

Review Essay

As Writing Professionalizes, Asking What, How, and Why

Douglas Hesse

Giberson, Gregory A. and Thomas A. Moriarty, eds. *What We Are Becoming: Developments in Undergraduate Writing Majors*. Logan, UT: Utah State UP, 2010. 240 pages.

McGurl, Mark. *The Program Era: Postwar Fiction and the Rise of Creative Writing*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2009. 480 pages.

Menand, Louis. *The Marketplace of Ideas: Reform and Resistance in the American University*. New York: Norton, 2010. 176 pages.

Scott, Tony. *Dangerous Writing: Understanding the Political Economy of Composition*. Logan: Utah State UP, 2009. 216 pages.

Strickland, Donna, and Jeanne Gunner, eds. *The Writing Program Interrupted: Making Space for Critical Discourse*. Portsmouth: Boynton/Cook, 2009. 232 pages.

Vilardi, Teresa and Mary Chang, eds. *Writing-Based Teaching: Essential Practices and Enduring Questions*. Albany: SUNY P, 2009. 186 pages.

I've directed writing programs for sixteen of twenty-four years since my PhD, a stretch that included ostensibly "higher" administrative positions from which I returned. Clearly, then, I've found something rewarding in this work—though I might just be a dull recidivist. Yet I never refer to myself as a WPA (as in "I'm a/the WPA at DU"), because the label seems to make "writing" merely the penultimate adjective to the mightier noun

“administrator.” I may be deluded that leading or directing or running (all are vexed verbs) a writing program is fine work but not the real point, just something to which a “heroic, self-sacrificing father figure,” as Jonathan Alexander and Will Banks have fairly characterized me, might resign himself (92).

So, despite having roles in the Council of Writing Program Administrators, despite liking and respecting people who do this work, despite believing that good WPAs are good for teaching and learning, I’m oddly discomfited whenever I hear a graduate student aspire to be one, when programs offer sequences in writing administration, when so many of us foreground identities as administrators over those as teachers and scholars. For a couple of decades, people have rightly worried about the conflation/reduction of composition studies with first-year composition. I’m starting to worry if we might be similarly collapsing “teaching writing” into “managing writing programs,” as if it’s all really about the staffing, the scheduling, the placing, the planning, the assessing, and so on.

When I consider my dis-ease, its sources seem dubious. Latent 1970’s working class suspicions of anyone too happy to be boss? A subconscious presumption, born of naïve Midwestern diffidence, that one ought to be tapped for this work rather than pursue it outright? A sense that “being in composition studies” centrally means teaching, writing, and studying writing, so that “running a writing program” is ancillary in the way that “management” is to medicine? Perhaps I simply possess “enlightened false consciousness[,] . . . the diagnosis of a tragic loss of righteousness . . . that creates a melancholy affliction in the subject,” who is aware of his or her complicity in something unseemly but rationalizes it nonetheless (Hardin 141). In naming my reticence, I’m not claiming it’s right.

And so I’ve been ambivalent about the professionalization of writing programs and their leaders/directors/administrators/chiefs. Lest I seem hypocritical or disingenuously privileged, please know that I favor formally organizing best knowledges and practices, especially against so much reductive nonsense about writing. I just think we need to ponder our work and identities, our motives and professional trajectories. Some recent books help frame what’s at stake.

In his compact and modest *The Marketplace of Ideas: Reform and Resistance in the American University*, Louis Menand asks four questions: “Why is it so hard to institute a general education curriculum? Why did the humanities disciplines undergo a crisis of legitimation? Why has ‘interdisciplinarity’ become a magic word? And why do professors all tend to have the same politics” (16)? While at least the first and, arguably, the second and third questions, directly resonate for American writing programs, com-

position studies is notably absent from the book, beyond a gratuitous jab that English PhD programs are now really designed to generate ABDs as adjuncts (146). Largely we're absent because Menand narrowly focuses on "elite" institutions with venerable liberal arts traditions. His defense: "the elites have had the resources to innovate and the visibility to set standards for the system as a whole" (18). I'll point out that having resources to innovate and actually doing so are quite different, especially when it comes to general education or writing, where many "elite" schools have been late adopters. I give you writing centers. Any number of solid, if modest, public universities (Illinois State comes quickly to mind) have not only had little difficulty instituting but also reforming general education.

