# Stop Me If You've Heard This: Dialectical Negations and Program Development Discourses

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**Abstract:** This article narrates the experience of rhetoric and composition faculty developing a graduate program at a growing state university in south Texas. The narrative emphasizes the contextual constraints that required "institutional critique" and rhetorical negotiations. The second part of the article argues for a critical stance on how we talk about program development more generally. I use critical theory to engage the contradictions inherent in institutional work and in our own discourses, in order to argue that while we navigate institutional constraints, we must remain "dialectically ambivalent" about the larger implications of the work we do.

The story I am about to tell is true. And this story may seem about as cliché as that statement. In the now familiar genre of our field, I would like to narrate my experience with the development of a graduate program in Rhetoric and Composition in order to point out the necessity for professionals in our field to engage in broad institutional analysis in order to develop or implement curricula and programs within our discipline. My story is meant to be instructive in terms of revealing the many factors that mitigate our idealized versions of program design and the material, on-the-ground realities of what we are able to accomplish institutionally. After telling my story, however, I would like to dialectically negate and critique the rhetorical function of that story in our professional discourse in general.

Like the many stories of professionalization, preparation, expectations, and realities that define the narratives of our field (see especially the essays in Anderson and Romano's book *Culture Shock and the Practice of the Profession*, and in Strickland and Gunner's collection, *The Writing Program Interrupted*), this story begins with my entrance into the ranks of faculty with a degree in Rhetoric, Composition, and the Teaching of English. I was most enthusiastic about the possibility of a position with a university near the U.S.-Mexico border in southern Texas because it was an institution that actually served the Hispanic population of the area. (The universities in Arizona, where I did my graduate studies, although in close proximity to the Mexico border, primarily served out of state, non-hispanic students.) The regional location of the institution and its relatively short history indicated to me that it was an institution that was being directly shaped by the culture of globalization, which very much resonated with my research interests. The university was moving its focus from teaching to a more research-intensive agenda, a moment of transition that I saw as enabling conscious efforts to maintain the valuing of teaching while tying teaching practices to research and theoretical activities. I had been informed by the interview committee that a PhD in Rhetoric and Composition had been proposed and approved at the departmental, college, and campus level.

"What will you bring to the development of a PhD program?" the committee asked me. At that time, I was working on an essay with Thomas Miller to contribute to Anderson and Romano's collection. In this essay, we historicized some of the tensions that are pervasive in the field's collective identity and development: the devaluing of teaching, the market forces that shape growth or demand for programs

in writing, the disparity between what graduate students are trained to do and what they actually end up doing in the faculty positions they take. One of the major issues we examined in that essay was the traditional force of the culture of research in defining scholarly activities and the social conditions that were reconstructing that research culture, including declining state support, increased corporate funding, and demands for community-responsive research and partnerships that directly addressed community need. We suggested that rhetoric and composition programs were in a position to be responsive to the changing culture of research through graduate programs that incorporated some critical principles. These principles included tying institutional analysis to pedagogical inquiry, foregrounding critical rhetorical skills to enable graduate students to be responsive in the immediate contexts they might find themselves, and tying rhetorical study to social issues. I felt confident in answering the committee's question and was able to articulate concrete program ideas (such as colloquia and partnership development) and curricular elements (such as courses in critical theory and rhetoric, and community literacy practica). More than that, I was excited about the opportunity to enact the vision I had been developing all those years studying rhetoric, working as a program specialist in various areas, sitting on committees, and attending conferences.

In the years just prior to my being hired at this state university, the department had hired two junior faculty in rhet/comp. I was hired in with two other junior faculty that year. The following year, we sat on a hiring committee that hired two new junior faculty; the second year I was there one of the junior faculty left, and we hired two additional junior faculty. Before the arrival of these eight faculty members in rhetoric and composition, there was one senior faculty member who identified with rhet/comp with an area of specialization in teacher education and preparation. Let me emphasize, the rhet/comp faculty went from one to nine in less than five years. Let me also emphasize that the only rhetoric and composition courses that existed in the curricula were the first- year composition courses and an upper-division course called "composition techniques." My assumption, of course, was that the English department had deliberated on the state of English studies and had determined that a rhet/comp program would enhance their undergraduate courses (enabling them to offer writing courses beyond the first-year sequence), strengthen the first year writing program, and develop graduate offerings to complement programs in literature and linguistics.

