

The Progress of Generations

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We present this essay as a collection of individual WPA voices addressing the question of how much the WPA experience has changed throughout what we now term the first and second generations of the professionalized WPA. We hold a range of positions, in terms of institutional types, job descriptions, and tenure status; our personal stories are also distinct, by reasons of age, gender, years of (professional) experience, and scholarly interests. Our titles vary, as do our work conditions. But our professional reflections, begun in the 2002 CCCC workshop, “The Intellectual Work of the WPA,” collectively led us to challenge the assumption of progress implicit in many WPA professional development narratives. The progress narrative, constructed as a chronology of increasing institutional status and disciplinary authority, depends on a composite WPA. As our individual WPA experiences suggest, the metaphors that defined and constrained first-generation WPAs—our field’s founders and now-senior members—do not neatly form a past professional era. “Second-generation WPA” may simply mean the latest group to contend with “old” WPA metaphors. We hope our individual views offered in these perspective pieces collectively trouble the WPA progress narrative as we explore our metaphoric houses—and the generations that haunt them.

THE WPA ON THE PROFESSIONALIZATION FRONTIER(S) Voice One

It's a heady dream: The Professionalized WPA. So clearly observed in a summer workshop or at a CCCC gathering, becoming professional in an institutionally defined way makes sense as the goal toward which we all strive—as a field, as individuals. Suppose, then, that all is as well as can be for a newly hired WPA—for someone like me, entering a department that is for the first time willing to recruit from the relatively new field of composition and rhetoric and from program administration. In one language of progress, the language of generations, I speak from the position of a second-generation WPA: I inhabit grounds well cleared by the department's first full-time program director. The writing program is well defined; TAs and lecturers are regularly oriented and often educated in regard to composition; the curricular goals bear significant resemblance to elements of the WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition. The redesigned WPA position comes with course-release time and the assistance and support of a tenured director. Even as a new WPA, I expect to be able to get off the train and step confidently into the new town, “the new immigrant scholar coming to live [. . .] in the culture of the department that hires her” (Fulkerson 134), ready to make further progress.

The generational progress narratives, we WPAs assure ourselves, are grounded in our own recently acquired sense of a national WPA discipline, framed by the slightly older progress narrative of composition and rhetoric. However, the time-based metaphor of *generations* elides crucial local contexts. Within an institution that has never hired a compositionist, or at a school that hired one twenty years ago and then isolated her in a basement or attic, a WPA progress narrative may be wholly invisible, overwritten by local codes. Except for a few junior faculty members, no one in these situations has encountered a professional WPA before; faculty don't read *CCC* or run across George Hillocks or Christine Hult. True, there is now some English Studies cachet to hiring an authentic composition scholar instead of arm-twisting the junior Victorianist into shepherding the TAs, but the department members may not know what an authentic composition scholar is, does, or needs. When Richard Fulkerson worries about the problem of a “mismatch between doctoral preparation and the [new academic job]” (123), his concern is for assistant professors who are unprepared for their departmental roles; but I wonder equally about departments or programs that are unprepared for their new assistant professors. For Fulkerson, active professionalization, which he calls a “professional metacurriculum” (122), is a solution; for me, his idea raises additional questions.

The place-based equivalent of *generations* is a Turner-esque frontier, wherein localities are steadily, progressively being civilized as people move into and through them; yet in reality the frontier is vast, and at any single point in time it hosts simultaneously Kansas City jazz clubs and North Dakota sod huts. In the ten years since I finished graduate school, I've seen several frontier English departments come to—and retreat from—various levels of readiness for a professional WPA. One faculty member referred to the department's new WPA position as “the comp czar,” intending to leave the new professor alone in charge of his or her composition serfs. In another department, a faculty committee promised to rewrite tenure guidelines to recognize administrative work formally, and then the committee simply reinscribed administration under, and subordinate to, “teaching.” A third department hired the WPA candidate whose rhetoric dissertation most involved something like the literature they knew and loved; as she began to publish collaborative essays on feminist rhetorics and electronic discourse theories, though, they grew puzzled, worried, even antagonistic. In a fourth, where all faculty teach writing, there was resistance to the very idea of a writing specialist doing anything but teaching her own classes. Before hiring me, my department made plans to “shelter” its pretenure WPA, as the new professional guidelines recommend, but did so by recruiting tenured faculty in other disciplines to oversee the writing program, suggesting and occasionally saying outright that “anyone could direct the program, really.”

To link *time* with *place*, the WPAs attending the workshop played with a third metaphor: the idea of *hauntings*, ghosts in place and out of time, often as real and influential as Toni Morrison's “haint,” Beloved. With the past so vividly, institutionally present, the idea of steady progress, wherein all of English studies gradually becomes aware and supportive of the work of composition and rhetoric and of program administration, doesn't hold true. Nor are departmental ghosts predictable or equally powerful: improvements within the composition program by a committed first-generation WPA may haunt the next WPA, as Voice 3 and Voice 5 note below. That the frontier elsewhere has been tamed and cultivated with much success can be encouraging to a WPA, as Voice 4 points out; that we have such a dizzying range of success stories and metaphors can be overwhelming, as Voice 2 explains. It would be good to have a professionalization guide—yet trying to replicate someone else's professional success in one's own institution can be, as Marcia Dickson notes (151), as painfully unsuccessful as Cinderella's stepsisters cutting off their toes to fit into the glass slipper.

What actually happens when a new WPA arrives at a place resembling PBS's *Frontier House* rather more than the competent professional meritocracies of *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* or *West Wing*? We know the

local stories. The new WPA may need to build a professional house before being able to hang out a shingle and begin practicing, to plant corn rather than plug in a microwave. While the house remains uncompleted, a WPA may sleep in a canvas tent, wrapped up in copies of the Portland Resolution to keep warm, hoping, meanwhile, for good departmental weather. A WPA may test the wind: what does it mean when a faculty member points to a prided research topic and asks, “How is *that* composition or rhetoric?” Or a WPA may examine walls already built, peering through the chinks: can it be equally true, as local mentors seem to suggest, that the WPA will have work diligently to teach her colleagues what professional WPAs do *and* that her definition of a “professional WPA” will need to conform to the expectations of the institution about what “research” or “composition” is?

