Textbook review for *inReview*
Chidsey Dickson

Mauk, John and John Metz *The Composition of Everyday Life,* Boston: Wadsworth (Thomson/Heinle), 2003 736 Pages

In *Opening Spaces: Critical Pedagogy and Resistance Theory in Composition* (State University of New York Pres, 2001), Joe Hardin writes that if composition is to "serve more than just an acculturative role in society and more than a service role in the academy" our pedagogies must "promote the idea that cultural, academic and disciplinary discourses are open, available, and useful sites where critical students and teachers can engage the values and ideas of the academy and of culture" (99-100). For those teachers who want their students to be not only accomplished and confident writers of academic prose but also critical citizens, able, if so inclined, to "question and resist the ideological formulations of the academy and of culture," the goal is *not* to 'teach' resistant values, whatever that would mean (valorizing identity politics and demystifying Judeo-Christian morality? Abandoning evidential reasoning, especially in its polemical mode, and adopting communitarian modes of reasoning?). Hardin suggests that rather than operating on a "fixed notion of what an empowered student would be—how he or she would act, think and write," students and teachers who recognize the politics of literacy—the obligations that learning to write, to maneuver in language, to insert one's self in multiple social spaces, entails—must work to keep discourse, text and rhetoric "open, available, dynamic, malleable, interested, and endlessly political" (113).

One of the primary stumbling blocks to achieving a social constructionist approach to language in the writing classroom—to keeping discourse, text and rhetoric "open"—is the traditional idea of the autonomous writer as origin and artist of nuanced communication—a very pragmatic notion of authorship present in Aristotle and F. R. Leavis and I would say every

writing assignment and program that asks students to master a set of discourse conventions (and not be changed by the activity, or constrained by various, intangible factors like one's cultural allegiances, ideology, etc.).

It is one thing to counter—in the pages of *College Composition and Communication*—the current traditional approach to authorship with a postmodern notion of writing as intersubjective, 'grounded' in expedience ("interests"), experience ("positionality") and/or an interrogative ethics ("dialogism") rather than truth, intention and reality, and another thing to translate this postmodern perspective into practice. Hardin helps us name or rethink our priorities when helping students to be critical thinkers so that we can be on guard against merely finessing them into being normative (or 'radical') thinkers, but its beyond the scope of his book to provide a pedagogy for achieving this. I find in the recent undergraduate writing textbook, *The Composition of Everyday Life* (*CEL*), a writing process that grows out of the intersection of (or interchange between) students' lives, academic heuristics and civic causes. I have not yet used this textbook, but believe that it has the potential of unprecedented success in providing, *pace* Hardin's critical pedagogy, a social perspective on invention, one that helps students write from the particular conditions of their own lives, pushing outward towards various publics, with many opportunities for exploring the consequences of their decisions as writers.

I don't think it is an exaggeration to suggest that *CEL* implements the most important developments in writing instruction in last twenty years. Some of these we have come to expect, for instance, examining rhetorical aims across the curriculum, offering a non-prescriptive approach to organization and voice, an examination of readings as examples of rhetorical agency and including writing contexts other than the college essay and other than print for prompting, shaping and publishing ideas. But *CEL* is unique in its emphasis on invention as a process of

thinking about the world that already happens away from the desk and the classroom, one that happens "everyday." The emphasis in *CEL*, you might say, is on subjectivity as a function of perception ('everyday life') and communication ('composition'). Learning to write well in this conception means learning to recognize better how we comprehend the world with or through different rhetorical aims and occasions (Burke would call them "terministic screens") and how that comprehension prepares for action (or inaction). *CEL* keeps texts and rhetorical interventions "open, available, dynamic, malleable, interested, and endlessly political" by making a writer's rhetorical choices answerable to both particular (though "malleable, interested, endless political") publics and a particular person (the writer herself, who is also "malleable, interested, and endlessly political").

I cannot point to one assignment or a one feature of the book that will, in itself, establish my claim that *CEL* offers a critical pedagogy for writing. The following description of the book's approach to writing in everyday life should make apparent the potential of *CEL*'s pedagogy, particularly its approach to invention, in critiquing what Foucault would call "discourse formations."

