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(Self)Critical Thinking: Toward a New Pedagogy of Composition and Literature

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

(SELF)CRITICAL THINKING: TOWARD A NEW
PEDAGOGY OF COMPOSITION AND LITERATURE

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

BY
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Many educational plans have failed because their authors designed them according to their own personal views of reality, never once taking into account (except as mere objects of their action) the men-in-a-situation to whom their action was ostensibly directed.

Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed

No meaningful discussion of teaching in postsecondary education can take place in isolation from the political and cultural forces to which institutions of higher learning are presently subject. Debates concerning ends and means of college education have been omnipresent in the mass media in the last few years; much of this discussion has concerned the discipline of English. More specifically, the teaching of English has been a recurrent theme, either overtly or by implication. For whether a particular discussion took as its ostensible topic the canon or feminism or critical theory, the point of contention was almost always the effects that teaching a given subject matter would have on students.

Although mapping where these debates currently stand is inevitably an incomplete project, a recent newspaper essay may provide a useful indication. Authored by an East Coast journalism professor, the article rehearses a familiar paradigm: members of a group long under assault finally turn
on one another (or at least are represented as doing so) and
themselves declare the death of the movement they had once so
ardently supported. Such a scenario is common in American
politics; witness the current demise of "liberalism," accom­
plished in part by former liberals. Similarly, several
prominent critical theorists are cited as announcing a "post­
theoretical" age. Patricia Spacks proclaims that "'decon­
struction is pretty much dead — except for maybe one or two
people at Yale'" (Yagoda). Jeffrey Williams claims that the­
ory is "'a dead end. At a certain point you say, "So what?
Let's go on from here."" The author adds,

Now that budgets are being pinched and academic
departments are attempting to broaden their
markets, obscurity has lost some of its appeal.

Another difficulty is that many of the insights
afforded by the new [theoretical] approaches have
not proved conducive to further inquiry. "DeMan's
book Allegories of Reading keeps getting back to
the same notion, that texts are unreadable,"
Jeffrey Williams says.

Thus, according to the popular press, we have moved from the
institutional hegemony of theory to the death of theory, all
in a few short years. How did this come to happen?, one
might wonder. And what are the consequences for teaching En­

Glish?

Ironically, the alleged age of posttheory has come about
through the efforts of theorists to make "theory" more "intelligible" to the nonacademic world. Disciplinary work to achieve this goal of, as Gerald Graff puts it, "corporate visibility" began in response to widespread charges in the media that English and other humanities fields were overemphasizing arcane theories at the expense of traditional approaches to classic texts ("Future" 256). Though such criticism has been waged against purveyors of the new in English since the advent of the discipline, the latest "culture war" or "humanities crisis" quickly became fraught with political and economic consequences. At stake were government fellowships and grants, student enrollment, and faculty positions and salaries - all jeopardized by popular media attacks on "political correctness," "theory" (especially deconstruction, feminism and marxism) and "cultural relativism."

Hence the drive for "intelligibility" and "corporate visibility." MLA conference sessions on "The New Formalism," "The New Pragmatism" and "Posttheory" were held, which functioned to represent the profession's "return" to "common sense" work. Theorists wrote books for lay audiences that accentuated their personal backgrounds, to "humanize" academic workers and their work.1 This was interpreted by some observers as theorists "hav[ing] made a transition from sometimes inpenetrable high theory to prose. . . that is suitable

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1 Most notably, see Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Colored People (Knopf, 1994); Cornel West, Race Matters (Beacon Press, 1993); Gerald Graff, Beyond the Culture Wars (Norton, 1992).
- and intended - for comparatively wide audiences" (Yagoda). Within the discourse of "theory" itself, it has become increasingly fashionable to emphasize one's distance from deconstruction and other critical theories thought to be overly obscure, as Spacks and Williams' comments exemplify. The overall rhetorical effect of these events was one of conciliation toward critics of theory. "You were right," theorists in effect conceded, "Our work was too abstract and jargon-laden; we will try to write more clearly and for a wider, lay audience."

This is not to discount the contributions that some theorists have made toward re-presenting today's professors as personable public intellectuals. But the overall flight from theory - the drive for corporate visibility and intelligibility - has not "solved" the "problems," ended the "culture war" or "resolved" the humanities "crisis." There was not, I wish to argue, a lack of corporate visibility concerning the work of English teachers. Rather, there was too much corporate visibility, in several senses. Graff's choice of words is telling: the Latin corporare means "to make into a body," which may describe what happened to English, as it became widely represented as a homogenous body of politically correct discourse by the corporate-controlled mass media. Most importantly, a recurring theme in the media representations was that English and other humanities disciplines lacked the "accountability" to their "consumers" that is expected in the
Oddly, many academics seemed surprised by this "war" against English et al., and their public responses, it seems to me, exposed their naïveté about the nature and function of the mass media in a capitalist society. Consider, for instance, a Chicago Tribune article about the "war." Not surprisingly, Teachers for a Democratic Culture was referred to as a "fledgling organization," while the National Association of Scholars was called simply a "conservative group" (Jouzaitis 1, 10). More problematically, Gerald Graff, who was interviewed for the article, made continual references to the ignorance of the "public" about the work of academics. The reporter quotes him making such comments as "'the public mistakenly has been led to believe'" and "'yet this story is believed by the public'" (10). The public has evidently swallowed whole a "'inaccurate and often frightening [media] picture of what's going on in universities'" that is "'ridiculously false'" (1). Graff does academics no favors by figuring the public as not terribly bright and easily manipulated and blaming them for misunderstanding university work. His performance reconfirms stereotypes of academics as elitist, snobbish and more than willing to place the burden of being understood on laypersons instead of themselves.

Such statements also reveal a remarkable ignorance about the function of the American media. In the Statement of Principles of Teachers for a Democratic Culture, Graff and
Gregory Jay state that "the mainstream media have reported misinformed opinions as if they were established facts." One must ask: Why is this surprising? If the mainstream media normally acted as Graff and Jay would have them do, alternative media would have no need to exist. If accuracy and informed opinions about the left's activities were hallmarks of mainstream journalism, America would be a much different place.

In this context, efforts toward greater corporate visibility do not serve the enterprise of critical theory well. Why, one wonders, has it been branded unfashionable or illegitimate to use a specialized disciplinary jargon, when, say, medicine or plumbing or physics is accorded such latitude? There is no widespread outcry per se if an American medical researcher wishes to apply a European discovery or theory of treatment to American patients, but an American literature teacher using a Foucauldian approach risks denigration in a reductive newspaper article.

To the posttheorists and media commentators, it is apparently not so obvious that the rhetoric of some kinds of critical theory is not easily reducible or translatable for a lay audience. Nor, I would argue, is it always appropriate to try. There is little need, I have found in my own teaching, to attempt to make college sophomores experts in Foucauldian or Derridean terminology and methodology. But there is significant value in introducing ideas about power, knowl-
edge, speech and writing into the classroom without going much beyond mentioning their authors. The possibilities for integrating critical theory and pedagogy are best realized given the recognition that theory is both an often-arcane means of communication among professional scholars and a set of ideas that can inform and improve classroom teaching. It is not necessary to dismiss theory as "dead" or nihilistic for purposes of better "corporate visibility" for English, as proof to the "real world" that students are getting their money's worth in literature and writing classes.

The aim of the present study is to move beyond the limitations of the educational projects to be subsequently described, to forge a "fourth way" that is neither exclusively "radical," "liberal" nor "conservative." As Dewey wrote, a revisionary pedagogy does not mean. . . a compromise between opposed schools of thought, to find a via media, nor. . . an eclectic combination of points picked out hither and yon from all schools. It means the necessity of the introduction of a new order of conceptions leading to new modes of practice.

(Experience 5)

The "new order of conceptions" to be elaborated upon in the present study is underpinned by "(self)critical thinking" — a mode of intellectual work that not only focuses on the subject matter to be studied but also attempts to analyze
self-consciously the subject positions assumed by the intellectual worker. This phrase obviously brings to mind the familiar objective of "critical thinking," which is presented in university catalogues and course syllabi as a general aim of higher education, and, especially, English courses. The primary distinction between the two modes of thought concerns the thinker herself. That is, while critical thinking emphasizes an investigation of the ideological workings of a given subject matter, (self)critical thinking urges that one turn that critical analysis upon oneself as well, considering how one's own ideological positioning makes possible certain kinds of analysis while disallowing others. This process of (self)consciousness-raising should include both teachers and students; as a teacher, one may become preoccupied with getting the material across to the exclusion of considering the psychosocial dynamics of the persons present in the classroom. Therefore, (self)critical thinking calls for treating the often-conflicting subjectivities of the classroom as texts themselves to be studied and ongoing attention to such "marginal" texts as students' comments in class discussions and individual conferences and their informal writing in a course, with response to these texts that encourages their authors to consider why they discourse as they do and what implications

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2 See Chapter 4 for a fuller treatment of the distinctions between critical thinking and (self)critical thinking.
there are for discoursing in those ways. Of course, arguing for such a pedagogy is not entirely new; the current study is indebted to the work of many theorists who called for pedagogical change in the 1980s.

However, both political correctness and the attempts to "solve" it through greater corporate visibility have made revisionary pedagogies more difficult to introduce. Students and teachers have been subjected to conflicting media representations of, on one hand, dangerous, leftist professors denying the existence of truth, standards and literature, and, on the other, posttheorists validating critics of theory. Hence the calls for a conservative "back to the basics" approach or the putatively more-liberal "teaching the conflicts" paradigm to alleviate the "disorder." The difficulty


A brief list of important works on critical/radical pedagogy in the 1980s and '90s includes Barbara Johnson, ed., The Pedagogical Imperative (Yale UP, 1982); Robert Scholes, Textual Power (Yale UP, 1985); Gregory Ulmer, Applied Grammatology (Johns Hopkins UP, 1985); G. Douglas Atkins and Michael Johnson, eds. Writing and Reading Differently (UP of Kansas, 1985); Cary Nelson, ed. Theory in the Classroom (U of Illinois P, 1985); Sharon Crowley, A Teacher's Introduction to Deconstruction (NCTE, 1989); Henry Giroux and Stanley Aronowitz, Postmodern Education (U of Minnesota P, 1990); Donald Morton and Mas'ud Zavarzadeh, eds. Theory/Pedagogy/Politics: Texts for Change (U of Illinois P, 1991); and Graff, Beyond the Culture Wars.
for a revisionary pedagogy lies more in such proposed "solutions" than it does in the alleged "problems."

"Political correctness" et al. – the current educational malady – can be seen as the progeny of the 1975 "literacy crisis," brought about by a decline in SAT scores and open admissions policies, and the 1983 "A Nation at Risk" campaign that cited a lack of agreed-upon educational goals as the primary reason why "Johnny can't write" (Shor *Culture* 105, 111, 60, 62). The blame soon settled upon the revisions of curricula and canons; the political right began battling to stop the alleged phasing out of the Great Books and Great Ideas that was causing America to fall behind educationally, aided by self-professed university "liberals" like Allan Bloom and E.D. Hirsch who possess, as Robert Scholes wrote, "a nostalgia for a not very closely examined past in which things were better'" (qtd. in Graff *Professing*, back cover). This nostalgia obscures a conservative political agenda that seeks to purge academia of the remnants of the alleged "permissive education" of the 1960s that condoned, in Ira Shor's words, "too little writing and reading, too many soft electives and too few required hard academic courses" (*Culture* 67). The attempts of some universities to combat what Shor calls the "conservative restoration" have met with charges that students are being "indoctrinated" with "politically correct" ideas.

There was widespread acceptance of most of these.
arguments, despite statistical evidence to the contrary. Mike Rose notes that

[in 1890, 3.5 percent of all seventeen-year-olds graduated from high school; by 1970, the number was 75.6 percent. . . . [while] in Sweden 45 to 50 percent complete the gymnasium (grades 11 to 12); in the Federal Republic of Germany, about 15 percent are entered in the Oberprima (grade 13).

(6)

"[O]ur schools," he argues, "have always been populated with students who don't meet some academic standard," but "[w]e figure things were once different [and] we look to a past--one that never existed--for the effective, no-nonsense pedagogy we assume the past once had" (7). Arguments like William Bennett's are readily accepted: "Fundamentally, education reform is a matter of improved results. . . . Whatever changes we make in American education -- and changes are clearly in order -- their value must be determined, finally . . . by measurable improvements in [their] knowledge and skills" (222). The question that remains -- "[I]f educational excellence were brought about, how could it be recognized?" -- goes unasked (Cherryholmes 37).

Education has been summoned to stem the tide and keep America culturally homogenous in the wake of increasing heterogeneity. Rose writes that education is being asked to do what our politics and
economics have failed to do: diminish differences in achievement, narrow our gaps, bring us together. Instead of analysis of the complex web of causes of poor performance, we are offered a faith in the unifying power of a body of knowledge, whose infusion will bring the rich and the poor, the longtime disaffected and the uprooted newcomers into cultural unanimity. (237)

In my own teaching experience, I have found that the main thing that "political correctness" seems to mean to students is that whites and males should be careful about who might hear certain kinds of "jokes" they tend to tell, and that minorities and women can acceptably be more vocal in their reactions against said jokes. Most students do not connect the PC phenomenon to larger issues of political agendas and curriculum debates — which is precisely what not only university administrators but also the political right want. The former don't want to make too many waves; they fear calls from alumni, parents, benefactors and governmental agencies about how Johnny, Mary and the other students aren't being "educated right." The latter wants these groups riled up, as a conservative former student newspaper editor argues:

Many conservatives. . . actually want a politically correct campus. . . . Conservatives never sought parity with the campus liberals. We sought — and still seek — ascendancy. We wanted
our universities to craft conservative curricula. (Kelner 38)

The political right does not want their motives revealed, especially to students; they wish the debate over education to be viewed as the subversives from the '60s versus upholders of solid American educational traditions and values. Such dichotomizing, combined with conservatives' nostalgia for, to borrow Stephanie Coontz's phrase, "the way we never were," has dampened enthusiasm for new ways of teaching informed by critical theory. In fact, the back-to-basics movement has been so successful at stifling more-widespread pedagogical innovation that it prompted a seemingly liberal counterapproach that explicitly thematizes (and legitimizes) its arguments with revisionary pedagogies by making those arguments the subject matter to be studied — "teaching the conflicts."

Gerald Graff first suggested "teaching the conflicts" in 1987's Professing Literature, in which he sought a solution to what he calls the "culture wars" — canon revision, political correctness, etc. He has described and further refined the idea in various essays since then; forms of these essays have been collected in a recent book. Graff's frequent promulgation of the idea is a sign that he takes it quite seriously — and, I would argue, so should English teachers, since Graff speaks for them often, on National Public Radio, in the Chronicle of Higher Education, on the lecture circuit, and now, as one of the founders of Teachers for a Democratic
Culture, the new voice of the "politically correct." For all of the "low corporate visibility" that he attributes to English studies today, Graff has received about as much "visibility" as a left-leaning literary theorist can in the present political climate ("Future" 256). Graff's self-appointed role as spokesperson for "English" (if not the entire university, in some instances) necessitates a thorough critique of his work on pedagogy.

Graff's current position as a defender of theory is noteworthy in light of both his past and present work. Curtis White notes that:

It was not all that long ago that Gerald Graff published a book called Literature Against Itself, which in many ways introduced the shape of things to come in (to be sure) trashier reactionary tracts like Alvin Kernan's The Death of Literature. Published in 1979, Literature Against Itself was a broadside against the politics of the sixties, against contemporary theory of the poststructural variety, and against the aesthetics of postmodern fiction. (4)

Interestingly, William Bennett, in To Reclaim a Legacy, also blamed 60s politics and "theory" "for undermining humanities education and humanistic values" (Graff "Academic" 10). Graff has undergone an intellectual transformation since then; he stated in 1989 that "'I realized I was learning more from the
new theories that I was attacking than from anybody else" (qtd. in White 4). However, from the 1979 Graff to the 1984 Bennett to the 1992 Graff, we seem to have "Graff Against Himself"; put another way, the critic who helped create what became the PC problem is now in charge of "solving" it.

The problem here, though, is not that Graff's thinking about theory and teaching has "evolved"; it is in his "solution." I want to suggest that Graff's cure for our current educational malaise is underpinned by the same problematic theories about curriculum and pedagogy that he now widely criticizes. Graff describes his project as follows:

My argument is that the most educationally effective way to deal with present conflicts over education and culture is to teach the conflicts themselves. And not just teach the conflicts in separate classrooms, but structure them into the curriculum, using them to give the curriculum the coherence it badly lacks. ("Teach" 51)

According to Graff, departments and/or institutions should "thematize the semester," using such topics as "Interpretation across the Disciplines; The Crisis of Traditional Culture; Majority and Minority Cultures; The Canon Controversy . . ." (Graff "Other" 835). The English curriculum would therefore "cohere" based on its conflicts or "incoherence."

This idea of coherence based on incoherence might pose conceptual difficulties for some of the lay audience that
Graff hopes to convert (as he himself was changed by theory), but more troubling is that his ideas would seem to be subject to the same criticism he once leveled at deconstruction—a critical school he now defends from conservative attacks. Graff wrote in 1987 that a theory like deManian deconstruction "is made suspect by its monotonous universality of application" (Professing 241). Graff's "conflict" model is similarly open to critique; it's the Theory That Eats Other Theories. It's seemingly inescapable; if one disagrees with Graff, that "conflict" is immediately thematized into his model. No disagreement is safe from being commodified in his paradigm: the "only alternative" to "traditional consensus thinking on education," he argues, is "to agree to disagree" ("Teach" 66). But one wonders how much of a departure "agreeing to disagree" is from "traditional consensus thinking." Graff's rhetoric here brings to mind Richard Rorty's buzzwords—consensus, community, conversation—and his pragmatist project, which, as I will argue in Chapter 2, is disturbingly protective of the status quo.

On the basis of this notion of "agreeing to disagree," Graff's idea of teaching the conflicts would be, he claims, both "practical and democratic" (51). I would argue that his paradigm is neither, but consider for a moment how it might work. A given "conflict-based" course would entail the time of at least two professors, relatively equal in rank and seniority, who have serious theoretical disagreements on the
topic at hand. Since possibly only the largest schools could spare having two full-timers in one course, the class would either have to be doubly enrolled or of regular size, with the department having to cover another section or course with another teacher. If the course is doubly enrolled, this might mean having 60 or 70 students on hand, which would make class discussion difficult at best. The English majors would probably contribute the most (as the students most likely to be interested in disciplinary conflicts), disallowing time for nonmajors to speak up and to become engaged with the conflict under discussion. In addition, in such a large course, there would inevitably be much more lecturing than if the class had only 15 or 20 students. Larger schools, such as those Graff notes (Syracuse, Pittsburgh, North Carolina, Illinois State), might be able to make the conflict model work, but the number of students who might be affected in such institutions is an extremely small percentage of the total number that attend college in some form ("Other" 834).

More importantly, one might question how "democratic" the conflict model actually is; Graff seeks to impose a particular humanities conflict as a theme onto a course in much the same way literary texts are fashioned into "themes" for traditional classes. Of course, Graff leaves the choices up to individual faculties and institutions ("Teach" 61-62), but a potential contradiction arises here: a "democratic" paradigm that dictates to students what the burning
controversies of the day are, in a "top-down" fashion. The Brazilian educator Paulo Freire's words may be useful here, at least metaphorically:

Unfortunately. . . in their desire to obtain the support of the people for revolutionary action, revolutionary leaders often fall for the banking line of planning program content from the top down. They approach the. . . masses with projects which may correspond to their own view of the world, but not to that of the people. (83)

Graff seems to dismiss the possibility that students may not be ostensibly interested in the "culture war" or canon revision. This is not to say that they shouldn't be, for as Graff and many others have noted, students have an important stake in these debates since they ultimately affect the way students are taught. What's suspect is Graff's methodology of forcing students in a given course to study a particular conflict as if it were a priori certain that the conflict is "important" to students. Having taught a unit on the canon controversy in a writing course, I have seen the apathy that results from imposing a "conflict" onto students – and I wonder if it would have mattered if another teacher were present whose views contradicted mine. There is a good chance, I think, that students would still see academics' disagreements as unconnected with their own experiences and interests.

Graff does write that, to "most people outside academia"
(and I would include undergraduates in this group), for example, "the phrase 'traditional literary studies' has always evoked approximately the same degree of recognition as a word like 'problematize' evokes today — which is to say, none" ("Academic" 7). Here, he recognizes that what is controversial or "problematic" to academics may seem utterly unimportant to nonacademics. In his model, however, Graff doesn't consider this fact. This is not to say that it is possible for teachers to be totally unimposing when they teach; classroom power relations cannot be so easily subverted. However, teaching a particular "conflict" could end up being not unlike teaching a particular literary text, in that the object of study for the course is chosen for the students. And I cannot help but be a bit skeptical of the practical possibilities of a revisionary model proposed by someone who admitted at a 1991 conference that he was only providing "concrete examples" for his ideas after being pressured to do so by his peers. In hindsight it may be unfair to criticize Graff for not being interested initially in how his ideas might play out. But I believe this initial lack of concern diminishes his argument — advertised prominently in the subtitle of his latest book — that the practice of his ideas will "revitalize American education" (Beyond).

While I am highly critical of the conservative back-to-basics movement and the liberal teaching-the-conflicts approach, the work of adherents of "radical" pedagogy must be
subject to critique as well — though radical pedagogy has not been the barrier to pedagogical reform that the other two approaches have. Radical pedagogy obviously represents the left wing in a continuum of educational reform efforts, but despite political sympathies I may have with radical pedagogues, they have not provided "the answer" to the American educational "malaise," either.

One must begin a discussion of radical pedagogy with the work of Paulo Freire's American disciples. They largely have followed two general avenues of critique. The first, which may be represented by the efforts of Henry Giroux, Stanley Aronowitz and Peter McLaren, can be summarized as follows:

[R]adical educational theorists have argued that schools do not provide opportunities for self- and social empowerment. It has also challenged the dominant assumption that schools currently constitute major sites of social and economic mobility. . . . [C]ritical pedagogy. . . dedicated to self-empowerment and social transformation. . . has sharply etched the political dimensions of schooling, arguing that schools operate mainly to reproduce the discourses, values, and privileges of existing elites. (Giroux and McLaren 153, 155)

These educators view American students in much the same way Freire is represented as approaching illiterate South American peasants, as subjects who required "liberation." In
the United States, though, as Graff points out, this process of liberation becomes more complicated: "If a student were to end up deciding that he or she is not oppressed, or is not oppressed in the way or for the reasons that Freire thinks, one suspects that Freire could not count such a decision as an autonomous one" ("Academic" 13).

