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*Virginia Anderson*

## Confrontational Teaching and Rhetorical Practice

Many composition teachers are deeply concerned about social justice. Such teachers feel obliged to respond to the drama of hate, violence, and fear that is now being played out on the national political stage. But exactly how is this obligation to be honored? Such socially concerned teachers—and I am one—must choose between taking confrontational stands against arguments they disagree with, or, conversely, effacing their own beliefs in hopes of ensuring a fuller play of voices in the writing class.

Several years ago, Maxine Hairston warned that political advocates can indoctrinate students or intimidate them into parroting the teacher's opinions. The vigorous negative response to Hairston (see Trimbur, Wood, Strickland, Thelin, Rouster, and Mesler in the May 1993 issue of *CCC*), suggests that she maps a site of real contention in composition. Some agree with Hairston that many modes of writing, including expressivist writing, can encourage diversity and tolerance in the classroom while avoiding overt politics (Fishman and McCarthy). Others endorse more activist, confrontational, or radical teaching. Activist teachers argue that the very act of teaching is a political and ethical intervention mandating a forthright choice of positions, responsibilities, and roles. They agree with Patricia Bizzell that teachers who reject the obligation to promote what they believe are positive values are "abandoning their responsibility to the community when they allow a theoretical perspective to silence them on questions of grave importance to common security" (283).

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Others agree that politics belongs in the classroom but echo Hairston's concerns. These teachers feel that effacing our own political stances in the classroom does not mean that we cease to teach political lessons. Some, like Linda LaDuc, empathize with the fear that teachers eager for "openness" in classroom debate may hesitate to challenge reactionary attitudes. Such silence risks "complicity" with undesirable values if students relapse into their old adherence to the status quo (154). Moreover, neutrality suggests that all views are equal; students already hunkered down in the "everybody-has-a-right-to-an-opinion" foxhole may dig even deeper into a solipsistic rejection of new voices and ideas. Edythe Johnson Holubec, David W. Johnson, and Roger T. Johnson worry that trying to stifle disagreement altogether teaches that disagreement can be avoided, leaving students without the skills for handling conflicts in the larger world. Richard E. Miller argues that ignoring conflict may even validate a student's sexist or racist leanings, as the student comes to believe that his issues are being censored rather than addressed. These possibilities present concerned teachers with a Hobson's choice: they may sidestep what they see as the dangers of open political advocacy, but there are other, equally serious consequences they must answer for. Some activist teachers see the hope of resolving this dilemma as naive. In a heated response to Gerald Graff, for instance, Adam Katz condemns Graff's call to respect conservative positions. He sees such advice as an implicit threat from "academic entrepreneurial crisis managers" (307) who, like "secret police agencies" (309), intend a repressive alliance with the Right (305).

The teacher's role in this debate is usually cast as a moral and ethical issue derived from the relations of education to truth, justice, and community. In this essay, however, I would like to follow Patricia Bizzell's advice (281–82) and see such ethical and moral issues as rhetorical concerns as well. Teachers all along the continuum between activism and neutrality recognize that classrooms are rhetorical situations, sites of complex interrelations between speakers, audiences, subjects, and codes. Our field encompasses a large body of scholarship on these interrelations. In this essay, I argue that this scholarship—that is, rhetorical theory—enables a constructive critique of activist pedagogy. I consider two prominent formulations of activist teaching—by Dale M. Bauer and James Berlin—examining both the underlying assumptions and descriptions of practice in rhetorical terms. A shared feature of both formulations is the evidence they offer, in the form of student resistance, that they have not forwarded the goals of the critical teachers who espouse them. Rhetorical theory predicts this failure and offers reasons for it, with three major implications. First, socially concerned teachers must become more self-conscious about our use of persuasive tactics and especially about our tendency to excoriate tactics

that we ourselves use. Second, we should be more alert and receptive to what Karen Fitts and Alan W. France call “extra-rational” persuasion, that is, the effects of cultural and emotional factors as sources of rhetorical power (321). Third, we need to think more carefully about audience, applying what both rhetorical and postmodern theory tell us about effective rhetorical choices. I believe that both classical theory and Kenneth Burke’s concept of identification provide valuable insights for fulfilling these recommendations. Indeed, I argue that rhetorical theory cannot only situate us and our critical hopes more effectively in relation to our students, but also ground a pedagogy that fulfills the activist agenda without putting teachers in the line of fire.

