The strength of *Working Theory* lies in its ability to blur the not uncommon binaries of theory/practice and teacher/student, and in its recognition of the difficulty of enacting a pedagogy that does not rely on these binaries. Too often the authors of pedagogical theories touted as radical and liberatory, for all their good intentions, fall short of developing a practice through which students can transform—and, more importantly, continue to transform—their worlds because these binaries are central to pedagogical practices. The possibilities for students to develop critical consciousness through reading, writing, and interpreting are limited when the subjects of “practice” and “theory” and of “teacher” and “student” are defined over and against one another in ways that defy the notions of border-crossing and multiple subjectivities that postmodern and radical pedagogical theories espouse. *Working Theory* is a stimulating and important book that contributes greatly to conversations on critical pedagogy and suggests new ways of thinking not only of theory’s relation to practice, but also of the relationship between teachers and students.


Reviewed by David E. Stacey, Missouri Western State College

Whether you live and work in the groves or the trenches of academe, you should find Rob Pope’s *Textual Intervention* to be a most unusual textbook. I work in a small state college and this book is a manual for my kind of work. My students are nontraditional, working class, often rural, almost all white, very Christian, and not always inclined to be here to do the work of learning. Many are in higher education only because they understand that a high school diploma or GED certificate is not enough anymore in the way of credentials to find and keep a decent job. With Pope, we might term my students “institutionally underprivileged,” and we might agree with him that the world we live in affects the way we see and say and do things in the university.

Many of my students are under-prepared for high academic inquiry and dis-prepared for critical thinking, problem-posing learning, and oppositional points of view. Our college president talks frequently about a school being run like a business, so I feel institutional pressure to “dumb down” my classes and train my student-customer-clients for technical or professional efficiency. But I also have a personal need to understand and work with and against the political, socioeconomic, and cultural forces that push all of us around—part-time instructors and professors as well as students—in this business of late twentieth-century postsecondary education. Because I do not want to reduce my notion of learning to job training or even to the instrumental but still vocationalist goal of “making them better readers and writers”; because I work at the interdisciplinary nexus
of composition studies where rhetoric, language study, and radical pedagogy meet; and because I need and want to understand where students are when we begin studying, re-evaluating, and changing our visions of where we want to go—I welcome Textual Intervention's powerful and positive synthesis of theory and practice.

This is a handbook/rhetoric/textbook that achieves the most practicable combination of literary and pedagogical theory I have ever seen. It is oriented equally to composition and analysis, to creative and critical writing. Pope’s version of “textual studies as praxis” is energetic and highly developed; it is, in his words, “writing in process generated through negotiation in groups, often in a heterogeneous range of genres, materials and media” (184). Pope’s presentation is never anything but clear, lively, and often humorous—“Fortunately,” as he admits, “all this is easier done than said” (92). With the aim of stimulating (re)writing in all things, he has devised strategies and techniques for what he calls “heuristic interactive learning.” He never flinches from the necessity, difficulty, or exhilaration of theory, and he refuses to accommodate academic distinctions often maintained between creative writing and critical analysis; basic, introductory, and advanced writing; invention, arrangement, and style; and composition, cultural, and literary studies. Pope’s aim is to prepare students to know about participatory discourse; he emphasizes the instrumental and conceptual aspects of language study—the whats, hows and whys of verbal meaning. He wants students to understand and produce many different kinds of writing about many different kinds of texts.

This book continues Text Book, the theoretical and pedagogical experiment in textual studies undertaken by Robert Scholes, Nancy Comley, and Gregory Ulmer in 1988 and recently reissued in a second edition. Textual Intervention also extends Text Book’s attention to moral and political themes, social issues, ideological uses of languages, and a deeper commitment to student writing “as an object worthy of methodical study and publication in its own right” (184). Its most prominent feature is Pope’s commitment to teaching as a vehicle for social change. Textual Intervention is from England, but this account only partially for the interesting political and pedagogic angle it cuts across the axis of the North American field of composition studies. Americans seem to have difficulty talking about class, race, and gender, and they are inundated by historically unprecedented amounts of ideologically charged information in advertisements on television and everywhere else. The kind of critical thinking that would respond to these American problems is necessarily “liberatory”; teaching as a vehicle for social change aims to generate countervailing ways of seeing and saying. A critical, generative, liberatory thinking calls not merely for “active learning” but for an activity theory grounded in language awareness and political acumen. A “radical rhetoric” engages dominating commercial, political, and educational discourses, and changes them.

Two difficulties present themselves. First, how can American teachers “in the trenches” be explicitly or directly political without turning off their often conservative students, perhaps drawing charges of “political correctness”?
Second, how can students in writing classes change the languages of dominant discourses? Both aims can be achieved through textual interventions of a liberatory and a critical linguistic nature. For help in addressing questions of race, gender, and class, at a time when “too much information” obtrudes upon political insight and dialogue and when the Internet is annihilating transatlantic distances, American teachers can look to the different, unfamiliar, and defamiliarizing synthesis of sources and practices this book presents, itself a synthesis and a critique grounded in language study.

