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Inviting Trouble

The Subversive Potential of the Outsider Within Standpoint

Jane E. Hindman

The Invitation

When the editors invited us authors—and, by implication, you readers as well—to critique what they identify as the dominant discourse of writing program administration (WPA) work, they bid us to consider several central questions:

Why, for instance, is there an apparent tendency to avoid critical scrutiny of WPA work and discourse itself? Why a tendency—in the WPA discourse at large—to locate problems only outside of the discourse and outside of writing programs and in the usual suspects, especially English departments? Is there a WPA blind spot that makes it difficult to look not only at the outside forces but also at ourselves as participants in and contributors to an accepted WPA discourse?

I like these questions: they're intriguing, irreverent, scary, the kind of questions whose answers are simultaneously perfectly clear *and* inexplicably obscure, for they require one to recognize the system she's caught up in. Because such questions reveal contradictions, posing them beckons a materialist inquiry that blows the cover on generalized accounts that naturalize our com(du)plicity in and with systemic oppression. Not surprisingly then, these questions are threatening to consider and even more threatening to answer publicly: despite the fact that, in theory, most of us believe in the power of inviting and holding the tension of critique, in practice our fear can derail our willingness to apply critical scrutiny to our everyday discourse and practice. Anger and pride may similarly blind even the most perspicacious among us to the value of such scrutiny. Yet anger, fear, and shame can also motivate us, provide a corrective lens, for such primary levels of emotion can uncover the affective dimensions

of disciplinarity and unravel what Lynn Worsham (1998) calls the “pedagogic violence” latent in disciplinary practices.

In good faith, then, I offer my materialist, feminist response, trusting that you will consume it in the spirit of inquiry that prompted it. My own hard-earned practice of listening to and mediating conflicted emotional reactions, my respect for feminist theory and in particular Worsham’s disciplined analysis of how our professional discourse and practice can colonize not just Others but ourselves, and the serendipity of a graduate student’s responding to my assignment in a feminist rhetoric seminar by critically analyzing his emotional response to our WPA’s discourse and practice—all these have emphasized for me the power and value of dissensus. Further, that same student’s sharp scrutiny, as well as the willingness shown by the department’s faculty and by the WPA himself to reflect on our roles as contributors to and participants in an “accepted” WPA discourse, convinces me of the productively subversive potential of inviting the standpoint of the outsider within as a means for effective critique of WPA discourse.

RSVP in Four Parts

1. The Viscera

My gut remains a bit wary, however. It’s true that the principle of intellectual inquiry, which ostensibly informs scholarly investigation, presumes that inviting troublesome questions enhances a healthy system, keeps it vigorous, intentional, aware. But in a dysfunctional system—one that routinely positions many of its members, particularly the most vulnerable, least powerful ones, in untenable situations—questioning the basis of the system’s authority is dangerous, even reckless. In this sense, the university is indeed a dysfunctional system wherein self-preservation is self-destructive, for what sustains me as an individual undermines me in the system. This tenet holds for those with power as well as for those without. Recognizing and speaking the truth—about, say, oneself, her own sense of power and authority as well as that of her students, her chair, her dean, and so on—may be essential to promoting an individual’s freedom of thought, self-expression, and action, but it often limits her access to a system within which being authorized and accepted is equally essential to her livelihood. Which need should she privilege? Which truth should she speak? Holding the tension of these contradictory needs, of this untenable situation, is excruciating, exhausting, and apparently unavoidable.

The hierarchical structure of the university sustains this double bind for WPAs and those they administer. At the level of our own disciplinary formation, we have certainly witnessed the tension inherent in contradictory missions: legitimizing composition studies requires our earning the institutional authority granted to other established disciplines, yet as practitioners we continue to resist the effects of professionalization, namely inequity, exclusion,

abstraction. Thus, when the editors ask why we authors in composition tend to locate problems outside rather than in our own discourse and practices, my first response is to say, “Because everybody just does. That’s the name of the game,” *and* to say, “Are you kidding? Who is going to be foolish enough to implicate themselves or—worse yet for the writers—their bosses?” And when they ask whether there is a “WPA blind spot,” I want to say “*Of course* there is: that’s the nature of the beast. Think about it: why would we *want* to look at ourselves in this ‘reflexive’ way; we’ve just barely established an ‘accepted WPA discourse.’ In fact, some of us must still fight intense battles to convince tenure committees that our contributions to said discourse deserve academic sanction. To locate ‘problems’ within our own discourse and/or writing program is to shoot ourselves in the foot, and we’ve been limping long enough, thank you. What’s the point of inviting trouble?”

