

## Composition as Management Science: Toward a University without a WPA

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Our basic claim is this: Though institutions are certainly powerful, they are not monoliths; they are rhetorically constructed human designs (whose power is reinforced by buildings, laws, traditions, and knowledge-making practices) and so are changeable. In other words, we made 'em, we can fix 'em. Institutions R Us. Further, for those of you who think such optimism is politically naive and hopelessly liberal and romantic, we believe that we (and you, too) have to commit to this hypothesis anyway, the alternative—political despair—being worse.

—James Porter et al.

Time was, the only place a guy could expound the mumbo jumbo of the free market was in the country club locker room or the pages of *Reader's Digest*. Spout off about it anywhere else and you'd be taken for a Bircher or some new strain of Jehovah's Witness. After all, in the America of 1968, when the great backlash began, the average citizen, whether housewife or hardhat or salary-man, still had an all-too-vivid recollection of the Depression. Not to mention a fairly clear understanding of what social class was all about. Pushing laissez-faire ideology back then had all the prestige and credibility of hosting a Tupperware party.

—Thomas Frank

The first epigraph is drawn from the winner of the 2001 Braddock Award for best essay published in a leading journal in rhetoric and composition. Most people working in the field will agree with the general

supposition of James Porter and his coauthors—that the “institutions” of rhetoric and composition and higher education more generally are very much in need of “change”—as well as with their basic and most urgent claim: that change is in fact possible. Later on, I quarrel with the ramifications of their argument, especially that change presupposes a managerial insider prepared to make the sort of arguments by which universities are “likely to be swayed,” to “ask for” resources using “effective rhetorical strategies,” and to work to build “disciplinary status” that can be “parlayed into institutional capital” (615–16).<sup>1</sup> This follows a general train of thinking in rhetoric and composition scholarship emphasizing how to “make arguments” that will be “convincing” to those “with the power” inside the institution (see, for example, Harris, Miller, Murphy, and Grimm).

Despite the evident sincerity of this line of inquiry, I’m profoundly unconvinced that a management theory of agency and what I call the rhetoric of “pleasing the prince” is particularly useful—much less necessary—to the project of transforming institutions. I prefer instead a *labor* theory of agency and a rhetoric of solidarity, aimed at constituting, nurturing, and empowering collective action by persons in groups. I think most of the historical evidence shows that education management and its rhetoric of the past thirty years—“the mumbo jumbo of the free market”—has created the institutions we need to change. Similarly, I think the historical evidence shows that the primary agent of resistance and ultimately transformation are the organized efforts of those whose labor is composed by the university, including students. The purpose of this essay is to survey the degree to which the managerial subjectivity predominates in composition studies, distorting the field’s understanding of “materialism” and “critique” to the point that it consistently attempts to offer “solutions” to its “labor problem” without accounting for the historical reality of organized academic labor.

To that end, my ultimate claim will be that “change” in composition depends primarily upon the organized voice and collective action of composition labor. But insofar as “institutional critique” insists upon the availability of alternatives to grotesque current realities, I’m prepared to make common cause with its authors. After all, Marx was among the first to insist that managers were workers too.

**The Heroic WPA**

[Now capital] hands over the work of direct and constant supervision of the individual workers and groups of workers to a special kind of wage-laborer. An industrial army of workers under the command of a capitalist requires, like a real army, officers (managers) and N.C.O.s (foremen, overseers), who command during the labor process in the name of capital. The work of supervision becomes their established and exclusive function.

—Karl Marx

The essay by Porter and his colleagues makes several important points. Following a number of philosophers working in the Marxist tradition, their effort is at least partially an attempt to hold onto critical theory, a commitment to justice, and a materialist frame of analysis, and they make a point of reaching out to rhetoric and composition scholars engaging in cultural studies practices, especially James Sosnoski and James Berlin. In particular, the piece emphasizes the necessity of critical theorizing to social change, and it stresses that critical theorizing implies a materialist analytical frame and “an action plan” for transformation. Of special importance is the authors’ suggestion, in an allusion to leading criticism of exploitative labor practices (especially Cary Nelson and Michael Bérubé), that transforming the practices of rhetoric and composition depends upon transforming individual campuses and the material situation of those campuses. The authors are right to emphasize that the “disciplinary practices” of composition are not those that composition has imagined for itself in a vacuum; they are practices that have emerged in specific historical and material realities that themselves need to be changed in order to enable new disciplinary practices.

But for purposes of getting started in our own inquiry, the most interesting question raised by the Porter essay is meta-discursive. Exactly what has gone on in rhetoric and composition discourse that the essay’s dramatic rhetoric frames the otherwise banal observation that “institutions can be changed” as a revelation to its readership? What structure of hopelessness so dramatically composes the audience for this piece that such an uncontroversial claim needs to be advanced at all, much less receive the disciplinary equivalent of a standing ovation (the Braddock Award)?

A big part of the answer has to do with current trends in the discourse away from critical theory and toward institutionally focused pragmatism,

toward acceptance of market logic, and toward increasing collaboration with a vocational and technical model of education. This movement in rhetoric and composition follows the larger movement traced by Thomas Frank and others, the historical reemergence beginning about 1970 of substantial political support for the “market god,” together with an accompanying revival of intellectual credibility for those “pushing laissez-faire ideology.” But perhaps the core understanding for our purposes is that the implied audience of the piece is lower-level management in the managed university. As the authors eventually make clear, the “we” that they are addressing in their research encompasses primarily “academics” with specific “professional class status,” such as writing program administrators (634 n.3). While they mention the possibility of “groups” being involved in “effective strategies for institutional change,” their real interest is in generating “rhetorical strategies” and “institutional capital” for individual writer/rhetors: “This method insists that sometimes individuals . . . can rewrite institutions through rhetorical action” (613). Insisting that critique can lead to action, the authors offer only one example of a critique actually leading to change: the establishment by Porter and Patricia Sullivan of a business writing lab. This example falls well within the article’s orientation toward the subjectivity of lower administration: “Those of us who are WPAs contend (if not outright *fight*) on a daily basis with our academic institutions for material resources, control over processes, and disciplinary validity” (614).

This is not to say that the authors don’t mention other subjects, only that the administrative subjectivity is privileged. Evoking a variant on the “teacher hero” narratives of exploited pedagogical labor, we might call the familiar figure of the Porter narrative the “heroic WPA.” The authors credit individual WPAs with two forms of “institutional action”: the formation of graduate programs in rhetoric and composition, and the formation of undergraduate writing majors. Together with the establishment of the business writing lab at Purdue, these two forms of “action” are meant to serve as inspirational exemplars: “When we start to get discouraged about the possibility of rewriting institutions, we should remember our own history” (615). Throughout the article, meaningful change primarily refers to actions taken by individuals rather than groups, administrators rather than labor, and persons envisioning themselves belonging to a professional or managerial “class,” but just barely and in connection with a “struggle for respectability” and “validity.”

It is in the context of this specific positioning that the otherwise unremarkable claim that institutions can be changed requires the kind of

urgency and repetition that it receives in this article. In the modern era, social transformation has transpired with many groups serving as the agent of change: students, political parties, trade unions, agrarian revolutionaries, social movements animated by the experience of racial, ethnic, and gendered oppression, and so on. Counterrevolutions have been led by military, industrial, and paramilitary interests, by the propertied classes, by superpower and colonial political surrogates, by fascist organizations, and by the intelligentsia. Professionals and managers, like most people, have been sometimes on one side and sometimes on the other of most transformative events. The professional-managerial group as a whole is conditioned by contradictory class status. On the one hand, they are persons who work to live (for most of their working lives, even the more highly paid physicians, lawyers, and managers cannot afford to stop working, tending to “cash in” toward the end of an arduous career). Nonetheless, the higher level of earnings associated with their position, as well as the status economy, tends to foster identification with the class that enjoys real wealth. This affective connection to real wealth leads professionals and managers to the purchase of consumer items intended to display their identification with bourgeois enjoyments: for most of his or her working life, the average member of the professional-managerial class is far more likely to own boat shoes than a boat.

