Chapter 41. What Can We Do? Adopting an Anti-capitalist Framework in Writing Center Work

As the stories in this book detail, there are many places that our field and its workers are headed. Many look towards more sustainable and labor-forward models of writing center work. Some are changing jobs or leaving the profession altogether. Others still root their work in joy and pleasure. Yet, others challenge the very notion of writing center work as it is currently configured. These narratives show that members of the writing center community are reconsidering their orientation toward work and how our centers operate: expanding to communities, countercultures, and perhaps most especially to more collectivist approaches. In particular, we see examples in these stories of several strategic logics for anti-capitalism that Wright (2019) describes in his book including: *smashing*, *dismantling*, *taming*, *resisting*, and *escaping* capitalism, all of which he draws upon in formulating a broader strategy of *eroding* capitalism.

Below, we explore these strategies and what they might look like in implementation, going beyond the theoretical into action: both in our everyday labor as well as in our larger efforts for advocacy and solidarity. And although we favor some approaches and paradigms over others, we do not necessarily prescribe them. That said, in this project, we elide "smashing capitalism" for reasons of moral value and our own skepticism. For one, the inherent metaphors for and appeals to violence in this more revolutionary strategy may be at odds with what we believe to be our field's values if not our own. Secondly, we feel that what amounts to a student service in the university system is frankly an unlikely place to amass the power necessary to destroy capitalism and is thus well beyond the scope of this book. Third and finally, Wright (2015) himself cautions readers that "Capitalism is not smashable, at least if you really want to construct an emancipatory future" (p. 22).

Instead, we invite readers to unlearn internalized capitalism (guidance provided in the section above) even as they imagine a world where the bottom line doesn't determine decision-making for our work. Imagine a space where outcomes might be measured differently from a Fordist model of appointments completed or students served. Imagine a space where you have an idea, initiative, or goal, and money is freely forthcoming without the need to leap through bureaucratic hoops. Imagine, in other words, a culture where capitalism–and its extractive short-term policies of harm–does not rule the day. If crisis and austerity do not dictate our work experiences, we imagine all kinds of progress that can be made. We imagine innovation and community work. We also imagine higher job satisfaction. So, in short, we don't need to labor within an extractive

system in order to do good work. We don't need to always be borrowing against our own well-being–or the well-being of our workers–to do a good job. Writing centers cannot solve the ills of capitalism on their own. But they *can* be a part of the solution, and they *can* provide an example for others to emulate in collectively solving it. Beyond the everyday experiences of our individual centers, anti-capitalism work also lies in coalition building, and we believe that laying out intentional strategies in this section will help our field to assemble collective actors. Wright (2019) observes that "Strategies don't just happen; they are adopted by people in organizations, parties, and movements" (p. 28). Writing centers, while always imbricated in larger neoliberal and capitalist projects, can also be spaces where we can advocate not only for our class interests, but for our moral values in anti-capitalist efforts beyond the institutions to which we are bound.

The suggestions below are direct ways in which we can erode capitalism, perhaps not wholesale or systemically, but in our day-to-day labor and administrative work. Some of these actions are collective, some are individual, some are both. We hope you can take away from the following section useful actions and goals to make your labor more sustainable and pleasurable.

Dismantling Capitalism

Wright (2019) contrasts the strategy of dismantling capitalism with smashing capitalism. Whereas smashing necessitates a rupture of the current order, dismantling is a means of changing conditions piece by piece. Dismantling capitalism starts with rejecting privatization, embracing social programs, and encouraging state-directed reform (p. 19). While many aspects of dismantling have become unfashionable after World War II–particularly as states became more capitalist–dismantling remains a key strategy in eroding capitalism. Rather than a singular disruption, dismantling as a strategy envisions a coexistence between capitalist and alternative models until there is a gradual process of replacement from the former to the latter. It is an incrementalist model.

