Signs and Subjects: Revising Perspectives on College Writing Textbooks

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The part you must jettison is not only the best-written part; it is also, oddly the part which was to have been the very point. It is the original key passage, the passage on which the rest was to hang, and from which you drew the courage to begin.

—Annie Dillard

In your second and subsequent drafts, you work to make an earlier draft’s potential real: you revise, and through revision—by adding, altering, or deleting sentences and paragraphs—you clarify your main point for yourself and, on the strength of that, for your reader.

—Leonard Rosen

Consider the profoundly different notions of revision articulated in the preceding passages and what those differences might mean for writing students. For Annie Dillard, revision is not necessarily about improving the existing text, for it might lead to an entirely new text. Revision, in this sense, is a generative process in which current writing inspires future writing and so on. Revision also involves a great deal of agency, for the writer may choose to “jettison” the text in full or part in order to follow a new insight. For Leonard Rosen revision is a much less open-ended task. Rosen wants writers to use revision to achieve greater clarity in their existing writing, making an abstract “potential” more “real.” While revision involves making changes to the “draft,” the activities of “adding, altering, or deleting” will leave much of the original text intact, like having a tailor alter a suit for a better fit.

The divergent positions on revision illustrated by the Dillard and Rosen quotations reflect a split between rhetoric and poetics that under-
writes the foundations of college writing instruction and emerges in the textbooks I analyze. This split disadvantages students by mystifying and devaluing their work as writers within a consumption-production bifurcation (Scholes). In such a bifurcated intellectual environment, composition instruction is often relegated to a service role of preparing students for the "real work" of their majors and careers. The composition textbooks I examine in this essay tend toward pragmatism partly because they concern themselves with a "service" mission. The pragmatism underwriting composition instruction may encourage textbook writers to address students as "students," rather than as "writers," emphasizing their need to acquire new skills and work habits, over their involvement with their own texts. Conversely, as a largely elective course, creative writing may avoid some of the panoptic regulation imposed on composition, leaving it freer to develop pedagogies that promote experimentation with writing and create more opportunities for students to identify with the role of writer. Even though the creative writing textbook I examine offers students greater authority, it also falls into a pattern of reproducing a rhetorics/poetics split in writing instruction, which limits students' opportunities to develop fuller roles as writers. As a result, students may not recognize or be able to act on the critical in the creative or the reverse, and they may understand literacy and their options as literate subjects in reductive ways.

The position of "writer," understood in the broadest possible sense as someone who is fully enabled to use the critical and creative potential of written discourses for purposeful participation in (re)writing reality, is a potentially radical subject position that students can only partially adopt in both composition and creative writing classes because of this rhetorics/poetics split. The composition writing student develops competencies; while the creative writing student develops techniques. Either way, their roles as writers are severely restricted by the ideological framework surrounding each enterprise. As I will argue, the emphasis on assertive prose and linear writing processes found in many textbooks (especially in composition) reinforces a variety of social inequities and familiarizes students with the rituals of the post-Fordist workplace. Textbooks help to reproduce dominant ideological positions that dissuade students from recognizing the ways literacy can be both personally and politically empowering, and from seeing how the power of discourse can be harnessed to change the realities they encounter. My argument focuses on the important yet under-recognized function textbooks serve in the process of assigning individuals to literate subjectivities.
My argument is layered. I begin by theorizing the basis of constructed subjectivity using the theories of the Russian linguist V.N. Vološinov in *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, demonstrating the connection between textbooks as ideologically charged signs and the construction of literate subjectivities. Then, I critique three textbooks written by prominent members of the composition community, analyzing the emergence of dominant ideological signatures in each that serve conservative political functions, and secondary signatures that have the potential to disrupt status quo social relations and enable the individual to construct more active or participatory literate subjectivities. I use “revision” as a touchstone throughout my critique partly for the sake of consistency in comparing one textbook to another. However, revision is also an important concept because it is involved with writing and literacy at multiple levels, as it brings text, self, society, and action into a mutually informing interaction. I return to the concept of revision often both to create a point of comparison among the textbooks and to model a more activist notion of literacy. I conclude by offering a revised definition of “revision” as a model for the kind of critical praxis that might emerge from my critique.

I recognize that making large claims about writing textbooks as a class of texts is problematic because they are so numerous and various. Nonetheless, I want to find a “way to approach the ‘problem’ of textbooks” because textbooks are such a ubiquitous part of college composition classrooms (Miles, “Disturbing” 762). Critique of their influence on students, teachers, and composition pedagogy is in my view an important, if not indispensable, part of critiquing the larger ideological conditions for writing instruction. I agree with Kathleen Welch’s assertion that “textbooks are instructional material more important for the writing teacher than the writing student” as they have a strong influence on decisions teachers make about how to teach writing (271). This may be truest for teachers with the least training in composition: the adjuncts and graduate students who teach the majority of introductory writing courses nationwide. I carefully analyze three textbooks in this article (and make passing references to several others)—Wendy Bishop’s *Working Words: The Process of Creative Writing*; David Bartholomae and Anthony Petrosky’s *Ways of Reading: An Anthology for Writers*, and Andrea Lunsford and Robert Connors’ *The New St. Martin’s Handbook*. I chose to focus on these three textbooks because they were written by prominent members of composition and rhetoric’s scholarly community whose names regularly appear in the field’s journals and conference programs. As such, these textbooks should represent the most recent theories on
writing instruction. However, as Welch argues, a discrepancy exists between composition theory and writing textbooks that points toward an underlying ideology that “leads writing instructors away from composition theory” (270). This ideology is founded on a shared confidence in a truncated version of classical rhetoric as a reliable paradigm for writing instruction, according to Welch. This ideology emerges in various manifestations in all of the textbooks I examined.

I will show that the textbooks I critique as products of our current historical moment are aligned in many ways with conservative political influences that define college composition as a basic skills course and situate college writing within a larger capitalist agenda. Many readers of this article will not be surprised to see such a claim made about a composition handbook because handbooks focus mostly on the rules of writing; nor will they be likely to find such claims about a creative writing textbook unusual because of its association with what some consider a “craft.” However, the extension of this claim to a theoretically sophisticated reader-rhetoric may cause some to doubt my argument. It is true that Ways of Reading anthologizes a number of works by members of disenfranchised social groups, making their politically progressive texts and perspectives available to a wide audience of readers. Nonetheless, I demonstrate that this textbook is grounded not in progressive educational or political theories, as are the reading selections, but in fairly conservative perspectives that reaffirm traditional masculinist and capitalist values. The ideological subtexts that emerge in writing textbooks can have the effect of undermining critical and feminist pedagogies in the writing classroom, can encourage students to construct relatively passive literate subject positions, and can help maintain the consumer-producer, rhetorics-poetics bifurcations common in English departments.

**Theorizing Textbooks as Multiaccentual Signs**

The ideological underpinnings of writing instruction emerge most dramatically and revealingly in the rhetorics-poetics, consumption-production splits that characterize the structure of English as a discipline (see Berlin and Scholes). These can be understood as reflecting class conflict. As groups compete for power in society, so, too, they compete for the right to name and define realities. Language is intimately bound up with these conflicts; instruction in reading and writing is a powerful medium for this process of (re)naming realities. How reading and writing curricula are structured is an important part of this social process. Politically progres-
sive scholars recognize this fact, which is why the struggle to revise the
canon of literary texts has been so important to women and people of
color. Changing the texts students read is an important way of changing
the vocabulary students use to define their experiences. A similar struggle
to revise the canon of college writing instruction to include a much
broader range of discursive options and a more open set of literate
practices is needed in order to encourage the democratic goals of literacy
education.