Still, on sunny mornings, I find it hard to resist the pressures and temptations—reinforced by years of attentive CCCC-going and by daily pronouncements on the WPA listserv—to help my program wash up and put on its Sunday clothes. I know what a professional writing program should look like, and I want that for our profession (and for me!), but I wonder how we’re going to get the dust off our shoes. Do our lecturers want to be formally educated in the field, and will the arts and sciences dean at an agriculture and basketball school be able or willing to pay for it? Do our TAs, hoping to be film-studies scholars and fiction writers, want to help conduct classroom-based research? If there is no program mission statement, how can we begin to assess our work intelligently? As it turns out, the professional’s mantra of “adapting” to a new institutional location is an understatement: a WPA’s tools and efforts may need to be reinvented or even replaced. If one’s finest professional tools and recipes were designed for stovetop cuisine, they may be of little use for making biscuits over an open flame—and it’s disconcerting to discover that one is simultaneously over- and underprepared.

I wonder, then, what advantage the professionalized WPA will have, if we see professionalization as involving nationally normed coursework and standards created to ensure a set of professional expectations, behaviors, and attitudes? Our CCCC workshop conversations illuminated several points of outright conflict between the national narrative and local contexts. A WPA may be invited to draw up a job description, just as practiced in a summer workshop, only to have upper-level administrators literally cross off elements of the resulting job definition. A WPA may also be told straightforwardly: only *this* kind of scholarship “counts,” CCCC position statements notwithstanding, because this *other* scholarship is the province of other, more traditional faculty members. The official “publication/teaching/committee-work” categories on another WPA’s annual report form may leave no clear place to display such staples of our arena of operations as “designed assessment tools,” “ran a national-conference workshop,” “wrote a collaborative e-jour-

nal article,” or “studied graduation rates of former FYC students.” Though the required categories may seem preindustrial to a professionalized WPA, at his new university they are state-of-the-art, or at least state-of-the-institution of affairs. Thus while the WPA must try to redefine the new position to professionalize it, he cannot define that position far from standards accepted at the institution, nor describe it without the language that has been locally institutionalized, nor entirely expect the institution to validate and uphold the progress he defines. Like many other WPAs, I live within an unstated paradox of the professionalized program administrator: my modern strategies and technologies may be the best tools on the market, but they may not work at all *here* or *now*.

It’s not all bleak and dreary: I have a “good job,” both in terms of intrinsic satisfaction and in terms of the position itself. I regularly have *fun*, as Lynn Bloom reminds us to acknowledge (“Are We Having Fun Yet?”). It is still possible that I may be “the one,” the WPA who succeeds at professionalizing the position and the program, who blazes a trail for the next generation to follow (without turning into a program-haint myself), who reassures us that our national progress-narrative is still on track. Yet the control I wield over the success of my professionalization, even in the best of circumstances, is incomplete. While some frontier schools are ready to be (further) civilized, some inviting situations may be too far out on the frontier to benefit much from our professionalization—or may simply not need the kind we offer.

I see two troubling ironies in all this. First, while compositionists emphasize the idea of teaching (writing) as an adaptive, reflective, context-dependent practice, we are also creating sourcebooks and management-strategy checklists to define the “best” in national writing-program administration, setting out the “professional metacurriculum” that Fulkerson envisions. Second, we are embedded in this professionalization process, one that, as Richard Ohmann noted a decade ago, “discredits other practitioners performing similar work” (qtd. in Gunner, “Fate” 114), just as the Council of Writing Program Administrators is worrying about bringing more diverse WPAs into the organization. To be sure, I wouldn’t have been helped much in my WPA position by having someone shrug and say, “Good luck out there, dearie.” I listen to the haunted, multiple-frontiered stories of my colleagues, however, and trust that we can find support strategies and flexible metaphors that enable us all to survive and prosper, wherever we step off the train.

THE GENERATION OF METAPHOR

Voice Two

I have difficulty explaining my job to people in my family, people at class reunions, people I've just met, other people in academia, even to colleagues in my department. They understand that I teach English. They may understand that composition courses differ from courses in literature or creative writing. It's the WPA part of my job that raises questions. Is a director of composition similar to an office manager? A school principal? A department chair? How do I characterize my job to people who associate "WPA" with FDR? More importantly, is there a frame of reference that will help *me* better understand my job?

WPAs themselves have turned toward the metaphorical realm to explain their roles. The sheer variety of metaphors used to discuss the roles of WPAs suggests a rich complexity of identity issues. For my purposes here, I've grouped metaphors employed by WPAs to describe their work into three general categories: metaphors of other professions, metaphors of performance, and metaphors of personal relationship. While I recognize that these categories are artificial, they function in the following analysis as interpretive lenses to facilitate understanding of the types of subject positions WPAs envision for their jobs, which in turn may help me understand the work I do as a WPA.

WPAs look for connections between their own roles and the roles of workers outside the academy. Laura Micciche compares WPA work to the work of flight attendants—a metaphor that helps her discuss the "affective dimensions of our [WPA] work through materialist analysis" (451). She uses the parallels between the emotional labor performed by flight attendants and by WPAs to argue that the "gendered affective production involved in WPA work" is in part responsible for the "exploitation and delegitimization of WPAs and their work" (441). James Sledd's term *boss compositionist* is an attempt to make visible the complicity of WPAs in exploitive labor practices in the field of composition (275). "Boss compositionist" brings to my mind the image of the road crew boss with the mirrored sunglasses in *Cool Hand Luke*, who rules his crew with the implied threat of his rifle marksmanship. In the film, Paul Newman and the other sweaty prisoners have to ask permission for any deviation from their labor regime: "Drink it up here, Boss?" Sledd's metaphor constructs composition instructors (i.e., graduate teaching assistants, part-time instructors, nontenure-track full-time instructors) as work crew members, factory workers, field laborers, or plantation slaves, depending upon one's conception of the work environment implied by *boss*. In Sledd's metaphor, according to Joseph Harris, WPAs are constructed as

sellouts: "[I]n exchange for faculty status for ourselves [WPAs] we have, in effect, agreed to make sure that the academic factory hums along efficiently in the interests of management—that is, of the tenured professoriate" (44). While Micciche's flight attendant metaphor makes visible ways that WPAs are exploited in their work, Sledd's boss metaphor indicts WPAs as the exploiters. Both Sledd and Micciche use metaphors of work in other, non-academic fields to strengthen their crucial critiques of what it means to be a WPA.

