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Taking Multiculturalism Personally: Ethnos and Ethos in the Classroom

Gregory Jay

1

Since its beginning in the 1970s, the movement known as multiculturalism has taken two distinct directions (for summaries, see Erickson; McCarthy and Crichlow viii–xxviii). On the one hand, multiculturalism celebrates the diversity of cultural groups. Sometimes called ethnic revitalization, this multiculturalism seeks to preserve the cultural practices of specific groups and to resist the homogeneity of assimilation. It sees the identities of individuals as primarily cultural, determined by their membership in a group, not as the expression of a unique self-consciousness. Oriented by identity politics, this multiculturalism rejects the individualistic model of personhood and instead stresses the analysis of communal expressive traditions. The forms and values of these traditions, in turn, become the focus of curriculum reform. Pedagogy is responsible for developing a competence in the student, such that he or she can understand various cultures and appreciate their achievements. This competence may even lead to the student's choosing to join in that culture's practices, though this choice may be seen as a social faux pas and as a violation of the decorum of essentialism. For marginalized groups, an appreciation of their culture can improve students' performances and so reverse the effects of bigotry and discrimination. Ideologically, this multiculturalism may be called pluralist, since it emphasizes the characteristics of individual cultures rather than analyzing the kind of social or political relationships between them.

This first type of multiculturalism is said by some to paint a picture of diversity in harmony, and so to obscure the structural relations of oppression, exploitation, or injustice that may actually define the differences between groups. We should not be surprised by this debate within the ranks, since multiculturalism stems in part from the political movements of the

1960s—such as the struggles of women, the poor and working classes, racial minority groups, and gay men and lesbians. Thus the second type (or tendency) of multiculturalism is oppositional rather than pluralist (see, for example, Giroux; Roman; Wallace). It is less interested in celebrating difference than in resisting oppression. Sometimes called radical, critical, or strong multiculturalism, this branch of the movement targets the unequal distribution of power in society. Rather than accepting the borders between cultural groups, it insists on analyzing how cultural divisions are constructed historically through racist policies or other institutionalizations of oppression. It insists that the teaching of cultural difference cannot be done meaningfully without studying the structure of social inequalities outside the classroom, and it advocates using pedagogy as a means toward transforming those larger social realities (see Jay, “Knowledge”). Radical multiculturalism would not be satisfied with teaching the appreciation of African-American cultural forms, for example, but would look critically at why African Americans so often sing the blues. This multiculturalism often undertakes a reading of the specific class relations between dominant and subordinate groups within local, national, or global contexts (on the global context, see Chicago Cultural Studies Group; Geyer; Mitchell). In some cases, these oppositional critics move away from the focus on culture, rejecting it as an ideological distraction from the material conditions and political arrangements determining the shape of subjectivities.

Such oppositional strategies for multiculturalism make crucial contributions, and I have found myself identifying with or endorsing many of their arguments. But I also feel they tend toward versions of economic or political determinism that are ultimately no more satisfying than models that examine culture only as a set of personal aesthetic practices. As Cameron McCarthy argues, we need “an alternative formulation that attempts to avoid privileging either ‘cultural values’ or ‘economic structures’ as ‘the’ exclusive or unitary source of racial inequality in schooling” (5). (For various attempts at such formulations, see the essays collected in McCarthy and Crichlow.) McCarthy’s call for an alternative to the impasse between economic determinism and cultural determinism will sound familiar to those who have followed countless similar debates within Marxist, poststructuralist, and cultural studies circles. What emerges from those conflicts is usually a stronger emphasis on the problem of *agency*: despite the much heralded “death of the subject” and other requiems for hu-

manism, critical theorists have rediscovered that the individual subject or person remains the vital and often unpredictable agent who realizes and mediates the claims of the economic and the cultural.

This renewed concern with personal agency seems to me part of a larger consensus that essentialism—whether used to define the homogeneous essence of a group or the singular nature of a person—must give way to more complex descriptions that accommodate the differences *within* groups and persons (see Epstein; Escoffier; Said). McCarthy's "alternative" will then require that we think hard about what multiculturalism teaches us about agency, identity, personhood, and individuality. If these are irreducible to either economics or culture, and if every person always occupies numerous contradictory social positions, then we need a third way, so to speak, to proceed, one that conceives of agency as an *ethical* condition, or that provides a complex description of *ethos* as the person's way of life. While multiculturalism should continue to advocate an antiracist, postcolonial, and resistant politics of the marginalized, multiculturalism should also lead to a horizon of ethical questions that cannot be entirely subordinated to identity politics or the analysis of ideology and political economy.

