going into detail on this point might actually help the reader to understand why he struggled with this decision. As to the resolution of his doubts about eating meat, Vishal admitted that he still experiences these doubts—a fact not mentioned in the original draft, which states that "Now till this day, that thought [of reverting to vegetarianism] has never come back to me." I encouraged him to incorporate some discussion of his doubts about giving up vegetarianism into the draft so that the reader understood that the feelings of acceptance from friends and convenience did not negate the worries that he experienced earlier in the narrative.

While all of these questions challenged Vishal to more clearly articulate the reasons for his decision to give up a vegetarian diet, they do so on the basis of information that he has introduced into the story in order to explain that decision. In that sense, the questions were intended to deepen his understanding of his decision to eat meat rather than to cause him to doubt that decision. Two additions to that draft are noteworthy for their contributions to the purpose of explaining his motivation for giving up vegetarianism. Whereas the previous paper simply noted that Vishal's parents strictly enforced his vegetarian diet, Vishal's subsequent draft provided more context about his religious upbringing. Specifically, he noted that he was born into the Swaminarayan sect of Hinduism and that his grandfather was "surrounded by many highly motivate [sic] priests" (1). When he started to consider eating meat, he sought advice from his grandfather, who told him, "In the many years that I have been on this earth, I have never eaten meat. Which should go for you but in this case I have no say in what you do" (1).

The passage continues: “Once he had told me all his stories and lectured me about this for weeks, I knew exactly what I wanted to do. He had motivated me to do what was best in my situation. Later I stopped being a vegetarian and started to eat . . . meat” (2). This revised passage provides more context for understanding Vishal’s internal struggle with the decision that he was about to make than was evident in the first draft of the paper. By noting the name of the sect to which he belongs, that he was born into that sect, and that his grandfather had ties to its priests, he helps the reader to understand the depth of his roots in this religious tradition. Furthermore, his grandfather’s advice is far more discouraging regarding Vishal’s desire to eat meat than that offered by his mother or priest later in the narrative. Given his grandfather’s position within the Swaminarayan sect, we can better understand the conflict he must have experienced after receiving this advice and the “stories and lecture[s]” that followed. Finally, that these conversations took place over a period of weeks suggests careful deliberation on Vishal’s part that was not indicated in his previous draft.

By clarifying the connection between his guilt about eating meat and his religious affiliation, Vishal helps readers to understand the nature of this conflict. With this understanding, the question as to whether and how this conflict was resolved weighs all the more heavily on the reader’s mind. The second addition that Vishal made to the narrative begins to answer this question:

To get over [my doubts] I had gone to the same priest again to talk to him again on the situation and this time he had told me “God will always forgive, just keep that in mind”.

After that conversation, I had gone to my grandpa again and told him exactly what happened. He was very content with me because I had acted [on] something that was

extremely important to him. Now till this day, I am still a meat eater but have certain thoughts that still run into my mind when I go . . . to my temple [back home] (4).

With this addition, Vishal succeeds in establishing continuity between the first half of the narrative, in which he struggled with the decision to start eating meat, and the second half of the narrative, after he made that decision. Whereas the previous draft claimed that the enjoyment that eating meat brought Vishal resolved his initial doubts, here those doubts continue to bother him even after he has started to enjoy the benefits of a non-vegetarian diet. This is understandable given Vishal's emphasis on his deep roots in Swaminarayan Hinduism at the beginning of the story. Indeed, we learn from this draft that Vishal continues to worship at his home temple, even after giving up vegetarianism—a fact not mentioned in the original version. By returning to the subject of his Hindu identity, Vishal also provides a (partial) resolution of the conflict he feels about eating meat that acknowledges the *source* of that conflict. Readers saw this conflict emerge in the first part of the narrative when he sought his grandfather's advice and was discouraged from changing his diet. It makes sense, then, for his grandfather's approval of his decision to become the event that resolves this conflict—however qualified that approval may be. With this revision, Vishal maps out the reasoning behind his decision to give up vegetarianism in a way that readers can follow and understand.

Many students engage enthusiastically with this type of questioning because they perceive it as connected to their own interests and commitments—a point I'll return to. At other times, students may perceive challenges to their *reasoning* as challenges to their *commitments*. One student who seemed to resist to my questions about his first draft, "Alex," had written a narrative about a shift in his attitude about guns. In it, the author explained how his upbringing in a "very socially and politically progressive neighborhood" led him to view guns and gun owners

with suspicion (1). This attitude changed, however, when he enlisted in the military. The paper described an exhilarating experience during the weapons training portion of boot camp, which took him back to the times he played with toy guns as a child. This experience, he claimed, completely changed his perspective: from one suspicious of guns and their owners, he became a recreational gun user and an advocate for gun rights. In our conversation about the paper, I pointed out that the draft didn't seem to account for *how* Alex's experience in boot camp led to a change in his views about guns. As a reader, I could understand why the enjoyment he felt using a gun for the first time would cause a conflict in his negative attitude toward gun users. But I wanted to know how the experience actually *changed* that attitude.

When I asked why his experience in boot camp caused him to begin viewing guns in a more positive light, Alex seemed frustrated. He answered, "Because a gun is like a tool. A carpenter uses a screwdriver, a soldier uses a gun" ("Alex" in conversation 2016). Significantly, this answer reverts back to a general defense of Alex's beliefs, sidestepping the specific inquiry that he had initiated: How did I come to believe that good people own and use guns? Based on this response, I inferred that my line of questioning had caused Alex to feel that his beliefs about guns were at stake. Within the iterations of critical writing pedagogies that I surveyed in the Chapter 1, such moments can be experienced as a kind of deadlock. Discerning a contradiction between the commitments that guide the instructor's line of questioning and their own beliefs, students may withdraw from the conversation or become defensive. In order to avoid this outcome, I reminded Alex that the genre of the conversion narrative did not necessarily call for the author to persuade others of his beliefs but, rather, to show that he sincerely held those beliefs. I hoped that reminding Alex of the purpose of the assignment would clarify the motive behind my questioning, which was not to subject his beliefs to scrutiny—though I appeared to be

doing just that—but to help him articulate the reasons for those beliefs.

Two revisions to the final draft helped to clarify the connection between Alex’s attitudes about guns and his experience. The first describes the moment when Alex first used a gun in weapons training boot camp. While a version of this passage appeared in the previous draft, Alex’s revision explains the significance of this experience to his developing attitudes about guns:

I had never known anyone who had shot a gun, or been interested in them. But there I was shooting guns, next to 80 members of my boot camp division who had become like brothers to me over the rigorous training cycle which is boot camp.... I had always thought that guns were bad, but here I was having fun for the first time in months, shooting guns and trying to beat all of my friends’ qualification scores. (2)

Whereas the previous version of the paper had simply described Alex’s enjoyment of weapons training, the revision frames that experience as an occasion of camaraderie between the author and his fellow soldiers. In that sense, the new passage provides context for understanding Alex’s statement that guns have both good and bad uses: here, guns are used for the “good” purposes of friendly competition and the forming of relationships. Granted, this point will give some readers—myself included—pause: certainly, relationships can be formed without the use of dangerous weapons, which always pose a risk (however minimal) to people’s lives. Furthermore, if exercises like the ones Alex describes promote a sense of community among soldiers, their ultimate purpose is to train soldiers for combat. One may argue that the camaraderie that soldiers enjoy in these exercises comes at a steep price. However, I would point out that such objections are only possible because they proceed from a premise that both readers and Alex take for granted: namely, that human relationships are, indeed, good. Readers may not follow this

premise to the same conclusion as Alex—that guns have both good and bad uses—but they now have some basis for understanding how he arrived at this conclusion. In that sense, the passage succeeds in establishing a believable foundation for Alex’s conversion, one rooted in assumptions that the audience shares.

“Easy to Write and Easy to Think About”: Student Perspectives

The final drafts of Vishal’s and Alex’s conversion narratives were representative of the quality of work I received from most students who completed this assignment. In most cases, students were able, through a process of critique and revision, to construct narratives that progressed consistently according to the boundaries set by their stories’ premises. In this way, students demonstrated that changes in their ways of thinking and acting were necessary responses to the conditions of their experience. In order to better understand why the conversion narrative was successful in promoting critical thinking about students’ commitments, I interviewed several students about their experience writing conversion narratives. My questions focused on the strategies that students used to tackle those parts of the assignment that they felt to be most challenging. If students were wrestling with challenges to their commitments, I wanted to understand what enabled them to take on this task. Was it, as I had presumed, that the assignment enabled students to better understand what they believed?

Most of my interviewees reported that, once they had figured out *what* to write, the process of writing the essay was relatively quick and easy (Alex; Jason; Jocelyn; Lucy; Rose). Significantly, these students explained that the writing process was easy *because* they were writing about their own experiences. Some emphasized the recent or ongoing occurrence of events in their narratives, as in one student, Jocelyn’s, remark that the essay “was really easy to

write 'cause everything's just really fresh, it's still happening today.' This point was echoed by Jason, who said, "[The story] was really just like fresh in my mind," which made it "easy to write and easy to think about." Others noted that, in writing about their own experiences, they were writing about things they already knew or felt passionately about (Alex, Jason, Lucy). Lucy commented that "it was easier...to talk about, 'This is kinda how this happened,' and to have it happen in your life...versus like...writing about something you've read or trying to analyze data and stuff." It is apparent from their remarks that most students view the experiences recounted in their papers as events that took place in the past that were then re-presented in the form of a narrative (Stromberg 3). In that case, the assignment was easy to write, not because students were committed to the perspectives to which they converted but because those experiences were readily available in memory. With the hard work of acquiring knowledge of the subject already accomplished, all that remained was to translate that knowledge onto the page.

Of course, this understanding of the writing process relies heavily on the "referential ideology" or "correspondence theory" of meaning in language, in which words function to convey a reality existing apart from language (Stromberg 2; Berlin, *Rhetorics* 30-1). By removing the canon of invention from the writing process, such theories conceal the extent to which memory of an experience is itself always already mediated by belief, so that there is no "easy"—direct, transparent—way for words to convey experience. Rather, the events that we remember are always a reflection of our commitments. This is not to contradict students' reports of their writing processes but to attempt to understand their significance for pedagogies that recognize the mediated nature of human knowledge. If students' memories of the conversion experiences they write about are mediated by their belief commitments, then there is another way to interpret their sense that the assignment was "easy," namely, that writing conversion

narratives helped students to understand what they believed. Along these lines, Lucy commented that the first draft of her paper didn't have "much of a structure the first time I wrote it, 'cause I was so busy writing out my ideas...it was just a conversation tone and all the thoughts in my head." Returning to the paper, however, she realized "Oh, I actually have to describe why versus just being able to write it all out. And so kind of being able to explain like, why something changed me or how it impacted me...I was like, 'I have to actually write about that.'" On the one hand, Lucy's comments seem to indicate that she *was* drawing on memory in the first draft of her paper, which related the events themselves but not their impact on her conversion. At the same time, writing the paper caused her to move beyond a mere inventory of her experiences to articulate the significance that those experiences held for her conversion.

