

I would define globalization as the freedom for my group to invest wherever it likes, for as long as it likes, to produce whatever it likes, buying and selling wherever it likes, and having to bear the fewest possible constraints as regards labor laws and social convention.

—PERCY BARNEVİK, former CEO of ABB

An unidentified reporter then queried the Secretary as to whether this plan could fairly be translated as take down the trees, tear-up the earth, evacuate the urban poor, and let the people hang, generally speaking.

—JUNE JORDAN, "Poem Towards a Final Solution"

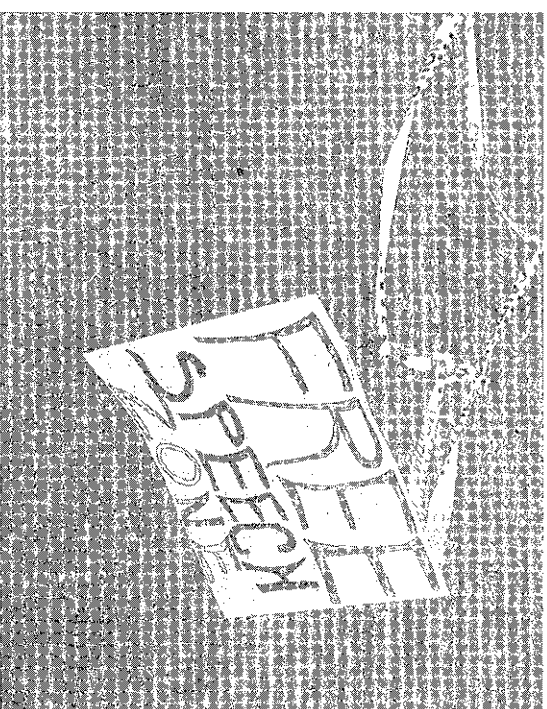
The main targets for neoliberal ire are the fragments of democracy and collective solidarity that exist within the state and whose existence the state guarantees. These fragments of democracy and collective solidarity stem from a mix of social gains secured through tremendous struggle by the oppressed and concessions made by the rulers to maintain social peace. We must protect these fragments of democracy and solidarity.

—ERIC TOUSSAINT,

Your Money or Your Life: The Tyranny of Global Finance

Living Room

Teaching Public Writing in a Privatized World



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Notes

1. Production, injury, death, and wage rates are all quoted in Georgakas and Surkin 1998, 85–89.
2. Carter's lyrics are quoted in *Detroit: I Do Mind Dying* (Georgakas and Surkin 1998, 107–108), as well as featured in the documentary about Black autoworkers' struggles against exploitation and oppression in *Finally Got the News* (1970). Publisher unknown, "Please Mr. Foreman" was originally released as an independent label 45 rpm in 1968 and later appeared on *Work's Many Voices*, Volume II (released in 1984 by the John Edwards Memorial Forum and distributed by Down Home Music/Arhoolie Records).

4

Making Space

*You can't drink the water
of the lake
you must drive somewhere else to buy
bottles of water to drink*

—JUNE JORDAN (1985)

Arresting Moments

Before the end of my Spring 2003 women's studies seminar, I asked students how they would create audiences for their final projects. Having spent our semester studying contemporary women rhetors such as Amira Hass and Arundhati Roy as well as attending campus forums on the pending assault against Iraq, we knew that exercising our public voices could be heady, daunting, and consequential. One student reported that when she'd raised questions at home about the U.S. government's aims in Iraq, her mother had angrily replied, "If that's how you feel, you're not welcome in this house." Another student wondered how she could counter sexist posters that had popped up in the campus library. A third student, working on a comic book for teen AIDS/HIV activists, wrestled with how to represent the "face" of AIDS without racial, sexual, and class stereotyping. I brought out several T-shirts my husband and I had spent the weekend making. One showed a map of Iraq, its major cities replaced by corporations (Figure 4-1). Across the map in large bold print was the word (NEO)LIBERATED. Students in the seminar evaluated this example of "visual communication" (George 2002), debating whether

“neoliberalized” clarified or—too much an academic insider’s term—obscured the shirt’s antiwar argument.

It was about this time that Katie came through the door, breathless, apologetic, and holding a stack of what she described as June Jordan-styled “found” poems about her semester’s major concerns—the buildup to the invasion of Iraq; the bulldozing death of Palestinian solidarity activist Rachel Corrie; the challenge of forming a position on such controversies amid conflicting reports and limited information—and her first attempts at asserting and arguing a stance, at informing and persuading an audience beyond herself and a handful of friends. One poem, titled “Action Alert: Bush Agenda” (Figure 4-2), was composed as a ransom note with jagged, multicolored words cut from magazines and pasted crazily across the page. Katie explained that she might perform these poems in a city poetry slam or put them on posters designed to look like meeting announcements. She looked at my T-shirts with interest.

“Something like that,” she said. “I want these poems to be *out there*, not just in a chapbook where my friends will read them and say, ‘Oh, Katie wrote a poem. Isn’t that nice.’”

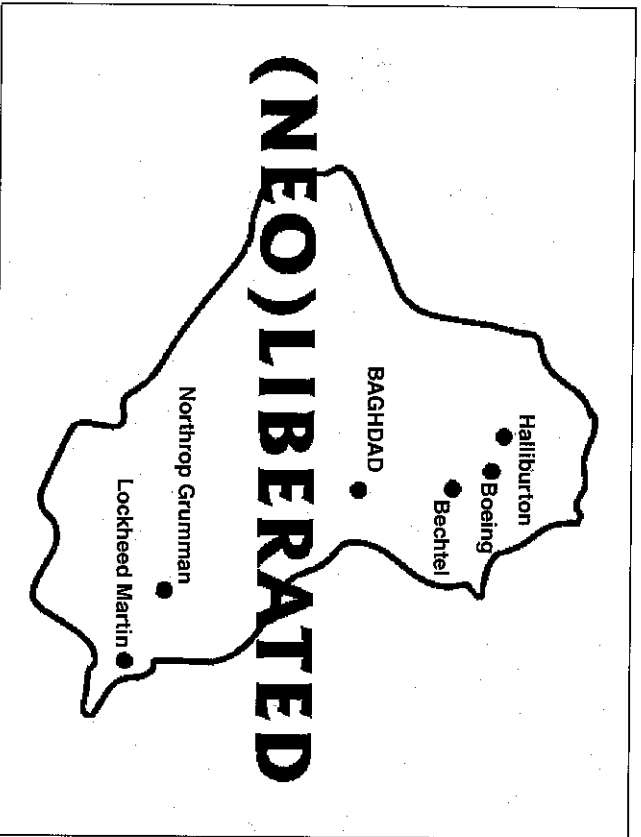


Figure 4-1

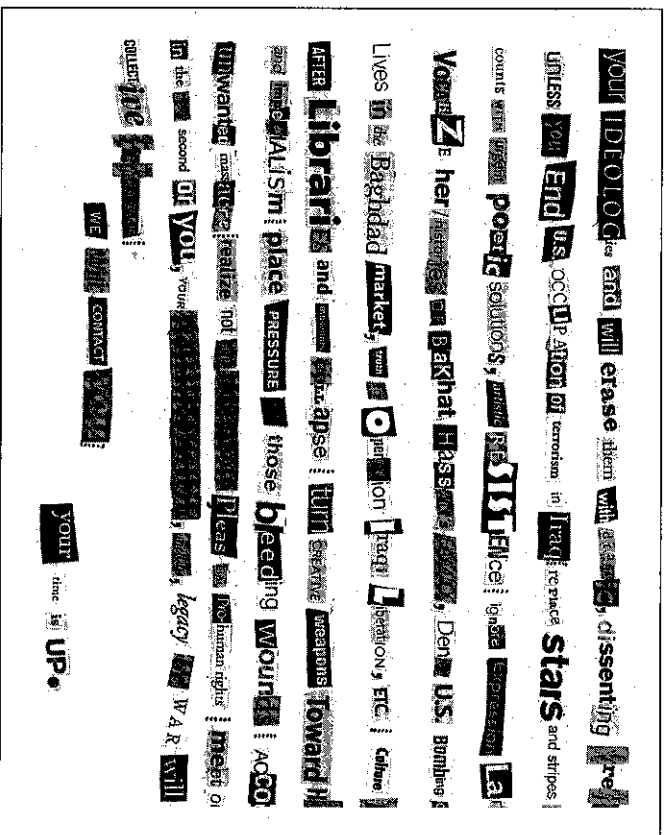


Figure 4-2.

