

Preface

Most readers would agree, I think, that postmodern theory, in the form of deconstruction and the new historicism, has made little difference in how we teach. Over the past thirty years, postmodern theory has altered the canon and transformed the way we read, but on the subject of teaching, it remains stubbornly silent. Rather than pursue its many implications for the classroom, post-modernism proceeds as though it has no classroom, as though its practice were a space constituted by the inquiry into the nature of language, truth, reality, self; a space structured by questions about language and the metaphysics of presence or by the interrogation of language and power relations.¹ The assumption seems to be “if we interpret a given literary text in a new way, we will undoubtedly teach it in a different way” (Cahalan and Downing 4), but if new readings guaranteed new practices, English classrooms all over the world would be making history. A theory of reading does not constitute a teaching practice; it is an ideological perspective that functions, in the classroom, as an agenda. And revolutionary though theory’s new agendas may be, they have not, by and large, been accompanied by revolutionary new classroom practices.

This book will argue that postmodern theory has inescapable implications for pedagogy, at both the college and secondary level, and that the analysis of these implications is long overdue. Given prevailing attitudes toward pedagogy at the college level and toward theory at the secondary level, however, a book attempting to address both audiences is

¹ For an extended analysis of current writing on theory and pedagogy, see Cahalan and Downing’s “Introduction,” in *Practicing Theory...*, 2-16 and their excellent, annotated essay, “Selected Further Resources for Theory and Pedagogy: A Bibliographic Essay” in *Practicing Theory...* 293-333. “Selected Further Resources ... groups pedagogical texts by theoretical orientation, e.g., cultural theory, psychoanalysis, feminism, multi-cultural theory. For a comprehensive bibliography of theory and pedagogy texts, see also the “List of Works Cited.” [Ed.] For an updated review of the literature on postmodern research methodologies in education, see Campbell, M. (2018). Postmodernism and Educational Research. *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, 6, 67-73. For related discussions of the relationships between postmodern theory and pedagogy, see Tesar, M., Gibbons, A., Arndt, S., Hood, N. (2021). *Postmodernism in Education*. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264093.013.1269>; Garifullin, R. R. (2019) *Foundations of postmodern pedagogy*. Kazan Federal University; Burbules, N. C. (2009). Postmodernism and education. In S. Harvey (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Education* (pp. 1-10). Oxford University Press.

bound to meet with resistance. For high school teachers, resistance will undoubtedly stem (reasonably enough, given constraints of money and time), from lack of knowledge about theory; for college teachers, from the long-standing perception of pedagogy as “secondary,” or worse, as a non-issue.

In most college circles, as my own teaching experience suggests and as an anecdote related by Sharon Crowley affirms, the question of pedagogy is a question *in extremis*. Following a lecture by a noted critic on the need to politicize students, Crowley reports asking him “*how* he went about accomplishing the politicization of his students, in his classroom, every day” (emphasis mine.) The critic, Crowley writes, “was reluctant to answer my question and even seemed embarrassed for me. He apparently thought that by asking him for a lesson plan, or an account of what he does on Monday, I was demeaning myself (and him, by implication)” (25).

The critic’s less-than-helpful response to Crowley’s question is not surprising. For the most part, pedagogy, in *academe*, is deemed insufficiently rigorous for theoretical interrogation, a subject more appropriate for education departments than literary studies. Those who write about the classroom are not in the same intellectual “class” as those who write about theory. So strong is the academic bias against pedagogy as a legitimate subject of inquiry, that many college English teachers are *embarrassed* to talk about issues related to the classroom. Recently, I asked members of an electronic Derrida discussion group for ideas on how to introduce deconstruction theory to undergraduates. Not one “deconstructionist” responded, not even privately. The silence was deafening and easily read: “We are on-line to discuss theory, not pedagogy!”

High school teachers, on the other hand, take pedagogical issues as their first priority. At the secondary level, the question of *how* to teach, *how* to introduce a novel or poem, receives more attention than issues relating to content or meaning. The *English Journal* is more interested in articles like “Using Poetry Cards to Stimulate Interest” or “How I Use Student Reading Groups to Teach Hamlet” than in questions and issues of interpretation. Although an ideal audience for publications pertaining to practice, high school English teachers profess themselves “put off” by postmodern theory. The ideas and concepts that now constitute literary studies in college, are viewed by many high school teachers with anxiety,

skepticism, resentment, and, in some cases, outright hostility. Given adequate time, money, and support to access theory, most secondary teachers, I feel certain, will recognize its merits and experience a “change of heart.” That scenario has not yet occurred, however, and meanwhile, practice in the high school classroom, as in the college classroom, continues as usual, unencumbered by theory and independent of its insights.

