Institutional Critique Revisited

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> "The philosophers have only interpreted the world…
> the point is to change it."
> —Karl Marx

In his article "Composition as Management Science" (published in *JAC* in 2002), Marc Bousquet provides a thorough discussion and critique of our article "Institutional Critique: A Rhetorical Methodology for Change" (published in *College Composition and Communication* in 2000). We appreciate the consideration that Bousquet gives our article; he takes our statement seriously and gives it detailed attention, even while disagreeing with it. We also appreciate the opportunity to reply to Bousquet's critique and to enter into a more developed dialogue about the issue. It is a critically important discussion for composition and for the university.

So what exactly is the issue? In his *JAC* article, Bousquet focuses on the university as a corporate entity and as a system of labor, in particular critiquing its abusive labor practices, especially the increasing reliance on part-time, unbenefitted, and undersupported workers—e.g., undergraduate student labor, graduate student assistants, and adjunct faculty. We agree with Bousquet on the nature and severity of this problem, and we find his scenic perspective useful in some ways.[1] Bousquet's critical approach pays attention to labor issues and to how administrative practices and philosophies at the university level impact our activities as teachers and researchers at the departmental and disciplinary level. Indeed, Bousquet's approach affords important insight into how universities have changed their identities and practices.[2] In short, he examines the material context for our activities as teachers and scholars—and not many scholars do that. (Stanley Aronowitz and Michael Bérubé are examples of others who do.) This perspective works as a form of institutional *criticism*—although we feel it is not helpful for effecting institutional *change*.

WORKS AND DAYS 41/42, Vol. 21, Nos. 1&2, 2003

We disagree fundamentally with Bousquet regarding two key points: (1) about the institutional location and source of this labor problem, and (2) about how to accomplish productive and lasting change. On the first point, the institutional and disciplinary location of the problem, Bousquet's *JAC* article does not consider the history of composition instruction in the English Department and in the modern university—the where. An examination of this history would show that assigning blame for our current labor crisis is not as easy as Bousquet describes in his article, and we see this as a serious lapse. No single discipline is to blame for the labor situation; rather, an entire institutional system is at fault.

Our second and more important disagreement concerns methodology—the how. Bousquet's response to the university's labor problem is to advocate "a labor theory of agency and a rhetoric of solidarity, aimed at constituting, nurturing, and empowering collective action by persons in groups" ("Composition" 494). Bousquet criticizes what he calls our "management theory of agency"—in his words, "the rhetoric of pleasing the prince" (aka, "acceptance of market logic" [496])—as not ultimately useful or effective in correcting the oppressive labor situation at the university. Thus, we disagree with Bousquet about means. His critical approach and his view of institutions are precisely the positions we intended to counter in our *CCC* article. We don't think his form of criticism does a very good job of changing institutions. If anything, his theoretical stance—i.e., criticizing from the outside, while holding a position of relatively privileged academic status from within—tends to preserve the hierarchical status quo that we see as part of the problem. Bousquet discards management-level action of the sort practiced by WPAs, seeing the only hope for improved labor conditions in direct labor action by workers. He implies that improved working conditions can be accomplished without structural or disciplinary changes in the institution. At any rate, he doesn't seem interested in structural change, while we very much are.

In our *CCC* article, we focused on changing institutions structurally using critical management techniques, an approach that we think will result in improved labor conditions over the long term (although that wasn't our principal focus in "Institutional Critique"). What Bousquet calls a "management theory of agency" is not, in fact, what we are espousing; he didn't take seriously enough our use of the key term "methodology." We are most interested in the interplay of macro structures (e.g., a top-down flow of power) *and* micro-level resistances and actions (e.g., the bottom-up revolution he advocates). In deCerteauian terms, we are interested not only in strategies, nor only in tactics, but rather in the spaces in which both strategies and tactics meet and interact for lasting social and institutional change. We feel that Bousquet presents an either/or choice, a false and ultimately unproductive binary. Rather than supporting one over the other, we look to both/and. Lasting social and institutional change is rarely possible without some of each.

Disciplines, Departments, and Histories

Our first major point of contention is with Bousquet's handling of the location and source of the labor problem. In "Composition as Management Science," there appear to be some confusions and omissions related to fields, disciplines, and institutional alignments. These confusions and omissions lead Bousquet to blame rhetoric and composition for unfair labor practices—but we want to start by challenging his basic assumptions.

First, Bousquet's treatment seems to confuse disciplines and departments. We consider our field to be rhetoric and composition (and for a few of us, professional and technical writing as well). While we have all worked in English departments, for us it is (or was) an administrative home only and not an intellectual home. For Bousquet, English also appears to be his discipline, his field of scholarly work. Bousquet seems to blame one field of study (rhetoric and composition) for the management practices of another field of study (English-as-literary studies) and their oft-shared administrative structure (the English Department). Conflating a field of study with an administrative structure is highly misleading.