Why, then, include this book in a review essay centrally concerned with books on writing programs? As a staff writer for the *New Yorker*, Menand represents higher education to a large trade audience, and his analyses provide interesting harmony and counterpoint to the issues of professionalization.

Menand characterizes the legitimation crisis in the humanities as having occurred in three stages. First was a shift of scholarly approaches "from formalist and universalist to historicist and hermeneutical" (83); as a result, any "merely" professional or vocational field, say accounting, could be appropriated by the humanities through a focus on "the history of accounting" (or, I'll suggest, "the rhetoric of accounting"). Second were antidisciplinary moves to accommodate areas (Women's studies, postcolonial studies and so on) that had been absent from traditional disciplines. Third came a move toward postdisciplinarity, toward "methodological eclecticism, boundary-crossing (a literature professor writing on music or fashion), post-professionalism (writing for a non-academic audience), and the role of the public intellectual" (87).

With tributaries in rhetorical theory and history, linguistics, psychology, sociology, and anthropology, journalism, and many other fields, composition studies has ridden all three waves, leading to long debates on whether we constitute a discipline, a field, an enterprise, or something else. "Program" has thus struck me as a conveniently ambiguous phrase to lasso some of this work, as has "center" for other rump academic enterprises. And yet in terms of campus economic, political, and economic respect, we're convinced (not without justification) that we need departmental status, with majors and tenurable faculties. I'll simply note that composition studies' expansionary moves come as relationships between disciplines and departments, between intellectual and administrative formations, are fluid and the humanities are vulnerable. It's a fertile time to grow writing. Composition studies has its own legitimation crisis, but at least the field has practical

catchet and comparatively less internal fractiousness, perhaps owing to its unifying narrative of marginalization, than, say, literary studies.

Menand's discussion of professionalism illuminates the complexity of our moment and motive. "Society" grants qualified professionals the power to regulate themselves in exchange for the promise of their disinterested quality in performing specific work. On the one hand, this creates an open meritocracy through credentialing. On the other hand, obviously, it makes professionals gatekeepers. In the academy, Menand suggests, "the most important function of the system is not the production of knowledge. It is the reproduction of the system" (105). This is a provocative lens through which to perceive the emergence of professional WPAs.

PUTTING IT TO THE WPA

What fascinates me is the potential for the profession of "writing teacher" or "writing scholar" or "writer" to be redefined as the profession of "writing administrator," a point that Donna Strickland and others suggested already a few years ago (49). On the surface, this seems silly; after all, there are many times more teachers than administrators, and isn't the point to ensure good teaching, good research, and the best allocation of resources? And yet it might be that we're nearing the fulcrum where that's not the point. Perhaps most people with permanent positions in composition studies will manage some aspect of writing at some point: creating and maintaining programmatic features, hiring and organizing teachers, securing and extending budgets and a place in the institutional order. Richard Miller (in)famously argued a decade ago that composition should foreground this administrative imperative, recasting graduate education explicitly as administrative training. In the face of these trends, how might we avoid letting our pursuit of professional status swamp our mission of doing good by students and stakeholders?

That is one of several urgent questions addressed in Donna Strickland and Jeanne Gunner's collection of sixteen essays, introduction, and foreword, *The Writing Program Interrupted: Making Space for Critical Discourse*. Strickland and Gunner have edited a provocative, often polemic, book that confronts us with tough critical analyses. At various points, nearly all touchstones of WPA work come under scrutiny, from the Portland Resolution, the Outcomes Statement, and the Intellectual Work document; to grand narratives (or the "totemic topics" as Strickland and Gunner put it (xv)) about the marginalization of writing programs and the victimization of their gendered leaders; to the very assumptions that WPAs benefit teachers, students, and writing. I expect these critiques will make lots of WPAs

uncomfortable. But this is an important volume that comes at a pivotal time.