In the absence of a theorized pedagogy, teachers at all levels fall back on models of teaching provided by former professors and mentors (just as they, themselves, emulate the practices and styles of their own predecessors). Traditional pedagogies, no matter how elegant, cannot empower the insights students need to comprehend the complex texts of postmodern theorists such as Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault.² What’s needed is a new pedagogy capable of communicating theory’s concepts and reflective of its values. Theory itself is rich in ideas for transforming the classroom and no one study can begin to suggest or exhaust the possibilities. This book explores (and limits discussion to) the possibilities of a pedagogy characterized by a postmodern understanding of play.

No one will deny that postmodern theory is difficult, time-consuming, and expensive to learn, but theory has become so integral a part of current academic talking and writing that theory, some might argue, is now what English is. That in time, theory’s influence will extend to all levels of language study, kindergarten through postdoctoral, seems inevitable. Meanwhile, before the gap between theory and practice assumes the density of a black hole, we need to start talking and writing about the classroom, in publications, conferences, forums, seminars, colloquies, lectures, electronic discussion groups, speeches, wherever our many-leveled and culturally diverse voices are heard.

² Those who think undergraduate or secondary students do not need theory’s insights or that postmodern theory is too difficult or too “problematic” for those just beginning the study of literature, will be persuaded otherwise, I hope, by arguments presented throughout this book. Derrida’s own views on the role of philosophy in the *lycee* are well known. Asked in an interview if philosophy could be taught to a seventh grader, Derrida responded: “Among the so-called fundamental disciplines, why should philosophy be absent from secondary school education?” (“An Interview with Derrida” 78).

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Introduction

Reality seemed slightly more intense at the playground. There was a dust, a daring. It was a children's world; nowhere else did we gather in such numbers with so few adults over us. The playground occupied a platform of earth; we were exposed, it seems now, to the sun and sky.

— John Updike, *The Playground*

I wish I could open this introduction by writing that at John Hopkins University in 1966, while delivering his famous lecture, “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Human Sciences,” Jacques Derrida was hit *dead center* by a spitball. Alas, such a scene is unthinkable. One of the blind spots of postmodern theory is that it frees language to the play of interpretation but closes play off in its classroom. Without play, without risk, negotiation, exchange, the classroom is empty: what is supplemental to, absent, or lacking in it, cannot come *into* play. Of all postmodern values, it is play and its corollary, risk, that empower and transform the classroom, yet play is the one translation, the one invitation in theory that in practice, from the secondary classroom to the seminar, we are least open to.

Intellectually, we have moved beyond the idea of a fixed center to embrace play, but in the classroom, we lecture and carry on as though none of this play concerns or touches teaching, as though the performance were always elsewhere, in a text, and not where we are, in the classroom. Postmodern theory has reshaped the canon and redrawn the boundaries of literary study but in the classroom, it remains stubbornly traditional in its attitude toward play.¹ Walk down any corridor at 10:00 on a Monday morning and look in on an English classroom. Odds are the teacher is at

¹ [Ed.] Despite widespread recent discussions about the importance of a play-based approach to learning (for a conceptual analysis, see Parker, R., Thomsen, B. S., Berry, A. (2022). *Learning Through Play at School – A Framework for Policy and Practice. Front. Educ., 7*), the main claim of this manuscript remains still valid. The importance of play has been widely acknowledged in pedagogy and education theories but, in practice, the traditional ways of teaching and learning are still prevailing in the classroom, which does not leave much room for play (for an updated critical review of the effective practice of play-based learning in the classroom, see Bubikova-Moan, J., Hjetland, H. N., Wollscheid, S. (2019). *ECE teachers' views on play-based learning: A systematic review. European Early Childhood Education Research Journal, 27*, 776-800). Postmodern views of learning at every education level (but, in particular, in higher education) are no exception, and they confirm the gap between theory and practice when it comes to the role of play in the classroom.

the front of the room, talking; the students, at their desks, listening, perhaps taking notes. In the seminar, where play is talked about and where theory might be expected to effect a new and playful praxis, there is laughter perhaps, but as Derrida complains of Rousseau's festival, there is nothing to *see*.²

We cannot deny that the texts of postmodern theory are performative, or that "the grammatological attitude," as Said states, is "theatrical" (196). When we teach these texts in traditional, readerly ways, in lectures, teacher-centered discussions, or through reading assignments, we send a wrong message to students. We tell them, in effect, that our practice is less playful, less disruptive, less theatrical, than the theory that drives it. Traditional methodologies cannot communicate theory's most powerful performances: parodic interrogations, chiasmic incursions, floodlit scenes, surgically detached operations, border transgressions, word genealogies, space/time acrobatics, graphic depictions of torture and dismemberment, and other postmodern maneuvers. Conventional classroom practices fail what in theory's texts seems most dramatic, most written, this book will argue, for the stage.

