

## WPA as Tempered Radical: Lessons from Occupy Wall Street

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### ABSTRACT

*Beginning with Henry Giroux's assertion at the 2013 Conference on College Composition and Communication to "Write the Public Good Back into Education," this article presents the role of the WPA as one poised to take on an activist stance against the corporate university. By connecting Occupy Wall Street with writing program administration, I argue for an administrative philosophy grounded in prefigurative practices, "building a new society in the shell of the old," and tempered, or moderate, radicalism to energize the wide base of contingent faculty and begin to incrementally change programs from the inside. Specific recommendations, both pedagogical and programmatic, are grounded in these concepts to propose small-scale changes that may improve immediate conditions for non-tenure-track faculty, even while WPAs argue for more substantive reforms.*

At the 2013 Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) in Las Vegas, Henry Giroux's galvanizing address, "Writing the Public Good Back into Education," called for widespread, visible, and radical resistance to the neoliberal corporate takeover of higher education. The corporate university has reframed the purpose of post-secondary education "almost exclusively on economic goals such as preparing students for the workforce" and has ideologically and relationally shifted away from its origin in training critical citizens and producing new knowledge. Further, deeply influenced by commercial models and interests, the corporate university values flexibility in resource management over providing job security, thereby "transforming faculty into an army of temporary subaltern labor" (Giroux, "Writing"). As the pool of contract labor<sup>1</sup> grows wider and deeper and top-down instrumentalism spreads, higher education as an institution now operates in a service function to well-funded, well-pro-

tected commercial entities. Composition, situated as a required introductory course and often employing the largest numbers of contract laborers, is cast as serving the servants.

Our institutions do not work to hide these practices; often, they are described as necessary strategies in a tough economy, responses to situations created by state-legislated austerity, or as mutually beneficial partnerships. Contract, temporary labor shares a grounding ideology with “Just in Time” (JIT) resource management, a business strategy that seeks to reduce inventory costs by generating products as needed. Product generation, analogous to contingent hiring, can be reduced without recourse when profits drop. From overreliance on JIT labor to fast assessment metrics, institutions of higher education unabashedly align their values with the capitalist tenets of efficiency, bottom-line profit, and top-down decision making.

However, higher education’s adoption of corporate practices may also provide its greatest weakness. Giroux suggests that resistance to this large-scale, well-funded takeover lives in energizing the base—students, teachers, and program-level administrators (“Writing”). As such, ideologies like those grounding Occupy Wall Street (Occupy) offer approaches for programmatic resistance.

Occupy, spearheaded by “brave young students,” has given us “a new language in order to talk about inequality and power issues [and has] attempt[ed] to create alternative democratic public spaces” (Giroux, “Writing”). Higher education is one of the last public spheres, and the growing visibility of its systemic inequities opens it to public protest strategies. If our writing programs routinely rely on contingent labor, then they support these systemic inequities and thus emerge as sites ready for Occupy-inflected resistance. This article reframes the role of the WPA as one poised to—and in many cases one which already does—take an activist stance to focus on the ethical dilemma of contingency. I connect Occupy with writing program administration to argue for administrative action grounded in prefigurative practices, practices which seek to “build a new society in the shell of the old” (Graeber 142).

As Marc Bousquet, Donna Strickland, and Sidney Dobrin have powerfully argued, WPAs are often caught in a middle-managerial double bind. Charged as resource managers and responsive to top-down demands, they are both powerless against and definitionally complicit in unethical hiring practices. Dobrin terms this relationship “the administrative imperative,” as power is not held singularly by the WPA or even by upper-administrators but instead is relationally enacted through program administration, “impl[ying] a sense of structured parameter or sequential mechanized control” (93). Program administration is a task-driven position; WPAs

carry the weight of budgets, salaries, and contracts, often at a human and humane cost. Unwillingly, they are charged to do more with less—less space, less funding, less secure contracts—in the mission shift to the corporate university.

The equation of contingent composition faculty and the metonymic ninety-nine percent is simplistic but offers traction in thinking about factors like corporate exploitation of labor and a resultant precariously employed underclass. As widely reported, 1 million of 1.5 million faculty in higher education work as contingent laborers, a boom that has led to establishment of the New Faculty Majority. Noam Chomsky cites “growing worker insecurity” and persistence of “precarious employment” as touchstone issues of Occupy (33). Further, he notes that the “precarariat,” the precariously employed, “is not the periphery anymore. It’s becoming a very substantial part of the society in the United States, and indeed elsewhere. And this is considered a good thing” (Chomsky 33). If a guiding tenant of free-market capitalism is for businesses to operate at maximum profit, then the precariat is necessary. Expendability is a strength in this model, since insecure workers may be fired in times of low profit and rehired without contracts when additional labor is needed. The specter of expendability also works to keep many of these laborers compliant.

Chomsky’s description of global economics expresses the situation in many of our writing programs. The precariously, contractually employed and the underemployed have moved from the exception to the expectation. Since first-year writing is a required course at many institutions, WPAs are thus likely responsible for staffing many of the positions held by the New Faculty Majority.