It is not clear that “lower management” as a group has ever figured in any substantial transformation of society or its institutions, or that lower management represents a particularly strong standpoint for individuals “advocating” change to upper management. Indeed, despite the occasional exception, the opposite would seem to be the case. Lower management is particularly vulnerable, highly individuated, and easily replaced. Managers at the lowest level aren’t usually even on the corporate ladder, but are commonly “tracked” separately from upper management echelons. In this way, persons managing a Taco Bell franchise are sometimes, but not often, the same persons who do management work at the parent TriCon corporation. The strong individuation runs up from the labor pool as well. Spending its days “on the shop floor,” lower management is nonetheless distinguished by its near-complete ideological identification with upper management. So the isolation of lower management is really a double movement. Such managers are isolated ideologically from the workers with whom they live face to face, and the mental and ideological engagement with upper management affected by lower management does not typically lift what amounts to a kind of social and workplace quarantine from those on the ladder of

promotional possibility. Whereas both workers and upper management typically spend most of their face-to-face time with those who share their interests, lower management's loyalties generally tend to be continuously at odds with its embodied intimacies.

Within academic capitalism, the heroic WPA might be seen as playing what Marx identified as the very working-class role of "a special kind of wage-laborer," the noncommissioned officer or foreman, the members of the working class whose particular labor is to directly administer the labor of other members of their class at the frontline of the extraction of surplus value. (In Marx's view, which I share, the "commissioned officers" or upper managers are likewise workers whose special task is to creatively theorize and enact procedures to the disadvantage of other workers.)<sup>2</sup> As Richard Miller has observed, many professional compositionists will directly serve as lower management: he writes that "most" rhetoric and composition PhDs will be "required" to manage a writing program, "oversee the labor of others" and perform "other such managerial tasks" ("Let's" 98–99). Consistent with the general orientation of Porter and his coauthors, Miller's observation suggests that professional compositionists more generally are interpellated as lower management: that is, that even those holders of rhet-comp doctorates who evade the "requirement" to serve directly as lower managers will need to be viewed as theorizing and/or providing legitimation (through the production of scholarship, the invention of classroom praxis, and so on) in connection with this frontline relationship between composition labor and "the work of supervision" performed by professional-managerial compositionists.

While promotion can be experienced subjectively as a change of class status ("the working class can kiss me arse; I've got the foreman's job at last") and is usually accompanied by material privileges, it is probably better to view the differences between lower-level management and labor as indicating a change of class loyalties, not an objective change of class status.<sup>3</sup> Despite the quotidian embodied, intimacy that the WPA and composition scholars more generally share with the rank and file of composition labor (from which they sometimes have emerged; a significant number of doctorates in rhetoric and composition appear to be awarded to persons who have served as adjunct labor), the lower-managerial lifeway of fighting for personal "control" over instructional "resources" and disciplinary status recognition is very different from the ethos of struggle usually associated with social and workplace transformation: the raising of consciousness, the formation of solidarities, the

building of coalitions, and so forth. If the analogy to the foreman or noncommissioned officer holds true, we would expect to find not only acquiescence to the “necessities” framed by the ruling class represented by upper management and commissioned officers, but even an enlarged loyalty to those imperatives. (As in the trope of the grizzled master sergeant who understands the “necessity” of sending troops under fire while the new second lieutenant sentimentally condones desertion and “cowardice,” the noncommissioned officer/WPA is still embodied, enlisted labor, but as lower management the WPA is required to be more “loyal” to the “necessities” of maintaining the class structure than those who genuinely benefit from the class structure.) In this context, the “heroism” of the heroic WPA consists precisely in his or her capacity to represent the interests of the ruling class as the interests of the workers (teachers and students) in their charge. Jeanne Gunner is particularly trenchant in this connection, noting that the “tyrannical positions” held by many WPAs in relation to their writing staff are commonly justified by sincerely held convictions of “benevolence” (158–59).

Certainly, the “heroism” of the heroic WPA trades on the intimacy of the professional or managerial compositionist with the composition labor force. This intimacy is reflected by a certain ambiguity in the first-person plural in composition scholarship: who is the “we” indexed by composition scholars? Who is meant by the term “compositionist”? Sometimes it means “those who teach composition”; sometimes it means “those who theorize and supervise the teaching of composition.” The movement between these meanings always has a pronounced tendency to obscure the interests and voice of those who teach composition in sub-faculty conditions, ultimately to the advantage of university management. At the same time, it imbues the ambition of the professional or managerial compositionist for respect and validity with the same urgency as the struggle of composition labor for wages, healthcare, and office space. Commonly, this confusion of the professional and lower-managerial interests with the labor struggle takes the form of suggesting that the set of demands overlap, or that the labor struggle depends upon the prior satisfaction of the professional and managerial agenda. From a materialist standpoint, the intimacy enabling the multiple meanings of “we” becomes a vector for continuing exploitation. Understanding this intimacy as a structural relationship requires careful examination of the possibility that the heroic narrative of disciplinary “success” for professional and managerial compositionists has depended in part on the continuing *failure* of the labor struggle.

A materialist view of the disciplinarization of rhetoric and composition would situate this ascendancy not (only) in the heroic struggle of writing program intellectuals for recognition and status, but in the objective conditions of labor created by upper management: the steady substitution of student and other non-, para- and sub-faculty labor for teacher labor; the establishment of multiple tiers of work; the consolidation of control over the campus by upper administration, legislatures, and trustees, and so on. For instance, if we are to locate the ascendancy of rhetoric and composition in the years 1975 to 1995, then we must also acknowledge that this is a period of time in which undergraduate admissions substantially expanded while full-time faculty were reduced by ten percent and while the number of graduate student employees was increased by forty percent (Lafer). How can composition's "success" be separated from this story of failure for academic labor more generally? Clearly, the emergence of rhetoric and composition into some form of (marginal) respectability and (institutional-bureaucratic) validity has a great deal to do with its usefulness to upper management in its legitimating the practice of deploying a revolving labor force of graduate employees and other contingent teachers to teach writing. The discipline's enormous usefulness to academic capitalism—in delivering cheap teaching, training a supervisory class for the cheap teachers, and producing a group of intellectuals who theorize and legitimate this scene of managed labor—has to be given at least as much credit in this expansion as the heroic efforts that Porter and his coauthors call the WPA's "strong track record for enacting change" (614). There is therefore a certain honesty in the tendency of some compositionists to urge the rest of the discipline to "admit" and embrace their "complicity" in a "corporate system" (see Harris 51–52; Miller, "Arts"). Indeed, in at least some cases, the advocacy of certain "changes" in composition seems to follow well behind the curve of academic capitalism's accomplished facts.

### **The Intricate Evasions of As: How to Be One of the Gang**

The professional life of an adjunct comes with its own set of challenges. At Houghton Mifflin, we understand the valuable role that adjuncts play in higher education, and we hope the information on this web site helps you to negotiate those challenges.

