



Dangerous Writing

Understanding
the Political Economy
of Composition

Tony Scott

DANGEROUS WRITING

*Understanding the Political Economy
of Composition*

TONY SCOTT

UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Logan, Utah
2009

Utah State University Press
Logan, Utah 84322-7800

© 2009 Utah State University Press
All rights reserved

Manufactured in the United States of America
Cover design by Barbara Yale-Read

ISBN: 978-0-87421-734-6 (paper)
ISBN: 978-0-87421-735-3 (e-book)

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Scott, Tony, 1968-

Dangerous writing : understanding the political economy of composition / Tony Scott.
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-0-87421-734-6 (pbk. : alk. paper) – ISBN 978-0-87421-735-3 (e-book)

1. English language–Rhetoric–Study and teaching (Higher)–Political aspects–United States. 2. English language–Rhetoric–Study and teaching (Higher)–Social aspects–United States. 3. Academic writing–Study and teaching–Political aspects–United States. 4. Academic writing–Study and teaching–Social aspects–United States. 5. College students–United States–Economic conditions. 6. College students–United States–Social conditions. I. Title.

PE1405.U6S4 2009
808'.042071073–dc22

2008047646

There are two kinds of saviors: those who want to soothe the souls of the suffering and those who want to heal the sores on the flesh of the suffering. Sometimes I wonder which is right. Sleep well. The couch may not be as comfortable as your leaves of grass, but there is a roof over it.

NGUGI WA THIONG'O, *Wizard of the Crow*

And in the final analysis, it doesn't bother anyone much that politics be democratic so long as the economy is not.

EDUARDO GALEANO, *The Book of Embraces*

CONTENTS

Acknowledgments ix

Introduction: Embodying the Social in Writing Education 1

- 1 Professionals and Bureaucrats 36
- 2 Writing the Program: The Genre Function of the Writing Textbook 60
- 3 How “Social” Is Social Class Identification? 108
- 4 Students Working 131
- 5 Writing Dangerously 180

Appendix A: Initial Questions 191

Appendix B: Code List 192

References 193

Index 200

About the Author 203

INTRODUCTION

Embodying the Social in Writing Education

Over the past four years I have gone through numerous jobs and have experienced the good, the bad, and ugly aspects. Learning from what I have come to see has taught me that the workplace is not always as pleasant as what you wish it to be. I have worked at places where I have not been treated as an equal, been sexually harassed, discriminated against, and have had issues with management. Through times of triumph I have learned to pick and choose my battles where, as an employee, I could still have my pride, dignity, and self-esteem. . . .

“Mariah,” university student and waitress¹

By the time she had reached her junior year as an undergraduate, Mariah already had an extensive work history at the wide, low-paying, low-security bottom of the fast-capitalist economy. She had worked in a daycare center and at a number of jobs in restaurants and retail. Much of that work had been for national chains. At twenty-two, she had been sexually harassed by a manager on one job, asked to wear more revealing clothes on another, left another job because of a hostile work environment created by racial tensions, and not paid by an employer who suddenly closed his doors and disappeared. Mariah sees higher education, in part, as a chance to eventually move out of these types of jobs—in the meantime, she has tried to live life as a university student and a worker in low-status jobs with as much dignity as possible.

A classmate of Mariah’s, Teresa, worked as an assistant manager at a discount shoe outlet. Teresa is in her mid-twenties and has also worked in a variety of jobs, including as a telemarketer and as a clerk for a newspaper. By the time she took the job at the shoe outlet she was married and both she and her husband were in school. She says that she became an “hours whore,” taking all the shifts she could get at eight dollars an hour to make ends meet. At least in terms of responsibility, this raised her status on the job considerably. In a store that relied almost entirely on part-time labor—a very common way of avoiding paying benefits—Teresa was

1. Student quotes used with authors’ permissions as part of a reviewed and approved research project.

eventually asked to work full-time: “Turnover is a fact of life for any retail store; in this case, it worked in my favor. I quickly earned seniority and full-time status as old employees left, some before I learned their names, and new employees joined the staff.” Full-time status meant health insurance coverage, a much-coveted benefit at this level of the economy that many postsecondary students as well as their part-time teachers don’t enjoy. Her manager, however, began to take advantage of her, giving her his managerial duties—opening, closing, doing accounting, and even taking money to the bank alone after hours—without commiserate pay. Shoplifting was an ongoing concern at her store, and when she was threatened by a group of organized, brazen shoplifters, she quit. She got an administrative job on campus, and after a few weeks went back to visit the store (and buy cheap shoes): “Only three of my former coworkers still worked at the store and all of them were looking for new jobs in the area. It’s not surprising—retail wears you down.”

So, apparently, does restaurant work. Marshall, a twenty-four-year-old waiter at a restaurant, initially had high enthusiasm for the amount of quick money he could make waiting tables. His enthusiasm faded over time, however, as he began to lose respect for his managers and question how the work was starting to change him. While working on this job at a well-known restaurant chain, he grew cynical about the difference between the restaurant’s carefully maintained public image and what he saw as a fundamentally exploitative work environment, and about a corporate structure that maintained a solid cap on advancement and hired upper-level management only from outside the company. He connected his own discouragement with the self-destructive lifestyles of many of his coworkers. His attitude eventually turned extremely negative:

On good days, I still hated the job. I could only admit to the day’s goodness in light of the hatred I had. I existed in a state of constant melancholy. I held open contempt for everything the restaurant stood for; I willingly expressed it to any who would listen, including management. I was just regarded as the weird guy. No one cared about my contempt, they weren’t agreeable or offended.

Marshall came back to school—he had dropped out—in part because he felt that his self-esteem was suffering as a restaurant worker, and he was slipping into a self-destructive lifestyle himself (drug and alcohol abuse and late hours spent out after work are a normal part of the culture at this restaurant). He continues to work, but he believes that school gives

him the feeling that he is moving forward, not wholly defined by the work that he continues to do for twenty-five or more hours each week. His work while not a student before returning to school therefore seems to function as a kind of cautionary experience for him, motivating him to stay in school and avoid the lives of many of his coworkers.

Camille, a mother of a one-year-old son, describes the beginning of her day like this:

Waking in the morning, I get out of the bed to begin my work day. I usually take a shower, dress myself, and dress my son. My son and I then go off to work together—into our living room. Yes, to arrive at my job doesn't take a thirty minute drive or even a ten minute sprint. I can be in my office, ready to start work for the day in just a few steps.

Twenty-three-year-old Camille runs a day care out of her home, with some help from her fiancé. After waking their son and getting him dressed, she springs immediately into action—making breakfasts and performing the dizzying array of tasks it takes to get her house ready for the children. Eventually, eight children—ranging in age from twelve years old to three weeks—are under her care at some point during the day. Her typical day is thus a blur of drop-offs and pickups, meals and regulatory-oriented paper work, dirty diapers and lesson plans. And yes—she also comes to class, occasionally with the one-year-old still in tow.

Over the past three years, I have centered sections of both a first-year course and an upper-division writing course on the theme of work. Students write essays in which they examine their work histories and experiences; they interview other workers as part of broader research projects; and they do secondary research on issues related to work in the current economy. The lives of Mariah, Teresa, Marshall, and Camille are typical among my students. They sat relatively close to one another in a single section of a writing class. Most of my students describe lives lived at the insecure bottom of the service economy, where according to U.S. Department of Labor statistics the overwhelming majority of new jobs are now created (U.S. Department of Labor 2008). They move from job to job, often working for employers who have obviously built high turnover into their business plans. They struggle with lower-level managers of widely varying competence who are also poorly paid and whose status is nearly as marginal as theirs. A few are self-employed—Camille running a day care center, another student doing contract office work from home. Far more work for companies that are household names:

Target, Nordstrom, Chili's, Starbucks, Barnes & Noble, Gap, UPS, Wal-Mart, Office Depot, etc. Carefully maintained, glossy corporate images are often a stark contrast to the gritty, everyday realities of workers at these companies.

In addition to being workers, they are also (mostly) full-time students at a large, urban university. As working, "nontraditional" students they are hardly an isolated demographic in higher education. In fact, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), a significant majority of all postsecondary students (73%) are now best (if ironically) classified as "nontraditional," and the overwhelming majority of all postsecondary students are in "second-tier" institutions (National Center for Educational Statistics 2006, 25).² Regardless of their ages—and postsecondary students are now older than they have ever been (according to the NCES, 39 percent are now older than twenty-five), students are spending much of each week in the alienating world of low-end service economy work. Moreover, many institutions of higher education have begun to adopt service-economy characteristics—in terms of their rhetoric (as students are increasingly referenced as "education consumers" and curriculum is approached as a portable commodity); in their marketing techniques; in the articulation of their goals; and in their positioning and management of teachers (see, for instance, Apple 2000; Blackmore 2000; Bok 2003; Miyoshi 1998; Schugurensky 2006; Slaughter and Leslie 2004; Smith 1999). Among the oft-cited characteristics of the "new" or "fast-capitalist" economy is its increased reliance on "casualized" labor, and its steady reconstitution of higher education as an ongoing training mechanism for continually displaced, often chronically partially-employed workers. Job insecurity is now very consciously linked with enrollment and goals in higher education, as colleges openly market themselves as paths to economic competitiveness, and programs—Masters-level programs in particular—are developed and marketed with displaced white-collar professionals in mind.

