Writing Program Administration as Conversation

Tom Recchio

> We say that we "conduct" a conversation, but the more fundamental a
> conversation is, the less its conduct lies within the will of either partner.
> Thus a fundamental conversation is never one that we want to conduct.
> Rather, it is generally more correct to say that we fall into conversation, or
> even that we become involved in it. The way in which one word follows
> another, with the conversation taking its own turnings and reaching its
> own conclusion, may well be conducted in some way, but the people
> conversing are far less the leaders of it than the led. No one knows what
> will "come out" in a conversation. Understanding or its failure is like a
> process which happens to us. Thus we can say that something was a good
> conversation or that it was a poor one. All this shows is that a conversa-
> tion has a spirit of its own, and that the language used in it bears its own
> truth within it, i.e., that it reveals something that henceforth exists. (345)
>
> —Hans Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*

At the end of their article, "From Icon to Partner: Repositioning the Writing
Program Administrator," in which they argue for "a radical redefinition of the
WPA" by "changing the basic architecture of leadership and the responsibilities
of the WPA" (155), Barbara Cambridge and Ben McClelland conclude as follows:

> The hidden curriculum of a university includes the lessons of administra-
> tive structure. If our positional [i.e., organizational leadership] and
> nonpositional [i.e., scholarship] values are to be consonant, we must
> reexamine the ways in which we administer writing programs. Resulting
> changes will reposition the WPA from icon to partner but, more impor-
> tantly, will model for students the ways in which we all can learn, know,
> and live as responsible, decision-making partners in the work and life of
> the academy and of the world. (158-59)

The passage makes two obvious points: one is about the structural
"hidden curriculum" of administration, which I take to be an echo of the notion
that what we teach has more to do with how we teach than with the putative
content of our words; and the other is about the desirability of the WPA function-
ing as a human being with whom one might work rather than the WPA being
perceived merely as a symbol with quasi-mystical powers that one would like to
but cannot quite believe in.

Important as those points are, what interests me is the relation between
WPAs and students implied in the changes that "more importantly" would occur

in the transition from icon to partner; these changes would "model for students the ways . . . we all can learn, know, and live." The idea of modeling for someone, of course, implies that we do and they watch. We initiate; they imitate. Partnership, in this "model" of collaborative administration, involves "teaching faculty, departmental administrators, deans, and all other constituencies which are currently in the relational network" (156). Note how what seems to be an unambiguous reference to conventional academic hierarchy—"faculty, departmental administrators, deans"—gets redefined by an abstract sleight of hand as a "relational network" of partners, a network that is later defined as "the community of people who care about students learning to write" (158). One wonders what meaning, beyond a vaguely positive associative one, the word "community" can possibly have (Harris). In my reading of Cambridge and McClelland's argument, that "community" may be for students, but students are not included in it.

The gap, evident above, between writing program administration and the students in whose interests writing programs are theoretically constructed typifies my reading of the published record of writing program administration scholarship. Only one of the eleven essays in Janangelo and Hansen's *Resituating Writing: Constructing and Administering Writing Programs,* for instance, deals in any sustained way with the question of the kind of work students do in writing programs or with the question of what kind of writing characterizes the work of the writing program. The one essay that addresses those issues, Lester Faigley and Susan Romano's "Going Electronic: Creating Multiple Sites for Innovation in a Writing Program," emphasizes teacher and student agency, introduces the idea of students' "extracurricular literacies" in reference to computer technology/communication, and identifies three rhetorical strategies, which they distinguish from the strategies of the "academic essay," that are characteristic of internet communication: the reliance on experience (i.e., "eye witness accounts"), the ubiquity of single sentence assertion, and the deployment of pathos. Despite those apparently student-sensitive emphases, the actual writing students do, their work in redefining and extending the range of essayistic literacy, is reported second hand in terms of procedures and interests (56).

More telling for me, however, is the fact that none of the essays deals with the conceptual and operational relations between the ideas and practices of writing in the program and the ideas and practices of program administration. Those relations define the boundaries within which hidden curricula, though not easily seen, flourish. In what follows, I want to explore the relations between writing program administration and the idea of writing that such programs administer. That is, writing programs do not simply model an idea of writing that students, one hopes, will imitate. Writing programs enact a practice. At the center of that practice is writing, and those who do the vast majority of the writing in any writing program are the students. As I consider the relations between the official pedagogy of the writing program that I administer and my administrative practices, I will not propose a model of what those relations ought to be. Rather, I see this essay as an opportunity for me to think publicly about

what I imagine such relations can productively be. In my exploration of the interanimations among my teaching of Freshman English, my teaching of other teachers of Freshman English (TAs), and my work as a WPA, I hope to come to terms (in some ways for the first time) with the hidden curriculum of my situation. I will leave it up to others to pass judgment.