A second impulse that follows from Freire is might be called "theory substitution" - that pedagogy would be well-served if traditional approaches were replaced by those underpinned by postmodernism and poststructuralism.4 This line of reasoning, exemplified in the work of Mas'ud Zavarzadeh and Donald Morton among others, seeks to replace the "dominant curriculum" with "(post)modern pedagogy," for the dominant curriculum is "an ideological operation, the purpose of which is to maintain the existing system by producing subjects who. . . see it as acceptable [and] also perceive it. . . as the way things are, ought to be, and will be" (12, 2). The aim of this second Freirean line is much the same as the first - the "liberation" of the student subject from an oppressive educational system. However, there is a need to

4 Throughout this study, I use "postmodernism" in a general sense to refer to both literary and theoretical discourses ("postmodern" fiction, poststructuralism) within our late capitalist historical period commonly referred to as "postmodernity." Since the adjective "postmodern" could stem from either noun, I will try to indicate by context whether I am referring to postmodernism or postmodernity. I take "poststructuralism" to refer to the theoretical discourses (deconstruction, new historicism, certain kinds of feminism and marxism) within the movement of postmodernism and the period of postmodernity.
theorize the position of the student subject within educational and pedagogical systems much differently, recognizing that her construction within a distinctively American educational system must be taken into account for a revisionary pedagogy.

That is, much radical pedagogical work has tended to idealize (and thus decontextualize) the student subject, positing her as oppressed by traditional pedagogy and curricula. It also relies on an inappropriate reading of Freire's idea of the "pedagogy of the oppressed." Though it is a crucial argument of the present study that students have been (and are being) done a disservice by certain conventional ways of teaching (to be described in Chapter 3), one must be careful to recognize that, in America particularly, few students "see" overt signs of "oppression" in their daily lives. In a discussion about an Adrienne Rich essay in one of my composition classes, for example, her argument that women still suffered from many manifestations of patriarchal domination did not resonate even with the women students. In a society where many forms of oppression operate subtly, it is no surprise that an argument like Freire's often does not ring true with students.

This situation poses questions for a revisionary pedagogy: Whose interests should it serve? Should radical pedagogues categorize traditionally educated students as victims of oppression and seek to deprogram them? There are moments
in the texts of some Freireans that lead one to think so. For Giroux and Aronowitz, the question of which direction a revisionary pedagogy should take is rather simple, one of "whether we educate students to adapt to existing relations of power or to learn how to read society differently so as to apply the principles of critical democracy to the creation of new and radical forms of community" (96). This seems to be a rhetorical question for them, but I maintain it should not be.

For there are, I think, more than two possibilities for action, despite Giroux and Aronowitz's binary rhetoric. Freire himself warns against what they advocate, when he writes that leaders of a movement can mistakenly "approach the masses with projects which may correspond to their own view of the world, but not to that of the people" (83). While American teachers certainly have the freedom to try to impose their personal ideologies upon students (although the extent to which such an effort would succeed is questionable given the fact that the alleged power of professors to impose a viewpoint on students is always subject to disruption by other professors professing other viewpoints), those who wish to enact a revisionary pedagogy should be guided more by what students want to know than by what teachers assume they should know. To assume unquestioningly that students have been victimized by a dominant curriculum and therefore must be liberated from its hegemony is to recapitulate the exact
structure of the traditional curriculum in which students are told what they should (want to) know. John Dewey noted,

It is not too much to say that an educational philosophy which professes to be based on the idea of freedom may become as dogmatic as ever was the traditional education that is reacted against. For any theory and set of practices is dogmatic which is not based upon critical examination of its own underlying principles. (Experience 22)

To teach differently requires structural change, not just a different politics that promises to "liberate," not "oppress" students. Radical pedagogues, I would argue, often miss Dewey's crucial point: a new pedagogy should not merely be critical of the old practices it seeks to change; it must also be (self)critical — that is, critical of "its own underlying principles."

The tendency in the radical pedagogy of American Freireans to cast debates about teaching methods and curricula into binary terms of liberation versus oppression reveals a problematic conception of the student as pedagogical subject. This tendency has at least two likely sources. The first, most obvious reason is the tenor and rhetoric of much of Freire's work, especially Pedagogy of the Oppressed. Reports of his work with illiterate peasants under politically repressive conditions exhibit, not unsurprisingly, a proclivity toward an "us versus them" mentality. It is difficult to
fault Freire for representing events in this way; in reality, his situation largely consisted of the struggle between those like himself who seek to spread literacy and the repressive governments of Chile and Brazil who knew that a literate populace was potentially disruptive politically. The problem, however, is that Freire's rhetoric has infiltrated the discourse of American theorists like Giroux and Aronowitz without adequate translation and contextualization for American education. "'We were blind, now our eyes have been opened,'" the words of Freirean students, seem to have become the implicit slogan of American radical pedagogy (Freire, back cover). The distinctions that Freire draws between his particular experiences and his more general model have not been respected by his American adherents. For example, Freire also argues for "the solution of the teacher-student contradiction, by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers and students" (59). What seems problematic for would-be Freireans, though, is that Freire doesn't see resolving the teacher/student opposition as necessarily following basic literacy. He believed (and, by all reports, proved) that teaching basic literacy did not have to be an exercise in paternalism. One could do this and democratize the teaching process simultaneously — a lesson lost seemingly lost on some American Freireans.

Unfortuately, they tend to see Freire as advocating a
romantic theory of the subject, which in turn leads them to see the postmodern subject as problematic. Giroux and Aronowitz, for example, write:

Unfortunately, in many [postmodern] accounts, the subject is not only decentered--it ceases to exist. In other accounts, the construction of the subject appears to be entirely attributable to textual and linguistic functions. The subject is constructed, but bears no responsibility for agency, since he or she is merely a heap of fragments bereft of any self-consciousness regarding the contradictory nature of his or her own experience. (78)

In Chapter 2, I will discuss the kind of subject traditional, New Criticism-inspired pedagogy has constructed, and in Chapter 4 I will describe the (self)critical subject that a revisionary pedagogy might engender. Here, though, I want to note briefly the theoretical problems that arise from a consideration of Giroux and Aronowitz's critique of the postmodern subject. First, they recuperate a Cartesian notion of the self, arguing that postmodernism causes the subject to disappear; that is, they presuppose there is an essential self that postmodernism has eradicated. Second, they criticize uncited "other accounts" for theorizing the subject as constructed entirely by language. This critique follows from their insistence elsewhere that the "domain of the text" and
that of "the real world" must remain unconflated (78). Their fear of postmodernism is unfounded and seems to result from a common misreading of Derrida's statement in the *Grammatology* — "il n'y a pas de hors-texte" — as "there is nothing outside the text," a poor translation that has long provided ammunition for critics of deconstruction (and the broader movements of postmodernism and poststructuralism) to dismiss it as irrational, nihilistic philosophizing (158). A more accurate rendering of Derrida's words is "there is no outside-text," which insists only that everything can be read "textually." Thus, the (postmodern) subject is "constructed textually," but only in the sense that it can be interpreted as one would interpret any other kind of text.

Third, Giroux and Aronowitz speciously attack the Foucault wing of postmodern thought, stating that the postmodern subject "bears no responsibility for agency." Despite entitling their project "postmodern education," they invoke a distinctly unpostmodern idea of agency that allows them to enact an opposition between actor and acted-upon — that is, a firm notion that there is a clearly defined agent to be blamed, praised or otherwise critiqued for a given action. I read Foucault as seeking to re theorize the subject in light of postmodernism, "depriving the subject... of its role as

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originator, and of analyzing the subject as a variable and complex function of discourse" ("Author?" 118). Contrary to Giroux and Aronowitz's claim, postmodernism encourages us to take a more self-critical view of how individuals are constituted as subjects within regimes of power and knowledge whose discourse and discursivity can be textually analyzed. I also read Freire as reconceiving the subject along postmodern lines when he writes that the

solution of the oppressor-oppressed contradiction does not lie in a mere reversal of position. . . .
Nor does it lie in the replacement of the former oppressors with new ones who continue to subjugate the oppressed - all in the name of liberation.

(43)

Neither Foucault nor Freire concur with Giroux's and Aronowitz's assumption that certain subjects (the "oppressors") possess, or are "originators" of power - which is characterized as an always negative force. I would argue that Freire and Foucault see power as productive, which can be "positive" or "negative." Power produced the prison and asylum, but it also produces literacy and literate subjects.

Zavarzadeh and Morton similarly see the student subject as a potential victim who requires liberation from the "dominant curriculum." However, certain tenets of their project are contradictory. More specifically, their efforts are grounded in what seems to be a paradox: remedying the
negative effects of a "dominant [traditional] curriculum" by calling for its replacement with a postmodern curriculum, a move that is quite unpostmodern. Put another way, I want to suggest that the institutionalization of postmodern theory as the structuring principle of a department or a curriculum is subject to the same charges of hegemony that Zavarzadeh and Morton make against the traditional curriculum.

This theory substitution they seek is in response to the institutionalization of a new "theoretical" English curriculum at Syracuse University, in which the Department of English became the Department of Textual Studies, and post-structuralism became the structuring principle of the department. Results of this change included the elimination of period courses and the addition of more contemporary theory and cultural studies classes. They believe, however, the theoreticians are guilty of appeasing the traditionalists. The new curriculum is wrongheaded, they say, because it relies on a "politics of coalitionism. . . an evasive political eclecticism and pluralism that avoid facing their own ideological complicity in perpetuating the regime of exploitation by reifying the subject as 'volunteer'" (24). It also "abandon[s] (post)modern theory in a desperate rush to re-legitimate thematics" (24). Most alarmingly, in their estimation, the new model represents the coalition that has recently formed in the (post)modern academy between traditionalists
and (post)structuralists. . . . [whose] political aim. . . . is ultimately to occlude the political economy of knowledge in late capitalism. (28)

Among the tenets of the model that disturb Zavarzadeh and Morton the most are the author-centered course and the three categories that underpin the new curriculum:

Some may suggest that it is a signal curricular change that students at Syracuse can now take Dickens without Dickens being a "required course": but is this what the much-discussed politics of canon-busting has come down to in the end? . . . .

As for the three basic categories used as the "template" of the new curriculum (history, theory, politics). . . . [they] behave in approved (post) structuralist fashion: they are reversible and emblemize the unending "play of signification."

(28, 29)

Their solution to this "new humanist program" is a "(post) modern subjectless humanities" (29).

While one may wonder what Zavarzadeh and Morton's ideal curriculum might actually look like (and what students might think about it), it is perhaps more important to notice that which they ignore: actual classroom practice and its theoretical underpinnings. I wish to argue that simply substituting the theory upon which the traditional curriculum rests (what Zavarzadeh and Morton call "new humanism") with a new theory
"(post)modernism") provides no **structural** change at all, merely a **thematic** one. Their description of the differences between a traditional humanist "interpretive essay" and a postmodern "critique" illustrates my point:

[In a critique,] the learner recognizes close affinities between the way she reads a Shakespearean sonnet... and the way she "reads" and understands events that take place in South Africa/Nicaragua/her domestic life. (7)

There are several disturbing implicit assumptions about pedagogy that must be noted. First, the authors ignore the effects of the teaching practices that presuppose any student writing. That is, if a student were taught that discerning the ideology operating within a text is crucial, "close affinities" between her interpretation of a sonnet and her understanding of apartheid might be duly noted, if only to earn a high grade from her teacher. Second, foregrounding these "close affinities" becomes the "right answer" to the assignment. What happens to the student who, try as he may, cannot discern any similarities between Shakespeare and Central American opposition groups? Third, what results from Zavarzadeh and Morton's model, even from a "critique," is merely another interpretation that compares one text to another (even if one or both aren't "literary"), a part of the traditional disciplinary project of producing readings, or, as they pejoratively refer to it, "the political economy of
knowledge in late capitalism" (28). Thus, a "(post)modern" curriculum, in their formulation, still functions in much the same structural way as the humanistic model they deplore.

The present study will be developed in four chapters. Chapter 2 provides a brief cultural history of how what Foucault calls "regimes of truth" — political, philosophical, economic and educational discourses that produce and naturalize certain truths about "what things mean" and "the way things are" — have suppressed possibilities for (self) critical thinking. Examples of these truths are the pragmatist idea that something is "true" if it "works" and the capitalist notion that "success" is a sign of "goodness."

Working from the assumption that education is political, I concur with Foucault that the real political task in a society such as ours is to criticize the working of institutions which appear to be both neutral and independent; to criticize them in such a manner that the political violence which has always exercised itself obscurely through them will be unmasked, so that one can fight them. (qtd. in Rabinow 6)

I argue that questioning the workings of institutions and the regimes of truth they construct could lead to what Foucault calls a "new politics of truth" or "(self)critical thinking."

Chapter 2 also fashions the broad context for a more specific argument that follows. In Chapter 3, I argue that
New Criticism functions as a regime of truth for the discipline of English and that it is especially influential pedagogically. While historians of English have noted the New Criticism's legacy regarding scholarship, its influence on pedagogy has only been briefly treated; even these brief treatments have only concerned the teaching of literature, not composition. Through analysis of previous literary historical work, literature and composition textbooks and student responses about how they were taught English, I maintain that New Criticism — in its pedagogical forms — still functions as the "common sense" of the discipline to the detriment of students and teachers alike, buttressing the rationale for the (self)critical pedagogical ideas described in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4 delineates both the "theory" and "practice," or praxis, behind (self)critical pedagogy. I articulate the theoretical underpinnings of (self)critical pedagogy and describe several ways I have approached teaching my own courses — as examples of (self)critical pedagogy — noting what seems to have worked, what didn't and possible future approaches.

Chapter 5 reflects upon the efficacy of working toward a new pedagogy, noting the institutional and disciplinary roadblocks to scholarly work about pedagogy and theory. I argue for pedagogy as a legitimate, if not the most crucial field for scholarship in English, as a subdiscipline that can work against the negative pedagogical consequences of the teach-
ing/scholarship dichotomy that remain operative.

For despite the useful and important work on rethinking and (re)theorizing pedagogy of the last 12-15 years, much remains to be done, for several reasons. First, even though English might considered a theoretically progressive discipline compared with other humanities fields, considerable antipathy still exists to poststructuralist projects, as noted earlier. Second, scholarly work about pedagogy is also marginalized; it is thought to be a lesser enterprise than interpreting literary texts. The National Endowment for the Humanities, for example, does not fund pedagogical projects. Third, theoretical work on pedagogy presupposes a certain amount of self-reflection about the way one teaches; therefore, it is not recognizable and legitimated as the kind of "basic" work that English professors are supposed to be doing. English teachers are widely viewed by the general public as responsible for teaching students "how to write" and "objectively" passing down the traditions of literature, while scholars are assumed to be digging up new facts about old texts or making new interpretations. Devoting time and effort to reflection about the way one teaches is not a publicly recognizable and valued project; if it is to be done at all, many think, education departments should handle it.

But I think it is important to argue that critiquing the ways we teach/write/read/think to better understand why we do what we do and how we might do things differently to help our
students become (self)critical thinkers and citizens is not an activity that is secondary to "getting work done," to "producing knowledge." The alleged crises in education that have been widely publicized in the last few years have often been described in such economic terms; students aren't accumulating enough knowledge to become productive citizens, so we teachers need to be more efficient, focusing on the basics — in English, the Great Books and writing for business. The real educational crisis, however, is treating education as a commodity subject to market forces, which is an approach that produces students and teachers who are discouraged from seeing the need to consider why they perform cognitively as they do. Chapter 2 suggests how we arrived at this condition.
"Conservatives as well as radicals in education are profoundly discontented with the present educational situation taken as a whole," John Dewey wrote in 1938 (Experience 89). Prescient as his words may seem today, they were not original. Politics and education have always been intertwined, from the idea of the "philosopher-king" to the phenomenon of "political correctness." In America, however, the two have usually been thought to be best kept separate; the "partisan" nature of politics should be kept out of the "objective" processes of education.

Nevertheless, there is a widespread impression today that the intrusion of "politics" is a primary cause for "problems" in American education. Such criticism has come from both "inside" and "outside" the system. Former Yale University President Benno Schmidt accused some college teachers of "'trying to achieve political objectives'" in
their pedagogy (Worthington 19). A business and public policy professor at the University of California at Berkeley writes, "[T]he politicization of... the classroom is distorting the purpose of liberal education" (Vogel 19). Journalist and critic Roger Kimball states that "higher education in this country has been transformed into a species of ideological indoctrination — a continuation of politics by other means" (20). To what extent these and other similar critiques have affected public attitudes is of course arguable, but their continued and widespread dissemination hints at the possibility of substantial influence.

Those who disagree with such criticisms have fought back in several ways. They have responded in print in both academic and nonacademic venues; an organization of university professors, Teachers for a Democratic Culture, was formed to confront what its members felt were misleading characterizations of academia. However, this allegedly problematic connection of politics with education also needs to be examined in broader historical and cultural contexts. Political correctness did not suddenly appear on American college campuses in the late 1980s; in many ways it is not a new phenomenon at all. It is, rather, a recurring educational "problem."

While it would be difficult to find anyone opposed to "solving" "problems" in American education, I disagree with the assertion that "politicization" of college campuses is one of the problems.
Instead, what may "ail" higher education today (at least insofar as English is concerned) is a lack of disciplinary self-consciousness about the extent to which many teachers tend to rely (often unconsciously) on traditional pedagogical assumptions that were formed when student demographics were far less heterogenous. As John Mayher argues, there is a need to break out of "commonsensical" modes of thought about the teaching process, to "frame pedagogical problems in new ways" (9). Such reframing would attempt to move from an emphasis on "critical thinking" toward teaching, thinking, reading and writing that is (self)critical. But this movement toward (self)critical thinking must be preceded by two related critiques. One critique should attend to the traditional pedagogical assumptions mentioned above, noting their weaknesses and strengths. A second critique should concern how those assumptions may have developed from larger societal assumptions about the purposes of education, the nature and methods of interpretation, the roles of knowledge and "intellectuals," and the uses of lived experience.

The latter critique, to be addressed in this chapter, begins with an argument proffered by the historian Richard Hofstadter in Anti-intellectualism in American Life (1963): that one hallmark of the intellectual and cultural history of America has been the repeated manifestation of what often has been called "anti-intellectualism." He defines the term as "a resentment and suspicion of the life of the mind and of
those who are considered to represent it; and a disposition
constantly to minimize the value of that life" (7). Anti-intellectualism, it seems, is again a significant force in cer-
tain cultural arenas, especially education. Academia, some
say, has been overrun by leftist intellectuals who force
their students to read politically correct, multicultural
texts instead of the Great Books that traditional, "commonsensical" teachers have assigned.

However, this situation is not solely explained by anti-
intellectualism. It is reductive to say that the current
perceived deficiencies in higher education stem from a sim-
ple, quintessentially American distrust of experts — and not
only for the very reason that many of the most vociferous
critics of education are "intellectuals" themselves. Rather,
the alleged educational malaise may have more to do with the
way capitalist societies function vis-a-vis the production of
knowledge. In "Truth and Power," Foucault offers "a few
propositions" about how "societies like ours" decide what
counts as "knowledge" — which has much to do with how educa-
tion functions:

"Truth" is to be understood as a system of ordered
procedures for the production, regulation,
distribution, circulation and operation of
statements. . . . "Truth" is linked in a circular
relation with systems of power which produce and
sustain it and to effects of power which it
induces and which extends it. A "regime" of truth. . . . This regime is not merely ideological or superstructural; it was a condition of the formation and development of capitalism. (73, 74)

The necessity for (self)critical thinking may be established in part by the premise that Americans — as subjects in/of a capitalist society — are (and have been) always already implicated in a "regime of truth."⁶ Within a regime of truth, power is exercised through (at least) two nodes: "intellectuals," who ground cultural truths or, put another way, "what things mean" in art, literature, etc. and policy makers and business leaders, who ground political and economic truths or, in other words, that which is desirable — the "American Dream," for example. Most individuals therefore do not make decisions about the production of truth; instead they abide by, consume or are otherwise subject to truth. As a result, such subjection to truth suppresses (self)critical thinking, which may be likened to what Foucault calls "a new politics of truth" (74). That is, I do not theorize (self)critical thinking as that which "replaces" critical or some other kind of thinking; I am arguing that it is a mode of thought.

⁶ It should be noted that, although the focus of this dissertation is American education and culture, Foucault's ideas and extrapolations from them may well be "true" of other societies as well. Indeed, Foucault writes that "this same regime [of truth]. . . subject to certain modifications, operates in the socialist countries (I leave open here the question of China, about which I know little)" ("Truth" 74).
potentially operational in all subjects. Thus, the present study largely departs from the spirit of Hofstadter's, in which he theorizes anti-intellectualism a kind of cognitive deficiency that afflicts Americans periodically. As Foucault writes,

> The problem is not changing people's consciousnesses – or what's in their heads -- [it is to change] the political, economic, institutional regime of the production of truth . . . . [to] detach the power of truth from the forms of hegemony, social, economic and cultural, within which it operates at the present time.

(74-75)

In other words, the goal of (self)critical pedagogy is not to change what students think; it is to uncover and make known the conditions of possibility that govern how they think, to encourage an awareness of how their attitudes, values and beliefs are not causes of particular actions, but rather effects of prior truths of which they may not be aware. (Self) critical thinking can result when subjects are encouraged to expose the forms of power that underpin regimes of truth, a process similar to what Freire calls "conscientization."

A contemporary example of an attempt to suppress (self) critical thinking is the "Why ask why?" advertising slogan. The question seems to express implicitly a fear that Americans might "ask why," think (self)critically, inquire into
the theoretical basis for some action or statement. The nature of the question as "rhetorical" also implies that it is not worthwhile or productive to "ask why," that it is better to accept the way things are. The slogan can be seen as an attempt to naturalize not asking why, to discourage (self)critical thinking.