The book's premise is that "the discourse that circulates about writing program administration rarely takes a 'big picture' look at its own premises" (xi). (*Interrupted's* main forebear, Bosquet, Scott, and Parascondola's 2004 *Tenured Bosses and Disposable Teachers*, less directly—and less ably—took on the construct of writing program administration per se.) The heaviest volleys come in chapters from Jeff Rice, Sid Dobrin, Bruce Horner, and from Laura Bartlett Snyder, who astutely articulates how "'feminist' styles of administration might actually be complicit in maintaining inequitable labor relations" (29). Rice critiques the WPA Outcomes statement as promoting "scientific management" (9-10) and emblemizing the general conservatism of WPAs. Dobrin characterizes the Council of Writing Program Administrations as "an attempt to create a master narrative of meaning under which administrators nationally operate with little or no open critique of what it means to administer or why administration has become such a central (and powerful) position within the ranks of composition studies" (61). He ultimately calls for "a type of un-administering of the administrators, in which wpa's work toward a more critical position . . . that specifically questions its own positionality, its own place" (68). I generally think Rice and Dobrin are enough right that we ought to pay attention to the points they raise.

However, some characterizations are over-extended. For example, I have never foregrounded the Outcomes Statement in any writing programs in which I've taught or which I've reviewed. (While I agree with its emphases and spirit, the statement strikes me as so broad as to be unwieldy.) Sure, this is an *n* of 1, but my point is that, for all the visibility of the outcomes statement and its proponents, it's hardly universal to all WPAs and programs, and hardly an oath to which allegiance must be sworn. Visibility ≠ universality. Dobrin's concern about totalizing makes some sense in large programs where contingent faculty do most teaching, but by his own acknowledgment, it doesn't typify colleges where staffing happens differently, including places that have no WPA. Furthermore, the apparent lack of critique in scholarly discourses doesn't prove the absence of critique by WPAs themselves. Many spend our scholarly energies on projects other than meditations on the state of a profession that defies grand narratives. Suellyn Duffey effectively raises this point in her chapter when she wonders, "Is the WPA position alike enough across institutional settings to be theorized monolithically, as it currently is" (187). Her complex answer is "not yet" (193), though I'd go further and caution against the desire implied in her answer.

Bruce Horner's chapter offers a smart critique that commodifying the intellectual work of writing program administration, privileging what is visible and reviewable, strips away other elements of effort and effect, including those derived socially. I think Horner is largely right, though the goal of the Intellectual Work statement is not to name all WPA activity as intellectual work, then claim that only intellectual work matters. Horner worries that valuing writing programs for the tuition they generate and the skills they produce confuses exchange value (which is rewarded in capitalist societies) and use value (which is not) (78-9). He uses this analysis to temper Marc Bosquet's concerns about managerial discourses. Even if one recognizes the problematic ethics of "paternalistic" management, Horner cites pragmatic constraints on glib solutions: "Arguments that otherwise show great awareness of the limitations imposed by current working conditions on composition teachers, which then advocate assigning those working under such conditions tasks like curriculum design, deny, ironically, the conditions necessary to carry out such tasks" (81). The irony is compounded by advocacy and bargaining efforts that focus on wages and security. Horner concludes, "By focusing almost exclusively on questions of hours and pay, they leave unquestioned, and contribute to, the commodification of their work" (81).

Other chapters in *The Writing Program Interrupted*, such as Joe Hardin's, offer similarly cogent analyses. Still others swim more in the WPA scholarly mainstream: Tom Fox's analysis of "expert" limitations in removing a bad writing test; Tom Miller and Jillian Skeffington's apology for philosophical pragmatism; Wendy Hesford, Edgar Singleton, and Ivonne Garcia's case study of a globalization initiative. Some few chapters less obviously contribute to the book's purpose and theme.