The Supreme Court’s “public forum doctrine” defines three forms of public space: (1) public streets and parks regulated by the “content-neutral” concerns of time, place, and manner; (2) dedicated forums such as federal plazas and state university greens that may further restrict time, place and manner but not, theoretically, content; and (3) other public property such as military bases, hospitals, and public schools where content (though this is an area of contention in Supreme Court decisions) as well as form may be more fully regulated.

The next morning when I checked my email, I found this message from Katie, sent late the night before:

I finished my ransom poem, made color copies, and then posted them around downtown tonight. However, I was stupid enough to post blatantly on a metal utility box on the corner of Main St. and S. Winoski, and a cop drove by and saw my friend (my not-so-trusty accomplice) and me walking away. I started to pick up my pace, since I knew he would quickly pull us over.... Yep, he got us.

Katie described sitting in the cruiser’s backseat while the cop demanded her school and permanent addresses,

Content can land one in jail if it's deemed to have "the effect of force" (Schenck 1919, 51). "The most stringent protection of free speech," wrote Oliver Wendell Holmes in the Supreme Court's unanimous decision to uphold the espionage conviction of Socialist Party official Charles Schenck, "would not protect a man in falsely shouting fire in a theater" (52). Schenck, of course, had not actually shouted "Fire!" but had distributed leaflets urging resistance to the World War I draft.

then warned that next time she would receive a \$50 ticket for each poster hung in a "nondesignated area." Both thrilling and alarming to Katie, he also read the poem, or a portion of it because its opening and closing lines were left behind when he tore it from the utility box. "Why did you write this?" Katie reported he wanted to know. "What do you mean by putting this up?"

Though in the end Katie was released and though her email to me concluded with a breezy, "I plan to do more tomorrow . . . I'll keep you posted (pun intended)," my heart continued to pound. This

run-in with the local police was the unanticipated result of an assignment I had given. Did I know Katie's rights in such a situation? Could she, for instance, have refused to get into the cruiser? Was she required to give this cop her permanent address? Although postmodernism might train us to look askance at "rights discourse" as a sign of vestigial liberal humanism, the question of whether we have First and Fourth Amendment protections, especially in our increasingly privatized, "quality-of-life"-zoned downtowns, is far from passé. And what if this cop had seen the left-behind opening and closing lines to Katie's poem? These lines specifically addressed the president of the United States and ended with the warning—or was it a threat?: "We will contact you/Your time is up." Weeks before, a local rap artist had been visited by FBI agents who interpreted lyrics on his locally produced CD as threatening the president's life. What constitutes a threat? Had Katie's poem crossed a line? If yes, what would it mean for her to revise it, to post only in designated areas? Or, conversely, what would it mean for her to make a calculated decision to challenge the designations? Given that my class had not prepared her to make a calculated decision, what would such preparation look like?

This chapter chronicles my efforts, albeit not always successful and complete, to learn the history and name the tools that students in a public writing classroom need not only to imagine and build rhetorical space but also to anticipate and think through the discursive *and* extra-discursive obstacles they'll face in attempting to do so. By focusing on the

The first federal court rulings on speech and assembly held that the argumentative forms working-class and oppressed groups have developed and relied on—leafleting, soapboxing, pickets—inevitably led to violence. Initially courts refused to grant these forms and forums any protections. One judge ruled that there can be "no such thing as peaceful picketing any more than there can be chase vulgarly" (Atchison 1905, 584). Later courts sought a workable language of control (Mitchell 2003, 70), making a distinction between (protected) speech and (unprotected) conduct.

"extracurricular" rhetoric that takes shape around kitchen tables and in rented rooms (Gere 1994)—also in city streets and public parks, on picket lines and graffitied walls—I want to add to the growing body of work that could reorient us from regarding rhetoric as a specialized *techné*, to understanding and teaching rhetoric as a *mass, popular art*. Here rhetoric is redefined from the property of a small economic and political elite to the public practice of ordinary people, who make up the country's multi-ethnic, working-class majority in their press for relief, reform, and radical change.

I also want to address two interrelated silences in our current literature on public writing and public-sphere theory. First is the silence regarding the steady conversion of public spaces and resources into private, for-profit property. Such privatization has been the chief legacy of well over twenty years of neoliberal economic policy—"capitalism with the gloves off" (McLaren and Farahmandpour 2002, 37)—that has only intensified under the guise of reinforcing "national security." Under the thrall of postmodernists who would teach us to see horizontal and scattered pockets of domination and resistance, academics are in danger of missing (or through our silence colluding with) the all-too-real consolidation and application of state-backed corporate power that has been the chief legacy of our new world order. That's why I find it hopeful and heartening that so many compositionists are directing their attention toward working with students on public writing out of a belief that such writing can *matter* in tangible ways. But at a moment when—from the malling of suburbia to the vertical integration of radio, television, cable, film, music, and print outlets into a few media monopolies—we face dramatically shrinking material and virtual space, we must also examine the twentieth-century's contradictory legacy: On one side, the free-speech battles and subsequent Supreme Court decisions that have *liberalized* our speech and assembly rights; on the other, the economic and social policies known as *neoliberalism* that have greatly reduced the locations in which we are able to exercise these rights. It's neoliberalism's dramatic encroachments upon

Virtual reality is not a sufficient counter to or substitute for increasingly privatized and regulated geographic space. Although information technologies and the virtual communities they create played organizing roles in such historic events as the

student takeover of Tiananmen Square in 1989 and the global demonstrations against a U.S. assault on Iraq in 2003, it was the physical taking of Tiananmen Square that made possible its transformation into a space representing democracy (Mitchell 2003, 148). And it was to prevent such a transformation that New York City cops herded thousands of frustrated antiwar protesters onto pens on February 15, 2003, far from the rally they'd traveled many hundreds of miles to attend.

voice, visibility, and movement that lead me to sum up our current moment in the United States particularly, as "privatized," (though this is a term we must also join much of the rest of the world in disputing, understanding that publicity rights have never been a given and have only been won through struggle).

Here, intervening in a second silence becomes crucial: the silence surrounding the rich history of in-the-street working-class rhetorical action against both the interests of capital and the state forces in place to protect capitalist interests. Neoliberalism—intent not only on privatizing public space (such as downtowns), services (such as education), and resources (such as electricity) but also on reprivatizing (as an individual boss's prerogative) hard-won environmental protections and labor rights—can appear to us as a backlash against the Keynesian welfare state. But we can also see it as a return to pre-New Deal arrangements between bosses

and workers, as the return of the (limited) welfare state to its former status of watchtower state, charged with preserving and protecting the interests of a propertied minority. It's here that we most need to recover working-class rhetorical memory. Because if we can resist the common academic assertion that we live today in a radically distinct postmodern, postindustrial society, we can return to capitalism's long history for examples not only of brutal assaults on the rights and needs of workers but also of the creative and persistent ways in which ordinary people have organized to claim living room. As we face heavily regulated, restricted-access publics, we need this history to give us clues about working with others to create rhetorical space while anticipating the resistance that comes—as Katie found—from even the slightest challenge.

Class Actions

"Involving students in 'public writing' is fraught with headaches of all sorts," acknowledges Christian Weisser (2002) at the start of *Moving*

Today's celebrated urban planners eschew the reformism of a Frederick Law Olmstead, who designed New York's Central Park to teach "courtesy, self-control, and temperance" to the urban working class (Davis 1992, 156). Instead, they restrict and discourage public use through postmodern architecture, electronic surveillance, and physical as well as zoned barriers. In the neoliberalized American city, quasi-free market economic policies join with an architect's ingenuity and the firm hand of the state to keep immiserated populations in order and (when not on the job as low-wage service workers) out of sight.