In this chapter, I will examine how various historical developments (or "statements," in Foucault's terminology) in American politics, philosophy, economics and education - our national cultural history - have functioned within their respective regimes of truth to suppress (self)critical thinking. Though this history is brief, I am hopeful it will provide significant support for the general line of argument. I undertake this critique to set up a more specific argument in Chapter 3 about the role of English pedagogy in the suppression of (self)critical thinking in students and teachers. The present critique shall begin with a brief look at ancient texts - the Phaedo and the Republic - that foreground pertinent issues about power and intellectual work.

In the Phaedo, Socrates convinces Simmias that there is a distinction between the soul and the body:

SOCRATES: Then, Simmias, our souls must have also existed without bodies before they were in the form of man and must have had intelligence.

SIMMIAS: Unless indeed you suppose, Socrates, that all such knowledge is given us at the very moment of birth; for this is the only time which remains.

SOCRATES: Yes... but if so, when, pray, do we
lose it? For it is not in us when we are born . . . . Do we lose it at the moment of receiving it or if not at what other time?

SIMMIAS: No, Socrates, I perceive that I am unconsciously talking nonsense. (Levison 73)

Socrates subsequently extends his argument, arguing with Cebes for the connection of the soul/body dichotomy with the oppositions of unchanging/changing and unseen/seen (75-76).

These binaries are further advanced in the Republic, where Socrates bifurcates "knowledge" from "opinion" in his conversation with Glaucon. Socrates describes knowledge as a "faculty" — "powers by which we do as we do" — like sight or hearing (254). Glaucon agrees that knowledge is a faculty, in fact, "the mightiest of all faculties" (255). Opinion, on the other hand, according to Glaucon, "is just that faculty whereby we are able to form an opinion" (255). Socrates then proceeds to raise the stakes: "Being is the sphere of knowledge and the function of knowledge is to know the nature of being?" he asks. Glaucon assents: "[I]f difference in faculty implies difference in the sphere and if, as we say, opinion and knowledge are distinct faculties, then the sphere of knowledge and of opinion cannot be the same" (255). Socrates then applies the coup de grace: "Then if being is the sphere of knowledge, something other than being must be the sphere of opinion" (255, emphasis added).

These exchanges in Plato founded an organization of concepts and principles, which have (consciously or
unconsciously) underpinned both scholarly and everyday discourse since antiquity: ideal/real, soul/body, unchanging/changing, unseen/seen, being/nothingness, knowledge/opinion. This cognitive hierarchizing has produced insidious results, as David Marcell comments:

[R]ationalism's dualism, primarily because of its conception of knowledge and truth as ab extra to human experience, had a paralytic effect on philosophy and on social and intellectual development generally. From the time of the Sophists, rationalism prevented men from going to their own experiences as the source of knowledge of the good and the true. . . . preserving culture's sacred cows. (255)

The knowledge/opinion opposition is particularly important, for it is integral to the hegemony of virtually all discourse. To the extent that any discourse is ostensibly involved in the interpretation of objects of study, the connotations that stem from "knowledge" compared to mere "opinion" separate "experts" from lay persons. Marcell notes that this dichotomy was an integral part of ancient societies such as Athenian Greece, "where a class of slaves did everyday, menial labor and a class of thus 'freed' citizens, priests and philosopher-statesmen could pursue knowledge of the ideal without having to involve themselves too intimately with commonplace concerns" (209). The scientific revolution of the
16th through 18th centuries and the work of Francis Bacon were attempts to ameliorate the dichotomy, by validating man's experience to attempt to discover nature's laws. However, John Locke and other empiricists retained the notion that "man was still assumed to function within fixed laws, which derived from the original design and purpose of the universe's chief architect" (Marcell 213). As I will describe more fully, pragmatism's reaction to this, in Dewey's words, "mere" empiricism, would be a "radical" empiricism that would reverse the binary - privileging experience and opinion over fixed truths and knowledge - but continue to perpetuate its structure. Reading Plato to rediscover the knowledge/opinion binary sets up the arguments that follow, which suggest that the knowledge/opinion distinction - a regime of truth that overdetermines all others in the West - goes a long way toward explaining how (self)critical thinking has been suppressed in America.

One can begin by noting the intellectual circumstances surrounding America's founding, for "America" is at least as much an idea as it is a physical place. It is significant that those who first settled America were escaping "civilization" - including the influence of (secular) intellectuals. The Puritans' evangelicalism and repudiation of European "decadence" were free to prosper in a frontier populated only by "savages"; Hofstadter considers the Puritans to be the first "anti-intellectuals" (49). The freedom from political
and intellectual oppression that characterized "the first Americans" fostered a sense of self-reliance, a quality that continues to be characterized as quintessentially American, having been disseminated in various guises ("common sense," "frugality," etc.) through such authors as Paine, Franklin and Emerson. More importantly, however, the legacy of early America, from the Puritans through colonial times, is one of intellect set in opposition to democracy, the former "as a quality which almost certainly deprives a man or woman of the common touch" (51).

It is not surprising, therefore, that this opposition would come into play in a widely disseminated discourse—presidential politics. The 1828 election, pitting Andrew Jackson against John Quincy Adams, was perhaps the first to be fashioned in these binary terms. While the fact that popular sentiment was against Adams because of his election as president by the House of Representatives in 1824 (despite Jackson's victory in the popular vote) was important, the issue of intellectualism was perhaps larger. Evidence of this includes the popular anti-Adams saying: "John Quincy Adams who can write/ And Andrew Jackson who can fight" (159). Hofstadter writes:

The main case made by Jackson's spokesmen against Adams was that he was self-indulgent and aristocratic and lived a life of luxury. [But] what is most relevant here [is that] his learning
and political training were charged up not as compensating virtues but as additional vices.

(160)

More than simple anti-intellectualism, this is an example of marshaling the knowledge/opinion binary to obfuscate a political decision and discourage the electorate from thinking (self)critically about the situation. Hofstadter views the Jackson/Adams race as a battle of the upper "writing" class versus the low/middle "fighting" class, accepts this opposition as commonsensical and natural, and sees it as the electorate's reasoning for picking Jackson. But it is significant, I think, that the above slogan, one might notice, coheres grammatically with an "and" — not an "or." One might say, then, that the slogan, although seemingly pejorative of Adams, was not a metaphor for the public's political decision-making process. Their opposition to Adams may have been more pragmatic; writing, an activity for the learned, was a luxury, while fighting was perhaps an economic necessity. That is to say, the electorate may have decided that the fighter Jackson was a better choice to address their immediate concerns than the writer Adams, a decision made at the expense of more self-conscious reflection about long-term needs. (The near destruction of the White House during Jackson's inaugural "open house" may serve as a metaphor.)

By the late 19th century, the always already present disjuncture between "intellectual" knowledge and
"commonsensical" opinion in American cultural and political discourse was widened through the increasing use of dualistic labels, the legacy of which fuels conservative/liberal name-calling today. The terms "individualist" and "paternalist" became part of common parlance, respectively referring to corporate self-sufficiency (a business functioning as a self-reliant "individual") and government intrusion (the stern father regulating the corporate "individual" too much) (Green 24). Individualism/paternalism soon took on connotations of intellectualism. Individualism was good, American and commonsensical, while paternalism was bad, European and intellectually based (27). This dichotomy can only be sustained, as Green notes, by a xenophobia that seems to be yet another Puritan legacy:

Both before and since the Bolsheviks, Americans have feared "socialism" and "communism" as alien, European things. . . . That the two words have historically been such powerful pejoratives derives not from their precision of meaning or from any widespread public understanding of Marx, but from their emotional connotations as symbols of an alien culture. (29)

Ironically, though, those opponents of big-business interests (Andrew Carnegie et al.) who were labeled "paternalists" found themselves, just before and around the turn of the century, newly cast as overly "feminine." In the early 1880s
battle over civil-service reform, the intellectualism question again was raised:

The professional politicians succeeded in persuading themselves that civil-service reform meant favoritism to the college-educated; that it would restrict job-holding to a hereditary college-educated aristocracy; and that all kinds of unreasonable and esoteric questions would be asked on civil-service examinations. (Hofstadter 184)

President Chester Arthur feared that the civil-service exams would favor "'mere intellectual proficiency'" over other talents (185). These reformers, who were more highly educated than the career politicians they were criticizing, soon came under fire for their supposed inability to operate in the "masculine" world of politics.

This characterization, deriving quite directly from prevailing popular assumptions about women, the "feminine" sphere and the inherent masculine bias of "self-reliance," foregrounded a troubling gender ideology at work in the American knowledge/opinion dualism. Hofstadter states: "[T]he politicians argued that culture is impractical and men of culture are ineffectual, that culture is feminine and cultivated men tend to be effeminate" (186). Late-19th-century politicians managed to align the opposition of masculine/feminine with the knowledge/opinion binary. That the
reformers did not question the hierarchizing – they tried only to show they weren't "feminine" intellectuals – demonstrates the hegemony of the knowledge/opinion opposition within the regime of political truth. The use of these dualistic labels, naturalized into everyday discourse, functioned to suppress (self)critical impulses to question them.

This may have allowed for the emergence of a president – Theodore Roosevelt – whose campaign explicitly thematized the masculine/feminine opposition. Hofstadter writes,

A recruit from the same social and educational strata as the reform leaders, he decided at an early age that the deficiencies charged against them were real and that if reform was to get anywhere, their type must be replaced by a new and more vigorous kind of leader. . . (191)

His constant references to "manly men" and "the strenuous life" attributed masculine qualities to the Republican party, while casting Democrats as overly intellectual, effete and "feminine" – characterizations that remain with us today.7

On the positive "American" side are self-reliance, individualism, big business, democracy, masculinity and commonsensical opinion. On the negative anti-American or "European"

side are paternalism, socialism, feminism and intellectualism. Naturalized in everyday discourse, these binary constructions are an integral component of the regime of political truth; the questioning of these oppositions is discouraged if not suppressed. Today, "politically correct" academics and "left-wing" political candidates are summarily dismissed as "radical" and "out of the mainstream."

Andrew Carnegie's legacy — specifically, the association of business interests with democratic American common sense — fueled the ideologically conservative regime of political truth into the 20th century. The election of Robert LaFollette as governor of Wisconsin in 1900 provides compelling evidence. The election of LaFollette — a left-leaning university professor — inaugurated a theory that the increasing complexity of problems facing governments could be ameliorated by university-trained experts. Business interests in the state — who fashioned themselves as "conservatives," in Carnegie's terminology — became convinced that the university was part of a conspiracy against them (Green 38; Hofstadter 202). Intellectuals like LaFollette were seen a threat to commonsensical businessmen like Carnegie's followers. Theodore Roosevelt, caught between his intellectual beginnings and a populist political career, was trapped in a quandary that Woodrow Wilson exploited, proclaiming, following LaFollette, that Republicans (and Roosevelt's Bull Moose followers) had become slaves to big business and
industrialists like Carnegie. Wilson pronounced conserva-
tives defenders of "special privilege" and captives of
"private monopolies" (Green 75). This view prompted many
attacks; perhaps Wilson's most assiduous critic was the
literary critic Randolph Bourne, who lambasted Wilson and his
"liberal intellectual" followers for their support of World
War I. David Green notes that

Bourne underscored the incongruity of talking about
"liberty" and supporting a policy that rested on
massive coercive authority. What was at fault, he
concluded, was the very idea that a coercive
process such as war could be used to "liberate"
society. (83)

Bourne also attacked his mentor, John Dewey (who strongly
supported the war), for this seeming contradiction. Bourne
might be considered a (self)critical thinker in this regard,
for he seemed to recognize the incongruities of the politi-
cal posturing and labeling, how even "liberals" were impli-
cated in the regime of political truth whose aims were more
to defeat conservatives and maintain power than to work for
"liberty." But Bourne's views were suppressed then and they
are but a footnote in American history now.

The years that followed - through Hoover's conservatism
into Franklin Roosevelt's "liberal" New Deal - provide more
evidence of how the regime of political truth continued to
suppress (self)critical thinking and how its influence can be
seen as more far-reaching than mere anti-intellectualism. If anti-intellectualism by itself could explain this regime, the New Deal would have never occurred, since its ideology was theorized by university professors (Hofstadter 214). However, in the wake of the Depression and the widely perceived failure of Hoover's administration, the "natural" dislike of knowledge-holders was set aside for pragmatic ends, primarily mass government employment. Roosevelt convinced the public that it was the government's duty to intervene to solve national problems and affixed the term "liberal" to such interventions (Green 119). Traditional interpretations of the New Deal state that Americans wholeheartedly embraced it. But what seems to have happened, one might say, is that the practice of the New Deal was accepted, but its theory was not. For when Roosevelt invoked the liberal label, he set it in opposition to "conservative," which he associated with laissez-faire industrialism. However, the regime of political truth holding sway still promoted the connection of the

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8 Offering a contrasting view, Stephanie Coontz argues that the New Deal "related to men as if they were all independent wage earners in the market and to women as if they were all dependent caregivers in the family. Rejecting citizen entitlements, such as universal medical insurance, New Dealers preferred measures such as workmen's compensation, which was tied to previous participation and remuneration in the labor market. Such wage-based welfare measures perpetuated discrimination against women (and minorities), who tended to have more difficulty persisting in the work force and ascending a job ladder that gave them wages high enough to exist on the fraction of the salary provided by unemployment compensation." See The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap (Basic Books, 1992), p. 138.
conservative label to positive concepts like self-reliance and democracy (124). Consequently, after the New Deal public works projects were finished, "liberalism" waned drastically and "the notion became widely current that the professors were running things," a negative impression of the government World War II only exacerbated (Hofstadter 217).

"Liberalism" continued to take a beating after the war, with Joseph McCarthy's "conservative" anti-communism besting Harry Truman's avowed liberalism. Truman's critics (notably Hoover and his protege Robert Taft) managed to so reinforce the connection of the term with socialism and communism (pitting "European" against "American" values once again) that rarely has it been considered positive since, with Lyndon Johnson's Great Society a brief exception that suffered much the same fate as the New Deal (Green 195).

Moreover, Truman's critics significantly influenced the 1952 presidential election. Though Dwight Eisenhower's popularity as a war hero might have overwhelmed any Democratic nominee, Adlai Stevenson's candidacy was doomed also by his popularity with intellectuals and liberals. Stevenson's tenure at the Harvard Law School, his open, enthusiastic support by university groups (such as a large number of Columbia University faculty who also denigrated Eisenhower) and his civilian service in both world wars prompted characterizations of him as an effeminate intellectual. His critics reinforced this at every opportunity: "The New York Daily News
descended to calling him Adelaide and charged that he 'trilled' his speeches in a 'fruity' voice" (Hofstadter 227). "'A vote for Eisenhower, the plain American,'" one Midwestern newspaper stated, "'is a vote for democracy'" (226).

Familiar dualistic labels notwithstanding, Stevenson's main problem was the perception of his message as leftist, intellectually based and overly theorized compared with Eisenhower's pragmatic, "middle-of-the-road" approach. Eisenhowe r ostensibly abandoned conservative/liberal labeling (though its connotations helped elect him) in favor of "the middle," or "anti-extremism" (Green 216). Anti-extremism as an idea and label was one-half of an extremely functional dichotomy. Its opposite, extremism, could be used to castigate anyone who disagreed with Eisenhower's approach and quickly was added into the regime's list of negative concepts.

The effects of this political pragmatism were far-reaching. Even "intellectuals" themselves lent credence to the middle-of-the-road approach. In 1955, Columbia University sociologist Daniel Bell published an anthology of essays extolling the virtues of anti-extremism, The New American Right, which included writings by Hofstadter, a historian at Columbia (Green 231). Green argues that this way of thinking left its supporters unprepared for the social extremism of the 1960s (239). The Vietnam War, however, functioned to rescue anti-extremism from turbulent times; it "evolved as a 'middle of the road' or 'moderate' approach to fighting
'communism' [and] drew broad support from self-styled liberals and conservatives alike" (254). Thus, there seemed to be little perceived contradiction in the "liberal" Lyndon Johnson proposing the Great Society while simultaneously escalating the war.

These episodes in American political discourse suggest the power of a regime of truth to regulate the behavior of its subjects, diminish the possibility of thinking (self) critically and questioning the legitimacy of its power and authority, and "ascertain the possibility of constituting a new politics of truth" (Foucault "Truth" 74). I have argued that this has been accomplished primarily through normalizing the distinction between knowledge and opinion and developing other dualistic labels to accompany it, thereby oversimplifying complex political issues and choices and positing them as either/or propositions that do not require meaningful reflection.

The suppression of (self)critical thinking in American subjects has also been accomplished by certain regimes of philosophical and educational truth. Specifically, I want to suggest that particular moments in texts of American pragmatism seem complicitous with the regime of political truth described above. The effects of this regime, however, are more subtle; political statements (government policies, other official edicts, etc.) give the impression of affecting the public more directly than philosophical discourse.
Pragmatism may have been particularly well suited for having such effects upon American subjects, for it appealed to "American" attitudes and modes of thought; it was presented as anti-European, anti-intellectual and anti-metaphysical. William James' definition of pragmatism — "[t]he attitude of looking away from first things, principles, 'categories,' supposed necessities; and of looking towards last things, fruits, consequences, facts" — is direct criticism of tenets of traditional philosophy such as Platonic "categories" and "principles" and "necessities" of Aristotelian argumentation (32). Cornel West gives a broader context to pragmatism's aims and significance: "American pragmatism is less a philosophical conversation putting forward solutions to perennial problems... and more a continuous cultural commentary or set of interpretations that attempt to explain America to itself at a particular historical moment" (American 5). Pragmatism moved philosophy from a fixation on the metaphysical to a concentration on the physical, from purely theoretical speculation to practical application.

Many have argued pragmatism has succeeded in exactly that way; West maintains it is "the most influential stream in American thought" — as a "non-philosophy" in a society of "non-philosophers" (212). Precisely because of its influence, I wish to argue that particular moments in its texts support the suppression of (self)critical thinking. But this is not to say that pragmatism causes such a suppression.
James' project of focusing on consequences (instead of first principles) and the contingency of truth (rather than its alleged metaphysical quality), insofar as it is an abandonment of foundationalism, the truth of the classical European philosophical regime, is laudable. For example, his emphasis on abandoning the "inveterate habits dear to professional philosophers" upholds the knowledge/opinion opposition (James 31). "A pragmatist," he writes,

turns away from abstraction and insufficiency,
from verbal solutions, from bad a priori reasons,
from fixed principles, closed systems and pretended absolutes and origins. He turns toward concreteness and adequacy, towards facts, towards action and towards power. (31)

The distinctions James draws between the pragmatist and the "professional philosopher" resemble those between the non-intellectual and the intellectual. Intellectuals, so the stereotype goes, don't worry about potential repercussions, for "they are too busy perfecting their "formal knowledge and expertise" (Hofstadter 19). Envisioning practical consequences is the forte of, as Hofstadter puts it with insufficient irony, "the common man"; it exhibits his "plain sense" (19). As noted earlier, to be an "impractical" intellectual around the turn of the century was to be an agent of protest, anti-business and anti-American (Hofstadter 38). Gerald Graff notes that some intellectuals in academia around this
time did nothing to dispel this notion, invoking Arnoldian rhetoric in their disdain for the public: "Scholars spoke of 'the complacent attitude of the contented Philistine toward the scholar, as though the latter were not more than a half-man and by no means to be taken seriously.' They deplored the 'vast and growing ignorance' that 'pervades society'" (Professing 115).

James' emphasis on the contingency of truth may also be seen as upholding the intellectual/non-intellectual and related dichotomies. He writes:

[A]ny idea that will carry us prosperously from any one part of our experience to any other part, linking things satisfactorily, working securely, simplifying, saving labor; is true for just so much, true in so far [it is set] forth, true instrumentally. This is the "instrumental" view of truth. . . the view that truth in our ideas means their power to "work". . . (34)

James implies that truth is a personal matter and what is "true" is that which is functional, contrary to what professional philosophers have always said. Another form of this reasoning is voiced by students who claim that their opinions on given subjects are "true" because they believe them. However, such reasoning has the potential to suppress a wider conception of the power of truth — for example, a recognition of "the status of those who are charged with saying what
counts as true" (Foucault "Truth" 73). James further supports this reasoning when he writes that, "New truth is always a go-between, a smoother-over of transitions. It marries old opinion to new fact so as ever to show a minimum of jolt, a maximum of continuity" (35). This emphasis on "opinion" and "fact" — rather than "knowledge" and "theory" — shows James figuring his ideas as "non-intellectual" and perpetuating the dichotomy.

How some of John Dewey’s work underpins the regime of philosophical truth is more complex. In its role as the theoretical basis for child-centered education, Deweyan pragmatism would seem to be the result of careful reflection upon the nature and processes of education — that students should be central to the theory and practice of American schooling. How then, one might ask, can moments in Dewey’s work be seen as potentially complicitous in the suppression of (self) critical thinking? This question may be addressed in two ways.

First, there is Dewey’s emphasis on "progress" and "growth" and his steadfast belief that "science" could serve as the vehicle for both. Like James, he considered traditional philosophy a failure, but his critique exceeded James’. Following James, Dewey maintained philosophy's preoccupation with metaphysical questions was unproductive; it was "circular" and "disputatious," its "schools" "arguing the same questions" that "still divided" them "much as they were
in the times of the Greeks" ("Philosophy" 842). But he also felt that philosophy failed in its blindness to "changing realities in the external world"—burgeoning industrialization and "progressive" scientific thinking (Marcell 206). Education, he argued, should be similarly "progressive" and "rational," using the scientific method as a structural guide. A problem, however, is that Dewey's vision of what West calls a "functionalistic education," one "that combined autonomy with intelligent and flexible guidance, relevance with rigor and wonder," can also be seen as a simply "functional" training that merely "adjust[ed] one to the labor market possibilities" (84). William Andrew Paringer states, "[T]he instrumental needs of a rapidly growing economy required the concomitant development of a citizenry who would either appreciate or acquiesce to those needs" (9). While it may be argued that Dewey did not have in mind the training of workers for easy admittance into the capitalist system and regimes of truth, the strains of functionalism and scientism in his pragmatism lend themselves to this kind of (mis)use.