Second, Bousquet seems to confuse an administrative *function* with a field of study. Throughout "Composition as Management Science," he equates rhetoric and composition with Writing Program Administration, as if the two are the same (a common error for those outside the field). To be sure, Writing Program Administration is an active branch within the field of rhetoric and composition, but a closer look at the membership of its listserv and council would show that many WPAs were not educated in rhetoric and composition, but rather in literary studies. Indeed, the editors of *JAC* voiced quite forcefully that rhetoric and composition should not be seen merely as a training ground for WPAs, with the assumption that training in the field necessarily means an administrative future (McLemee). In that article, Worsham and Olson argue that—just as in other fields—some scholars focus their intellect on theoretical work. We agree, although it is surprising that the *JAC* editors did not catch Bousquet's problematic assumption here.

Third, Bousquet seems to confuse a single course with an entire field of study. First-year writing *courses* existed long before college-wide writing *programs* did. Further, most writing programs comprise far more than the first-year course. Recent data supplied by the Modern Language Association (reported in Taylor) indicate that first-year writing courses continue to be staffed by those educated in something besides rhetoric and composition; conversely, that graduates with doctorates in rhetoric and composition teach a wide range of courses at all levels of the curriculum, including *but not limited to* the first-year course. It appears that English Departments are supplying the bulk of the labor for the continued presence of the first-year course. While we share Bousquet's dismay over this situation, we do not agree with the causal institutional relations he assumes.

In short, Bousquet's flawed view of the field of rhetoric/composition, and of its institutional alignment, leads him to blame the

oppressive labor situation in composition on the field of rhetoric and composition: "Clearly, the emergence of rhetoric and composition into some form of (marginal) respectability and (institutional-bureaucratic) validity has a great deal to do with its usefulness to upper management in its legitimating the practice of deploying a revolving labor force of graduate employees and other contingent teachers to teach writing" (500). According to Bousquet, the writing program administrator is the agent overseer of an abusive labor situation, the low-level manager, promoted from the lower ranks, who tries to put a pleasant face on this system and thereby make these practices minimally tolerable to part-time labor.

To arrive at these conclusions about the role of the WPA and of the field of rhetoric/composition requires that Bousquet neglect a lot of institutional and disciplinary history: for example, the history of the English Department, of literary studies in English, and of composition instruction in English. Ignoring this history is necessary in order to assign blame to "the emergence of rhetoric and composition" and to relieve the English Department of any moral complicity in the current labor situation.

So let's ask that embarrassing question. What role does the Department of English play in the current labor scene? You won't find the answer in Bousquet's discussion. He hardly ever mentions English by name (it appears in a couple of footnotes). Given Bousquet's own institutional position in an English Department, and given the kind of scenic critique that Bousquet practices, this is a startling omission. What precisely "has created the institutions we need to change" ("Composition" 494)?

If Bousquet's work had cited some of the myriad sources on the history of composition in English, it would have encountered numerous arguments that the development of the modern university in conjunction with the evolution of literary studies in English led to a labor binary—the grad students teaching first-year comp and the lit professors teaching upper-level and graduate literature courses—and that in fact this system was well established long before the field of rhetoric/composition emerged on the scene. (See in particular Crowley, especially Ch. 5, Literature and Composition: Not Separate but Certainly Unequal, and Ch. 6, Terms of Employment: Rhetoric Slaves and Lesser Men.) The history of composition in English has been thoroughly discussed (ad nauseum), both from the perspective of literary studies (Graff) and the perspective of composition (Berlin; Crowley; Halloran; Stewart). Yes, there are different versions of this history, but Bousquet does not cite any of them. Examining this history even minimally would complicate his theory that rhetoric/composition supports "a vocational and technical model of education" ("Composition" 496), that it is in league with the corporate university, or that it is to blame for the labor mess we're now in. In ignoring this history and in failing to address the role of English, Bousquet's essay is seriously flawed.[3]

Who is to blame? is not usually a productive question to pursue—except when the answer can help lead us to a structural solu-

tion. From our standpoint, the problem is that composition has struggled in an institutional location that does not value the teaching of writing as a serious intellectual enterprise, or at least not as much as it values the study of literature. While English has begrudgingly accepted institutional responsibility for first-year instruction, it has never committed significant institutional resources to that effort (i.e., composition is "the cash cow" that supports literature graduate studies), and the ideology of composition that it has supported is a problematic one (i.e., current-traditional rhetoric). English has tolerated rhetoric/composition (assigning it to the category of "marginal respectability"), but never, in our experiences, has it fully valued it or treated it with disciplinary respect.