The metaphor that has dominated my thinking about the teaching of academic writing over the past decade or so is of writing and reading as a kind of conversation. Informed by my reading of M. M. Bakhtin's notions of dialogism, answerability, multi-vocality, and unfinalizedness, notions that I have inflected through Hans Georg Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, I have written expository writing course descriptions that argue for a conversational model of academic writing (arguing that one converses with a text rather than argues for or against it); I have run student paper response sessions for TAs emphasizing that the teacher as grader is a respondent who while judging writing extends the conversation that the students' papers are a part of; and I have tried to organize my graduate course for new TAs, "Theory and the Teaching of Writing," as a forum for conversations about teaching, conversations that, ideally, extend beyond the classroom and permeate the Freshman English Program as a whole. Such conversations suggest that the idea of conversation in my work is more than a metaphor; it is a principle of human relations mediated by language. That principle has its origins in Gadamer's explanation of literary hermeneutics. Here is how he describes the way readers come to terms with the meaning of a text:

> . . . the meaning of a text is not to be compared with an immovably and obstinately fixed point of view which suggests only one question to the person who is trying to understand it, namely how the other person could have embraced such an absurd opinion. In this sense understanding is certainly not concerned with understanding historically, i.e., reconstructing the way the text came into being. *But this means the interpreter's own thoughts have also gone into reawakening the meaning of the text.* In this the interpreter's own horizon is decisive, yet not as a personal standpoint that one holds on to or enforces, but more *as a meaning and a possibility that one brings into play and puts at risk*, and that helps one truly to make one's own what is said in the text. . . . [T]his is the full realization of conversation, in which something is expressed that is not only mine or my author's, but common. (350; emphasis added)

That "conversational" model of reading has resonance beyond reader/text relations. In its emphasis on point of view not as a position that one defends but as a position that one "puts at risk" as one begins an inquiry, and in its depiction of understanding as an intersubjective achievement in which what gets expressed through conversation is not one's nor the other's but "common," Gadamer presents what we might call an ethics of inquiry which can be part of an ethics of administration. That is, clarity about one's own prejudices (the point of view from which one begins), openness to the other to a degree that destabilizes one's initial point of view (a willingness to see the other's position distinct

from one's own and to consider the claims of that position in relation to the matter at hand), and a recognition that in any human work mediated by language one never speaks in a single voice (as Bakhtin might say, one's own words always contain the intentions of others as well) can be read as a phenomenological description of ethical inquiry, ethical teaching, and ethical administration.

To make that claim, however, is clearly an idealization. Such an ethics implies an "always already" equality among those involved in any classroom or any writing program. That, of course, is not the case. I may want to (teachers and administrators in general may want to) imagine that when I (we) speak with students or TAs or junior colleagues or more senior administrators that we always speak simply as human beings to each other. That desire may, in part, result simply from the fact of human uncertainty: since I never feel absolutely sure about every detail of every thought I have, decision I make, or action I take, I internally de-register the perception others may have of the relative power of my position. Others, however, undergraduates and TAs in particular, seem all too aware of that power (uncomfortable as I may be with it). The awareness of others about power ensures that power remains an institutional effect, despite any implicit and explicit effort to deny it. What might the effects of the matter of course fact of institutional power be?