I begin my consideration of this pedagogy as rhetorical practice with Dale M. Bauer’s 1990 article, “The Other ‘F’ Word: The Feminist in the Classroom,” because it is one of the most eloquent expositions of the activist position, one that has resonated for politically concerned teachers since its publication. It is cited in both the third and fourth editions of Bizzell and Hertzberg’s *Bedford Bibliography*, and it continues to serve as a touchstone for radical teachers trying to define their own roles and as a point of reference for those defining themselves against the activist model (see Tremonte, Rosenthal, Stotsky, LaDuc). Finally, Bauer explicitly casts teaching as rhetorical, drawing on Kenneth Burke to ground her persuasive agenda. Thus, she invites an examination of her model in specifically rhetorical terms.

Bauer begins her essay by lamenting what she sees as an artificial split—her students’ determination to separate public and private, to keep politics out of the classroom and define the class as a neutral space (385–86). In Bauer’s mind, this split, which gives students the impression that the neutral classroom is whole—“well-rounded”—when in fact it offers an incomplete picture, can only be healed by retrieving the political and experiential realities that have been left out. For Bauer, this missing material can be supplied by a feminist politics. According to Bauer, the feminist rhetoric forces students to see gender identification as “a set of choices” rather than a biological imperative (388), hence demonstrating to students that their roles are rhetorically constructed and not natural (391).

But teaching as a committed feminist provokes serious resistance from Bauer’s students. In their evaluations, for example, students charge that “[The teacher] consistently channels class discussions around feminism & does not spend time discussing the comments that oppose her beliefs. In fact, she usually twists them around to support her beliefs” (qtd. on 388; brackets in original). Bauer echoes other activist teachers in defining such resistance as a sign that her students have been profoundly affected by the new perspective her position provides (391). She plans to use their overt resistance to disrupt their complacent self-constructions. Then, following

Burke's advice, she hopes to step into the resulting dissonance by offering them a rhetorical identification with her own position, thus engaging them in her own awareness.

This project requires Bauer to define students as possessing an "unacknowledged ambivalence" behind their unified facades (387). In other words, she must debunk and disable a merely apparent unity; provoking dissonance means deliberately exacerbating the splits she sees in students' consciousnesses and exploiting them to create new alliances (391). Her committed position gives students something to identify with rather than leaving them floundering in a "void" (387). Feminist criticism is an "act by which we teach students how to belong, how to identify, as well as how to resist" (391). Bauer's goal is to foreground cooperation and collaboration, provoking a Burkean identification with "affinity" and "coalition" in place of the competitive, individualistic "allegiances" with which the students' culture has burdened them (387, 391). To justify this exploitation of the ambivalences she sees in her students, Bauer draws on Burke's claim in *A Rhetoric of Motives* that identification implies division: "If men were not apart from one another, there would be no need for the rhetorician to proclaim their unity" (qtd. on 391). For Bauer, this means that only where there is division, with its concomitant dissonance and instability, can movement or change take place (389). Moreover, as Bauer notes, Burke sees rhetoric as an activity that can occur within individuals as well as between them, and Burke says that only when a rhetor persuades one of his own dissident selves can real conversion take place (*Rhetoric* 39).

Bauer, then, invites rhetorical analysis from a distinctly Burkean perspective. But a deeper reading of Burke challenges the very foundations of her project. In 1935, Burke addressed the primarily Marxist American Writers' Congress. In his speech, "Revolutionary Symbolism in America," he critiques a particular use of the tactic of identification that is hauntingly similar to Bauer's. Like the Marxist rhetoric Burke critiques, Bauer's dynamic language of struggle, acceptance, and rejection effaces her tendency to slight the process of persuasion. Instead, she presents herself as an embodiment of her political agenda, and hence as a site, intrinsically valid and appealing in itself, where her students will one day decide they want to end up. In contrast, for Burke, process is crucial. Sites are seldom intrinsically persuasive; identification is created. We induce it through the tactical choices we make—our own moves in the rhetorical alignment and the types of arguments we construct. What Bauer sees as a static moment of decision, Burke sees as an ongoing, dynamic, never-stable process requiring a "sustained rhetorical effort" (Burke, *Rhetoric* 34). So if Bauer hopes to move her students toward her agenda rather than merely offer it as a site

where they ought to reassemble, her neglect of process renders her efforts tactically flawed.

Burke warned his 1935 audience that its rhetorical agenda was doomed. He argued against using the symbol of “the worker” as the linchpin of Marxist strategies of identification. By its very premises, he pointed out, Marxism was required to represent the worker as pathetic rather than heroic, driving away the majority of potential converts who did not want to identify with such a debased image (269). In his analysis of Burke’s speech, Frank Lentricchia points out that this depiction of the worker as downtrodden sometimes led the middle class to sympathize with the worker but also inevitably to mark him as an “other” (287). Hence, the image distanced the audience from the worker rather than engendering in it the identification that the Marxist agenda required.