Other scholars have drawn comparisons between WPA work and the work of entertainers. Two of the three eponymous professions in *Kitchen Cooks, Plate-Twirlers, and Troubadours: Writing Program Administrators Tell Their Stories* are in show-biz. Mary Pinard employs a plate-twirler metaphor to characterize the multitude of simultaneous tasks she had to perform as a new WPA. Her advice for surviving as a new WPA is couched in the visual and kinesthetic terms of plate-twirling: "Seek balance amongst the many, often swirling issues in your program, but expect discombobulation: a slow wobbling on the one hand, and a blurring speed on the other" (61). In "Mothers, Tell Your Children Not to Do What I Have Done," Keith Rhodes alters the lyrics of "The House of the Rising Sun" to warn against the early ruin of compositionists by premature administrative positions. Rhodes employs the role of troubadour to articulate, as his subtitle suggests, "The Sin and Misery of Entering the Profession as a Composition Coordinator." Diana George, in her introduction to *Kitchen Cooks*, offers yet another show-biz metaphor for WPA work:

More than one WPA has certainly felt like a Song and Dance Man (or Woman), though few I know meant simply to create a good illusion. Still, we've run programs that had little or no funding, created live curricula against the painted flat of the undergraduate catalogue, tapped cleanly across the polished stage wondering who picked that music, and some have made promises they knew they could never keep. (xiii–xiv)

It's important to note that these metaphors of performance compare WPA work to a certain kind of stage performance; none of the performance metaphors involve prestige or accolades. WPAs do not refer to themselves in print as opera singers, classical pianists, award-winning actors, or lead singers in wildly successful rock bands. A troubadour is an itinerant performer, moving from venue to venue, relying on occasion and opportunity to do his or her work, relying for a living upon the patronage of some generous Lord or Lady. A plate-spinner is one act among many in a circus or variety show—an act that never gets top billing. A song-and-dance (wo)man might be a member of a stage chorus who functions as a transition act, filling the space in a vari-

ety show between the marquee performers. While each of these performative metaphors lacks prestige, each also carries connotations of a “utility performer.” In baseball, a utility fielder is a skilled player who can be counted on by the team to play any position at any time. He is often not the best pitcher, catcher, shortstop, or outfielder, and he earns only the league minimum. His talent—often the reason the coaches don’t cut him from the team—is his very functionality, his adaptability, his reliability. Plate-spinners, troubadours, and song-and-dance (wo)men are utility performers because they can be relied upon to keep the show going by being adaptable and perpetually entertaining. Each might even perform on the street or in the subway for nickels, dimes, and Egg McMuffins. These three performative metaphors capture several important characteristics of WPAness: their performances involve low or non-existent budgets, their acts are usually solo performances, the skills it takes to do their work are marginalized in the larger field, and their successes go largely unrecognized. Of course, as with any metaphorical image, the shortcomings of these performative metaphors raise important questions: If the WPA is the performer, who is the audience? What are the roles in these metaphors of the contingent faculty who do most of the teaching of composition? What is the role of students? What are the plates, songs, or dances? To what extent is education similar to entertainment? Just who are the opera divas and rock stars in the field of English studies? What kinds of changes in the field, in higher education, in the university, in English departments, would be necessary for a WPA to become more like a rock star? How would any of these changes affect working conditions, writing instruction, and student learning?

In addition to looking toward other professions, WPAs have employed metaphors of personal and family relationships to characterize their work. Lynn Bloom describes the underappreciated tasks of the WPA in her article, “I Want a Writing Director.” By alluding clearly to Judy Seyfer’s “I Want a Wife,” Bloom uses the metaphor of the wife to illustrate the countless thankless chores and duties that befall a WPA in a department that privileges its literature program. Doug Hesse draws personal parallels between his own role as a WPA and his role as a husband in his *Kitchen Cooks* chapter, “The WPA as Father, Husband, Ex.” Hesse’s spousal and paternal metaphors allow him to critique his “combined motives of being provider and being prover” and to elucidate the blurred boundaries between strategies of being a spouse and parent and directing a writing program (47). In Bloom’s foreword to *The Writing Program Administrator’s Resource*, she compares that WPA volume to Dr. Spock’s *Baby and Child Care*, which constructs the new WPA as new parent. These family-centered metaphors allow WPAs to conceive their roles in important ways, including the strong commitment WPAs

may feel toward their jobs, the sense of identity a WPA may help construct for a writing program, and the sheer sense of responsibility WPAs may feel for instructors and students in their programs. Familial metaphors also suggest an insularity from the rest of the university, as well as a level of demand that may compete for quality time with one’s literal family.

All of the aforementioned metaphorical constructions help to emphasize the performative and caretaking aspects of a WPA position, as well as some of the complex issues of power and authority. The variety of metaphors illustrates the complexity of the roles of WPAs in their institutions. While each metaphor may be applicable and valid, each seems insufficient on its own to explain the range of roles of a WPA. The complexity of a WPA position—the variety of duties and roles involved—is difficult to pin down and package.

The validity of each metaphor creates a need for larger metaphors—metaphors that can accommodate all these other valid metaphors—that can help us manage and visualize the complexity of WPA roles. One such metaphor is that a WPA is a wearer of many hats. However, the hat-wearer metaphor seems inadequate. Hats, after all, in the literal hat-wearing world, are donned and doffed voluntarily by their wearers, hats are tidily distinct from one another, and it’s never appropriate to wear more than one hat at a time. The term *multitasking* seems a more appropriate descriptor of the simultaneous role management required of WPAs; however, *multitasking* inaccurately implies a high level of control over one’s own ability to switch and juggle roles as a WPA. Sharon Crowley and Lynn Bloom both account for a lack of control by employing a meta-metaphor of “stickiness” to describe the multiplicity of duties that befall WPAs; Crowley dubs the WPA “the Velcro Professor” (227), and Bloom calls the WPA “a single individual responsible for everything, and to whom a plethora of tasks cling as lint to Velcro” (“Moving” x). Instead of the Velcro metaphor, during the spring of 2002—my first semester as a WPA—I used the metaphor of expanding foam sealant to describe to friends how my administrative duties seemed to fill all gaps in my daily schedule.

Another metaphor that has helped me conceptualize my own work as a new WPA is shapeshifting. A shapeshifter is a hybrid identity, characterized by changes in appearance, changes in character, and changes in power. Shapeshifters crawl all over our collective cultural consciousness: think of dual-identity superheroes such as Diana Prince-Wonder Woman or Peter Parker-Spiderman, think of the mercury-melting cop who chases Arnold Schwarzenegger in *Terminator 2*, think of werewolves, masters of disguise, chameleons. While it isn’t particularly helpful to see myself in my professional life as a dual-identity superhero or a moon-cursed monster, the con-

cept of shapeshifting helps me understand my WPA roles in terms of agency. The shapeshifter may shift shapes consciously and with specific intent, or the shapeshifter may find that his or her shape has shifted without specific knowledge or control. That is, sometimes the shapeshifting WPA controls his or her role or authority; sometimes others control the WPA's roles. The shapes and roles of the WPA are unstable and not clearly distinct from one another.

