PREFACE

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Left Margins began as a discussion of student evaluations. We found ourselves continually talking about student comments like "the class spent too much time on racist issues" and "there was too much about politics and not enough about writing." These comments echo recent criticism of (openly) "politicized pedagogy" from the right. Although we are convinced that there is no politically neutral or innocent way to teach (i.e., exert pedagogical authority), we realized we were failing to make manifest for many of our students the linkages between writing and cultural reproduction that recent theoretical work in rhetoric and composition has exposed. Analyzing student comments on evaluations, then (cf. Bauer), led us to formulate the problem as the general invisibility to students of the work of culture. Each semester, we have found ourselves plotting new pedagogical strategies to make students aware of the presence of ideology in their lives, to enable their reading and writing of powerful cultural texts, and to flag these texts as constructed, as not a part of the natural world, and therefore as susceptible to being reconstructed.[1] By inventing and refining writing assignments, we have worked to focus students' attention on culture as, in Fredric Jameson's words, "an objective mirage [or] . . . nimbus perceived by one group when it comes into contact with and observes another one" (33). Too often, this mirage or nimbus seems to them to be, plainly and simply, "the truth," or "nature," or "just the way things are."

In addition to tinkering with our own pedagogical strategies and tactics, we began to wonder how other teachers concerned with cultural politics conducted their classrooms. How does "progressive" writing instruction manifest itself at ground zero, in the pedagogical exchange between student-writer and composition teacher? How do other teachers teach students to engage important political issues

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necessary to civic life in a democracy? Since openly political engagement offers excellent opportunities for teaching rhetoric and writing, our conversation often turned to cultivating that moment of (sometimes profound) rhetorical conflict between the teacher's articulation of an oppositional stance—an agenda that moves against the political grain—and the student's resistance to it: how teachers prepare for contention, generate it, receive it, and use it as a further teaching occasion; how students respond to the teacher, each other, the texts, and activities when asked to read culture critically.

In the spring of 1992, we began to circulate among colleagues at professional conferences and in scholarly journals the following proposal:

> For a collection of essays tentatively entitled *Left Margins: Cultural Studies and Composition Pedagogy*, we are soliciting papers on practicing theoretically informed cultural criticism in the writing classroom. We're especially interested in exciting, "nuts-and-bolts"[2] strategies for teaching students to write critically about contemporary cultural media, thus developing awareness of their own ideological subjectivity. Essays might move from theory to syllabus to assignment, explaining what texts were used and in what way, how the pedagogy worked in practice, and how students responded. Our audience is primarily those who do the teaching of writing: GTA's, adjuncts, and younger regular faculty.

The proposal suggests a number of objectives that we shared as editors and that should be made explicit. First and most obviously, we wanted to offer a practical, pedagogical companion to recent volumes theorizing oppositional possibilities, most notably Harkin and Schilb's *Contending with Words*, Bullock and Trimbur's *The Politics of Writing Instruction*, and Hurlbert and Blitz's *Composition and Resistance*. These works have increased the sophistication of composition studies and are highly suggestive to experienced writing teachers. However, we imagined for the *Left Margins* project a voice more engaged with day-to-day classroom exchanges. Our objective was to enrich the body of theoretical work in composition studies by focusing on the *actualization* of theory in practice—that is, by illuminating the shadowy nether world where theory interacts with and informs real-world work: designing course syllabi and writing assignments, negotiating with students, and evaluating their work. We hope the collection will extend the work begun by the second, more "hands-on," section of Berlin and Vivion's *Cultural Studies in the English Classroom*.

We hope, therefore, that *Left Margins'* unique contribution will be its close-up view of how teachers and students engage radical peda-

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gogy (as Giroux uses that term). Because there already exist many fine articulations of theory about teaching writing, we asked contributors to focus on the classroom dialectic initiated by critical practice in confrontation with late-twentieth-century U.S. culture. We wanted to know, for example, how their assignments succeeded in light of their goals, which ones they regarded as less successful, and why. We asked them to show students dismissing their claims, or accepting them, or partially doing one or the other, and the instructor's responses to these developments. We requested that they consider why any one approach or sequence of approaches succeeded in breathing life into students' critical perspectives while others did not. How would they do things differently next time and why?

