

## INTRODUCTION

### AESTHETICS AND PEDAGOGIES

In *Experimental Writing in Composition: Aesthetics and Pedagogies*, I critically examine the role that theories of “aesthetics” (variously defined) play in major composition pedagogies. Scholars in composition and rhetoric such as Peter Elbow, Wendy Bishop, Winston Weathers, Lillian Bridwell-Bowles, Patricia Bizzell, Geoffrey Sirc, Gregory Ulmer, Cynthia Selfe, and Jeffrey Rice (among others) argue for the importance of teaching experimental and alternative styles of writing—including mixed genres, fragmented texts, collages, experiments in grammar, and various multimedia texts—alongside or instead of the traditional forms and genres employed in college composition classes, such as five-paragraph themes, personal essays, literary essays, argument essays, and research papers. Arguments for experimental writing, whatever pedagogical project they serve (for example, expressivist, multicultural, postmodern),

claim to critique the limits of normative forms of writing associated with academic discourse by invoking the liberating and critical power of art. Though the lines dividing different pedagogical projects can be blurry and shifting, in general these arguments claim that through the “freer” aesthetic space created by experimental and alternative discourses, students may be allowed to express their unique individualities, articulate marginal or underrepresented social realities, and/or critique the limits of dominant sociopolitical discourses and the institutions that perpetuate these discourses.

Historically, scholarship that addresses innovative or alternative forms, styles, or discourses has tended to argue why and how such innovative or alternative texts should be taught in undergraduate writing classrooms. These arguments and the pedagogies that follow from them suggest explicitly or implicitly not only that our pedagogical practices should be changed, but also that the values and goals of the field of composition and rhetoric need to be revised. In addressing these claims about practices and goals, I do not argue for teaching experimental writing in composition classrooms; nor do I aim to explain how to teach such texts (though I do reflect on how my experiences teaching such texts have come to inform my current thinking about composition pedagogy). Instead, I use aesthetic theories, particularly those of various avant-gardes, to critically examine those arguments in composition and rhetoric in order to reflect on how the field articulates the dialectics that shape it: between individual autonomy and alienation, the individual and the social (whether represented by social groups or institutions), freedom and social determinism, knowledge and art, determinate and indeterminate judgment, tradition and innovation, and between school and the “real world.” I also share lessons learned from histories of the avant-garde: the current viability of concepts of avant-garde art; the story of its successes and failures in its attempt to bring together art and everyday praxis; its claims (and the historical limits of those claims) to employ innovation for sociopolitical critique and transformation; and finally, the ways in which avant-garde art has challenged, or significantly altered or been absorbed by, art institutions and commodity culture.

While the discourses of aesthetics underlying pedagogies of experimental writing may generate new possibilities, they also generate new problems (and refigure old ones) for the field of composition and rhetoric and the teaching of writing. These problems involve the way we construct and position our students, the forms and modes we teach, the ways in

which we evaluate the work of student writers, the roles that we imagine writing might play in relation to other media, and how we construct the field's ongoing struggle with its institutional and disciplinary locations. Thus, *Experimental Writing in Composition* is as much an investigation of conventional composition as it is an investigation of unconventional composition.

When I suggest that we reflect on the dialectics that shape the field of composition and rhetoric, I mean by "dialectic" the rhetorical structure created by the construction of a hierarchical relationship of mutually defining terms understood to be oppositional. In the classical tradition, the point of reference here is the sophistical concept of *dissoi logoi*: two (contrasting) words. The rhetorical technique of *dissoi logoi* entailed producing contrary arguments on an issue, with the victor often demonstrating his or her rhetorical prowess by proving the weaker term or argument to be the stronger. Thus, one might argue, for example, that when art is opposed to knowledge in the context of education, art should be the goal, not knowledge. In this rhetorical opposition, knowledge is more commonly understood as the dominant term; therefore, an argument for art takes up the challenge of making the weaker term appear stronger. In composition, for example, academic writing, defined in opposition to creative writing, assumes the dominant position; therefore, an argument that would call for the teaching of creative texts in required composition classes would attempt to make the weaker argument appear to be the stronger. Or, for a broader example, advocates of experimental writing give precedence to innovation over tradition in the dialectical relationship of the two terms. Historically, rhetorical education has preferred tradition over innovation, continuity over discontinuity, dominant discourses over emerging discourses.<sup>1</sup>