Tony Scott's chapter does, but for the purpose of this review, I'd like to concentrate rather on his book *Dangerous Writing: Understand the Political Economy of Composition*, which develops similar issues at greater length. Scott braids two threads: a challenge to teach in ways commensurate with the service-working lives of students, and a sharp critique of institutions, programs, and WPAs (Scott openly implicates himself), that treat faculty in ways that parallel their students' economic lives. He focuses on "the sometimes directly contradictory relationship between a *scholarly profession* that seeks full status as a legitimate academic discipline and a *bureaucratic practice* that has a legacy grounded in labor exploitation and oppressive conceptions of literacy and higher education" (33, though he uses exactly the same wording on 43). Strong words, and yet it's fair to have us confront a cleft between the "upstairs" work of graduate research and theory and the "downstairs" work of teaching. Of course, I'd contend, it's not necessarily

bad to wield “a bureaucratic tool that can be effectively used to instrumentalize a particular view of literacy and learning” (47), provided that the “view” is sound. Some bureaucracies actually instrumentalize good, as have courts that overturn bad laws.

In a chapter subtitled “The Genre Function of the Writing Textbook,” Scott reports a qualitative study of how 20 contingent faculty choose and use writing textbooks. The interesting, if not entirely surprising, finding is that teacher “identification is centered on teaching writing according to the explicit and implicit norms established in this program, rather than on the ability to recursively theorize and thus critique particular pedagogies” (106). While I’d be very concerned if those teachers lacked the knowledge and ability to do the kinds of theorizing and critique Scott desires (and so do I), I don’t see this discovery as necessarily troubling, especially if the program has developed theoretically defensible “norms.” That is, I hope that faculty teaching the same course in the same environment would reach some common ground on local goals and practices, and I don’t think this view simply represents a longing to make curricular trains run on time. The implication is that imperious WPAs would inflict norms on subjugated faculties who have no recourse or means to exercise strong disciplinary knowledge in creating better curricula and pedagogies. If that happens, I worry, too.

A stronger issue is the disjunction between student job prospects and purportedly elitist readings and writing practices. Hoping to revive the agency and identity that were, ironically, lost when political pedagogies effaced expressivism for postmodernism, Scott wants students to write about, analyze, and contextualize their own experiences as workers, making “the material conditions of students’ lives. . . . a common starting point for inquiry and writing at the university” (156). Scott portrays this pedagogy, providing eloquent student writings and portraits. The book is well-written. Still, “dangerous writing” hardly seems dangerous at all; it’s not far from a *Ways of Reading* pedagogy but with “students as workers” at the topical center. Scott’s call to turn “more of the intellectual energy of our profession toward understanding how the economics of higher education are shaping writing pedagogy” is reasonable (187), but we’ve actually done a fair amount of that work already, and Scott’s done even more here. What’s really needed are clear portraits of desirable futures and thoughtful plans to achieve them.

PRACTICES, NOT PROGRAMS

It's hard to imagine a book further from the political economy of writing programs than *Writing-Based Teaching: Essential Practices and Enduring Questions*, edited by Teresa Vilardi and Mary Chang, which hearkens if not to a bygone era than to a parallel reality. Vilardi and Chang compile eight essays and a historical postscript written by participants in/leaders of the Bard College Workshop on Writing and Thinking (a three-week course for Bard students begun in the early 1980s) and the Institute for Writing and Thinking (a faculty development effort that promotes writing to learn). It consciously self-references these institutions, to the extent the book seems nearly a festschrift to Bard. Most chapters share anecdotes of the Institute's early days, citing key handouts and practices from the early 1990s, and celebrating the influences of founding director Paul Connolly and of Peter Elbow, whose impressive original consulting continues to mark the program.