Other students commented similarly that the assignment caused them to "think" about experiences that they had previously taken for granted. Describing his writing process, Alex said, "I feel like there was a sort of surface level I was kind of hitting, and once I really took a sort of step back and was like, well I do love this...so why do I love it?" Reading Alex's comments in light of our earlier conversations about his paper, the "surface level" that he mentions would seem to refer to those parts of the paper that describe the events that helped to change his perspective without clearly explaining the impact of those events on his developing views. While he had already reflected on his experiences enough to pinpoint the moments that facilitated his conversion, revising the paper required Alex to pause and reflect ("took a step back") on the precise impact of those events on his development ("why do I love it?"). He described this process as "scoop[ing] deeper" to a "layer of thought" not reached in the first draft. Jessica also reported that her conversion was "never something that I paid attention to. I just thought it just happened. This [paper] made me just grab moments...that made me say, 'Yes, this changed me,

and this impacted me in this way.” Similarly, Rose explained that, “I don’t think you ever really completely reflect on what you’ve changed about yourself, just now you are who you are, and before you were who you were...I feel like [the paper] made me think about what had shifted.” Like Lucy, these students describe their initial understanding of the experiences they wrote about as unreflective when compared to the understanding that they achieved in the course of writing the paper. Speaking from their initial perspectives, they describe the experiences they wrote about as events that “just happened” or circumstances that simply “were.” Through the act of writing, however, they were able to explain the significance of these events for their developing views (“this impacted me in this way”). Their remarks seem to suggest that writing the paper challenged students to examine the reasoning behind their conversions in order to provide an account of that reasoning that readers might find compelling. Through this process, they arrived at a new understanding of the beliefs to which they converted.

Conclusion

Admittedly the approach to critical thinking outlined here requires a considerable reorientation from the goals that have traditionally defined critical writing pedagogy, which encourages resistance to ideology by examining the ways that dominant discourses limit and restrict our perceptions of what is good, true, or possible. In doing so, these pedagogies seek to weaken the grasp of purportedly harmful beliefs on students and, in some cases, to convert them to more progressive ways of thinking. I have argued that such approaches generate resistance from students by grounding inquiry in the belief commitments of instructors, a move that unnecessarily limits the lines of inquiry that students might pursue (see Chapter 1). Extending Jeffrey M. Ringer’s argument that inquiry must be grounded in belief, I suggest that adherents of

particular belief structures are more likely to question their perceptions when doing so helps them to understand the truths to which their beliefs lay claim—a process that often characterizes academic inquiry. Finally, I have offered the conversion narrative as an assignment that facilitates critical thinking on the basis of belief, enabling students to challenge and revise their understandings and conclusions they have reached on the basis of belief by pursuing lines of inquiry grounded in their own commitments. Assignments like this one may not produce the transformations in student consciousness to which critical pedagogy has traditionally aspired, but they do enable students to achieve a greater degree of distance from received knowledge than is possible when critical thinking is divorced from students' own belief commitments. In this way, students are able to engage in a thinking and writing task that they will be expected to perform as they continue in their college careers.

Chapter 4: Grounding Critical Thinking in Belief Through Genre Analysis

At the beginning of this project I introduced the view that critical thinking is rooted in commitment to belief. By belief, I refer to ideas that one accepts without question. Countering the allegation that unquestioned assent to belief impedes critical thinking, Jeffrey M. Ringer suggests that taking a set of beliefs for granted may prompt one to seek a deeper understanding of the reality underlying those beliefs. Thus Augustine, in taking for granted the existence of the divine, was led to ask questions about its precise nature. As inquiry, prompted by belief, yields new information about the object of belief, the believer may discover that her previous understanding of that object was incomplete or inaccurate. The believer may then be inclined to question and revise her previous understanding in light of new information—that is, to practice critical thinking.

In the previous two chapters I sought to demonstrate that this capacity for belief to prompt and motivate critical thinking has significant implications for writing pedagogy. Specifically, I argued that it is possible for pedagogy to encourage and facilitate critical thinking by grounding inquiry in students' beliefs. The social-epistemic pedagogy of James Berlin enables students to critique the discourses of mass culture by positioning critique as a necessary step in students' production of those same discourses. Within this pedagogy, students' aspirations to financial and career success enable them to critique the media that embody and promote those aspirations because, in learning to question and revise the accounts of social reality presented in such media, they gain competence in producing the kinds of texts that will help them to achieve their aspirations. The "conversion narrative" assignment that I piloted in my own classes, by inviting students to explore the history behind their beliefs, enables them to identify gaps in the logical development of their narratives and to revise their narratives to

establish greater logical coherence. Thus, both assignments call for students to examine received knowledge from a distance necessary to question and revise that knowledge.

Another assignment that I have used to encourage critical thinking based on students' beliefs is a Community Profile. Here, students continue the inquiry initiated in their conversation narratives, researching a genre of communication used by an organization or community committed to the belief *to which they converted*. For instance, a student who wrote a conversion narrative documenting her journey to vegetarianism might research a genre of communication employed by PETA. Following Amy Devitt, I use the term *genre* to designate a category of communication characterized by particular rules, conventions, and rhetorical strategies that enable interlocutors to achieve shared goals. Next, students collect three examples of a genre of communication produced by their chosen organization, such as PETA's magazine advertisements, and conduct an informal analysis of those examples in order to determine characteristic features—rules, conventions, and rhetorical strategies—of the genre that enables the organization to achieve its goals. Finally, students design and create an original document in the same genre as the examples that they collected and write a formal analysis of this document explaining how it deploys the rules, conventions, and rhetorical strategies of its genre in ways that contribute to the organization's goals.

In this chapter, I show how the central task of the community profile—analyzing a genre of communication used by a community that shares one's beliefs—grounds critical thinking in belief. As Devitt argues, genres are composed of rules and conventions that reflect and reinforce the beliefs of people who use those genres. Genre analysis seeks to explain *how* the rules and conventions that characterize a given genre function to produce interpretations of reality that reflect and reinforce users' beliefs. Genre analysis reveals that such interpretations derive their

authority (as “truthful” or “valid”) and even intelligibility from the beliefs in which they are grounded. Genre analysis thus constitutes a form of critical thinking: the examination of received knowledge—here, any communication that adheres to generic rules and conventions—from a distance necessary to question and revise that knowledge.

As this chapter will show, critical thinking in the form of genre analysis can be carried out on the basis of the same beliefs in which a particular genre is rooted. The community profile project, in particular, grounds genre analysis in students’ beliefs by requiring them to examine a genre of communication that reflects and reinforces those beliefs. In this context, genre analysis becomes another method of investigating the “reality” behind one’s beliefs: in this case, the ways that fellow “believers” speak, write, and/or interact to achieve shared goals. I demonstrate the success, and also the unpredictability, of the community profile as an assignment that encourages critical thinking on the basis of belief through an extended analysis of a project by a student I call “Alice.” The inspiration for Alice’s community profile came from the story, recounted in her conversion narrative, of the pressures that she faced as a young Filipina to fulfill the rigid and unrealistic standard of beauty embodied in Japanese and South Korean makeup advertising. Alice’s community profile succeeds as an example of critical thinking insofar as she identifies the rules and conventions that characterize the genre of South Korean makeup advertising, explains how these rules promote a particular ideal of physical beauty, and applies these rules to create her own original advertisement in the same genre. Through this process Alice stands at a distance from the genre necessary to question and revise the claims such advertising makes about its products and consumers. A cursory glance at Alice’s community profile suggests the impetus for this line of analysis to be a hard-earned skepticism regarding the claims of makeup advertisements, rooted in Alice’s rejection of the beauty standards promoted by such advertising.

However, a closer examination of the project in light of Alice's conversion narrative reveals her motivation for critically analyzing the South Korean makeup advertisement to be a lingering, possibly unconscious commitment to these standards. Here, critical thinking enables Alice to gain a better understanding of the South Korean ideal of beauty, not in order to reject this ideal—as “oppressive” or “artificial”—but to bring her own features into closer alignment with it. In this way, Alice's project demonstrates how a commitment to a particular set of beliefs can serve as an impetus for critical thinking, even when those beliefs have troubling ethical implications.

Understanding Genre Analysis as Critical Thinking

The analysis of genre entailed in the community profile assignment, like the critique of ideology in film and television or the analysis of plot and character development in conversion narratives, constitutes another form of critical thinking as defined in Chapter 1: the examination of received knowledge from a distance necessary to question and revise that knowledge. Just as movies and television shows answer questions about social and political reality in ways that reflect and reinforce the ideological commitments of viewers, or a conversion narrative accounts for changes in the writer's beliefs in ways that affirm the necessity of those changes, genres of communication give rise to conceptions of social reality that reflect the belief commitments of persons who communicate in those genres. As Devitt observes, what users of a genre believe and how they view the world can be inferred from the rules and conventions that they follow regarding “who can do and say certain things, when, and where” (59). Within the trial system genre, for instance, the requirement that lawyers address objections to the judge creates a hierarchical power relationship between the judge and lawyers (60). This particular construction of the relationship between judges and lawyers, in turn, reflects the Constitution's emphasis on

the separation of powers. Among the rules and conventions that users of genres employ to construct interpretations of reality consistent with their beliefs are also rhetorical strategies: the verbal methods used to persuade a genre's target audience. In his discussion of the trial genre, Richard Weaver notes that prosecutors often rely on emotional and imaginative appeals to "actualize" the scene of a crime, to make it "mean something to the emotional part of us . . . that part of us involved whenever we are deliberating about goodness or badness" (219). From Weaver's argument, it is possible to conclude that the dramatizations of crimes that sometimes characterize criminal trials reflect the legal community's belief that emotional sensitivity and imagination are needed to reach morally sound judgments.

Genre analysis constitutes "critical thinking" insofar as examination of the rules and conventions through which genres construct particular accounts of reality—particular received knowledge—opens those accounts to scrutiny and revision. For example, in defense of his argument for the necessity of emotional appeals, Weaver shares the description of an alleged murder from the trial of John Francis Knapp. It is obvious from this description that the prosecutor, Daniel Webster, has included details that either do not relate directly to the murder ("the first sound slumbers of the night held [the victim] in their strong embrace") or are invented ("the beams of the moon, resting on the gray locks of the [victim's] aged temple, show [Knapp] where to strike"), in order to increase sympathy for the alleged victim (qtd. in Weaver 219). While Weaver defends these rhetorical strategies on the grounds that "there is the probability, or even the likelihood, that the murder was committed in this fashion," attention to these details included to excite the jury's emotions could also prompt criticism of Webster's account (Weaver 219). Such criticism can even be carried on the basis of Weaver's own commitment to "deliberating about goodness and badness" via emotional appeal. On this basis, one might ask

whether or not the inclusion of details like those in Webster's speech do not impede such deliberations by creating a potentially misleading, if emotionally compelling, account of the alleged crime. In this way, analysis of the rhetorical strategies that users of a genre deploy to construct accounts of reality that reflect their beliefs may prompt readers—even readers committed to the same beliefs—to question those accounts.