Some efforts may seem more likely than others. For example, writing centers often reject privatization of their services through outsourcing to for-profit corporations. Other efforts, like a state-directed reform of educational policy, seem less likely given the current political climate and taste for regulation in most sectors. Embracing more equitable, accessible programs, then, might occur as a bottom-up rather than a top-down approach. Below, we detail some of the keys to engaging in dismantling–namely, "never go it alone" and the critical importance of information gathering and sharing–and provide some ways that writing center administrators and other writing center workers can engage in dismantling actions across an institution. The point here is to reject neoliberalism through coalition building and collectivist pressure campaigns. To launch such dismantling work, one needs as much information (institutionally *and* field-wide) as possible. Knowledge really *is* power in anti-capitalist work.

The work of dismantling (as with many of these strategies) starts with building coalitions, gathering information, making allies, and networking across campus. In Act II, we see variations on this sort of work in Bond's narrative–"Growing Like Moss: Theorizing the Labor of Writing Center Placemaking"–about allowing the writing center to grow like moss, rhizomatic and purposive; not with unlimited expansion, but rather as nurturing what will be sustained and appropriate for the entity. Similarly, we see it in Tirabassi's narrative–"Advocating for Equitable Tutor Pay with Campus Partners"–where she describes collaborating with assorted campus stakeholders to ensure that *all* student worker wages were increased, not solely those of her tutors. We also see it in the work detailed by a union representative in "From the Archive of A Tutor Representative's Email Correspondences (Summer 2022)" by Anonymous. There are also times, however, where coalition fails, such as in Lucy's story "Counterstory: Ignored Labor with a Writing Center." Here, a good faith but exploited actor, Lucy, works to build a community around writing center best practices but fails because a learning commons director does not see the value in this work. So, while coalitions can be built, they are often time consuming and rely on good faith investment from community stakeholders.

Since the writing center director is often the sole full-time (or benefitted, one might argue, if not full-time) employee, many of these actions might fall to them. This is not to say, however, that the writing center director cannot connect their workers with similar kinds of educational workers throughout the institution or take other actions to bring people together. In fact, it is likely that they get the ball rolling on networking and coalition building among organizations on campus that have service missions, that employ student labor, and that are public-facing. These actions help to dismantle capitalism at the institution by creating a collectivist sense of labor, sharing information about working conditions and wages, and banding together to advocate for better working conditions and wages. Such coalition building brings along other workers (like graduate students through graduate council, through student unions, student governance, etc.) in their center and, perhaps, at other tutoring and informal educational spaces on campus.

Additionally, because writing center directors arguably have access to professional organizations such as International Writing Centers Association, Council of Writing Program Administrators, and the College Composition and Communication, etc. over time, they are more likely to be able to further collect information that rejects the fast education movement which encourages poorly trained, deskilled labor with a high turnover rate. In place of this, writing center directors can deliberately invest in their workers through professional development opportunities like training, attending conferences and networking events, and conducting research work and other duties typically reserved for more seasoned, permanent, and better paid employees. This model of worker flourishing is one that many in our field already engage and that several contributors also detailed in their stories.

Yet, another way to liaise with professional organizations includes conducting information gathering among colleagues, organizations, and field-specific

databases like the National Census of Writing or Purdue's Writing Center Research Project Survey about the state of the field. This can include collecting salary information for different pay rates for different kinds of administrators (faculty, professional, adjunct, etc.) and tutors (peer, graduate, professional, etc.) through AAUP Faculty Compensation Survey (https://www.aaup.org/our-work/research/FCS), IPEDs peer data (https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/use-the-data), Writing Center Research Project Survey (Purdue) (https://owl.purdue.edu/research/writing_centers_research_project_survey.html), National Census of Writing (https://writingcensus.ucsd.edu/); collecting information on standard (and non-standard) job positions in the field; securing grants for under-resourced centers; advocating for center sponsorship and partnership between well-resourced and under-resourced centers as a kind of wealth redistribution; creating coalitions of writing centers who have similar missions and student demographics.