In my brief list of dialectics relevant to arguments for experimental writing in composition, those who advocate changing pedagogical practices and goals in classrooms variously claim that innovative texts can help students reclaim their individuality in the face of deterministic social discourses, free them from socially oppressive genres, help them create art as a way of thinking differentiated from epistemic rhetorics, and help them give meaning and expression to their experiences and knowledge outside of academic concerns.

Conventional Composition	Experimental Composition
Traditional/conventional writing	Innovative/unconventional writing
Social	Individual
Constraint	Freedom
Determined (textual production)	Free (textual production)
Alienation	Autonomy
Knowledge/epistemic	Art/aesthetic
School	Real world/everyday life

Of course, the dialectical relationships of the above list are not rigid or natural. Indeed, as I will show later, arguments for experimental writing will variously make the case for the individual over the social or the social over the individual. Additionally, such arguments often attempt to redefine apparent dialectical relationships, reject them (often by proving the falsity of the opposition), or transcend them. Indeed, it is both a rhetorical and historical effect that constructs a dialectical relationship. For example, in the dialectic that opposes academic writing to personal writing—giving preference to one over the other—several compositionists (such as Patricia Bizzell) argue that the opposition is false and suggest a third position made possible by the synthesis of the two types of writing into a hybrid or mixed academic discourse. Similarly, *vis-à-vis* arguments for teaching the production of multimedia texts in composition classrooms, in the dialectic that opposes traditional writing to innovative or unconventional writing, some compositionists resolve the dialectic by giving preference to tradition; whereas others resolve the dialectic by giving preference to innovation. Furthermore, some of the arguments for multimedia composition refuse the academic/personal discourse dialectic and instead situate themselves in opposition to the dominance of print or alphabetic literacy.

Most arguments for experimental writing in composition, however, rather than transcend or synthesize, employ these dialectics in the service of a range of broad projects that include reclaiming the writer as an autonomous creative and expressive subject; using experimental writing as a means of sociopolitical critique in the context of ideologically conservative and constraining academic discourses (or alphabetic literacy); reflecting literacy in the context of postmodernity; or effecting a direct challenge to, or significant revision of, composition's institutionality (both its institutional location and its institutional identity as a field). While these various

goals may not coincide obviously, the advocates of experimental writing share common dissatisfactions, which they locate in particular forms or discourses, usually called “traditional” or “academic.”<sup>2</sup> The idea of academic discourse functions as the space in which to place much that is wrong with composition: academic discourse, it is said, prevents students from producing writing that is relevant to their lives; it inhibits personal expression; it prevents the articulation of knowledges or experiences outside of the dominant culture; and, finally, under its limited economy, it inhibits sociopolitical critique. Arguments for experimental writing, therefore, point to a space we fill with our dreams and desires for composition to be “otherwise” than what it is or has been, an alternate space in composition that, I would suggest, has been created by aesthetics.

Initially, it might seem that “poetics” is a more apt term than “aesthetics” in composition since both “poetics” and composition underscore “production” or “making” (see, for example, the work of Derek Owens or James Berlin, both of whom often emphasize “poetics” rather than “aesthetics”). Similarly, it might seem that “alternative” and “style” or “mode” might be more appropriate terms to use in composition than “experimental” and “writing,” particularly in the context of composition (e.g., Weathers, *Alternate Style*). And clearly, as Kathryn Flannery demonstrates in *The Emperor’s New Clothes*, one can manage a substantial critique of broader ideological issues by working with “style” as a key term. Indeed, there is a resurgent interest in style as a key term (see particularly Butler, *Out of Style*). However, in what follows, “experimental,” “writing,” and “aesthetics” represent most broadly and accurately a nexus of interests in the field. This does not mean that I am unaware of the connotations for “alternative.”<sup>3</sup> Nor does it mean that I am unaware of the ways in which “innovative” and “experimental” may imply different pedagogical projects, writing processes, or textual characteristics (see also my discussion of the politics of innovation vis-à-vis scholarship in the field of composition in chapter 2).