What strikes me about the debate among the various multiculturalists is the common assumption they make about the personal: identity in most of these theoretical or even practical accounts is defined and determined by totalizing social structures, such as culture or economy. Given this preference for a social constructionist approach to human identities, any reference to persons or individuals tends to sound like a throwback to the discredited discourse of Enlightenment liberalism, whose image of the universal man turned out to be the reflection of a few European and American white guys. Words like *humanism* and *individualism* are now regularly prefaced with discrediting adjectives like *bourgeois* or *Western*, which in many contexts they probably deserve. But if one grants that even the choice between economism and culturalism remains precisely a *choice*, something in part determined by a person (and not vice versa), then we need to account for the kind and quality of freedom that agents have, and the responsibilities that these freedoms might entail. In sum, I think we need an alternative formulation that avoids privileging either the social constructionist or liberal pluralist accounts of personhood in a multicultural society.

It is often said, sometimes with a conspiratorial spin, that the white masters of poststructuralism promoted the disap-

pearance of the subject and the author at the very moment when the disenfranchised were finally gaining power and voice (see Gates). Though I grant that this may not be entirely a coincidence, I would point out that in their own critiques the liberation movements also replaced personal identity with cultural subjectivities. Social constructionism goes hand in hand with multiculturalism, as both see the individual as the expression of the cultural practices of sociohistorical groups. The poststructuralist cry that “language speaks man” finds an eerie echo in the articulations of how race and ethnicity, sexuality and gender, class and nation, speak the person.

Yet multiculturalism and the liberation movements often associated with it continue to exhibit discomfort about replacing persons with subject positions. The experience, the literature, and the theorizing on multiculturalism insistently bring out the stubborn tensions between persons and positions. For example, as I live it, cultural identity is not a matter of choosing between a personal essence and a social construction. These are hypothetical entities in dialectical relationship to one another, and the shape their conversation takes over time constitutes the character of my person. *Agency* is one metaphor for naming this dialectic: agency appears in the way I take a social construction personally, as my duty, my responsibility, my ethos, my law, my enemy, or my love. *Agency* also names the tendency of cultural practices to become reified and bureaucratized, to become agencies in the institutional sense. Such an agency can make people its instrumental agents, robbing them of their persons in the process of making them its subjects.

I think there could be something healthy about insisting on the difference between persons and cultural identities. The difference between me and my cultural identity creates opportunities for change. Taking these opportunities as occasions for agency, I also end up taking some responsibility for what happens as a result. If I and my cultural identity were the same, and if I imagined that identity as homogeneous and univocal, then my actions and beliefs would follow in strict accord. I would be on automatic, so to speak. Of course, the multiplicity of my cultural identities and their lack of any totalizing framework ensure that this never occurs. My positions, by virtue of race or class or gender or sexual orientation or age or nation or political ideology or professional vocation, include many contradictions, making me usually the dominant, sometimes the marginalized, and quite often just the muddled one in the middle.

Negotiating the internal conflict of cultural identities requires as much or more energy and theoretical savvy as negotiating the differences between social groups or cultural formations. These groups and formations are not grounded in singular essences; they are coalitions and affiliations whose appearance of identity comes into being through history, strategy, and struggle. Categories such as heterosexual or white or Jewish American or middle-class are not natural or divine divisions, but rather the products of history. This does not make them false, unimportant, or unnecessary, but it does mean that we must accept some responsibility for them, whether we wish to advocate or deconstruct them. The solidity of these categories remains fragile and transient, as the history of these and other group formations demonstrates. As McCarthy notes, "An essentialist approach to race typically ignores or flattens out the differences within minority groups while at the same time insulating the problem of race inequality from issues of class and sexual oppression" (118). What we have learned from Michel Foucault and others about the invention of homosexuality as an identity category may be applied to the history of words like *white* and *middle-class* as well (see Omi and Winant). Such words not only name, but help shape, the groups to which they are attached. Like any name or noun, these categorical labels generalize at the expense of particular differences that are forgotten in the process.