Like corporations, universities have grown into lumbering, hydra-like systems too diluted and top-heavy to regard individual programmatic needs. Dobrin, echoing Bousquet, argues that the academic labor system is far too entrenched in these traditional management structures to be changed from the inside (96). However, Occupy’s foundational ideology of prefiguration provides WPAs with a set of methods for tempered radical action to encourage incremental change from inside the system.

#### CONTINGENCY IN COMPOSITION: THIRTY YEARS OF FRUSTRATED APPEALS

Giroux’s address situates labor contingency as a symptom of the corporate university; however, it represents only the most recent call to action in a disciplinary history rich with activist intentions. For almost 30 years, major figures in composition have worked to focus attention on unethical hiring practices. In 1985, Maxine Hairston’s controversial CCCC chair’s address,

“Breaking Our Bonds and Reaffirming Our Connections,” identified contingency as a result of rigid hierarchies and traditions guarded by literature faculty. “Our worst problems,” Hairston argued, “originate close to home: in our own departments and within the discipline of English studies itself” (273). The enemy was nothing so abstract as neoliberalism, but colleagues who considered composition a service course unworthy of adequate compensation.

A year later, James Sledd’s exhortation at the 1986 Wyoming Conference became a rallying cry to English faculty: “We should *see and say*—see our work in its full social and educational context, speak out against the hypocrisies of our societies and our profession, even when whistleblowers take a beating and our best efforts seem ludicrous and pretentious” (qtd. in McDonald and Schell 365). Sledd’s talk and Susan Wyche-Smith’s now historical response—“I’m oppressed. My students are oppressed. Why isn’t anyone talking about this?”—led to the drafting of the Wyoming Resolution (365).

The Wyoming Resolution, crafted from an activist exigency and “cross-generational and cross-rank collaboration,” represented, according to James McDonald and Eileen Schell, “the best kind of camaraderie and social action one could possibly imagine happening at a professional conference” (360). This crowdsourced document recommended three actions: To establish professional standards and expectations for institutions that employ teachers of college writing; to set grievance procedures to empower faculty against offending institutions; and to provide a method of censuring institutions that violated professional standards. However, only the recommendation to establish professional standards survived the CCCC executive committee’s revisions. The establishment of both grievance processes and censure “would require staffing and legal expenditures . . . beyond the scope of the organization” (qtd. in McDonald and Schell 370).

This truncated version of the Wyoming Resolution emerged as the 1989 “Statement of Principles and Standards for the Postsecondary Teaching of Writing” (Statement). Divided into two sections—“Professional Standards that Promote Quality Education” and “Teaching Conditions Necessary for Quality Education”—it aimed to “offer guidelines . . . for the professional recognition and treatment of part-time and temporary full-time faculty during the period when these positions are being transformed to the tenure track” (330). The Statement proved controversial, as it presented tenure-line appointments as the only professionally legitimate path for compositionists. Its sharp focus on tenure not only deemphasized immediate arguments for fair wages and job security (McDonald and Schell 372), but it also shut down the potential for establishing teaching-focused tenure-parallel tracks.

In 1991, “A Progress Report from the CCCC Committee on Professional Standards” (Progress Report) was published, evaluating the Statement and its intended consequences. The report cites “the exploitation of writing teachers [as] the most powerful evidence” in the university’s shift to corporate models (334–5). The Progress Report recommended three actions to CCCC’s members: 1) to document implementation of the Statement’s standards at their individual universities and to forward this data to the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE); 2) to define non-compliance with the standards not as disregard for them but as “an unwillingness to undertake realistic efforts of reform” (342); and 3) to raise the funds necessary for legal representation by collecting dues from members. The Wyoming Resolution’s assertion that “the salaries and working conditions” of college writing instructors were “fundamentally unfair” (qtd. in McDonald and Schell 366) had become, after six years and multiple incarnations, a request for data and financial support from already overworked and underpaid faculty. The bureaucratic process of policy making—Wyoming Resolution to Statement to Progress Report—slowly effaced Laramie’s activist spirit.

Ten years after Wyoming, five years after the Progress Report, Lester Faigley’s 1996 CCCC chair’s address, “Literacy After the Revolution,” again raised the issue of contingency with the membership of the discipline’s largest national body. Though composition had expanded by a number of metrics—growth of doctoral programs and professional journals, for example—its “success has not influenced institutions to improve the working conditions for many teachers of writing” (32). In contrast to Hairston’s local enemy ten years prior, Faigley connected labor contingency to global economics in what he called the “revolution of the rich,” the concentration of vast wealth in the hands of a few powerful individuals, an early invocation of the now familiar ninety-nine/one percent division (32–3). Struggling against these faceless enemies, Faigley argued, can only frustrate compositionists, who locate their democratic contribution in teaching and advancing literacy research to make writing—once a hallmark of public intellectualism—more accessible. Faigley concluded his address with the following directives: “You have to practice what you preach and engage in public discourse. You have to form alliances. You have to be more tolerant of your friends and look for common ground. You have to organize” (41). Echoes of Faigley’s argument can be found in Giroux’s 2013 assertion to “Write the Public Good Back into Education.”