We find this last avenue of consideration to be a particularly potent means of expanding access. Equality, specifically equality of access, is one of the normative foundations of Wright's (2019) anti-capitalist framework. Wright (2019) contrasts equal access and equal opportunity; whereas opportunity takes a more individualistic approach (which could be satisfied, say, with a lottery), equal access emphasizes actual access to the material and conditions that would allow for a flourishing life (p. 5). In the context of writing centers, some centers are funded at levels surplus to their needs and are thus able to pursue interesting and important research projects, community partnerships, and more. But we would ask the field to imagine a way to more equitably distribute that surplus, whether by asking more established and financed centers and programs to consider developing funds through regional organizations to help struggling centers; asking those centers to consider contributing more to professional organizations' travel- and support-oriented scholarships for conferences; asking our professional organizations to facilitate more needs assessment among their member institutions; and more. Our organizations could also provide guidance and resources to advocate for more stable tenure stream positions and labor organizing.

Taming Capitalism

The focus of taming capitalism lies in reducing its harms (e.g., exploitation, wage theft, precarity, extraction) through "reforms that introduce in one way or another egalitarian, democratic and solidaristic values and principles into the operation of capitalism" (p. 21). A "more humane economic system" (p. 21) is a cornerstone of this particular action. There are many ways that we might "tame" the adverse effects of late-stage capitalism on writing center work.

As one of the narratives in this project asserts "I've got a Secret," leveraging the accreditation process may be one of the most powerful means available to writing centers to tame capitalism. Colleges and universities in the United States all undergo accreditation and re-accreditation processes. Re-accreditation

processes occur on a ten-year cycle, though there are often check-ins before and after the major re-accreditation process. An accredited institution maintains education standards, which impacts qualification for federal monies, acceptability of transfer credit, and student enrollment.

The process of accreditation (https://sacscoc.org/accrediting-standards/reaffirmation-process/) is labor-intensive and involves many different internal and external committees. This process can be (and often is) a sign and a result of encroaching neoliberal logics on education. For instance, Moore et al. (2016) shared assorted concerns around the shift to larger scale assessments and accreditation, including big data, the increasing prominence of private educational assessment companies and their role in facilitating standardized assessment, and the shift from accountability to comparability between universities. That said, several case studies such as those in *Reclaiming Accountability* (O'Neill & Crow, 2016) demonstrate that large-scale accreditation-supported initiatives can be a site to leverage productive change for both programs and institutions. We see this shift, too, as a) a means to leverage resources to writing centers and thus improve working conditions, and b) a way to represent our expertise and praxis to accreditors and retain some autonomy in accreditation processes. In short, if we more purposefully integrate our work into some of the instruments of accreditation, we may receive the support to do what we have already been doing; if we fail to, we may be subject to the regulation and mandates without such support–our metalabor thus remains invisible.

The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) provides an interesting template to consider. SACSCOC accredits Southern colleges and universities in the United States. For the reaffirmation process, SACSCOC requires the creation of an institutional committee of faculty, staff, and administrators. That committee develops a quality enhancement plan (QEP) which is then shared with the entire institution. Students are also involved in this accreditation process. After an initial off-site review of the compliance certification, which results in a report, an on-site committee is created, which includes nearly a dozen administrative and faculty members from other institutions. They review different elements of the QEP, as well as core requirements and standards (related to things like the clarity of financial policies, the preparedness of faculty, the success of student support services, etc.). The on-site committee also creates a report and a response to the QEP. These materials are then, in turn, reviewed by SACSCOC Board of Trustees (BoT), who put forth a recommendation to reaffirm accreditation. This, in turn, is shared with the executive council, who recommends action to the BoT, who then finalizes their decision.