Just as Berlin grounded critical thinking in students' commitment to consumer ideology by orienting students' critique of consumerist discourses to the production of those discourses, the community profile assignment grounds critical thinking in the beliefs that students wrote about in their conversion narratives by orienting genre analysis to text production in a genre of communication used by a community who shares these beliefs. By comparing multiple texts belonging to the same genre in preparation for creating their own, original text in that genre, students come to see how these texts further the community's goals by following particular rules and conventions. More specifically, they see that these texts do not serve simply to communicate information but present an interpretation of reality that reflects and reinforces the community's beliefs. The motivation for students' analysis of these texts lies in the fact that, in learning how to compose according to the rules and conventions established by communities that share their beliefs, students gain greater insight into their beliefs. Thus the assignment—at least, in concept—provides further evidence that writing pedagogy can encourage and facilitate critical thinking by grounding inquiry in students' beliefs.

Critical Thinking in a Genre Analysis of South Korean Makeup Advertising

In execution, as well, the Community Profile assignment was successful in facilitating students' critical analysis and use of an organization's communicative practices, though not

always for the reasons I had predicted. Some students requested modifications to the parameters of the assignment which revealed belief commitments that went even deeper than those I had assumed would motivate this particular exercise in critical thinking—the beliefs to which students had claimed adherence in their conversion narratives. The remainder of this chapter focuses on the modifications requested by a student named Alice and the surprising project that resulted. When viewed in light of her conversion narrative, Alice’s community profile provides substantial evidence that her own deeply held belief commitments enabled her to practice critical thinking. As I had anticipated, she was able to examine the communication practices of an organization that shared her commitments from a distance necessary to understand how these practices appeal to the target audience’s beliefs and to skillfully and creatively employ those practices in a document that furthered the organization’s goals. At the same time, the critical thinking that Alice practices in her community profile, when read against the backdrop of her conversion narrative, seems to be rooted in a set of commitments that the student herself regards as having caused significant harm in her life and claims to have, at least partly, rejected. In this way, Alice’s projects for the class, as well as her subsequent reflections on this work in a post-semester interview, raise important questions about the ethical status of pedagogies that seek to harness composition students’ prior belief commitments to encourage critical thinking.

Prior to beginning work on her community profile, Alice wrote a conversion narrative in which she described growing up as a young girl of mixed Chinese and Filipina descent in the Philippines, China, and the United States. More specifically, she wrote about her struggle to achieve the standard of beauty that her Chinese mother seemed to embody: a “slim body with pearly white, glowing skin” (“Bleach” 1). She described this standard being imposed on her at a young age by relatives as well as by Japanese and Korean makeup advertisements featuring thin,

fair-skinned models that she would see at shopping malls in the Philippines. She described using papaya soap, gifted to her at the age of seven by her aunt, to lighten her naturally “tanned” complexion (“Bleach” 1). For her graduation present in middle school she underwent “rebonding,” a permanent hair straightening treatment (“Bleach” 1). In high school, she became heavily involved in athletics and ate a highly restrictive diet of undressed salads without toppings. With the lighter complexion, straighter hair, and weight loss that resulted from these beauty regimens, she was street scouted in Asia by small companies that needed models, while relatives were shocked by her transformation. Alice observed that she was initially pleased with her transformation and the attention it brought her, but was also disturbed by the stark contrast from her former appearance: “I looked in the mirror and saw a stranger or, rather, someone who wasn’t real. I saw someone who was lying to herself, and for the rest of her life would be a liar. How would I explain this to any future partner? What would my kids look like? What if my children saw their mother and didn’t see themselves in her as I had?” (“Bleach” 3). She applied various methods to reverse the changes to her hair and skin tone but to no avail. At the same time, the regret she felt over modifying her appearance set her on the path to forgiving herself and finding a more self-accepting attitude. As a college freshman she now allows herself to enjoy eating and has gained back some of the weight she lost previously. She now tells herself that it is okay to be uncomfortable with her body, at the same time refusing to make any further changes to achieve the “ridiculous” standards that were previously imposed upon her. For the first time in her life, she wrote, she has begun to experience a “sincere confidence” (“Bleach” 3).

As I discussed at length in the previous chapter, the conversion narrative assignment called for Alice to write a story that observes the principle of syllogistic form, or logical development of plot and character. In doing so, Alice engaged in the kind of critical thinking that

I described in the previous chapter, paying careful attention to the assumptions that held together the different stages of her narrative in order to construct an account of her conversion that progressed according to readers' expectations for logical character development. I assumed that it was Alice's newfound commitment to body positivity that enabled her to recognize and question the underlying assumptions in early drafts of her narrative, for doing so enabled her to demonstrate that this position was well-founded, as well as helping to clarify how she came to hold this position. Yet, in addition to thinking critically about the narrative as an argument for her own beliefs, there was an additional layer of critical thinking here that more closely resembled the critique of dominant culture advocated by Berlin (see Chapter 2). Specifically, Alice's account of the regret she feels after making changes to her skin, hair, and weight significantly undermines the implicit message she received from her cultural context: that in achieving a particular standard of beauty, she would find satisfaction with her physical appearance. Alice's desire to recover aspects of her physical appearance from before this transformation stands in poignant contrast to this promise of satisfaction.

One might reasonably assume that Alice's critique of the beauty standards to which she once aspired, like the careful application of syllogistic reasoning in her conversion narrative, was rooted in her newfound commitment to body positivity. In the narrative, this commitment seemed to grow out of the cognitive dissonance she experienced upon realizing that meeting the rigid beauty standards imposed on her as a young girl did not bring her the satisfaction promised by the advertisements that influenced her to pursue those standards. Following the instructions for the subsequent community profile project, Alice should have then researched a community that shared her newfound commitments to body positivity, such as the Dove Campaign for Real Beauty, or Fenty Beauty. To my surprise, however, Alice asked for a modification to the

assignment: Would it be acceptable if, rather than researching a community who held the beliefs she acquired through conversion, she researched an organization committed to the beliefs she held *prior* to her conversion? Specifically, she wanted to research the South Korean makeup industry and the poster advertisements for South Korean makeup brands that she saw as a young girl in store windows in the Philippines and China. I did not hesitate to greenlight her proposal. Having read her passionate critique of these ads in her conversion narrative, I anticipated—wrongly, it turned out—that she might use her knowledge of the communicative practices these ads employed to promote unrealistic beauty standards in order to produce an ad that satirized or otherwise subverted those standards. In that case, Alice would not be critiquing knowledge rooted in beliefs that she held personally—according to her conversion narrative, she had long abandoned her commitment to look like the women in these advertisements. Nevertheless, such a project would enable Alice to practice critical thinking—to question and revise received knowledge—from the location of her commitment to body positivity.

To my surprise, the document that Alice created appeared—to me, at least—to be a mostly unironic take on the genre, in the same style and tone of the ads she collected and analyzed. The apparent sincerity of the ad suggests that a different set of beliefs than Alice’s commitment to body positivity provided the impetus for critical thinking in this project—a point I will return to. At this point, I would emphasize that, while the ad itself does not engage in any obvious critique of the beauty standards it endorses, its skillful use of the rules, conventions, and rhetorical strategies that characterize South Korean makeup advertising demonstrates precisely the kind of critical thinking that the community profile assignment was meant to encourage. When viewed alongside her analysis of three similar advertisements for a brand of makeup called *Etude*, the document suggests that, in analyzing several Korean makeup advertisements, Alice

had demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of the cultural beliefs held by the target audiences for these advertisements, as well as of the rules, conventions, and rhetorical strategies that these ads use to depict products and the lives of people who use those products in ways that appeal to the audience's cultural beliefs. In this way, she demonstrates awareness that the company's depictions of its products and customers derive their authority from beliefs in which the target audience is already invested. Thus, while Alice does not *question* or *revise* these depictions, she does stand at a distance from them necessary to call them *into* question. Indeed, it is Alice's distance from the advertisements—her understanding of the ways its rules, conventions, and rhetorical strategies appeal to readers—that enables her apply those rules and conventions to construct an ad that readers will find persuasive.

Alice achieves a critical distance from the claims made in makeup advertisements, first, through awareness of the ways that the ads' cartoon-like drawings and illustrations are designed to reach the target audience of young girls. One of the ads analyzed by Alice features a pastel pink background with the faint outline of a cityscape recalling a European metropolis. Other visuals include an anthropomorphic cartoon cat, adorned with a pink royal crown and admiring itself in a hand mirror, and the photograph of a decorative pyramid of pink macaroons. Alice observes that "The purpose of the visuals and visual goal of the brand is for the purpose of feeling like a princess. Therefore, I can conclude that this is aimed towards little girls and eating [sic] off of their desire to look better" ("Community" 1). Here, Alice acknowledges that the visuals featured in the ad do not present an unmediated account of, or innocent fantasy about, the lives of people who use Etude makeup but, using a visual language that is accessible and attractive to young girls, casually reflect and reinforce this audience's beliefs: namely, that a "princess" possesses qualities—femininity, beauty, wealth, status, European heritage—worthy of

admiration and envy. Thus Alice remarks that “the purpose of the [ad] is to positively push the sales of their makeup brand, and by extension the beauty standards of South Korea”

(“Community” 1). This line of analysis demonstrates critical thinking not only in its recognition that the scene the ad depicts is an interpretation designed to sell a product—i.e. “using Etude products will make you rich, beautiful, and adored”—but, more importantly, that this interpretation is rooted in a particular set of beliefs that readers take for granted: that to become rich, beautiful, and adored is both possible and desirable. It is readers’ prior investment in these beliefs—not the accuracy of the interpretation—that lends persuasive power to the brand’s depiction of its product.

In addition to illustrations that build associations between the Etude brand, normative femininity, and socioeconomic status, photographs of models who appear to embody South Korean beauty standards are ubiquitous in Etude’s advertisements. The second way that Alice achieves critical distance from the messages conveyed in makeup advertising is by explaining how the photographs of models in these ads reflect and reinforce South Korean beliefs about the specific qualities that one must possess in order to be considered beautiful. For instance, a second ad from Etude that Alex included with her project contains three rows of panels, each containing the photograph of a Korean pop (K-pop) star alongside text descriptions that extols the figure’s popularity, fame, and/or good looks. Of the photographs, Alice observes that they depict “some of the biggest stars in SK. This associates good feelings with the brand, as all of these models are known for ‘natural beauty’” (“Community” 2). Whereas images like that of the self-admiring cat reflect and reinforce the general value that South Korea places on physical beauty, femininity, etc. these images of pop stars, which “show audiences what they could look like with [Etude] products” (“Community” 2), reflect the audience’s beliefs about specific

qualities that constitute physical beauty, which is here “natural,” fair-skinned, smiling, youthful, slender, and famous. The text that accompanies these images provides further insight into the specifics of South Korean beauty standards. Commenting on an ad for foundation that promises consumers “perfect flawless skin,” Alice observes: “The words ‘flawless’ and ‘skin’ are huge because the purpose of most Asian foundations is to appear younger and doll-like” (“Community” 2). Implicit in Alice’s analysis is the recognition that the claims Etude makes for its products, whether in the form of photographs of models or written description, do not appeal to consumers by representing “beauty” as it truly is but by depicting or directly naming qualities that readers already regard as beautiful and then associating these qualities with the product.