Postsecondary students are far more likely to be part-time workers now than they were in 1970: 80 percent work some amount of regular hours as they go to school and 39 percent work an average of thirty-five

2. John Alberti provides a thoughtful way of distinguishing "elite" and "second-tier" institutions (2001, 564–65). He draws on NCES statistics, but manages to articulate the distinction without denigrating the "second-tier." According to NCES numbers, only 24 percent of colleges are classified as Doctorate, Liberal Arts, and Baccalaureate—it is from this already limited pool that "elite" colleges would be drawn.

or more hours per week (National Center for Educational Statistics 2005). Their teachers are very much a part of the part-time economy too. A survey sponsored by the Coalition on the Academic Workforce (whose membership includes Conference on College Composition and Communication and The Modern Language Association) found that 93 percent of all introductory classes in freestanding writing programs were taught by non-tenure-track faculty.³ Moreover, 60 percent of *all* undergraduate writing courses were taught by contingent faculty (“Report on” 2001, 338). Given the low pay, lack of security and benefits, and high turnover at this large and expanding lower echelon of postsecondary education, teachers themselves are often far from the ideal of success that is marketed by many institutions of higher learning. Though typically these factors are ignored or left on the margins of discussions of literacy and pedagogy, the harsh logics of the fast-capitalist economy profoundly shape the contexts of postsecondary writing instruction in the United States.

In 1988, Janice Newson and Howard Buchbinder noted the rise of what they called “the service university” in their important *The University Means Business: Universities, Corporations and Academic Work*. They argued that universities would in future years be shaped by conceptions of higher education as a competitive moneymaking enterprise in which operations are rationalized for economic efficiency; vested faculty act as “entrepreneurs”; and knowledge is created, marketed, and sold as a commodity. Newson and Buchbinder read the tea leaves correctly. Ensuing research and scholarship (including the important work of Michael Apple, Sheila Slaughter, Larry Leslie, Gary Rhoades, Randy Martin, and Carlos Alberto Torres) has tracked the substantial changes that have occurred in funding, policy, authority, and mission in American higher education over the past three decades that have served to bring about the service university. This conversation and body of research is now well-developed and very consequential to writing education. We need to understand how changes in the economics of higher education are shaping writing education and how we should respond.

John Alberti has made the case that pedagogical models and theoretical discourse still tend to assume “elite” universities, and the largely privileged students who populate them, as the norm—even if it is a largely unacknowledged norm. A variety of factors, however—including open

3. The majority of those classes, 75 percent, were found to have been taught by part-time instructors and graduate assistants.

enrollment and the terms of the fast-capitalist marketplace—have radically changed both who students are and how they experience higher education. Most postsecondary students are now not from privileged backgrounds, and most institutions are not elite or very exclusive, but are what Alberti calls “second-tier” or “working class.” Acknowledging this doesn’t diminish the importance of the work of those of us who are at less exclusive institutions, quite the opposite: it necessitates a now long-overdue change in general perspective. If we

focus on those “second-tier” schools as the norm, we can take their institutional structures and ideological formations not as pale imitations of “real” college but as defining the major trends and developments, for good and ill, of higher education in the United States, developments that, not coincidentally, parallel the rise of both composition studies and the multicultural challenges to questions of canon and cultural authority. (2001, 567)

Alberti focuses on issues of access and economics at second-tier, working-class schools as he connects institutional issues (funding, admissions standards, etc.) with a multiculturalist curricular agenda. Economic class should not only be among the categories of difference that are recognized in multicultural agendas, but the lived experience of class should be “a catalyzing force for scholarly and curricular activism at working-class colleges and universities” (581). Multicultural political agendas should not be idealized in the cloistered classes of a well-positioned and well-financed economic elite; they should encompass issues associated with the economics of higher education as they are played out in the lives of all students—including the nontraditional majority—who are attending institutions under widely varied circumstances. He advocates an approach that combines curricular reform and service learning to build “multicultural coalitions” in the communities within which schools are located.

Rhetoric and composition scholarship has now long recognized that writing in industrial and civic spheres can only be adequately understood when situated in particular places and times. However, as Alberti, Bruce Horner (2000), Richard Miller (1998), James Zebroski (1998), and others have argued, the field has tended not to study and conceptualize student writing in the same way as writing outside of educational settings. “Writing program” discussions often do focus on institutional, material concerns, but from an administrative perspective. The emphasis is therefore on factors like compliance requirements,

budgetary issues, part-time and contract teaching labor, assessment, and the place of writing in general education and English curriculums. Systematic connections are rarely made between these factors and the character of literacy and learning as manifested in day-to-day classroom activity. In contrast, scholarly discussions of writing pedagogy—method, purpose, and praxis in writing classrooms—tend to account for factors other than the institutional settings of writing education: textuality, rhetorical theory, ideology, technology, revision, gender, race, and so on. Though everyday institutional practices and the material terms of labor for teachers and students have a profound effect on the character of writing pedagogy, they don't often appear in research- or theory-driven discussions of postsecondary classroom pedagogy. Advocating a more “ecological” approach to research in the field, Margaret A. Syverson notes that researchers of postsecondary writing, for all of their insistence upon the importance of location, “have been somewhat atomistic, focusing on individual writers, individual texts, isolated acts, processes, or artifacts” (1999, 8).⁴ Jeff Grabill argues that the fact that research in professional writing often accounts for institutional factors is one of the primary characteristics that distinguishes it from research more directly focused on writing pedagogy in postsecondary classrooms (2001, 16). The perception of “the social” in writing doesn't account for how the immediate social contexts of postsecondary writing are institutionally constituted. We don't, for instance, have a developed body of work that examines how the institutional positions of teachers (part-time or full-time but non-tenure-track) shapes how pedagogical praxis is carried out in classrooms. Most undergraduate writing courses are now taught by non-tenure-track faculty, but composition scholarship continues to be written largely from the perspective of tenure-track teacher-scholars who don't address the consequential differences between how they and contingent teachers are positioned in writing classrooms.

In this book, I join those who suggest that pedagogical goals and practices are an integrated piece of broader, situated institutional concerns. My perspective, however, is primarily political economic. I explore

4. There are some notable exceptions: Margaret Marshall and Bruce Horner, for instance, discuss the relationship between the material terms of teaching labor and pedagogy in postsecondary writing. Nevertheless, the field has a surprising, and perhaps telling, dearth of research that critically examines the effects of managerial practices (programmatic policies and goals, evaluation procedures, required syllabi, etc.) on writing pedagogy and student learning in postsecondary writing programs.

relationships between postsecondary writing, institutions of higher education, and the world of service work in fast-capitalism, with a particular emphasis on class. The terms of work for teachers and students in writing education are not subsumed by the academic field of rhetoric and composition. Teaching, administrative, and student work occurs on contended, highly politicized terrains and is shaped by economic logics and constraints. I describe student writers and their texts as pieces of broader material processes in which consciousnesses and institutions are continually being created: the socio-material terms of labor for teachers and students are at least as relevant to these processes as any research, past or present.

Throughout the book, I argue that the creative powers of teachers, students, and writing in postsecondary institutions are prevented from reaching their full potential by two primary factors.

1. A carefully circumscribed view of “the social” that has prevailed in the so-called “social turn” in rhetoric and composition prevents recognition of the immediate, dynamic relationships between student consciousness, institutional logics, and acts of production. This constraining view masks the internal, historically derived contradictions of a field that is closely tied to an institutional requirement (first-year composition) but has also been significantly shaped by open enrollment and the progressive politics of the 1960s and 1970s. The administrative logics of writing programs—formed in response to institutional and economic pressures—are, in many ways, at cross-purposes with the more radically material and politically aware conceptions of pedagogy and discourse that are suggested by a fully “social” or “post-process” view of writing. Those logics push practices in the field toward more easily commodified and administered pedagogies and away from the immediate, the creative, and the politically meaningful (and perhaps dangerous).
2. A continued reliance on dated conceptions of higher education and generic identity categories prevents us from constructively naming the terms of work and education in fast-capitalism, even as the lines between public educational institutions and private industry have become increasingly blurred. The political economy has changed dramatically over the past three decades—these changes have been characterized in various loaded terms, but

generally they are described as a movement from an “industrial” to a “postindustrial” or “fast-capitalist” economy. Though some scholars have addressed those changes, the field has not developed a discussion of what they have meant to our work. “Class” is too often a generic identity marker that is contained within “tolerance” projects, rather than a part of a politically actionable vocabulary that enables understanding of how we are positioned in terms of power and relations of production. To borrow Deborah Brandt’s term, the institutional “sponsors” of postsecondary writing—along with the terms of labor and economic structures that are created and sustained by those sponsors—remain largely invisible. Conceptions of what exactly is happening when our students write therefore often don’t make space for a counter-hegemonic consciousness or politics because they don’t account for how the political economic shapes labor and writing education at the level of institutional architectures. Still overused and underscrutinized, “academic writing” is a strategically vague, inadequate description of what happens when students write in academia.