The process of accreditation and reaffirmation–a process specific to SACSCOC–aims to create a kind of consensus among an institution's community for the focus of an assessment and implementation plan (say, for improving outcomes from first year writing). There are several opportunities for a writing

center administrator to become involved. From the initial QEP and reaffirmation planning committee, to the on-site visit, there are many chances to share research and assessment outcomes about the writing center that otherwise might not see the light of day. Furthermore, putting peer writing tutors in front of the on-site committee is a critical way to demonstrate the work of the writing center.

At the same time, accreditation is perhaps one of the places where we can advocate for recognition of our work alongside changes to how that work is done. Arguing for best practices and workplace standards for student support work, for example, can help to impact how accreditors evaluate the work of a writing center. If not up to par, this is a chance to advocate for more resources, better and more ethical practices, and, of course, regional standards for sustainable and regulated tutoring.

Advocate Through Accreditors

- Involve your writing center in your institution's accreditation process (https://www.chea.org/regional-accrediting-organizations).
- Provide research and assessment about the writing center to your institution's re-accreditation committee.
- Develop–through regional affiliates or main professional organization–workplace guidelines for best practices in tutoring work that includes basic resourcing requirements.
- Below, we share a template (Appendix B) that individual writing center directors can share with their regional accreditation board advocating for how the writing center ought to be assessed in the accreditation process.

As a note, we are not the first people who have asked for the International Writing Centers Association (IWCA) to develop worker and workplace standards for writing centers. An open letter shared in summer 2020 with the organization demanded a statement on the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement and the treatment of BIPOC people in writing center work. Another open letter demanded COVID-19 policies for academic workers. Still other individuals have advocated for research and response to erosion in our field's tenure stream job market. In the end, the COVID-19 workplace policy was never formalized, and the open letter on BLM and anti-racism work in writing centers became part of a larger initiative that, ironically, did not create a workplace statement or set of standards. Similarly, the job market work was sidelined despite researchers' findings that traced and predicted a drastic fall off in tenure stream academic writing center administrator positions. In over three decades of operation, IWCA has passed only seven position statements, most of which we feel do not address the material realities of our work or put forth best practices and standards that regulate our field. In comparison, Council of Writing Program Administrators and Conference on College Composition and Communication both include position

statements that directly address workplace issues like bullying, contingent labor, evaluating writing program administration labor for promotion and tenure, etc. College Composition and Communication has an entire section of their website devoted to working conditions. Yet, these other organizations–though they are also involved in writing center work and likely represent writing center administrators who also do other administrative work–do not include any statements specific to writing centers. Our working conditions, then, seem to matter less than others working in writing studies, which, we argue, is a canary in the coal mine issue. If stable writing center administrator positions continue to disappear, this will likely have a domino effect on other writing administrator positions, such as writing program directors, WAC/WID directors, etc. Therefore, we need to put forth field-specific standards for writing center administrators but, also, other workers.

Advocate for Field-Specific Standards

- Identify some of the greatest workplace challenges currently facing writing center workers (e.g., precarity, poor payment, confusing or unclear hiring lines, mental health concerns, healthcare policies, privatization, and outsourcing issues).
- Put forward position statements specifically addressing the challenges currently impacting workers and working conditions as well as ways to address these issues.
- Provide workshops, seminars, and other field-wide conversations around job negotiation strategies, creating memoranda of understanding (MOUs), clarifying hiring lines, and, even, guidance on developing field-specific positions and job ads.
- Create a list of best practices for the hiring and labor of writing center workers, just like WPA provides for WPAs, and for writing instructors.
- Develop a writing-center-specific certification and external review wing, much like the WPA consultant-evaluator panel.

Finally, professional organizations that are run on volunteer labor may not necessarily be the ideal spaces to advocate for workplace standards and aggressive worker advocacy. Other disciplines often hire and compensate the leaders of professional organizations and journal editors, which changes the production cycle, the balance of paid and unpaid labor, and the general functioning of these organizations. At the same time, however, most workers turn to unions and collective bargaining for sustained workplace advocacy and support. We place the action of labor organizing in the section below (resisting), however, one can argue that early trade union development responded to early capitalism, attempting to both tame and resist worker exploitation. So unionization efforts can fall into both of these categories.