While I will sometimes refer to arguments in the field by the terms other authors use (“unconventional,” “innovative,” “alternative”), I have settled generally on the word “experimental” partly because it denotes the risk-taking in the field that I think most arguments for such pedagogies suggest and partly because underlying many of the arguments for pedagogical changes in composition are some of the experimental, avant-garde impulses of the sort Sirc, Rice, and Ulmer address. Similarly, though this book is framed by arguments in the field of composition about multimedia texts, the book began with an interest in writing and maintains its focus on writing, albeit while also considering how multimedia literacies

affect what writing is and the ways in we teach writing in composition classrooms.

Finally, in what follows, “aesthetics” is the most appropriate key term for my purposes because it allows me to address not only a wide range of arguments in composition for experimental writing, but also the claims those arguments are making about the social functions and values of such writings. In other words, aesthetics broadly understood includes not just styles and poetics, and references to perceptions, but also the function and value (and ideologies) of art and the role of aesthetic judgment. Though I have endeavored here to provide some initial explanation of my terminological choices, the question of which terms composition scholars use in the field will continue to be a source of investigation throughout the book.

### AESTHETICS IN ENGLISH STUDIES, COMPOSITION, AND RHETORIC

My choice of “aesthetics” as a key term, rather than “poetics,” also points to the historical moment in English studies from which this book emerges. As in composition, where art or aesthetics seems to be a space of freedom and possibility, which we fill with our desires for the future to be different, so too in English studies, “aesthetics” has been often posited as a term that might give purpose and structure to a field struggling for relevance and identity. Many books and articles from the last ten or fifteen years have attempted to reclaim aesthetics for literary studies, or for the humanities more broadly. The goals of those reclamation attempts and the ways in which various issues in the study of aesthetics get figured are revealing. For example, George Levine’s *Aesthetics and Ideology* (1994) countered what he perceived as an overemphasis on ideological critique by suggesting a return to a more formalist criticism of the art object. Similarly, Elaine Scarry’s *On Beauty and Being Just* (1999) tried to think through the value of beauty in contemporary critical contexts. Still other books address the problems of objects and methods of study, as well as question what might constitute the defining limits of a field, by offering readings of key texts in aesthetic theory—for example, Wlad Godzich’s *The Culture of Literacy* (1994), particularly his discussion of theory and aesthetics in the chapter “The Tiger on the Paper Mat”; and Sam Weber’s reading of Immanuel Kant in “The Foundering of Aesthetics.” And books such as Barbara Herrnstein Smith’s *Contingencies of Value* (1991), John Guillory’s *Cultural Capital* (1995), and *Aesthetics in a Multicultural Age*, edited by Emory Elliott, Louis Freitas Caton, and Jeffrey Rhyne (2002), have tried to

help the field of literary studies think through what it might mean to hold onto aesthetics as a key concept.

Similarly, some books that theoretically situate composition pedagogy within English studies also participate in the revision, recuperation, or reinvigoration of aesthetics. Joe Marshall Hardin's *Opening Spaces* (2001), for example, devotes an entire chapter, "English Studies, Aestheticism, and the Art-Culture System," to tracing the author-critic structure of literary studies and its impact on composition pedagogy, as well as analyzing how English studies and composition participate in broad discussions of cultural value. Tim Mayers's *(Re)Writing Craft* (2005) invokes the powers of art, craft, and poetry to shift attention in English studies from literary interpretation to a focus on the productive aspects of writing. In this shift, he argues, lies the future of English studies, a future best ensured by an alliance between creative writing and composition.<sup>4</sup>