These types of changes to the canon of college writing instruction are
important because texts act as cultural signs, carrying ideological mate­
rial to subjects who then use that material to construct versions of
themselves and the realities they encounter. The multiple meanings signs
carry are the products of class struggle, and they are, as a result of this
dialectic, overwritten with conflicting ideological signatures, or what
Vološinov calls "accents." In Marxism and the Philosophy of Language,
Vološinov is concerned with confronting disciplinary boundaries be­
tween linguistics, rhetoric, and literary studies in order to advance a larger
view of the social function of language; his argument is especially
relevant for discussions of ideology and subjectivity, and, therefore,
should be of great interest to scholars in composition and rhetoric.
Vološinov argues that the sign is the fundamental basis of ideology; it is
to ideology what phonemes are to language—"Without signs there is no
ideology" (9). Any tool, object, consumer good, or human behavior can
become a "sign" in this sense when it acquires meaning. A tree has no
inherent meaning (at least none that is comprehended by humans) and,
thus, doesn’t rise to the level of a sign (that which carries accents or
meanings) until human beings ascribe some significance to it as, say, the
symbol of life or as a metaphor for family relations. According to
Vološinov, ideologically accented signs are the substance from which
individuals build subjectivity. “Consciousness,” is a product of an
ongoing dialectic between signs and subjects, and between subjects and
society, and its “content is ideological through and through” (91).
Consciousness is not predetermined by genetics, but is redetermined via
social interaction. It is formed and reformed over and over again out of
the ideological materials that individuals encounter every day. A sense of
identity and individuality is ideologically produced as well. The ideology
of individualism so revered in American society is a fiction according to
Vološinov, which he calls “individualistic subjectivism” stemming from
Romanticism (83). Contrary to the popular conception of individuality,
that which seems to emanate from an inner realm is actually formed out
of a dialectic with the outside world. That outside world includes the texts we read and write.

Vološinov’s sociolinguistics also challenges functionalist views of language that see communication as a transaction among stable signs by asserting that signs accrue multiple ideological accents as a result of class struggle. He calls the functionalist perspective “abstract objectivism,” and he associates it with eighteenth-century Enlightenment philosophies (58). He argues that a sign cannot have one meaning alone as objectivists would argue because meanings emerge through conflict and, therefore, are unavoidably multiple. A sign “preserve[s]... and ... trace[s] all the various stages through which a change travels” (18). The sign’s multiple accents are a record of the social dialectic that produces meaning. For instance, we can trace the “social life of the verbal sign” liberal to see how the multiple accents on it reflect battles over the American political landscape (21). Slippage in its definition indicates that conflict is active around this sign. Is a liberal someone who advocates liberty and democracy, or is a liberal a person who favors “criminal’s rights over victim’s rights”? Is a liberal someone who believes in the redistribution of wealth through taxation to create greater social equity, or is a liberal someone who advocates “big government” at the expense of job creation? Different accents on the word liberal are forwarded by different social groups who have different stakes in shaping the dimensions of American society. This act of tracing the accents on signs brings several factors to the fore: ideology is bound to materiality of signs; signs do not transcend the “social intercourse” that engenders them; and discourses “may not be divorced from the material basis” (21). This methodology helps us recognize the historically contingent nature of the sign and demonstrates that accents emerge through class conflict. Definitions of the purposes of composition instruction show similar signs of slippage, indicating that college writing instruction is also a sociopolitical battleground.

The record of class struggle left on signs is what Vološinov refers to as “multiaccentuality,” which is a central part of his sociolinguistic theory. As different groups vie for authority, the struggle involves acts of naming reality. Signs, which are the medium of naming, continue to gather accents throughout these struggles. However, the sign is not a perfect record of class struggle; instead, it distorts or “refracts” social meanings (23). This is part of a sign’s vitality. The more important a given sign is with regard to the interests of society, the more its dialectic quality and “multiaccentuality” will be visible (23). The multiaccentual sign is
also the material subjects take up in constructing consciousness. The sign is the vehicle of social engagement in Voloshinov’s theory.

“Multiaccentuality” also helps us understand how textbooks function in writing classrooms. Textbooks are in themselves ideological signs that carry multiple accents. Students are attuned to this ideological dimension of their textbooks. Recently, students in a section of introductory composition taught by me reported that they “dreaded assignments” from their textbooks simply because “they are textbooks.” What do they dread? Further questioning revealed that they anticipated “boring readings” and “overly controlling writing assignments.” However, a few students indicated that they were “surprised” to find some “interesting” readings in the book. Responding to the multiaccentuality of the textbook as a sign, the students recognized its dominant meaning or accent—as a source of boredom and control—and its secondary or subversive accent—as a source of potentially interesting material. These accents reflect social struggle over the meaning and uses of literacy, indicating that “the English field is doubly involved [in social change], first as the harbinger of traditional knowledge and second as the harbinger of turmoil” (Stuckey 12). These accents may also reflect the conflicting roles for composition, whether as a set of service courses (boredom and control) or as a legitimate disciplinary enterprise (potentially interesting material). The contents of the textbooks are similarly charged with conflicting ideological accents. For instance, “revision” is treated both linearly and recursively in all of the textbooks I examine, which may frustrate many students as they are pushed and pulled in opposite directions without a critical framework for making sense of the contradiction. The contradiction between linearity and recursivity may reflect and refract struggles over the social uses of literacy—whether to serve the needs of industry (an efficient linear model) or democracy (a circuitous reflective model).

Students are already attuned to many of the ideological accents they encounter in writing classrooms, and they can be said to form their subjectivities as students from these materials. Ira Shor observes students’ responses to new teachers, noting that prior experience plays a major role in informing the students’ perspectives. “They know me before they meet me,” he says:

They have met me every year before we arrived in this basement chamber. They met my prototypes and precursors in the classrooms they already attended. Before I even say a word, they expect the teacher to be a unilateral authority...
Because such a thing as the Siberian Syndrome occurs before I have said anything in class, ... critical-democratic teachers start at "less than zero" when we begin a negotiated curriculum. (16)

We start at "less than zero" because students are aware of, have internalized, and are responding to the dominant ideological components of writing classrooms. This is an active process of shaping one's own subjectivity from experience and the ideological materials embedded therein, including the ideological accents embedded in textbooks. Critical pedagogy, which focuses on increasing students' awareness of themselves as knowing subjects, provides a way to counter this internalized sense of alienation.

The alienated subject positions Shor observes among the students in Siberia reveals how students construct subjectivities from the ideological accents embedded in their experiences of education. However, this process of taking up ideological meanings is not static. Because signs are multiaccentual and because experiences differ from individual to individual, consciousness is distinguishable from public knowledges even though it is social as well. This does not mean that experience takes priority over language; to the contrary, "expression organizes experience. Expression is what first gives experience its form and specificity of direction" (Volosinov 85). Language helps to organize experience by giving grammar (structure), vocabulary, and meaning to what might otherwise appear as random and haphazard events. The subject is not a passive receiver of socially constructed knowledges, but is an active participant in the acceptance and revision of those knowledges as "determined by social relations" (86). Critical pedagogy exploits this dialectic in order to bring subjects to an awareness of their abilities to use discourses to revise reality. This revision is enabled by the sociolinguistic nature of both consciousness and reality.