These five moments—the Wyoming Resolution, the Statement, the resulting Progress Report, and Hairston’s and Faigley’s addresses—have not widely improved hiring conditions, nor has adoption of NCTE’s 2010

“Position Statement on the Status and Working Conditions of Contingent Faculty.” While this most recent statement recognizes the importance of “long-term security of employment,” its entreaty as a discipline-specific position paper carries little weight with austerity-minded upper-administrators.

Brad Hammer calls for a move to focus efforts of the CCCC on “contingency studies” to counter “twenty-five years of ineffectual position statements” that situate NCTE and CCCC as change agents without results (“Reframing” A1; see also Hammer “The Need for Research”).<sup>2</sup> Hammer’s assertion suggests that compositionists are poised at the edge of an historical moment they are charged with leading, supported by crowdsourced efforts like The Adjunct Project and organizations like the New Faculty Majority. Aided by digital technologies, contingent faculty can now go public with details their institutions would rather obscure. The Adjunct Project’s spreadsheet, for example, offers current data on pay-per-course, participation in shared governance, access to health benefits, and other resources contingent faculty and program administrators can use in arguing for improved conditions. The Progress Report’s solicited data sets have thus become a grassroots initiative.

#### URGENT REFORMS, RECESSIONS, AND THE RISE OF THE NINETY-NINE PERCENT

Viewed historically, a number of factors have influenced the current crisis in contingency: composition’s status as a discipline; gradual defunding of public education and concomitant public negativity toward educators; the Great Recession of 2008, which further reduced revenue and deepened the labor pool; and trends toward deskilling and deprofessionalizing teachers, starting in earnest in 2001 with No Child Left Behind (NCLB). In 2006, the report “A Test of Leadership: Charting the Future of U.S. Higher Education” (Spellings Report) outlined six “urgent reform needs,” focused on “a robust culture of accountability and transparency” (Ruben et al. 5). The report lists access, cost and affordability, financial aid, learning, transparency and accountability, and innovation as the most pressing issues in higher education, issues they argue deserve not only study but national- and state-level antidotes (U.S. Department of Education).

Firmly grounded in the metrics and surveillance vernacular of NCLB, the Spellings Report points to learning and innovation as urgent areas to address because of their connection to “national workforce needs” (U.S. Department of Education 4). Students enter college, the authors of the report propose, unprepared to meet intellectual expectations and “waste time—and taxpayer dollars—mastering English and math skills they

should have learned in high school” (x). Their model of reform thus begins with accountability measures to “ensure that colleges succeed in educating students” (x).

Both the six urgent reforms and the recommendations for action are supported by the language of neoliberalism and presumptions about the role of higher education as purely instrumental; colleges and universities should be given the means to be “efficient” and “cost effective” to “enhance student mobility and meet U.S. workforce needs,” not to mention legislative budgets (U.S. Department of Education 26). Absent from the report is discussion of instructor equity, improved salaries, intellectual freedom, or the growing reliance on contingent labor as “urgent reforms” that need addressed.

Shortly after publication of the Spellings Report, the AAUP released an official response identifying the report’s “dismiss[al] of the institutional foundations of American higher education” including “stability and continuity” for instructors, but like preceding statements, this response did little to improve hiring conditions (AAUP Committee on Government Relations). As long as contingency remained a local, programmatic problem, abstracted through disciplinary and institutional texts, it could be written off as business as usual.

The 2008 global recession only strengthened this sentiment. Jeffrey Bernstein, political science scholar and critical educator, writes, “Tightening state budgets and a weak global economy force schools to dramatically increase tuition at a rate far outpacing inflation,” graduating students into a dismal job market with record debt (1). The Great Recession of 2008 fundamentally influenced higher education in that large-scale unemployment, lagging state revenues, and mass financial struggle made the work of classrooms even more vulnerable to market ideologies and the deep pockets of corporate interests.

Bernstein concludes, “The days of higher education enjoying a privileged place in society, and operating largely outside the public eye, are over” (1). And while it is arguable if higher education ever maintained this golden age of autonomy—especially where public universities are concerned—his point is significant. Economic forces have necessarily impacted our classrooms. “[A]cademics,” Bernstein concludes, “increasingly find ourselves undergoing a trial of sorts in the unforgiving courts of public opinion and legislative bodies” (1). The depths of these unforgiving opinions would become increasingly more public, as the rise of Tea Party politics would infiltrate national discussions about education and craft a decidedly anti-labor agenda.

## PRO-LABOR RESURGENCE

On February 14, 2011, Wisconsin's new Republican governor, Scott Walker, made national headlines when he proposed Act 10, a "Budget Repair Bill" designed to strip public workers, including teachers at all levels, of their collective bargaining rights. The governor's decision to rush the bill to a vote prompted massive marches on the capitol building in Madison, drew international attention from sympathizers in Egypt—protestors who had just deposed a tyrant—and led to eighteen Democratic senators leaving the state for three weeks to avoid a quorum. Teachers marched beside farmers in a parade of tractors to the capitol building, making visible the interconnectedness that reinforces communities. Internationally, the media framed these protests as the American equivalent of the Arab Spring, since they borrowed tactics from protestors in Egypt, Tunisia, and Libya. John Nichols, a writer for *The Nation* and Wisconsin's *Capital Times*, notes that the Wisconsin uprisings became, in the U.S., "the reference point for a renewal of labor militancy, mass protest, and radical politics" (3) and gave body to a national pro-labor movement. However, after months of dissent, Walker's bill passed on June 29, and the protestors disbanded.