These “answers”—the “obvious,” everyday, nonspecialist kind—clearly come from the gut rather than from the authorized body of knowledge. They perhaps illuminate a reason for the “blind spot” (i.e., self-preservation), but I’m quite sure that WPA vision is by no means the only or the most severely affected. For what is equally obvious and obscure is that misrecognition (by which I mean an institutionally sanctioned not-noticing) is created by disciplinarity, that essential process of constructing academic authority that enabled the acceptance of WPA (or any other professional groups’) discourse in the first place. What’s more, the disciplinary system that we’ve been asked to critique enables the editors to publish this collection and the authors to appear in it. What that system historically disallows is the body and its undisciplined emotions. No wonder I’m feeling anxious.

2. *A/The Body of Scholarly Knowledge*

Another, more readily accepted means for answering the call for a critical perspective that might revise actual practices in writing program administration can be found in Worsham’s “On the Rhetoric of Theory in the Discipline of Writing” (1999). Worsham’s fundamental claim is that the field’s identity “arguably becomes possible only through an interest in theory,” particularly through “recent efforts to draw composition studies into the postmodern age and redescribe it as a locus for social and political change” (389–390). Despite its enabling benefits, however, our reliance on theory can have other, possibly damaging consequences, Worsham warns us: “[T]here are enduring interests in the field that may also appropriate and deploy the term of theory according to a logic that not only remains undisrupted by theory but that may also run contrary to its native interests. . . . This situation . . . makes urgent a study of what our appropriations reveal about the enterprise of writing, about the pedagogy of the field” (390, 391). Worsham’s analysis of composition studies’ appropriation of postmodern theory carefully details how the rhetoric of theory has enabled “those who possess its terms [to] increasingly claim hegemony”

(395) and how composition's claims for a postmodern identity mystify its collusion with capitalist modernization (396).

Most crucial to my purpose is Worsham's explanation of how composition's material contexts simultaneously obscure and illuminate the disciplinary processes that enable and disallow it: "Composition studies represents a discursive formation—and, I would say, a compromise arrangement—made necessary by the further stratification (aka "democratization") of American society after World War II. Its position makes it, on the one hand, uniquely situated to undertake a sustained and serious confrontation with its role in reproducing and extending the social and economic order, and on the other, uniquely vulnerable to mystifications about its adversarial role in relation to dominant interests" (396).

Readers surely will call to mind examples of how our scholarship situates the discipline in these contradictory positions. For instance, Lynn Bloom's well-known "Freshman Composition as a Middle Class Enterprise" (1998) confronts composition's reproduction of the status quo, as does Richard E. Miller's "The Arts of Complicity" (1998a). On the other hand, readers are just as likely to recall myriad claims for composition's ability to end oppression and promote social justice, which have become *de rigueur*, even on occasion to the point of absurdity. Consider, as just one instance, Min Zhan Lu's claim: "Composition might very well be the only institutional space where a majority of college students might use their tuition dollars to buy some legitimate time to think, reflect on, and revise the tacit goals, values and understandings prescribed by the discourse of flexible accumulation. How we use English in Composition . . . can have long-term effects on the future of all languages, all users of English, and the order of the world we share. (2004, 44). Even when an author's purpose is to undermine the power of dominant interests, such inflated claims for the possibilities of composition demonstrate that we are "uniquely vulnerable to mystifications about its adversarial role in relation to dominant interests" (Worsham 1999).