Both Burke and Lentricchia argue that this use of a divisive image also crippled the effort to build a powerful coalition because it played into the hands of the capitalist forces it was designed to overturn. Since capitalism explicitly promised citizens a chance to accumulate personal wealth, it promised a way of avoiding misery like that ascribed to the downtrodden worker. Capitalist ideology was thus able to appropriate and exploit the very image of the oppressed worker Marxists had labored so hard to create by agreeing that the worker’s plight was awful—in fact, the more awful the better. The more gruesomely Marxists depicted the position of the worker, the more capitalism could win people to the hope that through “American” values and virtues they could avoid sharing the worker’s despair (Lentricchia 288–89). Burke suggested a rhetorical solution. Marxists should usurp the more inclusive symbol of “the people” as an image that could embrace, and be embraced by, a larger stratum of American society (269).

Burke’s argument earned him only castigation. “The people,” as a symbol, was dismissed as contaminated because it had already been used in nefarious ways. In fact, Burke was compared to Hitler, who had appealed to “*das Volk*” (“Discussion” 276). For the 1935 Marxists, only the purist position of aligning their efforts with those of the genuine “worker” could qualify as an acceptable ideological stance (“Discussion” 277).

Bauer hopes to use “feminist” as a collective unifying symbol, but unfortunately, the use of “feminist” resembles the Marxists’ use of “worker” in several important ways. First, as Lentricchia points out, “worker” is an extant symbol in an extant cultural rhetoric, and as such, it carries with it an “attendant rhetoric” of related terms that American audiences cannot help finding “foreign” (290). Similarly, Bauer acknowledges that “feminist” carries with it a set of negative implications for her audience: “imbalance, fanaticism, eccentricity” (386).

Furthermore, just as the need to elicit sympathy by presenting the state of the worker as undesirable undercuts the concomitant need to present "the worker" in a positive light (Burke, "Symbolism" 269; Lentricchia 288), Bauer is driven by her strategy to associate "feminist" with a number of images that dilute her claim that "feminist" can be a positive place for students to reside. First, she must portray a feminist as militant if the feminist is to provoke crisis or challenge extant identifications. Bauer's feminist is confrontational, and therefore her job is to make students uncomfortable rather than welcome. Second, feminists want their converts not just to rescue, but to actively identify with, the powerless (390), those whose lives represent everything the students don't want their lives to be. Bauer's pedagogical example, Pat Barker's novel *Blow Your House Down*, asks students to identify with those who suffer, to take on a particular type of confrontational rage born of a situation they have come to college to avoid. As Burke predicts, two reactions can ensue from these pressures. Students can do as Bauer hopes, and see themselves as subject to the same forces that have oppressed these women. Alternatively, they can assure themselves that in America, no one need occupy these positions. In America, land of personal choice and personal responsibility, one can be sure to make wise career choices (if one is female, this means avoiding sexist employers), to stay out of dark alleys, to hang out with the right people, to carry a gun.

In other words, late 20th-century American culture offers people different ways of reacting to images of suffering and degradation, as well as to militant rage. As Bauer points out, construction of identity is very much a choice (388). Students can empathize with the images Bauer presents, but they do not have to be persuaded by her "but for the grace of God" argument that they might find themselves in those roles. Moreover, students seduced by the illusion of a stable individualist order may inevitably see the militant disruptiveness of the radical feminist as a threat.

Like the image of the "worker," the image of the "feminist" thus emphasizes difference rather than reducing it. Other elements of her argument emphasize difference as well. Despite Bauer's determination to resist dichotomies and "clear categories" (388, 394), her writing teems with binary oppositions: students vs. teachers, dominant culture vs. resistant counter-culture, inner vs. external authority, false unity vs. secret ambivalence, patriarchy vs. feminism. This last opposition alone can result in male students feeling roped off, even demonized. On her penultimate page, Bauer twice refers to violence and masculinity as related; although she later says that violence is both male and female, the article doesn't clarify how she makes this move. If Bauer, in fact, lets this overriding association of violence with masculinity surface in her actual practice, how can her young male students help but be annoyed? Thus, feminist teachers who rely on Bauer's

model are doubly separated from the identificatory moment—they align themselves with those the students hope never to become, and they depict themselves as enemies of what many students are.