—Adjuncts.com

Houghton Mifflin's college division registered the domain name [www.adjuncts.com](http://www.adjuncts.com) and created the Web site [Adjuncts.com](http://Adjuncts.com) primarily to introduce nontenurable faculty to its textbooks. The site additionally invites visitors to use a variety of resources organized by field (under a menu headed "Go to Your Discipline") and tailored to what it describes as the unique needs of the nontenurable faculty (their "own" challenges). Houghton Mifflin's language of "understanding" the "valuable role" of adjunct labor is redolent of composition's professional-managerial discourse on "the labor problem," which likewise features itself as offering help to composition labor in "negotiating" their "challenges." Most of the material on the site adopts the tone of a *Chronicle of Higher Education* advice column such as Jill Carroll's "How to Be One of the Gang When You're Not," which urges adjunct labor to overcome the social "prejudice" of research faculty by "acting like" someone with a professorial job. This "acting like" includes showing up at guest lectures, eating at the faculty club, organizing conferences, volunteering for committee work, doing scholarship, writing items for the faculty newsletter, attending department and campus meetings. Acknowledging that most of these actions constitute unwaged labor, Carroll represents that at least for those who have "made peace" with the "dominant facts of adjunct life" ("the low pay, the lack of respect, the lack of job stability"), all of this unpaid "acting like" a member of the professoriate might enable more "social interaction" with better-paid colleagues, ultimately paying off in the coin of emotion: "relationships with other faculty members can be intellectually rich and one of the most satisfying aspects of the job."

A reading of Carroll's text could press in a number of directions. A reading that looked to the feminization of teaching work—in the vein of Eileen Schell's book, for example—would comment on the concomitant feminization of reward in passages like this one, perhaps then going on to critically explore the advocacy of a "service ethos" for composition labor in Richard Miller's work: how much of the uniqueness of adjunct life's special "challenges" and rewards, such as "service" and "relationships," are coded as opportunities for women? Another line of critique would examine the fairness issues raised by a discourse urging professionalization of work ("Go to Your Discipline") in the absence of a concomitant professionalization of reward ("But Look for Your Paycheck Elsewhere"). These issues can be gotten at most vigorously by the growing literature on super- or hyper-exploitation such as Andrew Ross' investigation, "The Mental Labor Problem," which names a radical

erosion of the wage in many sectors of knowledge work, sometimes by substituting non-material rewards such as the chance to work in an exciting/creative/professional manner: “being creative” or “being professional” in this respect substitutes for a substantial portion of the wage itself.

Perhaps the most interesting reading, to which I’ll return in closing, would relate this problem of adjunct labor to the obsession among professional compositionists with their disciplinary status, a structure of feeling that can easily be represented as “how to be one of the gang” of disciplines.<sup>4</sup> In my view, the problem of composition labor’s felt exteriority to the gang of professors cannot be separated from the problem of composition management’s felt exteriority to the gang of disciplines: the two structures of feeling are inseparably related along the “degree zero” of the material specificity of composition work—which is to say, work conducted in the scene of managed para-faculty labor. (I borrow the term “degree zero” from Paolo Virno, who uses it to describe the “neutral kernel” of material determination that unites related but apparently contradictory structures of feeling. He asks, “What are the modes of being and feeling that characterize the emotional situations both of those who bow obsequiously to the status quo and of those who dream of revolt?” That is, how is that the same determining circumstances support those who go along and those who resist? [28].) This problem is not composition’s problem alone—foreign language acquisition and health sciences are also particularly visible in this respect—but nowhere is the scene so prevalent and institutionalized as in composition, where the terminal degree does not presently signify certification of professional labor but, as Miller observes, testifies instead to the likely “requirement” of serving in lower management. This is not to say, of course, that the circumstance is composition’s “fault”—far from it—only that it is a place of managed para-professional teaching where the conversion of the university to an “education management organization” (EMO) is visible, just as health sciences reveals the movement to managed care (the HMO). Professional composition, in my view, will never feel like “one of the gang” of disciplines until its labor patterns are more like those in other fields. (Of course, this equivalence could easily come about by the frightening but very real possibility—evidenced by clear statistical trends—that labor patterns in other disciplines will become more like those in composition, rather than the other way around.) To put it in blunt terms, so long as composition’s discourse remains a management science—or, alternatively, until history, engineering, and philosophy are

management sciences to the same extent—it is likely to fail to enjoy the status it seeks: the status of a discipline among peers. Insofar as we observe the continuing realization of the logic of the EMO, however, composition's "peerlessness"—its nonequivalence with the other disciplines—is likely to become increasingly visible as its "excellence," in Bill Readings' sense, *with composition exemplifying the ideal labor relation of the managed university* to which all other disciplines must conform.

One interesting variant on this last reading would be to push the identity crisis of composition management yet further and to examine critically the ways that composition management either tries to "be one" with the gang of composition labor or demonstrates its "understanding" and appreciation ("I feel your pain" or "I hear your song"), co-opting the voice of labor in the process. Yet another variant would reverse the observation that managers are workers too and would investigate the degree to which the working subject is also a managerial subject, as well as rhetoric and composition's role in what Randy Martin, following a long line of cultural studies critiques of "the managed self," describes as a campus-based "national pedagogy" promoting a "calculus of the self that eclipses labor's actual opportunities" (26; also see Brantlinger and Watkins).

The urgency and interest of other readings notwithstanding, at this juncture my primary concern with Carroll's column is the overall strategy represented by the line of thought it exemplifies ("advice for adjuncts"). What characterizes this field of knowledge, much of it generated by adjuncts themselves (such as Carroll), is the dissemination of tactics for "getting ahead in the system as it is." The keynote of this genre is that there are facts of life in the corporate university and most possible versions of agency revolve around learning the ropes of the corporation rather than imagining alternatives to corporatism. Most professional compositionists will recognize the emergence of this note in their own conversation in a twin sense. First, insofar as this kind of advice frequently comes from adjunct labor, this kind of discourse frequently is permitted to "pass" as the voice of composition labor—commonly to the exclusion or marginalization of the very different voice represented, for example, by the fifty-campus movement of organized graduate employees. This other voice is committed not to the recognition of the inevitability of the corporate university, but to struggling toward a different reality. Second, composition management deploys the value "getting ahead" together with a set of assertions about "the system as it is" in order to adopt a

paternalist standpoint of care within a general strategy of lowered expectations—saying, in effect, “Given current ‘realities,’ the best ‘we can do’ for the teachers and students in our care is to help them to get ahead.”

In terms of theorizing agency and change, therefore, a large sector of composition discourse appears to be moving toward an extremely limited notion of both, characterized by a sense of belatedness, in exactly the sense of Francis Fukuyama’s claim regarding the “end of history” or Daniel Bell’s earlier claim of an “end to ideology.” As noted above, the implications of an end of history for the discourse of managerial compositionists is that any “changes” that may be wrought in the future will be wrought within the frame of “recognizing” the inevitability of the corporate university or, as Miller puts it, “conceding the reality of academic working conditions” (*As If* 22).

The recent calls in mainstream composition discourse for nontenure-track instructorships (Murphy and Harris among many others) as a “solution” to the super-exploitation of composition labor is a good example of what is most disturbing about this line of thought. While the subtitle of Murphy’s piece suggests that he is writing, in September 2000, prospectively “toward a full-time teaching-intensive faculty track in composition” (as if such a thing required inventing), he confesses that he is really seeking only to “acknowledge what has *actually already taken place*” (23). What Murphy means by this is that part-time teachers are in most cases “really” full-time teachers, even if they have to teach at multiple institutions in order to do so (he cites his own case, teaching five courses per semester on two separate campuses, essentially “splitting” his appointment as a full-time teacher [24]). He goes on to propose that universities “formally recognize” this circumstance by creating full-time nontenurable positions that “those teachers could grow into over the course of a career.” The ultimate aim is that “teaching-intensive” faculty would participate in governance and administration and enjoy recognition as “legitimate full-time academic citizens,” albeit with “salaries running parallel to, although always somewhat behind, those of traditional faculty” (25).