Chapters focus on a tenet most famously articulated by Anne Berthoff, John Bean, and others: personal engagement with subjects, fostered by various assignments and techniques, will create a broad writerly sense, ability, and identity. These are familiar practices: personal freewriting, focused freewriting, reflection on process, collaborative learning and writing communities, dialectical notebooks, and radical revision strategies. Notably absent are discussions of how they relate to matters that have occupied composition studies for the past decade: genre, writing transfer, the social construction and constraints of discursive formations, writing with and for new media. Most notably absent are rhetorical considerations. Many citations are classics from the 1980s and 1990s, with such philosophers and theorists as Wittgenstein and Vygotsky figuring prominently, along with more belletristic figures. (A passage from Norman McLean's *A River Runs Through It* shows up in at least four chapters.) The book is an interesting historical document archiving a particular place, time, and orientation toward writing to learn.

Several chapters provide ideas new to some teachers looking for strategies and practices. For example, Margaret Raney Bledsoe's "Dialectical Notebooks" goes beyond "draw a line down the center of a page" to provide a well-articulated set of options. Carley Moore offers several prompts for deep revision. Alfred Guy outlines "process writing," what most of us would call "reflection" or writing about one's own processes. Ray Peterson discusses all these practices in a climate of standardized testing. I can still imagine faculty across the disciplines finding several techniques fresh, and

I can still imagine many colleges and situations in which this orientation plays well. After all, it invests considerable agency in students themselves.

As I read this book, then, the word that I keep fighting is “quaint.” Although quaint has largely a pejorative cast, it also embodies the sense of old charm and attractiveness, something appealing both because of and despite being out of step with its times or surroundings. Part of this may be due to the book’s embracing a view of writing from our field’s adolescence. Part might be that, despite the influence of “the Bard school,” what comes persistently through are teachers, classrooms, and students, in a space oddly free of writing programs, administrators, and their trappings. I’m not longing for program-less writing, for John Galt or Howard Roarke-like teachers. Indeed, the striking thing about Bard is its collaborative development and persistent—even programmatized—structures.

BEYOND MERE PROGRAMS

What We Are Becoming: Developments in Undergraduate Writing Majors, edited by Gregory A. Giberson and Thomas A. Moriarty, explores practices and principles that characterize some of the 60+ undergraduate writing majors that have emerged especially—but not only—in the past fifteen years. Surprisingly scant are references to *A Field of Dreams: Independent Writing Programs and the Future of Composition Studies*, the most important ancestor of the current movement. Another backdrop is *Composition Studies* 35.1 (spring 2007), an issue on writing majors introduced by Heidi Estrem and featuring several of the authors in Giberson and Moriarty’s book.

An opening chapter by Rebecca de Wind Mattingly and Patricia Harkin argues that a “post-disciplinary major in rhetoric and composition is a particularly good idea for research intensive universities in the current technological and fiscal states of affairs” (13), benefiting students, their faculty, universities themselves, and multinational capital. These rationales are persuasive mostly to compositionists already in the choir, though even some choristers might be put off by the assertions that such programs will be “lucrative” (20).

It’s striking that the next fourteen chapters mostly ignore the “research intensive university setting.” These chapters sort and resort into several categories. Several are histories and explanations of majors at specific schools, including Millikin, Colorado State, Mt. Union, Oakland, Southwest Minnesota, and Rowan. They’re interesting not only for their detailed depictions and, in the case of an engaging chapter by Kelly Lowe and William Macaulay, frank analyses of what can go wrong, but also for presenting less familiar schools. Other chapters focus on issues within majors. Dominic

Delli Carpini and Michael Zerbe use the curriculum at York to make a case for style and memory. Moriarty and Giberson advocate for civic rhetoric, Joddy Murray for multimodal writing, and Celest Martin for creative nonfiction. Swimming against the current, David Beard ultimately argues against an undergraduate rhetoric major. His argument is particularly curious given the explicit place of “writing” (not rhetoric and not composition) in the volume’s title. Would he be “for” a writing major but “against” a rhetoric major, and what would be the difference?