Thus we can likewise accept Worsham's claim that recent scholarship in the field enables a particularly seductive identification, namely that "the process of ideological proletarianization explicitly opens up for writing specialists the positions of 'underclass' and 'proletariat,' both of which operate as metaphors deployed to achieve the symbolic interests of a dominant group within the field rather than as representations of any material reality . . . a metaphorical operation that actually mystifies the ideological work of the field" (403). Though she mentions no scholarship in particular, again readers familiar with literature will evoke examples. Those of us considering "accepted WPA discourse" may invoke, say, Joseph Harris' laments about the nature of "boss compositionists," the division of labor within English departments, and his desire to identify as a "worker" (2001). Or perhaps we will recall Marc Bousquet's highly contested argument regarding composition's role in further institutionalizing and capitalizing on the work of poorly paid "disposable teachers" (2003). By assigning

blame to each other for the division of labor in the university and claiming an oppressed identity, these arguments misrecognize the symbolic capital that Worsham claims informs them: “Behind ideological proletarianization lies its contrary—namely the process of ideological embourgeoisment which deploys the metaphor of ‘underclass’ or ‘proletarian’ to acquire symbolic power for an elite professional class” (403–404).

Remember that it is our own discursive practice—particularly our rhetoric of theory—that mystifies processes like the “ideological embourgeoisment” that Worsham identifies. She warns that our efforts to construct a postmodern identity may work to mask the contradictions intrinsic to the field. She sees those contradictions as a particularly useful site for the “topos of questioning—the question, certainly, of history (of modernity and postmodernity) but also the question of identity” (399). Herein lies the essential tension at the heart of the editors’ search for a counter-discourse that nourishes critical reflection on current theoretical assumptions in WPA discourse and promotes critical change in material practices. That definitive tension in composition studies—between theory and practice, mind and body, reason and emotion, insider and outsider—can perhaps best be understood as a “question of identity.” Accepted WPA discourse is only one of many disciplinary practices intended to administer, supervise, manage the identity we appropriate for the discipline and its professionals.

Embracing the tension inherent in contradictory identities is not easily accomplished, however. Efforts to embody that “nervousness” can easily be read as downright offensive. As the often vehement objections to Richard E. Miller’s invitation for WPAs to embrace their roles as bureaucrats reveal, discursive identities that account for our material conditions seduce us much less effectively than discourse that figures us as cultural activists challenging social oppression and championing the underclass. To date, then, we remain myopic about how that mystification occurs. How can we recognize the ways our own discourse mystifies our domination by consent to disciplinary procedures?

3. *The Feminist Body*

Feminist understandings of the role of affect in knowledge construction and in the schooling of emotion is the answer. In simple terms, then—and strange as it may seem—noticing how we feel may be the key to recognizing our own discursive posturing. If and when we listen to our own bodies as well as to our “body of scholarship,” we may notice the pretensions in the discursive practices that mask our collusion with the symbolic interests of dominant groups.

For instance, noting my own affect is precisely what led me to recognize what I see as a “blind spot” not just in Bousquet’s article but also in typical disciplinary readings of it. A colleague asked me to read the article, noting it as an example of how “they” (tenured-track faculty in the English department) must feel about the process by which “we” (tenure-track faculty in Rhetoric

and Writing Studies) established an independent department and obtained status at their expense as well as lecturers'. What my reading invoked instead was my own anger not only at Bousquet's reductive description of compositionists as either managers or writing teachers, but also at my own colleague's short-sighted assumption that I enjoyed the same privileges he does. In denying the stratification of tenure-track professionals, both—following the lead of most if not all accepted WPA discourse—misrecognize the class stratification that divides not just tenure-track faculty from lecturers but also tenure-track faculty from each other. Their misrecognition obscures not just the disciplinarity inherent in the larger hierarchical structures of the university discipline but also the multiple standpoints from which to critique it.

For instance, from the standpoint of a lecturer in my department, her labor in teaching four or five classes a semester at administratively assigned times enables tenure-track faculty's privilege of teaching three classes a semester at self-designated times and with the additional bonus of a yearly graduate class. From my standpoint as an associate professor, those lecturers' labor *as well as my own* releases my colleague (who is also an associate professor) to do what Bousquet calls the work of "'real faculty,' that is, having the chance to govern, participating more fully in the intellectual community (thus becoming one of those who possess the terms to 'increasingly claim hegemony'), developing as an instructor, and enjoying better pay, benefits, protections, and security" (5). The discipline informing this division of labor among tenure-track faculty in my department sustains each semester I am assigned three sections of upper division writing (each of which enrolls twenty-seven students) while other tenure-track faculty in my department are assigned one graduate course (which enrolls five to ten students).