This is not an exhaustive list. I offer this sampling as a way to suggest that after cultural studies and critical theory had risen to dominance (and were therefore increasingly seen as constraining and limiting) in English departments, there was in many instances a strong but varied response, particularly during the middle and late 1990s. Some wanted a return to humanist ideals of beauty; some wanted to use popular culture or multimedia (e.g., film, television, the Internet) to challenge traditional literary aesthetics; some took an interest in formalism; others wanted to challenge the reign of rational epistemology or intellectual critique. Scott Heller's 1998 "Wearying of Cultural Studies" spoke of a general malaise and burn-out in the field of literary studies by those who felt that cultural studies had led them to a dead end.<sup>5</sup>

I tell this story about aesthetics in the field of English studies not because I think it led directly to the movement for teaching experimental writing in composition; rather, I offer it for two reasons. First, as I suggested above, in English studies references to aesthetics can represent what we most want or most fear when it comes to our disciplinary identity, and these desires and fears are often shared by compositionists within the larger field, even if they manifest themselves differently. Second, I offer this snapshot because in late 1990s and turn of the century, when I began formulating the ideas that led to this book, I was situated in an English department, which at the time allowed me to engage this resurgent interest in aesthetics and to think deeply about how I saw it paralleled in the field of composition and rhetoric. On a good day, I was at the exciting intersection of creative writing, composition and rhetoric, and literary and

cultural studies. On a bad day, I was somewhere in the cracks between (though being in the cracks has some serious advantages and allows for some unconventional thinking when no one is policing the boundaries). So, as English studies as a whole put aesthetics on the table for discussion, with all its hopes and dreams and fears and nightmares for what it might do for the field, particularly for the study of literature, I thought about the hopes and dreams and fears and nightmares that composition was having at the time for its own field. I began to think about how composition was starting to see its commitment to academic discourse and to analytical cultural studies as constraining and limiting. I also read the calls to change or reform composition pedagogy through the lens of English studies' larger concerns with the role that aesthetics might play in constituting a field and object of study. What I found in composition scholarship were several trends that seemed to speak to a larger set of tensions in the field.

First, I noticed arguments for teaching more literature in writing classes and for doing so not just as an occasion for critical analysis. Though there have been many such arguments over the years, the set of texts that best offers a glimpse of this historical moment is the series of exchanges and responses sparked in 1993 by Lindemann and Tate's articles in *College English* about the use of literature in composition (Lindemann, "Freshman Composition"; Tate, "A Place for Literature"). While Lindemann and Tate argue for and against the role of literature in the composition classroom, other scholars also explored the intersections of literary studies and composition and rhetoric, not just for the role of reading (and theories of reading or interpretation) in writing classes, but also for the production or rhetorical aspects of literature.<sup>6</sup> The other trend I noticed was an increasingly loud call to think about the relationship between creative writing and composition. Important figures for me at that time were Wendy Bishop, Katherine Haake, and, to some extent, Lynn Bloom. My institutional and disciplinary location encouraged me to notice these trends, scholars, and arguments.

As I delved deeper into these calls to use creative, experimental, or innovative texts in composition, I came to see them not so much as an attempt to heal disciplinary conflicts and divides (though there was a fair amount of that) but as an attempt to reclaim writing as an art form, or to borrow from Scott Heller's summary of the situation in the humanities, particularly English studies, as an attempt to reclaim the aesthetic dimensions of writing: "Maxed out on political analysis and cultural studies, scholars in the humanities have begun to talk again about the joys and pleasures of good, powerful—even beautiful—writing" (A15). Com-



positionists were also “maxed out,” but on conventional personal essays, research papers, and impersonal, thesis-driven essays, and on academic writing more generally. Even those critical essays informed by cultural studies were beginning to show some signs of pedagogical strain. One of the ways dissatisfaction with conventional composition manifested itself was in the arguments for experimental or innovative writing in composition classrooms, whose power, I was coming to see, derived from (often) implicit aesthetics that valued writing as art and students as artists.