One may agree or disagree with this proposal, but I for one feel constrained to point out that historically there have been plenty of “teaching intensive” assistant professorships requiring little research and plenty of teaching, as in the community colleges and most liberal arts colleges; why not “advocate” the (re)creation of professorships rather than nontenurable instructorships? Insofar as many if not most “teaching

intensive” positions have traditionally been professorial, what exactly is the appeal of making them nontenurable, if not, as AAUP and the major academic unions have long observed, to consolidate managerial control? Further, the “invention” of nontenurable instructorships, frequently paying less than \$30,000 for teaching a five-five load, coincides with a radically gendered segmentation of the academic workforce: the persons being offered these jobs (involving more than full-time work but yielding less than full-time pay and rewards) are overwhelmingly women, whereas in higher education at large the tenured faculty and upper administration continue to be primarily men. Is the work nontenurable because it is done by women? Or is it “women’s work” because it is nontenurable? (Minority faculty likewise are over-represented in the ranks of the nontenurable full-time positions.) And the leading studies of nontenure-track faculty indicate that about half are dissatisfied with their job security, salaries, and ability to keep up with knowledge in their field. Furthermore, contrary to Murphy’s projection of a “stable” nontenure-track workforce, the full-time nontenure-track population is characterized by high turnover. At any given moment, slightly more than half of nontenure-track faculty expect to leave their current position “within three years,” many of them for jobs outside of academe altogether (Finkelstein et al.). Even *U.S. News and World Report*—never known for a bias in favor of labor—reports on the trend toward nontenure-track instructorships under the headline, “The New Insecurity,” and feels constrained to observe, in a featured box, that fifty-seven percent of these jobs are held by women (as compared to twenty-six percent of tenured positions). Certainly, then, rhetoric and composition’s enthusiasm for this kind of appointment should be, at the very least, up for debate.

But the important point in considering Murphy’s article here is that what he proposes has actually *already* taken place and in a much more straightforward sense than he seems to be aware of. While Murphy acknowledges in a footnote that full-time nontenure-track appointments “have already been experimented with” at a “surprising” number of schools (37 n.2), the reality was that all major data sources in the early and mid-1990s (most of them drawing on the NSOPF-93 data set) already showed that as of fall 1992 *more than twenty percent* of the full-time faculty served in nontenure-track positions—for a total of more than 100,000 persons employed in this “experimental” way. Furthermore, by April 1999 the *Chronicle of Higher Education* and other major education journals circulated the results of the Chronister-Baldwin study, which showed that by 1995 the proportion of full-time faculty working off the

tenure track had climbed to twenty-eight percent from nineteen percent in 1975, while in the same period the proportion of those on the tenure track (but not yet tenured) dropped correspondingly, from twenty-nine percent to twenty percent (Leatherman). To be fair to Murphy, his overall intention might still be grasped as attempting to affect the proportions within the mixed employment pattern that presently obtains in composition by increasing the percentage of the full-time lectureships relative to the number of part-time lectureships. Nonetheless, a kind of position held by between one-quarter and one-third of all full-time faculty and rising steadily upward really can't be framed as an "experiment" in "new" kinds of faculty work.<sup>5</sup> Even a somewhat less rigorous voluntary survey—which probably undercounts nontraditional faculty work—showed that full-time nontenure-track instructors accounted for close to one-fifth of the instruction in all English and freestanding composition departments.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, the National Center for Education Statistics' "New Entrants" white paper, commenting on the fact that persons beginning full-time academic employment in 1985 or later were more than twice as likely overall (thirty-three percent) to serve off the tenure track than persons hired before 1985 (seventeen percent), postulated that the eye-opening statistical change toward nontenurable work for the whole cohort of younger scholars had a lot to do with the "considerable number of nontenure-track appointments for foreign-language and writing specialists" (Finkelstein et al. 29).

In this instance, then, what passed for a "reasonable proposal" for rhetoric and composition—even, portentously, as a "new faculty for a new university"—was in fact a practice well established in the management-dominated university by the mid-1980s. In this light, the proposal stands revealed not as the prospective and imaginary excursion into a better world, but to a certain disappointing extent thoroughly reactive and even apologist, functioning to *idealize after the fact*, legitimating an already existing reality that few people are pleased with. Furthermore, insofar as the major source of data on the workforce in higher education had already identified the creation of nontenurable full-time positions as a noteworthy trend *particular to writing instruction* fifteen years earlier—a disciplinary trend in new writing faculty so pronounced that it affected the statistical profile of the pool of *all* entering faculty—the fact that Murphy's article has so far been eagerly taken up elsewhere in the rhetoric and composition literature as a genuinely innovative "proposal" for "new faculty" suggests a pervasive self-ignorance in our discourse. How does it come about that one of the discipline's two or three leading

journals is prepared to publish a “practical proposal” regarding composition labor that is to this degree out of touch with the statistical reality of the composition workplace? This is ultimately not a question of Murphy’s individual research, but of the warm reception that this proposal—which-is-not-one received by professional compositionists (for example, Harris, who goes so far as to congratulate Murphy for “doing the numbers,” when at least in this respect Murphy hasn’t done the numbers at all).

So, it is perhaps unsurprising that the readers of the article by Porter and his coauthors would need to be encouraged to believe in their own agency as regards institutional transformation. After more than three decades of corporatization and, not incidentally, disciplinary advances for professional and managerial compositionists, most readers will have understood by now that their “track record” has everything to do with the *kinds* of “change” being enacted.<sup>7</sup> A lab for business writing? Sure. Salary, tenure, and research budget for writing program administrators? No problem. A graduate program or certificate in rhetoric and composition? Go for it. But when it comes to employing the institutional capital that comes from overseeing a large cheap labor force for purposes that run counter to institutional capitalism, such as addressing the scandalous working conditions of the labor force itself, the lower-management track record of enacting change is pretty poor. While there is substantial evidence that even in this early stage of the movement, organized adjunct faculty and graduate employees have the power to transform their working conditions—obtain health insurance, job security, the protections of due process, raises of forty percent or more, and so on, often by acting collectively to change local and national law, struggling successfully with the frequently illegal actions of university management—there is little evidence that lower management has the same power to effect these kinds of “change.”<sup>8</sup>

There is an earnest materialism to the pessimistic structure of feeling addressed by Porter and his coauthors. Most professional and managerial compositionists want to do something about the exploitative system of academic labor. However, whether they do so logically, intuitively, or from the experience of essaying numerous “rhetorical strategies” with disappointing results, most also understand that there is little they can do about the labor system, either as individuals or as administrators. Indeed, perhaps the most important realization of the administrative subjectivity is that “having” administrative power is to be subject to administrative imperatives—that is, to be individually powerless before a version of

“necessity” originating from some other source. This is, in part, the lesson of Annette Kolodny’s compelling recent memoir of her deanship at the University of Arizona, a position she correctly dubs “academic middle management.” She accepted the job in the belief that one committed administrator, “a feminist committed to both equity and educational excellence,” could make the kind of difference that Porter and his colleagues hope for the WPA, serving as “an instrument for progressive evolution.” In doing so, she ultimately felt compelled, with many reservations, to employ the wiles of the canny bureaucrat: “If logic and hard data failed me and I thought it would help, I teased, I cajoled, I flirted, I pouted. I bought small gifts for one provost and always remembered the birthday of another” (21). And despite some modest successes, many of them the result of committed over-exertions with consequences for her health, ideals, and friendships, she ultimately concludes that she had attempted something that couldn’t be done by administrative agency; she devotes the last section of the book to rediscovering such agents of historical change as unionism and mass political movements—demanding, for example, a more just distribution of material wealth and opportunity.