Language is the best medium for the process of (re)shaping subjects and realities because, according to Volosinov, the "word is the most sensitive index of social changes. . . . The word is the medium in which occur the slow quantitative accretions of those changes which have not yet achieved the status of a new ideological quality" (19). These accretions are accents, which are ideological, but are not necessarily formed into a system (an ideology); they are not hegemonic, but are traces of an ongoing social dialectic. For the subject, this means that consciousness is never individual, but is social, is never singular, but is multiple, and is never stable, but is ever forming. Expressions of an individual conscious-
ness are also expressions of a society. Accordingly, Volosinov argues that the "individual" understood as "possessor of the contents of his own consciousness, as author of his own thoughts, as personality responsible for his own thoughts and feelings . . . is a purely socioideological phenomenon" and therefore is unavoidably part of the social realm (34), whereas the individual understood as a biological organism that has an actual existence outside of ideology is part of the natural realm. Individual consciousness is social; individual bodies are biological. And neither one is ever able to rise above the contexts that engender them.

Dominant American ideology runs counter to this sociolinguistic material perspective by asserting that the individual is sole possessor of her or his consciousness and that personal success, at least in part, can be measured by one's ability to rise above society. This ideology is canonized in stories of the triumphs of individual men—the Ben Franklin, Albert Einstein, and Bill Gates stories we all hear that tell us that the real rewards go to the individual who achieves success on his own. (In fact, it seems clear that contrary to the "myths," each of these individuals profited from the specific social and historical conditions of his time, place, gender, and social class.) This faulty understanding of the relationship between the individual and society permeates writing textbooks, as I will show, which emphasize writing as the product of an individual (self-contained) mind or talent who is set in a masculinist opposition to other self-contained minds. This ideology also informs treatments of revision, which emphasize the need for the individual to correct the flaws in her or his own writing process. Privatizing literacy in this way encourages subjects to become alienated from literacy as they are left without an effective means to make sense of the differences between their experiences with writing as a social and nonlinear process and the mythology surrounding writing.

The dominant accents on signs (like "revision") generally reflect the interests of dominant social groups; by virtue of their dominance, those groups have the most authority to define reality. In our current historical moment, those groups are politically conservative and are invested in a post-Fordist capitalist agenda of producing subjects who "have as much emotional identification with their school writing as they do with geometry. . . . because students sense that only their submission to a task is required" (Clifford 48). Textbooks, in their function of reiterating the dominant accents they carry, remind students of their required submission. My students' complaints about boring textbooks may indicate a desire to overcome that submissiveness, but an inability to do so on their
own. As a critical pedagogue, it is my job to teach students to use literacy as a tool of liberation, to provide them with opportunities to (re)write their lives in ways that they will find more empowering, to (re)write knowledges in ways that they will find more compelling, and to (re)write reality in ways that they will find more engaging. A more complex view of revision (one that connects literacy, knowledge, and social reality) can be an important critical tool for achieving these ends.

Ritualized Depictions of Revision in Writing Textbooks
Textbooks are an important consumer good related to writing instruction; as such, they are very sensitive indicators of market pressures. The pressure is great for textbooks, especially composition handbooks, to serve pragmatic ends in terms of teaching students to write complete and correct prose. In this section, I argue that The St. Martin's Handbook (SMH) is typical in this regard. My analysis will demonstrate a distinct preference in SMH toward controlling students’ writing processes to achieve pragmatic ends. As a cultural sign, this handbook reveals its multiaccentuality as it vacillates between a recursivity and linearity in writing process pedagogy. Even theoretically sophisticated reader-rhetorics that encourage more complex understandings of texts can end up reinforcing dominant ideological positions. I found that Ways of Reading (WOR), despite its efforts to redress some of the shortcomings of other reader-rhetorics, reproduces gendered stereotypes that cast knowledge-making and textual production as aggressive processes. I will demonstrate that it also helps maintain a rhetorics-poetics, production-consumption bifurcation in English by emphasizing the importance of the text “over reader, writer, and context,” and by treating revision as way to impose closure on the reading selections (Welch 273). Playing to the perception that expository writing is “factual” and creative writing is “imaginative,” some textbooks draw sharp distinctions between the two closely related intellectual realms. This distinction is, of course, more ideological than practical. I use Bishop’s Working Words as both a foil for the previous composition textbooks and an object of critique in this regard. As a foil, I use it to demonstrate what is left out of composition textbooks. This textbook speaks to students as “writers,” encourages them to take risks with their writing, and presents revision as a complex process. Even though Bishop expresses a desire for her textbook to be “useful for those in composition classes,” she repeatedly addresses her audience as creative writers, reemphasizing a distinction she may have wished to diminish (2). The invidious distinction between composition
and creative writing common in English departments may make it more difficult for students to identify strongly with their writing outside of creative writing classes, making it more difficult for them to construct active literate subjectivities.

As I have mentioned, revision is a touchstone for my argument. The six textbooks I examine follow a set of the ritualized conventions for depicting revision, which include providing a definition, a set of guidelines or instructions, a writing sample with revision comments, and, usually, a clean finished copy of the revised writing sample. Also, only one of the five composition textbooks avoids tightly controlling the act of revision by limiting the kinds of changes writers might make to their texts and by fixating on the finished unified final product. The creative writing textbook offers students the most latitude for revision. A ritualized depiction of the revision process is one ideological tactic that presents finished discourse as "monologic," to borrow a term from Vološinov, by masking the multiaccentuality of signs and dialectic process of producing meanings. As critical pedagogues, we may ask our students for "understanding"—that is, for engagement with discourse as an unstable ideological material—while our textbooks more frequently ask for "recognition," or largely formulaic interactions with a seemingly "fixed, self-identical signal" (Vološinov 68). Thus, rather than producing invested writers, writing textbooks may encourage the production of passive literate subjectivity by presenting discourses as monologic, thus making it seem as though texts can reach a point where they can speak without responding or being responded to by other texts. Passive literate subjects may not recognize the socially and personally transformative potential of discourses as they fixate on the utility of seemingly stable discourses.

Vološinov likens monologic discourse to a monument. We may come across a monument in a park and it appears to be isolated from other monuments. It seems like an "isolated entity." It appears to stand alone, literally, as it is surrounded by trees and grass rather than other monuments, and, figuratively, as it appears to make its statement unaided by an ongoing dialogue with other similar statements. However alone it may seem, the monument always "makes response to something and is calculated to be responded to in turn" (73, 72). The monument, whether spoken, written, or carved in stone is dialogic not monologic. Textbooks present discourses in similarly abstracted ways. As Welch argues, textbooks "show us on every page, with every justified margin, that writing requires no context" and "that writing occasions require no contexts. Texts merely appear" (273). Much like the way the American myth of
success sets a successful individual apart from the rest of society, so, too, the finished text is set apart from other texts in textbooks. In other words, finished writing is treated as "dead language" in textbooks, and its reception is reduced to a mechanical and passive process of recognition. The linear depiction of writing commonly found in textbooks that moves from incomplete texts that receive responses from teachers and peers to complete texts that speak uninterrupted by dialogic response, presents written discourse as a process of moving from living to dead language, from active response to passive recognition. This is a disturbing feature of textbooks because it directly counters the efforts of liberatory literacy education to encourage active critical literate consciousness. It may suggest to students that less engagement with society, rather than more, is the goal of writing instruction and is a marker of improvement in writing.