As I began to focus my attention on these arguments, I realized that this desire in composition studies to reclaim the power of writing as art ebbs and flows in different historical and social contexts. I will be tracking some of the ebb and flow in this book, noticing how art as a category was called into service in composition in every decade from the 1960s through the 1990s for a variety of literacy projects. But, more importantly for my concerns in this book, I realized that this desire in composition to tap into the power of writing as an art form was, and is, often done without any critical self-consciousness of the aesthetic theories that were being invoked and marshaled for the cause of changing the way we teach writing. There was, in other words, a kind of tacit, commonsense assumption about what writing as art does or could do. This fact more than anything else motivated the work that follows. What, I wanted to know, could we learn about composition as a field and about our theories and pedagogies for teaching writing if, instead of treating them as tacit common sense, we brought the language and concepts of aesthetics to the surface for further examination?

In some instances, of course, compositionists have been explicit (though not particularly self-critical) about the aesthetics they were invoking in their attempt to reform composition. Sheri Gradin, for example, in *Romancing Rhetorics* traces the impact of romantic aesthetics on the field of composition, attempts to counter James Berlin’s critique of the ideology of romantic aesthetics and expressive rhetoric, and demonstrates the complexity of the romantic legacy in order to reclaim certain values for contemporary composition. Similarly, in the work of Geoffrey Sirc, Ulmer, and Rice, which I discuss in greater detail in later chapters, avant-garde aesthetics (borrowed from the likes of Marcel Duchamp, Joseph Beuys, Joseph Cornell, William Burroughs, and Amiri Baraka) are advanced as a resource for reimagining the work of teaching writing in what Ulmer has called variously “an experimentalist electronic paradigm” or the age of “electracy” (“Textshop for Post(e)pedagogy” 39, and *Internet Invention* xii). However, as I will show, if composition and the avant-garde share many

of the same goals, they also confront similar obstacles and problems. Therefore, in this work, I aim to lay bare implied aesthetics and put critical pressure on certain overt aesthetic investments in order to see what other lessons composition might learn from aesthetic theories—whether romantic, modernist, avant-garde, or postmodern.

## DIALECTICS OF COMPOSITION AND OF THE AVANT-GARDE

The history of writing instruction and its relationship to aesthetics is a long one. At least in Western cultural history, one could go as far back as the Sophists to think more about the tensions and complementarities among knowledge, rhetoric, and art. A thoughtful study of texts by Gorgias or Plato or Aristotle would be one place to start, and then the study would continue on through the ages. As Richard Lanham demonstrates, the Renaissance would be a particularly fruitful period to examine for the relationship between rhetorical or literacy education and aesthetics (*Style and Literacy and the Survival of Humanism*). Or, as Sharon Crowley, among others, demonstrates, nineteenth-century belletristic rhetoric is a rich field to plow (*Composition in the University*). But what I concluded from studying the history of aesthetics and composition scholarship was that the version of the field of composition I most wanted to speak to was the late twentieth-century (and early twenty-first-century) institutionalization of composition, which emerged as a field in the United States beginning in the 1960s. Then I began to see the arguments in composition for experimental and innovative writing as representative of significant challenges to the ways scholars and teachers in composition had imagined the role that students and their writing might play in the field and in college classrooms.

Arguments for experimental writing in composition, especially as they invoke art and the power and value of art in service of pedagogical projects, share many of the values and goals of various historical avant-garde movements. I am not saying that avant-garde movements of the twentieth century led to experimental writing in composition, or that there is in any way a causal relationship. Of course, there are cases (which I discuss in later chapters) of overt importation, such as in the work of Ulmer, Sirc, and Rice, whereby the techniques and values of avant-garde artists are brought into the scene of the writing classroom. However, what I argue is that experimental writing in composition participates in the larger set of dialectics that have animated both twentieth-century art and

education. Composition participates in the larger scene of these dialectics for a variety of reasons. Since composition is often institutionally situated in English departments and often situated intellectually within English studies, it sets itself in relation to the larger issues and concerns of English studies. One might tell an interesting story of composition in which some of the figures who shaped it as a field began as students and scholars of literary studies and brought those interests and concerns to the teaching of writing. Similarly, one might also tell a story in which composition courses are prerequisites to more advanced courses in literature. Finally, one might tell a story in which the recent interest in experimental multimedia texts brings to the fore the repressed fourth *C*, communication, or returns the rhetoric half of composition and rhetoric to dominance. As I will discuss in more detail later, Rice and Selfe, with very different agendas, both see the increasing interest in multimodal or multimedia literacy as just such a return of the repressed.<sup>7</sup>