The differences between the Dutch, German, English, French, Swiss, Russian, and Italian are forgotten, largely for political reasons, when the category "white" subsumes them all. Likewise the category "middle-class" obscures the real differences between men and women, gays and straights, and whites and blacks who share an otherwise common socioeconomic bracket. The differences within particular categories are suspended, then, when the identity of the group gets constructed. These suspended differences, in turn, are always potentially the sources of fracture and realignment as people respond to new claims on their passions and allegiances. *Person* is another name for the individual who is the remainder of this process, the leftover when totality fails, or the agent who negotiates the new contract. *Ethics* is one name for the way this person self-consciously conducts these negotiations, and *ethos* is a name for the way of life such conduct reinforces or makes possible.

There is always something a bit suspect about the plea to not "take it personally." In the case of multiculturalism, the plea would seem especially odd, given the roots of mul-

ticulturalism in the grounds of identity politics. But is a cultural identity personal? The problem of taking multiculturalism personally comes back to this puzzling question. I want to dwell for a moment on the possibility that identity and the personal are not the same thing. If they were, how could an individual experience the crisis of wondering whether to take being black or white, gay or straight, Christian or Muslim, personally? To pose cultural identity in the form of a question, as something that someone can choose to take or reject, as something that may be adopted or imposed, already introduces an element of agency, freedom, or voluntarism that strict essentialists or determinists reject. Personally, I think the resilience of the idiomatic question testifies to a practical belief that agency is both real and desirable, even if this means being vulnerable to ideological manipulation and one's own naiveté.

Within the practices of education, multiculturalism assumes some degree of personal agency in its teachers and students. Teachers are expected to take multiculturalism seriously, if not personally, and to change their syllabi, their classroom behavior, and their administrative goals. Students are expected to consider the possibility that the cultural values and practices of their group may be either the ideological mask of a will to power or the encoded expression of a people's resistance, outrage, and pride. Whether in the case of teachers or students, multiculturalism opens a gap between personal selfhood and cultural identity, and this is to the good. Taking multiculturalism personally ought to be an ethical injunction for every teacher, scholar, and student today, though obviously the effects of this ethic will vary dramatically depending on the person involved. For people like me, this ethic should be a kind of categorical imperative of pedagogy, for it insists on treating the Other as an end and not a means. Trying to formulate and live by this ethic forces me to confront confusing and painful things about myself and my profession.

2

Me, I got a late start taking multiculturalism personally. It was the early 1980s. I was teaching survey courses in American literature and had begun to introduce culturally diverse works into the canon of my syllabus, partly in response to the racial makeup of my classes at the University of Alabama (see Jay, "End"). Being from a suburb in Los Angeles and having spent the previous eight years in relatively elite institutions of

higher education, I was not accustomed to much in the way of racial diversity. Now I was teaching just down the street from the steps where Governor George Wallace had stood, only 20 years before, in defiance of federal orders to desegregate the university. By the early 1980s some 10% of the undergraduate population there were African-American, a proportion that regularly showed up in my survey classes.

The course tried to represent the heterogeneous groups who have given their radically different answers to Michel-Guillaume Jean de Crèvecoeur's famous question, "What is an American?" As the list of hyphenated categories multiplied—Native American, African American, Asian American, Polish American, Irish American, Jewish American—I felt left out. Who were *my* people? More uncomfortably, what was I doing trying to represent the Other anyway? Couldn't they speak for themselves? What was my ethical relation to this professional and pedagogical practice? Given the manifest failure of the institution to provide the marginalized with access to speech or representation, what was my responsibility? According to some of my African-American students, my responsibility certainly did not include designating them as the spokespersons for the race. The job of analyzing and denouncing racism in a classroom dominated by whites was, for them, the white man's job, since he'd invented race in the first place.

Identity politics and its discontents started following me home at night. Child of a secular Jewish father and a lapsed Mormon mother, I found myself puzzling over my own cultural identity. Did I have a race or ethnicity? A gender or a sexual orientation? A class or a nationality? Was my cultural identity singular or plural? And was it something I got by inheritance and imposition or something I could choose and alter at my will? Perhaps most importantly, why hadn't I worried about all of this before? Who was I that I hadn't had a cultural identity crisis? Why had I so suddenly become a white man? Was it only because I now lived in Alabama? Or had I been an invisible man to myself for all the years before?