Three months later, in September 2011, Occupy would adapt these tactics in establishing what Noam Chomsky has since termed the "first major public response to thirty years of class war" (9). Occupy's origin draws from a number of influences—the Wisconsin uprisings, the Arab Spring, and a series of protests throughout the spring and summer of 2011 by New Yorkers Against Budget Cuts (NYABC). The NYABC's Bloombergville, named after New York mayor Mike Bloomberg and modeled on Depression-era Hoovervilles, occupied Zuccotti Park four months before Occupy. However, the turnout—16 showed up for a June 14 NYABC rally—was deflating and NYABC fizzled out (Gitlin 14–8).

Occupy's September 2011 protest began two months' prior, just after NYABC's failure to mobilize. The July 2011 issue of the Canadian anti-consumerist magazine *Adbusters* featured a curiously powerful advertisement: a ballerina balanced on the back of Wall Street's charging bull. The copy was simple: "#OccupyWallStreet. September 17<sup>th</sup>. Bring tent" (Eifling). *Adbusters'* twitter, email, and web presence helped marshal resources, and on September 17, hundreds of protestors flooded Wall Street. Occupy has since grown internationally and spurred a number of affiliated groups, like OccupyColleges, InterOccupy, and most recently, OccupyGezi, a Turkish movement leading to the occupation of Gezi Park, one of the few remaining natural and public spaces in Istanbul, slated by the Turkish government to become the site of a shopping mall. While critics cite Occupy's

lack of leadership and inconsistent messaging as a detriment, its flexibility has allowed it to remain a locally responsive action group. However, even OccupyColleges—a site focused exclusively on higher education—neglects the unethical employment practices favored by most universities, instead directing its attention to student loan debt.<sup>3</sup> Contingent faculty and WPAs are then left to craft their own labor movement from inside, a move grounded in the emerging body of contingency studies.

#### TRACING THE EFFECTS OF CONTINGENCY ON NON-TENURE-TRACK (NTT) FACULTY

To wild applause, Giroux encouraged the overflow crowd of humanities teacher-scholars at the Las Vegas CCCO to “conduct your lives standing up and not on your knees” (“Writing”). By situating Occupy’s direct action alongside contingency, he provided an energizing petition to occupy our programs. Contingency studies has emerged as a focus in disciplinary scholarship (Bousquet, Scott, and Parascondola; Doe et al.; Hammer, “Reframing” and “The Need for Research”; Peckham; Schell, *Gypsy Academics* and “Toward a New”), and Giroux voiced many of our shared concerns regarding the corporate university:

Faculty in this view are regarded as simply another cheap army of reserve labor, a powerless group that universities are eager to exploit in order to increase the bottom line while disregarding the needs and rights of academic laborers and the quality of education that students deserve . . . There are few attempts to affirm faculty as scholars and public intellectuals who have both a measure of autonomy and power. Instead, faculty members are increasingly defined less as intellectuals as they are as technicians and grant writers.

Giroux’s talk recalls the emotional origins of the Wyoming Resolution, a generative moment when transparency in unethical practices led to open discussions of the impact of contingency on faculty. Ann Penrose’s recent qualitative research has begun to trace the effects of contingency on faculty members’ professional identities, and the findings support Giroux’s assertion that higher education’s corporate culture has long-term consequences.

Ultimately, Penrose argues that the contingent nature of NTT labor leads to an ideological devaluation of faculty members’ work, particularly by tenured and tenure-track faculty, and a sense of non-membership in three areas: expertise, autonomy, and community. To be included as a professional in the composition community includes “engagement with a distinctive and dynamic knowledge base, meaningful participation in community decision-making, and continuous interchange with others as col-

league, mentor, and co-learner—all of which require investments of time and energy that few writing instructors can afford” (118). In many departments, NTT faculty operate largely outside the collective reckoning of the tenured and tenurable, their abstracted presence recognized only during times of personnel reviews and budget cuts. This isolation is materially felt in large class sizes and long work hours, restricted access to resources like copying, office space, or technology, and the need to seek supplemental employment because of inadequate pay.

Contingency requires too many emotional, physical, and material resources of NTT faculty, creating a situation where upper-administrators and tenured/tenure-track colleagues can point to this depletion as cause for NTT faculty’s continued marginalization. If a NTT writing instructor teaching four courses a semester has no time to publish, then promise of upward or even lateral movement becomes unlikely. Lack of access to travel funds and technology may prohibit participation in professional conferences and workshops, factors that can lead to NTT faculty feeling isolated, unappreciated, and underprepared to compete for tenure lines or more stable employment. In many departments, when tenure lines do become available, NTT faculty, because they have been working in contingent positions and teaching primarily composition, may be considered less desirable candidates than those who are completing degrees or who are moving from one tenure-eligible position to another. As the AAUP noted in 1993, “[t]he teaching experience of non-tenure-track faculty members . . . may be interpreted as evidence of failed promise when measured against new PhDs who are just entering the market” (AAUP Committee on Part-Time). Contingency thus traps faculty into cycles of uncertain and unsupported employment with little potential for upward advancement.

