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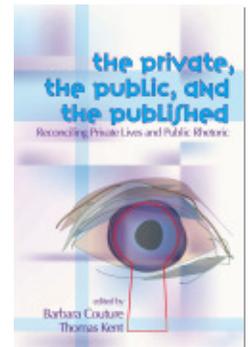
Published by Utah State University Press

Couture, Barbara and Thomas Kent.

Private, the Public, and the Published: Reconciling Private Lives and Public Rhetoric.

Utah State University Press, 2004.

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THE COLLECTIVE PRIVACY OF ACADEMIC LANGUAGE

David Bleich

PROBLEMS WITH ACADEMIC LANGUAGE

This essay considers the following thought: in the history of the academy, only one sense of privacy has existed, the collective privacy of the male group. As a social institution, the university and other academies have been, over the past eight centuries, groups of men, separated from the rest of society, bound together by a language few others in society knew, and, except in extreme cases, exempt from civil laws and constraints that applied to nonacademic citizens. The groups of men were privileged by their occupation of learning—reading, repeating, and interpreting texts again and again so as to contribute to the development of civil and sacred laws, principles, morals, and to the training of physicians. People who emerged from the academy did not hold power, but advised those, such as churchmen and governors, who did. This arrangement, strong and stable in itself, drew considerable strength from prevailing unconsciousness of, and resignation to, the principle of the androcentric rule of society.

This history is related to fundamental language problems we continue to face: (1) the complaints about academic writing as obscure; (2) the treatment of writing pedagogy as a relatively unimportant propaedeutic subject; and (3) the censorship of personal, subjective, and intersubjective genres. My path of presentation is first to note briefly the sense of the foregoing complaints, then to characterize the history of the university and how it may have led to the complaints, and then to consider in more detail how to think about them.

Inherent Obscurity

There have been complaints lately about the obscurity of academic work, especially its language. The 1996 Sokal hoax, in which gibberish

was mistaken by a respected scholarly journal for serious academic work, brought this complaint to the fore (see Sokal). But as Alain de Botton has written, the same complaint was made by Rabelais in the sixteenth century and by many before and after him: academics were “writing needlessly obscure books, ignoring simple truths, teaching nothing of value and abusing the respect of the population.” I stipulate the truth of the complaint and ask why academic work, and especially its language, has seemed so antisocial for so long. Sometimes the complaints have been so intense that Gerald Graff had to write in *PMLA*, the principal professional journal of English and language teachers, that “academic difficulty” was a myth and that succinct instructions regarding stylistic adjustments in writing can be given to critics and scholars to dispel the appearance of obscurity (1041). However, those familiar with academic treatises know that obscurity is not just in appearance, and that many academic texts are *needlessly* difficult and not comprehensible to most people, even those who are well educated.

The Degrading of Rhetoric and Composition

The field of rhetoric and composition, characteristically open to a variety of approaches, was on its way to becoming a forceful, active, and new sort of discipline, involved in both literacy and rhetoric, and expanding its interests to genres found in many parts of society. Abruptly, however, it has been constrained toward obsolete goals: teaching undergraduates to write “for their other courses.” Large, complex, intellectually sophisticated writing/graduate programs were reduced and placed under the stewardship of either staff reporting to deans or English faculty believing in the “service” role of writing pedagogy, as Frances Condon has described:

Comp/Rhet professionals in that Department (people whose work stands out in the discipline of Composition and Rhetoric as being of extraordinary, pivotal value . . .) were systematically attacked, vilified and disenfranchised. Under the guise of “complicating” understanding and developing more “rigorous” curriculum, members of the [English] Department hailing from other “sub” disciplines in English Studies imposed a vision of Comp/Rhet that, for all its pretension to cutting edge theory, reconstituted traditional, top down writing instruction and consigned Composition and Rhetoric as a discipline to a service and skills model, eliminated a visionary undergraduate writing program that was years in the making, and eviscerated an extraordinary doctoral program. (WPA Listserv, November 29, 2001)

Such development, apparently mysterious, is perhaps less so in the context of the history of the university, of which more shortly.