In addition to generic conventions that reflect and reinforce South Korean beauty standards, Alice also makes note of subtle ways that the ads appeal to cost-minded consumers. While it is easy enough to infer from photographs of models, or phrases like “flawless skin,” the values and beliefs of the target audience, the importance of more subtle rules of organization, or the use of words with particular connotations, lie in the consumer’s commitment to getting the most for their money. One ad depicts a series of five horizontal panels touting sales on various Etude products, each panel containing images of the product and/or models accompanied by text. Alice observes “I believe [the ad] is organized by ‘newness’ and ‘season’ of sale. This is to appear trendy and to compete with other businesses” (“Community” 3). Even details as seemingly minor as the order in which panels appear are determined by taking the target audience’s beliefs into consideration. Here it is the value that consumers, within a capitalist economy, place on a product that is *new* that dictates which sales appear first. The ad also appeals to cost-minded consumers through the use of words with culturally specific connotations. For instance, Alice notes that “multi-solution”—a word that appears frequently in

these ads—is a “*god-term*” in the South Korean beauty industry. Many women have a multi-step skincare routine and so, often look for one product to do multiple things. Or sets that make it cheaper to continue having multiple sets” (“Community” 3). Here Alice invokes Kenneth Burke’s concept, which I introduced earlier in the semester, of words that readers regard as unquestionably good. As Ken Brodiah-Bahm explains, a god-term “isn’t good because we can think of an argument why it is good. Instead, it is good because it fits with at least one common worldview that our audience holds about what is good” (par. 1). In keeping with Burke’s concept, words like “multi-solution” appeal to readers less because they provide verifiable information about the product and more because they acknowledge the consumer’s a priori commitments to cost and efficiency.

It is apparent from her analysis of Etude’s advertising campaign that Alice achieved a sophisticated understanding, first, of the belief commitments that readers must hold to find this campaign persuasive and, second, of the rules, conventions, and rhetorical strategies that the genre of the makeup advertisement uses to appeal to readers with those commitments. This line of analysis demonstrates critical thinking—the willingness to question received knowledge—in its implicit acknowledgement that such ads do not convey unmediated truths about Etude products or their users but an interpretation of those products, the persuasiveness of which depends on the reader’s prior commitment to South Korean beauty standards. This acknowledgement places Alice at a distance from Etude’s depiction of its products that would enable her to question those depictions. Alice further demonstrated this type of critical thinking by applying her understanding of the target audience for South Korean makeup advertising to create her own, original ad for an imaginary brand of makeup called “Sweet Palette” (Fig. 1). Here, Alice applied the rules and conventions that she observed in Etude’s campaign in new and

inventive ways, providing further evidence of the sophistication of her understanding of the audience for this genre and, by extension, her ability to view this kind of advertising critically.

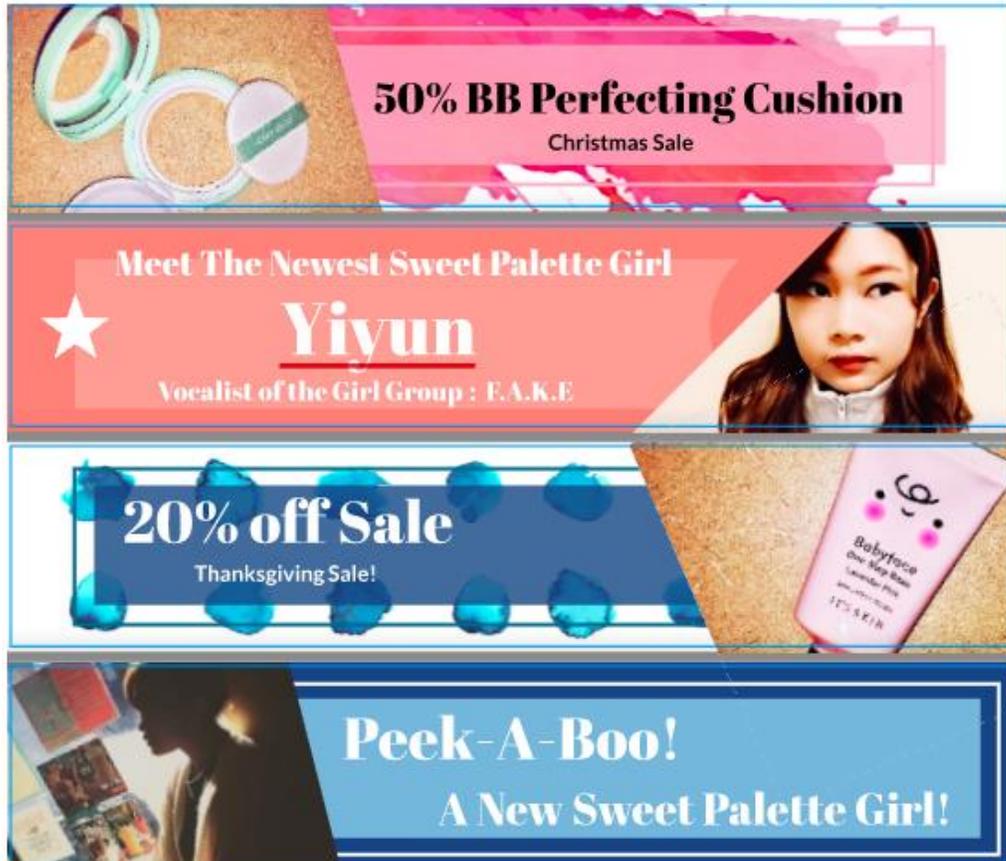


Figure 1: “Sweet Palette” Advertisement by Alice

Like the Etude campaign, Alice’s ad uses pastel colors like pink and blue and cartoon-like illustrations to reach a target audience of young girls, as well as to suggest that this brand’s products enhance the youthfulness of its users’ appearance. For instance, the product advertised in the third panel from the top, “Babyface,” features the drawing of a smiling infant’s face, signified by two rosy cheeks and, atop a bald head, a single strand of curly hair—recalling the style of illustrations one might find in a children’s picture-book. The ad also evokes youth and youthfulness through playful language: the fourth and final panel, featuring the photograph of a

model in darkened profile, reads “Peek-a-Boo! A New Sweet Palette Girl!” (“Community” 4). The visual and verbal strategies employed in both of these panels evoke the desire to look “younger and doll-like” that Alice previously attributed to the target audience for Etude’s ad campaign, but in slightly different ways than those ads had. Thus, the ad demonstrates that Alice had achieved an understanding of the audience for this genre that was sufficient not only for her to explain how other ads employed particular rules and conventions to reach this audience but to strategically employ those rules and conventions to reach the same audience herself. Her ability to discern which strategies her readers, by virtue of their commitment to a particular ideal of beauty, would find persuasive suggests that Alice does not take such advertising at face value but understands the extent to which its persuasive power depends on the context of belief in which it is viewed.

Pinpointing the Impetus for Critical Thinking in Alice’s Community Profile

That Alice created an ad in the same style as those she analyzed—the same ads that, according to her conversion narrative, had a damaging impact on her as a young girl—begs the question: what belief commitments, on Alice’s part, motivated critical thinking in this project? I assumed that it was a commitment to body positivity that, in her conversion narrative, served as the impetus for her critique of the beauty standards promoted in this type of advertising. Indeed, that narrative framed the rigid beauty standards imposed on her as a young Filipina as an obstacle to the hard-won acceptance of her natural physical appearance that she acquired later in life. Even taking into account Alice’s decision, in the community profile project, to analyze a genre of communication representing her *pre*-conversion beliefs, I assumed that it was Alice’s *post*-conversion self-acceptance and rejection of the beauty standards she once desired to meet

that was the impetus for this project. Certainly, the body positive attitude that Alice describes in her conversion narrative would have enabled Alice to stand at a critical distance from Etude's advertising campaign, identifying the ways the rules, conventions, and rhetorical strategies that these ads utilize to appeal to readers who, like her younger self, desire to embody an unrealistic standard of beauty.

Even in Alice's own "Sweet Palette" ad, one finds evidence of an attempt to critique the beauty standards to which Alice had previously been devoted, suggesting that this project was grounded in Alice's post-conversion commitment to body positivity. Most notably, the second panel of the ad features a photograph of Alice herself, accompanied by the text that reads: "Meet the Newest Sweet Palette Girl, Yiyun, Vocalist of the Girl Group F.A.K.E" ("Community" 4). That Alice places herself in the role of the pop star sponsor—a role that, in the ads she analyzed, is invariably occupied by fair-skinned Asian women—could be read as an attempt to undermine the rules and conventions of this genre and, by extension, the beliefs underlying those rules and conventions. It is also possible to interpret the name of the girl group (F.A.K.E.) as a commentary on the models usually featured in these ads, whose features are digitally and cosmetically altered to more fully embody the slender, light-skinned, youthful beauty ideal of South Korea. To the extent that the ad engages in a subtle critique of its own message, it may very well be that Alice's commitment to body positivity was the primary impetus for critical thinking in this project, which is evident in both in its awareness of the target audience's expectations and its apparent subversion of those expectations.

But this interpretation of the ad is complicated by the story Alice tells in her conversion narrative. There Alice explains in great detail the methods that she used in the past to alter her physical appearance to look more like the women in these advertisements, in particular the use of

hair bonding to permanently straighten her hair and papaya soap to lighten her skin tone. By Alice's own account, these methods yielded the desired results: she notes that the small companies who scouted her for modeling "were attracted to my height, my build, my new hair, and skin. Things I never owned naturally" ("Bleach" 2). When trying to understand the inspiration behind Alice's ad, it is difficult to look past the fact that the girl pictured was scouted by modeling agents for possessing precisely the features that the models in Etude's advertising campaign possess. In placing an image of *herself* in a South Korean-style makeup advertisement, is Alice's intention truly to critique the beauty standards embodied in these ads, or could it be that she is living out the fantasy of her youth—to *be*, or at least to look like, one of these models?

The name of the girl group, "F.A.K.E." also takes on a new meaning in light of Alice's assertion that she "never owned [these features] naturally," not as commentary on the unrealistic standard of beauty represented in these ads but as an expression of lingering feelings of inadequacy in light of these standards. Indeed, when I interviewed Alice about this project, she downplayed the choice to use a photograph of herself in the ad, saying: "I specifically kind of chose myself because I'm the only Asian person on my floor. I felt like it would be not in the style to use a non-Asian model If there were any other Asian girls in my dorm that I was really close friends with, believe me, it would have been her photo" (Personal interview). Alice's statement that she used an image of herself because only the image of an Asian model would be appropriate to the genre suggests that, in using this picture, she was not seeking to subvert genre conventions but was working well within their ideological confines. Furthermore, her comment that someone else—specifically, "any other Asian girl"—would have been better suited to appear in the ad suggests that she may still view herself as not living up to the ideal of beauty depicted in these ads.