Handbooks are by far the worst offenders on this score, which is possibly a result of their distinctly pragmatic aims in instructing students about the basic rules of writing. Joseph Janangelo refers to the ritualized depiction of revision in handbooks as a "narrative of containment." The linear product-oriented version of revision advances a model of composing that makes the writing process appear to be relatively risk-free, while it projects an image of writers as compliant and content with the outcome of the process. Janangelo critiques The Holt Handbook, which, like many handbooks, plots the progress of one student's assignment from start to conclusion. The end point, Janangelo notes, is a "clean copy, with no author's reflection, grade, or teacher's comment" (104). Handbooks tend to project the monologic text as a marker of completed, successful writing by presenting a linearized process in which dialogue diminishes as the text moves closer to completion. In actual classrooms, however, students' texts are rarely returned without some kind of response from the teacher or peers. The contradiction between what textbooks present about the writing process and what students experience in our classrooms may reinforce their sense that they are not "good writers" in that they have failed to achieve the monologic ideal. Frustrated by the contradiction between ideal and actual practices, and finding that they have no means of addressing this conflict, students may distance themselves from their writing, becoming alienated as a result.

The St. Martin's Handbook depicts a similarly "contained" version of the writing process and exhibits similarly conservative pedagogical commitments. Like many contemporary handbooks, SMH claims to address writing as a recursive process, which has become part of the new
composition canon. Welch argues that composition textbooks have replaced part of the classical canon with “process,” which has “reinforced the power of the modes in composition pedagogy.” However, Welch sees some hope in that the inclusion of process at all shows that at some level textbooks have to respond to theory (272). Continuing to critique the way process is treated in textbooks, thus, is not an academic exercise, but is a necessary part of resisting the stultification of composition theory by the textbook industry.

In the preface of SMH under the heading “Attention to Writing, Not Just to Correctness,” the authors state that “ongoing research and experience convince us that students need extensive practice in writing . . . that is compelling and powerful. Like all composition handbooks, this book provides guidance in checking and revising for correctness” (vii; emphasis added). Revision is mentioned very early in the textbook, but it is not linked with the recursive acts of composing found in so much composition scholarship; instead, it is identified with “correctness” and a product-oriented view of writing instruction. Compare this sense of revision with Ann Berthoff’s from “Recognition, Representation, and Revision” in which she defines “revision as a way of composing”: “If we reject the linear model of composing and the pedagogy it legitimates—teach the allegedly first things first; subskills before skills; the know how before the know what . . . —we will be free to invent courses which are consonant with the idea of the composing process as a continuum of forming” (555). SMH may gesture toward a more complex notion of revision when they say things like “Revising involves re-envisioning your draft” (50). However, they quickly bring such claims back to the pragmatics of the finished monologic text by saying this means “taking a fresh look at how clearly your thesis is stated, . . . how effective your organization is, . . . how appropriate your choice of words is” (50). Over and over again, effective writing is equated with technically perfected writing and not with a process that digs deeply into the text and reconsiders major rhetorical elements such as genre and purpose.

These ideological themes are repeated and reinforced throughout the textbook. In the section called “The Writing Process,” Lunsford and Conners assert that “writers always set and reset a series of goals as they write. . . . Researchers often describe the process of writing as recursive, meaning that its goals or parts are constantly flowing into and influencing one another, without any clear break among them” (4–5). This seems to bear some similarity to Berthoff’s and Dillard’s views of composing. However, then they provide some detail:
In *exploring, planning, and drafting*, the writer gathers information, develops a tentative thesis and organization, and writes an initial version of the piece. And in *revising, editing, formatting, and proofreading*, the writer improves the draft and polishes its language and appearance to their final form. (5)

This version of composing is linear and is tied to correctness and the efficient production of texts. It also asserts the dominance of traditional linear modes of argumentation in making a thesis statement a required component of early drafts. This commitment to a stage-model of composing is reinforced over the next few pages, providing a list of numbered steps that inevitably lead to the point where the "writing process is complete" (5). One of the most telling features of this stage-model is step seven—"thinking critically about your own writing"—which has the potential for encouraging students to work dialectically with the dissonance that arises through acts of composing. However, step seven is not intended to produce active reengagement with the text just completed in step six, but instead to focus on "improving" the writer's "own characteristic writing process" (7). These instructions privatize the writing process by indicating that it is idiosyncratic and individualized rather than a learned social behavior that can be examined as a cultural sign in its own right.

The product-oriented pedagogy advanced in *SMH* may, ultimately, serve the purpose of habituating students to the routines of work, where they will engage in a variety of mundane tasks in order to produce acceptable final products for employers, and where all failures in production reside with workers, who will need to improve their own characteristic work habits. Literacy is an important component of those work habits. In the post-Fordist workplace work is more textual than in the factories it replaces. Work in the service and information sectors of the economy often requires a lot of reading and writing. New technologies like the internet have even increased the amount of reading and writing done at the managerial levels, where work has traditionally been text-oriented. Consequently, workers at many levels need to be more literate and more flexible in their literacies than ever before. As James Berlin warns, "Today's workers must combine greater flexibility and cooperation with greater intelligence and communicative ability," and English departments do much of the work in terms of preparing students to meet these particular demands of the new workplace (46). Berlin continues, arguing that the "abstract mode of thinking encouraged in postmodern
literary studies” and the “collaboration, . . . peer-editing and group-composed assignments” common in writing classes “promote both the kinds of literacy and the quick and flexible learning required in the postmodern workplace” (51). It is no conceit to say that English studies is near the center of this battle over the subjectivity of workers. Writing instruction participates in the process of socializing individuals to the demands of the workplace in important ways. One of those ways is in the ritualized depiction of the writing process found in textbooks, which encourages the efficient production of traditionally organized texts.

The dominant capitalist accents (that value efficient production of discrete products) on SMH are quite heavy and are underscored by the book’s organization. Out of fifty-six chapters, only six are devoted to the writing process. Three of those six process chapters have subsections explicitly devoted to thesis statements, emphasizing that linearly-organized writing should result from a linear writing process. Their emphasis on the techniques of writing that lead to the completed linear text unified around a thesis statement reinforces the notion that writing is not an intellectual enterprise, but a discrete skill instead. These ideological underpinnings may alienate subjects from literacy by mystifying the writing subject (as one who follows procedures) and the text (as the product of practicing those procedures) in this all-too-common approach to process pedagogy. Nonetheless, SMH repeatedly gestures toward recursivity in the writing process, pointing toward a contradiction underlying the text. The conflict between two competing definitions of “writing process”—efficient and linear or time-consuming and recursive (which SMH gestures toward, but Dillard articulated more fully earlier)—point toward the current struggle between conservative and liberal social groups, who want to define literacy in different ways to serve different social purposes. Is literacy a basic and largely unintellectual skill necessary for workplace productivity, or is it a complex social ability necessary for democratic participation? Even though the dominant accents (of skills acquisition and efficient production) that emerge here are conservative, secondary accents (of complex linguistic process and social interaction) present themselves as materials for writers to take up in forming literate subjectivities.

