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Individual and Collective in a Large Writing Program

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REJECTING RELIGION, RESISTING DISCIPLINE

In the 1993 volume of *College English*, former TA Nancy Welch chronicled the disheartening story of her move from a process-based writing program (Program A) to one centered around cultural studies (Program B). Welch's narrative details an inexorable process by which teachers who resisted the group ethos of their new employer/community were isolated and even driven away. She herself, as the story goes, withdrew and returned to her original institution, where she completed a Ph.D. and went on to compose her indictment of teacher training in U.S. composition programs.

Welch's description of her transfer from the warm, nurturing environment of a writing program that embraced process pedagogy to one that aggressively promoted a cultural studies agenda frames its critique in terms of religious rhetoric. Listening to veterans profess their allegiance to the goals and practices of Program B, Welch identifies their talk as a form of conversion narrative. The majority of TAs embraced the pedagogical faith, while Welch and her fellow dissidents were isolated and even "excommunicated."¹ Readers of Foucault will recognize the notion that discipline is an inevitable counterpart of religion, employing the techniques of confession to "school" its already interpellated subjects. John Trimbur identifies Foucauldian discipline as an inevitable byproduct of the "politics of professionalization" in rhetoric and composition: "By a Foucauldian account of professionalization, WPAs, precisely because of their professional knowledges, are invariably implicated in acts of surveillance that constitute both staff and students as 'docile bodies'" (1996, 142).² Whether or not the politics of professionalization should take sole blame for the problem, I do believe that writing programs (like most educational institutions) are sites of discipline—if not actual punishment—a fact that raises the question of how both teachers and students should respond: With resistance or accommodation? Or something else altogether?

In composition studies, “resistance” to dominant ideologies has been examined from different theoretical perspectives, both as a positive pedagogical goal for writing teachers and as an institutional problem for teacher-trainers and administrators. Henry Giroux, most notably, sees resistance as a (political) weapon against a stultifying “tradition” of education and as a real alternative to an “accommodating” attitude that really is a capitulation to the system (Giroux 1983). Geoffrey Chase, applying Giroux’s taxonomy of attitudes specifically to composition pedagogy, sees the teacher’s role as helping students to “problematize” their existence by making them question the logic of moral and political structures. The teacher provides an environment in which “students are encouraged to see themselves as human actors who can make a difference in the world.” Within this environment, for both teacher and student “writing needs to be seen as an ideological process whose aims should include teaching students to write as part of a larger project in which they can affirm their own voices, learn to exercise the skills of critical interrogation, and, finally, exercise the courage to act in the interests of improving the quality of human life” (Chase 1988, 21). Constructive resistance need not be confined to the individual classroom, of course; Giroux imagines a reform of teacher education in which teachers “function professionally as intellectuals” and argues that “teacher education should be inextricably linked to transforming the school setting, and, by extension, the wider social setting” (1988, 73). But for Giroux, as for some other liberatory pedagogues, the center of democratic educational reform remains the student-teacher nexus.

When looked at from the administrator’s or teacher-trainer’s perspective, “resistance” is more typically classified as a particular problem of individuals that is subject to psychological or social analysis. In a recent article, Sally Barr Ebest (2002) analyzes resistance to composition theory in general as a disabling characteristic of some new teachers who either lack a sense of their own efficacy in the classroom or, after years of successful practice as writers, have developed a *modus operandi* that works for them but is insulated from critique and not necessarily responsive to the needs of student writers. Within the world of teacher education, as well, resistance is often addressed as an individual problem, requiring timely intervention and a redirection of pedagogical energies.³

From both sides of the ideological spectrum, then, resistance is seen as a struggle, whether between teachers/students and consumer culture or between instructors and higher administration. As either hero or goat, the teacher-as-individual figures prominently not only in liberatory

pedagogy and teacher education, but also in the epic tale of conversion and persecution with which this essay began. From the WPA's perspective, however, such events do not fit nicely into a folktale pattern. At the most concrete level, for the WPA resistance remains, first and foremost, a fact of life. Teachers who cannot or will not adapt to the basic policies and orientations of the program in which they work inevitably become the source of long, earnest conferences, student complaints, and (eventually) phone calls from the dean's office. But the ideological component of any writing program is at once more complex and less coherent than is often acknowledged. Composition pedagogy, within a programmatic and institutional setting, is and must be ideological; but when realized in, incorporated into, or represented by a writing program, the ideological bent of the dominant pedagogy is diluted, contradicted, qualified, and undermined by any number of extraneous factors ranging from system policies to staffing procedures. Thus, the range of instructor response—from accommodation to resistance—occurs within an ideological constellation that itself is conditioned by a bricolage of institutional policies and unspoken beliefs, departmental attitudes, and the perspectives of both the WPA who begins or manages the program and the WPA's predecessors—traces of whose decisions and beliefs a program's curriculum always bears.⁴ The WPA, as hybrid administrator/teacher, exists in a particularly uneasy relationship to the affective dimension of the program she belongs to precisely because developing a program ethos necessarily cloaks the hidden fist of institutional discipline with the open hand of a quasi-religious community. And by virtue of her double position the WPA, perhaps more than any other member of a writing program, remains aware of the tension between individual and collective.