I will argue that in order to find sustainable footing on the educational terrains created within the political economy of fast-capitalism, writing pedagogies should adopt a more dynamically social, yet materially grounded, praxis. This requires not only a recognition and critique of the terms of student labor as a facet of the political economy, but also of the increasing synergy between the aims and logics of the fast-capitalist marketplace and administration in higher education. The economic lives and struggles of Mariah, Teresa, Marshall, and Camille aren’t suspended when they walk onto campus. Academia doesn’t just produce academics, and writing teachers generally don’t determine the terms of their own work. New approaches to critical pedagogies should focus on critique of the political economic circumstances of work both outside and inside of higher education, and on transcending the conceptual limitations of a now institutionally appropriated, identity-oriented rhetoric that obscures as much as it reveals about labor, class, and the daily lives of most students in higher education.

In addition to its secondary research, the book will draw upon two primary sources of research. One is a study of the genre function of textbooks. It is based primarily on interviews with twenty-one writing

faculty, and positions textbooks in relation to the terms of teaching work in composition. The study provides a useful means of understanding the relationship between teachers' professional standing, the textbook industry, and writing pedagogy. A second study is a class-ethnography that centers primarily on student texts and illuminates much about the working lives of students, how they see their work and education, and the possibilities and shortcomings of various approaches to examining work in writing classes. It uses discourse analysis as a means of understanding how students continually create identities through their writing. What emerges is a complicated portrait of students rhetorically negotiating the figured worlds of work and higher education, working through their own complicated political economic identities and lives.

I have seen the tensions, contradictions, and opportunities for change that I examine in this book firsthand. I was a working-class, first-generation college student who (with the help of Pell grants and student loans) financed his own education working a variety of jobs including landscaping, construction work, waiting tables, working in warehouses, agriculture, and even in a meatpacking plant. I was an adjunct for two years, teaching days at an urban university and then working the second shift loading and unloading trucks at UPS—sometimes alongside some of my own students. I was also a teaching assistant (TA) in a Ph.D. program who worked with other TAs and adjuncts out of a crowded basement office. At this writing, I am an associate professor and the director of a large, and in many ways very challenged, first-year writing program that is staffed almost entirely by part-time and full-time non-tenure-track teachers. My experiences and ongoing struggles to understand my professional work inform, energize, and bias my research and writing.

In the remainder of this introduction, I more fully introduce the term “political economy.” The term has a long history and therefore carries quite a bit of baggage, but it is nevertheless well worth the trouble. A political economic perspective offers a means of understanding current writing and teaching praxis in composition that could generate creative, integrative new ways of doing work—writing work, teaching work, and administrative work—in rhetoric and composition. It connects the macro with the micro, grounding conceptions of work in the material conduct of that work. I then relate a political economic perspective to what Bruce Horner has called the “dominant conception of the social” in rhetoric and composition—a theme that will be explored in various ways throughout the book.

I won't argue that a political economic perspective will lead anyone out of the allegorical cave and into the pure light of perfect knowledge. Nor will I even attempt to account for all or most of the many possible political economic factors about which critically reflective teachers and scholars are, and need to be, concerned. This book will, however, offer a kind of conceptual webbing on which we can position the factors that shape writing pedagogy that we feel are most important. In so doing, it is my hope that it will expand the scope of what professionals in the field feel is relevant to day-to-day writing pedagogy, including the organizational cultures created by writing programs; the positions of teachers and students as workers in the current economy; the embodied, consciousness-shaping performances of that work; and the increasingly pervasive influence of the textbook industry. I hope to provide a useful way to see and act upon the challenges, frictions, and immense creative possibilities of a more fully social approach to learning and acting with writing.

BROADENING "THE SOCIAL TURN"

The Political Economy

I start from the assertion that writing, even writing in school settings, is embodied, creative production that is significantly shaped by political economic factors. To clarify, I am using "embodied" in a historical materialist way. In *Capital*, Marx uses the term *verkörperung*, which is translated as "embodiment" and also connotes "physical realization." For Marx, "embodied" labor is both material thing and process. It references bodies laboring, engaging in this or that productive activity at a given time; it also references how that labor is imbricated within relations of production that abstract and commodify it. Marx was careful to show that these two forms of labor are conflated in capitalism: this parallels the conflation of use-value and exchange-value and is thus a primary source of contradictions. In chapter 1 of *Capital*, he uses "embodied" in his descriptions of how labor is abstracted through commodification:

If then we disregard the use-value of commodities, only one property remains [of products], that of being *products of labour*. But even the product of labour has already been transformed in our hands. If we make abstraction from its use-value, we abstract also from the material constituents and forms which make it a use-value. It is no longer a table, a house, a piece of yarn or any other useful thing. All its sensuous characteristics are extinguished. Nor is it

any longer the product of the labour of the joiner, the mason or the spinner, or of any other particular kind of productive labour. With the disappearance of the useful character of the products of labour, the useful character of the kinds of labour embodied in them also disappears; this in turn entails the disappearance of the different concrete forms of labour. They can no longer be distinguished, but are all together reduced to the same kind of labour, human labour in the abstract. (1996, 128 [emphasis mine])

It is through this process of abstraction that products appear on shelves seemingly completely detached from the labor that went into producing them. In “concrete,” material settings, real material bodies labor and produce—and the fruits of that production have use-value. A pair of pants can be worn—and the worker who created the pants might be able to exchange them for something else of relatively equal use-value, a shirt perhaps. However, both the labor and the use-value of products are commodified by capitalism: concrete human labor is made to “disappear” as it is abstracted through exchange. Currency and circulation enables the pants and the labor that went into producing them to become a form of exchangeable capital, and this creates a system in which alienation and large-scale exploitation are possible. Workers are alienated from the products they produce by the terms of their labor, and they aren’t in a position to reap the benefits from the exchange of product for currency. Pants may be made in sweatshops for pennies on the dollar in remote parts of the world, but then appear on shelves at the Gap or Target far removed from laborers and the circumstances of production. Political economic analysis can enable an understanding of teaching and writing as concrete *and* commodified labor. It can help us to see important aspects of both the writing as embodied labor (for instance, teachers teaching and writers writing) and the writing abstracted (writing education as it is embodied within disciplinary and institutional frameworks)—ultimately, it can help us to see the ways that teachers and student writers are alienated from what they produce by the terms of their labor.

The term “political economy,” however, has a very old history and is richly textured and potentially slippery. As it is now generally understood through the lens of contemporary economic theory, “classic” political economic thinking had its roots in the eighteenth century, perhaps most notably in the work of Adam Smith and David Ricardo. When Smith described his utopian model for industrial capitalism in *Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, he described a system

in which people do the work to which they are “naturally” best suited. They do it cooperatively and according to a very calculated organization so that the dual goals of individual realization and collective efficiency and prosperity are achieved. Smith’s utopian model therefore carried common assumptions of the Enlightenment: he sought to realize what he took to be a *natural* order through a *scientifically* managed system. Liberal, political views of individual freedom and self-realization—natural essences and rights—were joined with positivistic views of scientific efficiency and progression.