Hildy Miller theorizes a postmasculinist approach to administration in which the WPA combines feminist and masculinist orientations to address both the collaborative, supportive aspects and the hierarchical, managerial aspects of a WPA position: "In the bi-epistemological institution, personas have to change with context" (83). Yet, as Irene Ward points out, conflicting roles, role ambiguity, and role overload can also contribute to job burnout for the WPA (54–55). Movement between masculinist and feminist stances requires a self-monitoring of identity—a reflective, theorized shapeshifting.

I see metaphors as tools to focus my understanding better about ways I'm constructing myself for others and how others perceive me. I'm working hard to know when it's inappropriate or unwise for me to take on a new task or to work alone instead of collaboratively on a project. I want to be aware when I'm perceived by my colleagues as a plate twirler, a boss compositionist, or a spouse, and I'm working to know when it's appropriate or wise to invoke one identity metaphor over another as I engage in discourse in meetings with administrators on my campus, in committee and department meetings, professional development workshops that I lead, and informal situations. While the political utility of identity metaphors might help me do my job better, metaphors also function as a way to understand myself in my position as a WPA.

WPA LEGACIES OR SKELETONS IN THE CLOSET?

Voice Three

The professionalization of writing program administrators presents special challenges because of the diverse constituencies the WPA serves, the many subjectivities the WPA inhabits to serve them, and the delicate balance that WPAs must maintain when negotiating relationships between themselves as practitioners, their institutions, and the field (Cambridge and McClelland; Gunner, "Politicizing"; Peeples). Despite this shifting ground, our progress narratives trace a history that currently includes seminars in graduate programs in rhetoric and composition; apprenticeship positions in those same programs offering graduate students the benefit of experiential learning they will later apply whether they seek explicit WPA

positions or not; and national conferences, workshops, listservs, journals and publications that describe knowledge-making for the WPA. Even our progress is making progress, as we notice a movement in our own journals and publications. Texts that once relied heavily on describing WPA-ness through narrative accounts of local contexts now devote considerable space to defining the intellectual work of the WPA, recognizing our role as researchers in our own right (Anson and Brown; Mirtz; L'Eplattenier). Recognizing that the administrators in these positions must constantly articulate their own identities and recreate the identities of their programs for audiences unfamiliar with our work or untrained in our field, we have made yet another move toward theorizing the ways WPAs accomplish these articulations (Rose and Weiser, *Theorist*).

Unlike many other professions which rely on standardized measures to reconcile any differences that might exist between principle and practice (Rose), those of us in WPA positions invariably find ourselves adjusting principles, practices, and perhaps our own philosophies to fit a particular set of institutional conditions and constraints. Although we, too, can claim foundational documents like the Portland Resolution and a growing corpus of shared theories and practices, often our disciplinary and experiential knowledge does not communicate neatly across institutional contexts. The dissonance created between what we know, what we do, and how we do it often hinges on how well we can reconcile our personal identities and public responsibilities against existing institutional conditions. In doing so, WPAs have the additional challenge of striking the delicate balance that delineates the WPA as an individual from the work of the WPA on behalf of the program. Such a separation can be complicated by an invisible predecessor—a ghost or skeleton—whose past is indelible in the departmental and institutional memory, but whose presence the current WPA must assimilate and process when faced with making decisions that result in programmatic change.

In my case, reconciling aspects of my identity with aspects of the institutional culture began with studying the documentation that I inherited about the program and documentation I subsequently produced articulating major shifts in the composition program. Of the inherited documentation, the most influential was a 126-page handbook authored by the previous director, Jacob. It contained statements of objectives connecting the teaching of composition to the university's core courses, and expanded descriptions and discussions of those objectives. Additionally, the handbook contained detailed discussions of policies and procedures, goals for courses in the composition sequence, and explanations of the academic grievance procedures. There were also many mini-essays that cogently explained everything from composition pedagogies to word processing features, and at least a half-

dozen sample syllabi from a variety of contributors. The handbook covered placement exams, rubrics, prompts, and model essays. The document was widely circulated: all composition instructors, full-time and part-time, had copies; many campus administrators had copies; and copies were circulated in the community to several high-school teachers and administrators responsible for area dual-credit courses. In all fairness to my ghost, a first-generation composition director with specific training in rhetoric and composition, the handbook was, for me or anyone inheriting the legacy of the position, a miracle in documentary reality. The material was not a mere compilation of models and procedures but a discursive representation of the teaching of composition in ways translated in and for the local context. Sifting through the hefty documentation, I found myself vacillating between a closeness and a distance that was at times comforting and at other times disarming. Engaging with the handbook early in my tenure in the position was an efficient way to get acquainted with the local history and more important than being motivated by a particular exigency. I was conscious of my maintaining a healthy distance from the materials. After all, I was in a new situation and more than likely would not have the benefit of talking to my predecessor. I was trying, as it were, to check my own “prejudices and cultural perceptions” (Connors, “Dreams”15), as WPAs must often do when engaging in the historical work of their programs (Mirtz 120).

In an institutional setting just over two decades old, Jacob managed to anticipate questions and capture philosophies that would explain and justify the teaching of college composition to a range of audiences. He re-created the program on paper. After documenting all of these principles, Jacob achieved tenure and then decided to move on. After his departure, the WPA position went unfilled for two years, until my arrival. During that time the handbook, which had undergone no substantive revisions for many years, became the authority for administering the program; it was proudly presented to me: “You might want to update some things, but for the most part Jacob’s already done everything—it’s all here.” And it was—except that the institution had added another decade to its history since Jacob had first arrived and begun to develop the program; the number of local high schools participating in the dual-credit program had nearly doubled; the student population had shifted from commuter to primarily residential; literally hundreds of composition textbooks had been published since the most recent texts suggested in the college handbook; and most significantly, the part-time faculty that Jacob hired had been converted, during his last term, to full-time instructor positions.