As Kolodny’s experience suggests, university administrators are doubly implicated in the set of transformations dubbed “academic capitalism,” being required both to make the university responsive to “exterior market forces” as well as to cultivate “market behavior” in the faculty. In this context, it seems clear that administrators, especially lower administrators, are more—not less—subject to the dictates of academic capitalism than the faculty. The faculty are at least “free” to resist marketization, albeit with varying degrees of success; whereas it seems that the work of academic managers at the present time fully overlaps with the project of marketization; there is literally no way to be a “manager” without feeling the “necessity” of adopting and promoting market values. The installation of managerialism as the core subjectivity of the discipline of rhetoric and composition is therefore not so much an indicator of the field’s “success” as evidence of its particular susceptibility, the very terms of its intellectual evolution intertwined with the university’s accelerated move toward corporate partnership, executive control, and acceptance of profitability and accumulation as values in decision making.

## The Hidden Idealism of Managerial “Materialism”

Management theory has become so variegated in recent years that, for some, it now constitutes a perfectly viable replacement for old-fashioned intellectual life. There’s so much to choose from! So many deep thinkers, so many flashy popularizers, so many schools of thought, so many bold predictions, so many controversies!

For all this vast and sparkling intellectual production, though, we hear surprisingly little about what it’s like to *be managed*.

—Thomas Frank

One consequence of the materialist self-understanding of the compositionist as a managerial intellectual has been a turn toward “pragmatic” philosophies in rhetoric and composition discourse. These urge the intellectual in rhetoric and composition to acknowledge this “complicity” and adopt the posture of a “canny bureaucrat” (Miller, “Arts”). Collapsing critical theory and cultural studies into classroom manifestations, this standpoint tends to characterize critical theory in crude terms (for example, as the dosing of students with outmoded lefty truisms). Its primary tactic is to attempt to turn the critique of Enlightenment theories of knowledge against its authors in critical theory, cultural studies, and radical pedagogy. For instance, Freirean pedagogues elaborating a critique of the banking theory of knowledge are (mis)represented by the pragmatist movement as themselves attempting to deposit “out of date” anticapitalist sentiments in the helpless student brain. For these pragmatists, the “ideals” of critical pedagogy are part of the problem, insofar as these idealisms are inevitably out of touch with fundamental “realities” of the corporate university. Ultimately, this debunking of critical theory and cultural studies has acquired no traction outside the field of rhetoric and composition, and it probably offers little of enduring interest even within the field beyond the useful but unremarkable observations that classroom activities are an insufficient lever for social change and that it is possible for teachers to deploy radical pedagogy in ways that further domination. This last observation is indeed useful—far too many teachers, just as Miller suggests, adopt radical pedagogy because it can be made to conceal our complicity with domination, but in my view this usefulness hardly adds up to a convincing argument that the only remaining option is for teachers to adopt a pedagogy overtly complicit with domination, or, in Miller’s words, to “strategically deploy the thoughts and ideas of the corporate world” (“Let’s” 98).

What is most interesting about this “pragmatic” movement is that it has managed to conceal its own hidden idealism—its less-than-critical adherence to what Frank dubs the “market god,” and its concomitant elevation of corporate management to a priestly class. By concealing its own market idealism underneath a rhetoric of exclusive purchase on reality, pragmatist ideologues have had a fair amount of success in discouraging the effort to realize any *other* ideals than those of the market. (This is the imposition of what Jameson calls “the Reagan-Kemp and Thatcher utopias,” and what David Harvey calls a “political correctness of the market.”) Among the many useful observations of the critical tradition is that despite the fantasies of those Marx loved to call the “vulgar political economists,” markets don’t exist transhistorically; they have “reality” to the extent that they are installed and maintained by human agents devoted to achieving particular market ideals. Pragmatist idealizations of the market conceal the human agency in the creation and maintenance of markets—what Sheila Slaughter and Larry Leslie describe as the conscious and deliberate “marketizing” of higher education in the United States and globally since the Nixon administration. Brought about not by necessity but by the planned and intentional defunding of public institutions together with a corresponding diversion of public funds to private ventures (“corporate welfare”), market ideals were energetically wrestled into reality by embodied agents with political and economic force, who in the process rolled back alternative ideals that themselves had been realized in law and policy by collective social action throughout the twentieth century (hence “neo” liberalism, referring to the reinstallation of nineteenth-century *laissez-faire* or “liberal” economic policies).

Changing the managed university (and the politics of work therein) requires understanding that the “market fundamentalism” current among university managers has no more purchase on what is and what should be than any other system of foundational belief. Understood as a humanly engineered historical emergence of the past three decades, the “managed university” names a global phenomenon: the forced privatization of public higher education; the erosion of faculty, student, and citizen participation in higher education policy, except through academic-capitalist and consumerist practices; the steady conversion of socially beneficial activities (cultivation of a knowledge commons, development of a democratic citizenry fit to govern itself) to the commodity form—the sale of information goods, such as patents and corporate-sponsored research, and the production of a job-ready workforce (see Rhoades and Slaughter;

Slaughter and Leslie; Martin). As Martin makes clear, these circumstances are not brought about in the North American and European context because the state has “withdrawn” from higher education, but because it “invests itself” ever more aggressively “in promoting an alignment of human initiative with business interest” (7). Globally, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank have actively promoted a similar “reform agenda” with respect to higher education and have used their power to impose involuntary privatization on national higher education systems, especially in Africa, requiring tuition fees, and effectively “recolonizing” cultural and intellectual life throughout the global South, as direct policy intervention combined with neoliberal “constraints” caused universities to “substitute new staff, standardize pedagogical materials and marginalize local knowledges” (Levidow).<sup>9</sup>

In all of these and most responsible materialist accounts, human agency drives history. But in the pragmatist-managerial version of materialism, collective human agencies are conspicuously absent. Even the agency of individuals is radically evacuated: for pragmatists, “markets” are real agents and persons generally are not, except in their acquiescence to market dicta. Miller, for example, writes, “The truth is that the question of who’s qualified to teach first-year writing was settled a long time ago by the market” (“Let’s” 99). In a world of systems “governed” by the “arbitrary,” the “only possible” human agency becomes something like flexible self-specialization, the continuous retooling of self in response to market “demands,” a subjectivity that Richard Sennett observes is just as unsatisfying a “corrosion of character” for those who “win” the market game as for those who “lose.” In this view, persons can only be agents by adopting the arts of corporate domination and by fitting themselves to the demands of the market, “working within a system governed by shifting and arbitrary requirements” (Miller, “Arts” 26). Representing corporate domination as a fact of life, this brand of pragmatism ultimately conceals a historically specific ideological orientation (neoliberalism) behind an aggressive (re)description of “reality” in which “left-wing” bogeymen are sometimes raised as the threats to human agency—see, for example, Spellmeyer’s redbaiting review of *Left Margins*—when the real threat to human agency is the corporate-bureaucratic limits to human possibility established by the pragmatists themselves. The pragmatist turn has left its trace nearly everywhere in composition discourse. Even while attempting to resuscitate the commitment to social transformation, following the lead of Marxist geographer David Harvey, Porter and his coauthors, for example, hold up as the straw

man of “ineffectual” critique the figure of “academics railing at monopoly capitalism.” Rather ironically for adherents of Harvey, they thereby reinscribe capitalist exploitation as the outer limit of “change” (leaving one wondering exactly how one can read Harvey and not see a member of the academy “railing” at capitalist exploitation and attempting to map its exterior).