Nancy Welch's narrative of her unhappy translation from one kind of large writing program to another has haunted me ever since its publication, but most especially through the five years that I have served as the Director of First-Year Composition at the University of Georgia. What matters far more than the story's truth status—indeed, the story is framed as a parable—is its admonitory punch. Who wants to find herself in such an untenable position? Who wants to inflict such pain on others? Certainly not me. These questions pass through my mind most frequently during that crucial week of new TA and lecturer orientation, in which newly hired teachers from all over are introduced to our program, department, and administrators. Much of the week is taken up with “essential information.” We meet and greet representatives from

Learning Disabilities, Disability Services, the Athletic Department, the Academic Honesty Office, and many other university constituencies. At this moment, our new teachers are experiencing the university as Althusser's "repressive state apparatus," in which teachers are legally bound by the terms of their syllabi and are subject to punishment for violations of department and university policy.

The mood lightens once this crash course in rules and regulations ends, but the new teachers and their supervisors also confront the reality of ideology during a more free-ranging discussion of pedagogy, grading, textbooks, and the use of technology in writing instruction. These are subjects that command the remainder of our attention during the weeklong orientation and during the semester-long practicum that follows and will be attended by most, although not all, of our new teachers. Recently, the group of new teachers has included a rather large body of second-year MA students who have finished a teaching apprenticeship but will be tackling their own classes for the first time. Members of this group have experienced the theory and practice of teaching only within their current environment; many were undergraduates at our institution, and so this group shows relatively little puzzlement or resistance to its policies and pedagogies. Others, however, are veteran teachers who have gravitated to our town and program from elsewhere. They ask concrete questions about pedagogy: "Is it OK if we write with our students?" asks a woman of about forty who first taught in a West Coast program. "In my former school, we taught some collaborative papers; can I substitute a collaborative paper for paper number four?" another queries. "Do you mind if I teach classical argument rather than Toulmin's model?" says a third. But our happy band of pedagogical brothers and sisters also contains newcomers like Welch who were reared, nurtured, and trained in one program and who, having left their first homes, find themselves in uncomfortably alien territory when dropped—like Dorothy from the tornado—at our door. Both anarchy and exhaustion/silence, two qualities that Ihab Hassan ascribes to postmodernism, are real and not particularly attractive possibilities.

I used to think that such teachers were a special case, but now have come to see their situation as representing, in hyperbolic fashion, that of all writing instructors who work not as itinerant sophists, but as members of a contemporary composition *program*. The inevitable tension between accommodation and resistance to programmatic imperatives informs, to some degree, the experience of us all. To purloin a phrase from Bruno Latour (1993), we have never been modern. But to theorize this

dialectic between engagement and estrangement, we need to get beyond the heroic narrative that pits individuals against a faceless collective, a narrative that unhelpfully constructs any given writing program as a monolith rather than a bricolage of attitudes and practices that enjoys a long and rich—if often obscure—history. The remainder of this chapter examines first how composition theory has paradoxically exacerbated, rather than put to rest, the myth of the composition teacher as “heroic individual.” This chapter then offers a “judicial” perspective on the relationship between individual and collective as one way of getting around the “conversion-excommunication” binary that informs the anecdote with which this chapter begins and a comparable “accommodation-resistance” binary that conditions current discussions of ideology and practice within writing programs.

THE WRITING PROGRAM AS CLASSROOM WRIT LARGE

Sharon Crowley’s brief polemical history of university writing instruction in *Composition in the University* serves nicely as a prequel to Welch’s story. Long ago, as Crowley and other historians have chronicled, composition classrooms were ruled by literary studies but staffed by full-time faculty. Then Arnoldian humanism reigned supreme and the universal freshman writing requirement justified itself in terms of vague notions of human cultivation and improvement. Material conditions for teachers degenerated as permanent faculty fled composition classrooms for literary study, a trend that poses a particular institutional problem for composition—namely, that over the years “first year composition has been remarkably vulnerable to ideologies and practices that originate elsewhere than its classrooms” (Crowley 1998, 6). Composition then becomes the colony of whatever disciplinary and institutional body acquires the right to “speak for” composition and so “dictate to teachers and students the goals they were expected to pursue as well as the texts they were to study and the curricula and pedagogical strategies they were to employ” (7). As Crowley writes,

University and college faculty imagine composition as the institutional site wherein student subjectivity is to be monitored and disciplined. The continuing function of the required composition course has been to insure the academic community that its entering members are taught the discursive behaviors and traits of character that qualify them to join the community. The course is meant to shape students to behave, think, write, and speak as students rather than as the people they are, people who have differing histories and traditions and languages and ideologies. (8–9)

For Crowley, writing pedagogy is complicit with this agenda; she sees an enduring “current-traditional rhetoric,” the disseminated remnant of a nineteenth-century pedagogy originally put in place to produce “Harvard men,” as the prime obstacle to curricular and workplace reform in composition programs. In local academic communities, she argues, the machinery of current-traditional pedagogy is compounded by the accumulated “lore” that distinguishes insiders from outsiders.