As a result, the essays in this volume are closely focused in on classroom exchange. Although the theories that undergird the pedagogy described here have generated intense debate (Hairston concisely documents rightists' objections), our contributors give scant attention in these pages to the swirl of contention outside their classrooms. They consistently highlight teacher-student interaction, rather than the larger dialectics of professional discourse. For discussions of the broader context in which contemporary classroom practices occur (particularly the notion of applying contemporary literary theory and cultural criticism to the teaching of composition), we refer readers to the many fine works that explore that terrain (see, for example, Easthope; Edsforth and Bennett; Ross; Giroux; and Grossberg, Nelson, and Treichler).

In addition to its focus on pedagogical practice, our call for papers reflected as well our persuasive intent: to make available compelling examples of writing instruction that facilitate political demystification and social change. Of course, placing the focus on *teaching* as a cultural practice is itself a political move; it reverses the invidious hierarchy that locates theory as an elite (read "masculine") intellectual prerogative and classroom practice as private (read "feminine") sphere bounded by, in Susan Miller's words, "the initiating care, pedagogic seduction, and practice for adulthood provided by nurses in bourgeois homes" (48). In other words, we hope to intervene in the tendency to reduce teaching to a set of "implications" that anyone can "apply" to the classroom or conference. Instead, we assume that pedagogies have theoretical implications with which our audience is already familiar, and that in this instance at least, we can reverse the polarity of the privileged theory/practice binary. Writing pedagogy steps forward as the social praxis of (too often empty or "unrealized") rhetorical theory and cultural criticism.

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In the process of editing submissions to *Left Margins,* we became increasingly dissatisfied with limiting the project to the production of a political manifesto. The descriptions of and reflections on pedagogy we were reading demanded wider consideration than would be accorded to them in isolation from other perspectives. In an effort to contribute to contemporary debate on the politics of instruction, we set about creating a dialogue between our contributors and critics of oppositional pedagogy. It was at this point that Gary Tate and Gerald Graff agreed to critique the essays in parts 1 through 5. Later, the idea of counterresponses was suggested to us by an anonymous reviewer of the manuscript (who described the critiques as "shooting fish in a barrel").

With the addition of part 6, the comments and counterstatements, *Left Margins* fully realizes its title's implied dialectic: for only in their contention with a "center" (a status quo) do positions become more or less "left" (or for that matter "right"). In these pages, therefore, the central point of dispute in composition studies becomes overt: it is the containment or extension of "writing" as the subject of pedagogy.

Those who want to stabilize the meaning of writing conceive of it as individual expression or as individual control over discursive conventions. For them, the aims of writing instruction are unproblematic and inherently liberating: to facilitate the individual's growth as a self-conscious, reflective person and a useful, productive citizen. Because the composing process is focused on the individual, it is seen as apolitical. As a result, the knowledges deemed most appropriate to "composition" are those necessary for students to realize private objectives (although those private objectives may articulate political conviction). To require a critical approach or to stipulate a topic that students would find uninteresting or uncomfortable is, for those who defend a traditional view of composition, to introduce a political agenda into what is essentially a private and therefore primarily an apolitical engagement with language. (See Hairston, Stotsky, and especially Phelps, who argues explicitly for "A Constrained Vision of the Writing Classroom.")

In parts 1 through 5, contributors to this volume reject the "constrained" view of composition. Rather they seek to extend in some way the definition of writing to include its social and cultural context. "Writing" cannot be isolated from the communal work that it accomplishes and out of which it grows. This means that culture coauthors each text, rendering chimerical the claim that individuals freely choose meanings to encode in writing. The contentious quality of *Left Margins*

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represents this more basic dispute over what constitutes "writing," suggesting that the process of writing is itself a dialectical act, originating in, reformulating, and redirecting contradiction.