All this is not to suggest that we should dispense with lectures and reading assignments or take less seriously the business of teaching and learning theory: we should not. But surely, a theory which values difference compels us to think how to teach the difference of its own texts. And because theory's difference is constituted by a capacity for play we are obligated, it seems to me, to teach difference as playfully as we can. To that end, this book models techniques and strategies for introducing theory playfully, through props, demonstrations, scenes, stagings, and other performance-based activities.

For its theoretical framework, this book borrows heavily from the work of Gregory L. Ulmer,³ the only scholar, to my knowledge, to deconstruct the work/play opposition and in so doing, to theorize a postmodern pedagogy. Ulmer has long insisted that the framing of the

² Current talk about play creates an impression of play, but this impression is a cruel illusion. In reality, the seminar, like the secondary and undergraduate classrooms, is empty of play. Perhaps it has always been so. But now, dominated by the abstractions of high theory and void of its performance, it is more so.

³ [Ed.] For the latest developments of Ulmer's work, please see Ulmer, G. L. (2012). *Avatar Emergency*. Parlor Pr.; also see Ulmer, G. L. (2005). *Electronic Monuments*. University of Minnesota Press; Ulmer, G. L. (2003). *Internet Invasion: From Literacy to Electracy*. Longman Pub Group.

scene of teaching is as important in a postmodern practice as the course content. In *Applied Grammatology: Post(e)-Pedagogy from Jacques Derrida to Joseph Beuys*, Ulmer analyzes the implications for pedagogy in Derrida's experimental (as opposed to philosophical) texts and in the practices of three postmodern teachers: Jacques Lacan, Joseph Beuys, and Sergei Eisenstein. Ulmer's analysis points to the concept of postmodern teaching as "a multimedia performance situation," one making use of scenes, experiments, invention, performance, nonverbal materials and apparatuses for demonstrations (AP 266).⁴ The activities in this book owe much to Ulmer's call for a pedagogy that "does something *with* literature, rather than saying something about it" ("Textshop..." 45).

Because the chapters that follow "do things" with literature that are "so at odds with traditional English teaching" (as an early reviewer put it), some explanation of their content is called for. What sets the material in this book apart and makes special demands on the reader, is that the activities it introduces (the ducking of a rubber duck, the display of torture devices, the construction of a postmodern garden) are *not* activities normally seen in an English classroom. The difference of the material is distracting, and in some cases, frustrating; the reader may have difficulty comprehending the use of toys, gizmos, skits, and scenes in a classroom focused on "literature." It is the book's special and, in some ways, quite narrow argument, however, that what is done with theory in the classroom should be at least as radically transgressive as theory's performance in the text, e.g., Foucault's opening scene in *Discipline and Punish*, Derrida's use of columns and margins in "Tympan," Kristeva's fragmentations in "Stabat Mater," Bourdieu's dense mixture of discourses in *Distinction*.

Theory introduced playfully is not only more reflective of the spirit and value of postmodern inquiry, it is also easier to comprehend. Regardless of teaching level or course content, theory teachers share the difficulty of trying to teach, often in a too-short period of time, ideas that assume as their very point a certain "unteachability." Play, in the form of scenes, props, and stagings, helps students see and instantly apprehend what might otherwise take many lectures to communicate. The concept of depthlessness or anti-foundationalism, for example, is not only visualized but *experienced* when students play chess on a board suspended from the classroom ceiling on invisible wire. Whatever their age or background,

⁴ As an introduction to Ulmer's ideas, I recommend "Text shop for Post(e)pedagogy," in *Writing and Reading Differently*.

students in the early stages of learning theory find the textual stage of theory's operations frustratingly abstract and distant from real life experience. The stagings that constitute "play" in this book are designed to help students draw closer, physically, to theory's performance on the page.