Discomfort with Genres of Subjectivity

In postsecondary English, “reader response” criticism has gained some currency, but few related this style of criticism to teaching (see Bleich; Flynn; Steig), and even fewer saw it as a broad approach to the subject of language and literature. As feminist criticism grew in scope and reference, “life writing,” autobiography, autoethnography, and genre mixing in academic writing became accepted formal practices. More people understood why “the personal is political,” and this understanding helped to produce a broader spectrum of genres from the private to the individual, to the collective, to the universal public. There are extant new genres that tackle the heretofore taboo “personal” and “private” experiences of scholars who are members of a wide variety of groups in society. Patricia Williams, Robin Tolmach Lakoff, Naomi Scheman in the fields of law, linguistics, and philosophy, respectively, have written personal, mixed-genre essays that bear directly on how they conceive their principal subject matters (see also Holdstein and Bleich). The resistance to the latter effect is what I consider in this essay as the key to the emotional and social paralysis of academic writing. Truly subjective styles are “feminized” in the pejorative sense.

THE UNIVERSITAS AND ITS SOCIAL PLACEMENT

Charles Homer Haskins, in his useful volume *The Rise of Universities* (1923), outlines Hastings Rashdall’s earlier observation that the Western university has been a remarkably stable institution, unchanging in its basic relation to the secular and religious governments of society. Mainly, the university is a *protected* society of masters and scholars. Until modern times, its main protection came from the Roman Church, but various local and national governments also protected it. Today it is protected by national governments in Europe and by state governments and corporations in America. What, actually, is being protected?

The history of the (oldest) universities of Bologna, Paris, and Oxford demonstrates the rationale of university protection. As some may erroneously infer today, “university” does not allude to something like “universal knowledge,” but to a living social arrangement of male students and teachers. The term *universitas* is cognate with the present-day term

union, as in labor union. In twelfth-century Bologna, Paris, and Oxford, the masters and scholars needed *rent* protection. As a group, these men from all over Europe were gauged as foreigners—"nations" in the historical literature—and sometimes in response to their disruptive carousing habits, they could not exist stably enough to pursue their studies, which were liberal arts, law, theology, or medicine. Thus, in the middle of the twelfth century in Bologna and Paris, and at the beginning of the thirteenth century in Oxford, the governments and, mainly, the Roman Church, stepped in to secure from the local landlords *rent agreements* for the housing of students and masters. Usually oversight went considerably beyond just housing. In return the *universitas*—the group of students and masters—was *protected* and came more directly under the dominion of the church. This agreement also led to the students and masters occupying the same space, which, in turn, developed into the "college," the place where all both lived and worked. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, universities were founded throughout Europe on this model of sponsorship (see De Ridder-Symoens). Though all students had preliminary study of the trivium, the principal advanced university subjects were civil and canon law (both based on Roman law), theology, and medicine. The church had established in the various universities sites of training that ensured its own continued dominion in society. As is the case today, however, men of various other interests were admitted to the university: there were high levels of secular interest in all the universities. Bologna was a center of civil law, Paris a center of theology, Oxford a center of theology and philosophy. The history of Oxford University is particularly interesting in that its early forms were concerned with secular civil law, especially its practice, but when the *universitas* needed protection, theology became the main subject (see Aston). Because of the "deal"—the sponsorship of the university as a whole—that guaranteed the training of future church leaders, prospective secular leaders were also welcomed as trainees. The ties between these two types of students ultimately led, in the rebellious American colonies, to the principle of separation of church and state. Yet, as was the case in medieval Europe, today in America most religiously sponsored universities make it their business to admit a variety of students; the separation is not complete.