While I'm sure that the work of those colleagues who appear more privileged than I enables some other division of labor further up the disciplinary hierarchy, what I want to highlight is the immediate angry reaction I had when I heard my colleague's acceptance and application of the us/them dichotomy: remember that it is attending to my emotional responses to professional discourse that prompts a shift away from identifying the Other (whether that be English or composition studies) as the source of dissatisfaction and to recognizing the arbitrary and self-serving practices inherent in the hierarchical structures of the university. Examining the nature of disciplinary processes, Magail Larson shows us that monopolizing status and privilege while making it appear to be equally available to all is ideologically necessary for any labor force wishing to legitimate its professional status (1977, 47, 51). Thus, for any professional, professing egalitarianism protects the inherent inequity in status that our professionalism itself constructs. Thus, to figure ourselves as equal partners or in the struggle for a democratic society is to construct an insincere identity. Needless to say, emotional responses to the "insincerity"—which I often experience as an outright lie—are typically read as neither relevant nor collegial, as much more petty or gossipy (i.e., feminine) than professional (i.e.,

masculine). Those who have such responses (that is, me and maybe you) are disciplined to think of themselves as petty, mean-spirited, overly critical.

I return to Worsham (1999) for an explanation of how that mystifying discipline operates. A discipline is a shamed-based system that “gives a punitive and humiliating function to even the apparently innocent elements of the disciplinary apparatus. . . . [D]isciplinary society achieves its goals of obedience, docility, and utility through the shame-effects resulting from the application of disciplinary procedures, but it also organizes what philosophers used to call moral emotions. . . . Thus, what we take to be the most private and personal of phenomena—emotion and the body—are effects of social organization and are made available for public administration through the techniques of discipline” (397). Worsham provides an extensive analysis of the “schooling” process that subjects and structures the emotions and the body in her much more widely known piece, “Going Postal: Pedagogic Violence and the Schooling of Emotion” (1998). There she relies on Bourdieu and Passeron’s notion of pedagogy as “the power held by dominant discourses to impose the legitimate mode of conception and perception . . . to impose the meanings that maintain and reinforce the reigning social, economic, and political arrangements as legitimate” (221). Pedagogy, Worsham tells us, “locates individuals objectively in a hierarchy of power relations; but also and more importantly, it organizes their affective relations to that location, to their own condition of subordination, and to others in that hierarchical structure. . . . In particular, pedagogy provides and limits a vocabulary of emotion and, especially to those in subordinate positions, it teaches an inability to adequately apprehend, name, and interpret their affective lives. This is its primary violence” (223). A central aspect of disciplinary power, “pedagogic violence” is a concept Worsham introduces to “make visible the relationship between discipline and violence, between what is most legitimate and what is most illegitimate, to open for examination the symbolic violence implied in teaching and learning” (215).

Just as a rhetoric of theory illuminates how disciplinary procedures shape discourse and practices, a rhetoric of pedagogic violence uncovers how those procedures misrecognize emotion as personal and private and therefore as inappropriate substantiation for cultural critique or intervention. The tool to expose the emotional colonization inherent in composition’s pedagogy, Worsham argues, is a feminist critique “that challenges the claim that through the appropriation of various theories and approaches the field escapes the disciplinary apparatus of modern patriarchal society into a nondisciplinary or postdisciplinary and postmodern (read egalitarian) place” (1999, 398). Because disciplinary procedures as well as primary pedagogy organize emotion, effectively elude semantic expression, and rely on mystification or misrecognition for their effective functioning, “decolonization and the struggle for social change must therefore take place at the primary level of emotion” (1998, 223).

It follows, then, that the struggle for effective critique and change in WPA discourse and practice should focus on affect and can deploy what

Alison Jaggar (1989) calls “outlaw emotions” to illuminate the ways that the body and the emotions are subject to hegemonic control. Because outlawed emotions tend to be most recognized among those who profit least from the discipline imposed by any system, the Others on the margins of a discourse, profession, and/or a hierarchy have the advantage of best access to the resources for decolonization.