Of course, I had had lots of identity crises before, but not ones that turned so specifically on how cultural categories determined experiences of identity. Being a child of the radical 1960s, I had long since taken for granted that my primary social identity was that of an oppositional intellectual. Hadn't I chosen a marginal and unprofitable major in college? Hadn't I consciously rejected materialism and sought higher values in art and philosophy? Hadn't I, to my father's bewilderment, decided to teach literature as a career and ended up in Tus-

caloosa? Even if I had become a professional, I could take some pride in being a relatively ill-paid, unrespected, uninfluential, and routinely alienated person. I thought of the cultural politics of my identity in conventional terms, positioning myself as the enemy of variously named forces of right wing evil. Surely the night riders of the Klan and I had nothing in common and could never be identified with each other. I clung stubbornly to the utopian dream of my own person, not recognizing how I too wore the white sheet wherever I walked.

Those years led me to write an essay on American literature and multiculturalism, where I added my voice to those of the canon busters. My professional identity began to change from that of a theorist publishing in *diacritics* to a teacher of literature writing for *College English*. Was this shift simply determined by the marketplace—in ideas and in jobs—or was it the result of experience and choice? Had I simply jumped from one kind of opportunism to another? The more I imagined that my professional choices had political and even moral claims, the more uncomfortable I felt (even as I enjoyed the rhetoric of polemic that these claims made possible). Professors were supposed to be useless, irrelevant, or at best ineffectual and harmless, and this went doubly so for liberal white men. Was multiculturalism an ethical way of life for the professor, and did it have anything to do with the way I lived my “real” life?

There was only one thing left to do: offer a class about the problem (I had already written an article about it, the usual last retreat of academic scoundrels). I decided to design a course called Fictions of Multiculturalism, which I now offer regularly at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee. The readings include modern prose fiction by a culturally diverse group of writers as well as critical and theoretical essays on multiculturalism and pedagogy. Institutionally, the course fulfills my university’s new cultural diversity requirement, so the enrollment includes people from a variety of majors. Fortunately, it has also drawn a culturally diverse student population, at least relatively speaking, as mine is a predominantly white working-class school.

In its design, syllabus, and classroom approach, the course intends both to ask students to take responsibility for their own cultural identities and to practice forming relationships with people who do not share their subject positions, values, skin colors, religions, and so on. In the multicultural classroom, the authority of one person’s experience quickly runs up against that of someone else, so that the limits of such

authority may be usefully marked and analyzed. Clashes of cultural identity do not always yield to a happy pluralism, however, or cheerful tolerance. On the contrary, the differences between cultural groups are often fundamental, sometimes deadly, and are better brought into the open than repressed (at least in the classroom). Multicultural pedagogy inevitably confronts the problem of how a social structure can successfully accommodate persons who find the beliefs or truths of others to be unacceptable and intolerable.

To get my students to take multiculturalism personally, I first ask them to write an analysis of their own cultural identity, which, it turns out, is very different from writing a personal essay expressing one's self. We use this paper and the first few readings (pieces such as Adrienne Rich's "Split at the Root" and June Jordan's "Flight to the Bahamas") to explore what a cultural identity might be, where you might get one, and how you might feel about the ones you have or the ones that others have. The notion of cultural identity strikes many of the students as strange. In the context of American individualism, the concept of cultural identity seems anomalous: identity is supposed to be personal, idiosyncratic, something that you do not share with anyone else. Seeing one's *self* as a cultural identity tends to erode the feeling of uniqueness so prized in American culture and so important to the process of assimilation. Assimilation results, the story goes, when an American self emerges after the immigrant casts off the cultural identity and trappings brought from another land.

This gets us to the paradox that the assignment aims to bring to the surface. Dominant American culture defines the person as essentially private and thus as lacking a cultural identity. A cultural identity would be a restraint on individual freedom, a straitjacket of convention, a prescription of inauthenticity. A cultural identity would limit what the person wore, ate, said, kissed, worshipped, wrote, bought, or sold. Modern entrepreneurial individualism, or consumer identity, considers cultural practices as strictly commodities, as entirely relative to the fundamental project of the self's acquisitive freedom. Histories of the US regularly narrate American selfhood in terms of European tyranny versus American freedom, the cultural conservatism of the Old World versus the open modernity of the New. In traditional dominant accounts, having a cultural identity tends to be associated, then, with people from the Old World or with racial minorities. Americans, on the other hand, are supposed to be those people who have abandoned the outdated garments of an old cultural identity to

stand naked and reborn in the perpetual future that is America. Of course, when your cultural identity by virtue of gender or skin color cannot be stripped off like an unfashionable wardrobe, your chances of assimilating go down.