Until the nineteenth century, it was essential to know Latin to enter the university. All lectures were delivered in Latin from the twelfth to the

sixteenth centuries, and most were delivered in Latin from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries. Students were certified as bachelors and masters by going through a Latin disputation—a debate with a master. The lectures themselves (lecture means reading), most of which were termed “ordinary” lectures, were oral readings of the main texts, always in Latin. The lecturers sometimes commented on these texts. Access to the texts themselves was limited, especially before printing, and so there was a strong oral component to the processes of learning. The trivium—rhetoric, grammar, and logic—was comprised of the elementary subjects which were meant to cultivate the students’ proficiency in Latin. The study of rhetoric had at least two main functions: to learn how to conduct oneself orally in order to win certification and to master the established Latin texts about rhetoric, such as those of Cicero and Quintilian. Given that the early universities’ studies of law and theology were aimed to create learned church leaders, it seems clear that the trivium was essential as a tool or a path to the main university subjects—canon and civil law as derived from Roman law, theology, and medicine. Latin was thus the “language of knowledge,” which meant something like this: real, formal, or “official” knowledge had to be articulated in Latin. However, even this statement is misleading. I want to emphasize that Latin was the language of status and power, and it was more important to know Latin in the sense of being proficient in it than it was to know anything else about it. The use of Latin was tied to the essential functions of church, to essential language in medicine and law, and to essential acts of crowns and dukedoms. The great majority of citizens did not know Latin, and it was, in practice, a “secret” or collectively private language spoken only by a privileged class of men. All authority, including the authority of knowledge, was articulated in Latin. To know Latin was to be a member of a privileged, exclusive male society, which, by virtue of its special knowledge of Latin, could regulate admission to membership.

One of the more important language events of Renaissance humanism was the discovery and study of vernacular literatures, enhanced by printing; vernaculars and printing became part of the academic scene together. Vernacular writing and literary language became, like Latin had been, something to be mastered rather than studied in a critical style. In any event, because the universities remained protected institutions, the subject matters *most important to the protectors* were the main

subjects. This meant that literature was less important than law and theology, whose practitioners were not very interested in humanism and its tendency toward encouraging an individual-centered sense of morality, not to mention access to the knowledge of a variety of languages, a knowledge that would put outsiders in position to challenge established practices. As a result of these dangers, language as an aspect of society was not a subject, but specific languages had to be mastered in order to read the texts written in those languages. The subject of language had weight only because knowledge of languages, and especially Latin, was the path of access to the positions afforded for university graduates. Before printing, learning meant going through the difficult process of mastering texts that one could not own or read easily. Just before but also considerably after printing, it was the texts themselves, more than their language, that had to be learned. The “skills and service” status of rhetoric and the liberal arts thus dates back to the founding of universities as we know them and is the result of the principal university subjects serving the interests of the protectors of the universities.

From the twelfth through the fifteenth centuries, the curricula remained stable: the three main subjects preceded by the liberal arts. When in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the advocates of humanism studied vernacular literatures and brought them into the university, this period represented, perhaps, the point of greatest respect achieved by the humanities and the study of language in the university. Humanists were what we might call “cutting edge,” and for a while they helped to open up the atmosphere and the scope of scholarly work on language and literature in universities. A case in point is that of the fifteenth-century Italian professor of rhetoric, the humanist Lorenzo Valla (1406–57). He has been characterized by modern scholars as being more expert in Greek than most of his contemporaries and as dedicated, more than other humanists, to advocating the greater importance of rhetoric and ordinary language over scholastic philosophy. Jerrold Seigel writes that Valla wanted to “model philosophical discourse on the language of business or politics . . . [and] align [his] conclusions with all the usual notions of common sense” (166). If philosophers try to “refine common language or criticize common ideas of morality, Valla’s answer was ready: ‘Let the people respond that the rules of speech and all decisions about it lie with them’” (167). Gradually, even in the use of the vernacular, a wide split developed between the language of the academy

and speakers of the vernacular, reminiscent of the split between Latin users and everyone else before the humanistic influence. Charles Trinkaus, referring to Luciano Barozzi's 1891 opinion, characterized Valla as "nearer to modern positivist and statistical methods than to rationalism[;] . . . like the positivist philosophers Valla was concerned with human liberty" (154). Similarly, Seigel writes:

Valla denied that [syllogistic logic] could ever aid in the pursuit of knowledge. One could not decide about the truth or falsehood of simple statements by any logical test, but only by means of some independently acquired knowledge. . . . He made it quite clear that he did not believe reason, by itself, could add to this knowledge. . . . He did not think that dialectic [i.e., disputation, the means used to certify masters in the university] was any more rigorous a procedure than rhetoric. (167)

Valla had an unusual (for the time) respect for ordinary language, and in that regard his stance has something in common with Wittgenstein and other twentieth-century philosophers like Austin and Bakhtin, who began taking natural language use very seriously. According to Walter Ruegg, Valla studied "spoken discourse" and interpreted authors in terms of "his understanding of language and his situation" (456). He was one of the earliest annotators of the New Testament. He "analyzed the Latin language as a living expression of the changing self-understanding of human beings" (457). He tried to create a logic derived from the grammar of ordinary speech. One may describe his approach as "contextualist," as he clearly responded to language as something living in a variety of social situations. Ruegg describes how Valla's reaching out beyond the faculty of arts came "into conflict with the other faculties":

As a result of such expansion, Valla had to flee from his professorship in Pavia because of the physical danger arising from his violent persecution at the hands of the members of the faculty of law; in Rome he was protected from the attacks of theologians only because he enjoyed the favor of the pope. (457)

Valla was considered dangerous because his subject, rhetoric, when pursued freely, implicated other subject matters. This amounted to an academic heresy, an overstepping of boundaries. The momentum of the Renaissance was carried forward by the discovery of new texts and by the

increasing ease of reproducing existing texts. Should a scholar of rhetoric follow the manifest implications of the subject, all texts in all subjects were eligible for critical study. Those scholars most comprehending of grammar, logic, and rhetoric and who had the most languages at their disposal were in the best position to recast the received texts in new lights. Valla's views on the importance of language did not prevail and still do not today: universities still behave as if full engagement in the study of language as it affects other subjects and as it releases disenfranchised populations is not in their interest.

During the Enlightenment of eighteenth-century England, we might guess that language study would be even more liberated than it was in the Italian Renaissance. But the opposite is the case, as described by Miriam Brody in *Manly Writing*. In the eighteenth century, following from the prestige of a science whose picture of the universe was deemed proof of the existence of God, "philosophers" did try to establish standard spoken and written forms and to affirm the superiority of one privileged dialect over others, but "the people" were unable to follow Valla's recommendation to decide on these rules. Traditional androcentrism established certain values that were sought in students and promoted in textbooks. Once again, as when Latin was the standard that limited access, the so-called King's English rendered language as a subject once more compulsorily and myopically propaedeutic: it was separated from the other subjects that depended on it, and it was confined to the status of a preliminary tool.

THE COLLECTIVE PRIVACY

These remarks are meant to open a discussion of how the history of the university helps to explain its social psychology as we live through it today. The three aspects of academic language I cited above—obscurity, the skills and service role of rhetoric and composition, and the eschewing of personal, affective genres—emerge from the collective masculine psychology that has developed in the university. In part this psychology is related to military values inherited from Roman law, passed on through the church, and then instituted by the church as it took over sponsorship of universities. However, monarchies functioned under the same male group psychology. It is not a great leap to say that this psychology marks a wide variety of male groups in society, such as athletic teams, legislative bodies, police forces, businesses, professional organizations, and so forth.

We know very few institutions, in fact, that do not function using this same androcentric social psychology. Our interest has been in how this psychology affects the use of language in the university. The instances I cited above are symptoms of mores, behaviors, and values that did, of course, precede the university and then were put to new uses as this institution formed in the twelfth century.