The subtitle of this collection, *Cultural Studies and Composition Theory*, implies a family relationship between these trans- or postdisciplinary fields of study. It reflects a search for writing pedagogy capable of challenging the "squeamishness about worldly matters of power [that] still infuses even leading scholarship in composition" (Schilb 179). For a number of our contributors, "cultural studies" is a rhetorical strategy for opening the classroom door to (post)Marxist criticism, invested as Gramscian "hegemony," Bourdieu's concept of education as reproduction of cultural capital, Althusserian interpellation of subjects by "IGAs," or Raymond Williams's "cultural materialism," among other elaborations of Marx and Engels (Brantlinger 85–101, Johnson, Murphy). As we intend the term in our subtitle, however, "cultural studies" signifies a wide range of critical practices from mainstream communication and media studies to a fairly rigorous historical materialism.

The emergence in American universities of cultural studies as a postdisciplinary model of inquiry suggests a way for composition, itself a post- (or at least trans-) disciplinary field, to address the absence of "culture" as an intellectual category in the culture of North America, and to dissolve at last the false dichotomy, as we see it, of process (or skill) and content (Trimbur, Schilb). There is no writing that is not an act of cultural articulation. Like most of the contributors to *Left Margins,* we reject the idea that language is a property of individual writers, who choose their beliefs and behaviors as voluntarily and as freely as they "choose their own words."

In the opening section, Henry Giroux "appropriates" pedagogy for cultural studies, arguing against "the general indifference by many theorists to the importance of pedagogy as a form of cultural practice" (4). But this appropriation cuts both ways: composition practitioners have in general avoided cultural studies' postdisciplinary insights into the discursive formation of composing subjects. It is this "[b]order writing . . . as a form of cultural production and pedagogical practice" (16) that will allow composition, as a critical educational practice, to appropriate cultural studies by finally resolving distinctions between form or process of writing and content. From another perspective, Alan Kennedy feels his way toward a middle ground between the political and the polemical. For him, writing belongs to "[t]he realms of production" (18). It is inherently political (in a way that reflection

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is not) because the very act of producing communicable meaning requires that individual experience "occupy . . . public space" (36).

The contributors to part 2, "Expropriating the Powers of Language," attempt in their pedagogy to refigure the relationship between written discourse and material culture. Joseph C. Bodziock and Christopher Ferry characterize themselves as "tricksters" uncovering the "culturally 'sacred' " (43), violating "the perceived order of things" (44) that empower and marginalize, and enacting a frightening "culture-in-progress." In her explorations of the half-lit graveyard of cultural mythos, Colleen M. Tremonte recounts her invitation to students—in conjunction with and sanctioned by classical stasis theory—to raise "a fine din tumbling linguistic tombstones and profaning cultural icons" (67). For Paul Gutjahr, housebuilding is the metaphor for teaching how (or at least *that*) "ideas manifest themselves in material ways" (70). Students explore "signifying systems . . . by studying tangible examples of material culture": home construction (70). Finally, Keith D. Miller, Gerardo de los Santos, and Ondra Witherspoon show how literate practices constrain social meanings by "de-producing" the overt politics of Martin Luther King, Jr., and how pedagogy might recover the rhetorical power and political immediacy or "reality" of the oral text.

Writers in part 3, "(Re)Writing Cultural Texts," narrate their engagement of students in analyses of popular culture. Kathleen Dixon examines with her students their responses to female and male rap musicians; as they contemplate Queen Latifah's performance in light of acts staged by 2 Live Crew or Yo-Yo and Ice Cube, the students learn to recognize discursive behaviors that preserve gender inequities: repression, universalizing, and binary thinking. Todd Sformo and Barbara Tudor take their students behind the television lineup on Monday evenings to assess the roles of technology and commentator reportage in manipulating, rather than merely facilitating (in an ideologically innocent way), viewers' experience of televised football. Christopher Wise uses Paul Ruben's *Pee-Wee's Playhouse* as the pre/text for students to interrogate the "nature" of sexual identity and orientation. His objective is "to undermine traditional gender-roles . . . [and] to alert students to their own ideological subjectivity . . . as 'gendered' subjects" (129).

