Private, the Public, and the Published

Barbara Couture, Thomas Kent

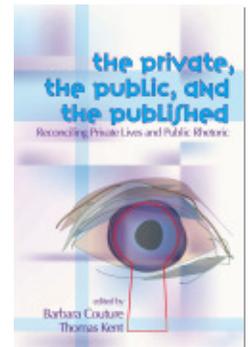Published by Utah State University Press

➡ For additional information about this book

https://muse.jhu.edu/book/9280

15

GOING PUBLIC
Locating Public/Private Discourse

Sidney I. Dobrin

It is surprising, in many ways, that this deep into the postmodern era we still make distinctions between public and private discourse(s) (or any discourses, for that matter). It seems that one of the primary characteristics of postmodernity is the debunking of narratives that cubbyhole phenomena in convenient, codifiable locations. Yet, our conversations regarding public and/or private discourses frequently maintain a binary opposition between the two. As Andrea Stover has noted: "The public and private frequently collide in my classroom, and I worry about it" (5). *Collision.* The term suggests both fundamental distinction between the colliding items and conflict between the two. Collision, not convergence. Conflict, not coherence. And worry.

Simply put, what I want to do here is to take this binary, this potential for collision, to task and argue that the distinction between public and private discourses is both false and limiting in our understanding of communication. In order to do so, I propose an ecological model for understanding discourse and turn to the work of postprocess writing theorists to explore the ways in which all discourse, be it defined as either public or private, emanates from the same location and serves, in fact, the same function, construction, and production. In turn, I will consider that individual communicators rely on a host of prior discursive moments to develop passing theories for engaging particular communicative moments and at no time separate those prior theories into realms of public or private but instead rely on all prior theories to enter into any communicative scenario. Hence, the distinction between public and private dissolve as each communicative moment is at once dependant upon and moderated by both "private" and "public" prior theories, and neither can be codified as anything more than a unique, individual moment of discursive production/interpretation. Ultimately,

what I argue is that the binary distinction of private and public is counterproductive in that it encourages discursive collision rather than a more holistic, ecological vision of the function of discourse and discourages particular discursive maneuvers in certain discursive scenarios, hence limiting discursive possibilities and potentially silencing users of discourse (the private denied access in the public). That is, I opt for an ecological, postprocess vision of discourse that sees all discursive moments as unique events that encompass all that is public and private at once. In other words, public discourse is as much private discourse as private discourse is public. And separating the two leads toward a disempowering discursive collision.

PUBLIC/PRIVATE DISCOURSE

In the introduction to the collection *Post-Process Theory: Beyond the Writing-Process Paradigm,* Thomas Kent begins to explain that those who subscribe to postprocess writing theories generally endorse "the fundamental idea that no codifiable or generalizable writing process exists or could exist" (1). He goes on to explain that "most post-process theorists hold three assumptions about the act of writing: 1) writing is public; 2) writing is interpretive; and 3) writing is situated." I would like to begin by extending Kent's notion of postprocess *writing* theory to an understanding of a postprocess *discourse* theory. Of course, the idea of postprocess writing theories directly reflects a reaction to the idea that the production of writing can be marked in an identifiable process, an idea that is distinctly a theory of composition studies. To theorize beyond the entrenched notion that student writers—in fact, all writers—engage in a recursive process of composing is to propose a rather disciplinary-specific theory. What I do not want to suggest here is that "discourse" is produced in a process similar to the ways in which we for so long assumed "writing" to be produced. We cannot theorize discourse in the exact same ways we theorize writing. In fact, I do not believe that I have ever encountered such a thing as process discourse theory or a discourse process paradigm. Discourse, that is, is more problematic, less tangible, even less codifiable (in the traditional view) than is writing.