It is no surprise, then, that many of my puzzled students end up writing essays about how they do not have a cultural identity. Some proudly announce that they are “just Americans,” while others more wistfully describe themselves as “merely normal.” This perception of the self as “American” and “normal” usually involves an implicit or explicit comparison to people whom the student identifies as having a cultural identity. These people with cultural identities are usually African Americans, Native Americans, or Asian Americans. They are described as having special cultural characteristics, unique food and music, strange languages, different beliefs. And, not incidentally, their skin is usually darker.

Of course, the lost students I am describing are the descendants of European immigrants, especially those in the third and fourth generations. They are most likely to see themselves as the norm and to see other groups as special, particular, or deviant. Having lost many of the ethnic characteristics that differentiated the quite diverse European populations who settled and assimilated in the US, these students have also assimilated the notion that freeing one’s self of cultural peculiarities is essential to becoming a normal, prosperous American. They do not see their own clothes, food, beliefs, values, or music as constituting a distinctive culture, just as they do not see themselves as having a cultural, rather than individual, identity. As you might expect, the exceptions are children of first- or second-generation immigrants whose families and neighborhoods have consciously preserved linguistic, religious, culinary, and social practices identified with the “old country.”

Students from non-European backgrounds have much less trouble with the assignment, since they are accustomed to being seen, and seeing themselves, as having a cultural identity that is different. While these students never fit into neat boxes, and while their personal experiences and senses of identity vary enormously, almost all share a daily consciousness of having to negotiate between their sense of being a person and their sense of belonging to a group. Their person, they feel, is often not identifiable with the symbolic figures that populate the hegemonic culture. They rarely see people like themselves on TV, except perhaps during police dramas or the local news. On the other hand, persons who see them-

selves as very similar to the dominant cultural imaginary do not experience themselves as having a cultural identity, since in their eyes they are not different. The universalization of their cultural presuppositions whitewashes them, allowing them to mistake the cultural for the personal and making them invisible to themselves.

I should note how gender skews this pedagogical exercise. As you might guess, many women students define their cultural identity in terms of their gender. They discuss how important their condition or experience of gender has been in shaping their ideas, feelings, and values. This assertion tends to come more strongly from self-identified feminists, but it also comes from many women of various political stripes. In two semesters that included over 70 students, I never had a male student write about the importance of gender to his cultural identity. Just as the children of European immigrants tend not to see their skin as having color or their values as being culturally specific, men tend to dissociate their gender from their individuality. I found this pattern extraordinary, knowing as I do how much time men spend talking about and asserting their masculinity. Yet, probably in part because of the nature of the course and the presumed values of the instructor, none of the men wrote about how growing up male had affected their identity.

The results in the area of sexual orientation were similar. Given the prejudice against homosexuality in our society, it is understandable that only one person explicitly identified herself as lesbian or gay through the assignment. (One other discussed her recent exploration of bisexuality.) And why should a gay or lesbian student come out to classmates? Is it any of their business? Is sexual orientation a private, personal identity rather than a social or cultural identity? Here the ethical puzzles for the instructor are daunting. On the one hand, I want to make my classroom a place that supports the expression of marginalized subjectivities, and I want that expression to alter the prejudices of other students. On the other hand, what right have I to make the sexual orientation of my students a matter of pedagogical manipulation? Is this the business of the professor? Can the professor, given his business, avoid professing biases and values in regard to sexuality or race or other social divisions merely by remaining silent upon them? And who is to say that sexual orientation is an identity waiting to “come out” anyway? Many, if not most, college students are still trying to figure out their sexual identity, as they come to learn that sexual identity is a complex process of changes that do

not stop with puberty or early adulthood or even middle age and marriage. Clearly the puzzles here are different than in the cases of race and gender, where the body usually gives people's identities away without their being able to choose whether to "come out." Yet even then, my ethical dilemma seems different in dealing with people depending on whether their position is privileged or subordinated. Rightly or wrongly, I have not felt much restraint about putting the race of white people or the sexuality of men before the class as a subject for critique, and I regularly push students in these categories to a more public reckoning with the relationship between their personal and their group identities. With privileges come responsibilities. The results of the initial assignment, in any case, give us a chance to analyze which kinds of identity seem to have ready access to public representation and what particular problems people face when speaking about different identity positions. In realizing the kinds of privileges or oppressions that our cultural identities bring, whether we choose them or not, students get a better understanding of the importance of history and may relent a bit in their insistence that they are not affected by, or responsible for, anything that happened before they were born.