It may be that Alice's decision to create a document in the style of South Korean makeup advertising was driven less by her newfound commitment to body positivity and more by a lingering commitment to the beauty standards represented in these ads. It may have been her own commitment to these standards that enabled her to read the genre critically—to explain how its rules and conventions appeal to readers with a desire to appear slender, light-skinned, doll-like, etc. Indeed, it is likely that Alice began studying these ads in order to better understand expectations for women in her cultural context long before her conversion to a more body-positive attitude, not out of a desire to question or critique those standards but in order to *achieve* them. In that case, Alice's project would provide further evidence—perhaps troubling evidence—for my claim that it is possible for students to practice critical thinking on the basis of their own strongly held beliefs. In her conversion narrative, Alice describes herself, from a young age, practicing an analysis of audience expectations similar to that seen in her community profile. Specifically, her attempts to alter her appearance to bring it into closer alignment with the South Korean ideal of beauty resembles her effort, in the community profile, to create an ad that would appeal to consumers of makeup brands like Etude. Just as Alice's "Sweet Palette" advertisement is informed by a painstaking analysis of the audience for such advertising, the performance of beauty that Alice describes in her conversion narrative is informed, at every step of the way, by a keen sense of the values and beliefs of an audience who is judging that performance. Perhaps it was these early, internalized pressures to modify her own appearance that informed her understanding of the culture applying these pressures and, consequently, enabled her to critically analyze the genre conventions of the South Korean makeup advertisement in preparation for creating such an ad herself.

The introduction of Alice's conversion narrative provides an early indication that her sophisticated understanding of the beauty standards embodied in South Korean makeup advertising derives from a desire she felt from an early age to meet these standards:

It was a stark contrast to look at my mother with her slim body and pearly white, glowing skin and then myself who was a burnt toast looking individual who was also nearly obese. The comparison started very young. I think I was seven when I first asked about papaya soap. Papaya soap is infamous in the Philippines for being a non painful solution to skin bleaching. My aunt bought me a pack of nine papaya soap bars that years. I had no self-confidence issues. I just knew I wanted to be the cover model of Japanese and Korean makeup commercials. You might think, well, why aren't you? What's stopping you? The reality is that they won't ever choose someone who looks dirty to them, someone like me. A jungle Asian, if you prefer the more direct quote. Someone who is tanned with Polynesian hair ("Bleach" 1).

Here we witness the young Alice cataloguing the specific criteria that define beauty within her cultural context much in the way she does in her community profile: A beautiful woman possesses a "slim body," "pearly white skin," Japanese or Korean features, while someone who is "burnt toast looking," "nearly obese," or "tanned with Polynesian hair" is the "opposite" of beautiful. Significantly, the young Alice receives this education in, or indoctrination into, the beauty standards that she will be expected to meet as a young woman from the words and actions of those around her: the aunt who buys her skin-bleaching soap, the company representatives who humiliate her. Thus, the impetus for Alice to develop an inventory of the beauty standards specific to her cultural context was in place long before she adopted a more critical stance with regard to these standards. Here, it is the pressure to *be* beautiful—a pressure that Alice quickly

internalizes—that motivates her to begin taking mental stock of the criteria that define beauty within her cultural context.

More important than Alice’s cataloguing of this information, however, is what she does with it. Specifically, Alice uses her knowledge of local beauty standards to modify her appearance to suit the preferences of those around her. The passage above continues:

I can still hear my cousins whispering and wondering if the sweater or skirt they bought me would fit. I can still feel the embarrassment burn in my cheeks when my cousin and I went to go try on our matching birthday outfits, only to find mine was too tight and hers fit perfectly. I won’t deny that I cried and locked myself in a bathroom until everyone left. No one bothered to find me either. In that bathroom I decided I hated this life. I hated scrambling for compliments on my appearance when there was none. I hated that I couldn’t just be as pretty as the rest of my family. I busted out that old papaya soap and scrubbed my skin raw (“Bleach” 1).

In the passage above, Alice does not passively receive this criticism from her cousins but interprets it as information about her *audience*, whose standard of beauty is (apparently) slimmer and fairer than Alice. By “busting out the papaya soap and scrub[bing] my skin raw,” she is using this knowledge of her audience to craft a performance that is tailored to meet their expectations—just as in her community profile project she deployed her knowledge of the rules and conventions that characterize South Korean makeup advertising to create an ad that would appeal to consumers. The former process, like the latter, implies critical thinking on Alice’s part: an awareness, first, that her cousin’s judgments are rooted in beliefs that go deeper than the judgments themselves and, second, that those judgments are consequently open to question and revision. If Alice’s cousin perceived that her skin had become lighter the next time she saw her,

then her commitment to a fair-skinned ideal of beauty would compel her to reevaluate her previous criticism of Alice. Once again, this process of critical thinking is carried out on the basis of Alice's commitment to the same beauty standards as her cousin, as indicated by her statement that she "hated that I couldn't just be as pretty as the rest of my family."

Alice further demonstrates critical thinking by gaging reactions to her performance—both her own reactions and those of others—to refine her understanding of her audience and their beliefs. To acquire a (still) lighter skin tone, she uses papaya soap until "my skin was peeling and dry, but it was white and I couldn't have been happier" ("Bleach" 2). When she drops down to 110 pounds—10 pounds underweight for her height—she begins "receiving compliments left and right" ("Bleach" 2). And, as stated previously, she wins the approval of small companies scouting for models, who "were attracted to my height, my build, my new hair, and skin" ("Bleach" 2). All of these comments signal that Alice had succeeded in her efforts to revise others' negative judgments about her physical appearance. As such, they affirm Alice's belief, passed on from her family members, that beauty consists of being thin and fair-skinned, with straight hair. At the same time, the positive reactions Alice receives in response to her beauty regimen adds to two important new criteria to her understanding of beauty, which requires the sacrifice of one's health—hence her skin was peeling and dry, and she was at least 10 pounds underweight—and one's natural appearance. Here, Alice continues to practice critical thinking in the sense that she stands at a distance from her audience's judgments about her appearance to further understand the unquestioned beliefs in which they are rooted. Indeed, it is this growing understanding of the beliefs that govern her cultural context and the measures she must take to live by them that eventually leads to her to reassess her commitment these beliefs, as she discovers that modifications to her appearance have created conflict with other—perhaps more

strongly felt—commitments: to honesty (“I saw someone who was lying to herself”) and to a particular vision of motherhood (“What if my children saw their mother and didn’t see themselves in her as I had?”) (“Bleach” 3.)

The similarities between the critical thinking that Alice learned to practice in response to criticism of her appearance and that which she demonstrates in her community profile suggest that this latter project was also rooted in her desire to achieve the South Korean ideal of feminine beauty. By standing at a distance from criticisms of her appearance, Alice was able to acquire knowledge about the beliefs in which these criticisms were rooted and, by adopting a strict beauty regimen informed by this knowledge, succeeded in revising previous conceptions about her. In this way critical thinking served the larger—albeit problematical—purpose of achieving the beauty standards instilled in Alice from a young age. While the critical thinking that Alice carried out in her analysis of Etude’s advertising campaign served the more immediate purpose of preparing Alice to create an ad in that genre, I would argue that this kind of critique would also provide her with the knowledge needed to meet the particular ideal of beauty in which she was formerly—and, to some extent, may still be—invested.

For instance, in her analysis of the first ad from Etude, featuring the feline narcissist and macaroon pyramid, Alice identifies an array of qualities—wealth, leisure, social status—that bear no obvious or necessary relation to physical beauty but which are nonetheless associated with beauty in South Korea (and in most other nations with capitalist economies). Presumably, a young woman would need, in addition to attaining a light-skinned complexion and a particular height-weight ratio, to cultivate these qualities in order to be considered beautiful in the eyes of her peers. Of course, Alice’s analysis of the particular physical features possessed by South Korean models, as represented in the second Etude ad, would also aid in her effort to understand

and so attain the South Korean ideal of beauty. Even the knowledge Alice demonstrates of the organizational scheme of the ads would enable her to locate the cosmetic products needed to attain the features she desired at a reasonable price. Indeed, it seems likely that Alice began practicing the kind of reading she deploys in her community profile project in her youth, as part of her ongoing effort to attain to the standard of beauty represented in these ads. In that case, it would have been her commitment to achieving these standards that motivated her to approach this type of advertising critically, providing further evidence for my claim that students are capable of carrying out critical thinking on the basis of their own strongly held beliefs.

Yet, if the critical thinking Alice practices through genre analysis is grounded in her commitment to the beauty standards with which she was raised, then how can one understand her previous claims to have rejected these standards in favor of a more body positive attitude? As Faith Kurtyka observes, conversion is “not a 180-degree turnaround but a gradual accumulation of positive emotion and dissipation of negative emotion” (110). Studying the conversion narratives told by women joining a new sorority, Kurtyka found that, as the authors progressed through the common “stages” of conversion identified by Charles Griffin (see Chapter 3), they did not simply experience reversals from negative to positive states. Rather, as the women gradually found their places in their respective sororities, positive emotions increased and negative emotions decreased, while both types of emotions remained present across stages. Thus, it is possible to infer that the process of conversion is never complete: following an apparent conversion, positive feelings will still linger toward one’s prior commitments and one will develop negative feelings, however minimal, toward one’s new commitments. Furthermore, the increase in positive emotions and decline in negative emotions that characterizes conversion is not always steady: for instance, Kurtyka notes that the “transitional” stage of women’s

narratives, when they moved into the role of new sorority members, were characterized primarily by positive emotions but also saw a near-doubling of negative emotions. These negative emotions sometimes caused women to reassess their place in the community before finally deciding to stay. Thus the conversion process, in addition to never being complete, is also unpredictable; it is always possible that, in the process of conversion, the positive feelings which linger toward one's prior beliefs, however minimal, will increase—and, conversely, negative feelings toward one's new beliefs will increase—throwing the convert's progress toward a new set of beliefs off course.

Reading Alice's conversion narrative in light of Kurtyka's findings, I suggest that the experience described in Alice's conversion narrative was not a conversion from one belief to another but, rather, an accumulation of negative emotion that led Alice to reassess her commitment to South Korean beauty standards. While this process could have resulted in Alice abandoning her desire to look like a model for a new perspective like body positivity, it is also possible that Alice will undergo another variant of conversion that Kenneth Burke describes as a "change to a more exacting attitude towards the faith [one] had already believed in" (*Rhetoric* 104). That Alice's conversion process from body insecurity to positivity was not, in Kurtyka's words, a "180-degree turnaround," is evident from the parallels between the critical thinking in which Alice engaged as a young girl in order to attain the rigid ideal of beauty enforced in her familial and cultural context and the methodical analysis of makeup advertising she performs in her community profile. Given that both these early and later instances of critical thinking serve the apparent purpose of attaining the beauty ideal represented in makeup ads, it is likely that Alice's positive feelings toward the beauty standards represented in these ads persists at some level in spite of her negative assessment of them. In addition, the self-image that Alice describes

at the close of her conversion narrative hardly represents a 180-degree turnaround from her desire to look like a South Korean model. For instance, she notes that she “began embracing who I am now, and started telling myself that it was okay to be uncomfortable with my body. I walked myself through forgiveness and told myself that discomfort is natural” (3). Here Alice acknowledges that her desire to look like these models persists, qualifying her declaration that “I’m done changing my body to fit the ridiculous standards I previously pressed upon myself” and suggesting a potential revival of Alice’s commitment to these standards. The possibility of Alice’s continued commitment to these standards, following her reassessment of them in the conversion narrative, might account for her ability to practice critical thinking on the basis of these standards in her community profile.