Discourse, if it is possible to talk about such a thing, if such a thing exists, is nontotalizeable. Yet, we need some vocabulary for talking about and for theorizing an idea of discourse, and what we learn from postprocess writing theories can help lead to a theory of discourse which,

while originating in postprocess composition studies, should rightfully be called something other than *postprocess discourse theory* as there is no process discourse theory from which to be post. In fact, to name some verbal exchange *postprocess* or *paralogic* discourse is both redundant and poor modification. Writing is a technology; it is a secondary representation of discourse, a sort of a metaphysical technology, one that perpetually contributes to and is bound by discourse but exists as a representative technology of discourse. That is, writing is not discourse per se, but rather a technological representation of discourse. Hence, the term *written discourse* is also problematic, and it should probably be recast as *written (representation of) discourse*. Discourse, too, is a technology, but discourse is discourse, neither postprocess nor paralogic, unlike writing, which can be both. Discourse is at all times only and totally discourse. So, what I offer here is neither postprocess discourse theory nor paralogic discourse theory but an understanding of discourse that draws from an understanding of postprocess writing theory and paralogic rhetoric.

To understand the postprocess model, it is important to note that postprocess thinking initiated both a shift from thinking about writing as an activity that begins "inside" a writer and a shift from scholarship that focused on individual writers (those theories often labeled historically as cognitivist or expressivist) to scholarship that acknowledges how external forces—ideology, culture, society, race, gender, environment, etc.—affect and are affected by writers (those theories often historically labeled social constructionist). Indeed, most scholarship about writing now acknowledges that writing takes place in relation not only to individual writers but also to the worlds in which they live and function. For Kent, this move in theoretical focus from individual writers to communication contexts was a move from what he has called "internalism" to "externalism" (*Paralogic*). (For an excellent critique of Kent's internalism/externalism discussion, see Davis.) As Gail Hawisher et al. explain: "During the period of 1983–1985, composition studies absorbed the changes brought about by the new emphasis upon process and began to chart the course it would follow postprocess, looking beyond the individual writer toward the larger systems of which the writer was a part" (65). It is from these locations that I begin to consider discourse.

Gleaning, then, from this glossing of the postprocess composition model, I want to propose a "postprocess" understanding of discourse

(though, again, this is a poor label). In order to do so, I offer a paraphrase of Kent: central to understanding discourse is the fundamental idea that no identifiable, codifiable, or generalizable discourse exists or could exist. There are three assumptions about discourse that are crucial: 1) discourse is public; 2) discourse is interpretive; and 3) discourse is situated. From here we can begin.

I take my central claim that there can be no identifiable, codifiable, or generalizable discourse from Kent's work in the postprocess theory of paralogic rhetoric. To summarize and offer an overly simplified explanation of paralogic rhetoric, as I have before in my essay "Paralogic Hermeneutic Theories: Power and the Possibility for Liberating Pedagogies," these theories state that each moment of communicative interaction is singularly unique and that the ways in which we interpret our communicative moments are not codifiable or verifiable in any logical manner (for a detailed explanation of paralogic rhetorical theories, see also Kent, *Paralogic* or Dobrin, *Constructing*). Ultimately, what paralogic rhetorical theories identify, then, is that discourse does not operate in any logicosystemic manner and never remains stable long enough for one to develop concrete understandings of the communicative interaction it encompasses. In other words, there are no codifiable processes by which we can characterize, identify, solidify, and grasp discourse. Communicative interaction, then, relies on strategies of what Kent labels "hermeneutic guessing," wherein participants develop strategies based on previous experience to interpret discourse for that moment of communication. Kent draws his notion of hermeneutic guessing from Donald Davidson's theory of triangulation:

> Each of two people finds certain behavior of the other salient, and each finds the observed behavior of the other to be correlated with events and objects he finds salient in the world. This much can take place without developed thought, but it is the necessary basis for thought and language learning. For until the triangle is completed connecting two creatures and each creature with common objects in the world there can be no answer to the question whether a creature, in discriminating between stimuli, is discriminating between stimuli at the sensory surfaces or somewhere further out, or further in. It takes two to triangulate. For each of us there are three sorts of knowledge corresponding to the three apices of the triangle: knowledge of our own minds, knowledge of other minds, and knowledge of the shared world. Contrary to traditional empiricism, the first of those is the least important,

for if we have it we must have the others, so the idea that knowledge could take it as foundation is absurd. (qtd. in "Externalism" 65–66)