British teachers of cultural studies often work within a tradition of critical linguistics sometimes called radical stylistics. Radical stylistics combines Hallidayean (“functional” or “systemic”) linguistics with cultural critique, Anglo-American and continental narratology, and British teaching practices one never seems to hear about in the U.S. (for example, the “redrafting” movement in primary and secondary schools and university programs that combines filmic-dramatic-literary study with production). In addition, as Allan Durant and Nigel Fabb indicate in “New Courses in the Linguistics of Writing,” English language teaching and linguistics courses have developed their own versions of activity theory in England, involving “worksheets” that complement lectures and seminars with “replacement,” problem-solving, and composition activities (The Linguistics of Writing, ed. Nigel Fabb et al, Manchester: Manchester UP, 1987, 233-34). Textual Intervention sits atop these and other influences as a highly developed set of teaching practices and activities that require readers to be active (re)writers of cultural textuality.

The book’s synthesis of theory and practice is different from what we are accustomed to in the U.S. In the simplest and most effective form of textual intervention—the “preludes,” “interludes,” “postludes,” and “workouts” in Pope’s “artisanal teaching”—students effect transformations in dominant discourses by making quick and immediate changes in texts. They talk in groups about what they have done, in terms of difference-as-preference, subjectivity and agency, sense and non/sense, creativity and criticism, “knowing how” and “knowing what,” de-and re-construction, and other notions, terms, concepts, and ideas. “Entering the conversation,” as Kenneth Bruffee might put, becomes intervention: transgression, confrontation, dialogic exchange, and dialectical change, in the more direct language and practice of textual intervention.

Radical stylistics is a brand of discourse analysis not unrelated to work done in the U.S. by people such as Richard Lanham, Joseph Williams, Marie Secor, George Dillon, and perhaps pre-eminently by Scholes, Comley, and Ulmer. In England, however, in the past twenty-five years at such places as the Universities of Nottingham, East Anglia, and Lancaster, and now at Oxford Brookes University (Pope’s academic home, formerly Oxford Polytechnic), teachers have been able to employ an active political awareness in a way that brings critical language study into close relationship with radical teaching. In Textual Power and then in Text Book, Scholes proposes a teaching sequence that moves from awareness of text in text (reading “literally” for authorial intention) to text
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don text (interpretation) to text against text (criticism). With a keener sense of
"teaching as a vehicle for social change," Pope in Textual Intervention moves
from "parallel, opposed and alternate" readings to "centred," "marginal," or
"alternative" re-writings.

This sequence is the basic configuration of Pope’s methods. After an
introductory overview, each of the three main chapters of the book follows a
similar sequence from parallel to different to alternative “wor(l)ds,” from
intratextual to intertextual to cross-cultural co(n)texts, from introductory
explanations to working examples to “extended workouts.” The fifth and final
chapter contains a bibliographic essay, a stylistic checklist for microtextual
analysis, and suggestions for macroanalytic projects. At the heart of Chapters
two, three, and four is the elegantly simple method that has great mobility and
even greater heuristic power: make a change; talk about it; ask yourself “What
if?”; talk about “why.” As Pope puts it:

*What if the text were different?* Intervene in the text in some way so at to “recentre”
it, thereby deflecting and re-directing its dominant “ways of saying” and its preferred
“ways of seeing” . . . . *Why did you make that particular intervention? What preferences*
does it imply or assert? (4:5)

There are numerous specific “things to do” with discourse throughout the
book, all calibrated to some degree to writing “with,” “against,” or “across” the
grain of a base text, ranging from high canonical literary art to quickly scrawled
messages left on refrigerator doors. In the first chapter alone, base texts include
car advertisements, Robert Browning’s “My Last Duchess,” Descartes’ “I think,
therefore I am,” and health warnings from cigarette packages. The “things to do
with discourse” include de- and re-centering texts, contexts, and cross-texts;
amplifying or dampening the personalizing and depersonalizing effects of the
pronouns in the base text; and restructuring and combining genre, medium, and
discourse. Specific techniques include summarizing and paraphrasing; chang­
ing titles, openings, endings, and introductory apparatus; refocusing narratives;
inserting new or different plots or lines in dramas; changing narratives into
dramas and vice-versa; compounding fictional and factual texts into “factions”;
and setting verbal pieces to image or music or movement. These activities are
playful in an essentially political manner: all are dependent upon the basically
subversive nature of the book’s first purpose—disturbing and then re-doing texts.
In no way is this mere de(con)struction, for the book is consistently geared to the
sequence “for, against, alternative” (196). Consequently, the overarching mood
of the project is a prototypically Oxonian disposition to enjoy work by
combining it with play. “Seriously,” Pope often interjects, “have fun,” and his
own fun starts with his own disciplinary tradition.