It did not take long for me to realize that what had actually transpired was that the then dean of the college had assigned these faculty lines and had sold the idea to the English department by explaining that the new hires in rhet/comp would teach first-year composition (our first-semester course is titled "Composition"; our second-semester course is titled "Rhetoric"), freeing up literature faculty to teach upper-division courses in their areas. It became clear that rhet/comp was entirely conflated with first-year composition, as was evidenced by the fact that the rhet/comp committee established by the department was chaired by the WPA and focused exclusively on first-year- composition sequence issues. Given that the rhet/comp faculty were inexperienced with committee work and most comfortable with first-year writing (with most of their experience focused on teaching first-year composition and working as assistant WPAs), it was difficult to articulate ourselves in any way other than how we were constructed by upper administration. The graduate program that had been proposed seemed abstract, at best, at that time.

The existing graduate programs in English included a well-structured MA in ESL that graduated most of our MA candidates. The other MA in English was traditionally literature focused, but there was only one required course (Bibliography –the literary research methods course) that was supported by a single advisor, and appeared to graduate students as offering fairly arbitrary course offerings. Predictably, when the proposed PhD in rhet/comp went before the state higher education coordinating board, it was rejected because the department was not graduating MA students in any timely or consistent manner. As I participated in early conversations about the PhD program, I quickly realized

that the assumptions I had about how programs develop had been shaped by idealized, decontextualized understandings of academic institutional politics.

Referring to Porter et al's article on what they call institutional critique, Anderson and Romano remind us that "an institutional awareness as opposed to mere disciplinary sensibility is a vital condition for productive action in a culture of institutions where we must be able to construct the agency to bring about change" (13). The layers of contexts that were shaping, resisting, and constructing the possibilities of a program (graduate or undergraduate) in rhetoric and composition were not simply departmental or based on student demand. Those contexts were most immediately obvious, but it was clear that the broader context included regional development propelling a changing university mission and rapid expansion of university enrollments, competition for roles and offerings at the state level, and college leadership that tended to rearticulate and justify the role of the humanities as needing to be responsive to "pragmatics" of a business model. As I processed the appropriate defeat of the PhD proposal, it became clear to me that the program originally had been proposed and embraced at the local level because of rapidly increasing undergraduate enrollment and the need for an increase in personnel to teach at the first year level. A graduate program in rhet/comp, of course, would mean graduate student teaching assistants to teach first-year writing. More rhet/comp faculty, of course, meant not only more instructors for those courses, but more supervisors of graduate assistants ("Comp bosses," if you will). While Green and Reid ("An Experimental PhD Program: Problems and Possibilities") rightly observe that "[i]t is ultimately changes in undergraduate education that need to inform any revision of graduate education" (58), we must be aware that our understanding of undergraduate curricular needs are not necessarily synonymous with the administrative perceptions and motivations for change.

On a steep learning curve, the rhet/comp faculty came to understand that without a great many proactive steps, we would remain defined and dramatically limited by these constructs applied to us. In response, the steps we took included:

- Conducting institutional analysis to determine the contexts and forces delimiting our identity and activities that I have briefly described above.

- Creating opportunities for advocacy and representation: Our first action was a successful proposal to create separate committees for rhet/comp and the lower-division writing program with separate chairs and collaborative structures. Additionally, we lobbied for representation on departmental curriculum and policy committees. We voted representatives from rhet/comp into college and university committee positions such as the College Council and the Faculty Senate.

- Working collaboratively with other programs in the English department and within the college to define student needs and mutually beneficial course offerings.

- Participating in university-wide professional development programs that impacted pedagogy and writing across the curriculum.