Resisting Capitalism

Dismantling capitalism, like taming capitalism, as Wright (2019) explains, requires high levels of cooperation and coalition-building. Each approach seeks to use state, or, in our context, institutional power to regulate the negative outcomes of capitalism. That is, to dismantle or tame the influence of neoliberalism in our institutions or writing centers, we must rely on the apparatus of the institution itself.

In contrast, resisting capitalism "seeks to affect the behavior of capitalists and political elites through protest and other forms of resistance outside of the state. We may not be able to transform capitalism, but we can defend ourselves from its harms by causing trouble, protesting, raising the costs to elites of their actions" (Wright, 2019, p. 22). Resisting thus lies outside of existing or proscribed state/institutional structures. This strategy may involve smaller-scale organizing within the institution or through individual acts of resistance.

Unionization is one such means to resist capitalism. While some of the effects of the labor movement also seek to tame capitalism through regulation, we feel this model–because of its grassroots action often outside official institutions–should be discussed in this subsection. Yet, because of the erosion of the labor rights movement from the 1970s until quite recently, academic unionization is the kind of work that takes place in fits and spurts. As labor historian Mattson (2000) notes, there is a strange relationship between academics and their work. At the same time that there was a movement of unionization happening in the late 1990s and early 2000s among graduate students at Yale, New York University, University of Maryland, and University of Washington and adjunct workers at Miami Dade Community College and state colleges across New Jersey, there was also resistance to unionization from tenured faculty. Arguing that academic labor still followed a guild model where apprentice workers like graduate students become more trained and better paid as Assistant- and then tenured-professors, many secure academics have assumptions about academia that are anti-union, even as they profess otherwise progressive politics (Mattson, 2000, pp. 5-7).

Academia works on "paternalistic and individual training" (Mattson, 2000, p. 6). Yet, with the adjunctification of the academic workforce–60 percent when Mattson (2000) was writing and closer to 71 percent more recently (Culver & Kezar, 2021)–this medieval guild model of academic labor falls apart. Instead, as Mattson (2000) noted, a small number of secure people sit at the top of the workforce hierarchy while the bottom three quartiles struggle to make ends meet. This very issue actually led to guild worker reform in the mid-19th century as more apprentices and journeymen realized they would never become master craftsmen (p. 6). While Mattson (2000) identified a movement taking place in 2000, this, of course, did not foresee the anti-union policies put into place during the second decade of the 21st century, such as right-to-work legislation in two dozen states and a Supreme Court Ruling that eroded unions through ruling that they cannot require workers to pay fees thereby prohibiting required member fees.

The academic labor movement has struggled to develop and articulate a sense of class consciousness for decades. We see this in TT faculty failing to adequately support unionization, but even more so failing to organize unions of their own. We posit that this is due to a lack of class consciousness among many–not all–in tenure-stream academic positions, particularly those outside of the Writing and Rhetoric field, which are still dominated by a small and select group of elite institutions (Flaherty, 2022). This struggle is further demonstrated and commented upon in several of the stories in Act II. For example, in "Writing Center as Life Raft," an anonymous contributor notes "Narratives have more power for people who are working class, who come from nothing and have nothing, and who have had to carefully learn the 'rules' and how to navigate the system." Both Giaimo in "Boundless" (this collection) and Witt in "'Fucking Up' and Listening in the Writing Center" (this collection) share similar stories of struggling with class consciousness and the implicit rules and narratives that underwrite this system in the workplace.