To address that question, I would like to consider John Trimbur's discussion of how the politics of professionalization "shape the living experience of writing program administrators" (142). Trimbur points out that WPAs "are invariably implicated in acts of surveillance that constitute both staff and students as 'docile bodies'." That surveillance, Trimbur notes, is carried out through the obligatory activities of administration: "course design, textbook selection, testing, placement, grading sessions, and classroom observations" are all activities within which we realize our "professional identity" by "differentiating, measuring, hierarchizing its [i.e., our?] subjects." Trimbur tellingly notes that

> Michel Foucault's description of how discipline works sounds remarkably like a description of a WPA doing course scheduling at the beginning of a term. Discipline, Foucault says, operates "on the principle of elementary location or partitioning. Each individual has his own place; and each place its individual. . . . Disciplinary space tends to be divided into as many sections as there are bodies . . . to be distributed." (142-43)

In order to side-step the implications of this "rather bleak portrait of the WPA" who functions as the "human agent" of a "largely unacknowledged system of power that operates behind the backs of its actors," Trimbur evokes Foucault's call for an "insurrection of subjugated knowledges" (143). While Trimbur looks to strategies of "popularizing expertise" (145) as a focus for a version of insurrection, I would like to look elsewhere for spaces that resist the disciplinary power Trimbur describes, and the first place I would look would be the classroom itself, that place of "elementary location or partitioning."

Granted, the image of the WPA placing names into slots on a scheduling sheet suggests a degree of impersonality where individual need is subjugated to the demands of institutional organization and discipline. We can compound the

image with that of touch-tone telephone computer systems slotting students into their classes. Thus the small degree of pleased surprise WPAs experience when scheduling goes smoothly is unfounded. What has in fact happened is the disciplinary function of the institution has simply coopted what seems to be WPAs' autonomous energy. Our pleasure, in this circumstance, is a mixture of sadism and masochism, our "success" a mark of our internalizing the power of the institution as a part of our own desire. But, as Robert Frost has reminded us, all metaphors break down, as does this too easy Foucault analogy.

As it happens, this past term (Fall 1997) I worked on the "Panopticism" chapter from *Discipline and Punish*, in Bartholomae and Petrosky's *Ways of Reading*, with my Freshman English students. When I read Trimbur's analysis in the context of my administrative and teaching work, I found myself in a dual role: I was the scheduler and the scheduled, the agent and the subject of power. I wanted, as my students so perplexedly and vigorously did, to resist the implications of the Foucauldian analysis of power. On the simplest level, that analysis did not account for the way I experience my working life; nor, if I can take my students' word for it (which I think I can), does such an analysis square with my students' sense of their own institutional experience. (This non-identification of the analysis of power with personal experience of power, is, of course, one of the insidious qualities of disciplinary power. We unwittingly experience our subjugation to power as personal agency. One of the things we tried to do to get out of the circularity of that argument in our response to Foucault's analysis was to address it as literally as we could—more on that below). With a vague sense of interest and discomfort, my students and I worked on the "Panopticism" chapter in order to test its explanatory power in relation to our experience in institutions, for example, schools, sports teams, clubs such as Girl Scouts, and families, which can be taken as examples of the extension of disciplinary power from prisons to public life more generally. The writing assignment was to imagine how Foucault would analyze the chosen institution on the one hand and then on the other to consider what that analysis misses. What does it not account for? One of the things it does not account for (according to my Freshman English class of Fall 1997 and me) is relationships.

That point emerged in a discussion about the literal differences between Foucault's description of Jeremy Bentham's panopticon and one student's example institution, a high school football team. In teasing out the differences, we addressed simple things: the diverse placement of bodies, the limited number of hours the players were "in" the institution of football, and the multiplicity of cross-connections among players in contrast to the singular isolation of the cell, the twenty-four-hour-a-day surveillance or potential surveillance, and the paradoxical dis-individualization that results from breaking the "see/being seen" (Foucault 202). We concluded that Foucault's argument about the multiplication of the panoptic model throughout institutions at every level of society created more than just the possibility of a general carceral culture; the multiplicity of disciplinary institutions creates multiple gaps, relatively free spaces where unofficial, unsupervised relationships become possible. That is, the relations among the institutions are not seamless; there are fissures within which resis-

tance, or contrary expressiveness, or the freedom to be indifferent to the institutions can flourish. The simple fact of friendships developing among football players, a fact which could be read as an extension of the discipline of the "team" concept on the one hand or that could be read otherwise as a solidarity that is born out of resistance to discipline, suggests that resistance flourishes within institutions as well. Consequently, no institutional power functions within itself seamlessly.

Trimbur's Foucauldian reading of the WPA coolly scheduling "docile bodies" into classrooms need not be read with bleak pessimism then, for the classroom is not always an isolated space that disindividualizes. On the contrary, the classroom can be thought of as a space where many individual lives converge, collide, collude, resist, act, or ignore. It is not a place where power is exerted unilaterally; it is not the only space teachers and students inhabit. Thus, when the WPA schedules teachers and the university schedules students, the institution may be fulfilling its surface disciplinary function while also assembling forces of resistance.