What's important here, however, is Wells's crucial emphasis on the need for teachers who want to imagine public forums for their students to "build, or take part in building such a public sphere" (1996, 326, my emphasis).

This is headachy, heart-pounding work, to be sure, especially because this building takes place under the conditions of neoliberal privatization, supported by a rhetoric of protective restriction and surveillance. The rhetoric—and reality—of restriction and surveillance (not only of the general population but also of university classrooms where students are presumed to require "protection" from professors' "liberal bias") has indeed been stepped up since September 11, 2001. However, urban historian Mike Davis (1992, 1998) and cultural geographer Don Mitchell

Beyond Academic Discourse: Composition Studies and the Public Sphere (xi). Even the initial task of helping students identify forums beyond the ubiquitous "letter to the editor" assignment is greatly complicated by the fact that forums don't simply exist; they must be created. As Susan Wells (1996) explains, "Our public sphere is attenuated, fragmented, and colonized; so is everyone else's. All speakers and writers who aspire to intervene in society face the task of constructing a responsive public" (328–9). Later in this chapter I'll return to the formulation that all speakers face a similar task in constructing a public because the difficulties and stakes of public-sphere building are very much a matter of one's gender, sexuality, income, race, and immigration status, and also because one's potential means, strategies, and power in public-sphere building can be even more particularly a matter of one's class location.

Strolling through a festive

outdoor mall, such as the

privately managed Church Street

Marketplace in Burlington,

Vermont, may give us the sense of

being in public, experiencing the

variety of people and perspectives

that is the hallmark of city life

(Young 1990, 119). But notice

who is absent (or banned) from

such a space. Next, try this: Drive

(or test the public transportation)

to the outlying "Banbanians"

(Davis 1998, 393) from which

an upscale market draws its low-

wage labor force.

(2003) point out that it's over the past thirty years that our parks, plazas, shopping malls, and downtown sidewalks have been locked down against the homeless, drug dealers, peddlers, and a student such as Katie seeking, without a permit, to exercise her political voice. The renewed interest among compositionists in public writing thus comes at a moment when the promotion of public rhetoric is most urgent and also most difficult (or at least more difficult than at any point since the McCarthy period). Yet it's also because of the difficulty of going public that public writing advocates underscore remarkable rewards: the reward of "animated, engaged, and at times feverishly pitched discussions about the ways that students use their discursive talents to make voices heard" (Weisser 2002, xi); the reward of student projects leading to substantive action beyond the classroom, action that in turn reinvigorates a teacher's belief that one really can "teach for change" (Pough 2002, 484).

There's also rewarding learning that takes place when we and our students consider the myriad ways in which our attempts to make voices heard are foiled. Such discussions can lead students and teachers to reflect on ingrained lessons about who is and isn't authorized to speak on a topic. For instance, one of Katie's classmates, Jayme, explained to the class that she is pursuing a biology degree to gain the scientific credentials

Creating a public sphere often involves getting not only physical but also disorderly by acting against physical barricades and enforceable laws designed to limit how many gather and what is said. Yet it's only speech not embodied actions that is protected by the First Amendment. (Mitchell 2003, 54)

her parents had lacked when they tried to defend their small farm against the development of a neighboring slate quarry. Discussion can also highlight the pitfalls of arguing with intimate audiences. Another classmate, Cassie, described feeling demoralized when her boyfriend and his roommates laughed off her objections to *The Man Show*. Class discussion also needs to focus—as my women's studies seminar failed to do—on the policed boundary between permitted and prohibited acts of speech and protest. A third classmate faced possible academic sanctions for her decision to go public by hoisting an antiwar flag on the campus green without first applying for a permit and also without seeking permission to remove the American flag that had been flying there. I'm not recommending that we encourage students to risk penalties for their words. Rather, as I reflect on these stories from that semester, I'm disturbed by how frequently students felt (in a class drawing out no specific lessons to the contrary) that going public means going it alone. It's much easier, after all, for a university

As "The World Says No to War" rally, I stand at a barricade reinforced by 25 armed policemen. Hundreds of these barricades have been set up to prevent some 500,000 peaceful demonstrators from reaching the rally site. I don't stand alone but with an organized group, 500 strong. First we chant: "The whole world is watching and they're on our side!" Then we chant and push: "Whose streets? Our streets!" The cops know they've lost. The barricade topples, they stand aside and we march unobstructed to the rally.

giving a new application to Marx's aphorism, we rarely do so in conditions of our own choosing (35). Hence images of antiwar protesting down lines of cops in riot gear. Hence a twenty-one-year-old college student facing four recalcitrant young men as she argues that *Man Show* brings into their private living room the public problem of sexism and misogyny.

At the end of her influential essay on teaching public writing, Wells (1996) speculates about the texts that might be composed in classes where students not only study public rhetoric but also practice it in ways useful to their lives. "Some of our students' most useful writing might remind us of a zine; some might sound like a church bulletin. My guess, though, is that it won't sound much like E. B. White" (340). In addition to the form and tone such writings might take, Katie and her classmates prompt me to speculate with Wells about what the *delivery* of such writing needs to look like. A discussion with students about delivery might include naming the varying goals of a public

When contract negotiation stalled and our faculty voted to launch a public campaign, several members counseled us to stick to "we do best"—making arguments supported by speakers-for-themselves evidence we created careful chaos: press conferences, Web press, didn't show, some the okay to hold an ed bake sale featuring as Rice Knives Temp. by the dozen?) and Vá Cupcakes ("Now 40 p more!").

administration to sanction one student her speech than to sanction one hundred. What these moments from semester also tell me is that *their* space—that is, public space with potential to operate as a persuasive public sphere—is created not through intentional civic planning or through application of a few sound and reasonable rhetorical rules of conduct. Ordinary people *make* rhetorical space through a concerted, often protracted struggle for visibility, voice, and impact against powerful interests that seek to render them invisible. People *take* and *make* in acts that are simultaneously verbal and physical. But notes Don Mitchell (2005, 100), "The public sphere is not a

argument, including the potential goal of deepening one's commitment to a position *even if* an immediate audience (such as Cassie's boyfriend and his friends) isn't likely, in that moment, to be swayed. A discussion about delivery might also include a definition of "culture jamming" and other anarchist-individualist practices of direct action that shaped Katie's after-dark, dressed-in-black forays downtown. Here we should consider the recent history behind this figure of the lone artistic revolutionary: the post-May 1968 disillusionment that led the "situationists" (and academics such as Michel Foucault and Theodore Adorno) to focus on autonomous culture workers—not a united working class with the potential to halt, and transform, a society's production, transportation, and services—as the locus of change. Important too are seemingly procedural topics such as whether to seek a permit for a public-space performance. As students and teachers ponder in the fullest way possible the rhetorical canon of delivery, there might even be (as one student suggested at the end of the women's studies seminar) training in civil disobedience or at the very least a guest lecturer from the ACLU.

In imagining such a classroom, I find myself very far not only from "On a Florida Key"—where E. B. White (1982/1941) gently rejected arguments for intervening in Jim Crow because desegregation would, in his mellow middle-class vacationer's view, come about in its own

The Balance the Budget. Bake Sale brought favorable top-story coverage on the 6 a clock news and endorsements from student groups. It also brought expressions of concern from colleagues who worried about his 'snooping to theatrics' and mentioning money.

good time—but also from the academic conference or debate, our usual stand-ins for the idea of public rhetoric. Instead, when I bring to class a newspaper put out by migrant workers organizing for labor and civil rights or when a student asks about a bumper-sticker slogan—the battle, for instance, between the anti-civil unions *Take Back Vermont* and the pro-civil unions *Take Vermont Forward*—I find myself much closer to the *actual* rhetorical struggles surrounding me and my students. However, by extending the common understanding of public rhetoric to include examples of "rhetoric from below,"¹ I'm not simply creating a more inclusive sense of what constitutes rhetorical action. We don't just add such argumentative forms to the usual examples of "rhetoric from above" such as a presidential address or newspaper editorials. What we do instead is create palpable tension between *individual* and *mass*, *legislative* and *extra-legislative*, *ruling-class* and *working-class* argumentative forums and forms.