When reading Adam Smith now, through a lens tempered by a few centuries of industrial capitalism, one might easily adopt a sobered view. Beside his crisp, clockwork vision of a free people working in an efficient, harmonious system, one might juxtapose deeply troubling, even nightmarish images: child labor and coal-blackened skies; company thugs and tent-city massacres; poisoned rivers and technologically advanced armies that wipe out entire cities with impersonal, industrial efficiency; the synchronized bodies of Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis*, wearily pulling levers according to the relentless timing of a giant steel clock. Again and again, in site after site, human bodies and labor have been employed in projects and within systems that can’t, by any stretch, be said to have realized human potentials. But in the public discourse we don’t typically see those images juxtaposed with Smith’s utopian image of a natural, rational, generally beneficial order through capitalism. Among the reasons that his articulation of free market liberalism persisted as an ideal is that Smith so beautifully joined a political ideology with a material economy—creating a tantalizing vision of people working together in organized, efficient systems that best realize productive and creative potentials, rather than exploiting them. Smith’s political economic system elegantly brought Enlightenment individualism and industrial capitalism under one umbrella, marrying a philosophy of personhood, freedom, and governance with a material science of economics and production. In the popular imagination, it continues to survive as a platonic essence, sullied only in actual applications for this or that reason. It can work, so the thinking goes, if only we get this or that right—“There is always room at the top.” If certain people do not thrive, it’s not the systemic structure itself—the poor can be wealthy, too, with better schools, more discipline, more gumption, etc. Higher education figures heavily into this thinking, as it is often constructed as an equalizer, a means of righting social wrongs and enabling one to

create one's own destiny. A statue outside of my own office building is of a man chiseling himself out of rock. Marketing in higher education, especially at institutions like mine, consciously draws on the "bootstrap" image of realization through individual accomplishment in a free society.

Marx would develop a different way of doing political economic analysis. Marshalling extensive research on the factory system in England, Marx situated human labor in broader systems of production, exchange, and wealth accumulation. His method was to move from the particular/material to the systemic and the historical. He painstakingly followed raw materials labor and goods through processes of production and circulation, eventually contextualizing specific material artifacts and labor within those processes. In so doing, he created a portrait of how everyday human labor is positioned within (and shaped by) circulation, valuation, and exchange. Through political economic analysis he showed how the terms of labor are historically produced and how they, in turn, become the causes of history. The conception of the free, rational "individual" was integral to Smith's Enlightenment conception of the political economy. In that conception the individual exists independent of the economic and exercises rational choice based on self-interest. Marx countered the figure of the rational individual with the political economic subject, whose labor and identity are significantly shaped by her terms of production. Rational choice, in Marx's formulation, is shaped not only by the limitations of the choices that are genuinely available to people of different economic classes, but by a class consciousness continually recreated in day-to-day life—through work and socialization. Identifying how exploitation, stratification, and injustice are built into the material terms of industrial labor for workers, Marx explained how alienation and conflict are inevitable outcomes of the political economy of capitalism. In so doing, he established a relationship between human labor, identity, and the political economic. Social class is produced by history, power, and the terms of labor—rather than being achieved individually through merit and the development of cultural distinction.

Though it developed diverse early roots in the work of, among others, Adams, Marx, David Ricardo, and William Stanley Jevon—all of whom used the term "political economy"—the contemporary field of economics has dropped the term "political." This reflects a general turn toward the mathematical and axiomatic and away from a broad

political, historical, or rhetorical disciplinary orientation.⁵ Some have associated this turn with a giving up on the project of a hopeful, generally beneficial theory of the economy. Those who, for instance, call current economics a “dismal science” argue that it has succumbed to a neoliberal form of reflexive realism that valorizes individual agency and rational choice as a means of subordinating or eliminating altogether questions of the greater social good or positive systemic transformation (Morrow 2006, xxi). Though created by a system that is historically contingent and changeable, capitalism’s inequities are naturalized, and the focus of economics becomes more exclusively tactical. Nevertheless, the combined term “political economy” continues to have currency in a variety of contemporary fields—including political science, sociology, anthropology, geography, and (to a lesser extent) rhetoric. Within those fields, methodologies and connotations vary, but political economic perspectives continue to be characterized by examination of the relationship between the systemic/ideological and the particular/material. It names systemic relationships that connect specific acts of production with broader political cultures, policies, and systems of valuation. The combined term usually references the material situation, the circulation of resources, and *the socio-material terms of production*: the details of how goods are produced, how they are circulated, and how human labor is positioned and valued. Much of this discussion draws on the conceptual vocabulary of Marx and historical materialism. It views economic relations as historically *produced* by human actions; therefore they are contended and transformable, not natural or preordained. Likewise, it views identity and human agency as a part of the material, rather than existing in some transcendent external essence.

Political scientist Andrew Sobel succinctly describes the two realms of political economies—the macro and the micro: “Macro political-economy investigates associations between political activities and substantive performance of an economy” (2005, 24). Broad economic indicators that are reported in the media and occasionally even

5. From this generalization about the orientation of economics as a distinct field, one quickly moves into highly contentious territory that is outside of the scope of this work and its author’s field. For instance, the neoclassical view has been supplanted by far more dynamic models of understanding. One generalization that might be sustained, however, is that contemporary economics is primarily concerned with mathematically measurable factors, rather than with historical context or how production and consumption are politically structured. Even this distinction is contentious, however.

explicitly mentioned in political debates are part of this macro-realm of the political economy: the gross domestic product (GDP), unemployment rate, inflation rate, interest rate, trade deficits, etc. These indicators are referenced as evidence of how the economy is generally doing. Macro-level indicators touch virtually every aspect of governmental policy—from educational and environmental to health care and social security. Sobel points out that we can see these indicators as both initiators and results of governmental policies. In contrast, a “micro political economy approach focuses on the processes that influence, motivate, and constrain the choices of individual political actors. In this approach, political economy describes the processes of choice that lead to government policies and to social, economic and political outcomes” (25). So the micro-level of the political economy is concerned with the choices and actions of particular agents in specific situations. Here the realm is local—what economic and political choices do agents make, and what are the assumptions and desires that shape them?

Importantly, the term “political economy” therefore necessarily assumes a dynamic and integrated relationship between the macro and the micro: micro-level choices about investments or a particular election might very well be influenced by macro-level trends—interest rates, unemployment rates, GDP levels, etc. These particular (“individual”) choices simultaneously serve to embody the macro-level indicators—people’s investments, savings, and debts are (after all) what create the broader trends. At the end of the day, micro-level actions are therefore inseparable from the macro-level factors: the distinction is a matter of emphasis and perspective rather than material reality. Once quantified and publicized, macro-level indicators influence decision making again in a continual feedback loop. While we might, for the sake of focus, separate certain aspects of the political from the economic (and certain aspects of the macro from the micro), the fact is that they are deeply, inextricably intertwined. Broad trends and political policies—systems that organize and value human labor—have profound effects on individuals; in turn, individual decisions and actions are what embody and enact those broad trends, policies, and systems. “Economy” isn’t the sum total of a set of formulas or quantified indicators: those are only attempts to understand and describe a dynamic, codependent, evolving material entity.

Rhetoric and the Political Economy

Smith and Marx were doing rhetoric even as they did economics. In *The Wealth of Nations* Adam Smith helps to create the vocabulary and ways of knowing for classic economics (McCloskey 1994). Likewise, in *Capital* a rhetoric emerges that carries its own vocabulary—and with it, its own actionable ways of knowing. “Exchange value,” “surplus value,” “circulation”—even the fundamental connotations of “labor,” “production,” and “history”—change in Marx and the conversation that followed. As Foucault describes the author function, he points out that Marx, like Freud, initiated a new discourse as a necessary accompaniment to a new way of seeing the economy. The vocabulary doesn’t just describe, it enables and acts upon: it is a means of understanding but also of articulating and potentially transforming. Revolutionary shifts of paradigm require equally revolutionary rhetorical shifts.

Victor Villanueva has argued that rhetorical study should refocus itself on the political economic, noting that the distinction that has arisen between political economic study and rhetorical study has always been unnecessarily limiting. Villanueva contends that rhetoric and political economy are both rightly seen as analytical praxis—ongoing efforts to understand and act—rather than as static bodies of disciplinary work and knowledge. Because both have to do with analysis *and action-in-the-world*, rhetorical analysis and political economic analysis significantly overlap in their purposes: “Let me put it this way. The role of rhetoric, according to Burke, is the demystification of the ideological. The role of political economy is the demystification of relations tied to the economic. If we’re to understand where we are and what is happening to us—and maybe even to affect it—we need the tools provided by both” (2005, 58). Villanueva argues that the study of rhetoric has been somewhat shackled by its situatedness in literary-studies-dominated English departments, which relegate rhetoric and writing to a subordinate, skills-centered role. When writing became an introductory course in English departments dominated by literary studies, it had a corresponding subordinating effect on rhetorical study: “Rather than rise to the level of the architectonic, rhetoric had become confined to learning to write about literature.” This subordination and orientation have changed to a certain extent in recent decades; however, contemporary rhetoric and composition as a whole has not assumed a political economic orientation. Villanueva

points out that when we do mention the political economic, it is usually secondarily in discussions of theorists like Raymond Williams, Walter Benjamin, or Paulo Freire, rather than as an emphasis in its own right (59). Still being carried out in the diminishing but still-long shadows of literary studies, rhetorical analyses often stop at textual representations as their own ends, rather than broadening the scope to recognize how cultural representations are historical process—subsumed within the circumference of political economic structures and also substantially involved in constituting those structures. As Villanueva writes: “Economies are carried rhetorically. We cannot discuss the ideological and thereby rhetorical reproduction of beliefs about gender, race, class, age, nation, religion, or any other of the axes of difference—without a grasp of how such axes are embroiled in the economic” (64). The implication is that rhetoric is not just the production of knowledge, but embodied material praxis with language. Like economic analysis, rhetorical analysis is tied to ongoing action in the world. Moreover, rhetoric is necessarily concerned with the consciousnesses that are constantly being reformulated through that situated rhetorical praxis.