Crowley’s incisive, and admittedly polemical, account of first-year writing finds some confirmation in the testimonial with which this essay began. Welch’s narrative alludes to both the global mechanics of rhetorical discipline and the local dynamics of academic communities. But her account also suggests, *pace* Crowley, that not an old-fashioned current-traditional rhetoric—but the very theories designed to supplant it—can lay at the root of the teacher’s alienation. The more subtle barrier to institutional community within writing programs, she implies, is neither the provost’s office nor the department elders but the ethos of composition studies itself. To a large extent this assessment is correct, although a number of additional factors—ranging from local politics to lack of local program histories—further complicate the picture. The end result, however, is an elision between the concept of a writing program and a writing class. The writing class becomes a synecdoche for the program as a whole, while the standardized syllabus models program coherence.

To some extent, any academic program is no more and no less than a bureaucratic unit organized around common goals, a set of bylaws, and policies governing both faculty and students. Within composition studies, however, “programs” have been increasingly defined as theory-driven, innovative, and standing in opposition to conservative teachers and sinister bureaucratic forces that seek always to economize at the expense of both teachers and students. Exemplary programs that spring to mind readily are identified with a particular person—Peter Elbow, Richard Lanham, Ross Winterowd, Andrea Lunsford—and therefore with a set of books, articles, and pedagogical applications associated with that leader’s attempts to persuade others to accept his or her view of writing. A second elision, then, occurs between composition programs and composition theories.⁵

Our field often defines the evolution of writing instruction as a battle between programs, pedagogies, and political positions. Histories of rhetoric and composition tend to focus on “schools of thought,” their chronology, their ideological status within the field(s) of writing instruction, and their inevitable demise. A number of important essays and

books attempting to chart the territory have appeared steadily since the 1970s, but none perhaps has been more influential than James Berlin's "Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class," brilliant in its own right and disseminated widely through its inclusion in Victor Villaneuva's influential anthology *Cross-Talk* and the Tate and Corbett *Writing Teacher's Sourcebook*. Every beginning teacher in our program who reads "Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class" either identifies with, or feels vaguely guilty for not identifying with, "social-epistemic rhetoric." Most certainly, their instructor feels the unwelcome stirrings of guilt about her many ideological compromises in the name of program consistency or institutional reality.

Who, after all, would want to "refuse" "the ideological question altogether" and claim a highly unfashionable "transparent neutrality," as "the rhetoric of cognitive psychology" does? Better, perhaps, to align oneself with expressivism, a rhetoric that "has always openly admitted its ideological predilections." But expressivism is unfortunately "easily co-opted by the very capitalist forces it opposes," and who wants that? Better by far to join the "social-epistemic" cause, make ideology the center of classroom activity, and enjoy the privilege of self-consciousness that is denied to all other schools of thought (Berlin 1988, 487).

For Berlin, admittedly, the stakes of ideological self-definition are high: "To teach writing is to argue for a version of reality, and the best way of knowing and communicating it" (Berlin 1982, 234). Composition pedagogy is not just driven by theory, but a lived practice that amounts to a highly self-conscious merger of theory and ethics. For this reason if for no other, Berlin pulls no punches. He admits up front that he finds social-epistemic rhetoric to be "the alternative most worthy of emulation in the classroom, all the while admitting that it is the least formulaic and the most difficult to carry out" (Berlin 1988, 82). Yet because a fine line separates political from religious rhetoric, "Rhetoric and Ideology" can also seem evangelical. For while some might balk at the difficult task posed by epistemic rhetoric, according to Berlin, "[A] rhetoric cannot escape the ideological question, and to ignore this is to fail our responsibilities as teachers and as citizens" (698). Even those academics willing to avoid the "hard work" that social-epistemic pedagogy requires would feel hard-pressed to deny this final call to duty. The rhetoric of ideological critique itself "hails" teacher-subjects with the promise of a self-conscious, civic-minded community of teachers dedicated to students and to the needs of the polis.

Berlin's influential rhetoric of historiography has been succeeded by vigorous debate about the history of writing instruction;⁶ and his

more lengthy history of the field in *Rhetoric and Reality* (1987), to be fair, describes the intersection of different attitudes toward writing not only as a chronological fact, but also as a dynamic process throughout the decades he considers. Nevertheless, the tale of our discipline's history from "Rhetoric and Ideology" highlights with hyperbolic clarity a tacit consensus that in the history of rhetoric and composition a new school of thought—identified with a powerful and usually male figure and with certain pedagogical exercises and "tricks"—will inevitably overtake and supplant its predecessor. This foundational story may appeal to composition teachers for several reasons.