"We come to know and understand objects in the world and each other," Anis Bawarshi explains of triangulation, "only when our interpretations match others' interpretations" (73). Theories of paralogic rhetoric make the similar claim that an individual comes to know an object through interpretive moves with other interpreters. In other words, knowledge is social and discursively constructed, but can only be discussed as such as a means of convenience, as the very discourse through which knowledge is made socially (publicly) can never be codified, confirmed, identified, or totalized.

Kent explains, via Davidson, that triangulation is dependent upon two theories: passing theory and prior theory. Prior theories are the interpretive strategies one brings to a particular communicative scenario—the hermeneutic guessing skills one has developed prior to a particular situation. Passing theories are the strategies one employs *during* the particular instance of communication. Each communicative act, then, becomes an interpretive moment unique unto itself in which a participant relies on particular prior theories to develop a passing theory in order to achieve successful communication with another. The skills we develop through prior theories, then, determine how effective our passing theories might be situation to situation.

To further examine the issue of discourse, then, what can be understood, too, is that discourse, the very medium through which we come to develop prior and passing theories, is also known only through our communicative interactions and interpretations with others. That is to say, discourse is a product of triangulation, a socially mapped construction, a phenomenon that cannot be codified but that must be assumed to be product and purveyor of social interaction. One does not come to discourse, come to know discourse, without social interaction. Hence, discourse itself is socially constructed, socially construed. Functioning, then, as the medium through which we come to know both discourse itself and the world, discourse is itself discursively constructed and is thus necessarily public. The idea of private discourse has become a term used as a sort of self-validation of the authentic, a resistance to this very idea that all discourse—in fact, all existence—is public. It provides the inaccurate idea of being able to escape the public while maintaining a hold on an identifiable, confirmable self that is separate from public

discourse, from social interaction, and somehow identifiable as such. If we are to accept Kent and Davidson's notion of triangulation as an explanation of the act of communication, then private discourse cannot exist free of the public; it is, in fact, itself public.

Turning back to my paraphrase of Kent, discourse, then, is public at all times. Private discourse may be identified as a discourse known and used only by one's self, but the fact of the matter is that before a discourse can be made private (the privatization of discourse?), it must first be experienced publicly. Certainly, then, we can say that there is a distinction between public and private discourse, but only as a matter of convenience and codification. That discourse which we conveniently call private is in no way different from that discourse we call public. However, we must recognize that because of the ways in which we come to know discourse, come to know through discourse, discourse does not begin private and then earn a label or stature of public discourse as it is made public. Rather, discourse begins public and is labeled private as is needed. This is an important distinction to make, for it allows us to recognize that any discourse, whether we call it private, public, home, hybrid, or alternative, is always already public. There can be no other kind of discourse, for discourse by its very nature, its very construction, is a public, social, triangulative, interpretive entity. Identifying something as discourse identifies it as a product of, mediator of, and a purveyor of the public. While individuals' discourses affect all discourse, discourse itself is that which makes individuals' discourses.