The key elements of masculine-exclusive social psychology are hierarchical government and leadership, competition, stoicism in the face of pain, concealment of weakness and vulnerability, and the use of language in the service of these principles.

Inherent Obscurity

This amounts to the agreement to use an “underlying code of the professorial message,” a language that appears to students and to the public to be a secret code, as suggested by Pierre Bourdieu in his reflection on academic discourse in the university. As already noted, the first university code was Latin, the language one had to know to be admitted to the university (Bourdieu, Passeron, and de Saint Martin 5). When vernaculars were/are used, jargon and related specialized vocabularies become the underlying code. The perspective of members of the university had been that the subject matters themselves were extremely distant from the interests of the population. Yet this could not be the case if the subjects were law, theology, and medicine, since everyone was affected by the law, the church, and the need to stay well: the subjects taught in universities have always mattered to the rest of the population, a situation that justified their pursuit in the first place. It is only that the *language of these subjects* could not be acquired by the public, which, as a result, had no access to the university or to the means by which the subjects affected society. In this way, the language of academics maintains its separation from the public, using the false explanation that the subjects themselves are remote from public interest. Socially motivated study became antisocial in the university.

The case of Martha Nussbaum and Judith Butler could be seen as a challenge to the view I am advancing. Nussbaum, in her hard-hitting critique of Judith Butler, observed that Butler may have overtaken the “extremely French idea that the intellectual does politics by speaking seditiously, and that this is a significant type of political action” (38). Derrida’s writings tend to bear out Nussbaum’s claim: American academics,

influenced by French post-structuralism via the Yale critics, imagine they are taking political action by speaking in obscure ways, using an arcane vocabulary, and making strong, anthropomorphic claims about the social action of abstract ideas. Certainly, Judith Butler has a clear political purpose in her books, and her writing is cited repeatedly for its needless obscurity. Both women are members of the academy and have acceded to its most honored positions. Thus, when a dispute is carried out exclusively among women, it might be said, the traditional agon continues and therefore may not be identified as “male.” I don’t think this argument can be made, however, as the academy itself is still being protected by the almost exclusively male corporations and legislatures functioning under traditional hierarchical rules. As Carolyn Heilbrun has recently detailed, for her to be accepted at all into the academy, she had to find a way to learn from her male role models yet create a new identity for herself. She learned from her male teachers how *not* to be obscure in her writing and scholarship:

”Jargon” was their [Lionel Trilling’s and Jacques Barzun’s] favorite pejorative term. Its misuse arose from the inclusion in prose for a general audience of the specific, technical terms of a particular discipline. When it came to writing, even all those years before the incomprehensible “theory” took over, Barzun and Trilling taught us how to write without shame or condescension for an audience as intelligent as we, though not perhaps as professionally trained. (12)

I bring this case up because it may seem as opposed to my point as the case of Nussbaum and Butler, yet it is to be explained with reference to the same consideration. In her book, Heilbrun spends many pages documenting, not merely reporting, the profound misogyny of all three of her teachers—Fadiman, Trilling, and Barzun—and the ways in which, buried in their own minds but emerging through various modes of speech and judgments of literature, was the assumption that she (their student) did not really belong in the academy. Thus, while her teachers had socially generous views about writing and language—views that still obviously do not prevail—they participated actively in the traditional animus to keep the academy an all-male society. Perhaps Nussbaum’s and Butler’s work enters a society that is, as it listens to Heilbrun, available to their voices. Yet both figures are strong feminist advocates who, as is clear from their work, are moving uphill in the same cause that

Heilbrun describes: *changing the academy*. They exemplify the “master’s tools” debate articulated by Audre Lorde. Butler tried to use the tools; Nussbaum, like Heilbrun, tried to change the tools and to use similar tools for different purposes. Yet all three are using both their language and their discipline to change the academy, to change the character of the university. Even though these three women have found a respected place in the academy, it is still run according to traditional male social psychology: women and others previously excluded from the university must follow the mores of the men who have run it for centuries: hierarchical leadership, competition, stoicism, the concealment of vulnerability, and the use of language in the service of these values. Academic obscurity has still not been revoked.