Each of the main chapters begins with readings organized by either *topos* (remembering, exploring the arts, etc) or aim (arguing, rebuttal, etc). As with most textbooks, these readings are preceded and followed by questions that encourage a thorough examination of ideas and strategies. However, the questions are better than the garden variety ("What do you think of X's use of Y?") because they help students explore ideas by *going, doing,* and *asking*, by ferreting not simply the main points, support, and implicit assumptions in someone's writing but inquiring into the consequences of these ideas in a dialogical fashion. In this way students learn that writing begins with reading. This is not the perfunctory reading and summarizing of an

anthologized text that can close it off to discussion, nailing down its claims and support and identifying its weak spots (its invalid inferences, its unsound evidence). The reading *CEL* frames is a careful and nuanced comprehension of the texts of everyday life—situations, activities, conundrums, etc.

CEL is also innovative in that at the end of the readings section in each chapter, students are asked to take over as writing teachers, and find their own outside reading in the featured pattern or aim and then fill out the critical reading prompts that the editors used for the other articles. So, for example, after finding their own text on memory, students write (as the editor had done for the other readings) some "exploring ideas" questions, "writing strategies" questions, and then a few "ideas for writing" prompts.

Then, the formal writing pedagogy begins. In the chart below, I describe the four stages of *CEL*'s writing process, as well as the subsections of each stage:

Invention	
	This section is designed to help students find and develop initial ideas by looking into their own experiences ("points of contact"), analyzing them, and then weighing the "public resonances" of their emergent ideas—how they might matter to other people. The focus in *CEL* is on developing ideas from the everyday lives of students and helping them shape and address those ideas in ways that respond to a number of people who can be reached and perhaps changed by the communication: the writer herself, an unknown public, the academy. Placing students' "point of contact" (their personal intersection with

	the topic or mode) on a bar with analysis and public resonance suggests that what a writer "wants to say" is as much a process of discovering ideas they can commit to as interrogating those ideas for rigor and relevance. All the invention prompts end with peer activity—some kind of involvement with others.
Point of Contact	Asks students to consider how their lives have afforded perspectives on the ideas and strategies set forth by various authors in the chapter. These are really ingenious and individualized for each chapter and therefore difficult to summarize. I should note here that ALL the invention prompts in *CEL* involve both solitary and group exploratory writing.
Analysis	Offers heuristics and procedures for developing initial ideas beyond what is immediately evident.
Public Resonance	Asks writers to think about how their rough ideas and essay architecture might intersect with the concerns and interests of others. In some sense, the writer is asked not to assume an audience but to find one. The idea of public resonance is, to my mind, postmodern because it suggests that regardless of a writer's aim, s/he writes within a context that shapes how people will interpret her words. Thus a topic—or a treatment of a topic, its rhetorical

	casting—resonates with people (or doesn't) because of values they hold and vestments in social structures.
Delivery	
	This section helps students develop ideas for publication; this requires that writers discover a thesis from their initial writing, clarify and support it, modulate the voice/tone, and revise.
Rhetorical Tools	Shows that shaping a thesis requires sifting through the work of invention to prioritize the idea(s) and then seek out support for them or it, anticipating responses (and rebuttals) to the argument, as well as possible concessions.
Organizational Strategies	Offers questions and observations on the choices made by the chapter's sampled authors to help writers explore different possibilities for the ordering of sections and of paragraphs.
Writer's Voice	Discusses how the authors in the chapter established their authority, their appeal, their connection with the topic and the audience through stylistic conventions.
Revision Strategies	Offers practical advice (read your paper out loud) as well as heuristics for "global revision" of the first two stages of the writing