One consequence of the assignment was to drive a wedge between race and culture. The students who felt they did not have a common culture belonged to the category that race discourse dubs "white." I have argued that this feeling was in part ideologically motivated, a blind spot of privilege and hegemony. But I also want to argue that in a way these students are right. Strictly speaking, there is no such thing as white culture. Culture makes sense when talking about ethnic groups and geographic populations, but it makes less sense when oriented solely by skin pigmentation. Historically, the term *white* was invented in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to provide Europeans, especially Europeans settling in the American colonies, with a word for their difference from Africans and Native Americans. As the scholarship of Afrocentrism demonstrates, the term *white* stands for a politically constructed group, grounded in a mythical Greco-Roman classicism.

"White" designates the supposed common culture binding diverse European immigrants. Since their ethnic and national groups do not constitute a common culture, historiography had to invent one for them to help justify the project of colonialism and the institution of slavery. In fact, "white" replaces ethnic taxonomies with a racial one, producing real confusion and misrecognition when the children of European

immigrants compare their by-our-bootstraps family tales of upward mobility to the bleak fortunes of African Americans, as if being a Polish or Italian or Irish immigrant were in some way commensurable with being a member of an outcast racial class (see Sleeter, whose fascinating interviews with white teachers of multiculturalism produced results not unlike those my assignment uncovered). White is a political category, not a cultural one (yes, I know how difficult it is to draw these lines, but here it seems crucial to do so). What holds white people together is not a common language, religion, cuisine, literature, or philosophy, but rather a political arrangement that distributes power and resources by skin color. By replacing a specific ethnicity with the metaphor of a colorless color, “white” has the effect of making everyone else different. But as Leslie Roman reminds us, “White is a color!” This makes the “ambivalent and oxymoronic phrase ‘people of color’ ” troublesome: “[g]iven the tendency of the multicultural discourse to celebrate diversity without adequately analyzing power differentials among groups positioned by racial categorizations and inequalities, the phrase ‘people of color’ still implies that white culture is the *hidden norm*” (71). But I think Roman’s reference to “white culture” here is misleading, since *white* came into use as a way of replacing cultural differences with racial differences.

No wonder my students were confused. To be a white person is to have certain advantages and distinctions socially, politically, and economically, but being white does not provide one with a culture. Indeed, the discourse of race separates whites from their own culture, insofar as it lies to them about how profoundly the work and art of racially subordinated people has shaped American culture. “The sequestered suburban white student is uninformed,” writes William Pinar, “unless he or she comes to understand how, culturally, he or she is also African American,” and this means more than admitting one’s infatuation with rap music, Magic Johnson, or Alice Walker (63). There is, I think, an American culture, but it is not defined by ethnic groups or racial distinctions. Rather, it is grounded in economic individualism, wedded to the practice of consumption, and hostile to the traditional constraints of cultural systems whenever these inhibit the workings of the marketplace. In this capitalist metaculture, cultural beliefs and practices are not traditions that constrain and guide behavior but commodities that may be deployed in order to create effects of pleasure, knowledge, profit, and power. Hence the much observed phenomenon of the postmodern subject, a per-

In this capitalist metaculture, cultural beliefs and practices are not traditions that constrain and guide behavior but commodities that may be deployed in order to create effects of pleasure, knowledge, profit, and power.

son whose cultural identity is essentially and repeatedly de-centered.