But like other activist teachers, Bauer holds that her divisive tactics are essential and instrumental. They are the agency through which her students are brought to crisis and made to feel the tension that she then encourages them to resolve in her favor. Without this pressure, she argues, students would never recognize, let alone confront, their own ambivalence in these ethical moments. Her confrontational stance amplifies inherent doubts her students harbor and allows them to work out instabilities that they would otherwise ignore. But the scope of Burke's rhetorical universe is such that he not only would have predicted Bauer's defense of such tactics, but would have had a terminology to describe it. What Bauer plays out here is what Burke scholar William Rueckert calls the pollution-purification-redemption cluster (98).

In Burke's theory of symbolic action, rhetors often posit an archetypal transformation from a state of division and discord to a transcendent state of unity and harmony through an upward movement in which some burden or contamination is "purged" or "sloughed off" (Rueckert 104). Burke believes that this trope of transformation has enormous if not universal appeal. The archetype, he says, is inherent in language itself, which constitutes the one means by which ideals can be given material form (*Rhetoric* 275–76). For Burke, language is in fact a dialectic enterprise in that each word conjures opposing terms and each of these oppositions can then be transcended through generalization to a higher, more inclusive term. Though this verbally-realized unity is radically unstable, the pressure to transcend opposition and division is so fierce that the trope of unification underlies many of our art forms as well as our persuasive appeals. Persuaders often court audiences by depicting a more harmonic state that will arise from sharing interests. In this utopian state, the audience is promised, "the lion and the lamb may lie down together," that is, act on intellectually constructed commonalities rather than succumbing to the very material differences that lead the lion to eat the lamb (Burke, *Grammar* 346).

Bauer might join many postmodernists in challenging such a universal archetype. Nevertheless, she describes the conversions she hopes to provoke in her students in just such transformational terms. Students come into her class corrupted by their old, false allegiances (391, 392). The divisiveness of Bauer's methods provokes a cathartic confrontation. If students form the new allegiances that Bauer urges, they are redeemed. They learn that their earlier allegiances were not ordained by their intrinsic rightness but rather were culturally conditioned. They now see that they can make an ethical choice; They *can* be otherwise. They have been brought to a new

level of consciousness through suffering. Moreover, this new level of awareness, for Bauer, restores a conflicted self to unity. Having purged the rhetorical other who has been struggling for their affections, students can complete what Bauer sees as the ultimate conversion: converting external authority into what Bauer calls an “inner speech,” an “internally persuasive word” (389).

If Burke is right about the appeal of such transformational narratives, then the tensions Bauer exacerbates could indeed be productive in just the way she predicts—if she can persuade students to follow her road to the Upward Way. But Burke would see the use of any confrontational persona as inherently risky:

The emphasis upon the *antithetical* tends to incapacitate a writer for his task as a *spreader* of doctrine by leading him too soon into antagonistic modes of thought and expression. It gives him too much authority to *condemn*—and however human this desire to grow wrathful may be, and however justified it is by the conditions all about us, the fact remains that his specific job as a propagandist requires him primarily to wheedle or cajole. . . . (“Symbolism” 271)

But like other radical teachers, Bauer continues to worry that anything less than the kind of radical commitment inherent in her symbol “reinforces . . . the dominant patriarchal culture rather than challenges it” (390). In order to offer students a clear choice, it would seem Bauer cannot let her guard down; she must keep her rhetoric pure, distanced from the seductive but unacceptable beliefs that characterize her students’ other worlds. She cannot grant rhetorical authority to any of their symbols.

Lentricchia castigates those who voiced similar complaints against Burke for his use of a degraded symbol. These critics, Lentricchia argues, misunderstand rhetoric. There is “no morally pure, no epistemologically secure, no linguistically uncontaminated route to radical change” (294). Separating rhetoric into good and bad on the basis of how it is used, Lentricchia says, can have destructive consequences:

To attempt to proceed in purity—to reject the rhetorical strategies of capitalism and Christianity, *as if such strategies were in themselves responsible for human oppression*—to proceed with the illusion of purity is to situate oneself on the margin of history, as the possessor of a unique truth disengaged from history’s flow. It is to exclude oneself from having any chance of making a difference for better or for worse. (294)

But Lentricchia’s analysis creates a dilemma for conscientious teachers, who often strive to make their students critical receivers of rhetorical inducement. They hope that students will learn to see beyond and some-

times reject certain appeals. They would like students to deconstruct harmful cultural myths like that, say, of rugged individualism. But Lentricchia implies that traditional appeals like myths and even traditional commonplaces should not be rejected as contaminated because of such negative associations. Indeed, even a purist like Bauer exploits traditional rhetorical tactics, like the pollution-purification-redemption paradigm. Nor does she eschew the machinery of mythology in leading students on a questlike journey toward a wholer, truer fulfillment. But the content of our persuasive efforts—the choice of images, ideologies, and symbols—also counts. Choosing these symbols, as Burke maintains, is an important part of the crucial persuasive process. Radical teachers, as Katz and Bauer show, face a dilemma in that the desirable positions they construct seem incompatible with the ideological images, values, and symbols occupied by their opponents. Maddeningly, these are also the sites often occupied by our students. Still, rhetorical theory insists that we must creatively use them as starting points. Bauer undercuts identification when she offers students only a stark choice between positions she casts as incompatible. Students who want to move from one to the other must leap a wide gulf.