Inequities structured into society are reflected in ideological accents inscribed in textbooks. Textbooks are one means that sexist, racist, and classist epistemology and politics creep into writing classrooms and undermine efforts to promote active literate subjectivity. Victor Villanueva
sees the teaching of composition as problematic because it "smacks of colonialism" (183). While all schooling works to socialize individuals, colonialist schooling socializes individuals into an oppressive social structure by naturalizing inequity. Traditional notions of *progress* and *rationality* (inscribed in ritualized depictions of "writing process") carry masculinist accents of linear movement and tend to conflate aggression with competence, which has been codified in the position of the ideal male knowing subject. In *What Can She Know? Feminist Theory and the Construction of Knowledge* the feminist philosopher Lorraine Code demonstrates that aggression has been associated with "such positive qualities as energy, power, and ambition: qualities that count as prerequisites for success in the white, middle-class, male professional world" (23). These values emerge in a variety of largely uncontested practices found in composition textbooks. The thesis-driven essay, for instance, which is nearly ubiquitous in composition classrooms, is at least in part a projection of this epistemological stance; it relies on the articulation of the same kind of assertiveness (directly stated authority, projection of confidence, aggressive defense of ideas and perspectives) that are valued in the ideal male knowing subject. Critical thinking and successful argumentation have been associated with aggressive intellectual and rhetorical abilities as well. The values reflected in a masculinized epistemology, if left unquestioned, may play significant roles in perpetuating inequality through literacy education.

Theoretically sophisticated reader-rhetorics like *Ways of Reading* (*WOR*) may be unwittingly participating in the process of creating a highly literate yet docile workforce by reinforcing a consumer-producer bifurcation in textual studies and by reaffirming traditionally masculinist epistemological frameworks. This very popular and well-respected textbook challenges students with syntactically and conceptually difficult readings and provides students with a broad range of options for writing back to the selections. Like any other textbook, it carries multiple ideological accents, some of which subvert its more overt progressive educational agenda. In this textbook, a masculinist notion of knowledge production (based in metaphorically aggressive intellectual behaviors) pervades the textbook. Further, even though the textbook intends to serve as "An Anthology for Writers," it emphasizes reading as the primary intellectual undertaking. Thus, despite its progressive politics, the text projects an image of its ideal knowing subject who is a male reader of difficult texts. This may be just the sort of preparation necessary for a post-Fordist workplace.
This projection of a gender-coded ideal knowing subject underwrites the theoretical foundation for reading in WOR. The introduction conflates aggression with competent, authoritative reading strategies, advancing a gendered epistemology for its model of active critical reading. In the "Making a Mark" section of the introduction Bartholomae and Petrosky encourage students to become "strong readers," which "involves a fair amount of push and shove" (3, 1). The violent language that privileges stereotypically masculine modes of gaining power stands out in these passages and is especially troubling from a feminist perspective as it privileges one gender-coded mode of making meaning above many other ways of knowing. They continue this masculinist tactic when they describe responding to a text as "taking over" at a point when the "author is silent" (2). While Bartholomae and Petrosky do not maintain this tone throughout the entire introduction—they also describe critical reading as being "sometimes peaceful and polite" (1)—they do emphasize aggressiveness as the preferred strategy for textual criticism. The reading subject, it seems, gains power (rather than empowerment) in WOR by disempowering others (by rendering them "silent"), which de-emphasizes the importance of more cooperative and collaborative modes of interaction that are actually advocated by many of the reading selections in the book, and may even reinforce the prominence of monologue by making the silencing of other voices a goal of active reading.

WOR's treatment of Adrienne Rich's essay "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision" is instructive in this regard. I am especially interested in this essay because of its emphasis on the concept of revision. "Re-vision," Rich tells us, is not merely a textual exercise it is a way of changing lives. It is the "act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction—[it] is for women more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival" (604). Re-seeing and re-naming are necessary steps that lead to changes in texts, histories, cultures, and individual lives. Re-vision is a social and political act as well as a deeply personal one. It is very closely akin to what critical pedagogues mean by critical consciousness. By including this essay in the collection, Bartholomae and Petrosky open up the possibility that students can assume roles as critical cultural agents in the ways implied by re-vision, not only by revising texts but by writing new versions of reality.

But this is not the tack taken by the textbook. Instead, out of the three reading questions and six writing assignments, only one draws students' attention to this radical notion of re-vision, and this assignment asks students to co-opt the concept in order to bring greater closure to Rich's
argument. In "Assignments for Writing," number two instructs students to "explore Rich's term—'re-vision'—by describing what you consider to be a significant pattern of change in Rich's poems" (617). Students are to "attend closely to and quote from the language of her poems" in order to explain what "she didn't yet know on a conscious level" (617). Students are not encouraged to use re-vision as the form of social action implied in Rich's use of the term. Instead, students come to grips with Rich's concept of re-vision in this assignment by using it to impose a close reading on her essay that makes sense of the gaps and lapses in the text. It places students in the position of reading Rich's mind, diagnosing her unconscious motivations, and using this omniscience to draw conclusions about her development as a writer. This is what Bartholomae and Petrosky mean by taking over at a point when the author is "silent," and it is a powerful demonstration of the traditional masculinist underpinnings of "strong reading." Readers make their "marks" by bringing the text closer to the monologic ideal, which to my mind undermines the essay's queer-feminist prose style. Each one of the writing assignments asks students to straighten out some aspect of the text. Other selections in this volume are similarly manhandled, which may leave students with the impression that deep critical reflection is an activity reserved for reading texts and cultures, and that revision should resolve ambiguities in texts. This is typical of the masculinist approach to reading advocated in the introduction, and may indicate that these are indeed philosophies the authors subscribe to. Noting similar features in other reader-rhetorics in "A Textbook's Theory: Current Composition Theory in Argument Textbooks," Lizbeth Bryant asserts that even politically progressive textbooks "fall back on the norm: the objective, logical, direct discourse pattern" and advise students to "'attack' the 'opponent'" in the normal course of written argumentation (123, 122). The aggressive interpretations students are encouraged to render in WOR reframe the radical components of the reading selections within a more conservative political framework.

WOR tends to tame the "wild tongues" it anthologizes (to quote the Anzaldúa essay in this anthology) by reinscribing the traditional masculinist reading subject, an emphasis that continues throughout the introduction and the assignments (36). For instance, when Bartholomae and Petrosky describe the writing assignments that follow each selection in the introduction, they indicate that students will find three types: (1) "write about a single essay"; (2) "read one selection through the frame of another"; (3) "define a project within which three or four selections serve as primary
sources" (15). Interestingly, only one assignment type uses any form of
the verb to write, opting instead for read and define. In WOR, writing is
presented to the students primarily as a means for recording their
interpretations of texts, rendering the texts they produce secondary to the
texts they read. Alan France critiques WOR on similar grounds, arguing
that it places students "passively, in the role of responsive readers of the
assigned text," thereby alienating students from literacy as a form of
social engagement (603). WOR asks students to assume positions as
consumers of culture (which is a relatively more passive position as
compared to the positions of producer or participant), by instructing them
to address texts as textual critics rather than "engage in a genuinely
critical praxis" (602, 607). Even though WOR presents students with a
fairly sophisticated set of texts and assignments that address important
cultural and political issues, it reinscribes a power-knowledge dichotomy
that values consumer activities (reading and interpretation) over pro­
ducer and activist ones (writing and participation). Although many
overlook it, the title of this textbook—Ways of Reading—announces
this emphasis, a fact that on its own makes it a problematic choice for
writing classes.