Labor economist Michael Zweig (2001) estimates that 62 percent of the U.S. adult population are in the working class, with limited control over the nature and pace of their work. Although Zweig excludes (as I would not) nurses, social workers, and teachers from his definition of working class, considering these as middle-class professions defined by 'autonomy and independence' he stresses that many of these jobholders have experienced the progressive despoiling of their once professional occupations in recent decades, with their work process increasingly dictated by authority from above' (xii).

one's work but defined instead (in a selective appropriation of the work of Pierre Bourdieu) by a supposed set of habits and tastes. Then comes the argument for or against a mission of "embourgeoisement" (O'Dair 2003)—for or against assimilation into the *presumed* middle-class social majority that writing instruction and its instructors are assumed together to represent.

Left out of formulations of composition as an inherently "middle-class enterprise" (Bloom 1996) is an acknowledgment of the actual material conditions of most composition instructors: Most—including, increasingly, those of us on the tenure track—are vulnerable to top-down increases in workload and reduction in benefits. A similar future of production speedups, compensation cutbacks, and job/social insecurity await the majority of our students. This is a point I try to dramatize throughout this book—the difference it can make for us and for our students when we approach class as determined not by income or lifestyle but by one's *available means* for safeguarding terms and conditions of work, one's *available means* for influencing public policy and for fighting exploitation and oppression. Here, however, my point is primarily historical: When class is dropped out of public-sphere theories and histories, what also gets dropped out is the past century's major battles for public space and public speech. Even more, we miss that what was

Radical labor and women's histories don't proceed along separate tracks: Angered at being barred from the 1932 Flint, Mich., sit-downs, women organized speakers' bureaus, carried billboards and, forming a 350-strong Women's Auxiliary Brigade to battle the police, also carried baseball bats (Brecher 1997, 216–17). Brigade cofounder Genora (Johnston) Dollinger later reflected, "The woman that had participated actively became a different type of woman. They carried themselves with a different walk, their heads were high, and they had confidence in themselves" (Zinn and Artzner 2004, 349). Thus women's (pullout) and bat-wielding) rhetorical practices were central to the strike, and the strike was central to creating new spaces and attitudes for women's rhetoric.

at stake in these battles—from Seattle in 1919 to Seattle in 1999—was the ability of a whole class of people to stand up as public selves at all.

Prior to World War I, in fact, the Supreme Court declined to hear any First Amendment cases. These cases, as Don Mitchell (2003, Chapter 2 *passim*) explains, were left to lower court judges who routinely ruled that workers are the property of their employers, property whose behavior employers have the right to control, including with police force. Additionally, Mitchell explains, lower courts ruled that—perhaps especially because the majority of urban workers were first-generation immigrants, bringing with them not only the languages and customs but also the radical traditions of their former homes—workers are by definition irrational and thus outside civil society. Subsequent Supreme Court minority and majority opinions—such as Oliver Wendell Holmes' oft-cited assertion that "the ultimate good desired is better reached by

free trade in ideas" (Abrams 1919, 630) or William S. Brennan's defense of a "marketplace" for ideas (CBS v. DNC 1973, 193)—have had important liberalizing effects. They've also set, as Mitchell (2003) points out, the decidedly conservative and commercial cornerstones of our dominant assumptions about the proper (or improper) exercise of free speech and the appropriate (or inappropriate) use of public space. Moreover, these rulings have sought to define those times of "clear and present danger" (Schenck 1919, 52) that make permissible a government's intervention in the content of speech. Indeed, the Supreme Court's first three free-speech decisions, all handed down in 1919, upheld rather than overturned the espionage convictions of antiwar socialists—including, most famously, Eugene Debs (1918), who was accused of "obstructing the war" for suggesting in a speech that draft resistance is a right rather than a crime. Subsequent First Amendment decisions, argues Mitchell (2003), need to be read for the ways in which they not only liberalize interpretations

On summer Saturdays Burlington's City Hall Park welcomes licensed vendors to its farmers' market but bars the "marketing of ideas" by any individuals and groups looking for public exchange and debate. Even the park's perimeter is off-limits, as members of a migrant workers' rights group found when police halted them from gathering petition signatures just outside the park. Market organizers, police explained, have paid for not only the park but the atmosphere that surrounds it.

of speech and assembly but also remain concerned with controls and limits. This is especially the case wherever the free exchange and exercise of ideas by one class of people—from an antiwar soapbox speech to a factory sit-down—interferes with the freedom of another class to obtain and safeguard raw materials, labor, markets, or even (in the case of a festival marketplace or touristy farmers' market) atmosphere.

Or to put it another way, the twentieth century's major First Amendment findings have liberalized speech in both meanings of the word. They have, in the tradition of democratic liberalism, codified an expansion, a liberalization, of a sphere of personal liberty for thought, association, assembly, and expression. They have also, in the tradition of economic liberalism, reinforced the role of the state in securing and enforcing the rights of capital. The past one hundred years' street battles for speech and assembly rights were thus battles not only *against* capitalist property rights and privileges but also *against* the prior decisions made by court justices and other super-empowered officials who aimed to uphold those rights or at least dampen challenges. For instance, it was in defiance of state-sanctioned and state-enforced Jim Crow segregation that Black and white port workers united for the New Orleans general strikes of 1892 and 1907. It was in defiance of the anti-picketing ordinances sanctioned by the Taft Court (*American Steel Foundries* 1921) and also in defiance of the mass deportations of immigrant radicals (in a vicious decade-long pogrom culminating in the executions of Italian anarchists Sacco and Vanzetti) that New York City garment workers and Colorado coal miners struck in 1927. The tactic of the sit-down (first used in the United States in 1906 by 3,000

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This story, from a CNN alum illustrates the contest between liberalism as a sphere of personal liberty to speak and act as one sees right and fit and liberalism as private economic rights off-limits from public interference. During a grocery store staff meeting, when the former student asked why a disabled coworker was being paid less than others doing similar work, his manager formally sanctioned him for violating the store's policy against discussing individuals' wages.

There's a punch line to the UVM student's story of being reprimanded for raising publicly the issue of wages. Following that meeting, the store's workers met on their own and soon after voted to unionize—voted that is, to make wages not an individual, private matter, but one that must be publicly discussed and collectively negotiated.

defiant history, a rhetorical history from those presumed to lack social and linguistic power, that can tell us how ordinary people are able to assert their own unified power against the alliance of capital and state. It's a history that can tell us too how in doing so, significant numbers of U.S. workers have historically defied not only bosses, governors, and National Guards but also the racism, sexism, homophobia, xenophobia, and able-ism that otherwise divide workers, block collective action, and thus benefit by far and away not the (usually posited as white and male) working class but the (primarily but not exclusively white and male) U.S. ruling class.