If we accept the maxim "all discourse is public," then we must also identify that all discourse is interpretive. Returning to Kent's explanation that each communicative scenario is unique and dependent upon individual interpretive moments, it becomes clear that discourse itself is dependent upon those very interpretive moments. In order for discourse to exist, each moment of triangulation requires a moment of interpretation. Each moment of interpretation requires a growing resource of prior theories to engage and successfully interpret each new communicative moment in order to develop a passing theory for that scenario. Now, it might seem reasonable to assume, then, that each communicative scenario requires the individual to develop an internalized or private theory for engaging each new communicative scenario, that, in fact, discourse originates internally, in the private self, before being made public. However, such an assumption neglects that all prior theories originated

in public, shared discourse before ever becoming prior theories. That is, in the chronology of prior theories, our first prior theories and all subsequent prior theories were developed through public interaction. No prior theory, no discursive experience, no internal conversation initiated prior to public conversation exists prior to triangulation, prior to interpretation. Hence, in order to engage something conveniently called "private" discourse, one must first have public discourse and must have interpreted moments of that public discourse in order to develop even a label of "private." Private discourse is nothing more than a manifestation of public discourse internalized. All discourse, then, is reliant upon individuals' experiences of interpreting discourse and making use of that discourse in order to develop prior theories of communicative interaction. Private discourse is merely symptomatic of public discourse.

Writing is, as I have said, a technology, and, as Kent identifies, it is necessarily place-based. Discourse, too, is a sort of technology and it is always place-based. Discourse is situated. Discourse always comes from someplace; discourse, to paraphrase Kent, is never nowhere. I have argued in my essay "Writing Takes Place" that writing is an ecological pursuit, that "in order to be successful, it must situate itself in context; it must grow from location (contextual, historical, ideological)" (18). I go on to explain: "Writing does not begin in the self; rather, writers begin writing by situating themselves, by putting themselves in a place, by locating within a space. Writing begins with *topoi*, quite literally with place" (18–19). Here, I want to argue likewise that discourse is place-based, is situated. Discourse, that is, is at all times local. Discourse exists in context. By this I mean more than a physical location, I mean to suggest that discourse is place-based in terms of historical location, ideological location, physical location, political location, imagined location, and so on. Discourse is a place-based technology, a thing that is altered to the needs of a particular context, made by that context, and ultimately the very thing that makes that context. That is to say, discourse constructs the places that construct it. The relationship between discourse and place is reciprocal, uncodifiable. Discourse makes place as much as place makes discourse. In our book, *Natural Discourse: Toward Ecocomposition*, Christian Weisser and I argue that this very idea of discourse constructing place, or *environment* as we term it, and place constructing discourse is the cornerstone of understanding ecocomposition, to seeing the relationships among places, environments, and discourse. What we argue is that discourse is

dependent upon the environments from which it grows, and those very environments are dependent upon, created by, those same discourses. Separating discourse from place is impossible; they are inextricably bound. Of course, making such a statement allows, then, for work to be done that sees the links between other discursive constructions—history, gender, race, culture, ideology, nature, and so on—and place. That is, the proposal that discourse is placed-based allows for the development of an ecological view of discourse.

ECOLOGICAL PUBLIC/PRIVATE

Before proposing an ecological model of discourse, I want to briefly examine what I mean by *ecological*. Unfortunately, the concept of ecology—and the oft-used prefix *eco*—has been popularly adopted to resound with the idea of environmentalism and with a particular political position. While I approve of such a position, I do want to emphasize that this is not the political position I take when I refer to an ecological model of discourse. Rather, I mean to allude to the science(s) of ecology, those inquiries that seek to examine relationships among organisms and their environments. That is, when I say that I want to propose an ecological model of discourse, I am suggesting a relational understanding of discourse, an environmental and place-based understanding of discourse.

In her 1986 article "The Ecology of Writing," Marilyn Cooper contributes to the initiation of the postprocess endeavor when she proposes an ecological model of writing "whose fundamental tenet is that writing is an activity through which a person is continuously engaged with a variety of socially constituted systems" (367). In other words, Cooper suggests that writing be examined not as an individual process but as a functioning and reliant part of the systems in which that writing is situated. While Cooper, like Kent and other postprocess theorists, addresses writing in particular, what she teaches us can help us to develop an ecological model of discourse as well. She writes:

> All the characteristics of any individual writer or piece of writing both determine and are determined by the characteristics of all other writers and writing systems. An important characteristic of ecological systems is that they are inherently dynamic; though their structures and contents can be specified at a given moment, in real time they are constantly changing, limited only by parameters that they themselves subject to change over longer spans of time. (368)

To once again paraphrase (and alter a bit) our view of writing so that it encompasses discourse, we see that all the characteristics of discourse are determined by the characteristics of all users of discourse and all other discourses. Discourse is inherently dynamic. Its structure cannot be specified, codified, totalized, or identified at any given moment as it is constantly changing, limited only by parameters that discourse itself is subject to change. Discourse, then, can be seen as ecological: a system (albeit, as I have explained it, and to borrow again from Kent, discourse is beyond system, as system suggests having identifiable characteristics) that is dependent upon the relationships of discourse users to each other in order for discourse to survive, reproduce, evolve.

What is critical about Cooper's ecological model is that it introduces the notion that writers interact with systems that affect their writing. As Erika Lindemann explains when writing about Cooper's article and about writing as system: "The ecological model usefully complicates the learning and teaching of writing because it reminds us of the social context in which all writers work" (296). Writers—or more to the point of this discussion, users of discourse—in essence are dependent upon their surroundings—surroundings that are dynamic, difficult to define, and susceptible to the forces imposed by other users of discourse. As Cooper notes, ecological models are not simply new ways of saying "contextual" (367). Context suggests that potential effects of *all* local systems can be identified through heuristics in order to provide writers with accurate and complete information prior to writing. Cooper points out: "In place of the static and limited categories of contextual models, the ecological model postulates dynamic interlocking systems that structure the social activity of writing. . . . The systems are not given, not limitations on writers; instead they are made and remade by writers in the act of writing" (368). Again, in a larger, more encompassing view, discourse is not systemic, yet it is ecological in that its users are dependent upon, inextricably linked with, and a product of those very discourses. Hence, an ecological model of discourse removes the need for a binary distinction between private and public discourse in favor of a dynamic interlocking view of discourse, one in which private and public discourse function in relation, connection, and dependence upon one another.

Cooper explains that "the metaphor for writing suggested by the ecological model is that of a web, in which anything that affects one strand of the web vibrates throughout the whole" (370). She posits:

Two determinants of the nature of a writer's interactions with others are intimacy, a measure of closeness based on any similarity seen to be relevant—kinship, religion, occupation, and power, a measure of the degree to which a writer can control the action of others. . . . Writers may play a number of different roles in relation to one another: editor, co-writer, or addressee, for instance. Writers signal how they view their relationship with other writers through conventional forms and strategies, but they can also change their relationships—or even initiate or terminate relationships—through the use of these conventions if others accept the new relationship that is implied. (369–370)

Cooper also claims: "In contrast, then, to the solitary author projected by the cognitive model, the ideal image the ecological model projects is of an infinitely extended group of people who interact through writing, who are connected by the various systems that constitute the activity of writing" (372). To extend Cooper's statement to include not just writing but all discourse, we must see the web of discourse as a much more all-encompassing and dynamic web, one that is perpetually shifting, always vibrating, and constantly reforming itself in terms that cannot be defined long enough to grasp the identity, shape, or characteristics of that web. That is, from moment to moment, the web of discourse maintains operational integrity through its relationships with users of discourse, the place in which those users of discourse use discourse, and its own shifting (lack of) form. In other words, when Cooper proposed a model of system and a metaphor of web, she began to see the relational value of writing but did not see the limits placed on writing or discourse by identifying either as a system, as a measurable structure. To envision discourse as more than a web like that of a spider and instead see it as something more dynamic and more elusive is to begin to develop an ecological model of discourse. This means creating a more holistic vision of discourse and seeing users of that discourse to be more active participants in it. An ecological model of discourse allows, in fact, the binary of private/public to fracture in favor of a more holistic concept of discourse as a perpetually public, perpetually discursive entity. It disallows the false authentication of self through private discourse in favor of authenticating a public self through discursive relationships, and finally, it allows for that public (the only) self to be an active contributor to, participant in, manufacturer of, and product of discourse.