Second, because of their easy cooptation by business and technocratic interests, many of Dewey's ideas can be invoked in the name of commonsensical, American, democratic, individualist growth. In his later work, Dewey chastised those whom he considered to misuse his work—both technocrats and "child-centered romantics," who "call[ed] upon [him] only for that part of his thought that supported their own partial
views" (West 84; Berlin Rhetoric 59). Hofstadter argues that Dewey's appropriation by groups with radically different ideologies is due in part to his obtuse writing style (367). However, a more compelling argument is that Dewey's preferred labels for his work - "democratic" and "scientific" - were sufficiently vague and so firmly established in everyday discourse as positive terms that there was no perceived contradiction in opposing ideological groups using the same Deweyan concepts. As Paringer notes, a concept like "democracy" can be used easily to "ignore or conceal the social contradictions in American society" (19). The middle-of-the-roadism that was the hallmark of pragmatism also contributed to Dewey's cooptation through a word like democracy: he never problematized "democracy." It was never a question of "do I fight?" or "do I flee?," but "how do I accommodate?" By assuming a pragmatic stance, he was philosophically wedded to that which already existed (American democracy). . . he took for granted. . . its [democracy's] internal hierarchies. (52)

Though I will argue in Chapter 4 that the "very late" Dewey - in 1938's Experience and Education - is a different case (and even somewhat Foucauldian), Dewey's earlier work tends to lend itself to a perpetuation of "the way things are" and reinforces the power of American regimes of truth.

The most prominent pragmatist in America today, however,
sees nothing wrong with the potential (mis)use of Dewey's reliance on science and democracy: "[T]here is nothing wrong with science. . . . there is nothing wrong with liberal democracy," claims Richard Rorty ("Solidarity" 16). "There is only something wrong," he argues, "with the attempt to see their [scientifically oriented liberal social thinkers like Dewey] efforts as failures to achieve something which they were not trying to achieve" (16). What Dewey, James and pragmatists in general were trying to achieve was, as Russell Goodman states, an "emancipation of philosophy" toward an "engagement with everyday life" (128). Rorty's pragmatic, "commonsensical" defense of pragmatism is based, though, on a notion that individuals should not be criticized for consequences that do not match their original intentions. That is, since Dewey did not intend for his ideas to be readily accepted by his ideological opponents, the fact that they were cannot be criticized. Rorty's position about the dissemination of written ideas is dated; Socrates recognized that writing can be interpreted in ways that may be quite antagonistic to the author's intentions. To note that some of Dewey's ideas may be appropriated for what some may consider pejorative goals is not necessarily to impugn him for having the "wrong" ideas or misguided aims.

Rorty's work, in fact, is much more recuperable for repressive regimes of truth than Dewey's. His project, according to Robert Westbrook, "involves little more than
making sure that individuals hurt one another as little as possible and interfere minimally in the private life of each" (541). This goal is accomplished through such conceptual means as "solidarity," "community," "consensus" and "conversation." Our worldly troubles, Rorty posits, are due to "the disappearance of human solidarity" in a postmodern age ("Method" 207). Our hope for solutions lies in "bourgeois liberalism," of which "Deweyan pragmatism" is the finest example (207). This state of liberalism can be achieved through a "quest" for "the consensus of a community" ("Solidarity" 17) based on "conversation," amongst "nations" and our American "fellow citizens" ("Postmodernist" 588). This "pragmatic framework establishes both the means and disposition to foster. . . compromise. . . which [is] necessary for the strength of democracy" (Bullert 208). Throughout his work, Rorty argues our society needs only "loyalty to itself" — its sense of community on the basis of democratic solidarity and consensus — to legitimate itself, not some "ahistorical backup" such as absolute truth or morality ("Postmodernist" 585).

Rorty's pragmatism has been criticized on several accounts. Paringer considers him to be overly idealistic and uncritical; on the notions of "solidarity" and "consensus," Paringer writes, "Yes, 'cooperation' is desirable and a fundamental human quality to nurture, but when it is not in evidence, why not? What inhibits it?" (123). West considers
Rorty's work apolitical: "What are the ethical and political consequences of his neopragmatism?... [T]here simply are none" (206). Both see Rorty's work as providing "moral dexterity" for the capitalist West to do as it pleases, while it hopes that life will improve for those subject to the consequences of its actions (Westbrook 206).

Most pertinent, however, is West's statement that Rortyian pragmatism "requires no change in our cultural and political practices" (206). This is not surprising in a way, since James attempted to found pragmatism as a kind of non-philosophy, as a movement that would not dictate subject matter to its adherents (the search for truth, etc.). But in Jamesian pragmatism, one had to pay lip service to what might happen if a particular choice were undertaken. For Rorty, that brief moment of reflection is unnecessary; there is little cause for thinking about why particular decisions are being made and what the consequences might be.

Pragmatism as a whole, from James to Dewey to Rorty, has the potential to rationalize the status quo (whatever it is at a given historical moment) through its drive for amelioration. Similar to the use of dualisms in political discourse, pragmatism's functionality in regimes of truth lies in its apparent lack of reliance on intellectuals and "professional philosophers," in its blend of democratic consensus-building (in Graff's terms, "agreeing to disagree") and commonsensical
practicality (a "see-if-it-works" notion, as Paul Berman puts it) ("Teach" 66; Berman 17). Pragmatism's radical initial impact and commitment to social justice are thus endangered by the possibility of codifying pragmatism into what West calls "a crude anti-theoreticism," the belief that the imagining of consequences can supplant the theorizing of specific social practices (209). Pragmatism was theorized as "a philosophy of present experience," eliminating the need for theoretical reflection (Paringer 39). As Foucault warns us, "the analysis of actual experience is a discourse of mixed nature"; it can end up "doing no more... than fulfilling the demands laid down when the attempt was made to make the empirical, in man, stand for the transcendental" (Order 321). Pragmatism, in certain instances, "posit[s] that the evidence given us by our sensations... is a pure and entirely trustworthy source of information about the world" (Crowley Teacher's 11).

Having examined the influence of regimes of political and philosophical truth in suppressing (self)critical thinking, the American regime of economic truth – capitalism – must be considered as well. Being in the "mainstream" of American thinking has always been "profitable"; to be "liberal" or "extreme" or "intellectual" has meant losing elections, reputations and money – crucial components for identity formation in a capitalist society. Written into this socioeconomic text, Americans traditionally have accepted, to
a significant extent, "the way things are" as the way they should be, merely to be able to live a materially decent life. This is not to say that Americans have not been amenable to "change," but that regimes of truth have dictated that such change will issue from the proper individuals or groups and fall within commonsensical strictures of thought – e.g. replacing Democrats with Republicans or vice versa without seriously considering candidates with alternative points of view. Not thinking (self)critically to question the status quo may have begun with the "religious belief in prosperity as a sign of godliness" of the Puritans that has metamorphosed into a "secular variant" in America: namely, "The chief sign of goodness is success" (Taylor 267). This "what works is good" mentality seems to be especially necessary, I would argue, in this period of postmodernity.9

Francois Lyotard's formulation that postmodernity is characterized by a loss of faith in "master narratives" (God, Truth, etc.)10 misses what seems to me to be an inescapable effect of the regimes of truth that govern America today: that because of what Fredric Jameson has termed the "schizophrenia" of postmodern life, subjects seek master narratives all the more strongly ("Consumer" 119). The rise

9 Again I use "postmodernity" to refer to our late 20th-century historical period, in contrast to "postmodernism," which signifies the cultural practices of postmodernity.

of religious fundamentalisms, the call for "back-to-basics" education, the focus of political discourse on "family values," the resurgence of identity politics — all indicate a general yearning for certainty in uncertain times, for a "referent" that "no longer exists" (Postmodernism 277).

There is, I believe, a strong correlation between our "throw-away style of life, in which everything which surrounds us suffers perpetual obsolescence" and the suppression of (self)critical thinking (Taylor 251). "Individuality" — a supposed bedrock of American democracy — disappears in a world where everything and everyone is bought and sold. People feel the "terror of imminent anonymity," the "experience of isolated, disconnected, discontinous material signifiers" (Jameson Postmodernism 358; "Consumer" 119).

Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that Rorty resorts to moral passivity and self-justification, saying, "[W]e should be more willing than we are to celebrate bourgeois capitalist society as the best polity actualized so far, while regretting that it is irrelevant to most of the problems of most of the population of the planet" ("Method" 210).

Political, philosophical and economic regimes of truth suppressing (self)critical thinking — especially the discouragement of questioning the connections of "growth" and "business" with "progress" and "democracy" — have provided the conditions for this sense of growing commodification, of dehumanization, largely through their effects on education.
Ira Shor points out the symbiotic relationship between traditional education and American capitalism:

If masses of students succeeded in school and college, the economic system could not possibly meet their expectations. The traditional curriculum... is a program structured to produce the high degree of failure that relieves the unequal economic system of the need to reward amass of high-achieving graduates. To maintain inequality, the system needs a limited number of individuals who climb up and are certified for success, along with a mass of people certified as mediocre and blaming themselves for their own failures.

(Empowering 10)

Or as Michael Ryan puts it, "Even two opposed groups – radical teachers and business technocrats – hold the same view of the university... that the university services capitalism by providing it with trained manpower, technology and new knowledge" (45). This process was bolstered by the rise of vocationalism or "career education" in the early 1970s. For example, Shor writes, the "authorization of $850 million in 1972 for occupational programs at the community college alone was three times the entire allocation made for capital construction on two-year campuses" (Culture 52). Having demonstrated their "extremism" and "anti-American" attitudes during 1960s war protests, those in the liberal arts and hu-
manities saw their departments "shrivel in size and prestige," their possibility for promoting (self)critical modes of thought dashed by their perceived lack of practical, commonsensical middle-of-the-roadism (52).

A current effect of the suppression of (self)critical thinking — the "political correctness" controversy — exhibits how many of the arguments and labels that historically have been used to dichotomize and hierarchize cultural issues are still operable. An examination of the PC conundrum reveals many of the same qualities that characterized previous political/cultural controversies. To be PC is to be intellectual, liberal, extreme, theoretical and feminist. Those who allegedly uphold "freedom of speech" against PC "tyranny" are populist, more conservative, pragmatic, practical and, while not always overtly anti-women, certainly not "feminists." As a war of labels, PC obfuscates the battle over political power that it really is. PC is not about "freedom of speech"; it is about conservatives who "sought — and still seek — ascendancy," who wanted "conservative curricula" (Kelner 38). It is not about "tenured radicals" from the 60s indoctrinating students with leftist ideas. Rather, as Barbara Ehrenreich recently wrote, PC is the new "evil, all-powerful ideological enemy" of the "American right," replacing European/Soviet communism (333). Unable to find Marxists abroad to battle, the political right found some in academia — as they did during McCarthyism.
The pedagogical problem here is the widespread acceptance of PC as a pejorative: "[M]ost folks now believe we brainwash our students by feeding them sixties radicalism alongside what one New Republic commentator calls 'warmed-over Nietzscheanism,' thus turning them into agents of political correctness" (Berube 126-27). As I argued in Chapter 1, the remedy is not more "corporate visibility" for English. The suppression of (self)critical thinking makes possible the conditions for a populist backlash given the right issue—such as one relating to "intellectuals." This is not the same thing, however, as saying "Americans are anti-intellectual." I am suggesting that the influence of several regimes of power makes the criticism of intellectuals productive—to get published, to win elections, etc. It allows one to appeal to a basic desire for simplicity in a world in flux, to stand for simple, certain "truths" that intellectuals often dismiss as naive.

Within English, the desire for certainty was no less strong. By the 1930s, the discipline was "groping for a principle of order" (Graff Professing 145). Disparate kinds of scholarship—philological, historical, psychoanalytic, Marxist—were hindering English professors' ability to transmit the true meanings of the classics to an ever-growing student body: "the need arose for a simplified pedagogy . . . . isolat[ing] literature as an autonomous mode of discourse with its own special 'mode of existence,' distinct
from that of philosophy, politics, and history" (145).

In the next chapter, I will argue that this "New Criticism" succeeded so wildly that it became the common sense of the discipline and survives quite nicely today as a default mechanism for any attempt at revisionary pedagogy; it is what one "falls back on" if trying something "different" doesn't "work" in the classroom. New Criticism's steady gaze on the "text itself" (and the pedagogy that results from this emphasis) will be critiqued as a form of hegemony that suppresses students' and teachers' (self)critical impulses.
CHAPTER 3

SUPPRESSING (SELF)CRITICAL THINKING IN THE ENGLISH DEPARTMENT: NEW CRITICISM AS PEDAGOGICAL COMMON SENSE

No historical lesson has been taken from the success of the New Critics.

Susan Miller, Textual Carnivals: the Politics of Composition

One adopts measures in keeping with his past training—and the very soundness of this training may lead him to adopt the wrong measures.

Kenneth Burke, Permanence and Change

The general effects of the subjectivity fostered by any English pedagogical orientation should not be underestimated. Susan Miller and Evan Watkins, among others, have argued that English is more widely influential than one might think. Watkins writes,

English is arguably the most important discipline . . . because it is perceived and educationally situated to operate "non-specifically." For with the exception of working in an English department yourself, English doesn't train you for a specific job; rather, it measures your level of general "cultural skills" available for transfer elsewhere, into a specific sector. . . . English is the
largest discipline that operates in these terms. Unlike the other humanities, English in some form is represented at every level of education. (205) The institutional site of English guarantees that a substantial number of Americans experience the consequences of its pedagogy.

I will argue in this chapter that the consequences of conventional English pedagogy contributes significantly to the suppression of (self)critical thinking and constructs subjects who, as William Cain puts it, are "at a total loss" not only when they are asked to respond critically to literature, but also when they are asked to speak "in a critically informed manner about their politics, attitudes toward history, and 'awareness of the environment' in which they live" (119). More specifically, I will examine the complicity of New Criticism in this process and how its pedagogical manifestations have become naturalized as "commonsensical" teaching practices, or, as Susan Miller puts it, "institutional habits" (2). Through an examination of previous disciplinary historical work, literature and composition handbooks and anthologies, student reactions, and personal experiences as both a teacher and a student, I will present a rationale for a pedagogy of (self)critical thinking.

Cain and Graff have described how New Criticism was institutionalized as disciplinary common sense. But critics have only briefly addressed the specific pedagogical...
consequences of this phenomenon. They have mainly emphasized the hegemony of New Criticism over literary scholarship and teaching literature in general. Concerning the former, they believe that New Criticism was a necessary historical corrective for literary studies. Graff notes that though New Criticism may seem theoretically unsophisticated today to some, "in its time the movement stood for theoretical reflection against the primitive accumulation of data" (Professing 247). Cain writes that "[t]he New Criticism made a necessary case against the bad effects of a certain kind of excessively 'historical' approach, and in this sense it was truly liberating" (111). While these statements are generally true, questions remain: Theoretical reflection about what? Liberating for whom? Graff and Cain inadequately focus on these issues of pedagogical legacy, especially New Criticism's effects on composition instruction.

Critics such as Hugh Kenner and Robert Scholes have sensed this; they combine Watkins' argument about the pervasiveness and consequences of English with a realization of New Criticism's pedagogical legacy. In 1976, Kenner wrote:

There seem to be no New Critics in business today . . . . [T]hey are extinct for the same reason that the unicorn is extinct. Expeditions find no unicorns because none have existed. It is arguable that the New Criticism had little to do with literary criticism but much to do with the teaching
Scholes also notes how New Criticism has been more than simply a literary theory:

Try to imagine the New Critical revolution... without *Understanding Poetry* and countless other textbooks that both changed classroom practice and provided financial rewards for those who developed effective vehicles in which to distribute the tenor of New Critical ideas. (18)

It remains difficult to find many English scholars who identify themselves as New Critics (or deconstructionists for that matter); categorization seems to be out of vogue - which is not necessarily a bad thing. But Kenner's argument concurs with Cain's - and accurately reflects, it seems to me, the current pedagogical condition - in that New Criticism was from its inception a pedagogical as well as a literary theory and that "its power is so pervasive that we are ordinarily not even aware of it" (Cain 105). I want to suggest that to try to teach (self)critically, one must become as aware as possible of its pervasiveness. I will turn first to its influence on literary pedagogy.

An interesting incongruity that exists between "literature" and "composition" as subdisciplines of English is the choice of adjective that precedes "pedagogy" in each instance. One speaks of composition or writing pedagogy, but when speaking of "literary" pedagogy (in the rare instances...
when it is mentioned), one tends not to think of the teaching of literature as "reading" pedagogy, which would be the logical analogue. This seemingly innocuous syntax is revealing in that it foregrounds the attitude that governs the teaching of literature. Scholes writes,

> When we say we "teach literature," instead of saying we teach reading, or interpretation, or criticism, we are saying that we expound the wisdom and truth of our texts, that we are in fact priests and priestesses in the service of a secular scripture: "the best that has been thought and said." (12)

Despite the work of the last 15 years or so to encourage movement away from a singular focus on canonical texts, it has been my experience as both a student and teacher (and the experience of many of my students in previous classes) that many literature students emerge feeling that they had been subjected to a quasi-religious ritual.

Scholes' analogy might be extended further, for even those literature students who resist the mystical impulses of Great Books are aware that they were (allegedly) in the presence of the sacred — though they didn't "buy it" — just as nonbelievers in a church recognize they were subject to religious belief. The material effect of this orientation is that thinking outside such a paradigm is nearly impossible; students are not encouraged to think about how literature
could be taught differently. Either one prostrates oneself before the text, they are led to believe, or one rejects such worship entirely in favor of a radical subjectivism that claims all interpretations are equally valid if they are strongly held. Both subject positions are based on the New Critical tenet that meaning resides exclusively in the literary text itself. That is, even though extreme subjectivism may seem more "liberating" than "text worship," there is actually little difference.

Some students are perfectly happy to learn that the meaning of a poem resides within the poem; in conventional literary pedagogy, if they can't guess what the meaning is, the teacher usually provides it for them. Alternatively, some students feel constrained by this approach and suspect there are as many meanings as there are readers. But in both cases, "meaning" emanates from the text – not from history or politics or the reader. And students know that, regardless of what they believe, they must provide the "correct," text-based, teacher-sanctioned meaning on exams, papers, etc.: "[T]raditional schooling has taught students that knowledge is serious only if it comes from the teacher or the textbook" (Shor Empowering 73). This critique shows how student resistance to pedagogy – the possibility of constructing and assuming alternative subject positions – has posed little threat to the power of New Critical literary pedagogy. By assuming universal agreement on the basic hermeneutic
question — Where is meaning found? — New Critical pedagogy constructs subject positions for students that presuppose they are incapable of answering that question themselves.

The after effects of New Critical student subject positions may be seen in students' words and experiences. In several literature courses, I have distributed a questionnaire on the first day of class concerning students' previous experiences with literature and what "advice" they have been given about how to interpret it. Before I have said a word about my approach to teaching, they respond to the questions, having been told only that the questionnaire will not be graded. Their responses suggest that many students' (secondary and) postsecondary literary education has been influenced profoundly by New Critical pedagogical techniques.

Nearly every response to the question "What 'advice' have you been given about how to read literature?" was guided by surface/depth metaphors — that meaning had to be excavated from the text, having been placed there by the author or formed by the interactions of the author's words, especially images and figures. My students gave these responses about how they had been taught to read poems:

I don't remember advice, but I remember going over stanzas.

I have been taught to try to find the hidden meanings.

It is hard to figure out sometimes.

I feel you should keep reading the poem until you
understand it.

Poetry has been taught to me in regard that there is always some underlying meaning and you have to break it down, piece by piece.

To keep an open mind, and read in between the lines.

Some poetry has hidden or double meaning.

I've been told to read slowly and really analyze [sic] what the author is writing.

I can't remember.

Since most of these students were freshmen and sophomores, I thought initially that their reactions might refer more to high school courses than those in college. However, in several upper-level drama and fiction courses, I received these reactions:

My instructors have told me what to focus on and look for without allowing any other interpretation.

I was taught to see literature as having some sort of deeper meaning. I was taught to respect textual writings in a "sacred" sort of way.

I have been taught to read between the lines, to find a hidden meaning, and to determine what the author meant.

I have been taught to get the meaning out of a story, etc.

While there has been an occasional more encouraging response ("What the author has written may not be what I think it is, but it [sic] doesn't mean that the teacher or other students
have the correct meaning\footnote{I say "more encouraging," to highlight the potential problem in this response as well. This type of reaction may be seen as leading to total relativism, an "anything goes" approach to the study of literature.} most students have indicated that their literary study has largely been an exercise in mind reading, as it was for me as an undergraduate.

In a Romantic poetry course, I remember reading a Keats poem ("Endymion," perhaps) repeatedly one night, trying to figure out what the meaning was, since the course had shown me to be a very poor mind reader. Having finally decided what the meaning was, I went to class the next morning and discovered, much to my surprise, that I was actually "right" — my interpretation "coincided" with the teacher's. I can recall the utter joy and amazement at finally "knowing" a piece of literature.

That sense of euphoria has since turned to something else — mostly frustration. Unfortunately, I don't think my experience and those of my students are atypical of what is happening in some (if not many) English classrooms. Recent pedagogical scholarship has not influenced as much of the discipline as one might think. This may be because conventional New Critical pedagogy is just as "productive" today as it when GIs were flocking to colleges in the late 1940s — it processes students through courses with maximum efficiency. Teaching students to "just read the text" takes much less time than other approaches one might use, largely because it
discourages self-consciousness about the reading process. Gregory Jay writes that New Criticism "was such a popular and successful mode of pedagogy [because] it disciplined the reading subject to an impersonal brand of aesthetic and moral commentary that was utterly blind to its own cultural idiosyncrasy" (324). There is a ruthless pedagogical economy to New Criticism that is just beginning to be challenged.

But to at least as great an extent as economics, this pedagogical model is based, at least in part, on fear. Scholes writes that, since the 1960s, we literature teachers "have been losing our congregations, and we are scared to death that our temples will be converted into movie theaters or video parlors and we will end our days doing intellectual janitorial or custodial work" (13). Some lament the evolution of English into a discipline where "cultural studies" and "theory" exist alongside "literature." However, whether or not one approves, English can never be the discipline it once was. What needs to be addressed is how teaching practices must change to adapt to the shifts in subject matter and student demographics. The canonical orientation and homogenous audience of English cannot be recaptured, so strategies must be devised for meeting the challenges that now confront teachers. Abandoning old habits can prove difficult, however. Recently, a colleague and I were discussing how to teach Thomas Pynchon's *V.* The main problem with the novel, he said, was trying to "boil down" the meaning of each
chapter to lecture about it to his students. This conversation confirmed my suspicion that almost any literary text – regardless how postmodern, radical, unconventional, etc. – could be made pedestrian (and productive of similar student responses) if taught in a certain (New Critical) way. Unfortunately, this approach is encouraged in some literary handbooks and anthologies – to which I will now turn – which materially affects the interpretive process and forestalls the construction of (self)critical subject positions.