A number of class-bound issues divide NTT and tenured/tenure-eligible faculty in writing programs. The explicit job descriptions for NTT faculty often exempt scholarly production and service in favor of policy-guided teaching. Penrose writes, “[i]n practice,” that is, teaching, “is where NTT faculty work—to a degree strikingly different from tenure-line faculty as a group” (109). Not only do contingent faculty invest most of their time teaching, in many cases to the detriment of their career goals; they are often subject to hyper-management by WPAs and critique from tenure-line and tenured colleagues, whose schedules may allocate time for scholarship. And while written job expectations for NTT faculty often exclude research and publishing, these faculty are implicitly expected to aspire to participate in academia’s reward system, long before those rewards are available.

WPAs cannot be expected to change national trends toward overreliance on contract labor or institutional hiring decisions; however, they can,

as Penrose proposes, change the way their programs frame “professional vision” as “more robust than the teaching-research-service model by which our institutions define us” (122). She suggests moving away from “partial and individualistic models” of program administration and toward “a more holistically grounded understanding of professional as collaborative and contributing” (122). In her suggestion for a collaborative culture of professionalism, Penrose seeks to correct the absence of community and lack of recognition of expertise described by her study participants. Instead of top-down measures emphasizing administrative oversight, building grassroots communities of practice and scholarship within programs may address bias against NTT faculty as “not serious about their careers” (AAUP Committee on Part-Time). WPAs may be the change agents empowered programmatically, if not institutionally, to build and support communities across tiers, reduce the NTT/tenure-track divide, encourage collegiality, and work against Dobrin’s “administrative imperative” (93).

#### THE SPACES OF CONTINGENCY

If, as Bruce Horner insists, “composition’s location [exists] on the border between the realms of the academic and the social” (3), then public protest strategies have much to offer writing programs. Dobrin outlines occupation as a necessary component for political and personal change. Both as we inhabit spaces and vocations, collective occupation indicates agency. Dobrin further cites a need for disruption of the status quo of composition—for WPAs to work against their own “exhaustion” and “stagnation” (110) as tradition keepers following a territorial “politic of recycling,” ever and overly concerned with disciplinary legitimacy (103). Disruption begins with upsetting the urgency of legitimation, which, he emphasizes, is “an argument about how spaces are occupied, ordered, and named” (104). The spaces and places of composition have grown troublingly routinized, unethical hiring practices accepted as inevitable, and the role of WPA iteratively reinforced in this relationship. Bousquet argues that what we have lost in the current administrative clutch is “learning to write as colleagues among colleagues” (518). Occupy’s strategic use of prefigurative politics helps reframe the intangible needs created by contingency—especially in Penrose’s three areas of expertise, autonomy, and community—and gives WPAs tools to begin to address them in their own programs.

#### PREFIGURATION: EVERYDAY ACTIVISM

Prefigurative politics describes the enactment of desirable, more just practices in the hopes that those practices will model new possibilities. Prefigu-

ration grounds the many disparate Occupy sites and provides an ideology from which they operate. Activists and labor theorists describe prefiguration as the pursuit of “building a new society in the shell of the old,” differing from outright revolution in that it tries to work within the bounds of systems of injustice to change those systems from the inside (Graeber 142). Occupy uses prefigurative politics, both tangibly and in social media, to produce “a new language in order to talk about inequality and power issues” and to “create alternative democratic public spaces” (Giroux, “Writing”). General Assemblies featured the “people’s mic,” which encouraged each person to speak with the understanding no one could be interrupted or asked to leave. In this way, Occupy hoped to model a true democracy prefigured to give equal weight to diverse—and often underrepresented—voices. Pure democracy, however, is a slow-moving and messy process; reports of the General Assembly’s long, contentious, and unproductive meetings became metonymic for its “inefficiencies and cultishness and the unfocused quality of the everyone-comes-everyone participates” methods (Gitlin 78). What Occupy gained in inclusion it lost in application.

Establishing a communal outpost within sight of the imposing figure of Wall Street made an argument of contrasts, especially as the powerful ninety-nine/one percent rhetoric moved Occupy from a fringe movement to a “full-throttle cultural meme” (qtd. in Roberts 758). But Occupy’s wholesale, overzealous resistance to logistical hierarchy tangled the Zuccotti Park site in organizational knots and stalled its momentum. Occupy’s organizational failure suggests that prefiguration’s goal to work within established systems should trend toward the conservative to be more effective and sustainable.

Learning from Occupy’s missteps, WPAs should approach prefiguration cautiously, to seek places where they can operate within the culture of academia to improve the status of contingent faculty. Protest tactics like ponderous General Assemblies, walkouts, strikes, and sit-ins are dramatic and often serve to make inequality visible, but large-scale changes resulting from these tactics are the exception. Because of the assumed expendability of NTT faculty, traditional activist strategies may fail to persuade administrators or other decision-makers and only lead to mass job loss for individuals and additional negative consequences for programs.