The Degrading of Rhetoric and Composition

The discipline of rhetoric and composition, with its population of more than half women and its strong interest in pedagogy, has attempted to change the approach to language in the academy. Members of this discipline have studied the history of rhetoric and have worked many more hours than other members of the academy observing students’ uses of language in a wide variety of contexts and genres. Also more than other disciplines, it has recognized the daily action of pedagogy: the ongoing need to pay attention to each student and to return to the students through the process of developing their thoughts. In several programs in the United States, the discipline has come close to a point that it could indeed help change the academy and its use of language. In fact, at this time, a writing teacher, Andrea Lunsford, has presented an initiative to the MLA to change the “adversarial academy” to a “collaborative” academy. But what Frances Condon described as happening in one department has happened repeatedly in other departments in major universities: when the program became important and influential, it was dismantled. In the past decade, several progressive, accomplished writing programs that have gone considerably beyond the narrow conception of academic writing have been “put out of business” for reasons that are not obvious, given their indisputable success. The only clear facts are that these programs had momentum, were training writing teachers to be imaginative, creative, inventive, and active, and that they all had faculty directors who were moved to other jobs, while parties without professional stake in the subject were given the task of running the programs.

The most widely publicized instance of this development occurred when the University of Texas writing program was abruptly suspended by the school administration after the Department of English permitted the teaching of writing to take place through the study of court decisions about civil rights. In this series of events, faculty members proposed to study and teach a specific language—that of the law—with its specific vocabulary and habits of use and as it was applied to a specific set of court cases that were of highest importance to the social health of this society. It would be hard to imagine a way better than this one to teach the use of language, and it was adopted with the voted support of over 85% of the faculty in a large department in a major university. Yet the dean peremptorily intervened, the program was canceled, and the faculty member who led it got another appointment at a different university. Is this much different from the fate of Lorenzo Valla? In one way it is: the faculty member whose initiative it was is female. Could this have been yet another manifestation of what Heilbrun experienced at Columbia in the 1950s? It seems similar to me. Linda Brodkey was not fired: she had tenure, but her position at the University of Texas was no longer tenable, and she left. Will someone say she was “driven” out, as Snowball was from *Animal Farm*? Yes, but then it will be affirmed that she left of her own accord, which, of course, she did. If writing programs and departments of rhetoric and composition grow normally, that is, just as other departments grow and develop, they move into the position of Lorenzo Valla: the close, careful, and disciplined study of language leads inevitably to the study of the language of all disciplines, and this language matters. But the sponsorship of today’s university has an overwhelming stake in not disturbing the key disciplines that produce wealth and maintain authority; sponsors have a stake in teaching language in such a way—skills and service—that supports what they sponsor, and that is happening today as it happened in the previous eight centuries of stable university functioning. Corporate sponsors need compliant managers and workers as much as the church and the crowns did.

Discomfort with Genres of Subjectivity

The male academy is not uncomfortable with all genres of subjectivity, only those genres that, if permitted to flourish, would expose the limitations of academic thinking. The roots of this discomfort have been outlined repeatedly by Walter Ong. He is an advocate of Learned Latin

and attributes the edifice of modern science to this language and the discipline it had taken to learn it. Science, he writes, “follows from scholastic experience” (*Orality* 114). He associates Learned Latin with writing itself, which he distinguishes from “orality,” the zone in which we experience “the emotion-charged depths of the mother tongue” (*Orality* 114). He advocates the fundamental trope of modern science—“separating the knower from the known” (105)—and presents Learned Latin as one of the key factors in establishing this axiom of scientific inquiry. He does not conceal his identification of all of these developments as characteristically male and at one point, traces back male agonism to the womb where, he suggests, male children develop in opposition to the female environment (*Fighting* 64-65). The value of Ong’s work is that he takes no pains to mitigate his argument: to him, it is self-evident that male development and its natural movement into the practices of Learned Latin through the church and the university are responsible for civilization as we know it. We may probably grant this argument, oddly enough, except for one key point: how natural could such a process have been, given the well-documented systematic, purposeful exclusion of women from this engine of civilization?