The ambiguities that characterize Alice’s conversion process suggest that the beliefs in which the conversion narrative assignment grounds critical thinking may not be the beliefs students claim conversion *to* but rather, those they claim to have renounced. Instructive in this regard is Kurtyka’s example of the sorority sister who experiences a twofold increase in negative emotions during the transition into her sorority, even as this experience is dominated by positive emotions, leading her to initially reassess her decision to join the sorority. Like this sorority member, the student who claims conversion to a new perspective may simply be in the process of reassessing long-held beliefs to which she will return, with a more “exacting attitude,” at a later date. Given the difficulty of determining which beliefs grounded critical thinking in Alice’s two projects, I am inclined to question the requirement of the community profile assignment that students must research a group or organization that represents the beliefs they claim to have adopted in their conversion narrative. It might be more conducive to critical thinking to allow students the freedom to study a group or organization that represents the beliefs they held *either*

prior to *or* following conversion, both of which may possess the potential to motivate critical thinking.

Audience Awareness as Self-Awareness

Even though the critical thinking that Alice practices in this project leads to her beliefs being affirmed rather than refused, such thinking can still be called “critical” because it leads to greater self-awareness on the writer’s part. Indeed, it is possible to read Alice’s analysis of the audience for these advertisements as a description of Alice herself. For instance, Alice’s assertion that the first *Etude* ads use colors, imagery, and themes that appeal to young girls, recalls the introductory paragraph of her conversion narrative, in which she describes herself, at seven years of age, being drawn to these advertisements: “I had no actual notion of self-confidence issues. I just knew I wanted to be the cover model of Japanese and Korean makeup commercials” (“Bleach” 1). The obvious parallels between the impressionable young readers of these ads that Alice mentions in her community profile project and Alice’s recollection of her own impressionability at that age suggest that, in the latter project, she is not simply standing at a distance from these advertisements or their messaging; she is standing at a distance from her younger self, identifying the strongly held values and beliefs that made—and continue to make—her susceptible to this kind of advertising. In our interview, Alice described the sense of nostalgia that she still feels for these advertisements, of which she was reminded when working on this project:

It was a nostalgia like, “Oh that was really silly,” but it brings about positive feelings rather than like, remembering ‘I hated myself’ or remembering things like that. I remember waking up 6 in the morning and padding all my foundation before school and

things like that, you know, silly things that . . . you wouldn't necessarily do now, and you're like "Oh why did I do that." So it was weird because I have a negative opinion of these things but it was also remembering things that like, Ah... that's kind of cute, I didn't know what I was doing (Personal interview).

Here, the positive feelings that linger toward these advertisements are supplemented by Alice's awareness of her consequent vulnerability to the appeals present in this type of advertising and even of her feelings of insecurity as a woman and Filipina ("I hated myself") that have resulted from this commitment. In this ways, Alice demonstrates that commitment to belief need not be naïve: one can possess awareness of the negative implications of one's beliefs and still find them to be worthy of commitment.

Of course, the type of critical thinking represented in Alice's project, in which questioning received knowledge reaffirms her strongly held beliefs, can—and sometimes is—carried out complacently or lazily. Suppose Alice had simply acknowledged that the ads appeal to readers because consumers possess a desire to be beautiful, or because they idolize music stars, and left her analysis at that. Both of these statements are true, but neither gives the reader any grounds for questioning the appeals used in these ads or the message generated through these appeals. What sets Alice's project apart is that she describes the audience for the ads with enough specificity that readers come to understand that such ads are only persuasive when viewed in a particular historical, cultural, and socioeconomic context. The form and content of the ads can, in turn, be altered and manipulated to more effectively appeal to readers in these contexts. I would suggest that Alice offered, along these lines, a truly *critical* reading of South Korean makeup advertising precisely because she was preparing to produce her own

advertisement in that genre, a task that depends on having specific knowledge of the audience one needs persuade.

Alice demonstrates specific knowledge of her audience, for instance, by drawing attention to the fact that all of these ads—which appear in a variety of countries and are seen by women of diverse skin colors—depict fair-skinned South Korean women, and that many of the products are used to make one’s skin appear lighter. As Alice explained to me in our post-semester interview, this genre convention reflects and reinforces longstanding racial hierarchies in Asia:

It seemed that like dark-skinned Asians or Asians that look more Polynesian are looked down upon simply because it’s the way ancient structures in Asia worked. So if you were light skinned it meant that you didn’t have to go out into the fields and, like, harvest and things like that. You could sit up in your space and not do things. But of course the majority of the Philippines is like super dark-skinned. And so a lot of that translates into this sort of underlying racism toward Southeast Asians because they’re dark-skinned and it’s got to the point where the Philippines has seen that and turned it into like an insecurity (Personal interview).

Here, Alice goes beyond generalizations that could be applied to any audience, clarifying that the appeal of these ads depends on cultural biases that carry specific meanings for Southeast Asian readers. Alice then uses this information to create an ad that, like those she analyzed, feeds on this audience’s insecurities by depicting fair skin as the norm—for instance, by featuring a fair-skinned pop star with a Chinese (Northeast Asian) name (“Yiyun”) as the brand’s model, as well as a logo for a product called “Babyface” that depicts a blushing infant with bright pink skin. The resulting document has the look and feel of the professional advertisements Alice collected

because it reflects the same sophisticated understanding of its audience's cultural context. Of course, this understanding of her target audience's cultural context enabled Alice to design an effective advertisement precisely because it placed Alice at a distance from the strategies used and messages conveyed in this type advertising necessary to question and revise these strategies and messages. If the persuasive power of South Korean makeup advertising is contingent on the culturally specific beliefs of those who view them, then such ads can be revised or completely redesigned to more effectively reach consumers. In this way, Alice's project suggests that students who analyze genres representing their beliefs, in preparation for composing within those genres themselves, may be able to conduct more specific, localized analyses of their target audiences. In turn, these students may acquire a more critical stance toward received knowledge.

Conclusion

Whereas the conversion narrative assignment that I discussed in the previous chapter grounded critical thinking in students' belief commitments by inviting them to reflect on how their current beliefs came into being, the Community Profile assignment encouraged critical thinking by asking students to examine a genre of communication used by a community who shares their current beliefs. Like the conversion narrative, then, this project grounded critical thinking in students' beliefs by providing an opportunity to learn more about those beliefs. I had expected that the beliefs that would enable critical thinking in Alice's community profile project would be those to which she laid claim in her conversion narrative—namely, a commitment to accepting her natural physical appearance, in spite of the enormous pressures she has faced as a Filipina to conform to an unrealistic standard of beauty. However, Alice's decision to study an advertising campaign by Etude, a South Korean makeup brand that promotes the standard of

beauty Alice was pressured to attain, enabled a different set of commitments to motivate critical thinking: a lingering commitment to the ideal of beauty represented in these ads.

In her analysis of Etude's ad campaign, Alice demonstrates critical thinking by explaining how the rules, conventions, and rhetorical strategies that characterize South Korean makeup advertising reflect and reinforce consumers' investment in a slender, fair-skinned, youthful ideal of beauty. This line of analysis exemplifies critical thinking in its awareness that such ads do not persuade readers simply by depicting the company's products in appealing ways but in ways that appeal *to* readers invested in a particular set of beliefs. While such a line of analysis suggests a skeptical stance toward makeup advertising, Alice's conversion narrative tells a different story. There Alice described herself analyzing criticisms of her appearance by friends and family members to understand the unquestioned beliefs in which those criticisms were rooted and using this knowledge to make modifications to her appearance that would please her own "target audience." The usefulness of both of these lines of analysis in helping Alice to understand and thus achieve the standard of beauty represented in South Korean makeup advertising suggests that the critical thinking that Alice carried out in her community profile was, like the critical thinking she practiced as a child, rooted in her belief in the validity of, and possibility of attaining, the standard of beauty imposed on her from youth. In this way, Alice's community profile project provides further evidence for my claim that writing pedagogy can encourage and facilitate critical thinking on the basis of the beliefs that students bring to writing. For some readers, this case study raises an important question: Should writing pedagogy encourage students to pursue projects on the basis of commitments that, by their own admission, have played a detrimental role in their lives? I address this question in the following closing chapter.

Chapter 5: Balancing Academic and Political Inquiry (Conclusion)

In this project, I have argued that writing pedagogy can encourage and facilitate critical thinking by enabling students to pursue inquiries grounded in, and guided by, their own strongly held beliefs. In the three pedagogical examples I have presented in support of this claim, students were able, on the basis of their own beliefs, to stand at a distance necessary from received knowledge in order to question and/or revise that knowledge. In James Berlin's social-epistemic pedagogy, which I examined in Chapter 2, students learn how to identify the underlying assumptions that film and television deploy in order to create stories that audiences will find compelling, a process that culminates in students using this knowledge to create their own videotaped productions. With a critique of ideology thus oriented to the production of media that represent students' own values and beliefs (such as consumerism), those beliefs are able to serve as an impetus for critical thinking. In my "conversion narrative" assignment, which I outlined in Chapter 3, students recount an experience that led to a significant change in their attitudes, values, or beliefs. Working through multiple drafts of their writing, students identify the unstated assumptions on which the logical cohesion of their narratives rest and, based on their findings, revise their narratives to construct a believable and compelling account of conversion. Through critical thinking as revision, students gain greater insight into their beliefs and the history behind them. Finally, in Chapter 4, I outlined an assignment called a community profile, in which students analyze a genre of communication used within a community who shares their beliefs, in preparation for creating their own, original document in that genre. Students explain how the rules, conventions, and rhetorical strategies that characterize their chosen genre reflect and reinforce the beliefs of the community who uses that genre. Here, belief is grounded in critical

thinking insofar as genre analysis provided students with new insight into their beliefs—specifically, into the ways that fellow believers communicate to achieve shared goals.

I initially justified my proposal to argue that writing pedagogy can found critical thinking in belief on the grounds that questioning and revising received knowledge is part and parcel of the process of academic inquiry in which composition seeks to initiate students. Significantly, this line of reasoning leaves unquestioned the assumption that the initiation of students into academic inquiry is a worthy goal for composition. I have until now sidestepped this question for two reasons: First, I hoped that many or most of my readers, as past, current, or future teachers of composition, would share this assumption (although they might challenge my understanding of what constitutes “academic inquiry”). Second, and more importantly, I believe that this question lies outside the immediate scope of my dissertation, which concerns *how* writing teachers might encourage and facilitate critical thinking on the basis of student beliefs. To some extent, however, this question can be said to hover over all of the preceding chapters, insofar as my method of introducing cases which illustrate that writing pedagogy *can* ground critical thinking in belief rest on the assumption that composition *should* teach critical thinking and the larger process of academic inquiry of which it is a part.