Stage

Because of the theoretical importance of the term stage to this book, its several meanings require elaboration. The archaic meaning of the word *stage*, one of two the book plays on, is "to furnish with a scaffold or platform" for public view. To stage postmodern theory in this sense of the word is to materialize and exhibit it, to put its views on view, to display, for contemplation, its concepts and ideas. The "raising" of issues for examination is of course a primary function of pedagogy, but in the traditional English classroom, it is done without recourse to the apparatus and machinery of the stage or platform. The question "Why don't we take a look at...?" *implies* some apparatus, object, action, to be observed, but falls short of producing it. A good staging makes a spectacle of itself; like any production, it makes dramatic use of props, machinery, movement, scenes, action.

The word *stage* also signifies "a period or step in a process, activity or development." This meaning, stage as learning *step*, is critical to theories of developmental learning and thus important to readers of this book. Most undergraduates, according to Widick, Knefelkamp, and Parker, are in the early, dualistic stages of cognitive development; they need a practice which challenges them intellectually but which is st(aged), one that takes into account the qualitative difference of their learning stages. In the early stages of development, students are less able to deal with theory in the abstract; they need learning experiences that are hands-on and concrete (292). The appropriate pedagogical practice for these students, as Widick et al point out, is experiential, one that makes use of tangible objects and that provides in-class opportunities to tinker and "test-out" perceptions (291).

Because the performance or staging-model of theory encourages risk, is hands-on and experiential, it is especially appropriate for undergraduates and, I would argue, for all students beginning a new and rigorous course of study, regardless of age. (One finds few relativists in "Introduction to Microbiology.") With the two meanings of the word

stage in mind, then, the challenge is to transform theory's abstractions into scenes or performances that students new to theory can experience physically and enter *into*. The project is not for the fainthearted. For traditional or relatively inexperienced teachers, the leap from the text to the stage—from the discussion of a complex theoretical idea to a performance that makes use of bodies and objects—will be a bit scary. But students respect the willingness to risk and for the most part, respond positively.

The Invitation to Play

If we can agree that students benefit from the staging of theory, the practical question—and one central to this book—is how to bring the stage *into* the classroom, how to think and shape the moves that summon it. Recently, for a workshop comprised of chiefly of non-English teachers, I was asked to prepare a lesson demonstrating the difference between a traditional approach to teaching a poem and a “postmodern” approach.⁵ For a text, I chose Frost's “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening,” a poem that opens easily to post-modern analysis.

Following a reading of the poem by one of the participants, I suggested that some postmodernists might argue that Frost feminizes the woods by depicting the trees as *femmes fatales* or entrapping sirens. One student, a biology teacher and football coach, shook his head incredulously. “Maybe I just don't understand poetry,” he objected, “but I can't see it.”

One strategy for helping students “see” the post-modern critique is to enact the reading as a dramatization.⁶ To show the feminist view of the

⁵ By “postmodern,” I mean those theories that follow modernism chronologically and are united in their attack on the modernist concept of literature as an autonomous art object subject to its own epistemology or “way of knowing.” In this book, the term *post-modern* includes (but is not limited to) poststructural theory (deconstruction, new historicism), feminism, psychoanalysis, queer, lesbian, gay theory, and all theories that reject, categorically, the idea of a structured center.

⁶ [Ed.] The use of dramatization in reading is consistent with the enactment theory, which has been introduced by Weik (Weick, K. E. (1988). Enacted sensemaking in crisis situations. *Journal of Management Studies*, 24(4)) and developed during the 90s and 20s in different fields. The use of enactment as a pedagogical tool has become particularly popular recently in studies on narrative comprehension (see, for example, Poeckl, C. V. (2021). The Literature-Enactment-Process. Exploring narratives through performative conventions. *Scenario*, 15(1)), also thanks to the influence of the “embodied cognition” theory, according to which language comprehension and thought involve processes also involved in actions, perceptions, and emotions (see the seminal article by Barsalou, L. W.

woods as “entrapping sirens,” I asked the women participants to stand together in the manner of a stand of trees and to move their arms through the air like branches swayed by an “easy wind.” Then, to give the coach both a role and a *stake* in the reading, I provided him with a yardstick “horse” and asked him to ride by the “lovely, dark and deep” woods. Being a good sport, he did so and as he approached the “woods,” I asked the women, also good sports, to make soft, whispery cries and clutching, pulling motions with their hands. Recoiling half in fun and half in earnest, the coach hurried his “little horse” past the tree-sirens and right out the classroom door! “A good scene,” Ulmer reminds us, is always better than “a long discourse” and a good horse, of course, always makes a good scene (*AG* 266).