3

Though multiculturalism begins in identity politics—in the conflation of personal and cultural identity—it should not end there. Taking multiculturalism personally is a way to move in, through, and beyond identity politics, while respecting the conditions that make those politics a recurrent necessity. We may want to challenge the centrality of identity itself in arguments about culture, for example, by considering the difference between having an identity and living by an ethos. Living by an ethos implies an important degree of agency, freedom, and responsibility in the way a person responds to the various claims of multiple and contradictory identities. While the notion of having an identity tends to reinforce deterministic scenarios, in which persons become prescribed categories, the notion of ethos holds open the future of persons. In this way, the relationship between person and cultural identity becomes more, rather than less, political, in the sense that by choosing to take or refuse the claims of racial or national or sexual or class identities, a person acts politically and makes a difference in the future. But ethos also recalls the ancient sense of the way a character acts in response to fate or fortune. To talk of agency and choice is not to return to a fantasy in which the individual can be or do anything, and it is certainly not to forget the histories and material conditions that shape the context of any agent's choices. On the contrary, the notion of ethos demands that a person be aware of his or her fate and know well the historical circumstances that shape the moment in which a person must respond to *what is* with an action aimed at *what might become*.

While a first step toward ethical intersubjectivity may be to recognize and respect someone else's difference from me, that realization still tends to leave me in the privileged position: I have the luxury of deciding to be tolerant and liberal. The structure of superiority is left intact. The sense of my own settled and unquestioned identity is also left intact, while all the otherness is projected onto someone else. Discourses about the Other tend to replay the original discrimination in which nonwhites or nonmales or non-Westerners are the Others. If you are one of those others, of

course, you do not see yourself as the Other except insofar as you look at yourself from the dominant ideological point of view. The next step, then, and it is an ethical as well as a political step, is to see my own subjectivity from the Other's point of view. Especially for those of us accustomed to identifying with, or being treated as, the norm, it is vital to undertake an active defamiliarization of one's own cultural identity and the way one has taken it personally. The exploration of otherness and cultural identity should achieve a sense of my own strangeness, my own otherness, and of the history of how my assumed mode of being came into existence. I could have been someone other than I think I am. And maybe I am.

As for those long accustomed to suffering the imposition of a sense of otherness as a judgment on their cultural identity, they continually struggle with that "double-consciousness" classically described by W. E. B. Du Bois: "It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (364). Identity politics provides one way to reunify this consciousness, rejecting the values of the oppressor's gaze and affirming instead the measures of a group's own experiences, beliefs, and visions. There may be some form of "double-consciousness" for the dominant subject too, for that subject also sees him- or herself through the eyes of the marginalized, the colonized, and the despised. But we look away from their gaze or fear it or reject the view of ourselves it expresses. While the dominated subject is cajoled, seduced, or coerced at times into identifying with the consciousness of the dominant, the dominant undergo no such necessity, and so their moments of identification with the marginalized usually follow the forms of pity, sympathy, or horror. Insofar as the dominated achieve a sense of self through identity politics, they too will experience the need to question the consequences of privileging their own point of view. Insofar as the dominant fail to find modes of understanding and empathy that force a reassessment of their way of life, they will deserve the contempt that the word *liberal* has gained in some quarters. A dialectic of dis-orientation characterizes the relationship between personal and cultural identity for both the dominant and the dominated. This dis-orientation is made more complex when we realize that we may occupy both positions at once depending on which of our social relations we are talking about. Disorientation, then,

is both the alienated condition we strive to heal and a goal of self-critical thought.

I would thus propose a pedagogy of disorientation as a complement to recent calls to restructure the educational institution from the Other's point of view. I know that many of our students already feel disoriented, either by the lives they have led or the things that we teach. But I think we need to make these disorientations into explicit subjects of study in our classrooms and into methods of analysis whose intellectual and ethical claims we theorize and practice. McCarthy cites Bob Connell's contention that we ought to "bring the uninstitutionalized experiences of marginalized minorities and working-class women and men 'to the center' of the organization and arrangement of the school curriculum." This suggests that "a political and ethical principle of positive social justice should inform the selection of knowledge in the school curriculum" (132). Personally, I take McCarthy's "ethical" as an injunction to disorientation, a call to subscribe to a principle larger than our own self-interested identity. In this ethos I hold my cultural identity and its practices to the standard of justice, and ask how my mode of being affects the lives of others and how my view of others makes my own identity possible.

Taking multiculturalism personally will not, in the end, provide you with an identity, or resolve the hostilities between races, or defuse tribal warfare, or remedy those inequalities inherent to multinational capitalism. But the often surprising kinds of personal and cultural identification or empathy facilitated by the multicultural literature classroom produce antiessential affiliations. Students do make connections across the insulating boundaries we have taught them to respect, and they do find this adventure in disorientation challenging and exhilarating. Taking multiculturalism personally does not mean harmonious understanding or celebrations of ethnic diversity, however; more likely it involves bringing cultural and personal conflicts into the open and disorienting the fictions of tolerant pluralism. The classroom will need an ethical discourse for handling these conflicts, just as it will need a political analysis for understanding their material conditions and consequences.