It was not long before I fully understood the extent to which the university community depended on the handbook and, further, the effect of that dependence in a changing institutional climate. In the meantime, however, I received a phone call from a twenty-five-year veteran high-school teacher and adjunct faculty member at the university. Widely respected among the teachers in the dual-credit program, she was not shy as she expressed her disdain for the recently scored placement exams that essentially did not reflect what she perceived to be her students’ high level of writing competence. Yet as events evolved, some of her best students had received ratings of “2” and “3” on a five-point scale. Before I could respond, she promptly referred me to page 62 of the handbook—a writing sample of a 2-rated essay, roughly one paragraph in length with quite a few grammatical errors. She informed me that all of her students had written at least two pages with fewer misspellings and grammar problems—clearly making them superior to the example in the handbook. “Jacob would never have scored these essays so harshly!” she said. The extensiveness of the documentation provided in the handbook gave, at least minimally, those in and around the institution a language for discussing “the comp program,” and that documentation established the expectations about what the program should be (and consequently what I, the new WPA, should be doing) and what that meant for the constituencies it served (and consequently how I should be doing “it,” whatever “it” was). I was not troubled by the fact that my actions appeared to be so inconsistent with the program’s history; to the contrary, I felt empowered because I saw my strategic responses to what existed as an opportunity to educate and effect change. Ruth Mirtz discusses the value of intra-institutional historical research in relationship to strengthening program identity:

One of the values of intra-institutional historical research is in program definition and identity, which can place the WPA in a stronger position, as a conceiver rather than just an inheritor of a set of courses. We have to see it as a gain in power through knowledge. In a recent article, Lisa Ede ponders the methodology of composition studies, asking, “How should we conceive of—and enact—the relationship between theory and practice, between our multidisciplinary discipline’s two related goals: the production of knowledge and the advancement of literacy? Similarly, how should we view the relationship between our experience [. . .] and the work we produce?” (129)

I used the example of the placement exams as a springboard for the annual summer conference hosted for those high school instructors who taught the dual-credit course. This particular example gave me a way to discuss program and course goals very specifically and doing so served as an

opportunity to introduce a revised evaluation rubric. The revised rubric and conversations about placement extended into the semester in the form of continuing conversations and norming sessions among the composition faculty. Confronting the handbook turned out to be an opportunity to reconsider and revise the goals for that part of the program, and it was an occasion to norm my experience with that of the faculty teaching composition.

Understanding the intellectual and political implications of this incident was one thing, but reconciling the need to distinguish my decisions from Jacob's in light of the current institutional context was something I had not anticipated. Making such a distinction between Jacob and me was complicated because, in theory, I agreed with his rationale for most of the content that was spelled out in the handbook, but because of changing circumstances, I could not act in exact accord with some of the existing protocols. The institution had transitioned through a change in leadership, and at the same time I was changing the institution by introducing new protocols to accomplish the work. Such changes had social consequences that threw into relief the contradictions between Jacob's philosophy, my training, and the impact of both on the new institution. Yet, for two semesters I had been referred to across the institution quite simply as "the new Jacob."

There were occasions when I found myself being loyal theoretically to Jacob, however confused I was in practical ways. For instance, articulating an evaluation protocol for composition faculty was another program goal. At the outset I was determined to solicit input from the instructors and also to retain as much as possible from the previous protocol to smooth out the transition, but at the same time I was committed to integrating current theory and practice. After consulting the handbook, and after many meetings of the formal evaluation committee and informal conversations with composition faculty, I presented a draft of the new protocol at a composition faculty meeting. Referring first to the required components for the teaching portfolio as outlined in the handbook, I began to share ideas for a revised evaluation procedure, for example, considering alternative definitions of "scholarship" and incorporating peer classroom visitations. When asked for their input concerning the revised evaluation procedures, several instructors shifted uncomfortably and exchanged glances. Finally someone said, "I wonder what Jacob would do?"

At that moment I realized Jacob had not left at all; in fact, he had taken up residence as a skeleton in my closet and he had company. His occasional bumping around underscored a few disparities: (1) the gap that existed between the documentary reality (the handbook) and the current institutional landscape, (2) the contextual differences between the institutional site where I gained practical experience in writing program administration and

knowledge of my new institution, and (3) the composition faculty's expectations of a director of composition predicated on the knowledge of the previous director. In essence, we were all clinging to some version of the past, mentally and physically, in the documents and practices held over from the earlier era; more often than not, it was Jacob's "intervention" that helped us brush away the cobwebs. In *Modern Skeletons in Postmodern Closets*, James Sosnoski describes the tensions that can exist when redefining our programs and our persons:

[B]eing unaware that some of the motives we acquired in the past are inconsistent with our current beliefs [itself] might be called "anachronistic." [. . .] You might say such anachronistic beliefs are skeletons in the closets of [our] minds. Though we consciously amend beliefs that are challenged, many ingrained beliefs associated with those we've abandoned remain as they were. We all have such skeletons in our cognitive closets. Our mental residences may be remodeled continuously, but many of their private compartments escape renovation, going unnoticed until something happens to open them. (5)

These renovations, Sosnoski argues, allow space for a productive critique of disciplinarity because we must reread our cultural experiences against reconfigured circumstances (12). As WPAs, we often find ourselves in situations functioning as inheritors and reacting to these anachronisms rather than functioning as conceivers and anticipating reconfigurations. To function more proactively, I believe, requires that we find strategic ways to translate our knowledge and experience from one institutional context to another. The professionalization of WPAs, for instance, should include spaces for performative and reflective exercises that allow WPAs to try on various subjectivities and examine how we might position ourselves in alternative institutional contexts. Furthermore, when accepting new positions and responsibilities we must respect the previous generation and understand that the work that came before us was the product of a set of social conditions acted upon by a person, the WPA, and not restricted to the WPA acting individually and in isolation. It is important that we recognize that the WPA position is always in relation and acted out in complex relationships and roles. And while it is the WPA's role to negotiate these relationships, the clearer the distinction between the individual and the position, perhaps the less difficult the transition will be for the next generation.

A year had passed since I initially shared my thoughts about faculty evaluation when I overheard two instructors in their office discussing coming deadlines for peer observations and the required contents for the teaching portfolio: "You mean [this author's] policy, right?"

AN ENTREPRENEUR IN PIONEER'S CLOTHING Voice Four

Like our literary colleagues who specialize in historical, national, or ethnic categories, rhetoric and composition candidates are being asked, in job descriptions, to display specific skills in decidedly administrative areas, such as creating a WAC/WID presence on campus, supervising computer use in English courses, managing the department's writing center or, as this collaborative article reflects, directing a writing program. Can junior faculty be expected to answer these challenges with no protection of tenure, no experience outside of graduate school, and with perhaps a single course release? How many voices would respond "Yes!" to this scenario? Hundreds. Just ask anyone on a hiring committee for such administrative positions in the last five years.