What most troubles me about the pragmatist movement is the way it seeks to curb the ambitions of our speech and rhetoric. In the pragmatist account, contemporary realities dictate that all non-market idealisms will be “dismissed as the plaintive bleating of sheep” but corporate-friendly speech “can be heard as reasoned arguments” (Miller, “Arts” 27). I find this language intrinsically offensive, associating movement idealism and social-project identities, and activist collectivity generally with the subhuman, rather than with (as I see it) the fundamentally human capacity to think and act cooperatively. More important than the adjectives and analogies, however, is the substructure of assumptions about *what rhetoric is for*. The implicit scene of speech suggested here is of “pleasing the prince,” featuring an all-powerful auditor with values beyond challenge, and a speaker only able to share power by association with the dominating logic of the scene—a speaker whose very humanity depends upon speaking a complicity with domination. As a cultural studies scholar, I respect the lived realities of subjectivity under domination and thoroughly understand the need for frequent speech acts of “complicity.” However, this does not suggest for me that this scene offers the central topos constitutive of human agency, or that the prince—however powerful—should be the object of our rhetoric.

Most astonishing about the recent success of claims that the logic and rhetoric of solidarity or justice “cannot be heard” is that these claims are so patently false, both as a matter of history and of contemporary reality. What do claims like these make of the achieved historical transformation associated with groups united by the idealism and critical imagination of rhetors such as Emma Goldman, W.E.B. DuBois, Eugene Debs, and Nelson Mandela? What of the gains of democratic revolutions after 1750? Or the nineteenth-century gains of abolition, decolonization, feminism, communism, and trades-unionism? Were any of these gains, together with the gains of the social movements after 1960, achieved by the sort of recognition of “institutional constraints” advocated by the pragmatists? And in the contemporary frame, despite the great success of corporate management in disorganizing labor, are the still- (and

newly-) organized voices of labor really “dismissed as the plaintive bleating of sheep” by management at Ford or the California state universities? Hardly. The millions of dollars and dozens of managerial careers openly devoted to the perpetual struggle to contain and divide labor at both places suggests the magnitude of the power they are attempting to defuse. (The graduate employee union at the University of Michigan calculated that the annual salaries of the university’s full-time bargaining team—\$630,000—amounted to only slightly less than the cost of the contract improvements that the union was seeking (\$700,000 per year). Likewise, are the nonprofit values of social entitlement, dignity, and equality advocated by the organized voices of AARP, NAACP, and NOW similarly “dismissed” by Washington bureaucrats? Not really.

So, what should we make of a discourse that pretends that the organized voice of persons seeking social justice is impractical and sheep-like, and that agency is primarily possible in adopting a bureaucratic persona? In my view, we should call it a management discourse, of the sort that Frank barely exaggerates in suggesting that it threatens to take the place of intellectual life altogether. In holding our gaze on the managerialism of composition discourse, we ultimately need to ask, *cui bono*? Who benefits? Despite its rhetoric of “student need” and “customer service,” is the university of job-readiness really good for students? If it’s really designed to serve student needs, then why do so many students drop out in the first year and fail to graduate? If it’s more efficient to reduce education to vocation, then why does it cost more and more money to go to college? (Certainly the salary costs for instruction aren’t the reason.) Exactly who receives the “economic benefits” (if any) of lowered salaries, reduced services, and lowered expectations? Why are so many young people underemployed if they are being increasingly “well trained” for corporate life? Or, as in David Brodsky’s scathing account, does the managed university primarily serve the interests of “the nomadic managerial hordes” that have “torn up the social contract” to govern in their own interest? It is not only adjunct faculty like Brodsky who suggest that the liberated self-interest of university management may not fully coincide with the interests of society. In an opinion piece excoriating the “dumbing down” of university leadership as a result of the ascent of managerialism and the market ethos, one university president observes that the “peripatetic” class of candidates for top administration are “more interested in landing better jobs than contributing to higher education” (Lovett).

In seeking to “transform institutions,” then, the discourse of rhetoric and composition might share the skepticism of adjuncts like Brodsky at the claims of management discourse to deliver democratic outcomes through corporate processes and change for the many by liberating the self-interest of a few. At its best, the managerial discourse in composition has an earnest commitment to bettering the circumstances of embodied composition labor and a real enthusiasm for a better world. Nonetheless, it has yet to acknowledge the limits presented by its failure to confront, in Frank’s words, “what it’s like to *be managed*.”

### **Toward a New Class Consciousness in Composition: Writing without a WPA**

The only worker who is productive is one who is productive *for capital*. [A] schoolmaster is productive when, in addition to belaboring the heads of his pupils, he works himself into the ground in order to enrich the owner of the school. That the latter has laid out his capital in a teaching factory, instead of a sausage factory, makes no difference to the relation. . . .

To be a productive worker is therefore not a piece of luck, but a misfortune.

— Karl Marx

At the beginning of this essay, I suggested a willingness to make common cause with the administrative subject targeted by Porter and his coauthors (because managers are workers too). In closing, I’d like to ramify that willingness briefly, in connection with Harris’ call for a “new class consciousness” in composition.

What Harris means by a “new” class consciousness is “one that joins the interests of bosses and workers around the issue of good teaching for fair pay” (45). Living in a “right to work” state, I have to say that my first reading of this evidently sincere rubric literally gave me a chill. At its most disturbing, this is Toyotist rhetoric clothed in academic Marxism, grafting the total-quality “team” of management and labor onto disciplinary identity, borrowing the term “class consciousness” to add an aura of legitimacy to the plan. As in all Toyotist versions of an “identity of interest” between management and labor, this plan simply consolidates managerial control. “What the director of a writing program wants,” Harris continues, “is to be able to interview, hire, and train a teaching staff, to fire teachers who don’t work out, to establish curriculum, to set

policies and to represent the program as he or she sees best. What teachers want are reasonable salaries, benefits, working conditions, and job security; autonomy over their work; and to be treated with respect as colleagues” (57). Leaving aside the question of whether this managerial portrait genuinely represents either class consciousness or “what teachers want,” I have to wonder by what mechanism would we adjudicate the conflicts that inhere even in this rosy representation? That is, how does the WPA’s right to establish curriculum and set policies square with the teachers’ right to “autonomy over their work”? Who defines teaching that doesn’t “work out”? Why should it be the WPA and not other teachers, as in other disciplines?



**THE AMERICAN TWINS.**  
 “United we stand. Divided we fall.”

Moreover, to anyone familiar with labor history, this rhetoric isn't new at all, but sounds exactly like the old "partnership between labor and capital" rhetoric of nineteenth-century anti-unionism, inked most famously by the dean of American political cartoonists, Thomas Nast. In his most famous images on the theme, Nast opposed both organized (or "monopoly") capital and organized labor, and he insisted on a community of interest between the two. For instance, in a *Harper's Weekly* cartoon of November 23, 1878, he shows a smith using a hammer labeled "Labor" to forge another hammerhead labeled "Capital" under the didactic headline: "One and Inseparable: Capital Makes Labor and Labor Makes Capital." In the cartoon labeled "The American Twins" reproduced here, Nast shows a worker and a top-hatted capitalist "boss" as Siamese twins, joined at the hip. Under the rubric "The *Real Union*," the reader is invited to see labor's interests as harmonizing with the "boss" on exactly the sort of principle that Harris suggests ("good [work] for fair pay") rather than in collective bargaining.