A critique of the effects of New Criticism on pedagogy, especially as manifested in handbooks and anthologies, must begin with Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren's 1938 work, Understanding Poetry. It is useful to look at a crucial passage toward the end of the introduction. The authors write:

[W]e must emphasize [a] matter of the greatest importance. . . . [C]riticism and analysis. . . . is ultimately of value only insofar as it can return readers to the poem itself – return them, that is, better prepared to experience it more immediately, fully, and, shall we say, innocently. The poem is an experience, yes, but it is a deeply significant experience, and criticism aims only at making the reader more aware of the depth and range of the experience. (16)

The highlighted statement provides clear evidence that Brooks and Warren sought to head off any inclinations toward
historicist interpretations that students or teachers might have had. That Brooks and Warren felt the need to issue such rejoinders may reveal the kind of reader they wished to construct for their anthology. After providing their audience with much information about the technicalities of reading poetry, Brooks and Warren explicitly state what kind of reader they are interested in:

Given intelligence and sensitivity in some degree, much of our learning is accomplished unconsciously. But to speak specifically of poetry, mere immersion does little good unless the reader is making, however unconsciously, some discriminations, comparisons, and judgments; if he merely wallows in a vague, pleasurable reaction, the immersion can mean little or nothing. (16)

The New Critical subject position suggested here necessitates a subject who is "intelligent" and "sensitive" enough to have an unconscious ability to learn. Less fortunate persons evidently learn only consciously — if at all. This subject must

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12 In fact, all of the following analyses of English handbooks and anthologies will be informed by this general idea — that what their authors request their audience not to do foregrounds certain anxieties about interpretation they wish to suppress in themselves and others. John Clifford writes that such a critique that "focuses on the outside, on what is excluded, reveals as much as an examination of actual content. . . . [A]bsence is as revealing as presence." See "The Subject in Discourse," pp. 38-51, in Patricia Harkin and John Schilb, eds., Contending With Words: Composition and Rhetoric in a Postmodern Age (MLA, 1991).
undergo a specific kind of "immersion" in poetry, an interpretive baptism that brings to bear his "intelligence" and "sensitivity" upon the poem to produce qualitative "discriminations" that are "immediate," "full" and "innocent" reading experiences. "Vague, pleasurable reaction[s]" — secular, sensual responses — are to be avoided.

Given the religious/secular, sacred/profane binary rhetoric of these passages, one need not have read Barthes or Lacan to see that Brooks and Warren advocate a puritanical interpretive subjectivity based on denial. They seek to occlude the "pleasure of the text," "jouissance" or any other corporeally pleasurable reaction to literary texts, which explicitly foregrounds why their recommended subject position discourages (self)critical thinking — it denies the self. In its attempt to privilege alleged interpretive virtues such as "objectivity" and "discernment," the Brooks/Warren New Criticism reveals a fear of their opposites — subjectivity, play, pleasure.

This anxiety is also specifically masculine. Their rhetoric sets stereotypically male characteristics such as discrimination and judgment in opposition to a feared "feminine" quality — pleasure — arguing that a feminized criticism would be ruinous. But this anxiety is cloaked by a layer of "scientific," "rational," "objective" language that seeks to construct a subject who would see the New Critical position as "natural" and "commonsensical."
In this regard, many current literature handbooks and anthologies pick up where Brooks and Warren left off. Their authors also try to present their ideological positions as widely agreed-upon truths about reading. I will now analyze several currently popular literature handbooks and textbooks, the problems in which are not, I suspect, isolated occurrences. This critique should not be taken as a wholesale indictment of the genre; I merely wish to show how their ostensibly helpful intentions toward literature students are often undermined by their rhetoric.

Richard L. McGuire's *Passionate Attention: An Introduction to Literary Study* was first published in 1973 by W.W. Norton and was reissued in 1990. According to Norton, it is one of their best-selling literature handbooks. It is evidently quite popular in its present form, since the 1990 edition is a reprint, not a revision. McGuire values the role of criticism in literary studies by defining it as the paying of "passionate attention" to literature, but the description of his book on the back cover reveals a problematic approach. It states that "the author's intent is to provide relationships between the interests of student and teacher, and to set them in a simple, coherent overall context" (emphasis added). While McGuire may be able to speak for his interests as a teacher, and perhaps also for those of his students at MacMurray College in Jacksonville, Illinois, a small liberal arts college with a homogenous (white, middle-class) student
population, a question remains: in how "simple" or "coherent" a context are students' and teachers' interests enmeshed at MacMurray or, even more importantly, a more heterogenous institution? Moreover, don't these "relationships" he mentions already exist? The interests and desires of students and teachers are certainly not always discussed or even conscious to the individuals involved, but they are always already present.

Rhetorical considerations concerning the student reader whom the text constructs must be examined also. Consider another statement from the back cover that precedes the one just cited above: "Students may read the book on their own in a single evening, for the author's intent. . ." One is led to believe that the relationships between students' and teachers' interests are not only simple and coherent, but they can also be learned in one sitting. Moreover, the third-person, formal diction ("Students may read") reinforces conventional notions of the subject positions of students and teachers and the idea of the critic-as-authority, allied with teachers.

Andrew Debicki has noted that this alliance between the critic and the teacher usually is not explicitly stated in print (handbooks, anthologies and the like) or in a conscious way in the classroom, but is manifested in the attitude that prevails in a classroom. He writes that a class
immersed in New Criticism. ... will be more likely to expect an authoritative solution to all of its problems on the part of the teacher; if none is forthcoming, it will probably attempt to invent an authoritative solution itself and then smugly move on to the next problem and poem. (181)

Central to the discovery of such "authoritative solutions" for New Critics is a primary focus on the "text itself." McGuire renames this "the work in itself" or the "objective approach" (14). In critiquing *Passionate Attention*, I wish to suggest that the pedagogical upshot of the author's "objective approach" is an objectification of students, not texts (if that were even possible), which functions as what Foucault calls a "dividing practice" wherein the subject is either "divided inside himself or divided from others" ("Subject" 208). In the case of the subjectivity engendered by a handbook like McGuire's, both divisions are encouraged.

That is to say, through its fixation on the authoritative interpretation of the literary text itself, student subjects are divided inside themselves by the promotion of a dichotomous mindset: the subject who reads "critically" and "correctly" for academic purposes versus the subject who "just reads" for pleasure. This fissure is then reproduced outside the subject; she is divided from some of her fellow students in English and other disciplines who feel that the literary pedagogical project coerces one to "read too much
into" texts to "succeed" in literature courses. To be a literature student (and especially an English major) is to lead a somewhat schizophrenic academic existence, subject to a constant internal and external struggle about what constitutes legitimate interpretation. This is not to advocate a single-minded mode of interpretation that would govern every text one encounters. Yet it is important to realize that literature students are being sent mixed (if not contradictory) signals about how they should read inside versus outside the academy and that these signals function to reinforce problematic oppositions such as academy/"real world" and academic literary study/"just reading."

Encouraging students to give the same sort of attention to Milton that they give to a Harlequin romance novel is not a viable solution. Still, McGuire reinforces the stereotype of "academic" reading, guiding the literary student toward a New Critical interpretive approach while proposing it as an "objective" view that interprets the work "as fairly as possible" (65): "The work should stand at the center of the reader's study" (24); "[O]ther studies are important to the work only if the work is the central object" (26). Good readers must also approach the literary work with "an acceptance of the work as it is," and they must "take up a new work with as much innocence as [they] can muster," "inquir[ing] into the nature of the truth of the work" (66).

McGuire's advice about how to read responsibly is trou-
blesome. The first problem, as exemplified in the just-cited quotations, is his constant reinforcement of the bifurcation of "the work" from what lies "outside" the work. The intrinsic/extrinsic opposition is the founding gesture of New Criticism; but although one may justifiably critique its theoretical untenability, perhaps a greater concern is the pedagogical consequences. For the typical student fear of "reading too much into the text" is squarely based on this dichotomy. The literary work, they have been told, contains its meanings, and while extrinsic information may help shed some light upon the work, the truth of the text is intrinsic and must be "excavated."

To encourage a New Critical view of the literary work in one's pedagogy is to limit the interpretive possibilities of students and to reinforce the stereotype of academic reading and thinking as an impersonal if not fruitless pursuit. McGuire's statement that legitimate criticism "does not require that the critic's own response to a work become a part of the discussion," but calls for "a detached point of view on the part of the critic" highlights the limitations of conventional, New Critical literary pedagogy (44). This limited and limiting view of the relationship between text and reader produces subjects who view the interpretive process as an archeological dig in which, if one moves enough dirt, shards of meaning will emerge.

As I will argue in greater detail in Chapter 4,
critical pedagogy entails a redefinition of the text/reader relationship along the lines of Derrida's notion of "general text," a deconstruction of the traditional, intrinsic/extrinsic model of text/reader relations. Derrida's work reminds us that interpretation does not (and should not) end with the supposed "empirical closure of the unity of a corpus" (Gasche 280). A (self)critical interpretive mode entails analysis of general text, predicated on the inseparability of the literary "work itself," the "cultural text" (Scholes' useful phrase) and the text that is the interpreter's world view or mode of interpretation (33). It is ironic that McGuire, at one point toward the end of Passionate Attention, seems to encourage a (self)critical way of reading when he warns that "there are teachers who do not desire to give their students a choice of possibilities" (67). He leaves himself open to critique as one of those teachers.

This is not to say that McGuire intentionally or consciously puts forth a limiting model of literary interpretation. But because his model is based on the idea that the meaning of a literary text resides in the "text itself," the rhetorical effects are inevitable. On the other hand, another widely used handbook, Random House's Reading, Writing, and the Study of Literature, edited by Arthur W. Biddle and Toby Fulwiler, attempts to provide a less New Criticism-influenced model for reading and writing about literature and, in large part, it succeeds. What is pertinent to the present
argument, though, is how New Critical ideas still manage to infiltrate the text's ostensibly egalitarian discourse.

The overall rhetoric of this text is much less prescriptive than McGuire's, and there is a far greater emphasis on the interrelations among thinking, reading and writing; that Fulwiler is a composition scholar may account for both advantages. A seemingly minor rhetorical detail - Biddle and Fulwiler's use of "we" compared with McGuire's reference to "students" in advocating critical approaches - might make a difference in how students perceive the relationship between themselves and the "experts." That is, Biddle and Fulwiler don't present themselves as holders of literary truth; rather, they fashion themselves as more experienced readers who wish to help students become more experienced as well.

However, their progressive pedagogy is occasionally undercut by conventional, New Critical admonitions. Consider the following passage from Biddle's and Allen Shepherd's chapter, "Responding to Fiction," in which they discuss the relation of a symbol to the fictional text:

To assume then, as some people do, that the symbol is hiding there somewhere and can be hunted down is a serious interpretive misconception. . . . Only after you feel you fully understand the literal level of the story's meaning and yet sense a pattern of suggestive details, a dimension beyond the literal, will you wish to explore
symbolic interpretation. Careful reading and common sense are the most important requirements.

Here the tension between unconventional and conventional pedagogy arises. To point out the fallaciousness of the traditional surface/depth textual metaphor – of attempting to excavate symbols from a text – is commendable. Yet to then advise that comprehension of "literal meaning" must precede "symbolic interpretation" is perplexing, in that such advice is underpinned by the same metaphor. As "careful reading" and "common sense" dictates, they say, one should first "fully understand" the literal, surface meaning to subsequently plumb the rich depths of symbolic meaning. The notion of "full" understanding poses difficulty as well. How does one decide when one has achieved it? And doesn't this notion violate a tenet of traditional literary study, namely that great literature is rich and complex to the point of interpretive inexhaustibility? Finally, as is the case in McGuire's text, meaning is once again assumed to be centered in the "text itself," not in the reader, or in the interpretive transaction between reader and text, or anywhere else.

This conventional line of interpretation is continued in Sidney Poger's chapter, "Responding to Poetry." In many ways, poetry is the most difficult genre with which to grapple pedagogically; as Poger notes: "We don't read writing like this very often, we don't talk this way, and many stu-
dents contend that nobody likes poetry anyway" (46). Thus, writing for an audience about reading poetry cannot be easy. Still, in this chapter, an organic, New Critical view of the poetic text is apparent at times. One key to understanding poetry, says Poger, is to imagine the poet's writing process. The question a poet asks herself - to which the poem is the answer - is: "How can I communicate what I feel in words?" (45). This question is ambiguous in a way that highlights the problem of its theoretical assumption. One might say that the question Poger is trying to ask is "How can I communicate in words what I feel nonlinguistically?" This poses a theoretical difficulty from a poststructuralist standpoint: how is one conscious of "feeling" a particular way without recourse to language? Another concern is raised by the question as originally stated: "How can I communicate (in words) what I feel in words?" But this too raises difficulties that are subsequently reinforced in Poger's text; he writes that since "poetry is made up of words, and words communicate something, we should be able to discover how the poem works" (46). His emphasis on the communicative function of poetic language restricts interpretation. Regardless of whether a poet intends her poem to communicate something, it can be read in a noncommunicative fashion. The converse is also true; a poet may intend to write an utterly unconventional, linguistically noncommunicative poem, but it can always be interpreted as having a clear message - even if
that message is that there is no message. Poger, however, doesn't entertain the possibility that the locus of meaning may lie "outside" the "text itself."

Another question he deems important to literary study — "How does the poem mean what I think it means?" — points students toward the conventional, New Critical idea that meanings lie only within poems. One might notice the rhetoric of the question; the poem means, while the reader thinks it means. The question does not focus in a (self) critical way on the role of the reader, as a question like "How do I think about the poem?" would. For Poger, words in a poem contain the meaning, or the poet's answer to some question, and it is the responsibility of the reader to see the meaning/answer and to imagine what the question was. Even while he states that "good literature is not exhausted through any single interpretation," he limits the kind of interpretation to be judged as legitimate (48).

James Howe's chapter, "Responding to Drama," is similarly as New Critical, but he uses different means than Poger. Howe works from a performance-based, reader-response approach, but his putative interpretive openness is often undermined by particular statements that imply that readers, as makers of meaning, function in much the same way texts seemingly do in New Criticism. Good readers are as internally consistent for Howe as texts are for New Critics. He says that "once a performance (or a reading) begins, the point of
view cannot be changed" (60, emphasis added). Notwithstanding the possibility that viewers of drama might be so enraptured by the spectacle of a well-acted play that their points of view, their interpretative stances, might remain relatively static, Howe's point is misguided. He implies that dramatic texts require responsible readers to engage in the interpretive equivalent of tunnel vision and that, if one's interpretive mind wanders, the interpretation produced is illegitimate. He reemphasizes this point later, when he writes that readers of drama "complete the script [and] give it a self-consistent interpretation" (69). Just as for a New Critic, everything in a poem must fit into the interpretation; readers must make their own readings "self-consistent." In both cases, nothing may be left out; everything must make sense; seeming contradictions must be manipulated into units. Those who cannot read in this manner aren't reading "closely" or "critically" enough.

Unfortunately, a corrective for this conventional view of students and their interpretative methods doesn't appear until the chapter on "Literary Criticism and Theory," written by James Holstun. He writes, "[W]hen literary critics claim to be studying 'the text itself,' they are in fact studying it from a particular theoretical point of view they may not want (or be able) to articulate" (73). It is noteworthy that this important statement occurs in the fifth chapter, after students probably have read the previous pieces on reading
the traditional literary genres. "Theory," in this construction, becomes simply another subject area to be covered after the important information about literature has been imparted. Still, Holstun clearly and usefully discusses the major critical/theoretical schools in a responsible way. He even says "the chapters in this book on poetry, drama, and fiction are New Critical" (76). However, Holstun also argues, in defense of New Criticism, "that there is a democratic and populist current at work in the New Criticism, since it claims to show students how to master certain techniques of close reading. . . and become their own authorities" (76).

Two issues need to raised here. First, the New Criticism was arguably never intended to be "democratic" or "populist," nor are its pedagogical consequences. Hugh Kenner, a New Critic himself, noted that the New Criticism "rescu[ed] poetics in the New World from naivete" (46). New Criticism was conceived as an escape from various forms of critical subjectivity (historicist, psychoanalytic, biographical, etc.) into the "text itself." And the methodology that enabled one to get at that text — "close reading" — did not allow one to become an "authority." Rather, students became increasingly dependent on teachers to verify the "meaning" they "found" in the text. Holstun argues that New Criticism adds a democratic and populist element to the preceding chapters, but it seems to me the opposite is true; the residual New Criticism in the previous chapters is precisely the prob-
lem. The "populist" element in New Critical pedagogy is what Adorno and others have called "authoritarian populism," in which a promise of order, of determinate structure, seduces the public. New Criticism reassures readers in this way; it wards off interpretive chaos, promising locatable meaning in the "text itself" through "close reading."

"Close reading" to find the "meaning" in the "text itself" is neither the only nor the best advice to give literature students. It is, Cain argues, the problem rather than the solution:

It is unquestionably basic to the discipline, but is not the discipline itself. . . . "Literature" forms one group or body of texts that we study cultural studies as interfering with the real business of criticism, we should see them as further evidence of how capricious and wide-ranging criticism can be. (118)

As I will argue in Chapter 4, literature students should be exposed to the same modes of interpretation that theorists use in their scholarship and teaching. There is a need to resist the way in which New Criticism functions in classroom discourse as a kind of default mechanism; when students don't respond to pedagogical efforts, teachers often resort to textual explication or "close reading" almost unconsciously. Holbrun notes that this phenomenon occurs "even when [a] professor is a Marxist, feminist, or deconstructionist who has
serious disagreements with the New Criticism as a theoretical approach" (77). This is not to say, as Cain makes clear, that close reading is inherently harmful. Rather, it is problematic when its practice dominates pedagogy. Resorting to teaching close reading supports the pedagogical economy of New Criticism. When a discussion-based approach is not "working," one may resort to a New Critical teaching mode to ensure that students are "acquiring knowledge" or "getting their money's worth."

**Text Book: An Introduction to Literary Language**, edited by Scholes, Nancy Comley and Gregory Ulmer, seems to resist the theory that close reading naturally leads to empowered student readers. The editors refrain from fetishizing such an approach; they emphasize "learn[ing] more about how narrative and dramatic texts work" (1, emphasis added). This focus on how human events are "textualized," how texts function in society, allows us as readers "to be a little more conscious of our own situations," or, increasingly (self)critical. The titles of three sections reveal their goal of expanding students' ideas about what can be "read": "Texts and People"; "Texts, Thoughts, and Things"; "Texts and Other Texts."

But this joint venture of a structuralist (Scholes), a compositionist (Comley) and a ludic postmodernist (Ulmer) often relies on familiar New Critical pedagogical techniques. **Text Book** is surprisingly schematic for a text that promises
"an alternative approach to the traditional course called 'Writing About Literature' or 'Introduction to Literature'" (v). It is scrupulously thematized and subthematized: the section "Texts and People" contains two subsections, "Story and Story Teller" and "Character and Confrontation." "Texts, Thoughts, and Things" comprises nine parts, including "Metaphor in Three Poems," "Metaphor and Dream" and "Poetic Uses of Metaphor." While I am not saying that this kind of classification can be avoided totally, one may see some similarities between Text Book and Brooks' and Warren's works.

More problematic is the meticulous introductions Scholes et al. provide for each reading selection. These seemingly innocuous guides for the reader profoundly shape her reading experience, foreclosing other interpretive possibilities. Consider, for example, the editors' introduction to a Mary Louise Pratt essay:

For our purposes, the most important thing to learn from Pratt is the six-part structure of the ordinary personal narrative. You will find versions of this structure - or interesting derivations from it - in every kind of text that presents a story. (2) Perhaps the editors might be credited for quite baldly stating what they're trying to accomplish, but why not just tell students about six-part structure if that's the only lesson they want students to learn from Pratt's essay? The second
sentence in the quoted passage is even more pernicious; they
tell students that "every kind of text that presents a story"
has a six-part structure. If a reader cannot find all six
parts, is the text not a narrative? Or is the reader incom­
potent? What should readers do with certain feminist and
postmodern texts that seem to be narratives but may not con­
form to the paradigm? The editors' introductions not only
preclude alternative readings of the texts they accompany,
but they also purvey a New Critical view of texts in general
– in this example, a search for structure that is not unlike
the hunt for "hidden" meanings.

Another weakness of Text Book is its overly brief, de­
contextualized reading selections. As noted above regarding
Pratt, the readings seem to have been chosen only for their
didactic usefulness. The editors generally want students to
get one lesson from each reading; the length of the readings
along with the introductions almost guarantee that. For
example, they excerpt a page of dialogue from Kate Chopin's
story "The Kiss" and then tell students: "Your task is to add
everything that is needed to make this into a play that is as
complete as the story from which it has been taken" (27, em­
phasis added). Again, there are two problems. First, they
make only one very direct writing assignment that seems both
daunting and unrealistic: "add everything that is needed."
This "task" will produce a play that is "as complete" as
Chopin's story. The editors imply that literature possesses
a New Critical wholeness, which students are charged with restoring.

The assignment also prods students toward "modeling" literary works, a pedagogical technique that Ulmer especially favors. Addressing students, the editors write, "One of the goals of [a] course [using Text Book] is to teach you to use models" (x). They subsequently list questions students should keep in mind while using their text, such as "What is the model I am to follow? . . . . What is the purpose of the supporting readings? How do they contribute to my understanding of the model?" (x). The last section of Text Book explicitly concerns modeling, notably Derrida's Glas and a text that models Derrida. The aim of modeling, according to the editors, "is to help students feel at home in the universe of textuality" (v). Modeling can be useful in that it allows students to be creative, to write outside the structures of the five-paragraph theme or argumentative essay. But modeling also can be problematic, as least as it is articulated in Text Book and in some of Ulmer's other work. Given the fact that Ulmer's preferred models are Derrida, the German performance artist Joseph Beuys and other white males, modeling can be criticized for its homogeneity. This is not to say that women or persons of color won't learn anything from mimicking Derrida's writing style, but I would argue that such writing assignments may shape those writers' 

13 See Ulmer's Applied Grammatology (Johns Hopkins, 1985).
responses in a way that represses conflict and marginality in their texts. The notion of "feel[ing] at home in the universe of textuality" is also troublesome. Writers on the margins often feel English teachers fail to take seriously their uses of language, forcing them to adapt to the language of white male power, Standard American English. While neither Derrida nor Beuys discourse in that way, women and minority student writers still may see Ulmer's modeling as a similar dictate. Though they would not discourage such an idea, one still wonders why Scholes, Comley and Ulmer don't propose Ishmael Reed or Maya Angelou as models. The "universe of textuality" into which the editors invite students seems, in the final analysis, unfortunately similar to Rorty's "community" or "conversation of mankind," albeit with a structuralist or poststructuralist veneer. It is a universe where white men's discourse is presented as "example," a quite traditional universe after all.