To return to the statement with which I started this section, “writing, even writing in school settings, is embodied, creative production that is significantly shaped by political economic factors.” The analysis I offer seeks to work through aspects of the relationship between writing education as concrete production—teachers and students laboring—and writing education as it is abstracted and commodified in scholarship, textbooks, program administration, and within broader conceptualizations of the university as a part of the fast-capitalist economy. Writing and writing education are not inert, prescribed product, however: they are production. Writing education isn’t just shaped by political economic factors, it also produces the political economic. Also, in spite of all of the efforts to control it through such methods as prescriptive academic modes, the encouragement of homogenized “objective” authorial positions, and emphasis on structure and grammar, writing—by its very nature—continually squirms beyond containment. It remains stubbornly and deliciously varied, and sometimes in the hands of those who are skilled and determined, consequential and dangerous. It is this active, hopeful, potentially transformative aspect of writing toward which this study will eventually turn.

The Social Turn in Rhetoric and Composition

According to what economic logics are the labors of teachers and students being situated? How do those logics shape what is produced? How, and for what interests, are alternatives omitted or constrained? I see a new focus on the political economic as a potential means of expanding the truncated view of “the social” that has come to characterize much of “the social turn” in rhetoric and composition studies. A focus on the political economic can enable more strategic integration of pedagogical, administrative, and scholarly praxis. There is now a widespread consciousness of the overuse and exploitation of contingent labor in composition, but little research connects the managerial logics that shape the systems of labor that flourish in writing programs to the assumptions that shape teaching and writing in the classes of those programs. We discuss, with a high level of sophistication and nuance, ideology as it plays out in student texts and in writing classrooms, but we don’t integrate factors like the working lives and histories of students or the public, consciously constructed and market-targeted images of sponsoring educational institutions. Rather than rigorously seeking to understand how what we do is shaped by how we do it, the field’s normal science continually sutures the split between disciplinary ambitions and projections and the material realities of writing education. It continually finds means of turning away from the contradictions that become apparent when the immediate and the material are juxtaposed with the structural and cultural.⁶

Because of the material realities of postsecondary writing education, significant aspects of “the social” in rhetoric and composition are compartmentalized as a means of perpetuating the normal science of the field. Unfortunately, this compartmentalization serves the cost-cutting agendas of upper-level administrators in higher education well and it has its antecedents in the institutional history of the field. Because of the

6. For instance, rhetoric/composition professionals fight for the legitimacy of rhetoric and composition as an academic field even as, at many sites, writing programs hire large numbers of people who have little or no background in the field to teach it. The field has broadened the scope of writing program administration as a scholarly endeavor and professional identification, but the specialization might not exist if contingent teaching faculty were not used to teach most writing classes. Indeed, the expansion and solidification of program administration as a professional specialization *relies on* the continuation of policies and practices that deprofessionalize the teaching of writing. We build first-year writing programs around “academic writing,” but staff many or most classes with teachers who don’t actually do any academic writing and don’t have full institutional status as academics.

relegation of so much of writing education to “writing programs,” professionals in rhetoric and composition (to a greater extent than those in other humanities fields) have been administrators as well as teachers and scholars, and those roles create continuing contradictions. As writing program administration has become an increasingly established professional identity—with many now primarily self-identifying as writing program administrators (WPAs) and some even establishing courses of study that center around administration—an administrative ethos has concurrently arisen. It is important to explore the ways in which this administrative ethos is distinct from a scholarly ethos, and how it positions postsecondary writing in terms of internal institutional dynamics and the broader factors that increasingly shape writing pedagogy, like mandated large-scale assessments. I discuss these distinctions in ethos in chapter 1.

Intractable contradictions between pedagogical practice and administrative and scholarly work are historically produced. Solidifying as a new dominant trend in rhetoric and composition studies in the late 1980s and early 1990s, “the social turn” is best described in terms of its emergence from what might be described as an institutionally appropriated and inoculated form of process pedagogy (Trimbur 2000). Unfortunately, but not surprisingly, the logics by which the social turn has been prevented from reaching its fullest potential—the means by which it has been constrained and gradually reconceptualized to conform to institutional and professional prerogatives—is a continuation of what had happened with process. In her historical essays, Sharon Crowley describes the development of process pedagogy; its proliferation as the dominant approach in college writing occurred within the context of the campus unrest of the late 1960s. As an institutional requirement steeped in hierarchical notions of literacy, the first year composition (FYC) class became a point of contention during that period. According to Crowley, universities responded to student and teacher dissatisfaction in a number of ways, including through abandoning the requirement or lowering the standards for exemption (1998, 205). It was during this period that process pedagogy began to gain ascendancy. Crowley argues that process was adopted in composition, in part, as a response to dissatisfaction among politically progressive and leftist students and faculty with the irrelevance of existing, heavily institutionalized curriculums—an attempt to make writing relevant to volatile, impassioned, rapidly changing times. The various characteristics of writing pedagogy that

came to be called “process”—workshopping, lending students more authority and control over their texts, multiple drafts, etc.—were touted as a means of countering a more staid, conservative, institutionally driven form of literacy instruction that did not reflect or respond to broader socio-political changes. So within the professional discourse of the emerging field, the binary was between an establishment literacy and accompanying pedagogical practice (that came to be called “current traditionalism”) and a more democratic, politically progressive literacy and pedagogy (that gelled under the umbrella of process).

Turning this binary somewhat on its head, Crowley drains process of some of its counter-hegemonic aura through describing it as a kind of palliative political adjustment. Neither a teacher-sponsored exercise in revolutionary practice nor a teacher-centered extension of a formalist literary tradition, process was a “less radical way to respond to students’ insistence on ‘relevance’ in their courses” (205). Lending students more authority certainly had a democratizing effect and was consistent with a more general project of undermining the authority of institutionally rigid, teacher-centered approaches to pedagogy, but it also had the effect of “displac[ing] some of the responsibility for classroom activity away from [teachers] and onto students” (207). It offered a way for institutions to encompass volatile political discourse without changing foundational structures or risking many careers. Crowley describes how process, over time, even came to be adapted to current-traditional instruction, ironically reinscribing the basic tenets of the pedagogical philosophy it was supposed to replace. Process, especially as it was commodified and standardized through textbooks, was gradually reduced to “pedagogical tactics” that often are employed within pedagogies that carry rigid notions of correctness and are re-centered, if more loosely than before, on academic modes. The adoption of process was, therefore, the new field’s first response to a threatening crisis. It pragmatically but brilliantly saved a lumbering system of writing education through providing an informed, palliative way to move through a crisis without substantial structural changes in the writing requirement or the terms of work for the people who teach most writing classes. Eventually, it would become commodified dogma in the realm of FYC textbooks and writing program orientations, far removed from any counter-hegemonic moment.

Crowley puts the history of FYC as an institutional requirement at the center of the problem that developed with process:

Theorists of process constructed a self-directed student who would take control of his or her own writing process; this projected student subjectivity was to replace the docile, rule-bound, grammar-anxious student subjectivity produced by current-traditional instruction. The institutional paradox, of course, is that students are forced to take the class in which they are to be constructed as self-directed writers. (1998, 217)

The requirement, and the professional and profit-making apparatuses that have grown around it, reasserted the technocratizing logics of institution and administration. Paradoxically, these logics were an ideal fit with current-traditional approaches to language and literacy, and they therefore resurfaced (if altered and politically adapted) within process approaches. Joseph Harris has elegantly described this technocratized version of process as a “new formalism”:

The problem with the older current-traditional approach to teaching writing, as has been argued over and over, was its relentless focus on the surface correctness of student texts, so that writing was reduced to an empty tinkering with verbal forms. But the advocates of process did not redirect attention to what students had to say so much as they simply argued for what seems to me a new sort of formalism—one centered no longer on textual forms but instead on various algorithms, heuristics, and guidelines for composing. This new formalism has proven little different from the old, as those versions of process teaching that don’t work toward a very familiar set of therapeutic and expressionist goals instead work toward an equally familiar set of technocratic ones. (1997, 56)