In a long process of negotiating institutional structures, the rhet/comp faculty learned, as Green and Reid frame it, that "the rhetoric of the department and its rhetorical relationships with the rest of the university provided a special opportunity for seeing the operation of discourse and power in the academy" (51). The necessary steps we took in this process did result in developing a graduate program proposal.

Although we were disappointed that the PhD proposal had failed, I and my colleagues were able to regroup and collaborate with our colleagues in literature to develop a proposal to revise the existing MA in English. The rhet/comp faculty met frequently to discuss our potential students, whom we

identified as current teaching professionals seeking to refine their pedagogical understandings (and seeking to obtain pay raises associated with graduate course credits); professionals in communication-intensive fields seeking professional communication experience and certification; and students preparing for doctoral study in rhet/comp or a related field or teaching at the community college level. Given that our student demographic includes about 85% Hispanics, we saw Masters level instruction as potentially having a dramatic impact on minority professionalization. Identifying three distinct profiles of potential students, we defined three emphases to support the different needs of these students, and identified a core set of courses in history, theory, and pedagogy. We also developed an "Introduction to Graduate Studies in Rhetoric and Composition" course to address the fact that many of our current graduate students are inexperienced in intensive academic study as well as to construct a curriculum that helped us to define the field to our students (and colleagues). We developed course proposals to support the program, creating descriptions and sample syllabi. Rather than designing course proposals around distinct areas of specialization, we created broad topic courses that would enable all of us to draw on our particular research strengths to design courses.

During this process, we were faced with yet another situation driven by institutional and administrative imperatives that reflected the logic of what gets called the "managed university." Administration dictated that to address our poor rate of graduating MA students, we should implement a 30-hour, thesis option. Such an option would have significant impact on curricular possibilities, and the departmental graduate faculty had already voted against such a proposal the year before because the administrative suggestion seemed to undermine the English faculty's ability to give students adequate exposure to graduate faculty and course materials. There was also a concern that graduate students would perceive the reduced-course option of the thesis track as the "easy route," thus tracking them to thesis-writing for all the wrong reasons. Administration's firm suggestion to include that reduced-course option into our rhet/comp proposal made clear to us that our opportunity to create a rhet/comp graduate program was being used to reintroduce a rejected administrative policy. We felt that this administrative move was effectively end-running shared governance structures. The rhet/comp faculty was put in a position of having to determine how to proceed with our goals and the need for a graduate program without undermining our colleagues' (and our own) control over academic policies. By carefully examining the institutional contexts and bigger picture—that is the necessity for maintaining a commitment to shared governance for the future of all our activities, we involved the department faculty in deliberations on this aspect of the proposal, enabled a conversation on the issue of graduate study in general, and determined a more appropriate credit hour requirement for our proposed program. In doing so, we won a measure of trust and support from our colleagues in literature, linguistics, and creative writing.

As the chair of the rhet/comp committee working on this proposal, I collaborated with the chair of the literature committee (which was also working on a revised MA program with more structure and course offerings that reflected the recent expansion of the literature faculty as well) on combining our proposed programs into a revised MA in English with tracks in either literature or rhet/comp. The combined proposal was approved by the English curriculum committee and put up for a vote from the general faculty. In that meeting, I was impressed by the clear solidarity of the rhet/comp faculty on the proposal, a shared understanding of the program, and the ability to explain the details of the degree program objectives. The majority of the conversation and debate in the meeting centered on some literature faculty members' concerns about the emphasis in literature, conversations that demonstrated that substantially less program-wide deliberation had occurred in literature than had in rhet/comp. The proposal passed at the department level as well as at the curriculum committee university-level, and the new MA program was up and running the following year. We have had success in consistently graduating MA students, and we all continue to take pride in revising and contributing to the program. We continue to assess critically the institutional pressures and other

factors that challenge our own assumptions, and we address those constraints through thoughtful analyses and practical actions.