Beyond the assumptions around a guild-like model of labor that requires years of investment, subjugation, and, ultimately, reward, there are also structural and legal barriers that prevent tenure-track faculty from either seeing their work as labor or seeing themselves as part of a labor class that needs union support. One systemic enactment that separates tenured and tenure track faculty from their fellow academic workers is the 1980 Supreme Court Yeshiva ruling (Lieberwitz, 2013), which made it illegal for tenure track and tenured faculty at private universities and colleges to form a union as they are classified as managerial. This kind of stratification of academic workers impacts both how these workers are classified (and the benefits and protections they are given), but, more insidiously, they create worker factions by separating out those with power from contingent workers. Despite recent drives to unionize adjunct and non-tenure track faculty at private institutions like Bates College (Neumann, 2021), it is still rare to have tenure and tenure-track faculty support for such drives. Additionally, institutions with money and power, like Northeastern University, have vigorously fought the formation of a graduate student union (Bernstein, 2017). In Act II, one anonymous contributor ("From the Archive," this collection) details some of the laborious work of union advocacy and representation for contingent workers, describing the ways in which management freezes these workers out of decision making around their center and jobs. Wall-to-wall organizing of different types of workers in the university–like the recent strike at Rutgers in 2023–appears to be one of the more efficacious ways to organize in higher education.

Despite local and often federal antagonism towards unionization, there have been a number of high-profile drives in the past few years that were likely spurred by the pandemic. Workers at an Amazon warehouse in Staten Island (Weise & Scheiber, 2022), at Starbucks locations in Buffalo, Rochester, Ithaca, Kansas City, and Manhattan–among many other sites–have all voted in favor of forming a

union (Molla, 2022). In academia, between 2013 and 2019–years when some of the most repressive state and Federal rulings against unions and workers' rights were passed–188 faculty unions were certified or recognized (Flannery, 2020). This momentum has only gathered steam during the COVID-19 pandemic (Wakamo, 2021) as working conditions have deteriorated and real wages have dropped significantly alongside major institutional restructuring, hiring freezes, and other workforce planning decisions that took away jobs from many academic workers across the United States.

In a lot of ways, we have come a long way since 2000, largely because academia is so broken. The majority of academic workers will never be on the tenure track. Graduate students who traditionally went into professional academic higher ed teaching careers now regularly talk about alternative academic careers and union drives. And the COVID-19 pandemic has clearly demonstrated that our administrators care more about the bottom line than worker or student safety. We know that collective bargaining can resist the extractive effects of capitalism through advocating for and securing better wages, workplace conditions, benefits, democratic governance, and a host of other worker-forward interventions. So, whenever possible, we urge readers to consider unionizing as a critical piece of the regulation work that is involved in resisting capitalism. Below, we include advice for unionization and collective bargaining, including a guide (Appendix C) to running a union drive.

Unionization and Collective Bargaining

- Work with local American Association of University Professors and union chapters to assess working conditions and gauge interest in forming a union.
- Consider enrolling (individually or as a group) in one of UC Berkeley Labor Center's workshops (https://laborcenter.berkeley.edu/workshops-leadership-schools/), which include multi-day intensive training, or course-based models that range from 200 dollars to 1,500 dollars and cover anywhere from 1 to 20 people, depending on the program.
- Consult with lawyers on the feasibility of forming a union.
- If faculty at private universities and colleges, consider alternative options like a minority or members-only union.
- Connect with local teaching and service unions (e.g., National Education Association, American Federation of Teachers, or Service Employees International Union) to undertake a union drive (Appendix C) that excites, educates, and organizes adjuncts, professional staff, and other non-tenure track faculty.
- Encourage student workers to unionize (Perkins, 2022).
- If you already have union representation, ask to join the bargaining committee as a representative.