Ong presents literacy as we teach and use it as having derived from the “Christian clerical culture” that David Noble documents as having repeatedly, regularly, and often with malice excluded women and opposed their access to equal citizenship. Certainly women were prevented and discouraged from becoming literate. Ong rightly characterizes this culture as promoting Stoicism and adopting the stance of “male puberty rites” (*Orality and Literacy* 113) in which the initiate must show that he can “take it.” Learned Latin helped to censor the “emotion-charged depths of the mother tongue” (*Orality and Literacy* 114) while the community that worked up and molded the privileged knowledge of this language separated emotion radically from formal study, setting the stage for the “separation of the knower from the known,” a common axiom of scientific work. As a result of this radical separation and with students’ involvement in Latin (learning it for the purposes of certification through debate), life outside the university acquired exaggerated and antisocial characteristics. Inside the university, intense pressure built up on the men to succeed and prove themselves; outside, their adolescent wildness was tolerated, overlooked, and understood to be the result of “boys will be boys” (*Rashdall*: 4). Yet both inside and outside

the academy, the men's behavior was antisocial—fiercely clubby and hierarchical in the university and then in the church, yet subversively and hypocritically undisciplined in civilian life, protected in part by the law and in part by the church itself.

Jason Berry's recent book, *Lead Us Not into Temptation*, suggests the great effort made by the church to conceal, rather than end, such behaviors. The academic antagonism to feeling and subjectivity may thus be traced in part to the learning, status, use, and protection of Learned Latin and to the military discipline usually used to teach it: beatings, as reported by Augustine and many after him (this is a somewhat unusual, yet nevertheless plausible, conclusion). The entrance of women in large numbers into the university coincides with the passing of corporal punishment and has opened up the range of genres and language registers in which scholarly work may be published. Personal and subjective writing itself has taken forms beyond the simple "confessional," the one genre in which formal autobiography existed not too long ago. Now personal, subjective, and emotional writing is clearly and carefully linked to a series of collectively held issues having to do with social equality, human rights, disclosure of systematic secrets such as sexuality and domestic violence (see Freedman, Frey, and Zauhar; Daly). We do not know at this time whether these new genres will have the effect of introducing the willingness to face and understand private and subjective experience in the different phases of scholarship. As anthropologists have been discussing recently, there are "issues" when scholars introduce themselves into a distant society in order to study it. And there are "issues" when students decide that yes, they can come out in their classrooms and that they can write and share narratives of parental sexual abuse, beatings, and alcoholism, as ways of learning that writing means writing about things that matter, things that will affect and touch others.

THEREFORE

In any event, academic language can no longer claim a collective privacy, though it is not surprising that genres of social disclosure and the critique of scientific language have been attacked and censored (see Gross and Levitt; Sokal and Bricmont). They are still not welcomed in writing programs or considered to be part of the study of language. There is still considerable resistance to the initiatives taken by Lorenzo Valla: the use of the knowledge of language to consider how all disciplines present

their authoritative claims for knowledge and understanding. Indeed, the value of “privacy” is often defended with citations from the U.S. Constitution, and many members of the academy, referring to themselves as “intellectuals” (Michael) seem unaware of how fluently this term announces a radical separation of “us” from “them”; the term “public intellectual” attempts to preserve a private sense of individual superiority for members of the academy in the process of claiming to want to reach a general public.

The problem of academic language cannot be isolated from the problems of society that have produced it. On the other hand, the traditional mores of academic language can no longer be assumed to be necessary. There are no longer any justifications for not letting the language speak of all the constituencies now entering the university and acknowledging that the received uniformities of academic usage are as inimical to the spread of understanding as the androcentric rule of society.