James Berlin's last book, *Rhetorics, Poetics, and Cultures*, also raises questions about critical teaching as rhetorical practice because of its approach to identification. In Berlin's sincere and comprehensive text, the radical postmodern writing teacher hopes to exploit cultural contradictions to teach that "the conditions of experience are made by human agents and thus can be remade by human agents" (101) in order "to serve more justly the interests of a democratic society" (112).

But the pedagogical sections of *Rhetorics* contain markers of Berlin's struggles with his own contradictions, most obviously his desire to honor democratic values of free speech while also directing the students toward what he wants them to learn. Repeatedly Berlin emphasizes that students' responses are spirited, undaunted, and unpredictable (103, 119, 129, 131, 145). But Berlin's faith in his own reading method and the interpretations of reality it necessarily renders leaks through as readers are told that students "must come to see," "must realize" (93), "must learn" (111), "learn to see" and "recognize" (120), "discover" (118), become "aware" (116), are "made aware" (130), and "begin to understand" (131) that the world they live in is the one Berlin sees. Any student who holds out for a worldview that does not contain the contradictions and demand the questions Berlin foregrounds is "deny[ing] the obvious" (102). Berlin's language even takes on a Foucauldian therapeutic cast: "More appropriate responses can come only in acknowledging and confronting this denial" (113).

Of course, postmodern theorists, like Berlin himself, would predict these contradictions and argue that Berlin cannot avoid them. But Berlin's

text shows signs of the kind of effacement he deplores in his students. Janice Lauer's afterword tells us that Berlin's last task in writing was following the advice of reviewers and "toning down his anger and blame" (182). We cannot know, of course, what form this search for a more balanced voice took, but it is instructive to consider that part of Chapter 7, "Into the Classroom" (131), appeared earlier in "Composition and Cultural Studies" (51–52). This section of *Rhetorics* ends with the calm reassurance, originally offered in "Composition" (52), that although "students and teachers are at odds," the classroom provides an open environment where not even the teacher's view "goes unchallenged." This is the only line in this thirty-one page chapter on classroom dynamics that refers to student resistance. Other discussion of student resistance has been shifted to the introductory chapter of the pedagogical section (Chapter 6), where Berlin says that he will not deny the fact of student resistance, which has "as often taken the form of passivity as it has active and open opposition" (103). In *Rhetorics*, Berlin says that the problem has been solved by letting students establish rules for classroom interaction, especially to discourage passivity (104). But in the original piece, after what is now the optimistic ending of Part 1 of Chapter 7, Berlin states that "the most remarkable effect of the course has been the intensity of resistance students have offered their teachers, a stiff unwillingness to problematize the ideological codes inscribed in their attitudes and behavior" ("Composition" 52). Struggling against this resistance, Berlin "discourage[s] papers arguing that painful experiences were most often the best experiences 'because they make you mature, independent, and self-reliant'" ("Composition" 52)—in other words, Berlin discourages a type of paper that doesn't reflect his own reading of the world.

What makes some of Berlin's students so unwilling to hear him? If, as he claims, he does not insist on specific conclusions or choices once contradictions have been uncovered, what can they object to? Rhetorical theory, however, makes sense of Berlin's intimation that his students are resisting the search for contradictions itself. This search, as we have seen, is one of the few things Berlin implements by fiat; the existence of contradictions and the value of searching for them is a tenet not up for debate (103). This tenet is central to critical teaching, and in the book, clinging to a more traditional worldview sounds like a moral deficiency. Students are admitted to the cadre of productive agents for democracy only if they agree to "negotiate" or "resist" prevailing truths. Affirming prevailing views, in fact, is not even an act; it is the passive acquiescence of the willing victim (71, 79, 104) whose passivity, we have seen, must be rooted out (104). To deny the postmodern view of the world and the politics that derives from it is to deny reality. But Berlin makes no connection between these assertions

about the postmodern nature of reality and the accusation he makes against his ideological opponents, who mistake their own ideological commitments “for accurate reflections of eternal truths. [They] accept [their] own signifying practices as finally indisputably representative of things-in-themselves” (80).