I was one of those voices that was heard and then hired in what the profession is calling a "junior WPA" position. I was also the first composition person hired in a department of fifteen full-time faculty devoted to literary studies; thus, my position, in a sense, is twice charmed—or twice challenged. On one hand, I teach composition courses outside first-year English, am expected to shape the composition program, and have been given some released time to do so. On the other hand, I never would have been hired on the tenure track "simply" to teach writing here, and simultaneously I do not yet have the protection of tenure as I face the task of altering the existing administrative and political structures. Shaping my identity, then, has become a process of embedding myself with both faculty and administrators on my own campus while coming to grips with the institutional and professional forces that identify and reify WPA work today. To survive the inherent professional dangers of such a position, one must see opportunity in the administrative mandates that accompanies the WPA role. For example, the additional committee work of most WPAs provides increased chances of getting to know the politics, personalities and power-relationships that may play out in one's tenure and promotion down the line. Also, one must make great pains to update and stay in close contact with one's chairperson and senior colleagues in the English Department. Planning one's actions and agendas, especially in the beginning, is something that should be done with plenty of advice and discussion with people who have been at an institution through its ups and downs.

What will the professional narratives of junior WPAs sound like in twenty or thirty years? Will they be tales of working as a WPA for an entire career? Will they tell of moving to other administrative jobs such as department chair or dean? Will they tell of "doing time" as a WPA to finally be

tenured and freed to simply teach? Or will they reflect the results of preprofessionalization, making of me (and those similarly positioned) a mutation in a trend toward an applied approach to the PhD in English studies? My own doctoral-granting institution now offers graduate courses and internships in WPA, and other institutions have begun to offer a WPA specialization at the PhD level. My generational voice as a WPA, then, closely resembles that of a teenager in the full bloom of puberty, a voice filled with changing angst and one impatient for maturity but stuck in a holding pattern that, like teenage, seems to last forever.

Detangling my own "preprofessional" or "junior" voice, I first grasp the most important people, the role models, from my college education: my academic advisers. All of them had administrative duties shape their professional identity. My undergraduate advisor was head of the writing center and developmental writing program. Similarly, my graduate advisers consisted of a department head, a graduate coordinator, an associate dean, and a WPA. All of these academics claimed rhetoric and composition as their expertise, but they spent more than half, if not all, of their time in administrative roles. None had coursework, internships, or professional development opportunities to prepare them for these roles; like many senior WPAs today, they arrived at their positions through volunteering or through institutional fiat.

Perhaps, unconsciously, I imprinted administrative expectations on my future academic career. Such impressions were affirmed as I studied the historiographies of the English studies discipline and the edited collections on WPA work. I cannot think of a more valuable thing for past, present, or future WPAs to do than to study works such as James A. Berlin's *Rhetoric and Reality*, Gerald Graff's *Professing Literature*, and Duane Roen, Stuart Brown, and Theresa Enos's *Living Rhetoric and Composition*. The last is extremely important in showing how one's circumstance and work combine to form an academic career and in showing the surprising number of twists and turns the senior scholars of our community endured in legitimizing rhetoric and composition's claim in English studies. Our field needs more of these narratives to demystify the distorted vision many graduate students have of their professors and professions—rarely is a career a straight line from BA to MA to PhD to full-time, tenure-track employment. Such literature also proved integral in raising my consciousness of the ways the static history of departmentalization and periodization collides with the dynamics of the academic labor market and economy. Through such literature, one will begin to see the tectonic integrity of writing and writing instruction in post-secondary education. Basically, the more one can learn about the origins and developments of the study of English and the special role writing and administration has played in this history, the better one will be equipped to deal with the variety of demands one will face as a WPA.

At the 2004 Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) in San Antonio, I attended a special interest group entitled “Junior Writing Program Administrators: Who Matters and Why?” and recognized immediately that this group was onto an emerging labor trend, one that I occupy. The professional status of those involved in this session varied widely from full professors to graduate students, yet all of us were united through our WPA duties and through an overall concern with what such a position meant to the academic labor market, English studies, and rhetoric and composition specialists in general. Several tenured or “senior” WPAs discouraged junior faculty from taking such positions; junior WPAs concurred but empathized with the job-seeking graduate students present, knowing that such an appointment was one of the few ways to secure a full-time job. I agree with both perspectives here because I have recently been promoted to associate professor while a junior WPA, but I am still nervous about my soon-anticipated tenure review.

As a result, pursuing WPA work at the entry level has allowed me to see opportunities in administration. I originally identified myself as a pioneer, one who enjoys a pre-WPA status in claiming virgin territory and occupying unknown professional space; however, I must also claim to be an entrepreneur, by organizing, managing, and assuming responsibility for the real and imagined circumstances and opportunities surrounding the position held and the department’s activities. I see the WPA position, not only WPA work, as itself entrepreneurial. I do not think that WPA entrepreneurship necessarily devalues or corporatizes the work of the junior-faculty pioneer, but it does usefully reify the reality of the academic marketplace and the junior WPA’s evolving place in it.

READING THE LOCAL

Voice Five

As this essay unfolds, it shows more and more how the metaphor of generational succession and the narrative of disciplinary and professional progress it suggests are problematic. As other voices have already pointed out, when we, like Studs Terkel, look to individuals in their local spaces, we find that the generational metaphor, best employed, does not simply characterize the individual WPA herself but may “reside” in any number of places—in the faculty and other instructors; in the program’s goals, policies, and procedures; in the ideology governing the program, department, and wider institution—as well as in the preparation, knowledge, and experience of the WPA. Additionally, generational identities may be shaped at points of interface, for example, between a WPA and her colleagues, between the WPA

and her program’s history, structures, curriculum, practices, and pedagogies, or between the WPA’s schooled sense of best practices and her take on what’s best in the local setting. Further, as my story will show, we may find, in any one or another of these generational sites and interfaces, generations layered in complicated ways, such as in blended or very large families in which one can have a niece who is older than oneself; an uncle, younger, or a stepmother who is one’s own age. Indeed, the more closely we look at any particular local history and institutional forces, the less ably we can employ even the metaphor of “generation” to fully construct a WPA’s identity.

Although it is clear that the temporal, spatial, and interactional aspects of the generational metaphor are problematic, let me continue using it to illustrate my own difficulty in reading the local, my own experience in one scene of the complex and closeted generational interactions that affected my and my colleagues’ success. Voice Four’s experience can be construed as one in which a second-generation WPA enters a first-generation department (or, perhaps, a pregenerational department, like the Garden of Eden before the Fall). While there is *generational difference* between this WPA and the department, there is no apparent *generational conflict*. Since the WPA is the first composition specialist around, there are probably no ghosts. The department very likely has had no prior exposure to rhetorical or composition theory and consequently would not know that it can threaten the epistemologies, value systems, and pedagogies of many English departments and thus maybe their own, especially if they were trained as formalists. The WPA in Voice Four has entered “virgin territory” and as a trailblazer may be like the early French fur traders in the upper Midwest and Canada—before other Europeans arrived to create settlements. The traders traveled rivers and lakes relatively unimpeded, conducted their commerce in conjunction with the indigenous inhabitants, and shared with them enough similar ways so that the two groups could to some extent coexist. In this instance, what figures more significantly than generational status in the WPA’s success is an apparent *laissez-faire* intersection between the WPA’s and the department’s goals, practices, belief systems, and so forth.