Defenses of rhetoric and composition as a discipline often have modeled themselves on literary theory and history, which also focuses on "schools of thought" and exemplary figures (Crowley 1994, 7). John Schilb derides this method as "taxonomania," a pseudoscientific effort to establish theoretical hierarchies by charting the terrain of rhetoric and composition (1994, 129). The master narrative in which important schools of thought inevitably succeed one another has also gained legitimacy from its (questionable) association with Thomas Kuhn's notion of a "paradigm shift," which has been evoked to elevate the vagaries of fashion in writing instruction to a higher status as quasi-scientific, and more loftily theoretical, revolutions of thought (see Hairston 1982).⁷ Stephen North (1996) and others have argued, however, that our field's tendency toward "paradigm hope" is both illegitimate and disabling.⁸ John Schilb agrees, cautioning that under the influence of "paradigm hope," "[T]he act of classifying might come to *appear* an end in itself, seeming to offer other scholars the convenient labels they are shopping for in their effort to establish rhetoric as a simple quasi science," but instead regulating the field it purports to describe (Schilb 1994, 130). In this way, the translation of theory into programmatic practice imposes a Foucauldian discipline on teachers and students. From Schilb's perspective, taxonomania can also lead to "canonomania," an impulse to "boil rhetorical history down to a particular set of cherished texts, an official heritage" (131). Schilb's critique of the way in which theory regulates practice in composition programs confirms Welch's representation of how institutional discipline finds expression in a quasi-religious pedagogical "faith."

A less well-documented but equally important influence on our understanding of what constitutes a writing program is the frequent paucity of local history for most programs.⁹ Lester Faigley (1992), albeit without bibliographical support, claims that the average life of a writing program is five years. My suspicion is that this definition relies on an

equation between program and director. A new WPA is not only a new broom, but a source of new “god terms,” in the vocabulary of Kenneth Burke (1961). With a new director often come new ideas, new textbooks, departmental syllabi, grading rubrics, assessment procedures, and new sets of commandments. These documents persist; what frequently is lost are the traces of conversations, committee meetings, and bitter struggles that prevent any one person from achieving the modernist gesture of “making new” a writing program. The equation between program and director, figured as a kind of monarchic succession, is reinforced by peripheral factors, such as the profession’s definition of success as movement from one job to another, one cause of turnover in WPAs; the length of administrative appointments in any given department (ours offers three-year contracts, with the possibility of renewal for an additional term); and others that I, from my limited local perspective, cannot even identify.

What artifacts persist in a writing program record the force of individual personalities on the writing curriculum but are silent on the collaborative, combative, and negotiated processes that inform the underlife of academic institutions. I have worked at the same university now for almost twenty years. Although I became First-year Composition Director only in 1998, I had served loyally on the Freshman English Committee since 1984. No matter that within the last week I have discovered an undocumented change in placement policy that has no resonance with my memory of the committee’s machinations during the year in which the change occurred and no discernible paper trail. I do remember, however, a meeting around 1991 when the then new director proposed that we replace the ten fifty-minute, in-class essays that teachers had been assigning with a smaller number of out-of-class essays, whose quality would benefit from drafting, revision, and peer editing. Despite this infusion of process pedagogy into the curriculum, the final exam continued to count for one-third of the students’ final grade, and does so to this day. The reason? According to my memory, this was a concession to the elders who feared a plague of plagiarism if students produced papers away from the watchful eyes of their teachers. Whether or not my personal memory of the meeting is accurate, no trace of that discussion can be found in our evolving departmental syllabus, grading sheet, the finely honed handbook of policies and processes—or even, if I could lay hands on them, the circumspect minutes of that meeting. What we lack is, in the vocabulary of Shirley K Rose and Irwin Weiser, “an understanding of document-event relations” (2002, 280).¹⁰ Without

these connections, no one can satisfactorily discuss whether or not the final exam should continue to carry such weight, given the fact that the elders who defended its utility have long since retired.

Throw into the mix one final ingredient, the particular experiences of novice teachers, for whose benefit most standardized features of any curriculum are concocted. Novice teachers, according to Christine Farris's research, tend to relate their teaching to their own educational experience and disciplinary expertise; to identify with certain labels, approaches, and theorists; to focus closely on the textbook chosen by or assigned to them; and to feel ambivalent about their relation to programmatic discipline and their role as evaluators of students (Farris 1996). (In my experience, modeling on a current or favorite teacher from the past can also play a central role in the new teacher's construction of his or her ethos.) In a second phase, new teachers tend to focus more on consolidating authority and fine-tuning classroom discipline. In most cases, as Farris shows, the teachers emerge from their first year in the classroom with a stronger sense of ownership and more nuanced understanding of their pedagogical ethos in its relation to that put forth by the assigned textbook. Nevertheless, the perception of writing instruction as a dialectic involving lore, disciplinary theory, and specific textbooks—a perception common to first-year instructors and often to recent arrivals from other pedagogical cultures—exerts a strong influence on local concepts of what constitutes a writing program.