Fortunately for the rest of us, the nineteenth-century labor movement rejected this rhetoric and worked in solidarity to establish the eight-hour day, reductions in the exploitation of youth and student labor, a more just wage, health benefits, release time for education and recreation, a safer workplace, and so on. And the contemporary labor movement in the academy will reject Harris' rhetoric as well, in part because so many of these nineteenth-century demands are once again relevant, but also because it is in their power (and not lower management's) to accomplish these things. Furthermore, what a large sector of composition labor (graduate employees and former graduate employees working off the tenure track) "really wants" is not to be *treated as* colleagues, but instead to *be* colleagues. Nearly every participant in the composition conversation would like to see writing instructors become "more like" faculty—to have the chance to govern, enjoy an intellectual life, develop as an instructor, and enjoy better pay, benefits, protections, and security. But this hasn't translated into a consensus among professional and managerial compositionists that writing instructors should actually *be* faculty. Why not? Isn't composition work faculty work? Or is composition's "faculty work" the supervision of parafaculty? Harris' vision for "our joined interests as composition workers and bosses" appears really to mean accomplishing the disciplinary and managerial agenda of "more direct control over our [sic] curricula and staffing—within departments of English, or, if need be, outside them" (57–58). It is hard to see how composition *labor* can have more direct control over "our" staffing

without transcending the evasions of “as” and actually becoming colleagues who participate in a hiring and tenuring process, just “as” the faculty do. So, unsurprisingly, nowhere in the actually existing academic labor movement over the past century has anyone discovered that what academic labor “really needs” is for lower-level management to have more direct control of curricula and staffing (or to have the chance to set up new departments for disciplines that don’t envision tenure for their workforce!). Somewhat predictably, this managerial plan for labor dignity is accompanied by digs at the CCC’s “Statement of Principles and Standards for the Postsecondary Teaching of Writing” for its “uncritical embrace of the tenure system as a guarantor of good teaching” (55).

So, on what basis might a real class consciousness in composition unfold? One clear way a genuine community of interest might unfold is in the mold of social-movement unionism, currently being practiced in a number of places in the academy, widespread in public-employee unionism more generally, and very significant in organizing efforts targeting the service economy. Advocated by Bruce Horner among others (207–08), movement unionism relates the public interest to the interest of the organized public employee, whose work is the “production of society itself” (a position that Horner redacts from Paul Johnston and that can be found more theoretically elaborated in the tradition of Italian autonomist Marxism—for example, Virno—but perhaps even more relevantly for the feminized labor of composition also importantly theorized in the feminist political economy of Selma James and Maria Dalla Costa). The “movement” union becomes a nexus for multiple struggles to converge and articulate an identity of interest in the project of transformation—a nexus of real-world agency through which organized humanity can once again see itself as the engine of history. The consciousness of “class” would invoke an identity of interests based not on workplace disciplines (“Oncologists unite!”) but on the common experience of selling one’s labor in order to live and on the desire—widespread in the academy, but also common in many sectors of service work—to “be productive” for society rather than capital.

But how could professional and managerial compositionists participate in this class consciousness or project identity? Certainly not as “managers” seeking “more direct control” of staff and curricula. Nevertheless, just as it is sometimes possible for deans and presidents to shed the administrative subjectivity and return to the labor of the professoriate, perhaps the professional and managerial compositionist can likewise

shed the desire for control and embrace the reality of collective agency. Are we so sure after all that what the professional compositionist “really wants” is “more control” over people he or she must creatively “treat as colleagues”? Perhaps what the professional compositionist really wants is to lay down the “requirement” to serve as WPA instead and to become a colleague among colleagues. Harris himself repeatedly identifies himself as a “worker” in a “collective educational project,” and unlike most contributors to the managerialist discourse he makes a point of endorsing collective bargaining and underlines the “structural and economic” nature of the problems we face. If we remove the taint of the pragmatist—the limits to the possible imposed by the “intellectual-bureaucrat”—we find in Harris’ “boss” a worker struggling to make him or herself available to the rhetoric and social project of solidarity.

What is ultimately most important about the efforts of Harris or Porter and his coauthors are not their various complicities, but their genuine attempt to explore a level of institutional critique that we are “not used to enacting in rhetoric and composition,” including changing law and public policy. Nonetheless, since these are areas in which organized academic labor has been struggling, often effectively, for decades, Porter and his colleagues’ statement that “we” are unused to acting in those arenas is false to an important extent. Indeed, any version of “us” that includes graduate-employee and contingent labor organizations would have to acknowledge that “we” are very much used to struggling over law with the university employer, and in the arena of policy with legislatures, labor policy boards, community groups, and the media—which means that if “institutional critique” is the answer to the pessimistic structure of feeling that presently characterizes professional and managerial compositionists, it is a kind of critique that the professionals and managers will have to learn from the workers in their charge. In order to realize the scene of lower management learning to practice “institutional critique” and the “arts of solidarity” from labor, we will eventually have to reconsider the limits to thought imposed by pragmatism and to learn once again to question the “inevitability” of the scene of managed labor to composition. In my view, composition’s best chance to contribute to a better world and to achieve disciplinary status depend on learning to write as colleagues among colleagues—a condition predicated on working toward a university without a WPA.<sup>10</sup>

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## Notes

1. The authors write, "In effect, we are assuming that individuals and groups/communities can indeed change institutions. But we are also assuming an agent of fairly powerful status already working within an institution: probably a member of the managerial or professional class who has entered an institution (e.g. the corporation) in some employee status that allows him or her to begin to make changes at least at a local level" (634 n.3).

2. The fear of "falling" out of the professional-managerial section of the working class is a prospect that professionals and managers worry about not just for their children but for themselves. The accelerated industrialization of knowledge work in the "knowledge economy" has meant that professionals and managers must continually rehabilitate their knowledge just to maintain their own career prospects and status. The privations of severe discipline and continual self-fashioning associated with training and apprenticeship (in undergraduate, professional-school, and early-career pressures) have become lifetime requirements for professionals and managers.

3. My purpose in this section of the paper is not to critique the work of actually existing WPAs, but to discuss the figure of the WPA as it emerges in rhetoric and composition scholarship more generally, as part of a historical turn toward practical and theoretical accommodation of the "realities" of the managed university. This would be a discussion of the WPA as canny bureaucrat/pragmatist boss, as constructed by Miller and Harris among others, insofar as that constructed figure threatens to become the field's dominant subject position and not the vexed and contradictory intentions and experiences of individuals. The real experiences of WPAs are simply too diverse to be addressed here. Not all WPAs, for example, are administrators—some serve as a kind of peer advisor in departments where most of the writing instruction is done by full-time faculty. Some WPAs are adjuncts themselves; many are graduate students. Nor is it my goal for this essay to be part of an effort to "reform" the practices of actually existing WPAs (as if the "bad policy" of lower administration caused the labor system), nor would such suggestions be consistent with this project's larger commitments. In the big picture, my goal would be not to reform but rather to *abolish* the WPA as part of a more general abolition of the scene of managed labor in the academy. In disciplinary terms, this would form part of a process of founding teaching and scholarship in rhetoric and composition on the basis of collegiality and self-governance that obtains elsewhere in the academy, rather than in the managed relation so firmly crystallized in the bodies and figure of the actually existing WPA.