Authors in part 4, "Practicing Rhetorics," describe courses in which content and practice are conflated. Rae Rosenthal combines feminist issues in rhetoric with feminist pedagogy. Offering students an opportunity to become "bilingual" in masculine and feminine modes of discourse not only makes them "more sophisticated writers" but also

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engages students for a semester with a "thought provoking and . . . potentially reformative" topic (140). Peter J. Caulfield believes that "a more comprehensive and powerful conception of rhetoric . . . ought to fundamentally alter how we actually teach writing" (157–58), and so he blends rhetorical practice in his classes with instruction in the ways in which "language (and everything that might augment it, such as color, music, or graphics) functions rhetorically to shape . . . our views of reality" (170). Raymond A. Mazurek initiates students into academic discourse by teaching and modeling Paulo Freire's Brazilian literacy experiments; a central tenet of his classes is the paradox that "[u]niversities are conflictive sites of power which often underwrite the status quo, but they are also places where traditions of critical thought create space for . . . self-reflective analyses of power" (175). Donald Lazere fuses instruction in critical research methods with explicit information on a range of partisan political positions. His goal, "to broaden the ideological scope of students' critical thinking, reading, and writing capacities" (190), is informed by "the need to counteract the deemphasis of politics, the absence of systematic exposition of a full spectrum of ideologies, and the atomized discourses that fragment American culture and education" (190–91).

While the material objectives of change envisioned by contributors to part 5, "Teaching for Social Change," differ, each constructs her or his writing class as a step—no matter how preliminary—toward social justice and equality. For Adam Katz, writing is the means to "sustained critiques of the hegemony exercised throughout everyday life" (211). Through critique of the university as an authoritarian institution (the rhetorical analysis of university documents, for example) and of the interests it serves, Katz exposes the inherent conflict between the ideology of educational emancipation and the training of literate workers in a capitalist system of production. Mas'ud Zavarzadeh admonishes a student who has suffered a "personal crisis" to work toward critical understanding of the relationship between this affective *experience* and the social and historical causes of such crises. Only by a social(ist) transformation (democratizing ownership of productive wealth) can the individual-in-crisis be relieved. Richard, the subject of Mary Beth Hines's qualitative case study, shares the emancipatory objectives of Katz and Zavarzadeh. As Hines's ethnography makes clear, Richard's pedagogy has as its object the defamiliarization (and eventual rejection) of the "imaginary relations" of the individual for "the real conditions of existence" (in Althusser's terms). Through critical study of cultural products (like the *OED*),

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Richard attempts to intervene in the social construction of dominant ideology. Bob Nowlan makes a case for dealing directly and openly with racism in the writing classroom. In response to his interlocutor (June), Nowlan argues against the liberal doctrine of gradual amelioration, advocating instead "contestation" of racist positions and critical examination of advantages racism confers on whites (including liberals). Finally, John C. Hawley considers what the legacy of the Society of Jesus might contribute to politically liberating writing instruction. Traditions of Jesuit education, he argues, authorize the practices demanded of multicultural and postcolonial worlds.

The dialectical turn of part 6 exposes the political conflict inherent in the cultural work of teaching composition: Gary Tate and Gerald Graff critique the work of contributors in parts 1 through 5; a number of those contributors then counter with critiques of Tate and Graff; we step in with an evaluation of the basic issue of the politics of writing instruction; and the volume concludes with an overall appraisal, Richard Ohmann's "Afterword."

Although it's always difficult to remember everyone who has participated in a work so collaborative as this, we would like to mention a few of those whose help was particularly timely. (As Huey Long is reported to have said in thanking contributors, "Those who gave in the primary get jobs; those who gave in the election get good government.") In ways that we can't easily articulate because they are so bound up with all of our thinking about rhetoric and writing instruction, Vivienne Anderson has helped shape this project. Henry Giroux and Richard Ohmann gave us early and invaluable encouragement. Others who offered helpful criticism and to whom we owe special thanks are the late James Berlin, Dale Bauer, Chris Weedon, James Sosnoski, David Downing, Bruce Herzberg, and Min-Zhan Lu. We're also greatly indebted to Gerald Graff and Gary Tate, whose critical responses made this volume genuinely dialectical. Priscilla Ross, our editor at SUNY Press, Don Lloyd, Elizabeth Larsen, and anonymous reviewers gave us provocative and insightful criticism, for which we're grateful. Karen Fitts thanks Loyola College in Maryland for generous financial support. And to the original contributors to *Left Margins*, we thank you not only for your patient cooperation but also, and especially, for teaching us new ways of working for social change.

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