There is much to draw on for writing classes from the archives of U.S. labor and civil rights struggles: the well-known and lesser-known speeches, op-eds, and letters gathered in anthologies such as Zinn and Arnove's *Voices of a People's History of the United States* (2004); the frequently anonymous handbills, posters, comics, song lyrics, and graffiti that Cary Nelson gathers in the opening chapter of *Revolutionary Memory* (2003); and the visual arguments of agitprop muralists such as Mike Alewitz (Buhle and Alewitz 2002) and worker-artist-filmmakers such as the members of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers (Finally Got

IWW workers at a Schenectady, New York, General Electric plant) itself developed in defiance of—not to mention self-defense against—city police, state militias, and federal troops who over the previous 20 years nationwide had killed some 200 striking workers and injured 2,000 more (Lens 1973, 111; Smith 2006, 4, 82). The sit-down strikers correctly reasoned that employers would be wary about sending troops into plants where equipment might be harmed. This is the unruly and

President Bill Clinton's 1999 national address on health care reform is an excellent example of rhetoric from above that needs to be examined with its class location—and behind-the-scenes interests—in mind. While Susan Wells (1996) reads that address as an example of how even a powerfully sanctioned rhetoric can fail in his search for a responsive public, health policy critics argue the opposite: Clinton's address was calculated to hide from public view the private interests, including the insurance industry, that had already set the "managed care"/"managed competition" agenda for the 1990s. (See Marmor 1994; Navarro 1994; and Himmelstein and Woolhandler 2001.)

the *News* 1970). These archives offer lessons in "rhetoric from below" to read side by side and, importantly, in tension and contrast with the many examples of "rhetoric from above" that are a writing class's standard fare. For example, Minneapolis coal truck drivers, in their fight to union during the cold Depression winter of 1934, had to fight against not only the police and National Guard but also the owner-controlled newspaper. To keep their scattered ranks organized against both bull and antistriker news headlines, the truckers started the nation's first day strike newspaper (Dobbs 1972, 112). What a reading of the *Minneapolis Tribune* side by side and in tension with *The Organizer* can reveal is how much the available means for "constructing a responsive public" (Wells 329) are a matter of class and also how much the question of appropriate tone is a matter of context and high-stakes debate.

A useful pedagogical strategy can be to pair a text already familiar to students with the other text or texts it was originally in conversation or debate with. For instance, we might pair the now canonized "I Have a Dream" speech delivered by Martin Luther King, Jr., at the August 1963, march on Washington with New York *Times* editorials and front-section news stories warning that the planned march "could cost rights votes" ("Negro Rally Seen as Threat to Rights Bill" 1963) and counseling against the "wrong method" of any civil rights action that could "block access and physically interfere with the passage of others" ("Right Goal; Wrong Method" 1963). To add a further layer of rhetorical complexity, we might include the original speech that SNCC activist John Lewis (1963) was to have read at the Lincoln Memorial that day, before being persuaded by the more conservative King to temper his call for Blacks to "burn Jim Crow to the ground—nonviolently." We might also consider not only the differences between the rhetorical approaches and methods of King and Lewis in 1963 but also their similarities by 1967, the year King delivered his incendiary "Beyond Vietnam." Or, to tease out what the New

From below arguments can also shake up abstract pie about "bridge-building" a "mediation," helping them to consider instead the var "between/against/for" no necessitated by particular struggles. Bridge-building between labor and civil rights activists carried the sit-down to Montgomery, while used to fight against Jim (and) for Black civil rights (1997). Similarly, the League Revolutionary Black Workers a bridge between the radical ideas of the Black Power Movement and the main the radical labor, enabling to defend themselves against concessionary bridge that officials had formed with industry heads (Georgakopoulos 1998).

When members of the migrant workers' rights group and I met with the deputy police chief about the apparent ban on petitioning at the farmers' market, he observed that his own family's dairy farm could not operate without (primarily undocumented and with few public rights) Mexican workers. Then he explained that while our petition didn't violate the city's ordinance against "aggressive solicitation" we should consider that raising such a controversial issue in public can provoke an aggressive response. Hence the interference of market organizers and police. They were only concerned, the deputy chief claimed, about our safety.

such strategies are disorderly and uncivil: as the Taft Court put it, "inconsistent with peaceable persuasion" (*American Steel Foundries* 1921, 205) or, as the *New York Times* opined, "the wrong way to achieve equal employment opportunity" ("Right Goal; Wrong Method" 1963). If today's students readily agree that civil rights protestors had employed necessary means, we might also ask them to examine more recent tests of speech and civility. For instance, when James Watts—Ronald Reagan's secretary of the interior, reviled for overseeing the mass transfer of federal lands to private development—attempted to give an address at the University of Vermont, an audience member fired up a chain saw. Similarly, at a 1998 televised "town meeting" in Columbus, Ohio, the audience heckled and jeered as Secretary of State Madeleine Albright made the Clinton case for an invasion of Iraq ("U.S. Policy" 1998).

By chanting "One-two-three-four, we don't want your racist war," that audience was indeed uncivil and disorderly, keeping Albright from delivering a clear argument for regime change. Watts was likewise prevented—as chain saw and audience roared—from making his case for a fully privatized and developed West. One can imagine a somber newspaper editorial admonishing both audiences, "Wrong method!" for their illiberal reaction against both speakers. Yet, if we consider that

York Times chose to overlook when it editorialized against a group of African Americans for blocking access to a racist employment office, a class might consider Anne Moody's (1968) painfully vivid depiction of a Woolworth's lunch-counter sit-in and the physical interference faced by Black students when they sought access to "whites only" counter service.

When we introduce class location and the challenges of rhetorical situation to our discussions of public-sphere creation and a rhetor's performance, we make it possible for our students to consider not only the need for striking workers and civil rights-era activists to engage in such tactics as takeovers and sit-ins. We also facilitate critical assessment of the view—from store owners, newspaper publishers, politicians, and judges—that

Watts answered the charge he was robbing future generations of their public heritage by declaring, "I don't know how many future generations we can count on until the Lord returns" (Balmer 2004, 723). Such affinity between the neoliberal and Christian Right agendas can lead to the faulty conclusion that the Christian Right drives U.S. economic and military policy. However, George W. Bush's warrants for invading Iraq included not only a crusader's belief in God's plan (Kaplan 2004, 9) but also the regime-change authorization promoted and signed into law by President Bill Clinton.

Liberalizing speech and assembly rights means *expanding* whose voices and views can be heard, it was *through* the chainsaw that the audience member brought into full public view the Reagan administration's behind-the-scenes deal making; and it was *through* the chainsaw that he created, for a few minutes, a space for an outraged public response. The unruly Albright audience achieved even more than a slender moment in which to speak truth to power: The Clinton administration's failure to secure the expected heartland seal of approval for its planned ground invasion, a failure widely broadcast by the CNN cameras for which the town meeting had been created, effectively scuttled that administration's regime-change plans ("U.S. Policy" 1998).

If we set aside judgments of "civil" and "uncivil" or "liberal" and "illiberal," we can see that such events actually exemplify the chance encounters with new perspectives and conflicting views that Iris Young (1990) identifies as the hallmarks of the Greek agora and that are remarkably rare in today's scripted town meetings and policed farmers' markets. These moments of stepping out of bounds, in order to push wider the boundaries of public speech and debate, come to us from and can reconnect us with (if we can shake off the postmodern *ennui* regarding the simulacra of contemporary public life) a *contentious* history of rhetoric. And in this contentious history, the question of available means—banner-draped podium on the stage or chain saw from the floor? national newspaper op-ed page or embodied blockade of an employment office?—is also very much a question of class.

Arrested Development

Of course composition's histories of the public sphere have always been about class and class conflict. These include the ancient conflicts between aristocratic and emerging merchant classes that set the stage for ideological contest between Plato and the Sophists or Cicero's patrician construction of the ideal (oligarchic) orator at the height of power struggle between Rome's *optimates* and *populares*. The fabled Enlightenment

Most students of rhetoric learn of Plato's disdain for the Sophists. Some may learn of the materialist/idealism philosophical divide between, say, Anaxagoras (who held the materialist position that man developed intelligence because he had hands) and Aristotle (who countered with the idealist stance that man developed hands thanks to the intelligence granted him by the gods). Yet few students are ever introduced to the stakes for Athens' aristocracy in sidelining both materialist philosophy and its dissonant *logoi* method, which threatened to strip this commercial slave society's antidemocratic customs, institutions, and hierarchies of their "universally and necessarily" (Novack 1965, 186, 188; see also Berlin 1994; Markus Wood and Wood 1978; and, *Sic*, Croix 1981, 412-16).

few and opposition to encroaching democratization that would further undermine the position and privileges of Athens' aristocracy. Or when we suggest to students that the ideal rhetor is a *disinterested individual* guided by the rules of *rational discourse*, we carry forward the interests and fears of eighteenth-century revolutionaries turned now toward establishing their position as the new ruling class. In contemporary rhetorical studies, when we emphasize with Kenneth Burke and John Dewey the problems of communicative understanding among (socially conscious but not class-defined) individuals, we carry forward their fears that—as Dewey summed it up in his debate with Leon Trotsky in a 1938 issue of *The New Internationalist* (Trotsky, Dewey, and Novack 1969)—class struggle must inevitably end in Stalinism.