That tenet is the backbone of one of the most potent means for combating misrecognized claims to objectivity and political neutrality, namely feminist standpoint theory. Originally described by Nancy Hartsock as “an important epistemological tool for understanding and opposing all forms of domination” (2003, 35), feminist standpoint inquiry requires one to situate herself in a specific material context, and then to use some aspect of her oppression within that context as a source of critical insight into how the dominant society thinks and is structured. As Nancy Hirschmann explains in her efforts to utilize standpoint as a postmodern strategy, “The central notion of a standpoint approach, as Hartsock develops it, is that material experience shapes epistemology. . . . [V]arious groups [of people who share a particular set of experiences] resist their oppression by drawing on the epistemological power their particular shared experiences afford to rename those experiences” (1997, 319). While this capability is by no means automatic, it can be cultivated through systematic examination of the material conditions that structure and limit our understandings of social relations.

Perhaps even more discerning as a crucial tool is a specially delineated feminist standpoint called the outsider within. In her germinal essay, Patricia Hill Collins enumerates the benefits of that status: a particular kind of “objectivity” that results from “nearness and remoteness, concern and indifference” as well as an ability to “see patterns that may be more difficult for those immersed in the situation to see” (1986, 104). In considering how outsider within academics historically construct their contradictory and conflictual professional identities, Collins claims that the typical choices are either leaving the academy in order to retain one’s identity as an outsider or suppressing one’s difference in order to become “bona fide” insiders. As she illuminates, however, a “third alternative is to conserve the creative tension of outsider within status by encouraging and institutionalizing outsider within ways of seeing . . . where intellectuals learn to trust their own personal and cultural biographies as significant sources of knowledge” (122).

An outsider within standpoint, then, offers a method for authorizing a personal (that is, embodied) epistemology and thus for constructing an alternative professional identity. What’s more, it can enable a more accountable, sincere method for constructing our scholarly body of knowledge. For instance, Collins claims that within her own discipline of sociology, black female academicians’ outsider within status makes clear “two types of anomalies” in disciplinary work: “[O]missions of facts or observations about Afro-American women in the sociological paradigms they encounter . . . [and] distortions of facts and

observations about Black women” (119, 120). Since insiders are those who produce the “facts and observations” of a discipline, those with only insider status are not likely to recognize such anomalies. Outsiders within do recognize them, however, and their perceptions warrant more coherent and sound disciplinary theory: “Since facts or observations become meaningful in the context of a theory, the emphasis on producing accurate descriptions of Black women’s lives has also refocused attention on major omissions and distortions in sociological theories themselves” (120).

It seems evident, then, that the outsider within’s standpoint can facilitate our constructing alternatives to an accepted WPA discourse. We have seen how that standpoint makes possible a rhetoric of pedagogical violence—that is, a means for recognizing how and when WPA discourse and practice colonize the emotions of those without power, especially with respect to naming and interpreting the conditions of their subordination. In describing my own emotional reactions to discourse like Bousquet’s, I’ve demonstrated how the outsider within standpoint (my insider position as a privileged tenure-track professor who is an outsider to the privileged work of “real faculty” as well as to the administrative duties of a WPA) contributes to a rhetoric of theory, that is, a means for recognizing how and when WPA discourse and practice constructs professional identities centered on metaphors that sustain the interests of the dominant group and mystify ideological work rather than represent a material reality.

4. *The Uninvited Body*

Let me now present a more extensive example from my department’s material circumstances of how an outsider within standpoint can bare the emotional stakes and ideological implications of WPA discourse and practice. The event took place during the 2005 spring term when the chair of our Department of Rhetoric and Writing Studies (DRWS) wrote an article announcing what appeared to be his autonomous decision to institute policy meant to reduce the effects of last-minute instructor and section schedule changes at the outset of each semester. The policy involved

establishing common opening assignments for our [seven] major [undergraduate writing] courses. . . . [E]ach class will begin with a common unit culminating in the first major writing assignment. . . . [T]he unit this fall will be based on *Nickel and Dimed*, the summer reading for first-year students. This common unit will provide greater consistency across sections and enable instructors who are switched at the last minute to step into their new course with confidence. (McClish 2005, 2)