However, as a multiaccentual sign, WOR contains subversive accents
alongside the more dominant conservative accents just mentioned. Some
of these more subversive ideological components emerge through read­
ings themselves, and some through the editors' insistence that students
apply all of their intellectual faculties to the process of interpreting texts.
This aspect on its own challenges the all-too-common "read for the key
points" approach, a fact which Bartholomae and Petrosky readily ac­
knowledge in the introduction. However, WOR also ably serves the
function of preparing students for the conditions of the post-Fordist
workplace, equipping them with greater intellectual flexibility and im­
proved communicative abilities without encouraging them toward activ­
isim. It may also disadvantage students by limiting the subject positions
they might assume to a masculinist stereotype.

In contrast to WOR and SMH, Bishop's Working Words (WW) seems
to be less invested in the competencies of writing and the politics of
reading in a post-Fordist economy. Possibly because creative writing
escapes some of the pragmatic accents placed on composition as a
cultural sign, Bishop's textbook takes a strikingly different tack with
students by assuming that they are writers who are invested in their
writing and willing to engage in numerous writing exercises for the sole
purpose of seeing what will come of them. There is no pressure to turn
each exercise into a finished product that will be graded; instead, the point is to become a more flexible, inventive, and invested writer. This shift from competency-development to engagement with the materials of writing may explain some of the enthusiasm students have for creative writing courses.

As with the other textbooks, the introduction to *WW* sets the tone: “It is my contention that, although *doing* your writing is essential, understanding what it means to be a writer—by cultivating a writer’s activities, discipline, and productive lifestyle—also contributes greatly to your writing growth” (2). Even though this passage runs the risk of reinforcing the Hemingway-like stereotype of the writer (the recluse or the drunken genius), it is nonetheless remarkable to see students’ lives linked to their writing in a textbook. Bishop is aware of that connection and addresses it directly a little later, claiming that “this persistent image of the lone writer is troubling” because it tends to be exclusionary of cultural, ethnic, political, and sexual difference and may inhibit rather than inspire writers (20).

Unfortunately, this textbook doesn’t dig deeply enough under the ideological foundations of creative writing by thoroughly disrupting the split between rhetorics and poetics that underwrites the English curriculum and disadvantages writers. Within creative writing, a rhetorics/poetics bifurcation tends to reinforce what Katherine Haake calls the “fundamental schism between writer-artists and writer-(artist)-teachers” in creative writing (4). This schism reflects a deep suspicion of theory and pedagogy that runs through the creative writing community. In the introduction to *Colors of a Different Horse*, Bishop and Hans Ostrom assert that “teacher-writers are often suspect not only because they have published little but also because they mix with literary theorists, rhetoricians, and linguists, thereby endangering the distinctiveness—the purity, if you will—of ‘creative writing’” (xiii). These schisms and points of resistance reflect and reinforce dominant ideological positions as much as ritualized depictions of revision and masculinized projections of knowing subjects, for they keep subjects from recognizing the empowering nature of a fully realized literacy, which combines both critical and creative attributes.

Revision is one of the practices upon which composition and creative writing pedagogies seem to most sharply diverge. In *WW* Bishop advises students that revision is a risk-taking activity: “Creative writers especially revise to learn about words and language, and about forms and the effects of experiments. Writers talk about the urge to get the words right
as well as the urge to discover through trying alternative, sometimes riskier, versions" (185). The emphasis on experimentation and risk-taking here indicates that the writer (who Bishop carefully identifies as "creative") is presumed to possess literate agency. This is a potentially radical subject position for students to occupy since the world and their places in it are not givens, but are linguistic constructs that can be deliberately manipulated through the texts they produce. The potential for writing to become an activist enterprise comes into better focus for students when they are encouraged to set aside product-oriented concerns in favor of process-oriented practices for awhile.

The presumption that students are writers is reinforced elsewhere in the text; for instance, in an earlier chapter on drafting Bishop discusses an essay called "How to Become a Writer" by Lorrie Moore, which she says "offers a serious and tongue in cheek look at our field" (75; emphasis added). In comparison to composition textbooks, it is remarkable to see students addressed as colleagues. Bishop draws students into the world of writing throughout the book by demystifying the writing process and the image of the lone writer. She makes regular use of composition and rhetoric scholarship to present a complex portrait of writers, texts, audiences, and writing processes, including in-text citations and lists of references for each chapter, coaxing students into increasingly active and engaged literate subject positions through the cumulative effect of these features.

Surprisingly, Bishop’s approach to revision follows the same rituals described earlier, but here the competing accents on revision as an ideological sign are even more apparent. At the beginning of the chapter called "Revision and Your Writing," she quotes Dillard and asserts that Dillard "appears to revise so that the act of writing may continue" (158). Like Berthoff, Bishop connects revision with composing and with the possibility of discovering "an entirely different piece of writing" (159). She emphasizes more than once that revision is a recursive process, and draws students' attention to scholarship that verifies this view. In keeping with this perspective, she presents guidelines for early and late revision, and separates it from editing. In this way she suggests that revision happens throughout the writing process and should not be reserved for polishing nearly finished papers. She presents revision as a deeply intellectual textual process that is vital to composing. It is how texts get written: "all writers revise," she repeats (161).

The writing sample used to demonstrate revision is coauthored. It shows actual handwritten changes (the other textbooks use computer-
generated script fonts) and shows the revised text in a column to the right. The changes and comments are difficult to make out and depict the actual mess-making that characterizes intensive revision. This is a more complex and engaging portrait of revision than was seen in the other textbooks. She attempts to calm students’ apprehensions about “revising a piece out of existence” by advising them to save all of their drafts so they can always revert to an early copy if they are dissatisfied with the changes (168). The kind of passivity and rule-following that is advocated in composition handbooks is likely to undermine the engagement that is necessary for students to revise their texts so radically.

Nonetheless, the conflicts over literacy apparent in the other textbooks are visible in this one as well. In the subsection “Revising Late Drafts,” Bishop speaks directly to students working on prose writing. She draws on David Madden’s book *Revising Fiction*, in which he offers a portrait of a writer who learns how to revise more effectively. At the first level, “he” (Madden’s writer) “fails to see” a “mistake.” Next, he sees it but can’t correct it. Third, “he sees it” and fixes it, and, finally, “he sees it,” fixes it, and recognizes “that solving technical problems in the creative process is just as exciting as writing the first draft” (173–74). Madden equates revision with correction. Madden’s product-oriented process stands in contrast to Bishop’s presentation of a complex portrait of revision. The multiaccentuality of “revision” as a sign emerges even in this creative writing textbook—revision as correction versus revision as composing—indicating that this text, like all of the others, arises out of the dissonance of class conflict as it relates to the functions of literacy (even creative literacies) in society. Interestingly, the pragmatic approach that dominates composition textbooks plays a subordinate role here, which may be a result of the dominant ludic accents on creative writing as a sign that denote play rather than intellectual rigor.