I don't mean to imply that we should not present to our students aristocratic, republican, and liberal conceptions of rhetorical practice—

and further examine with students the historically specific fears with which the "unruly mob" is regarded by Western rhetorical history leading figures from Cicero in 70 B.C.E. to Dewey in 1938. Patrician or middle-brow rhetorical values are deeply embedded in our profession in academic and political culture, and, crucially, in students' own idea of what it means to compose and deliver an argument. But our teaching should not overlook that these values are shaped within particular struggles and asserted against other values suggestive of a competitive political and economic order. As James Berlin (1994), paraphrasing Marx, points out, "[I]t is within rhetorics that humans become aware ideological battles and fight them out. . . . This is why there are always a given moment a plurality of rhetorics, even during the most repressive times" (117). When rhetorical textbooks and public writing classroom drop or downplay those ideological battles—including the plurality rhetorics they engendered and, especially, the stakes all around—wind up with a rhetorical history that is hagiographic (Aristotle wrote *The Book on Rhetoric*), impressionistic (*Rhetoric—high art or just a knack?*), or strictly academic and taxonomic, our own disciplinary ston on philosophy's and critical theory's dematerialized genealogy of ideology (*Sophists: the first postmodernists*). We wind up too with a field whose development is arrested, with aristocratic, bourgeois, and middle-class notions of public forums but little or no mention of soapboxing, flying pickets, the vernacular rhetorical arts that have historically and necessarily been deployed by those with no access to the sanctioned forums.

It's not simply a matter of oversight, this dropping of working-class rhetoric from our histories and readers. Our one-sided histories of rhetoric both arise from and persist through a central conundrum: How do we recognize the decidedly unquiet history of working-class contestation when its very unruliness appears to exclude it from our field of men (and occasionally women) standing at podiums or poised over paper? How do we learn from mass rhetorical arts when—if we've studied Cicero's rhetorical principles but not the historical context and political stakes shaping his political

We must also learn to recognize the particular strategies of class and oppressed groups employ if we're to apprehend more fully much of today's work-in-composition-and-literacy. Our field's studies working-class colleges (Gr 1999), small-town Wisconsin families (Brandt 2001b), hop communities (Richard and Lewis 1999), and inter-low-income African American families (Cushman 1998) be placed within—and should be defined as on the margins of—public spheres, defined competitors among elite) as private individuals, me a disinterested discussion public affairs.

conservatism—we view the crowd as ruled by frightening “impulses” that must necessarily be checked by the “the eloquence of one man” (Cicero 2001, 293)?

It is further not surprising that our textbooks and anthologies would most often present us with such a dematerialized, disembodied, and just-about-argument-free picture of rhetoric through the ages if we consider that our histories are also expressions of the contemporary society in which we write. And in contemporary U.S. society, actual rhetorical practice is constrained not only by neoliberal economic privatization, which eliminates the material spaces in which people without much economic means and political clout might meet and argue, but also by the ruling norms of the liberal public sphere, which prefer that people without much means and clout not meet and argue at all. The liberal public sphere has long preferred “thin” versions of political life with most citizens serving as “spectators” to a professional governing class (Barber 1988, 18) or a “procedural democracy” where participation for most people means voting every two to four years while “a small number of private (corporate and military) interests, in the pursuit of maximum profit, make decisions of sweeping impact” (Giroux 2002, 75). Upholding civility and order as its god terms, the liberal public sphere resembles almost not at all the publics most often discussed and celebrated in our professional journals (Arendt’s *agora* of agonistic display; Young’s city of difference and chance). It shudders even at limited, middle-class Habermasian contestation.

Liberalism’s ideals of civility and order, nevertheless, can seem like needed common sense, a humane approach to the potential chaos of public (and academic) life, and a needed counter to the sparring of today’s cable news pundits and radio shock jocks. In such an atmosphere, what we find in our rhetoric textbooks can seem like wise counsel: “People who know about rhetoric know how to persuade others to consider their point of view without resorting to coercion or violence” and “[U]nfair social and economic realities only underscore the need for principled public discussion among concerned citizens” (Crowley and Hawhee 1999, 4). Promoted as moral imperative, however, such counsel erases the history of the many who have needed to be uncivil (consider the muckraking exposés of Upton Sinclair) and disorderly (consider Harlem’s Depression-era rent strikes) in order to challenge both an unjust civic order and the exclusion of whole groups of people from the category of citizenship altogether. As the basic rights won and extended by those earlier generations are now rolled back, such counsel also may impede

When abortion rights activists called for “bubble laws”—such as the Florida law upheld in *Madsen et al. v. Women’s Health Center* (1994), prohibiting anti-abortion pickets within thirty-six feet of clinics—they aimed to safeguard clinic access. Bubble laws also had another effect: Physical pro-abortion clinic defense lines were largely abandoned and with them vanished a public, visible, and mass argument for abortion rights.

our ability to take on—and to grasp what historically has been necessary to take on—our society’s most pressing issues and glaring inequities (Benhabib 1998, 77–8). When we additionally sidestep the question of where civil discussion might take place, we further veil collusion between the liberal public sphere’s low level of tolerance for (might-turn-umruly) public argument and neoliberalism’s elimination of material spaces for public life and contestation altogether.

Indeed the very language of liberalism has historically operated in periods of proclaimed “clear and present danger” to reinforce the imperatives of order, stability, and security over *any* guarantees of public rights. Consider just this partial list of state-ordered repression carried out in the name of the greater public good: the roundup of 10,000 resident aliens, by order of President Woodrow Wilson, in the infamous 1919 Palmer Raids; the internment of 110,000 Japanese and Japanese Americans between 1942 and 1946 ordered by President Franklin D. Roosevelt; the McCarthy-era execution of the Rosenbergs and the Supreme Court’s upholding of the conviction of college professor Lloyd Barenblatt for refusing to answer questions posed by the House Un-American Activities Committee; and COINTELPRO’s vicious harassment of civil rights, Black Nationalist, and other New Left activists through the 1960s and into the early 1970s.

This is the history that set the stage for the Bush White House to proceed with its own aggressive, but not at all unprecedented, suppression of civil and labor rights (Chang 2002)—a suppression that marks a *continuation of one side of a long history of struggle over power and rights*. For instance, when Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge warned

Another unanticipated consequence of bubble laws is their use to prohibit union leafleting at workplace entrances, or petitioning near stores, bus stops, bank tellers—just about anywhere where one might find an audience (Mitchell 2003, 44).

45. A bubble law’s argument free ethos is also readily universalized. Hence the manager who tells the migrant workers, “activists that the farmers’ market must be kept a ‘neutral space’ for people to ‘enjoy the farmers’ market experience.’ Operating here is the anti-rhetorical virtue of neutrality, freedom from difference and debate.

On a cold February morning I pick up Mohammed and his family from the home where they were placed by local refugee services. They are among fifty families in Burlington awaiting appointments with Canadian immigration, which considers them all asylum seekers from the United States and its new requirement (issued in late 2002 and, several months and several hundred deportations later, rescinded) that all noncitizen adult men from twenty-six predominantly Muslim countries report for fingerprinting, photographing, and questioning. Mohammed, a ten-year resident from Pakistan, has four children, all U.S. citizens. But he's heard about the Iranian men detained in L.A., and his oldest son, he explains, is tired of harassment. We drive to the mall. His son needs a winter coat and his wife needs a winter sweater. They also need hats, boots, new jobs, new home, a place where they can live

between order and disorder, civilization and barbarism, deliberative citizen and threatening mob.