Nonetheless, it may be helpful for some readers to trace the real experience behind the rhetorical figure. For instance, tracing the risk of "schizophrenia" involved in moving from academic labor to academic lower management, Mountford observes that "having once been one of the instructor-laborers," the WPA genuinely wants to consider herself a labor "insider" and even an

advocate, but discovers herself willy-nilly “a representative of institutional interests” who suffers a radical “change in values” in connection with upper management, becoming in effect, “one of them” (41–43). George’s collection of narratives by WPAs is particularly evocative for those interested in the complex movement of the class allegiances of the actual persons in the job. Grimm’s “The Way the Rich People Does It” explores the strong equivalence between the diminished notion of what counts as “critical” for the members of her family, who performed maid service, and the pragmatism of administration in a writing program: “For the Conroy women, a ‘critical’ approach to the habits of the rich people meant [correcting their relatives] whose habits fell short,” a kind of pragmatic approach to the idea of the critical that Grimm calls “useful” in learning to “pay attention” to “things that matter” to the “rich people” of the academy (that is, “the people in funding positions in the university”) (6). In the same collection, Brown explores the problem of graduate students who serve as administrators of other graduate employees (“the peer who isn’t a peer”) in a way that can be extended analytically to the structure of feeling animating the whole field of composition. Hesse explores the consequences in his own life of living the role of “WPA-as-father,” in a set of paternalist iterations ranging from the mass-mediated images of paternal caretaking represented by Anthony Hopkins in *Remains of the Day*, to Bartholomae’s image of the WPA as Michael Keaton’s Batman (“protecting and responsible, yet also brooding”), to the images drawn from Hesse’s own adolescence “climbing on and off a garbage truck” (47, 50). For a critique of the many ways that actually existing WPAs become subject to the various ideologies of paternalism and benevolence, and the way in which even a shared sense of speaking from the “outside” can be mobilized by the administrative subject “in defense of tyranny,” see Gunner. For a discussion of the WPA as a worker with little control over the disposition of her own labor, see Micciche.

4. Downing’s “Beyond Disciplinary English” systematically relates the operation of disciplinarity in English to the exploitative division of labor in the field, a formation he calls “managed disciplinarity” (28).

5. An opinion piece by Murphy appeared in the *Chronicle* while I was revising this essay for publication. Overall, the later piece retains the rhetoric of the first (“We should formalize the . . . heterogeneity that actually exists in higher education”), but it substantially modifies his proposal in two respects. First, in the new piece, he now proposes creating *tenure track* positions for full-timers who concentrate on teaching, and, second, he limits the proposal to “institutions where other faculty members now get significant load reductions for research and where large numbers of part-timers are now used” (B15). Insofar as these kinds of institutions already have a full-time faculty comprised of between seventeen and twenty-eight percent nontenure-track faculty, many of whom concentrate on teaching (some are nontenure-track researchers), one has to ask, *even if* the “new” full-time positions were created by combining the part-time faculty positions into new tenure-track teaching positions, how would these new

tenure-track teaching positions relate to the huge number of already existing nontenure-track teaching positions? Or is Murphy now just arguing for the tenure eligibility of persons who concentrate on teaching, a position consistent with past academic practice at many institutions and the policies of all academic unions (as well as with my own views)? If so, kudos, but one still has to ask why does he now exclude nonresearch-oriented schools from his new recommendations, where the tenuring of faculty on the basis of teaching is common practice?

6. The survey breaks down teaching by department into “introductory,” “all other,” and “all” undergraduate courses. In English and freestanding composition courses, this schematic doesn’t quite capture the role of writing instruction, which comprises a significant percentage of “introductory” courses but is far from the total. Similarly, a great deal of writing instruction takes place in upper-division classes, such as business and professional writing, writing about literature and culture, and so on. The survey represents that seventeen to eighteen percent of “introductory” courses in the English and freestanding composition departments surveyed are taught by full-time nontenure-track faculty.

7. See Gunner (154, 160) for a skeptical account of what happens to proposals for change that threaten the “structural base” of disciplinary power, as well as the measure of improvements in “professional conditions” (“basically, the tenure rate for WPAs”).

8. For instance, the UAW-affiliated NYU graduate-employee union won raises of \$5,000 per year in its first contract (2002) for more than a third of its membership, with stipends increasing as much as thirty-eight percent over the life of the contract, plus one hundred percent health coverage. By 2004, the minimum graduate-employee stipend at NYU will be \$18,000 for a twenty-hour week. Similar gains are expected by the newly-organized bargaining unit for nontenure-track faculty on the same campus, the largest unit of its kind in the country. At the University of Michigan, the Graduate Employees Organization negotiated almost half a million dollars in additional childcare subsidy from its employer: \$1,700 per semester for the first child plus \$850 per semester for each child thereafter. Similarly, at the largest public university system in the country, California State, the union’s 2002 contract compelled the university to hire twenty percent more tenure-track faculty in each year of the contract, as well as expanded benefits and security for existing nontenure-track faculty, including three-year contracts for those with six years of service (Philips). For more details, see Lafer on graduate employee unionism, Griffin on contingent-faculty unionism in composition, the Coalition of Graduate Employee Unions website (<http://www.cgeu.org>), and *Workplace: A Journal for Academic Labor* (<http://www.workplace-gsc.com>).

9. In an article entitled “The Worldwide Rise of Private Colleges,” the *Chronicle* portrays privatization as a kind of corporate “white knight” that emerges in the aftermath of the “failure” of the public sector: “As the world’s hunger for higher education has outstripped the ability of many governments to

pay for it, a type of institution has come to the rescue that is well established in the United States . . . private colleges” (Cohen). Associating the “public” with failure, scarcity, and famine (“world hunger”), the piece assigns heroic agency to market institutions and the U.S. On this wildly rhetorical foundation, the piece proceeds to a stunningly propagandistic reversal of cause and effect in describing the privatization process: “In Mexico, a nine-month strike last year over the introduction of tuition at the country’s largest public institution, the National Autonomous University, drove some middle-class students who were impatient with the strike’s socialist ideals onto the campuses of private colleges . . .” (A 47–48). It is, of course, the forced introduction of tuition in a public institution that leads to the nine-month strike, so if there is a cause for middle-class flight from public institutions, it is not the “strike” or “socialist ideals” but the prior act of defunding. One must ask, why does the article install “impatient middle-class students” as the normative subjectivity, rather than the subject *actually the norm on the scene—that is, a striking student subject* engaged in a heroically protracted resistance to privatization?

The “Worldwide” piece heads a cluster on global privatizations: the piece on South Africa is typical in using its lead paragraph to introduce the reader to a student who visited a public university in Johannesburg only to be “put off by the dirty campus and by the common sight of demonstrating students doing the *toyi-toyi*, a rhythmic dance of protest” (A51). It is easy enough to pick out the faults of journalistic writing in the *Chronicle*, a journal aimed in large part at an administrative readership. But it seems less clear why rhetoric and composition should adopt the same aversion to the “striking” and “demonstrating” subject.

10. A version of this article will appear in *Composition as Management Science: Literacy Work in the Managed University*, forthcoming in fall 2003 from Southern Illinois University Press. It could not have been written without the inspiration and thoughtful engagement of my coeditors, Tony Scott and Leo Parascondola. This essay benefited enormously from the intellectual partnership of Heather Julien, Chris Carter, and Laura Bartlett Snyder, as well as from the generous contributions of the collective of *Workplace: A Journal for Academic Labor* ([www.workplace-gsc.com](http://www.workplace-gsc.com)), James Seitz, and an anonymous reader for *JAC*. With respect to the Nast cartoon, I am very grateful for the gifts of time and knowledge donated by Granville Ganter, Delinda Buie, Mildred Franks, and Harry Rubenstein, curator for labor history at the Smithsonian.

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