However, by turning contingency’s site of action, the classroom, into its site of protest, WPAs may be able to leverage some of Occupy’s spirit of resistance. In 1990, amidst the controversy surrounding the Wyoming Resolution’s “emasculatation” (Sledd), Susan Wyche-Smith and Shirley K Rose proposed “One Hundred Ways to Make the Wyoming Resolution a Reality: A Guide to Personal and Political Action,” presenting a list of pre-

figurative practices over twenty years before Occupy. Noting that “the distance between the standards articulated in the Statement and the reality at our institutions can seem so great that we may be paralyzed into inaction” (318), Wyche-Smith and Rose provided a list of everyday activist actions addressed to a number of audiences, including composition instructors, part-time faculty, graduate teaching assistants, and writing program and writing center administrators.

The authors acknowledged that writing instructors and administrators must be responsible for their own empowerment. Their commitment to change from within programs is evidenced by the list’s divisions: Instructors, both part- and full-time, are given twenty-six points of action; WPAs, nineteen; and professional organizations only four, including “tak[ing] official stands and provid[ing] policy statements” (324). Yet the problem of contingency Wyche-Smith and Rose sought to address is very different from our current, corporate-influenced crisis.

Writing about Occupy tactics in literature classrooms, Allen Webb and Jason Vanfosson note, “Teachers may not be able to camp out at Pearson Publishing, or in the parking lot of ACT or K12 Inc., but we can reject their profiteering from public education” (66). While it is true that “the impetus for change is again in the hands of writing teachers” (Wyche-Smith and Rose 318), echoing the spirit of activism present in Laramie, the post-NCLB, post-American-Legislative-Exchange-Council<sup>4</sup> writing classroom necessitates a reframing of programmatic micro-activism through global economic protest and grassroots action.

Prefiguration within academia must account for the kinds of failures Occupy did not consider, specifically the opportunity for effecting change by operating within accepted hierarchies. “Tempered radicalism,” defined as “grassroots leadership tactics that honor the norms, values, and mission of the academy, while simultaneously challenging its enacted practices,” provides a framework for response (Kezar, Gallant, and Lester 131). A qualitative study by educational scholars and administrators Adrianna Kezar, Tricia Bertram Gallant, and Jaime Lester<sup>5</sup> found that “tempered radicals,” despite their lack of institutional power, successfully argued for justice within their academic programs, including “pedagogical changes, access, and student support” (131). These grassroots leaders resisted corporate models through their day-to-day actions, such as “working with and mentoring students, hiring like-minded social activists, and . . . utilizing existing networks” to encourage slow change from inside the system (137). Noting, like Giroux, that the role of the college president has moved from the intellectual and moral center of the institution to corporate fundraiser, Kezar, Gallant, and Lester write that self-identified tempered radicals “act

as the conscience for the organization—often bringing up ethical issues” (131). The notion of WPA-as-the-ethical-conscience of a program adds to already overburdened expectations placed on administrators and supports Bousquet’s critique of the “WPA Hero.” However, WPAs are often charged to argue for improved material conditions to department heads and other upper-administrators, while quietly subverting upper-administrative dictates. In effect, many WPAs are already working as tempered radicals to occupy contingency. Further, and more in tune with the spirit of Occupy, by creating opportunities for NTT faculty to emerge as tempered radicals themselves, WPAs may establish pockets of programmatic resistance that, when networked, could spark change.

#### WAYS AND MEANS OF OCCUPATION

The following suggestions draw from current and aspirational practices across institutions. WPAs support Penrose’s three areas for renovation—autonomy, expertise, and community—while at the same time managing relationships with upper-administrators. On this assumption, the tactics I describe focus primarily on the former while pointing to gradual changes that may influence the latter. These suggestions are intended to supplement, and not to replace, arguments for adequate pay, job security, and access to resources.

##### *In Classrooms and Common Spaces*

As Nedra Reynolds points out, “the kinds of spaces we occupy determine, to some extent, the kinds of work we can do or the types of artifacts we can create” (157). As our primary site of action, the composition classroom emerges as the primary site of our occupation. In terms of course content, incorporating texts on local educational issues offers a corpus of rhetorically situated and immediately relevant documents for students to explore and interrogate. Texts like course syllabi, policy websites, college-level mission statements, and speeches by governors familiarize students with the decision-making processes guiding the class and provide opportunities for analysis and response. Encouraging students to trouble the discursive realities created by such documents not only makes visible the workings of these powerful, distant entities, it also moves students away from their understanding of the course as purely instrumental. Tracing the relationships between such mysterious bodies as the College Board, led by David Coleman, and initiatives like the Common Core State Standards, designed by the same David Coleman, empowers students to think about education as culturally constructed and politically influenced. This empowerment moves

outward to faculty when discussions of time to graduation are considered, since composition is often a requirement and defunding can limit seats and delay matriculation.

Faculty may be concerned that politicizing the course will only reinforce students' negative ideas about elitism in the university or work to silence students who feel that their political beliefs will be held against them; however, the composition classroom is already thoroughly politicized. A review of material conditions and current national dialogue about the role of the humanities confirms this stance. Grounding composition in local texts and contexts embodies its relevance and puts rhetoric close at hand. Giroux criticizes faculty who seek to maintain academic detachment in both their teaching and scholarly work, arguing that "professionalism does not have to translate into a flight from moral and intellectual responsibility" ("Should Part-Time"). Focusing course texts on locally situated discussions of educational access and corporate collusion brings these relationships to the fore where students can critically address them.