Other stagings begin with an idea for an apparatus, a “thingamajig,” contrivance, device, or object that powerfully embodies a theoretical idea. The effect of such an apparatus is a radical cynosure, an excited turning to the idea-on-display, a “sudden rush” of recognition. A good apparatus draws the eye, but it also makes the heart race and if excellent, the hair stand straight up on end. To prepare the reader in advance, I show and comment on one such apparatus here.

To introduce the disciplinary mechanism(s) that Foucault, writing in *Discipline and Punishment*, finds at the heart of all institutional discourse, I contracted with two students to construct, for the classroom, a full-size, working gallows consisting of a raised platform (with operating trap door) and an upright post (braced with 2x4’s), complete with crosspiece and heavy rope noose. On the appointed day, the students arrived in the room to find the chairs pushed aside and the gallows dead center. Their eyes opened wide in astonishment.

“Whaaaaa...?”

“Ohmigod.”

“Where did *this* come from?”

(1999). Perceptual symbol systems. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 22, 577–660; for recent reviews and overviews, see Shapiro, L., & Spaulding, S. (2021). Embodied Cognition. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.); Zwaan, R. A. (2021). Two Challenges to “Embodied Cognition” Research and How to Overcome Them. *Journal of Cognition*, 4(1), 14; Shapiro, L. (2019). *Embodied Cognition 2nd Edition*. Routledge).

“From this very room,” I said. “The gallows has always been in the classroom. The reason you have not seen it is that about two hundred years ago, it disappeared from view. It went underground, so to speak. And when it reappeared, it took a different form. It now looks like this.” I picked up and displayed a familiar school publication, the “Student Discipline Code.”

“COOL!” Wheels turned, eyes flew, some straight to the gallows, other from the gallows to the discipline code. two students tried to hang themselves. All had ideas and questions.

“I’m next.”

“Does the administration know about this?”

“Could someone really die on this thing?”

“What do you mean ‘underground’? Underground where?”

“How can a gallows turn into a book?”

“Could you get fired for this?”

These questions and others served as a highly effective pretext for linking ideas in Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish* with events in Kesey’s *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* and Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*. Discussions of *these* readings, led, in turn, to the construction of postmodern Barbie dolls; the invention of several in carceral apparatuses, including a working rack; and, among other projects, a Foucauldian discourse establishing micro penalties for delinquent joggers (projects shown in Chapter 3).⁷

⁷ Some readers may find the “non-literary” aspects of this project problematic but the real problem, as Ulmer sees it, is the failure to deconstruct the distinction between literary and nonliterary and between the formal essay and all other forms and modes of inscription. As teachers, Ulmer observes, we have been trained in the “analytical, calculative paradigm of reason”; we are open to new ideas- *providing* they are presented to us in “the familiar expository form of literary criticism” (114-116). [Ed.] To reinforce this point, note that the difficulty to distinguish between “literary” and “non-literary” aspects has very deep roots, which go beyond its discussion in literary and narrative studies. One of the sources of such difficulty lies in the language use itself (spoken and written) and the distinction between “pragmatics” and “semantics.” While the latter concerns the meaning of words (intended as a mental lexicon) and sentences (intended as the result of the rule-based combination of words), the former concerns the context (linguistic and extra-linguistic) in which words and sentences are interpreted. For a recent general discussion, see Depraetere, I., & Salkie, R., eds. (2017). *Semantics and Pragmatics: Drawing a Line*. Springer.

The Audience & Chapter Contents

Before concluding with a description of chapter contents, I want to comment, once more, on issues relating to the book's boundaries, limitations, and intended audience. Although addressed primarily to teachers of secondary students and undergraduates, this book should be useful to any teacher faced with the challenge of introducing, in a short period of time, the concepts and vocabularies of postmodern theory. While I assume the book's readers have some knowledge of postmodern theory, I have tried, where possible, to provide brief explanations of the "theory behind the scene." Some readers will find this background information insufficient; others may find it distracting or offensively simplistic. Other than to acknowledge the problem, I can do little but beg forbearance, both of those who want more and of those who want less.

I am aware, also, that while some readers may see the immediate relevance of the materials in this book for their own practice, others will want more contextualization or suggestions for fitting the scenes and demonstrations into a specific curriculum. The latter will want to know what happens after (or before) the scenes, if for example, after playing chess in midair, students go on to the hard work of reading "Structure, Sign, and Play." In response I will say that some classes go on to read theory, others may not, depending on factors unique to the class situation. I do understand the need for specific suggestions and I try, albeit in a limited way, to respond appropriately. Regardless of my effort to give the reader a clear understanding of the book's audience and limitations, I am certain to have overlooked aspects of the book that should, in this introduction, have been given consideration. Perhaps, in the overview of the chapters which follows this section, the reader will find answers to concerns and issues not yet addressed.