Resistance, of course, is not negation. On the contrary, it is an inevitable and necessary part of any action, the essential element that animates any task, any desire. Problems arise when resistance itself is negated, as in "passive resistance." A teacher's worst nightmare, I should think, would be to have everyone in class do exactly what the teacher asks on an assignment simply because the teacher asked them to, and they have already concluded that there is no point in expressing dissent. Similarly, no WPA wants a teaching staff that is simply obedient, working uncritically within the constraints established by a clearly planned system. My concern here is with the kinds of student writing implied by a writing program administration that would base itself on what Jurgen Habermas would call "cognitive-instrumental or 'strategic' rationality" (qtd. in Spellmeyer 164), the kind of rationality that places the highest value in writing instruction on "socialization, initiation, and indoctrination" (Bloom 78-79) at the expense of "critical awareness," which Spellmeyer argues remains, even in the context of theories of collaboration, "the hidden dimension of learning" (163).

Discussing the "silence" at the center of pedagogies constructed on transfer of knowledge models, such as the initiation notion upon which theories of the social construction of knowledge are based, Spellmeyer argues for a model of teaching that brings critical awareness, which he equates with Habermas's idea of "communicative action," and strategic rationality, which he equates with Habermas's idea of "purposive-rational action," together: "According to Habermas," Spellmeyer writes,

> all forms of social life entail a dialectic between these two different modes of action: purposive-rational action, the activity of a group toward a shared goal; and communicative action—reflection on and debate about the activity in each of its stages, before, during, and after the fact. . . . Whereas purposive-rational action presupposes agreement on relevant values and procedures, it is the task of communicative action to clarify

values and procedures and to recast them when they cease to be meaningful and valid for the members of the group. . . . According to this model, we decide what we will do, and then we do it. When we have done it, we confer on the results and make adjustments in our assumptions and in our plans for the future. Within the dialectic of purposive-rational action and self-reflective communication, each supplies for the other a sense that "something's missing." (164)

Within this model, it is difficult to imagine a writing program that is self-contained, under control, and running on all cylinders at all times, in other words, a writing program that is complete. In contrast, this model encourages administrators, teachers, and students to think about writing programs as always under construction, always being re-invented as term gives way to term, as day gives way to day. The most problematic part of the dialectic in the continual re-invention of writing programs concerns communicative action, that "conversational" element that gets disrupted by the real and imagined effects of power. Let me illustrate that point with another example from the classroom.

Every semester when I teach Freshman English, I ask my students after the first completed assignment to address these four questions: What do you see as the purpose of this class? How do we try to fulfill that purpose? How do you see your own work in relation to the first two questions? What things do you think you need to or would like to work on in the future? My intention is to get a sense of how the students are experiencing the class, their perceptions of how the class functions, and the quality of their commitment to the work of the course. When I read their responses, I look for evidence of resistance, for moments of dissidence which will shake up the smoothly functioning surface of our day-to-day reading, discussion, and writing. Most of the time, however, the responses are either too easily enthusiastic ("My work has gotten much better") or dutiful and resigned ("My work is a 'work in progress'. I'm trying to make my reading and writing better"). When someone tries to write a more nuanced and textured response, the evidence of resistance is often undermined by acquiescence. The following is a case in point.

The purpose as I see it is to become better readers and writers. Although most (All?) of us are here because we need this course to graduate, not all of us really like English. English, however, is not a skill that can be ignored, and as such, while we are here, we might as well do what we can to learn about it. Most of us have been forced to read stuff we don't like (a primary reason for not liking English?). Because of this, we taught ourselves to read quickly and for facts, much like a magazine article. The purpose of this class is to show us another way of reading and writing about material . . . for meaning, and, of course, this will be done by forcing us to read stuff we don't want to. But . . . there is no other way. . . . Most of us do not want to read these stories. You say, "Okay, now read them again" and most people chuckle sarcastically and mumble, "You're lucky we read them at all" or "Are there Cliff Notes for this?"