All of these factors, I would suggest, conspire to erase the distinction between a writing program and a composition classroom. The writing program is nothing more, and nothing less, than the writing class writ large. As Farris's study shows, such a conflation can be liberating for instructors, confirming William Irmscher's belief that teacher-student relationships have the single greatest effect on the quality of composition teaching (Irmscher 1987, 49; cited by Farris 1996, 107). But the substitution of classroom for program can also alienate teachers by obscuring their potential agency in both arenas, the classroom *and* the program.

ADJUDICATING DIFFERENCE: EQUIVALENCE AND HORIZONTAL RELATIONS IN A LARGE WRITING PROGRAM

The problem remains of how to imagine a writing program that invites individual teachers (and students) to exercise agency without deconstructing altogether the program itself. While most current debate about writing instruction concerns itself with deliberative rhetoric—

the relation of the classroom to civic duty and the public sphere—the untapped field of judicial rhetoric offers an equally useful model for defining writing programs as institutions *sui generis*. First of all, the judicial model addresses head-on what is, to me, the most trenchant criticism of contemporary writing instruction: its continuing connection with institutional discipline in the most austere Foucauldian sense of that term. Judicial rhetoric concerns itself with laws and trespasses, crimes and punishments, and so helps us to confront the rule-bound and consequence-driven dimension of writing program administration that most of us glance away from in embarrassment. Second, the metaphor of “writing program-as-judicial-system” tacitly acknowledges both the individual WPA’s power in relation to the teachers she supervises and her imbrication in a larger web of formal and informal power relationships within departmental, college, and university units. Finally, and most important to me, a judicial model for writing program administration acknowledges that “law” and judgments based on it necessarily commit violence against individuals’ desires and beliefs (on both sides of the teacher’s desk); judicial acts must inevitably involve violence as a product of power. As I hope to show, however, acknowledging the law’s inevitable violence can suggest a more holistic approach to defining rights and responsibilities for both WPAs and teachers.

For the remainder of this chapter, I will sketch out a rhetorical perspective on the conflict between individual and collective in writing program administration through the metaphor of “writing program-as-judicial-system.” I refer generally to some issues in contemporary jurisprudence, but will evoke more specifically useful lines of argument that have been developed in the work of Drucilla Cornell. Cornell’s work is grounded in feminism, literary theory, and psychoanalysis, but also offers concrete applications to particular case law on social issues ranging from abortion and pornography to employment law.¹¹ For this reason her work, and jurisprudence in general, is congenial to the mix of theory and practicality that also characterizes writing program administration. Furthermore, Cornell’s response to what Joan Scott calls the “equality versus difference dilemma” (Scott 1990) is useful for steering an administrative path between the idea that the collective trumps individual desires and beliefs (which, in programmatic terms, means an inflexible syllabus and assigned textbook) and the valorization of individual agency (which, at its extreme, means academic freedom at the expense of programmatic coherence).

Judicial rhetoric begins with the fact of power and its effects on individuals within institutions. In a recent essay, Louise Wetherbee Phelps makes a strong argument for the WPA's possession of and right to exercise power. Phelps rehabilitates power by redefining it as "leadership," an attitude that foregrounds moral agency. Although she grants that to a large degree the WPA is identified with an "institution, its enterprises, and more broadly, the ideologies that underlie them" (2002, 20), Phelps also believes that power is always negotiated and that hierarchy itself is at bottom a "collaborative" construction (27). Nevertheless, in recommending the "vigorous virtues" appropriate to leadership, Phelps merely reverses the parable with which we began; now, instead of the intrepid TA resisting heretical pressures, we have the noble WPA who forges a virtuous path between the needs of individuals and institutional mandates. The effect, in this second case, is to downplay the violence that underlies institutional discipline and lies at the heart of my judicial metaphor.

Violence is a logically inevitable counterpart to the power invested in law, Drucilla Cornell suggests, in a line of argument that is indebted to Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, and feminist legal thinkers. Writers within legal studies have responded to this stark view of legal institutions in different ways. Some stress the community established by shared stories; others discern the need for individuals to open themselves up to "otherness."¹² Derrida, most radically, follows the logic of the law's violence to a deconstructive conclusion; he argues that each case remakes the law anew, so that any attempt at equity—the adjustment of general laws to specific cases—is doomed to failure and therefore demonstrates the impossibility of justice and illegitimacy of the law. His conclusion is not nihilistic, however. Derrida responds to this dilemma with an ethical gesture, concluding that "we"—a rhetorically constructed collective based on ethical solidarity or friendship—have an unlimited and inescapable responsibility for the law's violence.