This question of whether the teaching of academic inquiry is a reasonable goal for composition, or when this goal *ceases* to be reasonable, hangs especially over Chapter 4. There I explained how I approved of a student named Alice’s proposal to analyze the genre of the South Korean makeup advertisement on the assumption that an inquiry rooted in her own commitments would enable Alice to practice critical thinking. As an example of critical thinking—and, by extension, of academic inquiry—the resulting project was a success: In explaining how the rules, conventions, and rhetorical strategies that characterize South Korean makeup advertising

reinforce a particular ideal of physical beauty, Alice stands at a distance from the genre necessary to question and revise the claims that such advertising makes about its products and consumers. However, the process of critical thinking that Alice carries out in this project bears noticeable similarities to thinking patterns that, according to her conversion narrative, Alice developed as a young girl, when criticism from friends and family would prompt her similarly meticulous analysis of cultural messaging regarding physical beauty. In this respect, I had to wonder whether the line of inquiry Alice chose to pursue may have been rooted, after all, in the rigid beauty standards represented in these ads—standards that, according to Alice’s conversion narrative, took a psychological and physical toll on her as a young Filipina. Alice’s story suggests that academic inquiry can be carried out on the basis of beliefs that are unhealthy or destructive, thereby affirming and strengthening those beliefs. In that sense, one may ask whether the teaching of academic inquiry is, in itself, a reasonable goal for composition.

I would suggest that a writing pedagogy that prioritizes the teaching of academic inquiry has the potential to become enmeshed in harmful belief structures for two reasons. First, as I explained in Chapter 1, inquiry always takes place on the basis of unquestioned beliefs, which it tends to reinforce. Typically, one is compelled to ask questions in the hope of attaining a greater understanding of the reality underlying one’s beliefs—the reality those beliefs purport to describe or explain. For instance, a key assumption of Linda Flower and John Hayes’ cognitive theory of the writing process is that writing, like a great deal of human activity, is goal-directed. On the basis of their belief that writing is goal-directed, Flowers and Hayes seek to understand the “heuristics” or problem-solving strategies that writers use to achieve their goals. The ideas that one takes for granted can thus provide an impetus for asking questions, as well as guiding and directing thinkers as they attempt to answer these questions. With these unquestioned ideas

or statements—beliefs—as its guide, inquiry tends toward conclusions that affirm and strengthen those beliefs. As one might expect, a question Flower and Hayes’ address in their study is the effectiveness of the heuristics that writers use: Do such heuristics guarantee that writers will achieve their goals? Their answer to this question is “no”: the heuristics writers use are only effective when writers actively reflect on how and when they should use them. “Good writers,” Flower explains, “not only have a large repertory of powerful strategies, but they have sufficient self-awareness of their own process to draw on these alternative techniques as they need them” (3). Of course, this answer reflects and reinforces the basic tenet that writing is, in the first place, goal-oriented.

The second reason that a pedagogy that prioritizes the teaching of academic inquiry is susceptible to entanglement in harmful belief structures is that the beliefs that guide inquiry always have implications for social, political, and economic arrangements—even, or especially, when theorists avoid taking an explicit stance with regard to these issues. James Berlin cites Hayes and Flowers’ cognitive model of the writing process as an example of a theory, which, in its refusal to consider the implications of its basic tenets for social, political, and economic arrangements, makes itself vulnerable to co-optation by certain social, political, and economic interests. Specifically, he argues that, by taking the goal-driven activities of experts in fields like business and science as models for the writing process, Flowers and Hayes construct a model of writing that can be appropriated to serve the “the modern college’s commitment to preparing students for the world of corporate capitalism” (482). Berlin elaborates on this point, saying that the “pursuit of self-evident and unquestioned goals in the composing process parallels the pursuit of self-evident and unquestioned goals in the corporate marketplace. . . . The purpose of writing is to create a commodified text . . . that belongs to the individual and has exchange value . . . just

as the end of corporate activity is to create a privately-owned profit” (483). Berlin’s point is not just that the goals of cognitive rhetoric and corporate capitalism are analogous but that they are highly compatible: if writers in a capitalist economic context understand the purpose of writing as achieving their individual goals and ambitions, then writing functions in the service of capitalism.

Following these two premises—inquiry’s foundation in belief and belief’s political, social, and economic implications—one can understand how the community profile project, in prioritizing the teaching of academic inquiry, could have resulted in Alice pursuing a line of inquiry rooted in potentially harmful beliefs. As mentioned in the previous chapter, I approved of Alice’s proposal to examine the genre of the South Korean makeup advertisement for her community profile on the assumption that the inspiration for this project was her newfound commitment to body positivity, as recounted in her conversion narrative. However, my greater concern than the precise set of commitments that inspired Alice to take up this line of inquiry was that Alice herself chose the particular genre of communication she would research. Giving Alice the freedom to choose the genre she would study, I reasoned, would ensure that the project was grounded in Alice’s own commitments, thus providing the necessary impetus for her to practice critical thinking in this project and, so, further initiating Alice in the discourse of academic inquiry.

It is here that the assignment arguably falls into the trap that Berlin associates with Flower and Hayes’ cognitive model of writing. In developing a model of the writing process that would help writers attain their own goals, Flower and Hayes do not take into account that the goals that writers pursue may serve political, social, and/or economic interests that conflict with the writer’s own interests and the interests of society at large. Similarly, in placing top priority on

students' attainment of the outcome of critical thinking, I had encouraged Alice to develop a line of inquiry that I believed was rooted in her own commitments—without regard for what, specifically, those commitments were. This line of inquiry, as outlined in the previous chapter, might be phrased as: “How do the rules, conventions, and rhetorical strategies that characterize South Korean makeup advertising reflect and reinforce South Korean beauty standards?”

Arguably, I did not take into sufficient account that this question might be rooted in beliefs that, while genuinely felt and thus conducive to critical thinking, were a reflection of cultural and socioeconomic forces at odds with Alice's own best interests: namely, the pressure to attain the rigid standard of physical beauty represented in South Korean makeup advertising. Indeed, to the extent that Alice pursued this line of inquiry (consciously or not) in order to better understand how *she* might attain the South Korean ideal of physical beauty, she was also pursuing a more fundamental question: “How can *I* look like the models in South Korean makeup advertisements?” Of course, the answers Alice provides to this question affirm its premise: that it is both possible and desirable for a woman of Filipina descent to look like a South Korean model. For instance, when Alice explains how photographs of models in these advertisements convey specific qualities that are considered “beautiful” in South Korean culture, she is at the same time taking stock of qualities that *she* must possess or acquire in order to attain this standard of beauty. To the extent that I encouraged to Alice to pursue a line of inquiry that was rooted in South Korean beauty standards, then, I encouraged her continued commitment to those standards. Indeed, some might argue that limiting my pedagogical focus to students' initiation into academic inquiry made me complicit with those standards.

The assignments and teaching strategies that I presented in previous chapters as evidence for my claim that pedagogy can initiate students into academic inquiry by grounding critical

thinking in student beliefs are also vulnerable to this critique. For instance, the conversion narrative assignment, which I introduced in Chapter 3, asks students to explain how and why their beliefs have changed over time. In the course of answering this question, students attempt to show that their newly acquired or altered beliefs are well-founded. It is in this respect that the assignment encourages critical thinking: as students seek to develop compelling arguments for their conversions, they must critically examine the reasoning behind changes in their ways of thinking and acting. In the process of questioning and revising the reasoning they present for their positions, students are able to make stronger cases for their conversions. Although students question and revise the reasoning behind their conversions, however, they do so not to question their positions but in order to make stronger arguments for them. In that sense, one could argue that the critical thinking encouraged by this assignment supports—is complicit with—the beliefs that students choose to write about. Furthermore, the assignment does not specify what kind of beliefs students can write about. Consequently, the positions for which students argue in their conversion narratives—and, by extension, the positions that the assignment implicitly endorses—can range from the apparently benign, such as changes in musical taste, to positions that many compositionists will find troubling; the narrative that I examined in Chapter 3, for instance, recounts how a student named Alex became a recreational gun user and advocate for gun rights. Thus, although this assignment helps students to gain greater facility in the type of thinking entailed in academic inquiry, it too is susceptible to the accusation of complicity with beliefs or ideologies that may be controversial.

One could even accuse Berlin's strategy of grounding critical thinking in student ideologies of complicity with those same ideologies. As outlined in Chapter 2, Berlin's social-epistemic pedagogy encourages and facilitates critical thinking by asking students to locate the

unstated assumptions in media they consume on a daily basis, in particular film and television and, on this basis, to understand the role that such assumptions play in creating audience satisfaction. For instance, students examine how the narrative trajectories of *Family Ties* episodes, in which parental pep talks serve to resolve problems rooted in social injustice, reflect and reinforce the capitalist belief that individuals in a free market economy are responsible for their own failure or success. Berlin wants students to recognize that, if viewers find such a story compelling, it is not because it offers a viable solution to social problems but because it reflects viewers' preconceived notions about how such problems are resolved. Subsequent to such analysis, students use their awareness of the role that ideology plays in television and movie storytelling to create their own filmed productions that apply similar strategies to reach viewers. Presumably, these productions exhibit and promote the same commitments (to consumerism, careerism etc.) that students observed in shows like *Family Ties*. In thus guiding students in the production of texts that reflect and reinforce free market ideologies, Berlin's pedagogy can be said to be complicit in the very ideologies that he hoped to inspire students to resist.

Berlin initially viewed the critical analysis of ideology as itself the proper response to this tendency for pedagogy to be co-opted by dangerous political or socioeconomic interests. He proposed that ideological critique, which makes visible the social and historical context of beliefs and their impact on individuals, might inspire students to resist harmful beliefs. As I argued in Chapter 1, however, it is often such beliefs that serve as premises for asking questions and developing arguments. Thus, pedagogies that position students against their own beliefs often remove any motivation students might have for participating in critical thinking and, more broadly, academic inquiry. That Berlin, especially in his later work, proposed that critical thinking be oriented to the production of texts suggests that he was aware of belief's role in

motivating inquiry: if students understood that ideological critique would enable them to produce texts that represented their strongly held beliefs, they would place greater value on—and be more inclined to practice—this kind of inquiry. The case studies of students surveyed in previous chapters, all of whom were able to practice critical thinking because they had pursued inquiries grounded in their own commitments, certainly attest to this idea.