When I joined a regional institution, judged excellent by public measures (such as *US News and World Report*), my generational expertise was different from my department’s—but the generational differences were *disguised* so that in addition to conflicts arising through what used to be called a “generation gap,” additional conflicts arose because I misjudged my department’s and colleagues’ identities. Had I known I was entering a mixed family, I would have approached my leadership, relational, and collegial tasks differently. The following aspects of the department led me to assume different generational knowledge among my colleagues than in fact

existed: First, departmental guidelines for composition showed evidence of composition scholarship (although it was dated). Second, the department's competency exams (also dated) showed the influence of writing assessment practices; third, faculty taught all the department's composition courses, which positively shaped my expectations about their knowledge of the field. Indeed, some faculty had composition backgrounds; a few more were English educationists, and one was engaged in doctoral study at a nearby research institution, well-known for its composition scholars. Having had two or three WPAs over the preceding twenty or so years, the department I joined seemed, from that marker alone, to be of a generation beyond the small liberal-arts school Voice Four discusses. In retrospect, I can see the hidden signs of generational identity that I missed during the search process and in my first months and year there.

Most faculty had been trained in literature, and those with composition backgrounds acquired them primarily through teaching assistant training in the 1980s, so the datedness in departmental pedagogies and assessment were supported rather than signals that the department was ready to change—even though it overtly acted as if it wanted to. Take, for example, the competency test. Designed in-house (with at least one of its designers still in the department), it included a severely flawed multiple-choice grammar and usage test. Many in the department wished to abolish at least this portion of the exam, as I had learned in my on-campus interview. Further evidence of the department's "enlightenment" was its desire to return local control of the written exam to the department, that is, to begin scoring the essay portion in-house, as it had done many years previously. Because such desires were overtly stated, I believed the department to have assessment expertise and savvy that I found out, painfully, it lacked. Calibration scoring sessions were unworkable; exam results were disastrous, and many of the assessment nightmares that can arise did.

In this department, the WPA position had languished, unfilled, for nearly three years, a sign, I see now, of problems awaiting me, one who entered this territory with more than fifteen years of WPA experience, with graduate specialization in rhetoric and composition, with substantial experience in writing assessment projects, and with confidence in my ability to develop collaborative working environments. Let's look more closely at why the position languished. The department knew that specializations in rhetoric and composition existed, and it knew the English studies cachet in hiring a WPA. Some of the faculty were even familiar with the composition scholarship, but overall, their knowledge of the field was varied, ambiguous, dated, and conflicted. And they wanted leadership and change only within the parameters of what they knew composition to be, parameters that were

unclear and, if they had been clear, would have circumscribed a territory I did not want to work within. The faculty at this institution had also had enough experience with WPAs to know that a WPA's policies and recommended practices might not closely match their own. A suppressed history of conflict seemed to bubble to the surface occasionally, like spectral images—blurred and almost unseen. Considerable angst underlay the surface of this situation.

An incredibly important insight into the local situation came in a faculty member's remark, which will, on examination, illustrate how hard it is to read the local, particularly if it is beyond the first generation. An Americanist, this faculty member had taught for thirty years, and for most if not all of them, he had taught first-year composition. He enjoyed the course, was committed to its importance, and was an excellent teacher. In an offhand remark one day, he revealed that he always felt uncomfortable when he completed his composition courses. He never felt sure he'd done the right thing; he was never sure he'd taught what should have been taught; he never felt "part of a team" (even though he definitely was not an outsider in the department). This revelation is surprising, especially because the professor contrasted it with his experience of finishing up the literature courses he taught. At the end of these courses, he said, he was always clear about his achievement. Pondering this remark can lead one to several conclusions (about epistemologies, for example), but I want to focus simply on his perception and my belief that his underlying angst reveals what many of his literature colleagues who also taught comp probably felt but were unable or afraid to express. They wanted certainty. They taught first-year composition every semester. They had been led by WPAs who had focused their teaching on writing process pedagogies, and so they had a modicum of professionalized expertise. They knew a field of composition studies exists, but their real or perceived knowledge, epistemologies, and theories of language were inadequate to see them through the semester with a sense of accomplishment. In uncomfortable ways, their literary grounding (formalist and modernist, for many) complicated their expectations of what composition courses should achieve.

The invisible, unexpressed angst expressed by one faculty member but probably felt by others certainly shaped the context in which I worked. My colleagues may well have wanted me to eliminate their (unexpressed) angst and insecurity, emotions that derived in part from knowing they were not specifically trained and in part from how persistent teaching comp became in their regular work load. Because they were "professionals," they *asked for* what sounded like second-generation expertise and sophistication. But what they wanted instead was day-to-day surety in their teaching lives—which second generation professionalization might only have undermined.

So what's the upshot of all this? A WPA's generational identity is not necessarily one that she can see reflected in her interactions with the material conditions of her working life. Even attempts to analyze the interface between generational identities and the relationship the WPA has with her department, her colleagues' ideologies and histories, and the pragmatics through which they live out their daily work lives do not lend themselves to clear generational characteristics. If we, as WPAs (new or veteran) entering a new job scene, appraise our skills and our departments in terms of the generational metaphor, we may well be confused, paralyzed, and ineffective. We can try mixing metaphors to read the local, to develop our plans and enact them, to shape our identities anew, but the generational identity of WPA scholarship may only repeat and intensify the frustrations that the Generation One WPAs lived through.

RETURN OF THE SPECTER

Voice Six

As my colleagues and I shared brief sketches around the workshop table about our WPA situations, I heard striking stories indicating how much the theoretically informed and politically savvy young WPAs knew about "old" WPA issues, challenges, and frustrations, from historical reading and from lived experience. Before that meeting, I had not recognized a peculiar hybridity informing their positions: the professional experience of most of these new WPAs recalled WPA dilemmas of the 1970s and 1980s—the uses and limits of authority; the disciplinary outsider syndrome; the composition missionary position; the role of cog in the machine. What became painfully clear is the extent to which preprofessional paradigms persist: the history of an older WPA generation lives on in various forms as the institutional context for these new WPAs, and their "new" knowledge and training has been forced into positions saturated by the ideological traces of an earlier era. Such monikers as comp czars, grammar police, labor managers, den mothers represent a whole catalogue of metaphors. Such positional paradigms seem to haunt both actual position descriptions and institutional cultural expectations, and, following suit, the daily lives of "new" WPAs. Their stories created for me, an older faculty member, an overwhelming sense of what might be termed "the spatiality of time." I recall saying at some point, addressing the younger WPAs in the workshop I was co-facilitating, "You live with ghosts."