Let me be absolutely clear that I do not urge the abandonment of critical theory, either as an epistemological method or as teaching practice. I have been deeply persuaded by the powerful readings of culture that various forms of critical theory yield. I believe that the creative destabilization such theory offers can help us move beyond our present political, economic, and social impasses to a world closer to our ideals. But I want to see the power of critical insight made more persuasive for those most prone to resist it. I want to make it more often a part of the normal perceptual apparatus of everyone from college students to presidents. I believe this persuasive power can be improved if practitioners of critical theory actually adopt the methods Berlin commends to his students: if theorists try to be as alert as possible, within their own terministic screens, to their own contradictions, to moments when their ideals and practices, for example, do not mesh.

A major step in this persuasive project is admitting that the pictures we paint of postmodern reality are truth claims and recognizing, that like all truth claims, they cannot be merely asserted as starting points. As activist teachers insist about everyone else's theories, they must be argued for. Much of our application of critical theory to teaching practice seems to skip this step, which classical stasis theory called that of conjecture. We believe we can simply tell students that their world is so rotten it will crumble before aggressive challenge, that all their truths are unstable, that their lives are a mishmash of fabrications, and that their worlds must be yielded up to exactly the kind of corrective exposure that Susan Miller, for example, decries. We beg the basic question, assuming as a starting point what we would do better to try to prove. This lapse compromises our power to create identification, since we have simply skipped the site and moment where shared starting points are built.

Two sources support my claim that we cannot move these resistant students—presumably those we most need to reach—until we address their conjecture level doubts. In *Moral Politics*, George Lakoff explores what he sees as the basic conceptual gap between conservatives and their progressive counterparts. Starting with an admittedly idealized binary opposition, Lakoff lays out two opposed metaphorical schemes based on family structure and argues that much of each side's politics can be explained by these models. Conservatives, Lakoff claims, base their actions and choices on what he calls the “Strict Father” model of reality (33). In this model, all the

cultural myths activist teachers deplore—self-reliance; meritocracy; self-creation through self-denial, discipline, and hard work—follow naturally from the conceptual and ideological grounding assumption, that the basis of all morality is obedience to legitimate authority (67–70). Although he later argues against this model as a useful guide for raising children, let alone running a nation, Lakoff shows how, given its first premise that authority is sacrosanct, the model provides a self-consistent, simple, and hence highly appealing template for social and political action. In contrast, the progressive model, the “Nurturing Family,” is more complex, harder to apply, and harder to argue for. In fact, Lakoff says, liberals have not formulated arguments for their metaphorical grounds; moreover, their failure to recognize the metaphorical gap between their views and those of conservatives has prevented them from understanding that the kind of issue-based persuasion on which they often rely falls on deaf ears (19). Lakoff does not offer prescriptions for bridging what he represents as a nearly absolute incommensurability between worldviews. But such bridging is precisely what critical teachers need to undertake. It is at the moment of conjecture, when we decide what the world is like and how it operates, that the first and most necessary bridge must be built. Lakoff argues that people often do construct their worlds in a mix-and-match fashion, drawing on different ideologies in different sectors, thus creating the kinds of ambivalences activist teachers hope to exploit (296). But these teachers can benefit from recognizing the profound metaphorical and emotional underpinnings of the conservative position. Lakoff says that until liberals (and radicals) cultivate such understanding, their persuasive efforts are doomed (19).

Conservative Roger Kimball’s response to Gerald Graff’s “teach the conflicts” solution (a variation on the “show them-the-options-and-demand-a-choice” model) supports Lakoff’s premise that the pedagogical value of questioning authority is itself at issue. Kimball rejects the basic premise that conflict and contradiction are worth examining:

[Graff’s proposal] is a prescription for confusion, guaranteed to muddle young minds. . . . It never seemed to occur to Professor Graff that some intellectual positions might be truer or more worthy of transmission than others. While lecturing us about how important it is to keep the discussion going among ideological adversaries, he neglected to ask himself whether cultivating ideologies (“teaching the conflict”) is the proper business of the university. (22)

In sum, radical compositionists often fail to incorporate important lessons of rhetorical theory as they construct their relationships with students. They especially devalue identification. In particular, they fail to

make a strong conjecture argument that can serve as a shared starting point with skeptical listeners. In what follows, I argue that these rhetorical principles can not only help critical teachers make their practice more persuasive and available to students, but can also ground a critical pedagogy itself.

The pedagogy I propose is rhetorical in two senses. It draws on rhetorical scholarship to guide teachers' practical choices about arranging and approaching material and classroom dynamics, and it provides the questions and resources with which writing classes can examine the signifying practices of their cultures.