Historically, too, the "mob" most feared and against whom presidential executive orders are issued and secret programs are launched are large groups and movements of people attempting to redress economic and social injustices. In the late 1910s, for instance—when all immigrants were required to register with the government (precursor of the Ashcroft-era registration requirement for men born in predominantly Muslim countries) and some 6,000 immigrants were detained under suspicion of pro-Bolshevik sympathies (a foreshadow of the McCarthy-

West Coast dockworkers that their planned strike posed a "threat to national security" and would necessitate a military response (Sustar 2002; Cockburn and St. Claire 2002), he was authorized not only by USA PATRIOT Act's new category of "domestic terrorism" but also by the 1947 Taft-Hartley Act, allowing military intervention to break strikes that threaten the "national interest." Jimmy Carter's earlier invocation of Taft-Hartley to force striking miners back to work and Ronald Reagan's use of the same law to fire *en masse* the nation's air traffic controllers serve as further reinforcement. Similarly, as the Bush White House oversees just in one sweep the deportation of some 13,000 Muslim men on mostly minor visa violations (Mann 2003), we should recall not only the mass deportations of Italian and German immigrants in 1919 (under the guise of fighting Bolshevism) but also the Clinton-era anti-immigration legislation, which used the cover of fighting terrorism to militarize the nation's borders and purge much of what we'd recognize as due process from deportation proceedings. These and other seeming *departures from* the tenets of liberal democracy are actually logical expressions of its founding dichotomy between order and disorder, civilization and barbarism, deliberative

Following the worldwide demonstrations that brought more than 10 million people, including at least half a million in New York City, out against a second Iraq war, the New York Times admitted, "[T]here may still be two superpowers on the planet: the United States and world public opinion." (Tyler 2003). At a moment when the New York Times itself had failed to distinguish not only between U.S. and world opinion but deep divisions within U.S. opinion, the sizable share of the population saying "No war in Iraq" managed to deliver that message.

the mid-1960s turn of the civil rights movement toward Black Power and antiwar militancy), U.S. liberalism reveals its limited tolerance for arguments that might actually alter, and indeed have substantially altered, social and economic arrangements. The deportations of immigrant radicals that proceeded through the 1920s could not prevent labor's astounding resurgence in the 1930s. Even a program as powerfully malevolent as COINTELPRO did not stem the rising tide of the Black Power, gay and lesbian liberation, women's rights, and antiwar movements.

By acknowledging this history and by including it in our study of rhetorical history and its lessons for today, we are then in a position to talk with a student like Katie about the long history of public space surveillance and public voice restrictions that her encounter with the cop gave her an inkling of. Moreover, we can consider the long and varied history of seemingly powerless individuals and groups resisting,

era which hunts)—the "mob" threatening the Wilson administration and the U.S. ruling class was, in fact, an increasingly organized and militant labor movement led by immigrants armed with socialist, anarchist, and other radical traditions (Brecher 1997, 104–14; Smith 2006, 89–91). It was particularly against an exploding labor movement and the threat of workers' arguments—expressed through mass strikes, the launching of labor parties, and, in the case of the United Mine Workers and the Industrial Workers of the World, or "Wobblies," a commitment to desegregated unions—that the 1917 Espionage Act, the 1919 Palmer Raids, and the murderous white supremacist rampages of 1919's "Red Summer" were launched. At pressured moments (Seattle's General Strike of 1919, arguments that might actually alter, and indeed have substantially altered, social and economic arrangements. The deportations of immigrant radicals that proceeded through the 1920s could not prevent labor's astounding resurgence in the 1930s. Even a program as powerfully malevolent as COINTELPRO did not stem the rising tide of the Black Power, gay and lesbian liberation, women's rights, and antiwar movements.

Even within neoliberalism's shrinking space for public argument, surprising openness sometimes appear. Take France's 1994 law requiring francophone songs comprise percent of radio station playlists. Passed as a bulwark against American pop music and on tide of French chauvinism in North African and Arab culture influence, the law in fact brought the art wave viability of rai to African youth in the impoverished banlieues of Paris. Strassour and Lyon.

confronting, and subverting restriction through creative means that have included (but have also included a great deal more than) Katie's anonymous poetic interventions. Yet if we are to acknowledge and learn from the legacy of working-class rhetorical action, we must contend with an additional contemporary academic tendency—to dismiss the working class as a relevant force for progressive change.

Who's Afraid of the Working Class?

Here we need to return to the construction of critical theory (and rhetorical theory) as an autonomous history of ideas and debates—"conversations"—divorced both from the larger social history that shapes and urges a set of ideas and from historical and contemporary contexts in which such ideas might actually be tested. Today's most radical theories, observes Susan Searls Giroux (2002), "theorize the political" but don't extend toward securing the *physical* spaces needed in which to act politically (81). A strict separation of even the most radical-seeming theory from the complications of context—part of theory's inward turn, which Jenny Bourne (2002) sums up as a turn away from politics as "something done 'out there' in meetings and parties" to politics as something done "here in the person" (199)—isn't simply more of the same age-old ivory tower isolation. The *ennui* (or sometimes outright disdain) with which actual involvement is regarded has a specific history both in the limitations of New Left radicalism of the 1960s and, profoundly impacting the theoretical schools still in sway today, in the defeat of the May–June 1968 revolution in France. For such influential or soon-to-become influential thinkers as Foucault, Lyotard, Deleuze, and Guattari, that defeat appeared as confirmation that Marx had erred in positing the working class as capitalism's gravediggers—as, that is, not only the victims of history but also potentially its agents. Far from being imagined as vanguard *or* as abject, the working class in post-McCarthy theorizing is figured instead—in a blend of Daniel Bell's (1976) claims of widespread abundance enjoyed by the American working class and Herbert Marcuse's (1964) laments of endemic working-class apathy—as well heeled and bought off. Titles by Bell, Marcuse, and Andre Gorz remain academic bestsellers even though their obituaries for the U.S. and European working classes proved immature. Poland's Solidarity Movement was shaking the foundations of the Stalinist regime in Poland at the very moment Gorz (1982) was penning *Farewell to the Working Class*. Daniel Bell's declaration that U.S. autoworkers had become too complacent for

In Living Room (1985), poet June Jordan did not join postmodern political thinkers such as Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985), who promoted, under the banner of radicalism, a denial of any "united discourse of the Left." Instead, in this collection that chronicles and laments the loss of living room for people struggling from the American Midwest ("Des Moines Iowa Rap") to the Middle East ("Apologies to All the People in Lebanon"); Jordan insists on the necessity of radical rhetorical solidarity, exemplified in the collection's closing poem "I was born a Black woman and now I am become a Palestinian" ("Moving Towards Home").

fortunes that had become evident in both the United States and Britain by the late 1970s. Moreover, those theorists, profoundly disillusioned by the struggles of the late 1960s, contributed to the virtual vacuum in Left political thought that aided what became by the 1980s a hard pull to the right.

Today, this theoretical torpor, minus its historical basis, is further codified in critical theories that replace mass action from below with (if any alternative is posited) classless "culture workers" as the instigators of, at most, *local* and *contingent* change. Hence enthusiasts of neo-Marxists Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge (1993), who broadly theorize a "proletarian public sphere," turn to indie media and the Internet as potential sites of democratization—without considering how to support or even recognize those groups attempting, against the consolidated forces of capital and state, to claim not only airwaves and cyberspace but also streets and workplaces. Nancy Fraser (1992) looks to local, alternative, and largely middle-class arrangements such as child care collectives and feminist publication initiatives as offering strengthened decision-making voice—without considering that most people don't have the autonomy to choose an alternative over capitalist arrangements and further that the decisions most profoundly impacting our lives and communities are

militancy hardly squares with the doubling of wildcat (unauthorized) strikes by U.S. manufacturing workers between 1960 and 1969 (Smith 2006, 220–22).