When I first read the article, I cringed at what I considered its impersonal and imperial tone, but—since that’s my reaction to virtually all managerial documents, including my own—I quickly dismissed it, especially since I assumed

that the upper-division writing courses I teach would not be affected. Within the next several days, a few of our forty-some lecturers approached me individually to ask what I thought about the policy, correct my assumption that upper-division writing classes were exempt, and voice their frustration with having to redesign their tried-and-true courses. Though I too was concerned about the pedagogical soundness and the workload implications of the chair's decision, I opted not to go public with my concerns. Instead, I talked with those lecturers about how to integrate the rhetorical purpose of the common assignment with the themes and purposes of their own curricula and placated myself with the knowledge that I would probably choose to ignore the policy and—quietly—continue with my own curriculum.

By the end of a week, however, I came to see things differently, thanks to the standpoint of an outsider within: graduate student Jim Ricker wrote an analysis of the chair's article as his response to my assignment to students in my feminist rhetorics course, in which we had just read Worsham's "Going Postal." I'd asked students to identify an instance of "pedagogic violence" in their own schooling and/or teaching and explain how that pedagogic instance worked to maintain and reinforce the reigning social, economic, and political interests of dominant culture. A teaching associate, Jim claims that "[t]he article fills me with a nameless, faceless rage at my powerless position in the academy." He explains that

[a] look at [the Chair's] article shows how bereft of emotional learning the Rhetoric and Writing Department, the Administration of [our university], and by implication, the system of state-supported higher education in late capitalism has become. His article addresses staffing issues for RWS courses, a "monstrously complex and unsettling" concern which has been "complicated by several significant factors" having to do with placing students in required composition courses (1). Solving the myriad staffing problems for this influx of students, notes [the Chair], involves an effort by the Department and University Administration to "improve coordination among units" (with minor administrative policy changes) in order to create "greater predictability," which will lead to "fewer last-minute instructor switches." Part of this coordination is a commitment by the Department to standardize the opening assignments for beginning writing courses. . . .

These changes in the working conditions for the RWS instructors are presented by [the Chair] as irreversible trends that the Department, given the "inevitability of the problem," is addressing by changing the working conditions of the human beings who teach. The problems are always passively described in non-personal terms: "students were placed" and "compelled" to take classes, and constitute a market force of student demand which required "special accommodation" for evening classes and which, in one of the [Chair's] few admissions of personal responsibility, "caught us by surprise" (2). These issues are presented in the article as . . . an

impersonal demand from economic and social forces that must be met by academic workers. (1999)

Interpreting the article's presentation of issues as "a kind of invisible pedagogic violence," Jim sees the article enforcing the type of "'discipline' that [Worsham says] 'arises from within the authority of existing social, political, and economic arrangements and serves quite effectively to reinforce their legitimacy' (215). And if one gets angry at the changes [Jim continues], she has no one to blame or focus her anger upon."

Jim ends by analyzing the chair's rhetorical strategies for presenting managerial goals and directives:

"[L]ooking for ways to make it easier for instructors to thrive in this challenging environment" (which is out of his control), [the chair] offers two pieces of advice for instructors: first, "as a matter of standard operating procedure," instructors should prepare basic syllabi for all the courses they [could be assigned to] teach in order to facilitate last-minute changes in their teaching program; and second, [the Chair] notes that "the time has come for instructors to abandon the mindset that a typical schedule takes place between the hours of ten in the morning and two in the afternoon" (4). By becoming "either a morning or evening specialist," he notes, instructors who volunteer for the very early or late classes "will be much easier to schedule" and "have much less of a chance of having their schedules turned upside down a week before classes" (4). By creating syllabi that fully integrate the standardized curriculum instead of developing their own "sophisticated thematic courses," [we] teachers should realize the wisdom that claims "that the advantages of the common opening unit outweigh (the) potential disadvantages" of incorporating the common unit into an otherwise individuated course syllabus (4).

