

Paul Feyerabend and a Multicultural Pedagogy
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Our subject at this conference is situating the cross-disciplinarity of WAC within a pedagogy of inclusivity and the ideas of philosopher of science Paul Feyerabend have a direct bearing on the epistemological questions which teachers of writing encounter. Feyerabend's name began to surface during the 1970's and 80's when hermeneutics, phenomenology, and cultural studies began to preoccupy rhetoricians and composition scholars. During the heady, Dionysian Sixties and Seventies, his book *Against Method*, published in 1975 spoke to the upheaval and questioning in the discipline. James Kinneavy refers to Feyerabend's connections to rhetoric in his essay "Contemporary Rhetoric" and a few articles on Feyerabend appeared in the first issue of the journal *Telos* in 1980. William Covino in his book *The Art of Wondering: A Revisionist Return to the History of Rhetoric* (1988) includes a chapter entitled "Rhetoric is Back: Derrida, Feyerabend, Geertz and the Lessons of History" in which he sets Feyerabend in the context of the new paradigms emerging in composition studies. Feyerabend is also discussed briefly in Michael Sprinker's "The Royal Road: Marxism and the Philosophy of Science" in *Rhetoric in an Antifoundational World*, published in 1998. Anne Ruggles Gere in her essay in "Teaching Writing: The Major Theories, observed that "when the teaching of rhetoric and philosophy are united, the following questions will become central to each model.

1. What relationship exists between language and reality?
 2. What relationship exists between thought and language?
 3. How does this model define 'truth' or knowledge'?
 4. What system of logic does this model employ to arrive at 'truth'?
- When such questions are asked and answered, models of composition pedagogy will become unified and thereby more effective."

Feyerabend's ideas are particularly relevant to Gere's third and fourth points—"how does this model define 'truth' or knowledge" and "what system of logic does this model employ to arrive at 'truth'" and today I would briefly like to discuss Feyerabend's relevance to this epistemological question, how it is related to multiculturalism and end with a specific example of how he suggested applying his ideas to teaching.

During the 1960's, one of the defining aspects of the counterculture was its questioning of the primacy of "logic", "rationality" and "science" in the modern world. Claude Levi-Strauss had argued in *La Pensee Sauvage*

that indigenous peoples' mythologies were as complex and valid a way of interpreting the world as our own supposedly superior methods. The Beat poet Diane di Prima in her "Revolutionary Letter #63" wrote: "Check Science: whose interest does it serve? Whose need to perpetrate/Mechanical dead (exploitable) universe/Instead of living cosmos?/Whose dream those hierarchies: planets & stars/Blindly obeying fixed laws, as they desire/Us, too, to stay in place...What point in this cosmology but to drain/Hope of contact or change/oppresing us w/'reason.'" And di Prima puts quotations around the word "reason." Feyerabend in several of his books including *Against Method*, *Three Dialogues on Knowledge*, *Science in a Free Society* and his three volumes of *Philosophical Papers* raised these same questions concerning the supposed superiority of the ideology of Science.

The key move in his argument is disentangling these questions appears in his essay "Knowledge without Foundation," as well as in Three Dialogues: "If science is praised because of its achievement, then myth must be praised a hundred times more fervently because its achievements were incomparably greater: the inventors of myth started culture while scientists just changed it, and not always for the better" (113). In several studies devoted to ancient Greek philosophy, he traces the transition from the mythic world view as represented by Homer and the gradual development of abstraction and rationality which culminates in the "scientific method." Abstraction drains the world of its multiplicity and beauty, reducing the immense complexity of nature. This reduction has for Feyerabend extremely negative implications for education and for the development of imaginative and creative young people. Here he echoes Eric Havelock who wrote in "The Coming of Literate Communication to Western Culture": "If it is desirable that a large majority of a modern population be literate, can this be accomplished without a prior linkage to the poetic and musical inheritance—in short, shall children be rushed into reading before they have learned to speak fluently, to recite, to memorize, and to sing suitable verse available in their own tongue? Furthermore, can a society which values the abstract above the poetic ever understand societies which do not?" Feyerabend would agree with Havelock here: literacy is a good thing, but so is the archaic, mythic world view. Thus in terms of writing, students should be encouraged to use their imaginations, to probe their inner worlds and to attempt at least some time during the term to write by immersing themselves in their unconscious. Writing should at least partially be tied to the poetic, the artistic and the expressive, with their roots in play and creativity. [By the way, I won't have time today to discuss this, but F also wrote about Dada...]

Feyerabend wants students to react to ideas, to be exposed to differing points of view and allowed to find their own way. "...a mature citizen is a person who has decided in favor of what he thinks suits him best... An essential part of a general education of this kind is acquaintance with the most outstanding propagandists in all fields, so that

the pupil can build up his resistance against all propaganda, including the propaganda called 'argument.' It is only after such a hardening procedure that he will be called upon to make up his mind on the issue rationalism-irrationalism, science-myth, science-religion, and so on" (*Against Method*).

The implications of this questioning of "civilized" ways of knowing for the curriculum and the evolving idea of multiculturalism can be seen in Feyerabend's comments concerning his beginning teaching at Berkeley in 1958, and here he was considerably ahead of his time: "My function was to carry out the educational policies of the State of California which means I had to teach people what a small group of white intellectuals had decided was knowledge. ...In the years 1964ff. Mexicans, Blacks, Indians entered the university as a result of new educational policies. There they sat, partly curious, partly disdainful, partly simply confused hoping to get an 'education.'... Who was I to tell these people what to think?...I wanted to know how intellectuals manage to get away with murder—for it is murder, murder of minds and cultures that is committed year in year out at schools, universities, educational missions in foreign countries. The trend must be reversed, I thought, we must start learning from those we have enslaved for they have much to offer and at any rate, they have the right to live as they see fit even if they are not as pushy about their rights and their views as their Western Conquerors have always been" (118-119). Thus the questioning of what gets to count as "knowledge" leads directly to questioning of the curriculum. Feyerabend began to consider multicultural ideas much in advance of other academics and began to seriously question the curriculum as previously constructed.

Finally, I would like to conclude with a brief example of how Feyerabend himself imagined one way of putting his theory into pedagogical practice. From his background working in the theater, he imagined a new sort of education in which the teacher's role would be to allow students a choice in deciding the "traditions" they would honor and believed a "theatre of ideas"—deriving from his studies of Brecht and Piscator—would allow the student several ways to proceed and he lists the following: "The 'objective' scientific account would be one way of presenting a case, a play another way (remember that for Aristotle tragedy is 'more philosophical' than history because it reveals the *structure* of the historical process and not only its accidental details) a novel still another way. Why should knowledge be shown in the garment of academic prose and reasoning? Had not Plato observed that written sentences in a book are but transitory stages of a complex process of growth that contains gestures, jokes, asides, emotions and had he not tried to catch this process by means of the dialogue? And were there not different forms of knowledge, some much more detailed and realistic than what arose as 'rationalism' in the 7th and 6th century in Greece?" (SFS, 119-120). Thus in terms of the writing class, students would be able to understand the different forms knowledge takes and to present their work in a variety of forms: for example, 1) a scientific/"objective" report, 2) a play and 3)

Feyerabend suggests a novel, but perhaps a short story would be more workable. There is indeed implied in Feyerabend's ideas a critique of literacy itself, because he ties the rise of rationality to the shift from oral to written culture. The writing class can become the place where students can both consider literacy and critique it: the instructor's role is to allow students to discuss the benefits of literacy and science and truth, but also open the class to a discussion of their liabilities. Thank you.