Cornell takes the pronouncement of law's violence in a slightly different direction. She argues that "equity" should not be defined in terms of either "sameness" or "difference" among individuals under the law and offers instead a politics of "equivalence." For Cornell, a concept of "equivalent" rights respects the "lived individuality" of subjects under the law (1993, 154). Such an attitude recognizes that insisting on "equality-as-sameness" constitutes sex discrimination, for instance, when a woman's leave for pregnancy is defined exactly as leave for a man's medical disability (such as a heart attack). While the logic of "equality-as-sameness" leads to inequity under the law, paradoxically so does

rigid commitment to a monolithic concept of difference; one example would be when difference is evoked to justify committing childbearing women to an inferior “mommy track” in their professions. A theory of equivalent rights, according to Cornell, differs from “equal rights” in that parties in a position of less power do not have to define their situation in terms of the cultural construction of groups who already enjoy particular rights and power. For example, “homosexuals should be given the *equivalent right* to be left alone in their intimate associations, whether or not they choose to mimic the life pattern of traditional heterosexuals” (153; original emphasis). To enjoy privacy, therefore, homosexuals do not have to show that their intimate lives are the same as, equal to, or even different from those of other groups whose intimacy is recognized and protected by law. They can define their own right in terms of “lived individuality.”

In Cornell’s later work, we can see more clearly how the notion of “lived individuality,” which might seem peculiarly essentialist coming from a Lacanian deconstructionist, helps to link both the narrower concerns of case law and Cornell’s very broad essays into theory with the everyday politics of public life. In analyses of such topics as pornography, abortion, and employment law, Cornell’s notion of lived individuality evolves into a fully fledged idea of personhood that elevates the politics of equivalence into a theory of equality. Without the minimum conditions for individuation, Cornell argues, “we cannot effectively engage in the project of becoming a person” (2000, 17). Personhood is not a given, she posits, but a process. Just as the noun “individuality” cannot exist without the verbal adjective “lived”—making the individual-essence dependent on the action of living—so too must the “person” be “personated” through public action or drama. In a clever inversion of the idea that a persona is a mask, Cornell resorts to etymology to define the (whole) persona as that which “shines through” the public mask: “[F]or a person to be able to shine through she must imagine herself as whole, or conceptually differentiate between the mask and the self. A person, in other words, is an aspiration because it is a project that can never be fulfilled, once and for all.” Thus a person enters “an endless process of working through personae” (2000, 19).

“Worker’s Rights and the Defense of Just-Cause Statutes” (Chapter Six in Cornell 2000) offers a concrete application of Cornell’s understanding of equality based on the individual’s inalienable right to develop as a person. In this essay, Cornell argues against the position that if employers must give “just cause” for terminating employees, by a reciprocal

logic employees would have to justify leaving their current employment for another job. Cornell's critique of this position relies on her insistence that freedom, which guarantees the possibility of personhood and therefore of individuality, depends not on abstract reciprocity in workplace relations, but on concrete "horizontal" relations. An insistence on hierarchy gives all power to the boss and none to the workers. But an insistence on reciprocity, or contractual mutuality, between employer and employee glosses over the real differences in power between the two. In other words, "just cause" statutes that impose legal restraints on employers recognize that employers and workers are not "equal," but neither are they irrevocably "different." Because powerful employers and less powerful workers exist in a "horizontal" as well as a hierarchical relationship, the state can step in to regulate workplace relations in order to emphasize the horizontal relations between them as persons. While the law stabilizes these horizontal relations by passing judgment on who has the most power and who the most to lose when employment is terminated, that determination is not fixed in stone. In other words, what is law and what is up for negotiation is itself always in motion. Thus, exercising judgment remains a process, one whose conclusion is, of course, eternally deferred.

Finally, Cornell emphasizes that all members of a legal community—the metaphorical "plaintiffs" and "defendants"—have a responsibility first, to be active in "shining" through their masks toward a future anterior self rather than merely resting on the merits of pre-established identities; and second, to exercise freedom and seek equivalent rights within a communal context. The state guarantees "conditions of horizontality" (2000, 187), which is the precondition for equivalent rights and personhood, but does not etch in stone what constitutes a person. Thus, the "plaintiff" has the right but also the responsibility to move forward in aspiration and not fall back on past stereotypes, just as the "defendant" must. Individuality has, paradoxically enough, a communal basis within a constellation of "law" that by nature does violence to (present) individuality but holds forth a promise of (future) personhood.