The historical avant-garde (of the early twentieth century in Europe and of the 1960s in the United States) represents a response to various social conflicts and crises and institutional dynamics. Experimental writing in composition from the 1960s through to the present is a response to similar social conflicts, crises, and institutional dynamics. Both avant-garde artists and writing teachers have struggled with the role of art in society and with negotiating certain key dialectics as I described them earlier: tradition/innovation, social/individual, constraint or determinism/freedom, alienation/autonomy, knowledge/art, institutional life/everyday life. In positioning the student writer as an artist and his or her writing as an art form, arguments for experimental writing in composition first aimed to alleviate students' presumed alienation from school literacies, as well as to reunite school and everyday life for students by emphasizing the freedom and agency of the individual student. Second, such arguments worked to conceive of composition as that which teaches students to use writing as sociopolitical critique via innovative forms. And finally, arguments for experimental writing in composition claimed to reform, challenge, or even destroy the institution of composition itself. The goals articulated by these arguments for experimental writing find their echoes in the goals of various historical avant-garde movements since, generally, avant-garde art has attempted three broad projects. It has attempted to unite art with everyday praxis by finding ways of expressing realities or experiences outside those of the dominant aesthetics or culture. It has worked to produce art that is politically critical and/or socially transformative. And finally, it has sought

to resist institutionalization and absorption by challenging or attempting to destroy traditional aesthetics, often employing innovative forms in the service of this project.

Historically, there are many avant-gardes, their projects are often irreconcilable, and one might even argue that avant-garde art is no longer viable. These assertions can make it difficult to speak authoritatively or comprehensively about an “avant-garde aesthetic.” Even so, I suggest that compositionists can benefit from exploring some of the discussions about avant-garde art. As the field of composition negotiates these dialectical tensions, it behooves us to examine historically and theoretically the successes and failures of the avant-garde as a way to shed some light not only on the possibilities but also on the problems of using experimental writing to reform composition.

As Charles Russell notes in his preface to *Poets, Prophets, and Revolutionaries*, the term “avant-garde” has seeped into our everyday vocabulary and can describe not only art, but also fashion, politics, business practices, and so on—indeed, the term “avant-garde” as an adjective is often applied to ideas, objects, practices, or people that are new, innovative, cutting edge, or experimental (v–vi). Even in these loose senses of the term, there is something about it that suggests that the criteria for evaluating the new dress, business practice, writing, music have not yet caught up with the object or practice. There is still, in other words, something futuristic or “avant” about these new things, ideas, practices, people. The “avant-garde” suggests, then, a significant break with the current practices or traditions. For example, avant-garde art can be seen as opposing classical and modernist aesthetics, including such values as organic unity, coherence, beauty, order, transcendence, representation, the autonomous role of art, and aestheticist attitudes. Additionally, avant-garde art is said to be futuristic if not prophetic, innovative, nonrepresentational (or at least challenging representational stability), fragmented, sublime, aware of its contingent and social nature, a process, a performance, or happening (not an art object), irrational, critically negative (nihilistic), anti–status quo, self-critical and self-reflexive (meta-aesthetical), anti-institutional, and intent on reintegrating art and everyday praxis.

Yet, these characterizations and distinctions are tenuous at best, given the vast amounts of modernist and avant-garde literature and the variety of critical interpretations of their significance.<sup>8</sup> When critics and theorists address the topic of avant-garde art, they are faced with the problem of making distinctions: formal, political, historical. For example, modernist writers and artists are preoccupied with “making it new” (to quote Pound).

But if avant-garde writers are merely formally innovative, then what is the difference between modernism and the avant-garde? Additionally, proponents of the viability of a contemporary avant-garde often assume that such art implies a progressive (or “leftist”) politics. As we will see in chapter 2, the assumption that avant-garde art is politically progressive becomes complicated once one looks more closely at the historical contexts for specific avant-garde movements (e.g., Italian futurism) as well as when one begins to look at histories of the avant-garde in American culture from the 1950s onward.