So we raise this question: To what extent has the Department of English (and its complicit organizational partner, the MLA) contributed to the abusive labor situation, at least in composition, through its historical marginalization of writing and especially the teaching of writing? We don't want to counter-blame the Department of English because the emergence of that department and the field of English literary studies is tied to the emergence of the modern research university in the late 19th century. English isn't totally to blame either. We simply wish to note that, before there was a field of rhetoric/composition, there was a required composition course *managed* by the Department of English, which is the institutional entity primarily responsible for the polarized labor situation we now have in composition—i.e., with tenure-track faculty teaching literature and grad students, adjuncts, and temps teaching composition. In short, the labor problem in composition didn't happen with the reemergence of rhetoric and composition; our current institutional circumstances, particularly the labor practices, arose and evolved out of disciplinary alignments, practices, and values set up a long time ago, not just invented recently. If Bousquet wants to play the blame game, he should look at the historical arguments suggesting that the Department of English has contributed to the labor problem in composition studies because of its 100+ year tradition of disdain and neglect for composition both as an important teaching mission and as a respectable area of scholarly inquiry—a tradition of disdain and disrespect that Bousquet continues.

Methodologies for Change

Our second major point of contention is methodological. Bousquet's argument is built on the assumption that all institutions are alike—large, monolithic structures. From this assumption, he draws several conclusions: that managers are all alike, that working for change from within institutions is useless, and that unions are the only way to effect change. Because we begin with the opposite assumption—that institutions are *not* all alike—we draw different conclusions. Our different conclusions call for different research methods and means of intervention.

Institutions are not all alike

Bousquet presents a macro-level view of institutions, while we take a micro-level view. In his work, institutions are monolithic, even disembodied structures. This is most clear in the opening paragraph of "Composition as Management Science" where he writes about "the 'institutions' of rhet-comp and higher education" (494). To call a field such as rhetoric and composition an "institution" is to use the latter term inappropriately. A discipline is not an institution; it is something much larger. A discipline may be defined by journals, conferences, professional organizations, academic programs, and the people who populate them—and also, of course, by defined practices, methodologies, and actions. To argue for change by focusing on a discipline only invites frustration because, as we argued, it "denies important physical dimensions and limits the potential for productive action" (Porter, Sullivan, Blythe, Grabill, and Miles 619). No one could expect to change the labor practices of an entire discipline unless it were through large-scale, organized, nation-wide action.

We, on the other hand, take a micro-level view of institutions. We assume that each institution is an entity composed of its own set of physical resources, procedures, and people. For us, institutions are literally physical entities; they are embodied in buildings and other uses of space (such as a campus); they function through written policies and procedures, through the decisions of those who enact them, and through the cooperation of those affected by the decisions. In other words, each institution is a "local manifestation of more general social relations" (Grabill 127). A local school is an institution, as is a city government, or even a union. Think about it: A union usually has a set of physical resources (a union hall), procedures (for voting, negotiating, striking), and people.

We reject an exclusively macro-level view of institutions because it leads to institutional determinism. Technological determinism states that human behavior is constrained by technology, which determines human behavior. The only option is to reject the technology, or even to rebel against it. Likewise, institutional determinism assumes that institutions constrain individual behavior and that the only response is to reject the institution or to work for revolutionary change from outside (as may be the case with many types of union movements).

Recent critical theory focused on technology has questioned deterministic views. As Weibe Bijker, Thomas Hughes, and Trevor Pinch point out, we can talk about technologies in three ways:

> ---As physical artifacts (e.g., an automobile or a computer)
> ---As activities or processes (e.g., the steps needed for making steel or a computer chip)
> ---As know-how (e.g., ability to design an automobile or chip)

It is when we look at a technology as an artifact only that technological determinism seems the most probable explanation because a technology is difficult to resist once it is in place. (Andrew Feenberg makes a similar argument in his *Critical Theory of Technology*.) If, however, we view technology as a dynamic process of development, and if we assume that technology may be developed in any number of ways, then we may see more hope for change.

Likewise, if we see institutions as static, monolithic entities, then it is easy to adopt a sense of determinism. Institutions, however, can be viewed in the same three ways suggested above by Bijker, Hughes, and Pinch. When we realize that an institution also involves processes of development, and the know-how (not to mention, will) to carry it all out and to maintain institutional practices, then we can begin to see points (fissures) where humans have the ability to change things.

An institution is sustained in part through the work of people interpreting and implementing various policies and objectives. "Without the joint behavior in which members engage," write Teresa M. Harrison and Susan M. Katz, "there is no organization. … organizations must be re-created every day. Because re-creation is essential to their nature, organizations are more accurately viewed as processes rather than as things" (19-20). Institutions are re-created, for instance, whenever a bureaucrat makes a policy decision. Certainly bureaucrats are rewarded for some decisions and punished for others; however, except for total institutions (such as prisons), people often have what Anthony Giddens calls the "power to do otherwise"—to act contrary to the policies within an institution (88). Thus, for Giddens, and for us, individuals within institutions—individuals such as WPAs—have "transformative capacity"—an agent's ability to "intervene in events in the world, thus producing definite outcomes" (88).