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Cornell's explanation of the communal basis for individuality within a context of "law-as-violence" provides a starting point for working through the relation of individual and collective within a writing program, at the same time suggesting a model for understanding the WPA's role within that dynamic. I began by suggesting that the WPA has a hybrid role, not

only as teacher/administrator, but as Phelps suggests, as an individual positioned between instructors and the upper levels of administration. So although she often “lays down the law” to those she supervises, she is not the law itself. Nevertheless, Cornell’s model for employee relations, grounded as it is in a notion of equivalent rights, can help to define the WPA’s adjudication between the curriculum she stands for (which might be considered “law”) and the teachers with whom she enjoys a “horizontal” relationship.

What would a concept of writing program administration grounded in equivalent rights look like? Although other institutions of different sizes, shapes, and constituencies might identify “law” differently, I would say that for my program—housed in a large state school with over one hundred instructors and about six thousand students per year—the underlying “laws” of our program are defined not ideologically, but bureaucratically. If not exactly etched in stone, the basic requirements for any first-year composition class are set out clearly in the *First-Year Composition Handbook*. The requirements that guarantee some consistency across sections of the course are the number of papers assigned (five); the length of papers (1,000 to 1,500 words); a standardized grading rubric; and the amount of weight assigned to the program-wide final exam (30 percent). Not surprisingly, consistency in the amount of work assigned and in grading standards across sections are the most frequent causes of student litigiousness; length of papers is also one important criteria for determining whether a composition course from another institution counts for transfer credit. Because these factors are frequent targets of anger and pain on both sides, they might be considered the curricular violence for which the WPA must take responsibility.

Etched less firmly in stone are features of the program that bear on teaching philosophy and disciplinary interest. The first half of first-year composition is taught as an argument course, the second as writing about literature. While these curricular orientations have now been defined by the Regents as gospel throughout the University of Georgia system, there is latitude for improvisation within these boundaries. A number of experimental courses, some sponsored by the writing program and some proposed by individual teachers, have been introduced over the years. Although the first-year composition program has a consensus textbook and sample syllabus, only those individuals hired at the last minute (for practical reasons) and first-time teachers in our program, especially those who are participating in the Composition Pedagogy Practicum, are *required* to use it. (And yes, to some extent this requirement extends

to those who have taught previously in other programs. Being on the same page throughout the semester helps the practicum's ethos a great deal.) Other instructors are not required to use either syllabus or textbook, although for some reason many continue to do so, even when they complain about its ideology, politics, or general infringement on their academic freedom.

I dwell on these mundane details not so much as an apologia for the state of the curriculum at the University of Georgia, but to suggest that what is "law" for one time and place may well not apply to others; more important, perhaps, within a concept of equivalence based on horizontal relationships, what is law and what is open for negotiation is always contingent. For these reasons, a curricular commitment to "equivalent rights" within the culture of a writing program is quite useful.

What remains is the even more vexing question of how to carry out a commitment to equivalent rights on a daily basis. Just to offer one example, once our program began to emphasize technology, teachers who wanted to substitute a collaborative Web project for one traditional paper have generally met with much more administrative enthusiasm than do those teachers who want to assign only in-class essays simply because they had assigned such essays in the past. An instructor who wants to collapse two papers into a lengthier one because of a well-defended proposal for teaching writing in the public sphere will have an easier time than one who just wants to concentrate on her own classes or upcoming oral exams. The examples I have given here may seem self-evident. Appeals based on curricular innovation are always more . . . well, appealing than excuses based on need or practicality. Within a dynamic of equivalent rights, however, the court is always in session. A teacher's relation to programmatic "law" depends on the process of personation, the "shining through" of a credible and appealing ethos through a succession of professional masks.

I have been asked, "How might a commitment to equivalency under the law empower instructors, or at least invite them to share power?" Such a goal, of course, is central to many important pedagogies, from Freire to feminism. But from the perspective I take here, it is the wrong question—or, at least, not the final question. To evoke again Hassan's charting of modernism against postmodernism, a commitment to writing program administration as a system of equivalent rights under the institutional law involves relinquishing the dream of modernism. Respect for "lived individuality" and belief in the process of personation both belong to petite histories, not to master narratives. Working on

horizontal relations, another postmodern directive, means at once a willingness to wear a mask and a recognition of the power of chance. As I have suggested above, for the most part, writing programs under institutional law are always and already in process. So what a respect for lived individuality and the pursuit of horizontal relations probably entails on a daily basis is committee work, meetings, repeated conversations, political organization, and lots of storytelling. Being “beyond accommodation” finally means constructing an institutional autobiography that acknowledges the impossibility of epic endings.

“JUDICIOUS” CONCLUSION

Would the fictional “Nancy Welch” have fared any better under the writing program that I have described here? I can only offer a counterparable that is “answerable,” in the Bakhtinian sense, to the narrative published in the 1993 issue of *College English*. Let us call our antiheroine N. Under a system of “equivalent rights,” during their orientation and first-semester practicum, N. and her compatriots (together with their WPA and other administrators) would have sorted out the “law” (program procedures and guidelines) from pedagogical philosophy and theory. They would have made their way through “Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class,” discussing not only the ins and outs of competing composition theories, but evaluating their own relationships to those pedagogies. Presentations by more advanced TAs, selected to represent a range of pedagogical philosophies and styles, assure the new teachers that there is more than one way to teach writing effectively.