The beauty of radical rhetorics like Textual Intervention is that radical
teachers emphatically do not “leave their students at sea” when they incorporate
cultural critique into their pedagogy. They may not drill skills or command rote
memorization for mastery of form and format, as back-to-basics traditionalists
would have them do; nor is the intervention a mere “going through the moves” that induces content knowledge only after an implicit or tacit form of knowing has been experienced. Nonetheless, this is as thoroughgoing an introduction to critical thinking as anything it would replace. For those who agree with Ira Shor, Wlad Godzich, and others who believe that a “new vocationalism” is the worst thing we can offer institutionally underprivileged students, Pope’s uncompromising emphasis upon “critical-creative education—not instrumental training” is most welcome (90).

*Textual Intervention* also has an explicit ethical component, presented as the moral imperative of the “world-historical view” (47) and summed up in frequent reiterations of the theme “every difference is a preference.” This phrase embodies the requirement that students must take responsibility for every change they make in a text by accounting for its implications. Pope sums up the generative results of an intervention process as a “system of (p)reference,” and he insists that all group work must arrive at a consensus, no matter how tentative, that “resolves all differences into preferences.” To arrive at parallel or different or alternative (re)writings, students must learn to talk to one another as writers, and to do this they have to be convinced of the power of their own discourse. In the workshops and subgroups of *Textual Intervention*, students must accommodate democratic participation, pressure writing, and negotiate to produce statements that differ with, oppose, or replace the base text. They must deal with conflict and consensus, process and product, for “[i]n the actual world of textual production and re-production differences must always be resolved into preferences; that is, if the textual process is finally to lead to a textual product. . . . Anybody who pretends otherwise is simply not living in that world” (10).

There is much to recommend contemporary British syntheses of language, cultural, and textual studies to American audiences, even though England and the U.S. may yet be “divided by a common tongue,” as Bernard Shaw supposedly said. This division does affect Pope’s book. Everyone’s favorites are here: “high” for “main” street, “peak” for “prime” time, “centre,” radio “programme,” and the like. On the whole, however, care has been taken to adopt a transatlantic idiom, so that a North American readership can certainly feel included in this book’s appeal. *Textual Intervention* does have the odd moment when a decidedly Anglo-Saxon referent might strike the American reader as indecipherable, for example, the extended discussion of “STUBBLE: BURN IT!” which replaces “Peugot: Love it!” in the book’s first intervention (a reference to the widespread agricultural practice of burning corn stubble in the autumn).

This book suggests that composition studies may be “bridging the gap” between writing theory and literary studies. In the past decade or so, critical linguists in England have fought their own turf battles with the literature faculty in the British university, which is another reason that Pope has so much to talk to us about now. Rhetoric and Composition is very much an American field of study (even though recent changes in higher education in England and other countries are slowly expanding its relevance), but with *Textual Intervention* and
books like it, we have an opportunity to expand both our experience and our influence. If his book demonstrates nothing else to its English and North American readers, it should persuade us that it is time for there to be commerce between us.

_textual intervention_ is a positive, powerful, different, pluralistic, ethical, politically engaged, interesting new approach. It deserves the widest possible readership and application.


Reviewed by Thomas West, University of South Florida

The essays in _Left Margins_ attempt to connect the liberatory and political impulses of cultural studies to the day-to-day realities of teaching writing. This attempt results from the editors’ view that “composition practitioners have in general avoided cultural studies’ postdisciplinary insights into the discursive formation of composing subjects” (xiii). As a result, most of the essays present pragmatic strategies for teaching students to write critically about contemporary cultural artifacts and media and, thus, to develop awareness of their own ideological subjectivities.

The strength of this collection is undoubtedly its unabashed dedication to writing pedagogy: the editors’ objective is “to enrich the body of theoretical work in composition studies by focusing on the actualization of theory in practice” (x; author’s emphasis). Much like Patricia Sullivan and Donna Qualley’s _Pedagogy in the Age of Politics_, this book offers itself as a pedagogical companion to more theoretical composition/cultural studies texts such as Patricia Harkin and John Schilb’s _Contending with Words_ and Hurlbert and Blitz’s _Composition and Resistance_. Nevertheless, _Left Margins_ does unfold into a somewhat productive theoretical discussion in the book’s “Rereading, Re-thinking, Responding” section, where outside respondents Gerald Graff, Gary Tate, and Richard Ohmann comment on the essays while the editors and essayists, in turn, respond to these comments.

The pedagogical strategies described in the majority of the essays take the form of innovative assignments devised by composition instructors who believe that to understand how cultural meaning works to situate individuals, students must be alerted to the historical and political dimensions of language and knowledge production. For example, in “Recovering ‘I Have a Dream,’” Keith Miller, Gerardo de los Santos, and Ondra Witherspoon describe how they introduce students to the normalizing effects of anthologies, interrogating the very sites from which students usually learn. The authors discuss how they work with students to show how anthologists, by typographically and textually altering Martin Luther King’s “I Have a Dream” speech, suppress its rhetorical