Indeed, the rhetoric/writing relationship is only one of many issues these authors consider, some explicitly, others tacitly. To what extent (or perhaps better, under what conditions), should these majors foreground consumption/reading/theoretical knowledge and to what extent production/writing/practical knowledge? To what extent should they feature “professional” writing versus “academic” versus “civic” versus “creative?” Liberal arts or humanistic education versus vocational? And how should these questions get addressed in local situations? Those situations include the positions of creative, technical, and first-year writing at a given school; the dispositions of literature faculty; the configuration and strength of the traditional English major; and the numbers and interests of writing faculty.

These several essays are interesting at the levels of particle and even wave, but ultimately unfinished at the level of field. One sees cases made for specific elements or orientations but little over-arching analysis. That’s maybe consistent with the point of the book and the historical spirit and charm of our field/terrain/post discipline, for which there is no innocent encompassing term. Neither “rhetoric” nor “composition studies” nor “writing” is big or neutral enough.

Sanford Tweedie, Jennifer Courtney, and William Wolff, in “Toward a Description of Undergraduate Writing Majors,” do offer Cartesian coordinates for sorting things out. Their horizontal axis ranges from “Liberal” to “Technical,” from courses in writing as a “literary” act per se to courses in writing for specific purposes, professions, fields, or genres (282). The vertical axis ranges from “general” to “specific,” from purely theoretical or broad courses to ones focusing on narrow genres or situations. This matrix is easily deconstructed, as Tweedie, Courtney, and Wolff anticipate, but it’s a useful heuristic.

But given plentiful options, which are “the best?” Sue McLeod takes up this issue in a brief afterword that suggests starting a “national conversation about shared outcomes [for writing majors], a conversation that might result in a document not unlike the Council of Writing Program Administrators’ Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition” (288). I imagine many authors in *The Writing Program Interrupted* expressing dismay at

the very prospect. Codifying the writing major or, even tracks within it, may have a colonizing function that effaces local features, and I caution us to live a good while with multiplicity and diversity in configuring departments and majors.

Mark McGurl's *The Program Era: Postwar Fiction and the Rise of Creative Writing* explores writing of a different sort, the emergence since the 1930s of hundreds of graduate and undergraduate programs, many (but crucially not all) federated under Associated Writing Programs (AWP). Writing less a critical history per se (in the vein of D.G. Myer's masterful *The Elephants Teach*), and surprisingly familiar with composition studies, McGurl mostly ignores the hoary question "are creative writing programs good for writers and writers?" Instead he wonders "how, why, and to what end has the writing program period reorganized U.S. literary production" and "how might this fact be brought to bear on a reading of postwar literature itself?" (27). He proceeds mainly through extended readings of authors against their times and institutions, from Flannery O'Connor through Ken Kesey, Toni Morrison, Raymond Carver, Joyce Carol Oates, and many others, in a lucid 400+ page account.

McGurl examines specific programs and their directors, most notably Iowa's and Stanford's, with Paul Engle and Wallace Stegner their respective WPA-like figures. But creative writing directors are decidedly not WPAs. Creative writing exerts influence less through single heroes than through "social atmospheres" constituted by writer/teachers and students (322). So, while compositionists may agree that programs are both "a social *technology*, a way of mobilizing human and other resources to achieve external ends" and "an embodiment of *tradition*, a place where the authority of past practices is contained and conserved" (151), composition and creative writing programs are configured quite differently. Partly this is due to the difference between providing universal coverage and offering selective access. Creative writing teachers are credentialed through publication and featured in alumni magazines, rather than hidden in schedules as "faculty TBA."