[The Chair] ends his description of explicit solutions to transparent economic conditions with an appeal that feminizes the situation in the traditional patriarchal manner: noting that "we are asking for a greater degree of flexibility from instructors than we have in the past," he empathizes with his fellow professionals by mentioning his children, and how he understands "the juggling required when work impinges on personal commitments" (4). The profession of teaching composition, the "effort to deliver excellent instruction," already a feminized occupation in a patriarchal culture, is further feminized as another aspect of a juggling act that the nurturing teacher/parent performs at any time of day or night. For this delivery we are awarded his "appreciation" (4). HmMMM. (1999)

Whether or not we are persuaded by Jim's analysis, we can surely see that it provides a standpoint that recognizes rather than mystifies the emotional stakes for the "managed" in this example of WPA discourse. That standpoint is enabled by Jim's status as an outsider within: as an instructor of students, he is authorized by the professional academic hierarchy to rank students while

he simultaneously occupies the least powerful, most oppressed position within the profession. The value of such a standpoint is not that it is more accurate or “true” but rather that it reveals if, when, and how WPA discourse reproduces dominant interests by organizing professionals’ affective responses to their subordination. Jim reveals how certain of the chair’s rhetorical moves—for instance, his appropriation of a “specialist” status for those instructors compelled to teach at unattractive times and/or his attempt to establish solidarity as a fellow parent of small children who understands that “significant sacrifices are required”—have little to no persuasive force in the face of his impersonal appeal to “greater consistency across sections” and its disavowed and unresponsive collusion with the goals of higher administration if not corporate capitalism. From the standpoint of the outsider within, the egalitarian principle that the chair intends to endorse—that is, ensuring that undergraduate students at our university get the writing classes they need to fulfill their requirements expeditiously and thus to acquire the literacy and critical thinking skills requisite to their academic work—is lost in managerial metaphors of synchronized units, predictability, and efficiency.

Interestingly, Jim’s written individual response does indeed represent a group experience, for the other outsiders within who had shared with me their private responses to the article focused on the same rhetorical moves in the chair’s article with similar emotional reactions. Additionally, however, the lecturers I talked with fixated on the chair’s reference to the “mindset that a typical teaching schedule takes place between ten in the morning and two in the afternoon” (4). Explaining the logistical impossibility of scheduling their five-course teaching load between the hours of ten and two—unless, of course, one were to take on a five-days-a-week schedule—these lecturers’ outsider within status illuminates what they see as the distortion of facts and observations about them that this specific example of WPA discourse presents.

But before we rush to conclude that the chair’s article and WPA discourse inexorably colonize professionals’ emotions, we must remember that WPA discourse is only one aspect—though a major one—of WPA practice. Nondiscursive practice has the capacity to strengthen, work against, or neutralize the emotionally colonizing effects of dominant discourse. Material circumstances of this departmental event demonstrate this capacity, too, for subordinates’ affective responses to the chair’s article were recognized: when private grumbling among those whose teaching would be most affected by the common assignment policy escalated to the point of full-fledged protest, part-time and full-time lecturing faculty as well as GTAs met with the chair and the acting director of the lower-division writing program to express their complaints officially. The acting director e-mailed the department council (a body comprised of the department’s ten tenure-track faculty as well as three representatives of its sixty or so lecturers) to inform us of his intention to make a motion that the policy change be placed on the next council meeting agenda, allowing for full council approval of what had been the chair’s individual decision. The council passed a motion that the common assignment be suggested but not required

in the lower-division writing courses and not even suggested in the upper-division writing courses.

Our conflict was resolved, then, amicably and productively, demonstrating that “management”—our chair as well as others in WPA positions—indeed values the viewpoint of the “managed” and even respects rather than punishes their civil disobedience. And despite this incident, or perhaps *because* of it, trust in the effectiveness and support of the chair sustains: in the following semester, the department’s referendum on the chair’s performance produced unanimous approval. Anonymous comments to the referendum question include comments such as these: “He has created a feeling of cohesiveness in a large and diverse milieu—no small feat”; “The fairest, most equitable chair I’ve worked under”; and “Thank you for your support of lecturers and faculty!”