Simply put, an ecological view of discourse suggests relationships. It places all participants in and of discourse in relation to one another; it

situates all users of discourse in and of a public discourse. It does not suggest that all users of discourse are the same, communicate the same, or use the same discourse. In fact, it does not suggest that discourse itself is ever the same. It identifies the perpetually shifting and dynamic nature of discourse as the environmental force that maintains all discursive relationships. Discourse itself is engaged in an ongoing, fluctuating relationship with all users of discourse. It (if there is even an appropriate pronoun through which to represent discourse) is affected by and affects all that stand in relation to it. Even those discourses we choose to label as private, hybrid, alternative, personal, and so on function in relation to discourse as a whole. That is to say, the labels we place for convenience, to distinguish what we interpret as different discourse, do not actually separate those fractions of discourse from the more encompassing concept of discourse. Again, to simplify, all discourse is public, all discourse is interpretive, all discourse is place-based, all discourse affects and is affected by its users, all users of discourse affect and are affected by discourse.

COLLISION

At the beginning of this short ramble, I noted that perpetuating the public/private binary gives rise to conflict, to the kinds of collision that Stover identifies as occurring in her classroom. It is particularly this sort of collision, this location for conflict, that I wish to avoid through a reconceptualization of discourse as an all-inclusively public, ecological entity. What I posit is that by disavowing the self-authentication through private discourse, through discourses that we identify as somehow representative of our own or our students' own true self, the risk of exposing particular discourses in larger discursive moments is reduced. Any time an individual enters into a communicative scenario, that individual makes certain choices as to what to bring to that scenario, what prior theories to make use of: choices, simply, of what to say and what not to say, choices of what and how to interpret. In any communicative instance, users of discourse make decisions as to what they wish to reveal, what they wish to expose within the discourse. Once a communicator has made particular interpretations available to others, that user risks vulnerability through exposure. Part of this vulnerability comes from the long-professed idea that revealing the personal places the discourse user at greater risk of vulnerability because that which is exposed represents

the authentic self, represents private discourse. By rethinking the emphasis we place on the risk of exposing the private as representation of self and instead seeing exposure as a participatory, public discourse, we stand to lessen the vulnerability of the discourse user. Let me offer a quick example.

On the morning of September 11, 2001, I watched the horrific events unfold on television as most of America did. At some point, I logged onto my computer to check CNN online. When my e-mail popped up, there were, as there always are, a series of e-mails from the WPA Listserve. At 08:46 (Mountain Time, I believe) Bonnie Kyburz posted the first message to the list with the subject line "Terrorism (?)" Prior to this message, all messages had been about general WPA-type issues. The messages following Kyburz's initial post began a thread discussing the 9-11 events, first relaying news of the events to those in their offices away from televisions or radios (I never thought of my office as particularly shut off from the world). The thread also bears marks of a community looking for comfort, extending wishes of safety to one another, of information. A few posts go on about business as usual, answering questions of writing majors and writing requirements. At 9:34 (Pacific Time), Gordon Thomas of the University of Idaho posted the following request: "I'd like to hear how people are responding to these plane crashes in their Writing Programs." He asks in regard to teaching about the event: "Does asking students to write or even discuss these events unduly inflame their emotions and make later teaching more difficult?" The conversation then turned to what composition instructors should ask their students to write, to how writing could be seen as a therapeutic response to the horrible events. Deb Core, for instance, at 12:49 (Eastern Time, I think) wrote: "Seems to me that letting them talk is more appropriate at this point than asking them to write, to the extent that writing is private and students need the communal at this point." The public/private binary became central within hours of the event. And writing teachers began to decide what "students need." At 10:41(Pacific Time) Gordon Thomas posted a writing assignment, part of which included these directions:

> Writing Exercise Concerning the Events of September 11, 2001, for classes meeting on September 12–14:
>
> Start by just having a general discussion for a few moments about the events of Tuesday, September 11, 2001. Try to get the students to contextualize

the event historically (many news commentators are now saying that the only thing that this compares to is the attack on Pearl Harbor and the Oklahoma City bombing, these comparisons may be controversial, but they are already being made).