Despite my early naïve notion that program design was primarily a matter of faculty vision and negotiation, this experience demonstrated the degree to which policies—academic or otherwise—are influenced by and within much larger contexts. Anderson and Romano frame the challenge facing rhet/comp as "about the sheer intransigence of the problem itself—the difficulty of shaking an academic field loose from its own history so that it can discover the freedom and flexibility necessary to produce critical and pragmatic responses at junctures of social and historical change" (2). The story I have narrated here, however, is not meant as another "war story" – the dominant metaphor for our professional experiences. To frame our professional negotiations as battles is problematic to me. Having told you this story, a success story that reiterates my (and others') oft-repeated concern for incorporating institutional analysis as a rhetorical method as part of our professionalization, I want to emphasize that this success story is one of *coping*, not of critical change or challenging hegemonic pressures defining the work we do. As I review the narratives that define much of the reflective literature in our field, I sense a danger of these stories functioning as a sort of group therapy, attempting to rearticulate our responses as "critical *and* pragmatic"—a conjunction of terms that, in the context of the current social-historical and political economy of higher education and globalization, I find in contradiction. I fear the danger of such constructions defining "critical activity" in strictly neo-Aristotelian or Habermasian terms of effective negotiation and consensus that ultimately efface institutional complicity as enabling the power structures that exploit us all. When we see ourselves as embattled professionals fighting for disciplinary identity, engaging our colleagues and administrators in those "struggles," I fear we redefine the stakes of a larger antagonism and turn our attention from sites where a more substantial and necessary struggle needs to occur.

The use of "stories" and narrative structures to relay our professional concerns, identities, and challenges is ubiquitous in our publications. The use of narrative plays a starring role in many of the titles in the field, such as Diana George's edited collection, *Kitchen Cooks, Plate Twirlers & Troubadours: Writing Program Administrators Tell Their Stories*, and chapter titles such as Vaughn's contribution to *Tenured Bosses and Disposable Teachers*, "I was an Adjunct Administrator." Nancy Sommers's essay, "The Case for Research: One Writing Program Administrator's Story," which begins with an anecdotal account of the frustrations and challenges of directing a writing program resulting in her forgetting to cook her family dinner, appears in an issue of *College Composition and Communication* as part of a symposium section titled: "The Scholar-Teacher-WPA: Stories from the Field." A fairly common structure for essays about writing program development (including this one) is the telling of a story followed by a reflection, and often a coda, regarding that story. For example, Tom Fox, in "Standards and Purity: Understanding Institutional Strategies to Insure Homogeneity," writes: "The two events that I narrate here, the elimination of a test on my college campus and the restoration of state funding for the California Writing Project, are 'success' stories" (15). In telling the stories, however, he is cautious to reveal how the events "left [him] and [his] colleagues more certain of WPA's limitations than hopeful about the power of ordinary professionals to effect change" (15).

While we attempt to address the fact that, as Jacobs and Gilberson put it, "disciplinary identity in rhetoric and composition continues to be a matter of negotiation" (182), by developing and revising graduate programs that emphasize professionalization, we discipline ourselves and our students *into* institutional structures while claiming a critical stance on those institutions. We further legitimize ourselves into institutional structures by compromising and negotiating positions making us more invested in perpetuating the power of certification and professional recognition at the expense of the "freedom" and "critical" positioning to which Anderson and Romano allude. Such contradictions are inherent in the socio-economic system, not a symptom of the inadequacies of our theory and practice. Our discourses attempt to resolve or neutralize these contradictions through rationalizations for our

compromises and congratulations for successfully finding the appropriate persuasive stance to situate ourselves within the university. As such, our discourses are ideological and serve to perpetuate hegemonic values. In short, our stories are not merely stories, but forces that shape our professional identities, pedagogies, and other institutional practices.

A substantial amount of rhetorical theory is devoted to narrative theory, exploring the important role that narrative plays in structuring our worldviews, values, beliefs, and subsequent actions. In *The Rhetoric of Fiction* and *The Company We Keep*, Wayne Booth warns us of the power of stories to actively inscribe readers' (and writers') worlds. In this way, our stories need to be understood as social practices. I framed my story within the context of the necessity for "critique" and "critical theory" in our professional practices—in program development, course design, and institutional participation. But, I would like to add here that we need such a critical orientation most in relation to the stories we tell. Taking my cue from recent diverse scholarship calling for a renewed look at the so -called Frankfurt School theorists,{1} [#note1] I would suggest that relevant critical theory to this element of self-critique/reflection comes from Herbert Marcuse and Theodor Adorno, who provide incisive analyses and approaches for dialectically engaging the implications of how we construct our work in the field of rhetoric and composition.