Because an institution must be maintained constantly, small modifications can lead to larger changes. As Stuart Blythe writes:

> Just as an ecological view of the environment prompts us to see the environment as a set of inter-related systems … so does an ecological view of organizations prompt us to see a given local institution as a series of inter-related systems. If changes in one system bring changes in others, then one's actions can have ripple effects in an organization. (10)

In the case of a college campus, the institution is maintained through an almost uncountable array of groups and processes. Any given campus is filled with faculty committees, administrative and accounting units, student organizations, grounds keeping crews, and so on. Moreover, these groups are governed by written procedures, accounting ledgers, and documentation and reporting processes. Because such documents can be revised, and because their wording can influence subsequent decisions, change may be

possible—for example, if policy is re-written and implemented or if space is allocated to a new program, thus assuring its recognition. We were trying to make the second point when we mentioned a "usability lab" (which Bousquet mischaracterizes as a "business writing lab"). Because "the existence of the lab signaled that serious work was going on … the usability lab became a key argumentative lever in securing administrative support for professional writing" (Porter, Sullivan, Blythe, Grabill, and Miles 629). In other words, a micro change in the allocation of space led to changes in the allocation of funds for other initiatives. Or, to use an ecological metaphor, a change in one system had a ripple effect that led to changes in other systems.

If institutions differ, so do managers within them

Just as Bousquet presents an abstracted perspective on institutions, so too does he misrepresent management practices. In Bousquet's work, all low-level managers are the same, whether in the military, industry, or higher education. Thus, he can equate the university with a Taco Bell, and WPAs with low-level managers in a restaurant chain—both of which are gross oversimplifications.[4] While it is true that writing program administrators are managers, we think it would be more useful to explore what management as an activity means—and, more importantly, what it *can* mean to do the work of management.

So what might a "management theory of agency" look like? It certainly doesn't look like the activity Bousquet dismisses as "pleasing the prince." In fact, a "theory of agency and a rhetoric of solidarity, aimed at constituting, nurturing, and empowering collective action by persons in groups" is consistent with certain management theories and practices and is very much like what we envisioned in our article ("Composition" 494).[5] But let's begin first with an example of what WPAs do. One of us (Jeff) functions as a type of writing program administrator. As Director of Professional Writing, he is responsible for coordinating the undergraduate major at the departmental level. As part of these duties, he is responsible for coordinating schedules and finding faculty to teach classes. However, he has no budget; he must ask for money from elsewhere. One place that the money comes from is another coauthor (Jim), who is also a WPA, though at the college level. Their department chair, who is also involved in budgets and scheduling, also functions as a WPA, as do at least two other colleagues who are responsible for mentoring and training new teachers and other issues related to labor. To be more precise, Jeff and Jim are both labor and management: Jeff can ask, for example, Jim to both teach a class in the major and fund his own teaching. Jim is both prince and pauper.[6]

In order to do part of one's work as a manager, a WPA clearly must be able to constitute, nurture, and empower collective action. One's colleagues, program, and department all constitute groups who must be able to act collectively if they are to act effectively. Is

the fact that the "group" action is insider action a disqualifying factor for real or true collective work? Are we really incapable of change, as Bousquet argues? Yes, probably, if we hold to his reduction of our theory of agency to the individual, heroic WPA. And yes, if again, management work is as institutionally simple as Bousquet portrays it. To return to Jeff's example, Bousquet's theory of agency and change—because it poorly understands how organizations actually work—cannot deal with a simple issue like money. Thus, he equates a budgetary scenario much like the one described here as fighting for low-level control of resources. A more nuanced understanding of how specific organizations work would focus on the budgetary process, on understanding how it works and how to leverage that process. Are we constrained? You bet … everybody is. That doesn't mean we are trapped. Effective institutional agents know how to work with constraints; a failure to do so will leave us with inadequate characterizations of university organizations and no way to imagine interventions.

Strategies, tactics, and unions

Because Bousquet demonstrates a deterministic, macro-level view of institutions and oversimplifies the concept of management, he places his faith for change in "social-movement unionism" ("Composition" 517). In other words, institutions are powerful and corrupt; therefore, change must come from those outside the power structures of the institution. That's where labor unionism comes in, in Bousquet's view—i.e., as a way to deal with the corrupt and oppressive upper administrator and the corporate system. We admit to some sympathy with this view. Yes, in some circumstances the only recourse *is* to play hard ball with the bastards. And at times this approach *has* worked in US labor history. We agree as well that union action can be an important strategy, although we want to complicate Bousquet's vision of how unionization can lead to institutional *change*.