This response succeeds admirably in registering the disparity between what I hope my students will experience in my class (writing is not a "skill"; it is a mode of inquiry, a technology that enables understanding and reflection, etc.) and what they do, in fact, experience (writing is an unpleasant necessity, part of what one needs to do to be certified—i.e., to graduate—and no matter how differently writing is presented, it [writing] remains an unpleasant necessity.) That difference in perception can be read as the result of the fundamental difference in power between my students and me; no matter what I say and do, they feel (and know) that I have power and they don't. Consequently, evidence of resistance (the refusal to read) is framed and contained by acquiescence ("there is no other way"). When we discussed their responses to my questions in the following class, I read the one above to them and focused the discussion on what that response communicates (the quality of the class's experience in English classes in general, including my writing class). My effort was not to correct what I took as a misperception of my intention in teaching (although I did hope that by discussing the gap between my intention and the students' experience, I would at least be more clearly understood); nor was it an effort to finesse the question of unequal power. My effort was to stimulate reflection on the actual situation of everyone in the class through conversation with the hope that reflection might lead to unpredictable forms of agreement or more open and generative forms of disagreement as the semester went on. Whether we achieved much agreement or generative resistance in reality is an open question, although I would point to our work on "Panopticism" as evidence that we came to some kind of implicit agreement in practice. I offer this example not as a mark of my success or failure as a writing teacher (although the example could easily be read one way or the other), but as an example of how difficult establishing and sustaining conversations that function as communicative action in the writing classroom can be.

I think of the Freshman English Program that I administer as a series of sites for conversations where, I hope, my point of view and the points of view of the TAs and students are open to question. In the exchanges at the center of the face-to-face encounters that ground the program, we all shape through our conversations ourselves as students, ourselves as teachers, and the writing program itself newly each year. The writing classrooms are, of course, the primary sites of such conversations, conversations which at their best enact a critical reflectiveness suggested by the Foucault work described above. The other significant administered sites of conversation are the program TA orientation, the required course on writing theory and practice for new TAs, and mid-term folder reviews. Each of these sites is typical of the organizational features of most writing programs and are not in and of themselves sites that privilege conversation. Each can be a site where orders are overtly or covertly given and surveillance in the name of consistency and standards the dominant practice. While I make no claim about these sites functioning free of discipline and surveillance (for when there is power, there are both), I try in each case to enable the sites to structure themselves as a conversation.

During the last week of the summer before classes begin, we have a five-day teacher orientation for new TAs. Over the summer I send them a packet with course descriptions of our two required courses, articles on the teaching of writing, a copy of the text required for those teaching our first semester course for the first time (after the first year, TAs choose their own texts), and a detailed letter of welcome that asks them to read the articles and as much of the book as possible. I also write and/or phone TAs experienced in the program and ask them to participate in the orientation. (Over the past eight years on average more experienced than new TAs have participated; in some years the proportion was easily two to one.) After the first day, which involves introductions of people and explanations about the writing program, the other days are organized on a series of topics (for example, working with readings for discussion in class, constructing assignments, responding to papers, organizing group work, etc.). Then from day to day the new and experienced TAs meet in groups with the focus ostensibly on the official topic. Invariably the discussion begins on topic but moves in unpredictable ways onto other things. The first year or so, I was concerned about what seemed to be a lack of consistency and, implicitly, of control. However, the response of the new TAs was so enthusiastic, the sense of connection among TAs so affirmative, that it seemed (and still seems) to me that whatever was taking shape within the unstructured (and thus genuine) conversations during orientation was worth far more than any anxiety I was feeling about my lack of control and, truth be told, my lack of knowledge about what exactly they were talking about. We have what seems to me to be a quite productive orientation status quo because the dynamics change from year to year. Even though the official agenda is constant, the conversation is protean. I remain the WPA, but I have also become a participant.

This latter fact has influenced the tone of the mid-term TA folder review, in which the TAs submit sample student folders (one high-, one middle-, one low-range folder and any others individual TAs would like to discuss) complete with all student papers with teacher comments and grades, assignments, in-class writing, and any other work, in short, the full documented record of their writing courses. What could be a highly charged meeting, where institutional surveillance of their work seems unambiguous through a direct meeting with their "boss," does not usually play out as one. To make that review an extension of the conversations that began in orientation and that have been extended in the "Theory and Teaching of Writing" course, I do not take notes or have a check list of questions. Rather, I begin by asking each teacher to describe her/his course, and I try simply to understand and respond to the description. What usually happens is that a conversation develops, the TA often asks unplanned questions, and we learn something, I think, from each other. In retrospect, it would be possible to describe the structure of the conversation and even develop an implicit checklist of questions (a kind of "Jeopardy" for the teaching of writing) based on the substance of it. But if it is true that the hidden curriculum is more powerful than the explicit one, then the values of critical reflection that we would attach to the writing we teach should also be central to the way we run our programs. Organized as a series of conversations, writing programs each can

have a "spirit of [their] own" through the use of a language that "bears its own truth within it, i.e., that reveals something that henceforth exists" (Gadamer 345).