Creative writing programs may be most appropriately contrasted, then, with nascent undergraduate writing majors. McGurl cites four growth factors for creative writing programs. These include "the student's desire to be a writer, the writer's desire for a steady paycheck, the institution's desire to be responsive to the desires of its inmates" (221), all magnified by the floating signifier "excellence." McGurl maintains that "creative writing in the university will exist as long as it seems too excellent to resist. . . . [A]n impressive creative writing program can be had for what amounts, as against particle accelerators and the like, to chump change" (407). Undergraduate "writing-but-not-creative-writing-but-maybe-creative-writing majors" or,

more aptly, “writing-majors-as-some-composition-studies-professors-might-imagine-them” have the interests and desires of their professors. They may attract students (and my money is on programs that foreground production and practice rather the philosophical relationship between Quintillian and Linda Flower). But what about these major will convey “excellence” to administrators?

Space precludes characterizing many aspects of this fascinating book, but I want to point out that McGurl’s method does something that most WPA research doesn’t: analyze programs’ effects on writing and writers in the culture at large. Other books I’ve been discussing have focused rather on what’s “good” for teachers and what’s “good” for composition studies. We’ve almost completely ignored the effect of writing programs on writing per se, by which I mean something larger than program outcomes. How do students in the “program era of composition” write compared to those in the pre-program era? How do students at schools with “strong” writing programs write compared to students at schools without? Note, the question is “how,” not “how well.” McGurl’s point is not to judge the fiction produced but to characterize and understand it. Obviously, it’s a question more easily asked of a few hundred authors than of several hundred thousand writers. Still, it’s a pressing research issue.

THE PROGRAM-PROFESSIONAL COMPLEX

What strikes me about these last three books is how the figure of the WPA recedes compared to the earlier. The latter focus on teaching courses and writers rather than administrative practices, and even in Giberson and Moriarty, majors invoke a curricular array and distributed faculty expertise. Together these disparate books suggest that WPAs should consider motives for making and sustaining programs and majors. At heart, most of us imagine programs serving their respective students. We believe ourselves enlightened disciplinary experts helping to manage those enterprises in often inconsiderate, even hostile, environments. Still our inclination is to consolidate and extend program-ness with features and activities that affiliate it—and us—with national, professionalized writing program administration. We cite “best practices,” yes, but we long, too, for status. When pundits complain that we ought to focus on “the basics,” like fixing student’s grammar through drills or teaching the obviously universal “rules” of good writing, we’re indignant certainly because our research and theory makes us know the futility. Would you have us release evil spirits through skull holes? But we’re also affronted personally, our credentials dismissed, along with our selves.

Now, I won't condemn self- or professional- interest. No discipline or department operates with utter disinterest in status, and even pastors and rabbis watch congregational bottom lines. Still, the danger, to channel Dwight Eisenhower, is that we may unthinkingly be creating a kind of Program-Professional Complex. When a preoccupation with administrative means occludes writerly ends, we should pause. I concede that I'm invoking a nonmanagerial intellectual center to our field. I acknowledge that structures inscribe and circumscribe learning, that the very existence of this essay in this journal deconstructs my desire to constitute our profession as teaching and writing rather than as administration. Perhaps the American and global economy is now so fraught that we can best but fret about professionally insuring our enterprises and selves against reductions in force or importance. That I get. But let's not get so enmeshed in those concerns that bureaucracy-making—even good and useful and noble and true bureaucracy—becomes our aspiration and delight.

I expect another fifteen years in my career, at least some directing writing programs, though I figure not most. As I peer at those years through the lens of these books, I see that creating conditions and opportunities for colleagues and students is an important but, at least for me, not singular or defining part of what it means to be in composition. Directing includes managing and strategizing, unapologetically so; beyond, it includes understanding not only “the program” and “the profession” but also its subject matter, to sound old fashioned, more as professor than as administrator. No doubt I read and write from a position of privilege, though that and how I got here continually surprise me even as I'm reminded that I'm white and I'm male, albeit rooted in the rural working class. When I recall my own graduate education, I'm struck that maybe only one of these six books is something like we'd have read in the 1980s. It's a sign of our field's maturity and health that they exist now, and we're better off for the historicizing, analysis, reflection, and critique they enact. I only hope they complement rather than displace knowledge about texts, text-making, text-makers, and teaching, which I perceive still as the heart of our profession.

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