Finally, periodization is equally problematic since modernism and the avant-garde coexist, by and large, historically. In fact, the confusion between modernism and the avant-garde can extend to analyses of individual writers. Depending on which critic you are reading, T. S. Eliot is a modernist (see Russell) or T. S. Eliot is an avant-gardist (see Perloff, *21st-Century Modernism*). Additionally, once one tries to take postmodern writing into account, the confusion triples and the conflation shifts wildly from modern/avant-garde to modern/postmodern to avant-garde/postmodern. Indeed, when one reads arguments for the viability of a contemporary avant-garde that situates itself within the context of postmodernity—arguing that the avant-garde anticipated postmodernity—one begins to wonder if the differences in terms even matter anymore or if history has become one proleptic mess. It is no wonder, then, that compositionists who argue for experimental or unconventional writing in composition pedagogies demonstrate such vacillating aesthetics, bumping around higgledy-piggledy among romantic, modern, avant-garde, and postmodern aesthetics. Indeed, this polysemous nature of avant-garde aesthetics is what often lends arguments for experimental writing in composition such power. In other words, many compositionists can argue for change and reform in composition pedagogy, while at the same time minimizing the sense of radical rupture by letting avant-garde aesthetics echo their historical precedents.

For example, contemporary arguments for experimental writing in composition, with their emphasis on the individual student, echo many of the concerns of expressivist composition of the 1960s and 1970s. Thus, if we want to understand the calls for experimental writing in our time, we need to consider some history of composition, particularly the aesthetics asserted and implied by expressivism as well as its legacy in contemporary composition. After all, expressivism in the 1960s and 1970s helped to forge and hold a place in composition for writing as art and for the student writer as artist. But this historical understanding of the aesthetic and ped-

agogical legacies of expressivism requires more than a mere reiteration of critiques of expressivism in composition. Many of the claims made about the value of experimental writing in composition echo, either explicitly or implicitly, claims made about the significance of avant-garde art. This is particularly true in regard to the avant-garde's conception of the individual artist. For this reason, histories, theories, and critiques of avant-garde art can help us to think through such issues as the dialectic of individual autonomy and alienation, the relationship of the individual to the social collective, as well as our assumptions about the relative freedom provided (or not provided) by aesthetic discourses. While many of the arguments for experimental writing in composition borrow their enthusiasm for the power of the innovative and experimental forms from the history of avant-garde art, my retracing in chapter 1 of the parallels between the individual artist in avant-garde theories and the individual student writer in composition aims to help us think more critically about the politics of innovative style as a locus of individual freedom.

While expressivists who argue for the teaching of experimental writing often critique academic discourse (not only the forms advanced by current traditionalism but also the newer cultural studies or rhetorical versions), they are more concerned with the student as individual, his or her honest or authentic writing/self, and therefore relegate social or ideological concerns to the background. Compositionists who advocate experimental writing in service of multicultural, social constructionist, or postmodern pedagogies similarly challenge the hegemonic ideologies associated with academic writing. But they tend to foreground the ways in which alternative forms of writing represent social groups and situate individual students within larger social structures and discourses. In doing so, they attempt not only to help the individual student, but also to change larger social, political, and institutional structures, including the field of composition.

In chapter 2 I examine some key arguments for teaching experimental writing by this second group of compositionists. Many of these arguments claim that experimental writing (reading it, teaching it, writing it) is inherently political both in the context of the classroom and in the context of larger institutions (for example, the field of composition). To address these claims, I examine historical and theoretical debates about the politics of the avant-garde as a way to shed some light on, and problematize, assumptions made by this second group of compositionists about the progressive politics of experimental writing, the category of innovation, and the degree to which experimental writing is an attempt to critique,

reform, or destroy the field of composition, particularly as it identifies itself with the teaching of academic writing. In particular, I argue that successful avant-garde approaches and aesthetic values have been either co-opted by late capitalism's marketing culture or accommodated by discourses of power (including those of governmental, educational, and mass media institutions). I examine the ways that experimental and alternative writings in composition are already in the process of being absorbed, accommodated, and managed by various apparatuses of authorization and dissemination, thus appearing to limit significant critique and perpetuate business as usual in composition.