Escaping Capitalism

We acknowledge that a great deal of what we outline above will no doubt result in still more metalabor for writing center workers. We would add the caveat, however, that this work is necessary to ultimately reduce the sorts of metalabor less in line with our values. We offer a final set of strategies that would help reduce this less-meaningful sort of metalabor through what Wright (2019) describes as *escaping* capitalism, which is an effort "to try to insulate ourselves from the damaging effects of capitalism, and perhaps escape altogether its ravages in some sheltered environment" (p. 23). Existing scholarship and practices in writing centers already echo many of the values and work of escaping capitalism. One can see parallels, for example, between the sorts of sites we seek to foster on campus and Wright's (2019) description of how "Workers cooperatives attempt to create workplaces organized around principles of democracy, solidarity and equality, free of the alienation and exploitation of capitalist firms" (p. 23). Although there are inherent power differentials between directors and tutors (and other paraprofessionals involved in writing center work), the ethos of writing centers is often embedded in democratic and egalitarian practices within our spaces. Even beyond the culture and practices we may foster within our centers, there are strategies for escaping capitalism for individuals, such as pleasure activism, so-called quiet quitting, setting firm boundaries, or even leaving.

Pleasure Activism

While leaving and quiet quitting (or drawing hard boundaries around work) are very much in the cultural zeitgeist with the Great Resignation, we believe that this other, less discussed, strategy of pleasure activism is one that merges social justice with practices found in Zen Buddhism like non-attachment and loving-kindness to subvert oppression. Additionally, strategies like leaving or quiet quitting are also included in pleasure activism, as we detail below in the "pleasure principles" brown (2019) created below.

In Act II's collection of stories, several talk about how community care and the flexibilities of work and mentorship help workers to thrive in their positions. For example, Anand discusses the importance of a mentor in shaping professional and personal development ("Thank you for Carrying Me Through, Thank You for Your Labor"). Molly Ryan details the process of coming out as queer over and over again to support others in the writing center in "Coaching Queerly: Healing in Writing Center Work." Mary Elizabeth Skinner & Jaclyn Wells in "Labor of Love: Managing the Writing Center and New Motherhood during the Pandemic" discuss how work sharing and flexible work schedules help them to take parental leave. Another example of how intentional work policies can be enacted to support one's work-life balance comes from this collection's "Care and work/spaces: Writing center labor during COVID-19," where Janine Morris shares caring for her terminally ill mother

during the COVID-19 pandemic. Here, flexible work policies allow Janine to return to Canada to care for her dying mother without fear of job loss or missing work. Finally, Oluwatosin Mariam Junaid finds joy in tutoring work and the fellowship of shared practice during the COVID-19 pandemic in "What the Covid-19 pandemic taught us about writing center work: The joys of a tutor at the Laboratory of Academic Literacy (LLAC)" (this collection). Here, the joys of the work and the gifts that this field can give us are facilitated by mutual aid, community care, flexible work policies, mentorship, and pleasure-centered work.

According to maree brown (2019), pleasure activism is "the work we do to reclaim our whole, happy, and satisfiable selves from the impacts, delusions, and limitations of oppression and/or supremacy" (p. 11). While brown (2019) discussed pleasurable activities that might seem separate from intellectual (or even paid) work such as food, fashion, humor, the erotic, the arts, "passion work," she also recognizes that there are "policies and power dynamics inside of everything that makes us feel good" (p. 11). brown (2019) also recognized that pleasure in a capitalist society is bound with precarity, oppression, and scarcity. In engaging in pleasure activism–particularly focusing on "those most impacted by oppression"–we can tap "into the potential goodness in each of us [even as] we can generate justice and liberation, growing a healing abundance where we have been socialized to believe only scarcity exists" (brown, 2019, p. 11). Pleasure activism, then, in a real sense can combat the deleterious effects of toxic work culture like workism, burnout, bullying, and racism. In embracing the collective and focusing on abundance (rather than scarcity) and "passion work" (rather than optimization) we can be more joyous and satisfied, even as we "bring about social and political change" (brown, 2019, p. 12).