Be prepared for the possibility of some students expressing great anger or fear (or both). It is quite possible that some students may say things that they don't really mean. Do your best not to inflame such feelings, and keep in mind that it does help some people to talk about this at the time. The best attitude for you to take is to be nonjudgmental about their responses unless someone says something that is overtly hostile to international students, Moslem students in particular. . . .

After this short oral discussion, ask them to take out paper and write freely in answer to the following questions.

Now that some time has passed since your first heard the news, write down some of the pieces of information that you have learned since the initial news. Just list the information, not how you feel about it (yet).

Describe how your initial response changed as you learned more about what had happened.

What is the primary feeling that you have concerning these events? Why do you feel that way?

What do you think the response of the U.S. government will be to these events? How do you feel about that potential response?

When the students have finished writing, ask them to put their writing away and keep it until later in the semester. Explain that you won't be collecting or reading their work. Tell them that they may want to save this writing as a personal record of what has happened.

Let me offer an explication of this questionable and inappropriate assignment: something horrible has happened in the world, and we as writing teachers should have our students expose themselves before us. In other words, as writing teachers, it is our duty to ask our students to perform the private in a public forum on demand. I can think of no other example of a larger instance of collision or of providing the place for collision to happen. (Please note my apology for the seemingly insensitive metaphor of collision here in relation to the events of 9-11.) I also fail to see how this assignment teaches writing, but that's another matter. I understand that carrying out Andrea Stover's metaphor here is a bit uncomfortable, but as I explain to my students, my primary objective as a teacher, writer, scholar is to make folks uncomfortable. We tend

to pay attention to things that are uncomfortable; we try to adjust them. Uncomfortable clothes for instance, get altered; uncomfortable discourses don't seem natural, like they belong somehow.

The WPA discussion and the writing assignments proposed in this discussion seek to validate the student's authentic self by asking (in fact, demanding) that the student express feelings, the private, in a public forum under the guise of therapy, under the guise of helping the student. I would like to point out as well that such therapeutic assignments often stem from instructors' needs for a therapeutic response to a situation inflicted upon students. Yes, the September 11 disaster was hideous, and many students and teachers wanted/needed to discuss it and should be able to, but not under the aegis of writing assignments, not at the command of a writing instructor.

Don't hear, however, that I am arguing against the expression of feelings, against the rights of students or any other users of discourses, to self-expression (for more on the role of emotions see Dobrin and Weisser). I am in favor of and even encourage such things. However, to suggest that, first, the feelings of students are somehow private expressions of themselves, and, second, that teachers of writing have a right to demand those discourses be made public is abhorrent. However, when we encourage students to see how their reactions and their feelings are part of a more encompassing discourse that is affected by its relational aspects, students are in a better position to act in that discourse rather than be exposed in that discourse, made vulnerable in that discourse. Asking students to perform the private publicly is counterproductive. Asking students to make decisions about their public discourse participation seems more empowering, more discursively responsible. I find it difficult, in fact, to find a reason to want to maintain a concept of private discourse, of an authenticated self; doing so merely provides an opportunity to allow expressionism to raise its dying head and maintain a foothold in the conversations of discourse studies.

Let me conclude, then, with a final maxim: discourse is always already. Period. In order for discourse to be, it must be public, it must be interpretive, it must be place-based. Hence, any discourse exists only in relation to discourse and to users of discourse. Discourse is itself affected by and affects its users, constructs and is constructed by its users. Any discourse, no matter what we chose to label it for the sake of convenience—not the sake of actual identification or codification—is, then, always already public.