Continuing to focus on the ways in which experimental writing challenges the field of composition and rhetoric, its goals and pedagogies, in chapter 3 I argue that the field's interest in experimental writing is both a response to various crises in judgment in composition and a catalyst for provoking such crises. Drawing upon the work of theorists of aesthetic judgment, such as Barbara Herrnstein Smith, Immanuel Kant, and Jean-François Lyotard, and examining recent scholarship in composition on evaluation and assessment of student writing, I argue that many compositionists have neglected to address the ways in which the teaching of unconventional or experimental writings demands a reconsideration and revision of the criteria by which student writing is judged. Such an examination of our evaluative criteria would challenge the dominant pedagogies and conceptions of literacy education by which the field of composition constitutes itself and its goals. In particular, I use Lyotard's argument that truly experimental writing produces an entirely new pragmatic situation, paired with Aristotle's notion of prudence, to refigure the composition teacher as a prudent judge who must evaluate experimental student writing in the absence of previously established criteria.

If, in the preceding chapters, I address the issues of experimental writing pedagogies, aesthetics, and judgment in broad terms, then in chapter 4 I address these issues through a case study of the collage. Indeed, this chapter serves as a kind of companion chapter to earlier ones, primarily chapter 3 on the crisis of judgment in composition. The collage is by far the most dominant experimental form taught in composition classrooms, yet very little work has been done that investigates, in more depth, theories and histories of the collage. Claims for its value to writing instruction variously argue for the collage as part of the writing process, point to its significance as a postmodern form, and even appeal to its history as popular arts and crafts technique. Bringing together some histories and theories of the collage as an art form with arguments for its efficacy in the teach-

ing of writing, I examine the collage as an instance that exemplifies the multiple and often contradicting claims made for experimental writing in composition. Here, I argue that the dialectical tensions inherent in historical and theoretical debates about the values of the collage are inherited by arguments for the collage in composition pedagogy. Furthermore, in chapter 4, I closely read several textual collages written by undergraduates in one of my freshman writing classes. I not only test claims I advanced in chapter 3 about the necessity of revising our criteria and processes of judgment vis-à-vis experimental student writing, but I also show in detail how my evaluative abilities as a teacher are affected by specific collages written by individual students. I demonstrate how, in the act of reading experimental student writing, one might pedagogically use reflections on the act of judgment as a way to keep in play what both conventional and experimental writing have to offer composition students and teachers.

Arguments to expand the composition curriculum include not only print texts generated by the resources of alphabetic literacy but also other media such digital video, Web pages, social networking tools, mobile applications, audio texts, and even, in some cases, sculptural and performative products and productions. For example, some compositionists suggest that teaching the production of multimedia texts in composition courses is merely an updating of the means of persuasion, since traditional rhetorical principles abide (see Selfe, *Multimodal Composition*), a position reminiscent of Winston Weathers's attitude about Grammar B. This is the new project for the old business of composition. Yet other compositionists such as Sirc, Rice, and Ulmer—not coincidentally relying on the cultural legacy of avant-garde art (with a healthy dose of poststructuralist theory often in the form of references to Jacques Derrida)—argue that composition as we know it is over, its goals, values, and principles thoroughly destabilized as multimedia texts (often digital, but not always) mark a radical break with older pedagogical projects. In my last chapter, I point out the ways in which multimedia composition is and isn't changing composition pedagogies. As with previous arguments about experimental writing and mixed genres, more contemporary arguments suggest that only (or especially) through the use of new technologies and media, students may be allowed to express their unique individualities, articulate marginal or underrepresented social realities, and/or critique the limits of dominant sociopolitical discourses and the institutions that perpetuate these discourses. In addition, I try to shed some light on and provide some insights into the possibilities for resolving, or even living productively with, tensions created by these dialectics.