We may also occupy common educational spaces using collaborative pedagogies and public writing. The National Day on Writing (NDOW) offers a recognized day of action where writing classes may choose to install themselves in common spaces, to engage in public writing, and to bring sections together in shared action. Depending on the physical layout of spaces, NDOW installations may be strategically placed in proximity to offices of deans, provosts, and presidents. By making the work of composition visible and unavoidable, and by flooding these common spaces with students and faculty, upper-administrators may begin to see the impact of these important courses. Further, as the world has witnessed with the OccupyGezi protests, common spaces encouraging open dialogue—speakers' corners—are rapidly disappearing in favor of profitable or less contentious use. Working within institutional guidelines, composition faculty may productively harness common spaces to encourage students to "talk back, talk to one another, engage in respectful dialogue with faculty, and learn how to engage in coalition building" (Giroux, "Should Part-Time"). By making ourselves, our students, and our work in the classroom physically manifest and by grounding this work in civic discourse we trouble institutional notions of prepackaged teaching and instrumentality.

Many of these pedagogical occupations are already happening in our classrooms and common spaces. The next move, perhaps left to WPAs, is to connect them intra-programmatically and inter-programmatically to build communities of support and expertise between NTT faculty and the students in their courses.

### *Occupying Programmatically*

Programmatically, prefiguration may take a number of forms: as distributed administration that invites NTT faculty to participate in curriculum development; as a move toward academic freedom; as renovated personnel reviews favoring transparency in metrics and clear and equitable access to appeals; as encouragement of a culture of scholarship; and as support for peer-mentoring networks. I discuss each tactic in detail.

WPAs with administrative flexibility may invest in a model of distributed administration. In many cases, NTT faculty possess programmatic memory and a bulk of the teaching load. Because of their familiarity with the intricacies of classroom practices, NTT faculty are thus ideal sources for curricular reform, assessment, and policy generation, as they negotiate these bureaucratic structures more often than tenured faculty. Recognizing that NTT faculty already operate at maximum course loads, inviting them to participate in administrative service feels counterintuitive. However, arguing for single course releases or one-time stipends are small points when weighed against large-scale salary and contract initiatives.

Further, if WPAs are able to open their programs to academic freedom—instead of, for example, working from shared syllabi or textbooks—NTT faculty may feel that their expertise is valued. Prepackaged modules, long in use by NCLB and other federal public education initiatives, suggest that teacher presence is optional. Honoring academic freedom demands that all composition faculty derive their own syllabi in accordance with program objectives, choose textbooks meaningful to their pedagogical goals, and have the freedom to address curricular outcomes according to their knowledge base. By recognizing academic autonomy, WPAs must reject mandatory professional development requirements, as strict oversight manifested in this way deprofessionalizes, minimizes instructor agency, siphons away time and energy, and firmly places the program administrator in the role of resource manager.

Academic freedom also implicates a shift in the way WPAs conduct personnel reviews. Strict adherence to shared syllabi provides efficiency in instructor assessment while open course designs are far more difficult to assess, yet it is an important trade to consider. The review process connects program values—sometimes actual checklists—with practices that may contradict the methods NTT faculty may use to manage their work loads. Quantitative student evaluations, for example, can be weighted evenly with professional development, as fast metrics provide a way to quickly assess stacks of dossiers; as a result, NTT faculty may feel pressure to focus on customer-service driven models of student satisfaction. Faculty teaching

heavy course loads may develop strategies to work around time-intensive requirements like holding monthly individual conferences or responding to student drafts. These work-flow strategies make up an important part of the underlife of many writing programs and can be supported by attention to the personnel review process and its components. In the most troublesome cases, the personnel review and appeals processes for NTT faculty are occluded, relegated to mysterious behind-closed-doors WPA meetings.

WPAs can better descriptively assess the teaching that is taking place in their programs by inviting NTT faculty to work collaboratively to suggest dossier content, assessment rubrics, appeals guidelines, and methods for dossier collection. This last point becomes particularly important considering technological affordances like access to computers and software. Communally developed review and appeals processes not only empower NTT faculty in matters of professional advancement; they also encourage grassroots initiatives that may build communities for future direct action.

In rejecting a culture of oversight (through shared syllabi, common texts, and occluded or top-down review and appeals processes), WPAs could instead emphasize a culture of scholarly production. Heeding Giroux's call to move away from considering instructors as only "technicians and grant writers" ("Writing"), encouraging a culture of scholarly production may emerge as a way for WPAs to model inclusion to tenured and tenurable faculty who may not consider contingent faculty members of the profession. This community of scholarly production may include collaborative action research projects, article writing and reading groups, symposia, and equal distribution of publication opportunities.