In his book *One Dimensional Man*, Herbert Marcuse reflects on the pervasiveness of alienation in modern capitalism where human beings' desires and abilities to engage creatively with each other or the world are repressed by the logic of capital. Marcuse discusses in great detail the ways, in modern capitalism, "[m]ass production and mass distribution claim the *entire* individual, and industrial psychology has long since ceased to be confined to the factory" (10). He refers to the sophisticated processes, not only of commodity production, but of ideology itself: "The productive apparatus and the goods and services which it produces 'sell' or impose the social system as a whole" (11-12). The result of this production of ideology is a "progressive stage of alienation," or an "absorption of ideology into reality" that "turns Reason into submission to the facts of life, and to the dynamic capability of producing more and bigger facts of the same sort of life" (11). What Marcuse points out is that as our social structure has become more and more determined by and dependent on a complete immersion in capitalism—as workers and as consumers—the "prescribed attitudes" necessary for all of us to accept this structure are imbedded in all that we consume and all that we produce. He continues, "Thus emerges a pattern of *one-dimensional thought and behavior* in which ideas, aspirations, and objectives that, by their content, transcend the established universe of discourses and action are either repelled or reduced to terms of the given system and of its quantitative extension" (12). Ben Agger explains that Marcuse has identified that "[i]n late capitalism, enlightenment is celebrated as the faculty of competent adjustment to the given. To be rational is to be realistic, not to aim for the stars" (138).

"One-dimensionality" names the frames of thought and discourses that rationalize and reinterpret contradictions inherent in the socio-economic system in ways that elide those contradictions, enabling humans to accept and cope with increased alienation and administrated control over individual and collective lives. As Agger succinctly points out, "one-dimensionality is a pervasive feature of capitalism, used to keep human needs as well as human consciousness in perpetual check [. . . and] is not a development simply of ideology but also of social practice" (133). The functionality of one-dimensionality is highly rhetorical, dependent on language manipulation and discursive maneuvering. For example, Marcuse provides an extended explication of a labor study in the social sciences that re-interprets workers' complaints in ways that manipulate the representation of workers' issues into individuated, solvable situations. If workers stated: "Wages are too low," the researchers would pursue additional questions and rearticulate the worker's issue as "'B's present earnings due to his wife's illness, are insufficient to meet his current obligations'" (112-13). Marcuse's example demonstrate the ways in which incompatibilities with the social system become coded as symptoms of

individual inadequacies to be remedied by a "reasonable" reinterpretation more in line with the parameters of the system.

I would suggest that our professional discourses are a complex set of social practices that function to perpetuate/facilitate a sort of one-dimensionality and naturalization of the inevitability of capitalist logic. Our professional sense of alienation and anxiety are abundantly evident in the stories we tell about lack of respect from our colleagues, our real and justified concerns with the material conditions of our labor, our frustrated expectations in curricular and program development. Yet, we tend to rearticulate those frustrations and conditions as isolated obstacles to our minor victories. We recognize that the proliferation of rhetoric and composition professionals will soon glut the market, yet we share best approaches to developing new graduate programs. Most of us experienced the exploitative conditions of being a graduate student teaching assistant, but we tell stories of developing stronger TA training materials that will somehow ameliorate the situation of graduate students having to juggle real lives, having to struggle with the most demanding learning of their academic lives, and having to teach increasing numbers of courses with growing numbers of increasingly underprepared students at the mandate of a university administration unwilling and unable to fund exponential growth.