Nevertheless, the need for pedagogy that initiates students into academic inquiry does not remove the need for pedagogy that is responsive to social and political injustice. If my project has shown considerably less attention to the latter need, it is because these two goals—initiating students into academic inquiry and addressing social injustice—often come into conflict. I attribute this conflict to the difference, as formulated by Stanley Fish, between academic and political inquiry. To practice academic inquiry, according to Fish, is to make a question, issue, or topic an “object of analysis, comparison, historical placement, etc.” (*Save* 25). Within academic inquiry, arguments pertaining to a given topic or issue are “dissected and assessed *as* arguments rather than as preliminaries to action” (*Save* 26). Fish further elaborates: “The action one takes (or should take) at the conclusion of an academic discussion is the action of rendering an academic verdict as in ‘this argument makes sense,’ ‘there’s a hole in the reasoning here,’ ‘the author does (or does not) realize her intention,’ ‘in this debate, X has the better of Y,’ ‘the case is still not proven.’” The individual practiced in academic inquiry is able to render “judgements of craftsmanship and coherence” by answering questions such as “Is it well made?” and “Does it hang together?” Such questions function as preliminaries to action only in the sense that they “equip students with the analytical skills . . . that will enable them to move confidently within traditions [of inquiry] and to engage in independent research when a course is over” (*Save* 13). When one practices political or ideological inquiry, by contrast, one assesses issues, topics, or

questions with an eye to recommending or rejecting a particular course of action. Here one might argue whether a certain policy is right for the country, for instance, or whether scientists should practice stem cell research (*Save* 25, 26). Both of these concerns, Fish argues, fall outside the immediate scope of preparing students to participate in established traditions of academic inquiry or to engage in independent research.

While Fish claims that academic inquiry does not pursue action, the questions one chooses to ask and the answers one discovers in this type of inquiry are still determined by one's beliefs: the assertions or ideas about reality that one takes for granted. And, to the extent that the beliefs which guide and direct inquiry have implications for social, political, and economic arrangements, even academic inquiry has a bearing on action. Here, then, lies the conflict between pedagogies that aim to initiate students into academic inquiry and pedagogies that aim to respond to social injustice: the course of action suggested by a given line of academic inquiry, as a result of the beliefs that guide and direct that inquiry, may impede the forms of political inquiry needed to address certain instances of injustice. Alice's community profile is again instructive in this regard. Here, Alice deliberated over precisely the kinds of questions that, according to Fish, characterize academic inquiry: questions of quality, coherence, and craftsmanship. On the one hand, Alice did not ask these questions in order to produce an ad that would actually be used to sell makeup—that is, as a “preliminary to action”—but, rather, to practice and demonstrate facility with the analytical skills needed to engage in a particular tradition of inquiry (genre analysis). In this respect, Fish might categorize Alice's project as an example of academic rather than political inquiry. At the same time, and as I argued previously, it is possible that Alice's inquiry into how makeup advertisements are made was motivated by her own desire to better understand, and so achieve, the beauty standards promoted in this type of

advertising. If that is so, her inquiry was grounded in a belief that fulfillment of these standards is both possible and desirable. This assumption would have impeded certain kinds of political inquiry into makeup advertising, such as questions about whether the beauty standards promoted in these ads perpetuate certain forms of racism, or questions about the ethics of advertising that capitalizes on consumers' insecurities.

Of course, Alice's failure to consider these and other political implications of makeup advertising was predetermined by an assignment and pedagogy that were designed to encourage and facilitate academic inquiry—specifically, critical thinking—rather than any particular line of political inquiry. Critical thinking can be carried out on the basis of any number of beliefs: both the person who supports tighter regulations on firearms and the person who opposes such regulations can, by virtue of their respective commitments, stand at a distance necessary from arguments for their positions to question and revise those arguments. Thus, it is not the particular content of students' beliefs, or the political implications of the inquiries they pursue on the basis of those beliefs, that is at stake in pedagogies that prioritize critical thinking. Rather, it is the freedom to develop lines of inquiry rooted in their own commitments that, I have argued, enables students to practice critical thinking. By contrast, a pedagogy that aims to engage students in political inquiry in order to address specific forms of social injustice must be rooted in some particular set of commitments that will determine how 'justice' is defined, how to recognize, diagnose, and respond to instances of injustice, etc. The conflict between these two imperatives is obvious: defining a particular set of commitments that will guide and direct political inquiry inevitably places certain limits on students' freedom to develop lines of inquiry rooted in their own beliefs. In light of this conflict, the pedagogy that I outlined in this project omits to define a particular set of beliefs that should guide and direct students' inquiries, so as to ensure that

students' own commitments will provide the impetus for inquiry and, in turn, critical thinking. Yet, as this final chapter documents, I later wondered if some of the inquiries that students had chosen to pursue were not only questionable on social justice grounds but may have conflicted with students' own best interests.

It is tempting to defend my decision not to place any specific restrictions on students' inquiries on the grounds that judgments regarding ethical or political questions fall outside my responsibilities as a teacher of writing. Indeed, Fish argues that the dual task of (1) introducing students to new bodies of knowledge and traditions of inquiry, and (2) equipping students with the skills needed to participate in those traditions, is too large for teachers to become occupied with current ethical, social, and political issues (at least, issues that do not have an immediate bearing on the work of initiating students into academic inquiry) (*Save* 18-19). However, while I agree that there is a difference between initiating students into academic inquiry and deliberating on ethical or political matters, I am reluctant to accept that the responsibility of college instructors should be limited to the first of these two tasks. To some extent, the inquiries that students in a college are permitted to pursue always fall within certain ethical, political, and other boundaries decided in advance by the instructor. For instance, I imagine that most teachers would not permit a student to pursue an inquiry into the legitimacy of the claims of Holocaust deniers without (at the very least) specific stipulations regarding what constitutes a credible source. The question, therefore, is not whether teachers should initiate students into academic inquiry or seek to form students with certain moral or political values but, rather, how to balance these often conflicting demands. To suggest particular guidelines that teachers might follow as they seek this balance falls outside the scope of my discussion. Rather, this project serves to highlight the *difference* and potential conflict between these two goals. In the foregoing chapters,

I have outlined a pedagogy that was largely effective in initiating students into academic inquiry. Yet, as this final chapter suggests, success in this area may have been attained at the cost of ignoring, or at least not sufficiently attending to, the ethical and political implications of students' work. I leave to readers the question of how to develop writing pedagogy that encourages and facilitates inquiry that is ethical and socially just while also proceeding on the basis of students' own, strongly held beliefs.

Works Cited

- Alex. Personal interview. 20 March 2017.
- Alex. "The Story of My Obsession." 18 Oct. 2016. The University of Arizona, student paper.
- Alice. "Community Profile." 13 Nov. 2017. The University of Arizona, student paper.
- Alice. Personal interview. 11 Dec. 2017.
- Alice. "What do Bleach, Sports, and Rebonding Have in Common?" 15 Oct. 2017. The University of Arizona, student paper.
- Berlin, James A. "Contemporary Composition: The Major Pedagogical Theories." *College English*, vol. 44, no. 88, 1982, 765-777.
- . "Poststructuralism, Cultural Studies, and the Composition Classroom: Postmodern Theory in Practice." *Rhetoric Review*, vol. 11, no. 1, 1992, pp. 16-33.
- . "Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class." *College English*, vol. 50, no. 5, 1988, pp. 477-494.
- . *Rhetorics, Poetics, and Cultures: Refiguring College English Studies*. 1996. Parlor Press, 2003.
- . "James Berlin Responds: 'Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class.'" *College English*, vol. 51, 1989, pp. 770-77.
- Broda-Bahm, Ken. "Know Your 'God Terms' and Your 'Devil Terms.'" *Persuasive Litigator*. 17 March, 2011, Persuasion Strategies.
<https://www.persuasivelitigator.com/2011/03/god-terms-and-your-devil-terms.html>,
 Accessed 5 May 2019.

- Brodkey, Linda. *Writing Permitted in Designated Areas Only*. U of Minnesota P, 1996.
- Burke, Kenneth. *Counter-Statement*. 1953. U of California P, 1968.
- . *The Rhetoric of Religion: Studies in Logology*. 1961. U of California P, 1970.
- Chomsky, Noam, and Edward S. Herman. *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*. Pantheon, 1988.
- DePalma, Michael-John. "Re-envisioning Religious Discourses as Rhetorical Resources in Composition Teaching: A Pragmatic Response to the Challenges of Belief." *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 62, no. 2, 2011, pp. 219-243.
- Devitt, Amy J. *Writing Genres*. Southern Illinois UP, 2008.
- Dobrin, Sidney. *Postcomposition*. Southern Illinois UP, 2011.
- Fish, Stanley. "Anti-Foundationalism, Theory Hope, and the Teaching of Composition." *Doing What Comes Naturally: Change, Rhetoric, and the Practice of Theory in Literary and Legal Studies*, Duke UP, 1989, pp. 342-355,
- . *Save the World on Your Own Time*. Oxford UP, 2008.
- Goodburn, Amy. "It's a Question of Faith: Discourse of Fundamentalism and Critical Pedagogy in the Writing Classroom." *JAC*, vol. 18, no. 2, pp. 333-353.
- Griffin, Charles. *The Rhetoric of Form in Conversion Narratives*. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, vol. 76, 1990, pp. 152-163.
- Hawk, Byron. *A Counter-History of Composition: Toward Methodologies of Complexity*. U of Pittsburgh P, 2007.
- Jason. Personal interview. 10 May 2017.
- Jocelyn. Personal interview. 24 Jan. 2017.
- Kopelson, Karen. "Rhetoric on the Edge of Cunning; Or, The Performance of Neutrality

- (Re)Considered As a Composition Pedagogy for Student Resistance.” *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 55, no. 1, 2003, pp. 115-146.
- Lucy. Personal interview. 9 May, 2017.
- Kurtyka, Faith. “Learning How to Feel: Conversion Narratives and Community Membership in First-Year Composition.” *Composition Studies*, vol. 45, no. 1, 2017, pp. 99-121.
- Manufacturing Consent: Noam Chomsky and the Media*. Dir. by Mark Achbar and Peter Wintonick. Zeitgeist Films, 1992.
- Newkirk, Thomas. *The Performance of Self in Student Writing*. Heinemann, 1997.
- Newkirk, Thomas. 2004. “The Dogma of Transformation.” *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 56, no. 2, 2004, pp. 251-271.
- Perelman, Chaim, and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca. “From *The New Rhetoric*.” *The Rhetorical Tradition: Readings from Classical Times to the Present*, edited by Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg, pp. 1375-1378.
- Rickert, Thomas. *Acts of Enjoyment: Rhetoric, Žižek, and the Return of the Subject*. U of Pittsburgh P, 2007.
- Ringer, Jeffrey M. “The Dogma of Inquiry: Composition and the Primacy of Faith.” *Rhetoric Review*, vol. 32, no. 3, 2013, pp. 349-365.
- Rose. Personal interview. 1 Feb., 2017.
- Sanchez, Raul. *The Function of Theory in Composition Studies*. SU of New York P, 2005.
- Stromberg, Peter G. *Language and Self-Transformation: A Study of the Christian Conversion Narrative*. Cambridge UP, 1993.
- Sukan, Idil. “How I Became a Feminist: My Origin Story and the Importance of Meltdowns.” *Medium*. 25 June 2015, <https://medium.com/@idilsukan/how-i-became-a-feminist-my->

origin-story-and-my-latest-public-meltdown-807cfa8acf71, Accessed 10 April 2017.

Vishal. "Veg to Non-Veg." 28 Feb. 2017. The University of Arizona, student paper.

Weaver, Richard. "Language is Sermonic." *Language is Sermonic: Richard M. Weaver on the Nature of Rhetoric*, edited by Richard L. Johannesen, Rennard Strickland, and Ralph T. Eubanks, Louisiana State UP, 1970, pp. 201-225.