Thus, my attempt to show here how our chair’s discourse, and by extension other instances of accepted WPA discourse, naturalizes pedagogic “violence” may therefore seem extreme, if not ridiculous. And yet there’s an instructive authority in the anger and fear of those—particularly the outsiders within—who had felt betrayed, patronized, and unappreciated. Likewise, Ricker’s analysis of how emotional colonization is disguised in the chair’s metaphors of organizational efficiency is compelling. Further, it’s a material fact that as a result of this particular instance of WPA discourse, many within the department—including the chair—were compelled to devote what little “extra” time and energy they had to the resulting conflict. Most importantly, that discourse threatened carefully cultivated inroads of trust and collegiality within the department. Though in our case that threat proved to be unsubstantiated, reestablishing trust and collegiality is always hard work that does not guarantee positive results.

What I find enriching, then, about considering these particular material conditions is not the instructive potential in their “bad example” but rather the serendipity afforded by the contradictory accounts they precipitated: first my own response to the chair’s article (as a privileged faculty member but not a WPA), then the lecturers’ responses, my student’s relatively uncensored emotional response from a recognized outsider within standpoint, and later the chair’s lengthy and thoughtful response to the first draft of this article. What most struck me about these competing discourses was the ease with which each of us can identify the “blind spots” in another’s discourse while simultaneously authorizing the integrity of our own. Pointing out the lack in others’ discourse while rationalizing one’s own may well be the definitive feature of traditional professional practice. But it doesn’t do much to promote change. On the other hand, inviting others—not my peers, but Others—to illuminate what I cannot see is potentially revitalizing. I further contend that instituting such an alternative to accepted professional discourse and practice would surely promote feminists’ professed belief that there is strength in the differences between us.

As an example of what that strength could look like, I want to ask this: what might have happened if the chair had had the advantage of reading Jim’s response to the article *before* it was published? What if he as the WPA had

invited “trouble” before it occurred? Further, what if standard WPA practice didn’t simply invite but also integrated the standpoint of the outsider within which, by definition, would be the position most likely to recognize the unequal power relations that obtain in acts of colonization?

Of course, I can’t be sure about what might have happened in such a case. I am certain, however, that the invitation would have changed what the chair later described to me as his “misperception that this idea [of a common assignment] was not particularly controversial”; it would also have altered what Jim’s assignment described to me as his “nameless, faceless rage at his powerless position.” Perhaps between them those two may even have found an alternative method for meeting student need (the recognized principle informing the WPA discourse and policy) without impinging on faculty’s autonomy in curricular innovation (the recognized principle informing their affective response to WPA discourse and policy). But inviting the standpoint of an outsider within need not result in any utopian agreement in order to offset the pedagogic violence of accepted WPA discourse. If, as Worsham contends, that colonizing power depends on the dominant discourse’s capacity not just to keep people in their place but also to disallow their anger vis-à-vis their subordination, then welcoming the standpoint of the outsider constitutes an effective strategy of decolonization and the struggle for social change. If and when outlaw emotions are invited, heard, even welcomed, they can do the work that Worsham asks of the rhetoric of pedagogic violence, that is, “to open for examination the symbolic violence implied in teaching and learning” (215).

What better way, then, to address the editors’ challenge for us to “look not only at the outside forces but also at ourselves as participants in and contributors to an accepted WPA discourse?” Granted, demystifying the emotional colonization, appropriation, and partiality of our discourse may result simply in more open acknowledgement of the hierarchy of privilege and authority that informs our professional practice. I argue nonetheless that domination by an acknowledged autocrat engenders less pedagogic violence than a bureaucrat’s misrecognized tools of shame and fear. Furthermore, and if we are sincere about our professed commitment to social change, then we can in good faith trust that WPAs who come to recognize their previously mystified methods of conferring their own privilege and authority while colonizing others will, by the fact of that recognition alone, be moved to revise their accepted discourse and practice.

Worsham tells us that “the issue at stake in any of our appropriations is the ethos of intellectual work that will prevail in composition studies” (1999, 401). To understand how those appropriations are couched in the “rhetoric of theory,” in the rhetoric of pedagogical violence, in the arts of complying with bureaucratic necessities, we need to sustain a critical awareness of the ethos, the subjectivity, we’re creating for ourselves and for the Other. Relying on the epistemological power of the outsider within—inviting our own outlaw emotions, as well as those of our colleagues—may well provide the tool for such critical awareness.