	process: invention and delivery.
Considering Consequences	
	Although the next section ("Everyday Rhetoric") asks students to recast (and rethink) the central ideas of their essays in different media (webpages, posters, etc.) and in regard to different audiences and, thus, to undertake a different rhetorical action, this section asks them to simply reflect on how the ideas brought forth in their essays might influence a general audience's actions, be of benefit or harm to them.
Everyday Rhetoric	
Writing, Speech, Action	This section is truncated, deferring to a full-blown treatment of the writing in alternative genre to the college essay in Chapter 13, where the editors cover formats, occasions and software necessary for producing letter writing, memos, news releases, brochures, posters and fliers, email and websites.
Exploring Visual Rhetoric	This section covers how images can be rhetorical and how images might augment print compositions. I see it as excellent training for coming to terms with visual rhetoric, something necessary to write

	effectively in "everyday" situations, which often call for the inclusion of images (i.e., brochures, webpages). It is also yet another "point of contact" for students in the invention stage of writing.

Most rhetorics have their apparatus in one chapter. *CEL* deploys the framework in each chapter, making it possible for students not only to get comfortable with the terms and concepts but to appreciate how the heuristics work in different contexts and therefore develop a comparative sense of what, for example, "analysis" means for writers searching for causes versus those trying to radically rethink a commonplace assumption or social norm. Too often, rhetorics, narrowly focused on one rhetorical occasion and voice, restrict what it means to analyze, to find or interrogate support for a claim, to only that which involves propositional claims and deductive logic. *CEL* shows that the discovery of ideas also involves analysis. For instance, developing the significance of a memory requires (analytic) decisions about which details to keep, which to discard. Contrast that sense of analysis (as the sifting and finding the details that carry the right associations for the mood or scene the writer is setting) with how the analysis works in the chapter on explaining relationships, where it still requires some associative thinking (as when a writer asks if two things she is examining "share qualities or characteristics" 84) but also occasions causal thinking (how does one thing influence another?) and historical thinking (how has the relationship changed over time?). Analysis, I learned reading this book, involves the linking of one's incipient ideas to different patterns of development. It's not necessarily, as I had believed, an unpacking of buried assumptions, a rigorous accounting of the deductive logic, and thus, the validity, of a piece of writing.

The argument chapter (Chapter Five) does explore analysis (Toulmin) as a form of (deductive) critique because the genre broached in that chapter is formal argumentation, which the editors suggest "involves a direct intervention with readers' assumptions, biases, and possible rebuttals."

While composition textbooks often privilege the writer's personal experience and creativity *or* analytic abilities *or* engagement with the public sphere, this book manages to give equal weight to all the resources and resonances of a writer finding and developing ideas in the everyday world. *CEL*'s exploration of radical thinking recalls for me Yagaleski's *Literacy and Technology* or Faigley and Selzer's *Good Reasons,* both of which prompt students to think and write outside the constraints of the academy; its concern for the ethics (the consequences) of writing recalls Gregory Glau and Craig Jacobsen's *Scenarios For Writing*, which has students argue from interested positions to one another in role-playing exercises designed to foreground the rhetorical nature of arguing in (not altogether happy) communities. As in *Scenarios*, *CEL* makes the invention process a peer-interactive process of testing strategies and ideas for their coherence and "public resonance."

While I have used all of the aforementioned textbooks, I have not used *CEL* because it is only just now available (Fall, 2003), but in my review of the book for the publisher last year, and in my revisiting of the textbook for *inReview*, my sense is that this will be an extremely appealing textbook because it is so flexible—it will be extremely helpful to writer trying to move past the five-paragraph form but also those writing about service-learning experiences or finding their feet as researchers, analysts and synthesizers of multiple treatments of a topic. The textbook's full edition (includes a brief handbook and guidelines for research) is even rich enough in rhetorical tools and diversity of prompts to be used over a two-course sequence of

FYC. But what captures my interest is *CEL*'s emphasis on the processes and occasions for writing as everyday concerns, not rarefied academic finger exercises for managerial elite or a lesson in Standard White English. Even those teachers who don't associate their teaching with Hardin's or anyone else's version of critical pedagogy will still appreciate the concern here to help students negotiate a *middle ground* between the academic space of acute observation, analysis, research, and synthesis (all those aims and heuristics that facilitate inquiry) and the personal/social space of why something "matters to me."