As the semester progresses, the teachers begin to negotiate the boundaries of various policies. N. learns that although many of her peers use their required class time in the computer lab to explore issues on the Internet—reinforcing the textbook’s emphasis on current events and popular culture—she can develop a useful set of prewriting and revision exercises related to upcoming papers for her days in the computer lab. N. also learns to adjust her classroom practice to a departmental grading rubric that, in her expressivist judgment, puts far too much emphasis on grammar and correctness. She makes this adjustment by constructing a series of process-oriented rubrics for drafts, using the departmental rubric only for the final product, and developing a sensible but liberal policy that encourages students to rewrite unsatisfactory papers. (And, of course, to satisfy the demands of law she adds a crystal-clear statement about drafting and rewrites in her course syllabus, then explains the rationale behind her pedagogical choices to her class!)

After the first paper, a student comes in to complain. In N.'s class he must produce three drafts for each and every paper while his roommate, who is in another class with a different teacher, has to write only one draft. This student never revised in high school and does not want to do so now. As N.'s choices have been arrived at by negotiation, the WPA recognizes the integrity of the teacher's "lived individuality." Nicely but firmly, she tells the student that his TA is not "required" to limit her number of drafts. Indeed, she has discussed this issue with the teacher, and together they have decided that in order to honor N.'s belief in the efficacy of drafting, she will require one less essay from her students than is called for by the *Handbook*. These decisions are explained to the student, and the WPA offers to move him to another section. Satisfied that his workload is equitable, if different from, that of students in other classes, the young man decides that he likes N. as a teacher and elects to remain in the class.

N. continues on in the Ph.D. program. After taking a course in composition theory and a seminar on service learning at the Institute of Higher Education, N. decides that expressivist pedagogy can be enriched by providing students with real-world imperatives for writing. She is chosen to participate in a campus-wide Learning Community Program that is grounded in social issues and involves a service-learning component at the local homeless shelter. For this class, N. is able to jettison altogether the departmental grading sheet and to construct a series of rubrics designed to reflect the processes of investigation and writing that are unique to this teaching situation. The WPA asks that N., in turn, stick to the departmental grading scale for the sake of program consistency, even though it differs from that used by other professors in the Learning Community. Her students, after all, will have roommates who are taking "regular" English 1101. This time there are no complaints. In fact, N.'s class is a real success. She receives a teaching honor and gives a paper on her experience at the CCCC. Back at home, the WPA invites N. to mentor several other interested TAs for the service-learning composition class. The service learning version of English 1101 is incorporated finally into the curriculum as an alternative route to satisfy the composition requirement. N. has fulfilled her right and responsibility to develop into a person whose identity continues to "shine through" her evolving teaching personae. She is rewarded with a tenure-track position at another university in the region.

The portrait I have painted here is transparently utopian, but N.'s experience is a collage drawn from real events and people. In imagining

her trajectory for this essay, I have acquired a clearer sense of the benefits and drawbacks of a writing program based on a judicial model. In the ongoing negotiation of “horizontal relations” between teacher and WPA, the TA must surrender some autonomy and personal ideology, while the WPA gives up the right to mold the program in her own image. On the other hand, the WPA achieves a better working relationship with her teachers and N. claims her right to a “lived individuality” that, although falling short of complete autonomy, gives her a voice in the program’s evolution. Most problematic but perhaps most exciting of all, the program itself grows and changes with time.

From this perspective as well, the TA who passes through our first-year composition program en route from one professional place to another becomes not an anomaly, but the epitome of a composition instructor. For if personhood is an aspiration whose end is always ahead, then who better epitomizes the personhood of a writing teacher under curricular law than the liminal subject, the instructor newly arrived from parts and pedagogies unknown and thrust into a new culture of composition? The TA in transit may feel like she is required either to profess the faith or risk excommunication, but neither the fact of pedagogical violence nor the imposition of disciplinary limits prohibits the construction of any given writing program as a public community in which teaching-persons negotiate with structures, and indeed, with the WPA as the law’s representative. For me, such a construct offers an alternative to the widespread belief that accommodation to or resistance against writing program and institutional demands constitute a teacher’s only choices.

In *Beyond Accommodation*, Cornell notes that revisionary metaphors are by necessity utopian: “[W]e are never simply working within what ‘is,’ because what is, is only reachable in metaphor, and therefore, in the traditional sense, not reachable at all” (1999, 168). In other words, to be “beyond accommodation” means simply understanding that you are *not yet* beyond accommodation. In my scenario, the heroic story of individual resistance and triumph with which this essay began would yield to another kind of epic, in which teachers, WPAs, students—and epic narratives themselves—are always *in medias res*. For me, that’s a good place to be.