The problems I see in Text Book suggest that using textbooks and handbooks in (self)critical literary pedagogy may be ill-advised. New Criticism so pervades even the most seemingly progressive or avant garde textbooks that the only way to leave open the possibility of (self)critical thinking may be to avoid them entirely. Of course, editions of primary literary texts have apparatuses of their own that are

14 See Chapter 4, p. 126 ff., for a discussion of classroom alternatives to using textbooks and handbooks.
also often based on New Criticism – which reinforces how closely the productive capacity of New Criticism is related to such disciplinary matters as book editing and production. Texts with New Critical apparatuses sell because they make teaching easier, and this cycle is not easily broken – in literature or composition.

The influence of New Criticism on the teaching of writing has not been widely discussed. This is perhaps yet another consequence of the disciplinary cleavage between literature and composition. There is hardly a mention of composition in Graff's *Professing Literature* or Cain's *The Crisis in Criticism*. However, New Criticism's role in shaping composition pedagogy is a fertile topic for examination, though a complete treatment is beyond the scope of the present study. In what follows, I will first describe the New Critical assumptions that underpin popular approaches to the teaching of writing. Second, I will show how these assumptions have been manifested in several current composition textbooks and anthologies, and what kind of student subject positions they construct.

Sharon Crowley, whose work often explores connections amongst various kinds of critical theory, was perhaps the first scholar to hint at the New Criticism/composition relationship. It is surprising that this connection was not explored earlier than 1989, in her NCTE monograph *A Teacher's Introduction to Deconstruction*, since its genesis seems
rather obvious. Crowley writes, "Since many teachers of writing were trained to be teachers of literature, it is only natural that they transfer the set of assumptions made about texts in new criticism into their teaching of composition" (26-27). Despite the rise of composition as a distinct field within English and the institutionalization of graduate courses in composition theory and pedagogy, many individuals whose ideas about textuality and the nature of writing are underpinned by New Criticism are currently teaching writing. Among the New Critical ideas that Crowley criticizes are: 1) students' papers are "the finished product of their authors' coherent and determinable intention[s]"; 2) those texts should reveal "some coherent meaning, and should give some clue to [their] authors' intention" to a reader; 3) teachers' interpretations of students' texts are "authoritative," given their expert status as readers; 4) the meanings that teachers extract from students' papers are derived according to "objective" and "universal" criteria; and 5) the student authors "ought to be able to see the meaning (or lack thereof) that their teachers see in a completed paper" (27).

These assumptions (which will be discussed later as they pertain to particular composition texts) are further buttressed by their compatibility with a rhetorical theory nearly synchronous with New Criticism - current-traditional rhetoric. This affinity becomes evident through a comparison with current-traditional rhetoric's main tenets, as critiqued
by James Berlin: 1) the rhetor "is to be as 'objective' as possible, necessitating the abandonment of social, psychological, and historical preconceptions that might interfere with a response" to the object of study; he is to give "an innocent reaction" (as Brooks and Warren advocate); 2) truth "exists prior to language," while "[l]anguage is regarded at worst as a distorting medium that alters the original perception, and at best as a transparent device that captures the original experience so that it might be reproduced in the faculties of one's audience"; and 3) the audience is "outside of the meaning-making act [and] assumed to be as objective as the writer, so that the language presented can stimulate in the reader the experience the writer originally had" (Rhetoric 8). Current-traditional rhetoric regards "all truths... as certain, readily available to the correct method of investigation" and, therefore, writing instruction should advocate "patterns of arrangement and superficial correctness [as its] main ends" (9). In comparing New Criticism to current-traditional rhetoric, one sees that although the former is concerned with the consumption or interpretation of texts and the latter more with textual production, both approaches seek to construct objectivist, scientific subjects for whom textual production and consumption are straightforward processes. Moreover, both paradigms have become disciplinary common sense. Berlin echoes Cain's comment about the normalization
of the New Criticism when he writes that current-traditional rhetoric has made it impossible "for the majority of English teachers... to conceive of the discipline in any other way" (9). An analogy may be drawn from Foucault's comment about Western education since the 18th century: "The Normal is established as a principle of coercion in teaching with the introduction of a standardized education and the establishment of the ecoles normales (teachers' training colleges) ..." ("Means" 196).

Composition textbooks and handbooks have contributed significantly to this situation. Robert Connors writes that "textbooks, which change with glacial slowness, provide stability amid the shifting winds of theoretical argument. They serve as sources for the proven truths needed for students' basic training..." (190). In what follows, I will show that the spirit of New Criticism15 still informs composition textbooks and anthologies in the two functions that these texts are supposed to perform as "the chief representatives of the lore and wisdom of the past" — "advice" about "how to write" and "professional" essays presented as "models" or stimuli for student writing (Dewey Experience 18).

The sheer number of composition texts and the scope of

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15 In the remainder of this chapter, I will refer to the theoretical assumptions that underpin the composition texts under discussion as derived from "New Criticism," rather than make repeated references to "New Criticism/current-traditional rhetoric," having already argued that the two paradigms are similar philosophically.
this study precludes exhaustive critique, but I can best support my general argument about New Criticism's influence on composition pedagogy can be made through critiques of two current, extremely popular texts. Rise Axelrod and Charles Cooper's The St. Martin's Guide to Writing was first published in 1985, with a second edition in 1988 and a third in 1991. It has been, according to John Clifford, "perhaps the most well received of the new process rhetorics" (43). Substantially little about the text, however, has changed, which may indicate that its adopters in English departments across the country have been pleased with its structure and pedagogical effectiveness. It is, writes Robert Connors, an example of

[t]extbooks [that] are beginning to appear that concentrate on having students learn the processes of writing rather than abstract concepts about writing, that liberate the teacher to listen to her students rather than enslaving them to an author's theories. . . (192)

How "liberatory" the Guide is will be considered in the following remarks.

One might first focus on the epigrams inside the front cover and on the first page. Initially, they seem to be pithy bits of advice about the writing process from professional writers, some familiar to students, some perhaps not; the first four quotations are from Annie Dillard, Vladimir
Nabokov, William Faulkner and Hannah Arendt. But the epitograms also function as what Crowley and Stephen North call "practitioner lore" (Crowley Teacher's 27). They define lore as advice about writing that is constantly reproduced and "impervious to fully rationalized critique" (28). More importantly, Crowley argues, "nothing that has gained admission is ever dropped from lore, even though some of its tenets might... become contradictory..." (28). For teachers, reliance on practitioner lore is, in Crowley's estimation, "hazardous," because of the potential for one's pedagogy to be undermined by contradictions. The upshot for students is that the presentation of lore about the composing process—from writers students know (or are told) are "important"—occludes (self)critical subject construction. If students are exposed constantly to contradictory descriptions about writing, without learning about the theories behind them, the writing process may remain mystified to all but a few of them.

Arendt's epigram states, "For excellence, the presence of others is always required." On the facing page, one may subsequently read Hemingway's: "You can write any time people will leave you alone and not interrupt you." The student reader is confronted with a social constructionist view of writing from Arendt and a romantic paradigm from Hemingway, which are completely antithetical. "Well, which am I supposed to do to write well?" one might imagine a student
thinking; the nature of writing and how one becomes a better writer remain mystified.

Another example is James Van Allen's words ("I am never as clear about any matter as when I have just finished writing about it") compared with John Updike's ("Writing and rewriting are a constant search for what it is one is saying"). The problem here, once again, is not that opposing views about writing are being presented; rather it is that they are not adequately contextualized and theorized. These epigrams metaphorize the explicit "advice" that composition textbooks usually provide, in their seeming author-ity and "common sense" that functions to suppress (self)critical thinking.

The epigrams also serve as a preview for the structure of the rest of The St. Martin's Guide. The text characterizes writing as taking place within firmly set genres — the traditional modes of narration, description, definition, classification, comparison and argumentation. Each genre is presented in a separate chapter, so they seem to be entirely different kinds of writing. More problematically, because of this structural separation, students become writing subjects who discover, in other classes, that only writing teachers (of New Critical inspiration) assign papers that utilize just one rhetorical mode. Paper assignments in the rest of the university generally require the use of many different modes. Writing assignments based on this paradigm become artificial
exercises in New Critical textual production, with "clear intentions" and readily ascertainable meanings. As Clifford notes, the Guide creates the illusion that we can transcend ideology with three well-developed paragraphs of evidence, that we can somehow change the minds of others in a rhetorical vacuum freed from the pollutants of prior social alignments. This thinking is more than naive; it denies identity, represses class conflict, negates the way ideas originate in specific social configurations. (44)

This approach also suppresses the possibility of (self) critical subject positions, putting students at a potential disadvantage when they attempt to write for non-English courses.

Another facet of Axelrod and Cooper's work that requires discussion is the "professional" essays that appear throughout as examples of the various genres of writing. A selection from Maya Angelou exemplifies narration; an essay by Barbara Ehrenreich serves as an example of argumentation. That such writers as Angelou and Ehrenreich are present in the third edition is an improvement over the two previous versions, which featured overanthologized composition models by E.B. White and George Orwell. However, a problem remains in the third edition; each selection is only three to four pages long, a fragment of the original work. This brevity
suggests that well-written narratives always tell their stories quickly and that good arguments always proclaim their significance unequivocally. This is not to downplay the values of conciseness, logic and readability. But students do miss the valuable experiences of a writer working out her thoughts on the page and seeing writing more as often-painstaking production than easily digestible consumption.

Overly brief and easily consumed essays are not a problem in David Bartholomae and Anthony Petrosky's third edition of *Ways of Reading*, an anthology that has always featured challenging if not difficult readings. The third edition includes selections from Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* and Susan Willis' *A Primer for Daily Life*, as well as essays from Mary Louise Pratt and Patricia J. Williams that originally appeared in academic journals. Remaining from previous editions are essays and stories from Stanley Fish, Jane Tompkins and Alice Walker. The text thus avoids the problem of Axelrod and Cooper – promulgating an overly simplistic view of the writing process.

*Ways of Reading* is challenging from both teaching and learning standpoints (as I discovered while using the second edition several years ago), and the editors' philosophy about the writing process is akin to that of the present study. Addressing students in their introduction, they write that

Writing... gives you a way of going back to work on the text of your own reading. It allows you to
be self-critical. . . . It gives you an opportunity to. . . qualify or extend or question your interpretation. . . (Bartholomae and Petrosky 3rd ed. 4)

But while the spirit of their project is laudatory, some structural aspects of the book can be critiqued, for some remnants of New Critical pedagogy can be discerned.

This is due to their emphasis on "assignment sequences," paper topics that ask students to compare and contrast various essays. (The instructor's edition declares Bartholomae and Petrosky to be the "uniquely qualified. . . names most prominently associated with sequenced writing.") However, a problem with combining sequenced writing with extremely challenging essays is that a class spends inordinate time reading and writing about two or three essays, often to the point of student disinterest. Moreover, students are subtly prodded toward certain interpretations through the language of the paper assignments. An example is the assignment in which students are asked to compare Walker Percy's and John Berger's positions regarding "possible 'approaches' to a painting in a museum":

Two of your approaches should reflect Percy's best advice to a viewer who wanted to develop a successful strategy; two should represent the best you feel Berger would have to offer. When you've finished explaining these four approaches,
go on in your essay to examine the differences between those you associate with Percy and those you associate with Berger. What are the key differences? And what do they say about the different ways these two thinkers approach the problem of why we do or do not see that which lies before us? (93)

There is a logistical problem in that Percy's essay occurs much later in the book, but the language of the assignment is a larger concern. In asking for "four approaches," Bartholomae and Petrosky risk returning to the "five-paragraph theme" paradigm in which students cease to think, read or write after four approaches have been located or five paragraphs have been written. And in asking what the differences between Percy and Berger are, the similarities are summarily excluded. Student readers are told that Percy and Berger approach issues in different ways, not similar ones, and may assume that any similarities they can discern are illegitimate. This is not to say that the differences are unimportant to bring up. Rather, one must anticipate the consequences of highlighting and legitimizing textual differences instead of the similarities.

In the assignment sequences, essays are also grouped together thematically for use in longer writing projects. A possible problem here is that the theme of each sequence will function to limit the possibilities for interpreting the
essays. For example, Berger's "Ways of Seeing" essay is grouped under two assignment sequences, "Ways of Composing" and "Ways of Seeing." One can foresee students who are working on the former project picking out only what they need from Berger's essay to fit with the other essays in that group (by Paulo Freire and Adrienne Rich). That is, students might radically decontextualize Berger's essay to "make it fit" into the thematic paradigm that Bartholomae and Petrosky constructed, a move many students make when confronted with a constrictive writing assignment. The editors are not returning students to Brooks-and-Warren-like positions, but this critique reveals how New Critical tendencies can surface even in demonstrably progressive pedagogical projects.

The pedagogical legacy of New Criticism may be even stronger than previous scholars have thought. And this is despite the fact that the authors of the above-mentioned handbooks, textbooks and anthologies would seem to be among the most active, theoretically aware members of the discipline. One must also consider the "silent majority" who do not publish widely and may not be acquainted with contemporary theories — and how many students their teaching affects. New Criticism-inspired teaching, I would argue, has resulted in the suppression of (self)critical thinking about teaching otherwise. The mode of teaching otherwise that I am calling "(self)critical" is elucidated in the next chapter.
[A] freeman ought not to acquire knowledge of any kind like a slave... [K]nowledge which is required under compulsion obtains no hold on the mind.

Socrates, Plato's Republic

Though often seen in university catalogues and course descriptions in many different fields, "critical thinking" does not have a widely agreed-upon definition, despite the fact most university instructors would probably say that critical thinking is something they are trying to encourage in their students either implicitly or explicitly. Nearly any pedagogical approach can be legitimated by claiming that it causes students to "think critically"; the range of teaching methods that critical thinking might be called upon to justify is nearly infinite. Teachers who prefer lecturing would claim that they are cultivating critical thinking in their students; instructors who use mostly class and peer group discussion might make a similar claim. I wish to suggest that the academic goal of critical thinking has been inadequately theorized, and its practice often plays out as the mere acquisition of subject matter instead of intellectual work — (self)critical thinking — that is meaningfully
(self)critical of both subject matter and the subjects who study it.

Educational scholarship can provide what have come to be the standard definitions of critical thinking, which are then utilized in various institutional discourses. Ralph Johnson cites three common definitions:

1) reasonable reflective thinking that is focused on deciding what to believe or do;
2) the skill and propensity to engage in an activity with reflective skepticism;
3) disciplined, self-directed thinking which exemplifies the perfection of thinking appropriate to a particular mode or domain of thinking. (40)

James Drake describes critical thinking as "the determination of the meaning, as well as the acceptability of a statement" (30). Joanne Kurfiss provides yet another: "an investigation whose purpose is to explore a situation, phenomenon, question, or problem to arrive at a hypothesis or conclusion about it that integrates all available information and that can therefore be convincingly justified" (2).

Yet I would argue that critical thinking as just defined is only the initial step in learning. Pedagogy based on a traditional notion of critical thinking does not encourage moving to a more complex level of intellectual work. Only two of the above definitions even mention such modes of
thought as "reflection" or "skepticism" — thinking that is more complex. Conventional theorizations of critical thinking remain focused on answering a question like "What?" more than questions such as "How?" or "Why?" They suppress (self)critical thinking in teachers and students, treating knowledge as a commodity to be stockpiled, rather than engaging in philosophical speculation about the nature and function of knowledge. As Sharon Crowley warns:

[R]ead­ing and writing pedagogies are inevitably grounded in theory, whether these theories are consciously subscribed to or not. If a pedagogical strategy is to be coherent, its teachers must articulate its rationale for themselves as fully as possible. Such a fully articulated rationale will explain why one strategy may be preferred to another; more, it will help teachers to understand the ideological ramifications of their teaching strategies. (Teacher's 29)

Her argument is also applicable to students. (Self)critical pedagogy seeks to encourage students to think about why and how they think the way they think, to consider the conditions that make it possible to think in a particular way. Critical thinking, however, largely fails to account for the role of the subject in the processes of intellectual work; it tends to theorize learning as an objective intake of information.

In this chapter, I will describe possibilities for the
praxis\textsuperscript{16} of (self)critical pedagogy. First, I will articulate more fully its philosophical underpinnings. Second, I will present several ways I have approached teaching various composition and literature courses, noting what seems to have worked, what didn't and possible future approaches. In keeping with my intention that (self)critical pedagogy must always be situational and ad hoc, these "case studies" are presented as suggestions, not as rules to be followed.

As discussed in Chapter 1, recent debates about educational change have been overdetermined by related political and cultural battles, which has resulted in, at best, oversimplification, but, at worst, misrepresentation. There are problems with the ways in which students are taught, but they will not be solved by recuperating hierarchical paradigms whose residue remains tangible even today. Ira Shor argues that "the traditional approach blames the victim and protects the system. The deficient individual is set up as the problem and the traditional curriculum as the solution. . . ." (Empowering 104). I use the word "toward" in the title of the present study to indicate that "pedagogy" should never be considered a finished project, that no pedagogy is ever a "solution" to societal ills real or imagined. Henry Giroux

\textsuperscript{16} To emphasize the interdependence of "theory" and practice in (self)critical pedagogy, I borrow Freire's term "praxis," which he defines as "reflection," or theory, and "action," or practice, combined. See Pedagogy of the Oppressed (Continuum, 1968), p. 66.
and Peter McLaren provide a useful definition of the kind of teaching promoted by (self)critical pedagogy:

"Pedagogy" refers to the process by which teachers and students negotiate and produce meaning. . . . A [((self)critical) pedagogy] . . . is one that is necessarily partial and incomplete, one that has no final answers. It is always in the making . . . (157, 182)

There are no "final answers" for what may ail education in general or the teaching of English in particular. In (self) critical pedagogy, I advocate the adoption of a particular attitude about teaching, one that constantly calls its own presuppositions and subsequent practices into question.

To a significant extent, such an attitude would be a return to what Foucault calls "a philosophical interrogation . . . rooted in the Enlightenment," a mode that "problematises. . . the constitution of the self as an autonomous object" ("Enlightenment?" 42). Invoking "Kant's reflection," Foucault promotes "investigation into the events that have led us to constitute ourselves and to recognize ourselves as subjects of what we are doing, thinking, saying" — a "critical ontology of ourselves" (45). I propose (self) critical pedagogy as the educational manifestation of such an interrogation or investigation. (Self)critical thought "has to be conceived as an attitude, an ethos. . . a critique of what is at one and the same time the historical analysis of
the limits that are imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them" (50).

(Self)critical pedagogy is also indebted to contemporary critics who have called for what Thomas Kuhn terms a "paradigm shift," necessitated by such phenomena as the increasingly heterogenous student bodies in the American university and the influence of poststructuralism on English departments. Robert Con Davis is exemplary in his statement that "Education has been transformed only when the relations of education most broadly are reconstituted" (251). Such words as "shift" and "transformed" usefully negate the idea that students would be best served simply by throwing out older teaching methods and replacing them with newer ones, as theorists like Zavarzadeh and Morton argue. Patricia Harkin and John Schilb contend that pedagogy "should not mean worshiping certain thinkers or stances but should involve continually evaluating those stances and envisioning ways to modify or even add to their insights" (10). Untheorized privileging of the "new" is as problematic as naive reliance on the traditional. As Derrida states, "[I]f there's merely a reversal" in a hierarchy, "you merely recapitulate the same structure you had previously" ("Women" 202). However, a new pedagogy should not consist merely of few "new" twists added to the old paradigm; new ideas should not be treated as "mere additions or increments" to the "stockpile" of knowledge (Kuhn 391). What's needed is a pedagogy that is
conceptualized differently and not predicated on old (New Critical) paradigms — what Dewey called "a new order of conceptions leading to new modes of practice" (Experience 5).

The concept of the paradigm shift is useful to differentiate between (self)critical pedagogy and other "revisionary" pedagogies that attempt to incorporate new ideas into traditional paradigms. Graff's conflict model (discussed in Chapter 1) is an excellent example of how a purported pedagogical reform can retain the baggage of tradition. I discovered this (unfortunately) after reflecting on my teaching of an essay by Jane Tompkins in a writing class.17 Describing how I taught the "conflict" in her essay, using a Graffian agree-to-disagree approach, may shed further light on the problems inherent in a pedagogy like Graff's. My comments that follow this case study serve, I hope, as an enactment of (self) critical thinking, demonstrating that relentless self-consciousness and self-reflexiveness about one's classroom practice can improve one's teaching and students' learning.

Tompkins' essay, which I taught in an advanced composition course, describes the process of doing research about the relations between native Americans and Puritans in colonial America. She points out there is a wide range of

theories about who was to blame for the near extermination of the "Indians." These interpretations range from very traditional accounts to revisionary views. My students had been exposed only to "traditional" history, so they found what Tompkins describes as the poststructuralist position -- that there is absolutely no way to get back to "what actually happened" to assign blame -- rather troubling ethically. They felt that, even though hundreds of years have elapsed, some party must be held responsible for the atrocities. Tompkins encourages this posse mentality when she argues that, even after poststructuralism, we must still make ethical and moral decisions:

. . . you [don't] have to accept just anybody's facts. You can show that what someone else asserts to be a fact is false. But it does mean that you can't argue that someone else's facts are not facts because they are only the product of a perspective, since this will be true of the facts that you perceive as well. What this means is that arguments about "what happened" have to proceed much as they did before poststructuralism broke in with all its talk about language-based reality and culturally produced knowledge. (577)

While not totally dismissing poststructuralism as an interpretive method ("when what is under discussion is the way that beliefs are grounded"), Tompkins characterizes it as
unethical when discussing "the facts of a particular case" (577). According to her, one either opts for a moral search for the "truth" or a passive acceptance of the world as mere language or discourse; she ends the essay by stating that her own "poststructuralist" work "is not directed towards solving the kinds of problems that studying the history of European-Indian relations has awakened [her] to" (578).