Unpacking recent developments in the union movement demonstrates the interplay of micro-level actions with macro-level authorities and structures that we have been advocating. For example, one way to tell the story of unionization efforts is to focus on the cumulative effect of resistances and organizing efforts (micro-level actions) over time. Both the University of Massachusetts and the University of Illinois had been attempting some form of unionization since the 1970s ("A Brief History," "GEO History"). After more than 20 years, both now are recognized by the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) as the designated bargaining unit, so both have the right to negotiate with their administrations.[7] We would call these sustained campaigns over time, with different generations of graduate students using different tactics and techniques, an accumulation of micro-level actions that eventually contributed to a change in how each university does business. In both cases, the administrations were forced to concede and negotiate with union representation. In DeCerteauian terms, there were sustained tactics

(the tools of the weak) within a systematized strategy (the structures of power), creating a kairotic moment for institutional change.

Another way to tell the story, however, is from the institutional macro-structure side—in the legal language of the legislature. One of the many factors that allowed the groundswell of graduate student unions to be successful is enabling language within the law.

For private schools such as New York University, the key discursive move was a more recent interpretation of the 1935 National Labor Relations Act (NLRA, the law establishing a right to "form and assist labor organizations, bargain collectively, and to engage in concerted activities" such as sit-ins, work stoppages, and so on). The NYU case ruled that graduate assistants *do* fit the definition of "employee," thus ensuring them the rights accorded to other private sector employees (see also Duane, Vaughn). This ruling on behalf of graduate assistants stands in stark contrast to the 1980 *NLRB v Yeshiva University* decision, which defined faculty as "managerial employees" because of their role in shared governance, effectively denying faculty in private universities the right to organize.[8] Both prince and pauper again.

Public universities, on the other hand, are not covered under the NLRA, and therefore are governed by state labor laws. As Bousquet points out, these may vary greatly from state to state, and may be particularly difficult in those states traditionally hostile to labor interests (the so-called "right to work" states, such as the one where Bousquet resides). More than twenty public universities have been able to locate the fissures in their own state's labor laws and place their graduate assistants (and in some cases their adjunct faculty) in the category of "employee." Thus, for all intents and purposes, the legal ability for graduate assistants to organize is no longer disputed in either public or private universities.

The enabling legal structures (established through discourse) are part of the macro picture. At the same time, the exigence for that discourse was the cumulative effect of years of graduate assistant unions struggling for recognition. Such is the interaction of de Certeau's tactics and strategies, of Foucauldian resistance to discursive formation, of the micro/macro interplay we have articulated. Rather than showing an alternative to institutional critique as we have formulated, then, we would argue that Bousquet's unionization examples illustrate the confluence of factors quite ably, the interplay of micro-actions and resistances within macro-structures.

We have illustrated here a two-way path, with one representing a bottom-up approach to agency (long-term struggles using tactics), and the other representing a top-down authority (capital "I" institutional strategies such as laws). However, even the two components described above do not give a complex enough picture of how an effective institutional critique might work. One of us (Libby) lives in a union-rich state, with two nearby universities struggling for graduate assistant union recognition at the same time. The same laws apply; many of the same tactics were used. The two cases vary greatly, however. Graduate assistants at Brown University (private, ivy league, with a strong tradition of liberality)

continues their struggle for collective bargaining as they await an appeal of an NLRB decision granting recognition.[9] By contrast, the University of Rhode Island (public, land grant/sea grant/urban grant, with a strong tradition of being underfunded) went from its earliest graduate assistant unionization efforts to a vital first contract in an astonishing ten months. With similar tactics and strategies in place, what else is happening in the discursive fissures of these institutions?

We would like to see the URI case as an example of a concerted effort by many to do the right thing for the purposes of institutional critique—to change working conditions for the better. Somewhere between the micro and the macro, however, there needed to be other agents of change.

Michael G. Bailey, of the URI/AAUP/GAU, has identified several factors that contributed to the difference in cases between URI and Brown. In addition to enabling legislation, and the well-organized efforts of handful of committed graduate students (many of them from English, Rhetoric and Composition, and Communication Studies), three of the features Bailey outlines are worth commenting on here. First, the faculty strongly supported the graduate students in their efforts; in fact, the AAUP's Executive Committee voted unanimously to provide additional support for the graduate assistant union should their efforts succeed (practically speaking, this meant increased staff hours and a reconfigured job description for the Executive Director—both language acts). In contrast, Brown's faculty is not itself unionized, and did not support the organizing efforts of the graduate students (Bailey, Herzog). Second, because URI is a campus already housing seven other unions, the University's director of labor relations had a high comfort level with labor negotiations and the collective bargaining process, with communications mechanisms already in place.[10] Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the University's president had repeatedly failed in his attempts to increase graduate assistant stipends, and took an *actively passive* stance, publicly declaring that students should make the choice whether or not to unionize—another language act, and one that contradicts Bousquet's oversimplified characterization of administrators: "URI is an environment in which all but a handful of our employees belong to one collective bargaining unit or the other. If this is the choice the students want to make, why can't we make the process work for them?" (Carothers, quoted in Davis A8).[11]