In their study of the emergence of basic writing as an emphasis in rhetoric and composition, Bruce Horner and Min-Zhan Lu note a scientific positivism in the version of process and academic writing that emerged in the 1970s and 1980s. They describe a tendency in this period to see writing in acultural, ahistorical terms that emerged in the work of, for instance, Kenneth Bruffee, Peter Elbow, Thomas Farrell, Janet Emig, and James Moffett. Writing in this work was divorced from the messiness of cultural conflict and divergences and isolated as a manageable and *natural* therapeutic process in which problems with not only writing but thinking could be resolved. Addressing how “community” is constructed as homogenous and free of conflict in the work of Bruffee and Farrell, Lu describes how writing classes assumed a “healing” aura. Writing classrooms were sites in which students’ differences, struggles, anger, and frustrations are socialized away in pedagogies that avoid conflict and

aim toward resolution: “They sustain the impression that [students’] experiences ought to and will disappear once the students get comfortably settled in the new community and sever or diminish their ties with the old. Any sign of heterogeneity, uncertainty or instability is viewed as problematic; hence conflict and struggle are the enemies of basic writing instruction” (1999, 39). Horner and Lu link this homogenization tendency—which is really a tendency to erase difference and ameliorate class conflict—to both right-wing pressure to create a “depoliticized” curriculum, and to a perceived need to build the field on an “objective,” scientific (rather than on more of a historical materialist) foundation. Lu is particularly adept at showing how Vygotsky and Freire were co-opted in ways that “amputated” their Marxist orientations and appropriated them for a largely dehistoricized pedagogical project (1999, 66–69). The field’s understanding of the social nature of writing thrived on ideologically cleansed notions of social development that saw conflict and struggle as problems to be transcended, rather than as legitimate responses to injustice and inequality.

The initial promise of process pedagogy may have been as a means of doing writing education in a more immediate, varied, and perhaps even politically consequential and creative way, but it was grounded by composition’s ties to the institutional requirement—to textbooks; to standardized programmatic curriculums; to low-status, often inexperienced teachers; and to the managerial ethos produced by the field’s increasing identification with program administration. In theory, the social turn might have served as a corrective to the institutional co-option of process. In an influential *College Composition and Communication* review from 1994, John Trimbur even described it explicitly as a means of moving into a “post-process” phase in the field in order to refocus on social justice issues—to make writing more politically relevant. At least as a stated set of assumptions for new approaches to pedagogy and research, the social turn moved the focus of the field away from isolated texts, standard academic textual forms, and solitary authorship and toward a view of writing as situated social action. It emphasized sophisticated cultural adaptability—to situated genres, to specialized discourses, to communicative norms, and so on. Process pedagogies that had succumbed to the steady lure of generic modes (argumentation, expository, etc.) were to give way to those that focused on reaching particular audiences with particular messages in particular ways. Perhaps most importantly, the social turn reflected a more constructivist view of subjectivity. While process

still relied on a self-knowing, self-contained notion of individual identity, many articulations of the social turn were informed by an understanding of identity as a more fluid, socially constructed entity that is continually created through discourse. The term “discourse communities” entered the field’s lexicon at this point, particularly in work that described how students should be taught to adapt to “academic writing.” This conception of writing supplanted a conception that maintained rigid separations between authors, audiences, and contexts. Indeed, “audience” as a distinct area of research emphasis fell by the wayside as meaning-making came to be seen as cooperative, negotiated, and heavily dependent on cultures and artifacts. Certainly, the ways that scholars like David Bartholomae and Patricia Bizzell framed the project of FYC in terms of entering the “community” of academic writing had a profound effect on writing pedagogy in the 1990s and would come to narrow the scope of the social turn. In both Bartholomae’s “Inventing the University” (1985) and Bizzell’s *Academic Discourse and Critical Consciousness* (1992), two highly influential works of the period, the “social” function of writing was formulated as socialization into academia.⁷ Many first-year writ-

7. However, the way that they described both the socialization and the communities are somewhat distinct. Bartholomae argued that students can be taught to gain a degree of authority in academic settings through adapting a discourse that, he admits, is largely alien to them. To borrow the language of Bakhtin, students gain authority within the contexts of their schooling through *ventriloquating* the voice of authority—of academics. In a widely cited passage, Bartholomae admits that these attempts to project an authoritative, “academic” voice are typically problematic and uneven. The problem, as Bartholomae puts it, is that students must learn to:

speak not only in another’s voice but through another’s code; and they not only have to do this, they have to speak in the voice and through the codes of those of us with power and wisdom; and they not only have to do this, they have to do it before they know what they are doing, before they have a project to participate in, and before, at least in terms of our disciplines, they have anything to say. (156)

Bartholomae leaves the socialization process open-ended. He doesn’t claim that most students easily, if ever, achieve what might be called “mastery” of academic discourse. Rather, successfully “inventing the university” will likely lead students to write “muddier and more confusing prose” (162). Moreover, the kind of authority students will typically achieve is described in a very qualified, limited way: “Our students may be able to enter into a conventional discourse and speak, not as themselves, but through the voice of the community” (156). When students “invent the university, it is “not as themselves”: it remains alien to them. Bizzell linked writing more closely to socialization and suggests that the learning of academic conventions in writing is also the learning of academic habits of thinking. Students entering basic writing classes not only have deficits in writing, but deficits in thinking: “Students who struggle to write Standard English need knowledge beyond the rules of grammar, spelling and so on. They need to know: the habitual attitudes of

ing textbooks and curriculums continue to be based on the learning of “academic writing” as an entry into “the academic community.” The title of the second class in the two-section FYC sequence at my own university is “Writing in the Academic Community.”

Important questions have arisen about the project of enculturation into academic communities through writing. How exactly does this socialization into academic discourse happen? What is the difference between academic writing and consciousness and mere mimicry? Is the discourse that occurs across academic writing singular and stable enough to have its own term—and even if it is, can it be learned by those who have not been socially initiated? Finally, what is the long-term worth of spending so much time and effort teaching academic writing to students when most will never actually be academic writers? As early as 1989, Joseph Harris critiqued the tendency to genericize academic writing, pointing out that “the learning of a new discourse seems to rest, at least in part, on a kind of mystical leap of mind” (17).⁸ In the ensuing years, the general understanding of discourse communities has likewise been deepened and complicated, particularly in genre studies. Important work by Carolyn Miller, Charles Bazerman, Amy Devitt, David Russell, Anis Bawarshi, and others supplanted “discourse communities” with more dynamic conceptualizations of what happens when people communicate in particular social settings.⁹

There is scant evidence that this more complicated view of genre and situated writing has shaped the conceptualizations of “academic writing” that continue to define basic and first-year writing curriculums. Moreover, and more to my point here, “the social turn” was rarely explicitly articulated in relation to the material terms of teaching and learning in postsecondary writing. Through its narrowed focus on “academic writing” and its comparative lack of interrogation of what higher education is and how it is changing, the social turn has been sandbagged and appropriated by the same institutional and political pressures that

Standard English users toward this preferred form; the linguistic features that most strongly mark group identity” (1992, 86).

8. Harris advocated seeing academic “communities” as more conflicted, more diverse, and more materially situated than “the idea of the university” suggests.
9. “Discourse community” conceptualizations of situated language use were critiqued as too static, too rigidly bounded, too suggestive that one could adapt to a discourse through explicit instruction rather than long-term immersion. Discourse communities have been largely replaced in the field’s scholarly vocabulary by terms like “systems of genre” (Bazerman 1997) and “the genre function” (Bawarshi 2003).

homogenized process. The field has favored a “social” view of literacy and learning that, paradoxically, may have more to do with avoiding the more important and potentially even revolutionary aspects of the social in writing than embracing them. Though founded on a constructivist sensibility, the social turn has unfortunately often been characterized by a turning away from an imperative to understand and account for how consciousness, institutions, and politics are socially produced and reproduced at the material sites of writing education. Even as they emphasize the importance of specific audiences and locations, “social” approaches to discourse and pedagogy have stubbornly continued to reinscribe the figure of the writer as an autonomous actor in stable, external socio-political spheres. Wrapped in the freshly spun gossamer of culturally sophisticated *techne* appears the same old self-interested, self-contained individual that was carried from current-traditionalism through process—only now rather than navel-gazing, to which she was given during the more expressivist phase of process, she focuses outward to adapt to given rhetorical situations in ways that meet her own rationally (and privately) conceived ends. The “social” subject of composition is therefore often still a modernist subject, even if now she is dressed up in fast-capitalist garb for adaptation to the information economy. She understands that writing is “social” and cultural but typically only in a very constrained way. Rather than *encompassing* the writer and her spheres of practice, “the social” and the relevant space for action with language are often only recognized *between* them (see figure 1).