But what troubles me most about these discourses, as I have mentioned above, is the unreflective ease with which we evoke "critical theory" as we rationalize our place in a one-dimensional society. In the above narrative, I referred to my belief that in order to address programmatic and pedagogical exigencies, rhet/comp professionals need to employ critical analysis of the historical and material forces constructing our discipline and our activities. My narrative, I indicated, was instructive because through such "critical analysis," my colleagues and I were able to navigate social and political factors in order to articulate, promote, and successfully gain approval for our proposed graduate program. The implication of that model of applying critical analysis and declaring that process a "victory" of sorts, is to reduce critical theory to a method or tool useful in accommodating the limits of a larger system. Employing the terminology of critical theory in this way, I risk redefining the theory, trivializing it, and altering its function. Critical theory is based on resistance to and transformation of systems of domination and has the potential of enabling us to identify what Marcuse called "the chance for alternatives" (*One Dimensional Man*). But this potential is greatly compromised if we collectively come to understand critical theory, or critique, as merely being rhetorically savvy and adjusting our expectations to our circumstances. Although our interventions certainly are actively changing our environments and allowing us to engage in successful activities, we need to question how we are working to transform social structures, and if we are not actually perpetuating those problematic structures by becoming more comfortable in them. As Ben Agger points out, "Critical theory has itself been integrated into the academy, legitimated as a series of courses, books, journals, and conferences… . Our engagements with critical theory have become comfortable cultivation" (9).

In their article, "Institutional Critique," Porter et al argue for a critical stance on institutional structures and realities. They claim that critique has been all too negative and abstract, pointing out the evils of institutions. "We think critique needs an action plan," they assert in very pragmatic terms (613). The article points out that the critical insights of theorists like David Harvey and Michel Foucault, as well as those directly within our discipline, tend to focus on global rather than local issues and ignore the material realities specific programs face. They narrate their success in applying what they repeatedly label "critique" in specific sites in order to achieve "rhetorical action." They claim, "Institutional critique is, fundamentally, a pragmatic effort to use rhetorical means to improve institutional systems" (625). One example the authors provide of successful (effective) institutional critique involves persuading Microsoft to include "usability testing" into its process of product design. Another example they cite was the establishment of a "usability lab" in the professional writing program that became "a key argumentative lever in securing administrative support for professional

writing," as well as "institutional respect" (629). These examples are clear successes; however, they must be understood as successful at participating within, and--in fact, reproducing hegemonic values. Creating strategies for more effectively appealing to consumers through "usability" functions of consumer products, creating structures that *elevate* writing to the degree of "respectability" of the sciences—these interventions can be understood as rhetorically effective precisely because they appeal to the dominant "technological rationality" (as Marcuse identifies it) of late capitalism.

Porter et al effectively redefine "critique" as adapting to the dominant rationality. They are dismissive of critique aligned with the tenets of critical theory—that is, critique that examines the totality or global systems of domination that shape and delimit what occurs within the institutions necessitated by larger systems in order to identify possibilities for achieving alternatives. The authors suggest that such theorizing is just that, theorizing, and is best left to speculative thought. Further, they suggest that such critique is entirely pessimistic and negative. I would argue, however, that redefining the goals of critique as pragmatic and oriented toward local "solutions" is the ultimate pessimism, further closing the universe of discourse, eliding radical possibilities, and celebrating submission to the dominant logic.

I am not arguing here that we ought to abandon our pragmatic goals and daily practices. Nor am I suggesting that these goals or the institutions in which we function and negotiate meaningful lives are simply evil. I am suggesting that we use caution in our discourses about those activities and that we dialectically engage our own practices and discourses in order to assess the broader implications of them. In *Negative Dialectics*, Theodor Adorno critiques the history of philosophy as a perpetual effort to resolve the contradictions between thought and matter, knowledge and representation—a history that continually attempts to divorce itself from historical processes, material conditions, and the cultural structures that mediate human relations. Adorno proposes a theory of negative dialectics—an orientation to and rigorous engagement with all human activity that understands contradiction as constituting human thought and human reality. Adorno, like Marcuse, points out that the relegation of theory to a decontextualized realm of philosophy perpetuates and enables deep contradictions in social-political-economic structures and humans' interactions with those systems. Critical theory argues that philosophy fails if it does not directly and "ruthlessly" engage and challenge material and social realities.