Taken together, these three textbooks reveal some of the ways that a division between rhetorics and poetics is maintained in the academy and, more to my point, the way such a distinction in the curriculum participates in alienating students from their writing. Writing is a highly regulated activity in these composition textbooks and writers are encouraged to see themselves mostly as readers of texts, rather than participants in society. As students move into the discursive realm of creative writing, however, they are presented with a different set of ideals. Bishop’s textbook indicates that creative writing students are accorded more freedom and responsibility for their texts. However, they are likely to dismiss the critical components of their work with creative discourses, seeing it
instead as a serious but unintellectual craft. Either way, the radicalizing potential of literacy is dampened both in the composition and creative writing textbooks.

Given the ideological conditions just outlined, it seems likely that students are being discouraged from identifying themselves as writers in an active and critical sense. Under such conditions, students probably won’t locate the sources of their failures or successes, their happiness or frustrations in a social contract. Nor will they be encouraged to see their literate abilities as a viable means of developing critical consciousness, which involves understanding social conditions and the role of signification in the creation of those conditions (Knoblauch and Brannon). Instead, they may be more likely to seek the source of their frustration inside themselves and to achieve success through aggressive competition. They may continue to see dialogue as a marker of failure, and writing as a mechanical (rather than intellectual) activity.

**Going Too Far: Re-vising Revision to Encourage Critical Praxis**

Subjectivity can be understood as ideolinguistic product that is based, at least partly, in narratives that are a linkage of signs into larger units of significance. Subjects may construct themselves through words, stories, and images they get from the world around them. (More simply put, I know who I am because I can tell myself who I am using narrative, and because I can compare myself to others using analogy. “I” am who and what I say “I am.”) Subjects get the materials for these narratives from the cultures to which they belong, and since those materials come in the form of ideologically accented signs, consciousness, itself, is ideological. Changes in subjectivity can also be said to proceed in the same fashion as changes in society, via the process of dialectic social interaction. When textbooks disguise this social dialectic, they perform a conservative ideological function by forestalling social change.

Although it is difficult to determine the exact relationship between textbooks and actual classroom practices, it seems clear that the ideologically conservative approaches found in most textbooks are consistent enough with classroom practice and/or program goals to warrant their continued purchase. If composition textbooks can be taken as indicators of classroom practice at all, for the most part they demonstrate that students are not being encouraged to see themselves as writers, which has implications for their abilities to assume roles as literate-participants in society. This can be seen in heavy-handed efforts to control the decisions that students make about their writing, and to emphasize the mechanics
and techniques of writing. In this regard, the *St. Martin's Handbook* demonstrates a conservative ideological commitment when it masks the social dialectic by presenting discourse as monologic. The theoretically sophisticated reader-rhetoric *Ways of Reading* reproduces dominant masculinist epistemology and a consumption-based model of literacy that encourages students to identify with roles as "readers" of culture rather than "participants" in society. Bishop's creative writing textbook *Working Words* opens up many interesting possibilities for students to assume positions as "writers"; however, it maintains a rhetorics/poetics split that disadvantages both composition and creative writing students, relegating the former to the role of service and the latter to the realm of craft. In each case, the avenues to a fuller sense of literate agency are blocked. Critical literacy educators can help students navigate these obstacles by challenging textbook ideology with their students and pushing for revisions to textbooks with publishers.

Recently, I spent two consecutive class periods critiquing the notions of revision advanced in our two program-recommended textbooks for first-year composition—John Trimbur's *The Call to Write* and Lynn Troyka's *Quick Access: Reference for Writers*—with the students in my section of a first-semester writing course. On the first day, the students and I read and discussed the definition of revision presented by Troyka: "When you revise, you take a draft from first to final version by evaluating, adding, cutting, replacing, and moving material" (27). Like Rosen's, and Lunsford and Connors' definitions, Troyka's approach to revision aims at creating an essay with a "better fit." Following the ritual described earlier, she provides a sample essay with revision comments (mostly word and sentence level changes) and a revision checklist. I also presented my own definition of revision (included later in this essay) to the students that day. They were suspicious of my definition, asserting that I had "gone too far" by connecting it to their lives as well as to history and politics; after all, "it's only writing." But they also noted that by comparison, Troyka presents revision reductively: "She makes it seem like you can do everything with one sweep through your paper, and I know that's not true," one student said as others nodded in agreement. Even though this exercise didn't radicalize the students' understandings of revision, it did call the pragmatics of Troyka's version into question.

On the second day, we looked at Trimbur's definition, which emphasizes that revision is not a mechanical process with "right and wrong answers," but an interpretive one (440). Trimbur provides a sample of student writing and set of guidelines. The writing sample shows large
pieces of text being moved and/or cut and notations that indicate that the student plans to do more writing. The students recognized that Trimbur’s guidelines leave writers with more “thinking to do” than does Troyka’s checklist. Through these classroom activities, the students became aware that the two textbook authors and their teacher all had different views of revision and that embedded within those views were assumptions about the kind of work involved in writing. This classroom activity assisted students in developing a greater awareness of the subtexts underwriting their textbooks, and possibly a deeper sense of the complexities of literacy. This type of awareness is a necessary condition of critical consciousness in my view.

The ideological dimensions that emerge in many textbooks speak poorly for the effectiveness for promoting critical literacy. If literacy is to become a politically and intellectually empowering ability, then students need to be exposed to a much fuller range of textual experiences than most composition textbooks provide. Increased proficiency with the skills of writing also needs to be accompanied by increased awareness of the ideological functions of literacy. Although there are many possible ways these principles can be worked into college composition classrooms (like through service-learning), I would like to return to the problem of revision. Revision is an important touchstone for this argument because it is so intimately connected with larger frameworks for writing. Of all the activities of the writing process, revision is potentially one of the most radicalizing in that it involves constructing alternative realities in order to enable the writer to see texts and contexts differently and make changes to both. A more complex version of revision also has the potential for addressing the divide between rhetorics and poetics in English studies.

The division between rhetorics and poetics runs deep in academic culture, and, to my mind, is one factor that keeps composition textbooks from fully adopting critical pedagogy. Creative writing classes tend to escape panoptic regulation because they are seen as ludic and are better able, therefore, to develop the textual practices that would encourage a radical concept of revision. However, the rhetorics/poetics split limits this radical potential by undercutting the seriousness of the work done in all writing classes. Intellectual labor gets split into two realms—critique-analysis and creativity-imagination. Here, analysis is serious intellectual work, while imagination denotes play. But even the serious intellectual work of composition is diminished by the larger “service” mission of these courses. Imagination, on the other hand, is undermined by its association with “craft,” which in addition to signaling low forms of art
is associated with feminized labor and black magic. A sharp distinction between rhetorics and poetics helps mystify and devalue the imaginative and critical work done in all types of writing classes. Disrupting the division of writing into these two categories in the English curriculum strikes me as both a difficult and necessary step for creating an intellectual context conducive to promoting active literate subjectivity.