What does all this mean in terms of institutional critique? At some level, the URI case speaks to the potential effectiveness of a strong confluence of factors from *both* bottom-up, *and* top-down, *as well as* so-called "intellectual bureaucrats" who know how and when to do the right thing. To be sure, this may appear to be exalting the role of the middle manager to hero status, but such a reading would miss the larger, more complicated picture we are painting here. Although Bousquet and others might now argue that we are trying to justify our own importance as WPA-type middle-managers, we are actually more interested in finding unexpected, per-

haps hidden, forms of agency in the discursive fissures within the structures of any institution. Sometimes those gaps reside within the sphere of what might be considered middle management. If so, so be it—let's use it.

Ethos and positionality

So far we have suggested that Bousquet's form of criticism is not likely to lead to meaningful institutional change. But then critiques such as his are not really aimed at change; their purpose is to establish a position. Bousquet implores the university to provide more tenure-stream jobs to replace part-time teachers, but, other than insisting on that change, he offers no action plan for implementing it. How does Bousquet propose to fund this proposal? How will Bousquet persuade upper administrators to reallocate hundreds of thousands of dollars from other parts of the university to the humanities? (Even to ask such questions positions us as dupes of the corporate university, according to Bousquet. We need to simply *insist* on economic justice.) More to the point, to ask such question is to commit to more subtle views of institutions and management work and to commit, frankly, to changing things. And in that respect, we see Bousquet's stance as part of the problem.

In "Composition as Management Science," Bousquet embodies the critical ethos of the Master Critic (see Sosnoski), criticizing the morality of the institution and standing for humanistic values. It's a well-established stance in literary theory. Master Critics enjoy much prestige and attention (while at the same time, as far as we can tell, effecting little lasting institutional change). We hasten to say, not all theory or theorists fall into this category. We see the work of some theorists (e.g., Jim Sosnoski, Jim Berlin) as on-the-ground, in-the-trenches work that attempts to change the institution through curricular and pedagogical revision and realignment. The Master Critic stands for the humanities, the arts, the individual, justice for the oppressed, all those important values eroding in the management university. Universities love such people—or at least a few of them. Even though they speak against the evil institution, the university is perfectly willing to support them because they provide a useful example of academic freedom (without really threatening to change the institution), and they do publish a lot. The University will credit that work with raises, promotions, and recognitions. Meanwhile, the WPA who is sacrificing her research and writing in order to build a respectable first-year curriculum and to keep class sizes from running through the roof can barely clear the tenure-promotion committee and enjoys none of the academic prestige or respect that the Master Critic enjoys. In fact, she even suffers scorn from that critic as a "low-level manager" in collusion with the evil university. Her work and her field are deemed "marginally respectable."

In contrast to Bousquet, we have tried to offer specific strategies for change. And some of us have established a very clear action plan designed to change the institutional hierarchies in which we

work: Move writing instruction out of the English Department, where it is undervalued. Put it into an academic unit, a writing department, where it will be valued. Gradually reallocate resources to support writing and writing instruction at the university. Make arguments incrementally to improve the infrastructure of support for writing: less reliance on part-time faculty overall; better working conditions for part-time faculty; smaller class sizes, etc. Three of the four of us have participated in dramatic institutional initiatives to improve writing instruction; three of four of us are now (or will soon be) in departments of writing (Jeff and Jim in the Department of Writing, Rhetoric, and American Cultures at Michigan State University; Libby in what she and colleagues hope will become the Department of Writing & Rhetoric at the University of Rhode Island). These departments are (or will be) humanities-based departments of writing, focused on teaching writing in socially, culturally, and critically aware ways. We know that administrators are willing to support such efforts when they can see reasonable arguments for doing so in terms that clearly benefit students, add value to the community, and add value to society at large.[12]

Conclusion: Reclaiming Pragmatism

An action plan that advocates a separate department of writing—one of many that we hoped institutional critique might help our colleagues imagine—is dismissed out-of-hand by Bousquet's positionality. We suspect that the establishment of a major and the significant institutional alterations that entails would be considered an easy given, much like the creation of computer classrooms—a "pragmatic" solution.[13] In fact, Bousquet alludes to a "pragmatic" movement in the field and suggests its dominance, and so we would like to end by reflecting on this term. We have never heard of a pragmatic movement in rhetoric and composition, and the label of "pragmatist" is not one we would readily accept (well, maybe some of us would more than others).