With regard to the description of chapter contents, I have two important concerns. For one, I do not want readers to infer from the descriptions that because I encourage play, I have abandoned all traditional activities and assignments. I have not. In a postmodern practice, play and work are not oppositional; play does not displace reading, writing, and thinking about literature in ways that are intellectually rigorous (although one effect of play is that students enjoy the work more and invest more in the task). In a typical semester, for example, my students might read and discuss *Their Eyes Were Watching*

God, One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest, Song of Solomon, The Tempest, The Scarlet Letter, Life in the Iron Mills, Trifles, Sula, and A Streetcar Named Desire as well as selections from feminist criticism and the texts of Derrida and Foucault.

I am also concerned that because I am more interested, in this book, in showing scenes rather than dross spots, demonstrations rather than lectures, props rather than texts, my practice may appear to be more playful than it actually is. As I am sure my reader suspects, not all my class sessions are *jouissant*; some roll merrily along; others, apathetic and lackluster.

Underlying each of the book's five chapters is the idea that aspects of postmodern theory, when translated into developmentally appropriate classroom activities, can help secondary and undergraduate students understand language as a site of struggle. Chapters 1 and 2 are devoted to Derrida and deconstruction theory. Chapter 1 contains techniques for introducing Derrida's attack on logocentrism, or the privileging of speech over writing. It also provides two scripts, one for a performance of a feminist-deconstructionist reading of Keat's "Bright Star" and one for a deconstructionist demonstration lesson on *Hamlet* (along with student responses and critiques). Chapter 2 offers activities and materials for interrogating alphabetic and non-alphabetic writing. It offers suggestions for writing projects that make use of homonymic play, ideas for the construction of postmodern apparatuses, and directions for planting "a garden of postmodern delights."

Chapters 3 and 4 are devoted to Foucault and new historicist theory. Chapter 3 contains activities and materials for introducing culture as a concept. It makes a case for the school as a first object of new historicist inquiry; provides schoolrelated materials for analysis, along with materials linking school discourse with discourse from other domains of student interest; and proposes techniques and activities for combining analysis with illustration. Chapter 4 contains materials and strategies for the analysis of power relations and for approaching the literary text as discourse. It models a new historicist research project framed as an investigative report; shows examples of new, experimental project report styles; argues for the displacement of the student journal with the letter; and suggests strategies for interrogating the letter both as writing and as discourse.

Chapter 5 examines the role of props in the postmodern classroom and provides an annotated list of props tested in my own practice. Props, as this chapter suggests, provide powerful tools for piquing student interest in theory and for effecting perceptual breakthroughs. The props described in this chapter are not prescriptive; they intend only to argue the value of the apparatus in the postmodern classroom, to suggest that in the same way theory breaches textual boundaries, practitioners of theory must now breach “the classroom supply list,” reaching everywhere- into toy stores, kitchens, garage sales, antique shops, tool boxes- for new pedagogical materials. As this chapter argues, even the materials found traditionally in the classroom (chalk, eraser, blackboard) can and should be put to postmodern uses. Theory supplies the logic of play, but the apparatus of play, the equipment, gadgets, and gaming pieces, are the domain of the classroom.

I conclude this introduction by circling back to its opening text, the passage taken from John Updike’s essay, “The Playground.” Outside my classroom is a playground used by the school’s early education program. I have only to look out the window to see the “daring” that characterizes it and that for Updike, intensifies reality. A child runs screaming in a circle, eyes shut tight. Another shoots down a slide on his back, headfirst. Another hides himself in a bush. Terms are negotiated; possessions exchanged, substituted or simply wrenched away. Expressions of glee, surprise, delight change, in the twinkle of an eye, to expressions of anger, indignation, frustration, denial. Authority is not absent from the playground, but it is less evident there: children interact freely, wiggle bodies, test limits, try out ideas, pop out of bushes, strike deals. Seen through the lens of theory, the playground would appear to be the ideal postmodern classroom, a space open to risk, mask, daring, death, negotiation, dance, contestation, and beyond that, to the “the sun and the sky,” a platform or stage for exhibit, {dis}play, and exposure.