From Marcuse and Adorno's analyses, I understand the possibility of an orientation I would call "dialectical ambivalence." To be dialectically ambivalent is to recognize and name the ways in which our undertakings, such as the program development I described in my narrative, are complicit with problematic power structures. It would be utterly irresponsible and ridiculous of anyone to dismiss the realities imposed on us by the fact that we are part of and constitutive of the institutions we act in on a daily basis. Dialectical ambivalence does not in any way deny that we must act and do things, and we do those things with the best of intentions and out of necessity. To be dialectically ambivalent, however, is to identify the delimitations and etiology of those actions and to be, yes, *negative* about the systemic sources and implications of those actions. Our discourse often displays an allergy to discomfort and the desire to rationalize alienation. Our narratives tend to be cathartic, offering solutions and resolutions. We tend to require our discourses to articulate *the answer* to the problems we identify, as if a single individual or even a group of individuals can determine the solution for our collective good that is radically different from our current system and do so within the word limit of our journal articles. The function of critique is not to provide solutions, but to make us all uncomfortable enough for us to desire change. Marcuse's observations on the one-dimensional character of our "rationality" is that "contemporary society seems to be capable of containing social change—qualitative change which would establish essentially different institutions, a new direction of the productive process, new modes of human existence. This containment of social change is perhaps the most singular achievement of advanced industrial society" (xii). He argues that we are persuaded

and persuade ourselves that our system is inevitable, that finding a comfortable space within the system is rational and appropriate. But, as Porter et al rightly suggest, our institutions are peopled by us, and our social and political structures are made by people, thus can be changed by people. But such change is only possible if humans "live in need of changing their way of life, of denying the positive, of refusing. It is precisely this need which the established society manages to repress" (Marcuse xiv). And, it is precisely the role of critique to remind us of this need.

As we continue to develop and expand our rhetoric and writing programs and share our stories and best practices, I believe we need to incorporate parallel discourses negating and problematizing the programs and the curricula, but also the narratives by which we negotiate values and meanings in the work we do. I see this work being enacted in crucial ways in our field by those who problematize our historical narratives and professional identities. The lively conversation enacted in *Enculturation*'s issue, "Rhetoric/Composition: Intersections/Impasses/Differends," especially Sharon Crowley's incisive "Composition is not Rhetoric," and Victor Vitanza's "Abandoned to Writing: Notes Toward Several Provocations," which resists any type of cathartic reading, are examples of sustaining important critiques of our own work. Donna Strickland and Jeanne Gunner's collection, *The Writing Program Interrupted: Making Spaces for Critical Discourses*, is an important attempt at reinvigorating critique as necessary in our field. In their introduction, they acknowledge the difficulty of balancing our daily necessary practices with the necessity of critical theoretical engagement, and assert, "but the work before the critically pragmatic WPA is to give up neither critique nor action" (xv). What is revealing in Strickland and Gunner's project, however, is their own discovery that not everyone in the field shared their critical commitment, as they indicate in their introduction: "We felt sure that many people would be eager to contribute to a critical discourse for writing program administration. But as our first deadline arrived and passed, we realized we were perhaps wrong" (xii). Fortunately, they pursued the project and several contributions to the collection, such as Tom Fox's, Tony Scott's, and others, disrupt more conciliatory narratives from the field. Critical theory and critique is not a sufficient condition for transformation, but it is a necessary one. If our own understandings of what we do or what we are is infused with dialectical ambivalence, I suspect there is a greater possibility that the "chance[s] for alternatives" that Marcuse glimpsed in 1964 remain viable for us to look for and act upon.

## Notes

1. See for example, Agger's 1992 book and Nealon and Irr's 2002 collection. Marcuse and Adorno are especially relevant to rhetorical theory and inquiry because of their astute attention to the functions of discourse and language in the interplay between political-economy and culture. (Return to text. [#note1-ref])

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