I begin by claiming that we share with students a nominal belief in concepts like freedom, equality, opportunity, community, responsibility, and, indeed, individual empowerment. I endorse the critical project of helping students investigate the ways that their culture prevents these ideals from being realized. I share the goal of suggesting to students that alternative social and political stances like feminism offer a closer approximation to the ways we and our students mutually define these ideals. But a rhetorical pedagogy would recognize that students' choices of these new sites are actions, manifested in their treatment of others, their social participation, or their political decisions. In classical stasis theory, calls to action like those teachers make when they ask students to assume responsibility as political agents for social progress are the last, not the first, step in a persuader's itinerary. First, as I have argued, comes conjecture, an argument about the nature of the world we live in. Second comes definition, where we explore what our terms mean. According to stasis theory, only after examining issues at these levels can arguers effectively connect with interlocuters at the levels of value and action. I offer an example to show the practical implications of stasis theory on a rhetorical teaching practice.

Recently, the decision of the 5th Circuit Court of Appeals in *Hopwood vs. The University of Texas* threw affirmative action policy at the University of Texas into turmoil. In an effort to mobilize public support, many faculty and student supporters of affirmative action held a teach-in, which my Critical Reading and Persuasive Writing class voted to attend. At the teach-in, the largely supportive audience was exhorted to support affirmative action through letter-writing, participation in rallies, and other, even more active roles. Speakers at the teach-in offered moving personal accounts and statistics to demonstrate the prevalence of racism. But when my class of mostly white, middle-class students discussed their impressions, they challenged the activists at a very basic level and easily found their own explanations for the evidence presented by speakers. They were not convinced, in particular, that the anecdotes and statistics were adequately sufficient and representative to prove racism existed, or that ending affirmative

action would be racist. Why, one student asked, is it unfair or racist to base college admissions on test scores?

This question, barely touched on at the teach-in, loomed in this student's mind both because the validity of test scores is a cultural given in her world and because, as she later told us, she felt she had been rejected for a scholarship because of affirmative action, despite her higher scores. Hence, she had both rational and emotional reasons for questioning what I see as progressive claims. Stasis theory, by foregrounding conjecture and definition, addresses her question at both levels.

Rationally, the student's question can be recast as a hypothetical syllogism: if test scores measure merit, they are fair selection criteria for college admissions. This question asks exactly what test scores measure—a conjecture question. Next, it asks whether what they measure can be defined as "merit." Finally, it asks us to look at the tangled relations between our definitions of "merit" and our definitions of "fair." These definitional issues embroil us in ever deeper issues of conjecture. If we agree that "fair" means that people receive what they have worked for, how do we determine that one person has worked harder than another? This question demands that we define "work."

These rhetorical questions, I submit, are the same kinds of questions critical teachers encourage students to ask. By pinpointing the moment when we try to make do with poorly defined terms or to paper over uncertainty, they can show students the complex and frightening underbelly of the simple solutions and comfortable opinions they have entertained. Such revelations, activist teachers believe, are the gateway to transformation. They allow students to answer the most basic conjecture level question—to see that the world is endowed with what Fitts and France call "rhetoricity" (322), which makes truth a construct that can be undone and redone. But, importantly, the questions are supplied by the theory itself, which can be taught as theory, and not by the teacher as his or her politics.

The student, though, is also empowered by this pedagogy. Both my own need to honor democratic values and my understanding of rhetorical effectiveness denied me the option of simply telling the student that she was wrong. As much as I wanted to urge this student to support affirmative action, she was serving notice that I would not persuade her until I had answered these more basic *staseis*. My teaching would be most ethical and effective if I allowed her to create an inner authority by answering them for herself. Such an approach did allow me to point out that she had begun with a conjecture question on which a huge body of research has been conducted. It allowed me to say that she could argue neither for nor against affirmative action until she had investigated that research. The bottom line, the lesson of stasis theory, is that it is counterproductive to con-

front people on questions of value (affirmative action is good) or policy (affirmative action should be retained) while such complex questions of conjecture and definition are hanging fire. Thus, though I did not convince her of the value of affirmative action, my effort to focus her attention on the *staseis* of conjecture and definition fulfills the goals of critical teaching.

Such an approach has several distinctive strengths. First, it allows rhetoric to be taught not as a radical leftwing intervention but as Western tradition. This historical framing need not be a cop-out. As political scientist Benjamin R. Barber points out, the Western canon *can* be taught as a history of rebellion and subversion (105); for example, the conflicts between Plato, Aristotle, and the Sophists, as Susan Jarratt has demonstrated (“Toward”), are *the* postmodern conflicts, conflicts about what and how people can come to know. Buttressing classical rhetoric with Burke, or with cultural studies taught as rhetoric, broadens the scope of rhetoricality. Transcendent knowledge can never look the same.