I pointed out to my students what I saw as a flaw in Tompkins' argument: that if the traditional search for "truth" constitutes one end of an interpretive continuum and poststructuralism the other, there is considerable space between the two poles where an individual can construct interpretations that suit the problems at hand. I proposed the following "solution" to Tompkins' critical dilemma, one that would "solve" both its historical and political dimensions: one can agree with the poststructuralist position and recognize that trying to assess responsibility definitively is impossible, but still take concrete, political action if one is concerned about the situation of Native Americans. This action could take the form of lobbying legislators for better governmental treatment or supporting social service organizations that address the problems of Native Americans (such as the high alcoholism and low literacy rates). Such actions, I argued, would be much more valuable to society than spending that same amount of time attempting to decide who was at fault in colonial America. I added that my statement
did not mean that studying history is unimportant; I wanted
to emphasize the necessarily limited powers of traditional
historical interpretation.

My little talk did not, of course, dissuade some stu-
dents from taking moralistic positions in their papers on the
subject, in which they were asked to think of a way through
Tompkins' ethical dilemma (other than those I had proposed in
class discussion). These writers still advocated blaming ei-
ther the Puritans or the "Indians" themselves for the atroci-
ties. Others, however, suggested concrete action such as
putting one's skills to use in a native American community,
as a doctor, nurse or social worker; they argued that doing
so was much more useful than trying to assign blame for past
harm.

At the time, I was pleased that some of my students took
to my idea of an interpretive continuum and potential "useful
space" in the middle. I was more pleased when, in subsequent
class discussions about the papers, students seemed to real-
ize that their points of view were only several among many
others, that their ways of seeing had to compete with oth-
ers', to be taken seriously.

But in reading (self)critically the text of this teach-
ing to tease out the pedagogical contradictions that, as
Sharon Crowley argues, "risk confusing students (and teach-
ers) on a fundamental level," I can detect several unexamined
assumptions on my part that highlight certain problems in a
model such as teaching the conflicts (Teacher's 28). First, as I mentioned in Chapter 1, what seems to be a conflict to academics often won't get a rise out of today's undergraduates, and this is not just because, as Graff thinks, these conflicts are hidden from them. Political correctness, for example, has been widely publicized both in the mass media and the university curriculum, but, for the most part, students don't think it's as big a deal as academics do. Less publicized conflicts elicit even less student interest. This is not to say that Tompkins' general topic — how different groups construct their own histories — is not important, but it is to argue that how a teacher approaches the topic in her pedagogy is crucial. I would have better served my students by doing two things differently. First, the writing class, with no ostensible subject matter to cover, can provide an opportunity to engage in teaching that better accounts for students' needs and interests. Such (self)critical teaching entails using students' interests and experiences, coordinated and organized by the teacher, as the primary "texts" for the writing course. Instead of being provided with a "conflict" by the teacher, students bring in texts that they see as embodying conflict and that they have some stake or investment in. Ira Shor states, "The way students speak, feel and think about any subject is the starting point for a critical study of themselves, their society and their academic subjects" (Empowering 22). Instead of giving my stu-
dents the conflict, I could have asked them to provide one.

Alternatively, if I had decided to keep Tompkins' conflict, I still could have engaged the students differently, by not presenting them with a "solution" to Tompkins' "dilemma" at the beginning of our discussion. Instead, I could have let them voice their reactions to the essay, as a starting point. This could have led to better discussion, since their experiences reading an article from Critical Inquiry was most likely much different than mine. Trying to imagine how I might have read Tompkins' essay as an 18-year-old, I might have commented about the assumptions academics make about their audience when they write. Such a discussion about rhetorical, intellectual and class assumptions would be potentially interesting, and, most importantly, it would be a conflict generated by students, not by a teacher.

Another criticism of the way I taught Tompkins' essay concerns her characterization of poststructuralism in this essay, which is misleading and uncharacteristic of the theoretical positions she has taken in other instances. I quote again from "'Indians'":

> Being aware that all facts are motivated,
> believing that people are always operating inside
> some particular interpretive framework or other is

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18 See "The Reader in History: The Changing Shape of Literary Response" in her Reader-Response Criticism (Johns Hopkins UP, 1980); and, especially, "A Short Course in Post-Structuralism" in College English 50.7 (Nov. 1988).
a pertinent argument when what is under discussion is the way beliefs are grounded. But it doesn't give one any leverage on the facts of a particular case. (577)

She footnotes this passage: "The position I've been outlining is a version of neopragmatism. For an exposition, see Against Theory: Literary Studies and the New Pragmatism, ed. W. J. T. Mitchell (Chicago, 1985)" (fn. 21, 579). Tompkins aligns herself with the "neo-" or "new pragmatists" like Stanley Fish, who joined with Stephen Knapp and Walter Benn Michaels' "Against Theory" movement. In his essay "Consequences," a follow-up to Knapp and Michaels, Fish "agreed that 'theory's day is dying'" (White 4).

Neopragmatism and the conflict model share similar assumptions. She overcomes the conflict in her essay—the problem of "history"—by admitting that history is constructed, but that such an admission doesn't change the way one should interpret history. In other words, one accepts a different (poststructuralist) definition of history (in Graff's terms, one "agrees" about this) and goes on about one's business as before ("disagreeing" about who gets the blame for whatever historical event). The idea of constructedness that comes out of poststructuralism really isn't important, for one keeps interpreting in the same way.

In my teaching, I did not confront what I believed to be Tompkins' misrepresentation of poststructuralism. Instead, I
tacitly agreed to disagree with her by attempting to use her paradigm to "solve" her "problem." I bought into her opposition of poststructuralism versus "traditional history" and urged my students to find a middle ground. Intent on making this "conflict" seem important to my students, I dictated what their responses should be: either take my "poststructuralist" "solution" or the "traditional," "historical" view. I discouraged students from thinking (self)critically and constructing their own meanings — which is, it seems to me, the most serious problem with the conflict model. It assumes that students' experiences and interests are secondary to academic disagreements about texts in helping students improve their thinking, reading and writing skills. Graff’s model remains in the realm of what Freire calls the "banking model of education." 19

19 Tompkins has argued ("Teaching Like It Matters," Lingua Franca, August 1991) that Freire's concept of "banking" education is perhaps too harsh to describe mainstream American pedagogy. She writes,

We have class discussion, we have oral reports, we have student participation of various kinds — students often choose their own paper topics, suggest additional readings, propose issues for discussion. As far as most of us are concerned, the banking model is obsolete. (24)

She maintains, instead, that we have to contend with the "performance model," in which "we teach our students how to perform within an institutional academic setting in such a way that they will be thought highly of by their colleagues and instructors" (24-25).

Rather than trying to "prove" which model is more prevalent today, I would argue that performance pedagogy is a logical American extension of the banking model. That is, few instructors at American universities adhere strictly to
Banking education, Freire's now-infamous idea, is pedagogy in which students are "patient, listening objects," empty vessels waiting to be filled (57). In the banking method, "the teacher chooses the program content, and the students (who were not consulted) adapt to it" (59). In teaching the conflicts,

a department or college. . . decides that in the coming semester some or all of its courses will have a common theme. . . . Having determined the theme, instructors (with interested students) choose two or three common texts, which will help give focus to the theme. . . (Graff, "Other" 835-36, emphasis added)

Such a scenario is my Tompkins episode writ large. Graff implies that the most conscientious students will help determine the content of courses. But one wonders, if Graff is correct about students being shielded from conflicts, how does one find any students to participate in the setup who are knowledgeable about the conflicts? And if those students

the banking model today; America is about "progress" and "democracy," so most teachers allow such activities as Tompkins mentions. But, the "payoff" they obtain from performance pedagogy affects students in ways that are "no less coercive [and] no less destructive of creativity and self-motivated learning" than banking pedagogy. Thus, it seems to me performance pedagogy is but a kinder, gentler banking method of teaching that may or may not be more widespread than strict "banking" education. In their effects on students, it seems to me they are virtually indistinguishable, so I will refer to teaching that produces these kinds of effects on students as "banking" methods henceforth.
can be found, aren't they functioning in much the same way as the instructors, imposing particular texts on classes? Though teaching the conflicts initially may seem to be a way to teach differently, I would argue – both theoretically and from personal experience – that it fails to liberate teachers and students from traditional, "banking" subject positions.

A first move toward (self)critical pedagogy requires re-thinking the idea of subjectivity or subject construction as it pertains to the English classroom. Gregory Jay proposes a redefinition based on the metaphor of the imposter: "Teachers are imposters, though no more so than their students, and education ought to disclose the structures and articulate the consequences of the postures we have assumed or imposed" (315). The pedagogical subject as imposter is a functional metaphor for the redefinition of the pedagogical subject as splintered and conflicting, rather than whole and harmonious. Foucault describes this as "the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects" ("Subject" 208). One of these modes is the naturalization of "the traditional rational man standard (the straight, white, male, Christian, English-speaking, middle-class individualist)" as the "universal measure" by which subjects are categorized (Perry and Williams 230). This postmodern conception of the subject relates to teaching in terms of what might be called the "teacher function" and the "student function." Following Foucault's notion of the function of the author,
the subject of/in pedagogy may be retheorized similarly:

The author's name serves to characterize a certain mode of being of discourse: the fact that this discourse has an author's name... shows that this discourse is not ordinary everyday speech that comes and goes... On the contrary, it is a speech that must be received in a certain mode and that, in a given culture, must receive a certain status... The author's name manifests the appearance of a certain discursive set and indicates the status of this discourse within a society and a culture. ("Author?" 107)

That is, teachers and students function as "authors" of "texts" continuously. Their discourses mark them within pedagogy as teachers and students and construct them as subjects in/of pedagogy; they cannot think, read and write "as they please." Acknowledging that human beings are not "free agents," that they do not participate in education neutrally or innocently, and that they are conditioned to function within particular relations of power in the classroom productively redefines "teacher" and "student" as discursive functions rather than autonomous selves. In its consideration of power relations, this redefinition also highlights the "differences of gender, race and class among students and teachers [that] provide situations in which conflict does arise" (Jarratt 113). That is, difference in the classroom is ex-
plored seriously as the effect of relations of power vis-à-vis the subject, rather than being dismissed or sublimated to reach a consensus.

Such a redefinition of the subject undermines the idea of the teacher as "transmitter" of knowledge. In this commonplace kind of pedagogy, a teacher "cognizes a cognizable object while he prepares his lessons in his study. . . [and then] he expounds to his students about that object" (Freire 67-68). While this pedagogy may be more common in scientific disciplines and some humanities fields, it is still easily discernable in English departments. Most of my undergraduate education and a significant amount of my graduate training were exercises in this pervasive pedagogical model, whose adherents assume that the "neutral" transmission of "objective knowledge" is the primary function of the teacher. Dewey writes that this kind of "learning"

means acquisition of what already is incorporated in books and in the heads of elders. . . . [T]hat which is taught is thought of as essentially. . . a finished product. . . . It is to a large extent the cultural product of societies that assumed the future would be much like the past, and yet it is used as educational food in a society where change is the rule, not the exception. (Experience 19)

Rejecting the teacher-as-transmitter model requires a concomitant disavowal of the student-as-receptacle presuppo-
position. The popularity of the latter characterization has increased since the advent of the "literacy crisis." It has become fashionable in some circles to blame the ignorance of students for any number of educational and social problems. Students know a great deal about many topics, but their knowledge is illegitimate to certain "experts" on education — Kimball, Dinesh D'Souza, George Will et al. That is, students' "blank slates" have in fact been written upon, but not in "acceptable" ways. Conservatives' emphasis on reiterating the knowledge and authority of the teacher reveals their "political opposition to student participation because [of] it[s] challenge [to] power relations in school and society" (Shor Empowering 33).

Viewing students as empty boxes awaiting teachers' deposits of knowledge also leads teachers to blame "lazy," "apathetic" or, most euphemistically, "unreceptive" students for the failure of "education." Regrettably, it was only in the last few years that it occurred to me that I was a large part of the problem. Of course, there are many students who will resist any kind of pedagogy, even the best teaching efforts. These cases, however, are rarer than one might think; and, I would argue, teaching practices which more closely involve students in their own educations have a stronger possibility than traditional approaches of alleviating such problems.

Involving students more closely in their learning requires a significant emphasis on their experiences.
Stanley Aronowitz and Henry Giroux call for "taking seriously and confirming the language forms, modes of reasoning, dispositions, and histories that give students an active voice in defining the world" (104). But this move also entails "working on the experiences of... students in order for them to examine both their strengths and weaknesses" (104). That is, to take seriously the materials students bring into the classroom — the knowledge they already possess — is not "a static entrapment in what students already know and say" (Shor Empowering 44). Neither is it to engage in the relativism that conservatives think pervades the university, in which all interpretations are equal and canonical texts go unread. (Self)critical pedagogy simply acknowledges that any ostensible topic or theme of a course is actually more about the subject positions students and teachers assume (and the interpretations that are subsequently produced) in relation to that topic than it is "about" the topic itself.

Theorizing about subject positions, however, does not have to result in "purely academic" discussions about the death of the subject or the disappearance of the individual. Stephen Ungar writes that critics of Foucault complain that he "trace[s] the disappearance of the individual within the impersonality of institutionalized discourse" (92). This view — anti-Foucault, anti-Barthes, etc. — is reductive and limits the valuable contributions that Foucault and other
poststructuralists can make to pedagogical theory. A Cartesian conception of the individual does not have to be recuperated to enact pedagogical change. Foucault writes,  

*Of course, it would be ridiculous to deny the individuals who write, and invent.* But the individual who sits down to write a text... resumes the function of the author. What he writes and does not write, what he sketches out... all this interplay of differences is prescribed by the author-function. It is from his new position as an author that he will fashion... all he says.  

("Discourse" 222, emphasis added)

Foucault describes the postmodern subject who is able to think, read, write or teach in any number of ways, but who is constituted in a given subject position within a particular institutional context. Far from being "confined" by the notion of subject functions, teachers and students can begin to examine (self)critically the grounds for their institutional behaviors and work toward adapting them for desired goals.  

(Self)critical examination of institutional behavior inevitably leads to a reconception of what counts as knowledge. Following Lacan, Shoshana Felman writes that "knowledge is what is already there, but always in the Other. Knowledge, in other words, is not a *substance* but a structural dynamic: it is not contained by any individual..." (33). Similarly, in (self)critical pedagogy, knowledge is not a
tangible object to be passed on from teacher to student. Knowledge production should entail continual classroom negotiations among teachers and students about what counts (or might count) as knowledge, but not simple exercises in consensus building. Consensus is a comforting notion for some (Rorty, Graff et al.), but it largely effaces important, irreducible differences of class, gender, race, religious belief, sexual orientation and many others. Foucault questions whether a concept such as "consensus" is even possible, since any consensus "reached" inevitably poses another question that demands another consensus as an answer. As he argues, "'the "we" [of a consensus] must not be previous to the question; it can only be the result – and the necessarily temporary result – of the question as it is posed in the new terms in which one formulates it'" ("Polemics" 385). It is irresponsible to give students the impression that arriving at a consensus will "solve" a problem; that differences can be sublimated easily if everyone agrees, or agrees to disagree; that power and knowledge magically emanate from consensus. "Power produces knowledge. . . . [P]ower and knowledge directly imply one another," Foucault notes, but power "is not by nature the manifestation of a consensus" ("Body" 175; "Subject" 219).

Therefore, knowledge is inherently political, in the sense of Terry Eagleton's definition: "the way we organize our social life together, and the power-relations which this
involves" (194). This wider definition encompasses the material effects of knowledge production and consumption: "All knowledge... does something to someone, benefits and oppresses, empowers some and deprives others — exists, in short, as a dimension of work with an effect in the world" (Davis 264). Knowledge "operates through acts of exclusion and marginalization," as Michael Ryan states (53). Students should be made aware of the ramifications of the fact that knowledge is not value-neutral, that "official" knowledge is created through exercises of political and institutional power. But (self)critical pedagogy would deal with a disciplinary "conflict" like the politics of knowledge in a different manner than the conflict model would, in less of a top-down fashion. Students' experiences are rich and varied enough that, at some point in almost any course that encouraged (self)critical thinking, I suspect they would broach the topic of what counts as knowledge in the context of class discussion and/or research. Teaching the conflicts, however, assumes students have a stake in a given conflict; (self) critical pedagogy teases out what concerns students in the contexts of their experiences and interests. The next section provides further examples.

While most revisionary pedagogies seek to eliminate the literature/composition hierarchy, one may also have to devise more-local strategies to change pedagogy that provisionally acknowledge the power of existing structures toward the end
of deconstructing them. These structures—administrators' attitudes, "recommended" textbooks and handbooks, course offerings—cannot be wished away. They are "norms [that] are firmly in place," supported by "hundreds of minor and arbitrary truths... taken for granted, unchallenged, accepted as inevitable" (Clifford 43). For composition, two propositions can be made. Though John Schilb, among others, "worries" about writing teachers who "retain the service ethos or residues of it,"20 I would argue that one may work against that institutional assumption by having (self)critical composition teachers team-teaching core curriculum or general education courses with the "experts" in those disciplines (178). Just as the production of knowledge should involve teacher-student negotiation, what counts as "good" writing in political science, for example, could be negotiated among teachers and students and made a part of the course. This is different from the conflict model, however, in that the "conflict" of what is good writing arises from particular pieces of student writing, not predetermined academic disagreements. Instead of "Writing Across the Curriculum" (which, unfortu-

20 The work of noted composition scholar Kenneth Bruffee is an example of Schilb's fear: "Much of what we teach today—or should be teaching--in composition courses is the normal discourse of most academic, professional and business communities. . . . [A]s Rorty has put it, [education is] a process of learning to 'take a hand in what is going on' by joining 'the conversation of mankind.'" See "Collaborative Learning and the 'Conversation of Mankind'" in College English 46.7 (November 1984), pp. 643, 647.
nately, sometimes means to non-English faculty: "I guess I have to grade three papers instead of two"), there would be "Writing-in-Virtually-Every-Freshman-Course." Perhaps compositionists could venture into higher-level courses in other disciplines as well. Calling for "critical-democratic learning across the curriculum," Shor maintains that "Every content area, from biology to economics to accounting to architecture, can pose its subject matter as critical problems related to social conditions and student experience" (Empowering 187). Although one might argue that this idea simply reinscribes stereotypes about composition, this effort would be preferable to the way that many composition programs currently operate, as service entities uninvolved in any kind of pedagogical experimentation. "[T]he teaching of writing," John Clifford notes,

is inevitably an ideological act and thereby one part of any culture's attempt to reproduce itself, both intellectually and economically by creating accommodating students who are eager to fill designated positions of influence within various institutional landscapes. (39)

(Self)critical pedagogy can disrupt this process, especially if it takes place in both English and non-English courses.

A second proposal — which could take place in an institution more amenable to experimentation — entails conducting a writing course in an explicitly (self)critical manner that
would take students' experiences, interests and needs as the main focus, absent ostensible subject matter (authors, periods, movements) to cover. Students' interests and experiences, coordinated and organized by the teacher, would serve as the primary "texts" for the writing course. Instead of being provided with a "conflict" by the teacher, students would bring in texts of all kinds in which they have some stake or investment. I suspect teachers would be surprised at the importance and weightiness of the issues that students want to discuss. Such a course could proceed as follows: the instructor walks in the first day without a textbook or a syllabus; instructor and students generate a list of topics that reflect their experiences and interests — what they know, what they would like to know more about; they choose several topics on which to focus for the semester, and students organize themselves into research groups that will be responsible for presenting the topic to the whole class; each group collects several short texts that treat each topic (with assistance from the instructor if needed) and gives them to her for duplication and dissemination to the entire class. This approach "imbues" students "with a sense of the writing process as multifaceted, evolving and exploratory" (Clifford 46).

However, teaching writing in this way does not rely on the currently fashionable "process" approach (promoted in such textbooks as the *St. Martin's Guide*) with its "dozens of
discrete steps and scores of self-purifying questions about coherence devices and structuring techniques," which "forge[s] a truly constructed subject, committed primarily to reinscribing the obvious and the known in hypercorrect and bloodless prose" (48). This regulatory apparatus is usually suffused with a rhetoric of "empowerment students" and an aura of the "harmonious, nurturing" classroom (Vitanza 157; Jarratt 113). Such a passive-aggressive model is, according to Victor Vitanza, "the biggest hoax ever perpetrated on 'the student body'" (157). The process paradigm provides false security; it is a pedagogy that theoriz[es] the individual as "free" yet at the same time subjected to the "authority" of a higher power [and] preserves the notion of the free person who can enter into transactions with other free persons in the free market — but who is, at the same time, obedient to the free-market values that legitimize the existing political order.

(Zavarzadeh and Morton 3)

Process pedagogy may be even more insidious and pervasive than traditional composition instruction in that it is ostensibly less authoritarian and more student-centered. But there is little difference at the scene of teaching; even prominent advocates of process insist that their research shows "writing is goal-directed [and] writing processes are hierarchically organized" — hardly a theoretical leap from
current-traditional rhetoric (Hayes and Flower 388). This attachment to tradition and hesitance to embrace new theories is an example of how, according to Sharon Crowley, "the composition establishment rewrites or simply resists theories that threaten its preservation instead of foraging through them in an effort to rethink itself and its potential complicity with traditional academic values" ("Reimagining" 192). The only significant process in the process model is students being processed through what Susan Miller calls "the textual carnival of correctness, propriety and 'good breeding'" (91).