By moving to emphasize communities of scholarship among NTT faculty, WPAs can provide opportunities for participation in the "dynamic knowledge base" of composition (Penrose 118) and disabuse shortsighted institutional notions about NTT faculty members' academic promise or commitments. Further, this scholarly production could take programs as their sites of research to begin to address the injustices experienced by NTT faculty, turning a disciplinary lens on widespread unethical employment practices (see Hammer, "Reframing" and "The Need for Research"). In this case, the role of the WPA-as-gatekeeper is important, as some of this scholarship could draw programs, departments, and institutions negatively. WPAs must then move to protect these researchers and their work by leveraging the influence they do hold.

Giroux admonishes academics who engage in politically distant scholarship, arguing that Occupy raises important questions "for faculty to rethink those modes of professionalism, specialism, and social relations which have cut them off from addressing important social issues and the

larger society” (“Should Part-Time”). Too long, he argues, have academics focused on isolated, socially and politically irrelevant scholarship. Moving from the personal to the political to the professional thus builds a base for research on contingency, complicating composition’s dynamic knowledge stores and extending the reach of professional publication to feature more work by NTT faculty.

Finally, and in service to each previous recommendation, writing programs may work toward justice by encouraging networks of peer mentors among NTT faculty. Geneva Smitherman notes, “Mentoring is a kind of nurturing whereby the mentor helps/motivates the mentee to construct a vision of possibilities beyond the present moment” (qtd. in Okawa 512). Unlike traditional novice/expert mentoring relationships, peer mentoring relies on equality in status and can become a powerful method as it supports faculty who wish to leave academia or who are considering changes like additional credentialing or moving to a different institution. WPAs can support these connections in a number of ways: by respecting “underground” networks—physical and digital—or by visibly and vocally supporting contingent faculty’s desires to organize outside the classroom, such as helping provide resources for alternative-academic (alt-ac) discussions. At a time when higher education budget cuts are daily news, the most vulnerable faculty may utilize these underground networks of communication for consolation or assistance. Discussions, however, should be grassroots initiated; that is, NTT faculty determine both content and frequency.

Noam Chomsky remarks that change “requires a mass base. It requires that the population understands this and is committed to it. It’s easy to think of things that need to be done, but they all have a prerequisite, namely, a mass popular base that is committed to implementing it” (42). Working in our individual programs is an important first step to energize this base, and there is much we can do here and now, both pedagogically and programmatically. Eileen Schell’s rhetorics of common cause and coalition building dovetail with these tactics, as she proposes a “New Labor Movement” to “resist the divisions” among tenured, tenure-eligible, and NTT faculty (“Toward a New” 109) and to build a community of engaged scholars across contract lines.

WPAs cannot change national trends in contingent labor, nor can they often immediately address inadequate material conditions. Arguments for improved compensation, more secure contracts, and access to resources may take years to see through. In the meantime, WPAs and NTT faculty can work together to make incremental, sustainable improvements in their programs. We need to “ask big questions” and “demand an alternative vision and set of policies” to guide our program administration, and we

need to ask these questions publically and collectively, in ways that cannot be routinely ignored (Giroux, “Should Part-Time”).

Moving toward collective action may also concurrently disrupt the notion of the WPA as the “central symbol of writing on campus” and the “glue” that holds the program together (Cambridge and McClelland 157). Linda Adler-Kassner encourages us to work “[t]ogether, here, now” (vii) to improve the visibility of our writing programs and to “tak[e] action to change [the] stories” of writing on our campuses (128). Reframed, instead of focusing on what contingent faculty cannot yet do or do not yet have, WPAs and NTT faculty can work as tempered radicals, within the lines already drawn, to support knowledge building, encourage autonomy, and develop community within programs in service to gradual change.

## NOTES

1. There are productive distinctions between the various categories that comprise contract labor, including contingent faculty, non-tenure-track (NTT) faculty, and adjuncts. For the purposes of this article, since the focus is on precarious employment, I use contract, contingent, and NTT faculty interchangeably, acknowledging that these terms are often locally and programmatically defined in use.

2. Anne Ruggles Gere’s 2009 report found that over 88 percent of faculty teaching composition did so without the security of tenure (4). In reality, this percent may be even greater, since Gere’s survey drew from only the CCCC’s membership list, and many contingent faculty may lack either institutional or personal resources to join professional organizations or may feel that credentialing outside rhetoric and composition excludes them from membership.

3. OccupyColleges is maintained primarily by students, so this focus on loan debt is not illogical nor out of place. Though unaffiliated with Occupy, *Edu-Factory*, a U.K.-based blog, tracks and mobilizes academic protestors internationally. In addition to their web presence, *Edu-Factory* hosts an annual conference and publishes an open-source journal.

4. See Linda Adler-Kassner’s “The Companies We Keep *or* the Companies We Would Like to Keep: Strategies and Tactics in Challenging Times” for an in-depth exploration of both the range and depth of these vast and well-funded corporate bodies that dramatically influence both secondary and post-secondary education.

5. Kezar, Gallant, and Lester’s findings are based “upon interviews conducted with 165 grassroots leaders—84 staff (administrative staff) and 81 faculty (academic staff) members at five different institutions (an average of 33 individuals per institution) engaged in grassroots leadership. Faculty interviewed were from all ranks (lecturer, assistant professor, associate professor, full professor), and

staff ranged from custodial staff to mid-level staff (assistant director in a student affairs office). There were more people of color and women than their proportional numbers” (136).

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