Thus politics can also be understood in terms of how the person negotiates the space between identity and community. A relentless critique of every student's and teacher's bad faith is contemptuous of the ideal of community. Unlike critique, politics as a social enterprise requires that persons form com-

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munities based on a mutual recognition of common interests, which must be understood in part by testing discourses against persons and ideas against experiences. One thing that multiculturalism disorients is individualism, since multiculturalism continually ties persons back to the web of their interpersonal cultural identities and affiliations. In the dialectic of personal and cultural identity, an analysis of one's cultural identities may disorient the fictions of one's personal selfhood and vice versa.

Still, I would resist the movement toward depersonalization among some advocates of oppositional pedagogy. According to Donald Morton, for example, "persons . . . must be distinguished from their 'discourses' " so that those discourses can be effectively critiqued (82). This distinction removes the critique of discourses from the realm of the ethical, where relationships between persons require attitudes such as tolerance, respect, responsibility, sympathy, justice, empathy, and humility. Most students will not readily perceive a distinction between the professor's contempt for their discourses and contempt for their persons. I do not think we can remedy the past injustice, which dismissed people's discourse because of their bodies, by returning to an ideal wherein discourses are evaluated without reference to the bodies that produce them. If multiculturalism has a central lesson, it is to teach us to respect this embodied character of cultural production.

Treating persons as only discourses would apply post-structuralist theory to pedagogy in a manner that is both theoretically reductive and strategically harmful. Depersonalizing critique and pedagogy would underestimate the emotional and idiosyncratic ties that individuals have to knowledge and power (see Worsham). An ethic of care for cultural differences in the classroom is superior, in my experience, to the pedagogy of confrontation and hostility that Morton advocates. As Patrocínio Schweickart argues, engendering critical discourse requires a good deal of listening to others, rather than speaking at or for them. The connection of persons to discourses is an ethical one and cannot be reduced to ideology, because discourse is where the person mediates between the various ideologies and social positions that claim allegiance or obedience. The person takes responsibility for negotiating the relationship between ideologies (or institutions) and the experience of the individual. An ethic is precisely a set of principles that is not coincident with the person, but rather something he or she embodies only individually and imperfectly. The difference

between personal and cultural identity creates the space where ethics must take place.

I believe that ethical imperatives inform political change, since concepts of justice and of rights include a moral dimension. Self-interest and the acquisition of (or resistance to) power cannot found a community or a political philosophy; the former cannot do justice to social relationships involving conflicting self-interests, and power without a concept of the good is only instrumental and thus nihilistic. Social inequalities will not be alleviated without structural changes in the government and the economy, to be sure, but these cannot be motivated or justified without recourse to arguments about the evils of unbridled self-interest and the irresponsibility of the will to power. Demonstrating these points will involve careful historical argument about the particulars of a social legacy, as well as scrupulous theoretical debate about what constitutes the good, universally and in a given instance.

A focus on ethics can strengthen the process of creating mechanisms that do justice to the competing claims of different cultural groups. It can also make for affiliations between individuals who in their everyday lives often differ with each other and within themselves. The importance of this ethical moment needs to be reasserted and restored in the current climate, where “the political” (often vaguely, if at all, theorized) reigns. In the agency and decisions of the ethical subject, the competing demands between the universal and the particular seek their only practical justice. The ethnic and the ethical will have to recognize each other in this territory of competing demands, a territory that includes the classroom. To get beyond the accusations and scapegoating and name-calling, we need to acknowledge the mutual dependence of our ethical and political persons. Unless we can believe in our responsibility to each other, we may be in store for an endless history of self-righteousness and violence.

Notes

This essay was written for a conference on “Pedagogy and the Question of the Personal,” organized by Jane Gallop and held at the Center for Twentieth Century Studies at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee. I want to thank Gallop for her invitation and her editorial work, which was extensive. The proceedings of the conference will appear in a volume titled *Pedagogy: The Question of Impersonation*, edited by Gallop and to be published by the University of Indiana Press in 1995.

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