Left out of pedagogical practices driven by this view are sticky but essential issues that come with a recognition of how motivations and identity themselves are continually formed and rearticulated *through* discourses—and, perhaps more importantly, how everyday labor both shapes and comprises social contexts, including the educational institutions in which teachers and students work. Through coping adjustments that keep the structure of the current system of requirements and teaching labor largely intact, in a sense these aspects are continually “black-boxed” and moved safely outside of the concerns of writing pedagogy.

Surveying the scholarship of the late 1980s and into the 1990s, one can see considerable anxieties about the potentially revolutionary ramifications of a more fully social view of writing education emerging concurrently with the social turn. Maxine Hairston began to make her famously controversial arguments for the teaching of “craft” rather than “art” in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and the critiques of Freire that

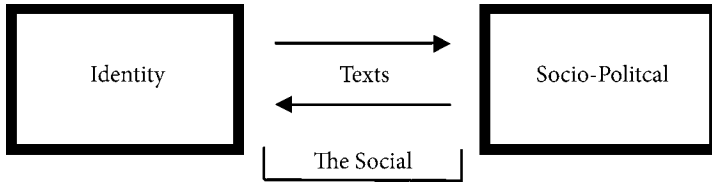


Figure 1. *The Containment of the Social*

have become de rigueur over the past decade have also tended to posit a carefully circumscribed view of the social against what is conceived as heavy-handed political activism in the “consciousness”-focused aspects of critical pedagogy. Juxtaposed against the now stock character of the soapbox Freirian pushing her own politics under the pretense of doing writing education is the image of the more humble, more responsible teacher helping her students reach their *pragmatic* goals for writing—which they, unlike the soapbox Freirians, recognize and respect (often as a safely privatized black box).¹⁰

In these articulations of the proper goals of writing pedagogy, the sphere of the social is limited to behavior with language at the moment of articulation, rather than subsuming the messy ongoing dialectics of consciousness and institutions. The outcome of social pedagogy is individual adaptation. So writers are still imagined to enter an institutional sphere that is largely stable and external to them, write within that sphere as they develop their now “socially” adaptive “craft,” and then move on through various other (still stable) spheres in their (still private) life trajectories. Writing is still “craft,” even if enacted with greater social awareness, and transformative potential is contained by the assumption that one can separate craft from ideological enactment with real social and political ramifications—in short, the radical likes of Vygotsky, Bakhtin, and Bourdieu are reconstituted and redeployed toward the ends of the information-age economy. Craft can somehow be learned and practiced *with awareness of* culture and ideology without concern for the inevitably problematic and anxious dialectical thicket of institutionality, consciousness, and action-in-the-world. The messy factors that make writers always already real, evolving, and consequential

10. The dichotomy tends to obscure that critical pedagogical approaches are extremely varied, and in my experience typically employed by teachers who are particularly sensitive to their students’ opinions and desires; students’ positions within, and desires for, education are also widely varied and complicated, in spite of their economic class (Seitz 2004)

agents in already real, evolving, and consequential material locations are left outside of the sphere of disciplinary concern.

Reactions to politically focused pedagogies over the past ten years continue to suggest that a focus on ideology in writing classes too often comes at the expense of writing proficiency and they therefore advocate a curious kind of self-conscious instrumentalism. Interestingly, many acknowledge the political aspects of teaching and writing, but in the next breath push them aside in order to focus on “writing.” This double-move is couched in uniquely liberal terms of empowerment and presented as a means of respecting students’ opinions and *their own* goals for higher education. This is the case, for instance, in arguments for the importance of recognizing students’ instrumentalist goals in writing pedagogy through giving them a job-ready form of literacy (see, e.g., Miller 1999; O’Dair 2003; Smith 1998). These arguments at once acknowledge that identity is socially constructed and sometimes even that education is a powerful site of cultural interpolation, but then also reessentialize consciousness in an effort to recognize and respect students’ now-privatized desires and experiences. In a recent *College English*, for instance, Sharon O’Dair (2003) admits the power of education to enact “embourgeoisement” and alienate students from home cultures. She therefore concedes that postsecondary education can be a powerful mechanism of socialization. However, she nevertheless advocates an instrumentalist approach that consciously attempts to minimize that socialization in order to locate the proper process of social formation elsewhere (home? friends? workplace? K-12 education? pop media? religion? all of the above?). She argues that it is not our business to fundamentally change how working-class students see the political economic—they have their own reasons for coming to school. They should therefore have an “excellent primary and secondary education, as well as excellent secondary and postsecondary vocational training,” because this is what is best suited for a working-class consciousness—which remains intact—if not implicitly naturalized, at least external to higher education. “Excellence” in writing is consciously limited to instrumentalist categories not problematized by the field’s many ideological critiques of standard written English.

Others assert a more subtle distinction between language practice and social practice in order to advocate a writing pedagogy that tries to keep its political aspects—which they carefully acknowledge—safely bracketed. In another recent *College English* article, Harris asserts that he is

not convinced that there is any necessary link between learning a critical practice and acquiring a critical consciousness—or any other kind of consciousness, for that matter. But this doesn't strike me as a problem. For if our aim as teachers is to help students take part in the cultural and political discussions of the day, then we need less to influence their attitudes (which strikes me as a kind of intellectual canvassing for votes) than to help them learn to deploy more powerful forms of reading and writing. (2003, 578)

The pedagogy in this piece on revision is built on compartmentalization as a means of scouring away much of the untidiness that comes with a fuller conception of the social (and the political) from the craft of textual production. In his construction of the student as a blackened center, a lacuna that critiques, Harris separates the term “critical” from “critical consciousness” in the hope that it can refer “more concretely to writing that responds to and makes use of the work of others” (578). He argues that he doesn't want to “depoliticize the teaching of writing” but he does nevertheless want to foster among students an understanding of what he calls the “distinctive moves and gestures” of academic writing without explicitly discussing them as political. He thereby asserts the stability of both students and the institutional spheres within which they operate (mostly limited to a conception of the academic here) as a way of distancing his model from pedagogies that he believes are “far more social than textual,” which he suggests is a shortcoming (580). While the political has now long been acknowledged, including with sophistication and insight by Harris himself in other important work, as being deeply intertwined with language and education, the political is here revised in the narrowed way that has to do only with electoral politics (“canvassing for votes”) rather than the ongoing, dynamic social formation of values and identities.

As more textual and less social beings, students assume a rather ghostly not-quite-presence in the writing classroom and within institutions. Harris takes issue with Ira Shor because Shor imagines the goals of teaching in terms of “shifts of consciousness rather than changes in practice” (2003, 578). Can we separate critique from the consciousness of the critic? Can we separate practices from consciousness? If we choose to try, what are the goals and ramifications? I don't think we can talk about “distinctive moves and gestures” in academic cultures without also recognizing that routinization, everyday social rituals, discursive commonplaces, and textual genres are precisely what constitute and

inculcate ideologies. “Changes in practice” are recursively, inextricably bound with “shifts of consciousness.” To suggest that they are not is to suggest that practice and consciousness are not deeply interlinked. The foundational work that gave rise to a contemporary, social conception of language and learning, from Vygotsky and Bahktin to Raymond Williams and Bourdieu, describes language-use as both a molder and an outcome of material, social—and thus ideological—processes. When we articulate, we do; we act upon ourselves and our environments. I argue in this book that the normal science of the field encourages these contortions in order to contain the potential dangers, and the innate resistance to standardization, suggested by the more expansive view articulated at the onset of the social turn by people like Trimbur, James Berlin, Crowley, and Shor. Paradigm-threatening anomalies that continually emerge out of specific material locations and undermine generalized conceptions of writers learning writing—such as those associated with the terms of student and teacher work, and the rapidly changing business of higher education—are continually, and sometimes very cleverly, swept to the margins in the interests of maintaining disciplinary and programmatic regularity. After rhetorically strategic asides about the politics of discourse and the role of language in ideology, scholars assume the mantle of the wizened pragmatic realist and find inventive ways back to the safety of “academic discourse”: clear and rational motivations → carefully crafted texts → stable, generalizable contexts. The inconvenience and messiness of particular people writing with consequences within complicated, evolving milieus is regularized to provide a stable, manageable object of study and education. As Horner argues, the pervasiveness of a narrowed view of the social “testifies to the dominant’s seizure of the definition of the social as uniform, all-encompassing and static rather than as a dynamic ongoing process of struggle among heterogeneous and conflicting forces” (2000, 216).

Paradoxically, as I argue in chapter 2, it is the material terms of writing instruction and program administration themselves that help to make the constrained view of the social so intractable in composition pedagogy. Many who teach writing in postsecondary institutions may not have the educational backgrounds necessary for a nuanced understanding of writing and pedagogy as constitutive acts within political economic spheres. Moreover, writing pedagogies that explore questions of individual and social formation as they relate to discourse inevitably bring ideology to the fore and are therefore potentially controversial.