Pragmatism, of course, is a powerful and uniquely American philosophical tradition, associated with figures such as Charles Sanders Pierce, William James, John Dewey, Richard Rorty, and Cornel West. Not bad company. But we suspect that Bousquet didn't mean pragmatism in quite this way. By wielding the label as a club, he clearly means "a mere ideological cloak for corporate liberalism and managerial social engineering which [serves] the long-term interests of American capital …" (West , *Keeping* 103). Bousquet certainly meant to use the notion of pragmatism as synonymous with expediency and efficiency, with mere instrumentalism.

As Cornel West acknowledges, the "cloaked" version of pragmatism does exist, for philosophical pragmatists wear many colors. But the way in which Bousquet dismisses the pragmatic, either the philosophical or the instrumental, seems to come with an unfortunate cost—the cost of an action plan, in fact. We would like, there-

fore, to reclaim the position of pragmatist. As Cornel West characterizes pragmatism, it is "a diverse and heterogeneous tradition. But its common denominator consists of a future-oriented instrumentalism that tries to deploy thought as a weapon to enable more effective action. Its basic impulse is a plebian radicalism that fuels an antipatrician rebelliousness for the moral aim of enriching individuals and expanding democracy" (West, *American* 5). Furthermore, pragmatism is epistemically antifoundationalist, deeply suspicious of grand theories and narratives, and in the tradition of John Dewey, very much interested in institutional projects and interventions. While we utilized Critical Theory in our "Institutional Critique" article and find that tradition useful, it is useful to us because it requires action—indeed, sustained instrumental action—in order to enact the project to its fullest (philosophical critique-as-explanation is a job half-done). This is why Institutional Critique is a *methodology*, a sustained and systematic action, not merely a political position or strategy. It requires a commitment to certain ways of understanding institutions, an understanding with both epistemological and activist commitments. Pragmatism, too, insists on critique *and* action, a type of praxis that requires some imagination and commitment.

We want to suggest that what is needed is a bit more pragmatic work, not less of it. Indeed, a truly "pragmatic movement" in rhetoric and composition would be a good thing. We are thinking of something on the order of West's "prophetic pragmatism," or a position of "relentless critique … and democratic content" driving an action plan (*Keeping* 139; see also *American* chapter 6). Why? Because as we tried to make clear in our article, we reject any attempt to "stand outside" institutional life—whether those attempts are philosophical or strategic—as ontologically, epistemologically, and politically impossible as well as strategically ineffectual. We insist as well that as muddled and complicated as it is, institutional insider work is instrumentally necessary and intellectually rich—change simply will not happen without it. This is pragmatic, and we would love to see such a movement in rhetoric and composition.

Notes

[1]The university work force *is* becoming increasingly bifurcated: a shrinking pool of higher paid, tenure-stream research faculty at one end of the spectrum; a growing pool of underpaid staff and part-time workers (including those doing the bulk of undergraduate teaching) at the other end. In "The Waste Product of Graduate Education," Bousquet provides a valuable critique of the university's use of labor, in particular the oppressive use of its own students and the increasing reliance on part-time, underpaid, and unbenefitted instructors to handle a significant percentage of undergraduate teaching (especially but not exclusively in first-year composition courses).

[2]For example, we share Bousquet's concerns about the privatization of university education (privatization being the partner of corporatization). We see our students (and, in some cases, our children), both graduate and undergraduate, working more hours per week because of the rising cost of their education. The result is that it takes them longer to finish degrees; they suffer more personal stress (related to family and money, chiefly); they accumulate greater debt. As federal and state support for higher education shrinks, the cost for attending what used to be called "state-supported universities" is rising. State universities have already moved from "state-supported" to "state-assisted" (Penn State University is merely "state associated"). If the current course holds, we can expect that the large state universities will eventually become fully or mostly privatized. (Miami University of Ohio has already eliminated the difference between in-state and out-of-state tuition.) As a result of this trend, fewer students will be able to afford college. Those who do will have to spend more time working than studying, and they will accumulate greater debt. The educational gap between the privileged haves (whose families can afford to pay for their private education) and the underfinanced have nots (those who can't afford a college education without collecting massive debt) will increase. To address this severe problem will require a national-level discussion about the future of public funding for education at all levels.

[3]For most of the 19th century, English departments did not exist and the study of rhetoric was a prominent feature (if not the center) of the academic curriculum (see Halloran). What happened after the Civil War to change the curriculum? The decline of rhetoric and the emergence of the English Department is a fascinating and complex history, and it very much involves class, as higher education became more widely accessible to the middle class in the late 19th century (Halloran; Berlin). More students attended college; more middle-class students attended college; and, particularly with the emergence of land-grant institutions, college education became more widely accessible. (At the same time, however, university-level education became more technical and scientific, more tied to economic interests, less classical in its view of knowledge.)