By imagining and advancing the notion of a *complacent* U.S. and European working class, academics of the 1960s and 1970s did more than fail to stay in touch with these pitched labor battles that in the early 1970s also grew out of and fed back into the political battles of the Black Power, women's, and antiwar movements. (As Georgakas and Surkin [1998] point out, the autoworkers who organized the League of Revolutionary Black Workers were inspired by and sought to carry into the factories Detroit's Great Rebellion of 1967.) In imagining and advancing the notion of a *complacent* working class, academics also missed the decline in working-class

Activists in the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) made full, artistic, and effective use of from-below and do-it-yourself argumentative forms. These ranged from plastering price-gauging drug companies and pharmacies with "AIDS Profiteer" posters to, dressed as Grim Reapers, taking over the meeting of a local government board that had just cut HIV/AIDS funding. Importantly, ACT UP activists staged these interventions not for a situationist's love of avant-garde artistic disruption but to make—and win—the life-or-death argument that HIV/AIDS drug protocols be speeded up with treatments made available and affordable.

not locally made. Similarly, when I ask my students for examples of ordinary people taking rhetorical action, they typically speak of "edgeworkers" and "culture jammers" (e.g., the solitary student who transformed campus stop signs into STOP BUSH signs or Katie with her anonymous poem posters). Anarchist-informed political agitations do indeed offer an attractive "just-do-it" ethos and a needed hands-on practice in public-sphere intervention. But edgeworking and culture-jamming also share with democratic liberalism a "tyranny-of-the-majority" distrust of mass democratic participation as well as the Marcusian academic view of the larger public as (at best) complacent and unaware.

When my students' individual and small-group exercises in public agency—including their participation in spoken-word poetry forums, shareware collectives, and Taco Bell boycotts—bring them confidence and lead them to the

additional tools they'll need to challenge increasingly concentrated power and genuinely have a voice, I'm all for it. I'm all for insistence that *there is an alternative*. Yet I'm concerned that when, as Susan Searls Giroux (2002) puts it, "agency gets reduced to making lifestyle decisions [and] wise consumer choices" (75), such attempts at public participation will quickly appear to these students as sadly inconsequential. Fear that her work might be without consequence was what Katie expressed when she first brought her poems to class and wondered what impact they could have beyond publication in a chapbook to be read by friends. The textual manipulations in her poem "Action Alert" were inspired by Ana Castillo's (1994) theorizing of a Chicana poetics, born in part from Castillo's disenchantment with the disintegrating Chicano movement in the early 1970s. But when Katie sought to shift from exploring the linguistic dimensions of (r)evolutionary change to creating rhetorical space where public discussion and debate of the poem's issues could actually take place, she hit the limits of a poetics/politics fixated on solitary acts of writing. Likewise, when we go no further than considering with our students the

A refreshing example of collective rhetoric uniting large and diverse groups of people against neoliberalism's global assaults is the slogan taken up at the 2002 protest of the World Economic Forum in New York and at the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre: "They are all Enron and we are all Argentina!"

class rhetorical solutions of the electronic town meeting, blog punditry, or (equally individualistic and suited primarily to the ethos and autonomy of the middle class) scattered, spontaneous cultural interventions. That is, if we want to have real decision-making influence.

It's here that we need to offer students at least an inkling of the mass rhetorical arts needed to build a Camp Solidarity, prepare for a street-taking demonstration, deal with the challenge of sustaining a democratic movement. It's here too that we need to introduce the history—and

the very concept—of working-class power, not as a theoretical construct (as it largely appears in the work of Negt and Kluge) and not as a musty anachronism (as in automatic academic dismissals of the term) but as something with here-and-now significance for us and for our students. Katie, for instance, now teaches in a community-based literacy program for migrant workers. Monthly she witnesses her students' struggles for living room in a post-NAFTA world; monthly she also faces the question of how to make her bare-minimum salary cover the cost of her rent, transportation, and health care. Though she is not subjected to the superexploitation of the migrant workers who receive pennies for the tomatoes they pick and fear any publicity that will attract the notice of

alternative publics of independent media, food coops, or do-it-yourself zines, we hit the limits of these rhetorical means, alone, to take on what seem likely to be the biggest issues ahead: health care, abortion, Social Security, entrenched and increasing racial and economic segregation, immigrant and Arab scapegoating, and ongoing, escalating war. As was true in 1935 and in 1968, the majority of this society—including most of our students and also most of their teachers—will need more than the individual and largely middle-

Seeking health care coverage, a small farmworker's local has picketed the entrance to a hospital-wing construction site. In response, the builders bring in replacement workers from Mexico via South Carolina. As the strikers debate their options, an organizer from another union chimes in: "I'll bet they're illegal. I could have the INS here in a minute." The president of the farmworkers' local shakes his head. Instead, they select someone on the picket line who speaks Spanish to talk with the workers about the picket and their shared need for jobs with health care, safe working conditions, and the right to organize without fear of being fired or deported.

border patrol or their vigilante supporters, Katie's own "privileges" seem pretty slim. When I add to my syllabi such texts as Jeremy Brecher's *Strike!* and Sharon Smith's *Subterranean Fire*, I'm not just trying to give working-class history its due. A majority of my students are going on to jobs—as teachers, social workers, health care providers, engineers, service workers, and technicians—that are, or are increasingly subjected to the disciplining and contingency of, working-class jobs. In the workplace and in social, political spheres beyond, what power they have will be collective, not individual. The worth of their labor, the safety of their working conditions, access and equality in their schools and other civic institutions, the health of the environment in which they live—all this and more will depend on their knowing at least something of this history.

Lessons Learned

Students in my Spring 2003 women's studies seminar did not, of course, go out and build a Camp Solidarity, nor did I shape this seminar to provide the history and tools we need even just to hang a poster downtown. Still, I'm astonished at what the students were able to do—though much too much on their own. Cassie—the student frustrated by her attempt to convince her boyfriend and his roommates to turn off *The Man Show*—organized a panel on the destructive impact of welfare reform in Vermont. More than seventy people attended the panel including a reporter and photographer from the state's largest daily newspaper, despite the fact that—as Cassie repeatedly and worriedly pointed out—she was "just" a college student with no "official" sponsors. In a conversation at the semester's end, Cassie emphasized the importance of learning the basics of how to organize and build an audience for such a forum, not only for her education in public-sphere creation but also for the encouragement of other women lacking official sponsorship as well: "[W]e don't live in a place where standing up and getting on your soapbox is valued, especially as women. And I think that's what needs to change."

Consider this potent combination of art, embodied struggle, and rapid communications: An email arrives from the Labor art Mural Project (LAMP) announcing that Israeli bulldozers had rolled in to plow under oystroprop artist Mike Alewitz's latest project, a mural in East Jerusalem at the newly built Raehel Corrie Peace Center, painted with U.S. Palestinian and Israeli labor activists. The next day, following a flurry of emailed and faced protests from around the world, the bulldozers retreat. This collaboration of workers and artists has been—for the moment—saved.

The public visibility of a soapbox is what Katie, with her anonymous postering, may have been avoiding—initially, that is. But as it turned out, Katie didn't hang up any more poster versions of "Action Alert." Instead she went to the Church Street Marketplace during the noon hour and passed out copies of the poem in person. She also engaged in conversation with those who stopped to puzzle over the poem or talk about its ideas. On those conversations, Katie told me in a postsemester meeting, she was rethinking the "air of intellectualism" in the poem, which, she'd decided, should show more of her own frustrated search for the facts of the bombing of a Baghdad market or explain the story of Bakhat Hassan whose elderly family members were gunned down by U.S. soldiers at a checkpoint south of Karbala. At the conversation's end, Katie said she was reconsidering poem's in-the-margins command to "Empower yourself" explaining that she might add to it a specific invitation to an antiwar meeting or teaching thing: "I definitely talk about collective revolution," she said, "but how things evolve and how do we forge any sort of revolution if people do come together?"

And there it is: why we need to make rhetorical space—a grocery store to talk about wages, in a panel to hear from women about the felt impact of warfare, in a festival marketplace to talk about U.S. soldiers ordered to shoot—and why in doing so we are regarded dangerous indeed.

Note

1. "Rhetoric from below" owes its phrasing—and its implied argument about the collective actions of ordinary people as the force that drive progressive change—to independent socialist Hal Draper. Against the autocratic Maoist and Stalinist politics that dominated the New Left in the 1960s, Draper (2004) offered a clear and appealing vision of "socialism from below."