What I am arguing for in writing program administration is a case for less emphasis on organization and instrumentalities of action—who is responsible for whom, who is rewarded, what counts as research, how might one pry support from a dean, and the like, important as those things are—and more emphasis on the day-to-day, face-to-face human actualities of writing program administration, an emphasis that both extends to and emanates from the classroom. While it would be foolish not to have strategies for organization, procedures of redress and accountability, and instructional goals for a writing program, it would be equally foolish not to acknowledge that the unpredictability of changing circumstance and human need puts continual pressure on organizational structures to adapt or even to disintegrate. To frame the distinction between the value of administration as expertise on the one hand and administration as a site of human relation on the other, consider the ideas about administration implicit in the following piece of administrative "wisdom":

> . . . a wise administrator once told me that he thought five years was long enough for most administrative positions. "It takes a year to learn the new job," he said, "two years to invent changes, and two more years to get them into place. After that you get too wedded to the status quo and are much less willing to shake things up." (Bloom 74)

That rule casts most administrators as hired guns who come into town, clean things up, and get out of town before they become too attached to it. The emphasis is on a superficial expertise and mastery: one year to learn, two years to plan, two years to implement, and then the cycle begins with someone else learning, planning, and implementing. On that model, a WPA at a research institution would hold the job on average two or three years fewer than it takes for a new graduate student to earn a Ph.D. Such an instrumental view of administration assumes that the stability that emerges through the development and nurturing of ethical working relationships becomes a status quo, which must be destabilized. It implies that administrative practice cannot stimulate and accommodate change; therefore, there must be continual administrative change.

In contrast, consider Kristine Hansen's discussion of ethical writing program administration, in which she argues for a relational administrative practice as opposed to a masterful practice. Applying the ethical vocabulary of Emmanuel Levinas, Hansen writes: "To be conscious of the other and of the infinite difference between our two selves is to be conscious of my moral obligation to the other. If I do return his gaze, rather than totalizing him, or reducing the infinite in his face to a representation, I am obligated to respond to him; I am obligated to be less selfish" (36). From there Hansen argues for the necessity of bringing administrators above the WPA level "face-to-face" (37) with those who teach in writing programs in order to stimulate an ethical motivation for administrative change in the treatment of part-time teachers. Although she presents her point in the context of her specific efforts to achieve better working

conditions and compensation for writing teachers at her institution, her main point that "relationships are the venue for ethical action" (41) is widely applicable. If to teach writing is an ethical act (and I would argue all teaching implies an ethics), then to administer a writing program is an ethical enterprise. If one grants those two points, then the reasonable conclusion to draw is that ethical writing program administration depends on the quality of relationships not only between the WPA and other administrators or between other administrators and teachers but between the WPA and writing teachers and among the writing teachers themselves. In addition, within institutions relationships develop through language; thus, the quality of relationships within a writing program depends in large part on the quality of conversation (in the philosophical sense of Gadamer, not the instrumental sense of Bruffee) that the writing program stimulates and sustains (or not).

Sustaining ethical conversation and thus relation within a writing program requires, it seems to me, a shift in emphasis from thinking about administration as masterful organization and implementation to conceiving of administration as relational and receptive. That is, no matter what structure a WPA might construct, no matter what practice a WPA might require, no matter what goals the WPA might set for the program as a whole, the structures, practices, and goals of particular teachers and among students in particular classes will never be identical. It is, then, essential that the WPA see the differences between ideal projections and actual practices as productive so that everyone involved in a writing program can recognize that they have a role in making and remaking the program as they grow within it. In that light, dissent is never a threat. It is always there in one form or another. Repressed dissent is unambiguously destructive, but in most of its other forms, dissent is what keeps a program fresh by being a continual stimulus for conversation.

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