One theory about why composition declined and English literature developed can be called "the Harvardization of the English Department" (Stewart, 1982), which occurred at the end of the 19th century. According Stewart, "the prestige and influence of the Harvard department, with its increasing emphasis on literary-critical scholarship, significantly helped cause the reduction of rhetoric and composition to second-rate status, despite the numbers of students enrolled in such courses" (121). Composition did not disappear within English Departments (because English needed the enrollment numbers that first-year composition provided), but it did decline. As Berlin's histories argue, a truncated form of rhetoric —"current-traditional rhetoric"—emerged (largely emanating from Harvard). That truncated rhetoric, according to Berlin, focused on limited matters of arrangement and style—and neglected invention

and public discourse. According to Berlin, this form of composition is "complicit with a politics designed to preserve the interests of corporate capitalism and the university-trained experts who serve it" (189).

So yes, Bousquet is right to recognize an approach to teaching college composition that is indeed "complicit with capitalism." However, that approach has been around far longer than Bousquet supposes; there have been more than "three decades of corporatization" (CMS 507). More like 13. The reemergence of rhetoric/composition as a serious field in the 1980s—i.e., the effort to resuscitate the composition curriculum, to revive the lost art of invention, and to focus on public discourse (what cultural studies rhetoric does) — is an effort to correct the limitations of current-traditional rhetoric, which has its institutional roots in English departments, and to re-establish rhetoric/composition as a serious field of academic inquiry (as it once was in the American university).

[4]Bousquet also grossly oversimplifies when he describes administrators. Not all administrators are corrupt and oppressive. Some would actually like to improve labor conditions and actually are willing to do so when they hear effective arguments that take into account practical realities. Consider the work of the URI president, mentioned later in this essay.

[5]We are thinking of Critical Management Theory (CMT), which has developed more fully in management and business schools in the UK and in Australia than in the US. CMT focuses "on how the profession and professional norms and institutions regulate, discipline, [and interact] in their respective domains [that are] shaped by explicit mechanisms of power and doxa" (Zald unpaginated). It is argued, of course, that Critical Theory is marginal to the core interests of professional schools and nearly invisible in the practice of managers, lawyers, teachers, and so on. This is in some sense true. But it is not necessarily true. Do all organizations oppress and alienate? Are there no examples of workplace relations that are ethical? More to the point for the type of scholarly and administrative work we were imagining, Critical Theory can and should be relevant to how we shape and conduct ourselves as professionals.

[6]Writing Center directors have similar subject positions as well, as both Stuart and Libby have found at separate institutions.

[7]University of Massachusetts graduate students began unionization attempts in 1976, and voted to become a local UAW chapter in 1990 (thus beginning negotiations). Their first contract took effect in 1991, a clear success. The graduate assistants at the University of Illinois, on the other hand, have been working toward unionization since the early 1970s, voted to become an AFT affiliate in 1997, but as of July 2003 have yet to reach a first contract (Smallwood).

[8]Although those outside the field may wonder why those of us in rhetoric and composition quibble over who has the power to determine key definitions, the NYU unionization case and subsequent court decision illustrate that definitions can be of great consequence. Definitions, and subsequent re-definitions, are often

where discursive fissures can be located and used. Location of fissures and redefinition and reconfiguration of terminology, we maintain, are part of the institutional critique process, and can be an example of institutional critique in action.

[9]The appeal, not incidentally, hinges on a definition of "employee."

[10]One telling statistic is that 74% of institutions *with* unionized graduate assistants also have unionized faculty (Julius & Gumport 2002).

[11]In a February 2002 memo to the Commissioner of Higher Education for the State of Rhode Island, URI President Robert Carothers wrote: "the University does not object to the Board proceeding to enter into collective bargaining with an appropriately certified representative of graduate student employees." By contrast, Brown University President Ruth Simmons actively tried to block the UAW's attempts to organize; she has been quoted as saying "I am prepared to fight this as hard as I can to prevent the unions from entering our university on behalf of our students" (quoted in Herzog).

[12]Do these departments have labor problems? Absolutely yes, particularly at Michigan State University, where the first-year composition teaching load was just raised to 28 credit hours per year for visiting assistant professors. In part, the increased load at MSU happened because the GEU won an improved contract for graduate teaching assistants. In response to the contract the administration did not provide more money for the enterprise of teaching first-year composition. Rather, the administration paid for the union "victory" by (a) reducing the number of available assistantships available to graduate students (putting a large number of graduate students out of work), and (b) increasing the teaching load of non-union labor. In other words, the administration just shifted resources, putting a greater burden on those without union representation (i.e., the visiting faculty teaching composition). In this case it is difficult to argue that a union victory resulted in institutional change. Certainly it did not lead to overall improvement in pay or working conditions for composition teachers.

[13]Such work isn't easy, of course, and as far as we know, has never been freely given by administrators who make such decisions. Majors, teaching space, and technologies designed for specific uses are extremely difficult to acquire.

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