One step could be for composition to take a cue from creative writing by encouraging students to assume roles as “writers” in the larger sense, providing frequent and substantial opportunities for students to radically revise the texts and contexts that make up their lives. Textbooks could reflect these commitments. For instance, the definition of revision included in textbooks could be broadened to reflect a critical-creative approach, such as articulated by Rich in “When We Dead Awaken”:

Re-vision—the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction—is for women more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival. . . . A radical critique of literature, feminist in its impulse, would take the work first of all as a clue to how we live, how we have been living, how we have been led to imagine ourselves, how the very act of naming has been till now a male prerogative, and how we can begin to see and name—and therefore—live afresh. (604)

Re-vision is not simply about producing a finished textual product, nor is it merely about experimentation. Re-vision, which arises out of feminist principles, is about living in a historical and material world. More specifically, re-vision involves carefully critiquing actually existing social conditions, reflecting on the history of those conditions and on the ideological perspectives that underwrite them, and articulating new versions of reality that promote the causes of equity and democracy. Re-vision is a form of critical consciousness that presumes the active agency of the writing subject. Re-vision asks a lot of the writer, who is responsible for understanding texts and textual practices within a complex social context, for critiquing existing inequities, and for imagining new (con)texts for living. This final step extends beyond the writing itself by asking the writer to enact the principles articulated in her or his text. Re-vision is an activity that leads to critical self-reflection and to principled forms of social interaction.

An alternative textbook written with re-vision in mind might include a section that reads like this:
Revision: A Definition for Writers

Revision is an activity that involves multiple layers of decision-making about texts, and their consequences for audiences and society. Every text is a formulation of a version of reality to which writers would like readers to subscribe. At its very heart, then, writing involves a social interaction between writers and readers that changes certain aspects of their relationship to each other. Taking our understanding one step further, we can see that texts make changes to the aspects of society in which they participate. Revision engages the writer with those interactions between texts and social contexts directly. Writers who recognize the social function of the texts they write may wish to make their texts as effective as possible. Addressing revision as a layered activity can help.

1. The first layer of decision-making involves reconsidering your text as text by carefully examining and making changes to features such as genre, purpose, style, perspective, and organization. As you are considering these features, you may make decisions that alter your text substantially or even entirely. Revision is not an activity that tidies up your paper, but instead can lead, at least initially, to making a bigger mess. *Deep revision* of rhetorical and poetic features of your text is an inevitable and welcome part of the writing process.

2. The next layer of revision involves careful consideration of the social and intellectual contexts in which your text participates. Who is it written for? What do they already know or believe about the topic? Here, you will need to consider the history and politics of the issues you address in your writing, bearing in mind that these issues are not easily reduced to a pro/con stance. Again, major changes to your writing are a welcome outcome of considering revision at this layer.

3. Often we write something and find that readers respond in ways that we haven’t anticipated. Sometimes readers even act upon things that we have written. A third layer of revision involves concerning the potential impact your text will have on the world around you. This layer of revision asks you to attend to the consequences your position may have on other people’s lives. What social assumptions does your text seek to reinforce, change, undermine, or advance? Who will benefit from the social impact of your text? Address those potential consequences by revising your essay to produce socially-responsible results.

4. As you consider the aspects of your text described in layers 1-3, you may find yourself beginning to work with the fourth layer of revision, which involves reexamining your own life. In a sense, every text you write is autobiographical in that it records your thoughts, knowledge, perspectives, and/or attitudes on a given subject. Your experiences, values, goals, and ambitions are intimately connected with the ways of knowing you considered in layer two, with the modes of articulation you reflected on in layer one, and with the consequences of the positions that you examined in the third layer of revision. Once you have carefully considered revision at each layer, you will have a clear sense of the kind of impact your writing will have on your readers, and of the relationship between your writing and your values. Therefore, the fourth layer of revision involves changing your conduct in the world in accordance with the principles you articulated in your text or the reverse. This layer may also become the starting point for new writing, as it might inspire you to rethink textual, social, personal, and intellectual decisions you made earlier.
This is a major shift from the way many composition textbooks describe revision in that it emphasizes changing texts along with changing perspectives, changing contexts, and changing lives. The ultimate goal of this form of revision is not necessarily the production of traditional linear discourses, although that possibility is not excluded. Writing is not a mechanical activity produced by following a routinized stage-model of composing. It is also not the product of aggressive efforts to vanquish dissonance. It is as Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg describe in their textbook *Negotiating Difference: Cultural Case Studies for Composition* "a negotiated settlement among . . . contending forces" (6). At the minimum, composition classrooms need to treat writing in this more complex fashion in order to open up possibilities for students to adopt positions as writer-participants in society; and textbooks, as an important and influential pedagogical material, need to reflect this critical turn.

As teachers of composition, we should read the textbooks we order more critically and be less willing to accept textbooks that do not advance the goals of critical pedagogy. In order for students to more fully avail themselves of the benefits of critical pedagogy, composition instruction should provide more opportunities for students to act like writers by making decisions regarding genre, content, purpose, and self-presentation. As students work with these writerly concerns, they will confront and negotiate the dissonance that engenders discourse, and they may very likely find that the ideal of a monologic text is less compelling. They may come to realize, as did Rich in another of her essays "Split at the Root: An Essay on Jewish Identity," that "If you really look at the one reality, the other will waiver and disperse. . . . Nothing has trained me for this" (238). Nor have our students been trained for this. They will inevitably encounter, as we do, the tension she describes. However, they will be less prepared than she, less prepared than we, to address these tensions since they will have been largely denied opportunities to write an essay that "has no conclusions" (238). A re-vised approach to revision can be the cornerstone of a more fully-theorized critical democratic literacy pedagogy.

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**Notes**

1. Sharon Crowley sees “service” as an untenable position for composition to continue adopting since it discourages students’ engagement with their writing. She also cites the universal requirement as an unethical practice that
really serves the purpose of supporting academic empires, rather than any actually useful educational function. She finds that the service mission of a universal composition requirement is a burden that composition studies will not be able to dig itself out from under as it moves toward disciplinary status unless the practice is abandoned.

2. I am distinguishing between "reality," which is an ideological formulation, and "actuality," which is the physical fact that the world exists outside the boundaries of discourse.

3. The assignments accompanying Geertz's "Deep Play," to give another example, emphasize students' roles as readers of culture. Assignments following the excerpt from Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed encourage students to read education. Students are instructed to read blackness in response to the excerpt from Du Bois' The Souls of Black Folk. Reading is the primary activity being taught by WOR. Writing seems to serve the purpose of advancing the goals of reading instruction.

4. It is difficult for some to understand how "agency" can exist if the individual is a social construct. Agency resides neither in the individual nor society, but emerges through the dialectic interactions between subjects and multiaccentual signs. The movement represented in the concept of "dialectic" and the indeterminacy represented in the concept of "multiaccentuality" means that subjects have many opportunities to revise and rearticulate the ideological materials they confront through experience.

5. It would be a mistake to see teachers and WPAs as powerless in this situation, as merely being able to accept what publishers offer them. Libby Miles argues that WPAs can play an active role in textbook production and argues that there are moments in the textbook production process that are "open to intervention and change," especially when WPAs are acting as "adopters, as formative textbook reviewers, and as consultants" (31). WPAs can enact the principles of feminist and critical pedagogies in their interactions with publishers and book representatives. They can exert pressure for textbooks that are more consonant with their views. They can reject textbooks that undermine critical and feminist pedagogical principles. They can even propose textbooks of their own that will more adequately address these concerns.

6. Kathleen Swaim reports on a similar activity she did with her students in which she looked at how textbooks treat "organization." She found that students benefited from seeing that there are "many differing approaches to writing among which they were to discover and develop their own" (87).

Works Cited

Anzaldúa, Gloria. "How to Tame a Wild Tongue." Barholomae and Petrosky 36–45.


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