(Self)critical pedagogy rejects this "repressive ideal of perfectly written texts," re theorizing writing using both "composition" and "literary" theories (91). David Bartholomae and Anthony Petrosky argue that

... it is hard to distinguish the act of reading from the act of writing. In fact, the connection between reading and writing can be seen as almost a literal one, since the best way you can show your reading of a rich and dense essay... is by writing down your thoughts, placing one idea against another, commenting on what you've done, taking examples into account, looking back at where you began, perhaps changing your mind, and moving on. (Ways 2nd ed. 12-13)

Writing, in this view, is something that humans do con-
stantly, often unconsciously; "thinking" or "reading" is making meaning or "writing" interpretations. As Crowley puts it, "[T]he instigation of writing simply cannot be isolated from its contexts, which are myriad" (Teacher's 38). This poststructuralist view opens possibilities for students in both of my composition scenarios. In the first, students can see writing as, in Janet Emig's useful phrase, a mode of learning and that the act of writing can help one understand whatever topic is being studied. In the second, students can use writing (in journals, for instance) to explore the many subject positions they assume in their lives. Reconceiving writing in this way detaches it from its historical constitution as "a national course in silence," "a method of discipline," "a field of surveillance [in which] one had to define the aptitude of each individual, situate his level and his abilities, indicate the possible use that might be made of them. . ." (Miller 55; Dewey Experience 17; Foucault "Means" 201).

This view of writing and the composition course is also important for (self)critical pedagogy in the literature classroom. For example, I accentuate the connections among reading, writing and thinking by conducting literature courses along much the same lines as writing courses. Individual assignments are not graded; students write weekly reaction papers and use them as a basis for longer essays. There are numerous student conferences, in which they receive
oral and written feedback on their performance in the course and are asked to comment on their own progress in the course and the conduct of the course in general. During class meetings, there are few (if any) lectures; pairs of students are responsible for leading discussions each day. All of these approaches foreground, for students, that "education" and "knowledge" are not static processes or concepts, that they need to be (self)critical and self-aware of their progress in the course. I, the students and the conducting of the course itself undergo continuous self-analysis and critique.

Other (self)critical techniques involve the subject matter of literature courses. For instance, instructors tend to teach the same courses repeatedly and usually don't turn over the reading lists substantially from year to year. Therefore, literature teachers often possess stale, stock interpretations about the literature they teach, which they continue to promulgate. (Self)critical pedagogy urges changing reading lists as often as possible, even assigning texts that teachers have never read before (or at least haven't taught recently), and/or, better yet, allowing students to choose the texts they wish to read.

One potential drawback to these actions is that the workload for the teacher could become overly heavy. However, my experiences using both techniques have been almost entirely positive, in courses ranging from sophomore introductory courses to upper-level period courses for English
majors. In a typical course, for about one-half of the semester, I assign works I have not yet read, written by authors with whom I am familiar. (In a contemporary literature course, I used Don DeLillo's *Mao II* and Donald Barthelme's *The King.*) I have found that proceeding in this way allows me to provide adequate biographical and historical background (if class needs dictate), but frees both me and my students from silence-filling stock comments to which I might resort if I had taught the text many times before.

During the other half term, students choose what they would like to read from texts that we both bring in that are appropriate for the course. Through several rounds of voting (and negotiation), the texts that the most students wanted to read are chosen. A good mixture of genres, authors, etc. is usually chosen, because I allow students considerable time to make relatively knowledgeable choices. (In some cases, students have taken it upon themselves to research particular authors to make better-informed decisions.) Most importantly, because students have a stake in choosing what they read, they are usually much more interested in the material, and more-engaging class discussions result. And, as with the previous technique, I cannot dominate our meeting time with my commentary.

In (self)critical literary pedagogy, students can benefit from the fact that teachers present texts unencumbered by years of stock responses. However, this is to advocate nei-
ther a naive nor a "just read the text" approach; rather, students are better served by approaching texts on footing nearer to their teachers and less afraid to voice responses if they know their teacher is reading the text for the first time as well. The need exists, of course, in particular kinds of courses, to give students historical background about literature. However, even this need can be addressed differently. Instead of lecturing about the Elizabethan world picture, for example, students can investigate the historical background themselves, perhaps finding new and different sources than those on which teachers usually rely. Approaches such as these might lessen the often negative pedagogical implications of classroom power relations. There will, of course, always be power relations in the classroom; (self)critical pedagogy neither romanticizes the subject of pedagogy nor assumes that power is unequivocally bad. It seeks, rather, to alter power relations and subject positions to allow for the construction of (self)critical subjects, "students [who] read and write and think in ways that... encourage self-consciousness about who they are and can be in the social world" (Clifford 51).

To provide a more concrete example of (self)critical pedagogy in the literature classroom, I can report on my experiences coordinating a poetry course that evidenced both the advantages and difficulties of teaching differently. I was fortunate to team-teach this course, a typical poetry
survey. Such a setup aids (self)critical teaching in both logistical and philosophical/theoretical ways. We were able to allow students to experience several different pedagogical configurations—pairs, small and large discussion groups—with which we could interact more meaningfully as a duo. I often found that teaching solo, I sometimes couldn't get to—or could spend only a few minutes with—pairs of students. These various configurations were necessitated by our firm belief in choosing the subject matter for course democratically. As a first assignment, students perused the Norton Introduction to Poetry (our only required text) and several other texts we provided, chose three poems each and wrote a rationale for their choices. We photocopied this material and distributed it to the entire class. As their next assignment, students read through their peers' choices and came to the next class prepared to vote on our semester's reading.

The voting was enlightening in several ways. First, many students, especially white, middle- to upper-class males, chose the most canonical poems: Frost, Dickinson et al., those from their previous educational experience. Other class members, notably women, persons of color and white ethnics, chose the work of poets from their respective social and ethnic communities—Adrienne Rich, Ishmael Reed, Seamus Heaney, Gloria Anzaldúa, Maya Angelou and others. Our students seemed reluctant to choose any poem outside their
fairly immediate range of experience.

However, the range and number of poems chosen, and the reality of having to make decisions about which to read, provided some lively (self)critical discussion during the rounds of voting. We talked out why they chose particular poems, what those choices reflected about their previous education and their life experiences. We discussed the nature of literature anthologies and how and why students had these collections from which to make their choices — how editors had, in a profound way, already limited their choices. We argued about whether rock music lyrics were poetry and whether we should bring some of those texts into our course.

The students significantly changed our vision of how the course would proceed — and we could not have been more pleased. The poems chosen through the election process were complemented by rock lyrics and students' poems; a paper assignment was jettisoned in favor of attending a live poetry reading and reporting on it; presented with a choice, most students opted not to receive grades on individual assignments. In fact, soon after the semester had begun, we stopped collecting individual assignments and started evaluating students' writing portfolio-style, with the writing assignments deriving from class discussions. And all of this came from the group whose members contributed some of the student comments in Chapter 3 (see page 79 ff.). My recollections of the course are reminiscent of those I have
of an undergraduate creative writing course - a class structured as a workshop, with students trying new and different things without fear of failure (i.e. poor grades), a community of thinkers, readers and writers utilizing, not sublimating, their differences as occasions for (self) criticism and the production of knowledge. This course was the best enactment of (self) critical pedagogy I have experienced; our excitement was such that we soon delivered a presentation about it at a meeting of the Illinois branch of the National Council of Teachers of English. We were pleasantly surprised how a group largely consisting of high school teachers found our approach to be interesting and potentially useful. While it would be naive to say that the way we taught this course is universally applicable, the fact that (self) critical pedagogy may have the potential to also affect secondary school teaching is an important additional argument for its consideration.

The anthropologist Margaret Mead once said, "The only answer to change is more change" (ii). Her words describe the educational situation English teachers face today. Students have changed along lines of race, ethnicity, class, and gender; the literary canon and disciplinary fields of interest have been restructured as well. But what has not changed a great deal in English studies (especially on the literary side) is pedagogy. What literary works mean, or what is rhetorically effective writing, is not immutable - and the
ways in which these values are taught should not be unchangeable either. (Self)critical pedagogy encourages this recognition to respond more critically and conscientiously to the needs, experiences and interests of today's increasingly heterogeneous student population. Teachers who concur with Mead must lead this movement; in Chapter 5, what I see as the responsibilities of those who seek pedagogical change will be described - noting the various institutional, disciplinary and political barriers that confront the pedagogue as public intellectual and some of the consequences that may lay ahead if pedagogical change is not enacted.
CHAPTER 5

TEACHING AS SCHOLARSHIP IN ENGLISH STUDIES

What is constant in the context of university teaching is the academy itself, with its hierarchies.

Sharon Crowley, "Jacques Derrida on Teaching and Rhetoric: A Response"

The present study is, among other things, an attempt to work through an unexamined paradox: English teachers spend little time intellectualizing about that which makes the profession possible—teaching. This is so obvious a point that conservative critics of higher education have often made it, but few English teachers seem to acknowledge that their livelihood exists only through students' (and their parents') wallets. No one is paying bills through writing journal articles or books.

This is not to say that the majority of English teachers do not care about teaching or are otherwise irresponsible. My point is that the discipline is set up to function in such a way that teachers go largely unrewarded for reflection on their teaching; colleges don't hold the equivalent of secondary school in-service workshops, where teachers are required to attend, but are paid and released from a day of
teaching to learn more about teaching. In postsecondary education, practitioner lore is popular; teachers rely on a vague notion of "what works" instead of exploring the theories that underpin their practice. Consequently, teachers often shirk their responsibilities to students, not only as teachers, but also as public intellectuals. In this chapter, I will discuss the various hindrances both inside and outside the academy to doing scholarly work about pedagogy, how they might be overcome, and what the consequences of not overcoming them might be.

Foucault describes how every society, institution or discourse erects a "general politics of truth" — that is, a system of rules that governs which types of discourse are legitimate and what kinds are not (73). I have argued throughout this study that the politics of truth, or "regime," that structures English departments is New Criticism. This system of rules, which Foucault terms "internal," are "rules concerned with the principles of classification, ordering and distribution" ([Discourse] 220). His discussion of the internal rules that govern a discourse is first directed toward what he calls "commentary" or what might be termed "criticism" or "theory" — that is, writing that comments on prior writing. Foucault articulates the relationship between "secondary" texts ("commentary") and "primary" texts, as follows:

[I]n what we generally refer to as commentary, the difference between primary text and secondary text
plays two interdependent roles. On the one hand, it permits us to create new discourses ad infinitum: the top-heaviness of the original text, its permanence, its status as discourse ever capable of being brought up to date, the multiple or hidden meanings with which it is credited, the reticence and wealth it is believed to contain, all this creates an open possibility for discussion. On the other hand, whatever the techniques employed, commentary's only role is to say finally, what has been silently articulated deep down. It must — and the paradox is ever-changing yet inescapable — say, for the first time, what has already been said, and repeat tirelessly what was, nevertheless, never said. (Discourse 221)

The internal rules that govern a discipline, however, are different:

In a discipline, unlike in commentary, what is supposed at the point of departure is not some meaning which must be rediscovered, not an identity to be reiterated; it is that which is required for the construction of new statements. For a discipline to exist, there must be the possibility of formulating — and of doing so ad infinitum — fresh propositions. (Discourse 223)
Though Foucault does not explore the relationship between "commentary" and "disciplines," I wish to draw upon his ideas to discuss how the two terms are related with respect to the workings of English departments.

Although "criticism" and "theory" are not synonymous, I will refer to them together as "criticism" in the following discussion, in the sense that they are both "secondary" texts or "commentary" upon "primary" texts. English as a discipline requires that criticism adhere to a notion of legitimacy; it must comment on a primary text in a systematic way and produce a new reading of that text. But, as Foucault points out, these standards are inherently paradoxical; criticism must be "original" yet "faithful" to the primary text. Criticism must articulate what was silent "deep down" in the primary text; it must make intelligible what was previously unintelligible but present. Extending this line of reasoning to encompass "disciplines," one can then postulate that the relationship of commentary to a discipline is structurally similar to the relationship of commentary to primary texts. That is, when one does scholarly work about a discipline, one is mandated to generate "fresh propositions" (to "belong to" and "uphold" the discipline); yet, simultaneously, one must produce criticism that uncovers and explains what was already there. Simply stated, to perform "useful" work in a discipline is largely to conform to what are considered the
important objects of study; propositions, that is, should not be too fresh.

The primary texts or objects of study in English departments are obviously cultural texts and history, particular authors, genres and so forth. Increasingly, at certain institutions, student writing and the history of writing instruction have become acceptable texts for scholarly pursuits. However, what almost completely subsidizes the study of all other objects — teaching — is not nearly as acceptable as a scholarly pursuit. If one were to ask any parent of a college student what her tuition payment is "buying," she would probably say "knowledge." However, teachers know that tuition doesn't necessarily buy "knowledge" (teachers can't make students learn), but it does "buy" "teaching" — professors talking in classrooms. Therefore, teaching (or, to put it more broadly to include both teaching "theory" and "practice," pedagogy) would seem to be an extremely important object of study, a crucial primary text of the discipline of English.

But this is not the case, for several reasons. First, only in the last 12 to 15 years has pedagogy reached a status that might be called a subdiscipline; "theory" and "composition" have had similar histories as they had to carve out disciplinary space from "literature" and "rhetoric." The 1982 Yale French Studies issue entitled "The Pedagogical Imperative" marked the advent of this critical venue. Thus,
the study of pedagogy as a field or subdiscipline within English has only a brief history. Second, although an increasing amount of work on pedagogy is being performed, it is interesting to note who is doing this work. These pedagogical theorists range from deconstructionists (Barbara Johnson, Gayatri Spivak) to feminists (Paula Treichler, Chris Weedon) to compositionists (Sharon Crowley, Elizabeth Flynn) to literary-turned-cultural critics (Robert Scholes, Gerald Graff, Stanley Fish) to theorists from other disciplines (Henry Giroux, Stanley Aronowitz). These are by no means homogenous voices, but there is one denominator that unites them all: they began their scholarly careers in traditional fields, in projects deemed "acceptable" by their respective institutions. My point here is not to diminish anyone's accomplishments in pedagogical scholarship; rather, what interests me is the situation that one must "pay dues" early on in an academic career by doing "acceptable" work. After one does this - in a dissertation, then a book or two, perhaps - then one can choose more iconoclastic scholarly options, such as pedagogy.

The third reason that pedagogical study meets with disciplinary and institutional resistance (which overlaps with the first two) is the age-old conflict between tradition and innovation. This conflict is manifested in various ways and to varying degrees in subfields in English; new historicism, for example, has had notable effects on Renaissance studies
in the last ten years, while postmodern criticism has begun
to affect Old English and medieval scholarship. The disci­
plinary situation of pedagogical studies is more difficult to
describe. Its ostensible subject matter—teaching practices—
is a vast network of texts that is impossible to "read."
That is, a significant body of work has been produced in the
last ten years about teaching college literature and writing
classes, but to what extent this work has affected how En­
glish courses are actually taught is debatable. Teaching
tends to be a "subject" that most teachers feel they already
"know," just as they "know" Othello or The Great Gatsby. I
am not saying that most teachers are not open to learning
more about Shakespeare or Fitzgerald; my point is that there
is much more at stake for teachers—both professionally and
personally—in making decisions about the way they teach.
At stake professionally is the fact that how one teaches de­
termines how much time one has to devote to one's scholar­
ship, which in turn decides if and when one gets promoted and
tenured. This is not to say that those who publish do not
care about their teaching; but it is to acknowledge that many
schools place more emphasis on publications for possible
tenure than they do on teaching evaluations.

Potentially risky on a more personal level for teachers
is how to regard recent work on "liberatory" (Freire, Giroux,
Aronowitz) or "transformative" (Shor) pedagogy that not just
questions, but often severely rebukes traditional pedagogical
practices, linking them pejoratively with conservative political policies and the disempowerment of students. Referring to "the educational policy of the Bush administration," Aronowitz and Giroux argue that its aim is to wage an ideological offensive to persuade . . . school authorities to see themselves as moral agents of intellectual standardization . . . . [A]lternative goals such as student empowerment, individuation, creativity. . . intellectual skepticism. . . and unconventional learning styles and subject matter are to be excluded from approved pedagogical or curricular mandates. (8)

While Aronowitz and Giroux imply a more causal relationship between conservative political policies and college classroom practices than may actually exist, the connections they make here and throughout their book between political and educational policies are compelling. One can envision work such as this causing a significant amount of intellectual self-examination on the part of its readers. Such questions as "Is my approach to teaching harmful for my students?" may arise. Teaching differently or untraditionally is a significant risk for teachers; there are many potential dangers with seemingly few tangible rewards. As Ira Shor writes, "[D]oing classroom research is one way to merge teaching with publication, but such research is not yet high-status knowledge rewarded by
colleges and universities" (Empowering 233).

Barriers to pedagogical scholarship outside the academy may pose an even greater problem, if one agrees with the argument above about the economic relationship between teachers and students. That is, one engages in self-criticism about how well one is living up to the teaching end of the transaction. These obstacles begin with the demands that society at large places upon the university; it must produce educated students, scientific advancements and other tangible products. There has long been a widespread suspicion that the humanities - most notably English and philosophy - do not produce anything of (material) value.

And even to those who will admit that interpretations of literary texts actually count as work, it appears that, lately, all the humanities seem to be producing is what William Bennett terms an "infection" - multiculturalism, deconstruction, theory, etc. (Nelson 40). The furor over theory (usually invoked in arguments about political correctness) is based on the assumption that the Great Books have been jettisoned and professors are now teaching anything they please, as long as the authors are neither dead nor white nor male. While it is difficult to ascertain the extent to which this view is influential among the public, it does play on a complex of anxieties. One fear is that the university is wasting many students' time and money. A second is a class-based anxiety - that everyone in the academy knows time
and money are being wasted, but doesn't care and feels intellectually superior to boot. The public can dismiss the university as the "ivory tower," but it still fears that the university is smug in its ability to have time to engage in the philosophizing and theorizing that nonacademics don't. As Paul deMan puts it, "It is a recurrent strategy of any anxiety to defuse what it considers threatening by magnification or minimization, by attributing to it claims of power of which it is bound to fall short" (5). Therefore, teachers who study pedagogy theoretically or philosophically have cause for concern that such work would not be publicly considered legitimate. Time spent thinking about teaching, in this view, is time one isn't actually teaching. Popular media reports of the easy life college professors enjoy abound:

A professor's working conditions seem [to be] heaven on Earth. The hours are wonderfully short, six hours in the classroom being considered back-breaking labor at prestigious universities. During the summer, faculty members with wanderlust can usually find some foundation or government agency to buy them airline tickets to academic conferences in faraway places. (Grossman 3)

But despite such false characterizations, it is extremely important that pedagogical scholarship take place, for two
major reasons.

First, university teachers are public intellectuals who, in my view, have the responsibility to take a properly questioning, (self)critical attitude toward all of the "texts" they encounter. Despite Bennett and other conservatives' calls for the academy to promote the "common culture," the university must be a site where skepticism about such notions is encouraged, if not celebrated. It is nearly always in a battle with outside conservative elements who wish to maintain the political and cultural status quo. As Giroux and Aronowitz argue,

What meanings are considered important, what experiences are deemed the most legitimate, and what forms of writing and reading matter, are largely determined by those groups who control the... cultural apparatus of a given society. (93)


Secondly, I believe teachers need to think (self)critically about pedagogy because of the number and variety of students they affect, the possible influence they may have in the construction of student subject positions. In 1980,
women became the majority in the university student body in the more than 2,000 American institutions of higher learning; by 2000, at least 1 million foreign students will be attending colleges and universities in the United States (Troyka 253). Considering that English courses are required at almost all institutions, the possible consequences of English pedagogy are considerable. Moreover, as Giroux and McLaren state, education "establish[es] the conditions under which some individuals and groups define the terms by which others live, resist, affirm, and participate in the construction of their own identities and subjectivities" (162).

Teaching is a political and ethical act for which teachers must take serious responsibility. Derrida suggests that such an emphasis is especially important in light of increasing corporate and government involvement in universities. He writes of "the necessity for a new way of educating students that will prepare them to undertake new analyses in order to evaluate [the] ends of . . . apparently disinterested research" ("Principle" 16). Gregory Jay concurs: "American pedagogy has largely abandoned critical thought out of its obe­­sian to vocationalism. . ." (337). While both are right, I believe, it must also be emphasized that the role of the teacher-intellectual should not necessarily be to advocate for or against a particular ideological position. It should be to call into question every ideology; the teacher cannot be apolitical in the process of teaching, but she can be
(self)critical of her own positions and those around her.

The nature of teaching in America must also figure into pedagogy. Yet another paradox of teaching is that while America has prided itself on being "democratic," education has not. But if (self)critical pedagogy is about anything, it is about radically democratizing schooling. Adam Katz writes,

It is not, as in liberal classrooms, a question of "everyone" having his/her own "say," but of directing attention to those power relations embodied in discourses in such a way as to enable students to take responsibility for their . . . equal access to the means of. . . knowledge production. (238)

Students are typically positioned as mere consumers of knowledge, much as they are consumers of other commodities. (Self) critical pedagogy would have them assume subject positions of knowledge producers, wherein "reading and writing [are] seen as productive categories, as forms of discourse that configure practices of dialogue, struggle, and contestation" (Aronowitz and Giroux 93).

If students are encouraged to believe they have a stake in their own educations, perhaps the largest problem with English pedagogy can be solved — that students are often, to put it plainly, bored stiff in English courses. And too many teachers are bored with teaching, as well. What may have
captivated the attention of undergraduates at some point in the past seems to work no longer. One might attribute this to TV culture or other societal problems, but I think it is also due to the increasingly heterogenous students now attending American colleges and universities — who have far different interests and backgrounds than their predecessors. Shor argues that "Academic language and bodies of knowledge need a multicultural compromise with students' everyday language and experience. The academic world of knowledge is awesome, but unfortunately it was built without... respect for cultural diversity" (Empowering 84). There is a need not only for change in subject matter but also, perhaps more importantly, in teaching practices. But, as Dewey said, the road of new education is not an easier one to follow than the old road but a more strenuous and difficult one. It will remain so until it has attained its majority and that attainment will require many years of serious co-operative work on the part of its adherents. (Experience 90)

The problem is, Dewey wrote those words in 1938, and they have only grown in relevance. If pedagogical change continues to move so slowly, future students' lack of interest in literature and writing may be the least of America's worries — much more is at stake. "A democratic society needs the creativity and intelligence of its people," Shor writes. "[S]tudents need a challenging education that [allows] them
[to develop] as thinkers, communicators and citizens. . . . Conditions in school and society now limit their development" (Empowering 10). (Self)critical thinking and pedagogy can help change these conditions, giving students "a chance to develop the critical thinking and democratic habits needed for active citizenship in society" (85).


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