A smooth historical narrative of professional progress is, of course, very appealing. John Trimbur argues in "Writing Instruction and the Politics of Professionalization" that "we are in the thrall of the stories we tell and

[. . .] our master narrative points to professionalization and discipline formation as the inevitable outcome of the plot" (134). We see a version of this narrative in Gary Olson's foreword to the *Allyn and Bacon Sourcebook for Writing Program Administrators* (admittedly an epideictic piece): "[. . .] the field of rhetoric and composition has reached a new level of disciplinary maturity in that finally, specialists in the field are setting the standards for our writing programs; we have finally gained a degree of control over how writing will be taught in institutions across the nation" (x). Trimbur and Anne Ruggles Gere warn that such tales of professional progress mask the persistence of oppressive ideological practices in WPA work, their essays focusing on the inevitable reproduction of inequity and elitism that results when WPAs "identify with the existing order of the academy" (Gere 126). Trimbur examines how WPAs themselves are implicated in practices of mastery and dominance through their role in the Foucauldian process of disciplining. Robert J. Connors puts it even more forcefully: "[T]oo many rhetoric PhDs have been willing to blunt their own perceptions and act as the overseers of oppressive and pedagogically indefensible composition programs" (*Composition-Rhetoric* 209). These critiques focus on the construct of the "boss compositionist." Yet the persistence of historical paradigms suggests that WPAs are in some ways also themselves docile bodies with overdetermined identities. In lived terms, the weight of historical paradigms continually impinges on the idealized and critical professional progress narratives.

Trimbur writes, "The contradictory politics of professionalization are enacted [. . .] at the point of production, in the everyday workings of writing programs, and therefore it may be useful to describe how these politics shape the living experience of writing program administrators" (142). The workshop tales indicate that the "living experience" of new WPAs is shaped by oppressive constructs and practices embedded within the signs of professional progress that run alongside their composition-rhetoric expertise, tenure-track appointments, and formal job descriptions. In most workshop tales, the new WPAs were well treated professionally and were accepted as experts and colleagues, but their acceptance masked an assimilationist assumption: while the departments into which they had been hired recognized the disciplinary nature of their fields, they also assumed their arrival would change nothing. They were expected to engage in what might be called current-traditional administrative work. The departments' operating paradigms often used local lore to displace or compete with individual WPA knowledge.

One result was a kind of self-defensive closeting of knowledge. In one instance, we heard of a WPA doing his program work silently, as it were, in private. His program development happened in a space apart—in the closet,

so to speak, of the department and larger discipline. This work was further cloaked by terms—WAC, technical writing—that were established in the department familiar and so unthreatening and in this way the administrative discourse that stands in for the social and cultural issues of writing program work itself assisted the cloaking effect. The politically vulnerable, new (that is, tenure-track) WPA saw the pragmatic value of focusing on such curricula. Authority and collegial status would derive from and depend on perceived adherence to the locally invoked paradigm of WPA work—in one particular case, it was a paradigm of WPA as (male) technician overseeing the machine of composition instruction, adding new parts as needed, but most of all keeping things running smoothly. Conversations with (literature) colleagues were guarded so that the disciplinary version of heteronormativity was carefully preserved. Several as-yet untenured WPAs reported a similar guarding in department exchanges and program work. Some did so because they lived with the ghosts of rejected predecessors, as with Voice Three, “the new Jacob.”

Perhaps all of us perform our work and lives among oppressive shadows. In *Specters of Marx*, Jacques Derrida plots out a theory of “hauntology”:

Repetition *and* first time: this is perhaps the question of the event as question of the ghost. *What is* a ghost? What is the *effectivity* or the *presence* of a specter, that is, of what seems to remain as ineffective, virtual, insubstantial as a simulacrum? Is there *there*, between the thing itself and its simulacrum, an opposition that holds up? Repetition *and* first time, but also repetition *and* last time, since the singularity of any *first time* makes of it also a *last time*. Each time it is the event itself, a first time is a last time. Altogether other. . . . Let us call it a *hauntology*. (10)

“The new Jacob”: a first time is a last time. We live with ghosts. The narrative of professional progress is disrupted at the level of individually lived experience by other, spectral narratives that materially affect our work and identities, the dialectic of which can never transcend the hauntology.

The expectation that Connors indirectly voiced—that the certification of rhetoric-composition PhDs will forward the narrative of progress, moving us beyond our history of exploitation and amateurism—ought to be complicated by a recognition of the spatiality of time. Understanding and addressing the inevitable persistence and presence of past paradigms and narratives is especially important today, when interest in WPA history is high and new narratives are emerging. Consider the recent interest in WPA archival work. If seen as a commodification of history in the form of the archive itself, archiving can become an attempt to contain and leave behind that history—

to imbue it with use value for “argu[ing] persuasively within institutional settings” (L’Eplattenier 136) to enable progressive change. Derrida discusses such certification rituals as exorcisms in which one

pretends to declare death only in order to put to death. [. . .] The certification is effective. [. . .] But here effectivity phantomalizes itself. It is in fact [en effet] a matter of a performative that seeks to reassure but first of all to reassure itself by assuring itself, for nothing is less sure, that what one would like to see dead is indeed dead [. . .] it says (to itself), what used to be living is no longer alive, it does not remain effective in death itself, don’t worry [. . .] it is often a matter of pretending to certify death [. . .] the restless dream, of an execution. (48)

Linda Brodkey has argued that the “institutional future of composition is in the moments when a piece of common sense is dislodged and along with it the presumption that it goes without saying that the familiar is natural” (xvi). Brodkey’s “moments” and Gere’s use of Raymond Williams’s concept of “the long revolution,” which “embodies ‘contradictions between different parts of the general process of change’” (119) are most helpful if treated as spatially material, not just temporally ideal. The moments of lived experience, as we see in the tales from the new WPAs, are occupied, haunted, happening and re happening within and beyond linear time. In the postmodern mapping project that Tim Peebles has forwarded as a means of moving from a unitary WPA identity/role to a perception of the fragmented subjectivities and positionality of the WPA (153), the spatiality of time is a needed additional axis.

Perhaps WPA agency does depend on our recognizing the moments that allow for the undermining of paradigmatic “common sense.” But in these moments that are also spaces in time, each WPA is carrying the professional DNA of earlier generations. New and old, we live with ghosts, and our narratives must inevitably be haunted.

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