Second, as critical pedagogies should, a rhetorical pedagogy that begins with classical stasis theory asks students for new intellectual work. In my experience, many students try hard not to read materials with which they disagree. It often takes up to three drafts for them to collect the opposing points of view necessary for the most basic exploratory paper and to report on them with any degree of accuracy. In the process, they find that beliefs they have taken for granted do not look so obvious to everyone.

Third, the onus for unsettling students' convictions shifts from the teacher to the recalcitrant “facts.” One student who came to class firmly convinced that Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray's *The Bell Curve* was valid found by semester's end that she could not make a supported argument in favor of her belief. She could not bring herself to argue for the opposite point of view, but she recognized the limitations of her own knowledge. Her only reproach for me was that I had not designed the assignment to help her out of her dilemma. Finally, this approach relieves the teacher's rhetorical burden. The confrontational model, even in its most benign formulations, requires that teachers be expert debaters, quick on their feet and fully armed with data on an infinite number of topics. Such demands devalue and even deprive us of many devoted teachers whose interactional styles may be less aggressive.

A cogent challenge might be that I am undercutting my own brief for persuasion by trusting too much in facts to speak the self-evident truth for me. This need not be true if the nature of fact itself becomes part of the course. I have students read brief selections from a small sociology textbook, Jeffrey Katzer, Kenneth Cook, and Wayne Crouch's *Evaluating Information*. This book teaches that even in science, self-evidence is always suspect and certainty doesn't exist. One useful assignment has asked stu-

dents to locate apparently contradictory factual arguments and then investigate the source of the contradiction. They often find that their analysis leads them to issues of definition. For example, whether particular facts support your claim that American society promotes equality depends on what you mean by equality. I try to exploit this shift to definition, the second neglected move in the persuasive process. Especially useful here are assignments that ask students to explore the rhetorical concept of the commonplace. Locating the same commonplace in opposing arguments and then discussing how different rhetors employ it may not convince students that one definition is better than another, but it certainly opens their eyes to what terms like "contested meaning" imply.

My sense that we often gloss over these fundamental processes through which we might create identification leads me to a final question: with whom, exactly, do radical scholars really want to identify?

In 1935, Burke believed his colleagues when they said they wanted to convert the world. He gave them practical advice for moving beyond their counterproductive practice of preaching to each other and for going out into the world to tackle the unconvinced ("Symbolism" 271). But what if the rhetoric of the particular Marxists Burke lectured was not, in fact, manufactured for outsiders? Similarly, what if the real solidarity that appeals to activist teachers is not that solidarity we might achieve with our students, but rather the unity and satisfaction we find in our radical stance?

I do not question the validity of committed radical positions, but I respect their dangers. Richard Sennett sees the kind of insular rhetoric produced by fervent believers in political causes as an example of what he calls a "politics of personality" (281). For Sennett, as politics becomes personalized, rhetorical and emotional energy shifts away from concern with intergroup social and political relations to a focus on political positions as badges of personal worth. Solidarity within the group becomes more important than the relationship of the group to the outer world. Sennett warns that when this happens, group assumptions and rhetorics cease to be examined and developed. Rather, adherence to group dogma becomes a personal test. Groups devote themselves to discovering and pillorying heretics, those who do not measure up to the group's rigid code (305–12). Sennett would not be surprised at what happens when Adam Katz decrees that Gerald Graff's centrist appeals prove that he is not an insider in the activist camp but a traitor who must be banished. At this juncture, the students drop out of the essay; it becomes a personalized, even *ad hominem*, standoff between the two principles whose virtue is on trial.

The activist ideal can only be thwarted by this failure to differentiate between identification with each other and with the putative focus of our efforts, our students. If we really want to accept our rhetorical responsibility

in our ongoing persuasive encounters with students, we must be open to all manner of rhetorical tools. Where moral purity requires us to reject our students' cultural allegiances summarily, persuasion and identification ask us, instead, to inspect them carefully, to ask why they attract so powerfully and what they really entail. As Burke says, we are obliged to "use their vocabulary, their values, their symbols," as much as we can ("Symbolism" 272). But for all its unsettling challenges, rhetoric can also offer us some reassurance: finding ways to make our rhetorical interactions with our students truly conjoint efforts allows us both to honor our democratic values while actively and effectively furthering our democratic dreams.

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