They run counter to the hardly invisible administrative/institutional hand that shapes writing program decisions concerning curricular goals, textbook choices, criteria for evaluation, and so on. Politically safe writing pedagogies lead to more efficiently administered programs and more portable pedagogies that can be commodified in various profitable ways, such as through composition textbooks and the increasing array of software tools that are being created for, and marketed to, writing programs.

We have not adequately historicized the social turn in terms of its synergies with the hegemonic fast-capitalism that emerged during the 1990s and its largely unacknowledged reflection of a neoliberal view of rhetoric, politics, and the public sphere. Through continually inventive ways of keeping the scope narrow, “social” pedagogies carefully preserve important elements of the liberal political imagination. They enable authors with still-private, autonomous motivations to achieve their goals with awareness that they will need to adapt their messages to specific situations in order to be effective. They thereby offer a truncated conception of the creative and productive possibilities of writers within a naturalized status quo. Authors with privatized political consciousnesses are free and individualistic choice-makers working within stable milieus that define the choices and opportunities for expression—the model of authorship is therefore consistent with consumerist conceptions of democracy created by hegemonic capitalism. Individuals compete in the “marketplace of ideas”: in this marketplace, the best ideas that are articulated most effectively win out. Basic “social” questions about how desires and motivations are continually formed through discourse and learning, who has the real power to speak and be heard, and the inequalities and injustices that are hardwired into societal structures all remain in the murky background—at once acknowledged and defined outside of the proper sphere of pedagogy.

MAKING WRITING DANGEROUS

In this book, I argue for a more active view of the social as a means of connecting writing more immediately to material concerns. I argue that we should risk letting our practices as teachers, scholars, and writers be dangerous. The students I described at the beginning of this chapter—Mariah, Teresa, Marshall, and Camille—should certainly not be targets of a resocialization project with preordained and overly determined political ends. Nor should they be robbed of the opportunity to more

fully evolve in ways that are personally and politically transformative. They should—they have the right to—have the opportunity to find opportunities for creative work through developing an understanding of the dialectical relationships between language, materiality, social relations, and consciousness. As Gee writes, “language has meaning only in and through social practices, practices which often leave us morally complicit with harm and injustice unless we attempt to transform them. . . . any proper theory of language is a theory of practice” (2005, 8). For this book I would alter that to “any proper theory of writing is a theory of practice.” Neither the student nor the educational institution are trans-historical givens. Each is continually recreated through daily labor and therefore is subject to positive change and hopeful possibilities. Writing education can be characterized by ongoing struggles to understand and positively transform the particular historical and material circumstances of production inside and outside of academia.

In chapter 1, “Professionals and Bureaucrats,” I examine the challenges and contradictions of teaching writing in higher education. Arguably, the general ethos that the field of rhetoric and composition has constructed for itself is averse to institutional hierarchies. The academic field’s “we” is clearly sometimes intended to subsume contingent writing teachers, and sometimes clearly not. While the impulse to generalize might derive from an egalitarian impulse, the line between egalitarianism and a manipulative and even cynical appeal to populism can be murky; avoiding recognition of institutional hierarchies is also a means of preserving and exploiting them. Though they differ in other aspects, the field’s most widely cited histories associate the rise of composition studies with the rapid growth in required writing sections that came with open enrollment. This growth led to an increasing awareness that, in spite of the long history of the requirement, little was actually known about how to teach writing well. Because these classes were largely covered with contingent teachers, it also led to the creation of a professional layer of WPAs who not only manage FYC in English departments but who primarily self-identify as WPAs. The result of that growth has been the development of a professional/scholarly realm that grew out of the first-year requirement, but which now often seems removed from the daily labor of teaching required introductory writing classes. I argue that in order to articulate the ongoing role of FYC in rhetoric and composition, it is important to explore more thoroughly the sometimes directly contradictory relationship between a *scholarly profession* that

seeks full status as a legitimate academic discipline and a *bureaucratic practice* that has a legacy grounded in labor exploitation and oppressive conceptions of literacy and higher education.

Chapter 2, “Writing the Program: The Genre Function of the Writing Textbook,” proceeds from the professional/bureaucratic distinction established in chapter 1. The chapter presents some of the research from a study that examines how twenty-one writing faculty in a particular program conceptualize, choose, and use textbooks. “Rhetoric” is a contentious ongoing discussion among scholars; a textbook, in contrast, is primarily a commercial enterprise, and the successful commodity should be designed with the primary consumers in mind—the decision makers. In some cases decision makers are WPAs who make texts mandatory for their programs. In others, as in this program, it is left to the teachers. The overarching point is that those two realms, the scholarly and the commercial, are fundamentally different in important ways—and they carry their own loaded and consequential rhetorics. As this study suggests, textbooks do significantly shape pedagogies in many classes, and they are often chosen for reasons other than the soundness or the currency of the theoretical basis on which they are founded. Rather, a whole host of far more pragmatic concerns drive textbook choices. When they choose textbooks, the teachers interviewed for this study aren’t nearly as concerned with theory and research as they are with factors like cost, the usability of the instructors’ manual, layout, and whether the book includes clear assignments. So textbooks are more properly understood as a situated work genre that responds to, and in turn shapes, programmatic prerogatives. They are less accurately seen as an extension of the scholarly realm of rhetoric and composition. I argue that they are therefore a part of the administrative apparatus that often very strongly works against the more fully social, potentially transformative view of writing described above. Textbooks help to “write the program” through responding to its need for standardization and efficiency.

In their oft-cited study of the language of “new” or fast-capitalism, Gee, Hull, and Lankshear have argued that “we have yet to fully invent an adequate language of critique for the new capitalism” (1996, 42). Chapter 3, “How ‘Social’ Is Social Class Identification?” examines distinctions in how class can be examined in writing classes. Critical approaches to writing pedagogies are still typically centered on fostering identification within social categories. In this chapter, however, I examine the various names we give to class experience. Do they, for instance,

emphasize the social markers of class, or do they emphasize situatedness in relations of production? Do they reflect an understanding of the changes that have occurred in the political economy over the past four decades? A significant transformation in the political economy that began to become clearly hegemonic in the 1970s shifted agency from labor to management based largely on the belief that a globally competitive economy required giving management maximum flexibility. Job security as a fundamental right of citizens and an essential component of general well-being fell away from the political economic discourse and out of legislative policy decisions. In its place came the so-called “global” or “fast capital” era of managerial flexibility and worker insecurity—an era in which government hesitated or refused to intervene in employer/worker disputes (and when it did, usually acted on behalf of employers). A host of governmental policies and historical contingencies have fundamentally changed what it means to work in the United States and how people see themselves and their work in relation to the broader political economy. I argue that examinations of class that emphasize markers or habits of consumption are at risk of becoming appropriated by now highly adaptive institutional structures and thus drained of their counter-hegemonic potential. I advocate strategies that foster a rhetoric of identification and social justice in writing pedagogy that accounts for the position of higher education in the new economy.

In chapter 4 I focus on student work. “Students Working” begins with a discussion of the clash between the still solidly upper-middle-class aesthetic of higher education and the day-to-day lives of the nontraditional, working students that actually are the majority of postsecondary students. I describe a political economic model for writing pedagogy that uses the material terms of labor and institutionality as starting points for writing and research. Within this model, students write about work and working lives and critically examine the circumstances of their own educations. They examine the terms and significations of fast-capitalism and casualized labor—for instance, what it means to be an “associate” at a retail store, a “contract worker” at a cable company, or an “adjunct writing instructor” in an English department. Importantly, however, this model doesn’t leave its own immediate institution unexamined. Students are encouraged to connect the dots that lead from the material terms that shape their lives as students and workers to broad economic trends and the politics and discourses that sustain them. This chapter also draws on analysis of student texts to explore contradictions between

the “figured worlds” of higher education and work.

Finally, in chapter 5, “Writing Dangerously,” I argue that this pedagogy only makes sense when enacted against a backdrop of institutional change. We can struggle to resolve the contradictions that exert a perpetual drag on our field through seeking to make administrative, scholarly, and pedagogical work *a singular praxis*, an extension of integrated—if actively contentious and evolving—philosophies of labor, literacy education, organization, and culture. Rhetoric and composition might be able to move into a post-writing program era. Pedagogies that come from the assumption that writing is a powerful social praxis cannot be enacted where labor is not even afforded the dignity of a truly professional status. Positive models exist for writing programs that have made the decision to take the necessary, if difficult and even painful, steps to reduce or eliminate reliance on contingent labor. Hopeful, empowering writing pedagogies will (and can only) be, an extension of hopeful, empowering organizational frameworks.