Pleasure activism includes practices that can be applied, as brown (2019) has noted, to one's work life as much as one's social life. Some of these–like saying "no" to say "yes" later, or moderation is the key, are themes that are echoed in many of the stories in this book. Others like "riding the line between commitment and detachment" or "we become what we practice" are strategies that have analogues in Zen Buddhism and mindfulness work (p. 12). Engagement in specific consistent behavioral and thought practices, and practicing non-attachment are keys to spiritual practice. They can also teach us important lessons about how we approach work and the limiting factors beyond the self at work. All of this, we hope, will help people to have more healthy work lives and, also, leave room for more positive feelings like contentment, joy, and, hopefully, pleasure.

Pleasure activism, however, is inherently political and concerned with the work of social justice and liberation, particularly anti-racist work and racial liberation; it is not hedonistic, despite the use of the term pleasure. As maree brown (2019) noted: "pleasure is not one of the spoils of capitalism. It is what our bodies, our human systems, are structured for; it is the aliveness and awakening, the gratitude and humility, the joy and celebration of being miraculous" (p. 13). brown (2019) observes a natural abundance in the world and pleasure activism taps into

that abundance. Yet, even the concept–not just the practice–of pleasure is denied to so many of us because it is so often the purview of those who are wealthy, able, white, and straight enough to enjoy it. Returning to the collective, and combining it with pleasure activism, one can imagine alternative work (and social) spaces that tap into positive feelings while orienting towards social justice. Many writing centers are already trying to do this work, though we do not explicitly characterize it as pleasure or joy.

So, for different people, expression of pleasure activism might look quite different and have vastly different implications and outcomes. For our BIPOC colleagues, pleasure activism might be a matter of life or death, as Neisha-Anne Green (2018) detailed in her International Writing Centers Association keynote when discussing Black Lives Matter activists facing burnout and struggling with suicidal ideation or navigating her own dangerous experiences with racism in the workplace. For our white colleagues, this might include engaging in pleasure activism that is oriented towards racial justice and liberation; work that centers joy but also justice. This might include new workplace policies that protect and support workers, celebrating workers–especially BIPOC workers. It might include reimagining the work of the writing center as one that is both justice-oriented AND pleasurable, perhaps even occurring outside the university or college.

We often talk about a love of work, but really we mean pleasure and passion as they relate to work but also extend outside labor and production, as maree brown (2019) identified. Untangling our feelings about work and how we situate ourselves in our work (or do not) helps to build healthier and joyous connections to our work, even as it also helps us to escape the more toxic effects of late-stage capitalism such as exploitation and oppression. This approach allows us to alter our relationship to work to one that is meaningful, socially just, and outside the typical bounds of neoliberal institutions.

Pleasure Principles (adopted from maree brown, 2019, p. 12)

- What you pay attention to grows.
- We become what we practice.
- We feel pleasure when we make decisions and live into them.
- When we are happy, it is good for the world.
- The deepest pleasure comes from riding the line between commitment
- and detachment.
- Make justice and liberation feel good.
- Your “no” makes the way for your “yes.”
- Moderation is key.

Quiet Quitting, Work to Rule, and Drawing Hard Work Boundaries

The term *quiet quitting* has gained traction in popular discourse in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic although the term itself is somewhat controversial. As

a recent article in the *Guardian* characterizes it:

> Rather than working late on a Friday evening, organizing the annual team-building trip to Slough or volunteering to supervise the boss's teenager on work experience, the quiet quitters are avoiding the above and beyond, the hustle culture mentality, or what psychologists call "occupational citizenship behaviors." (Tapper, 2022)

In short, *quiet quitting* generally refers to the trend of people consciously (quietly) refusing to go above and beyond the existing and explicit expectations around performance and productivity in their work, or, specifically, working only to one's contractual obligations.

That said, even the term itself is couched in capitalist ideologies. Ed Zitron, publisher of the labor-focused newsletter, *Where's Your Ed At*, explained in an interview with *National Public Radio* that "The term 'quiet quitting' is so offensive, because it suggests that people that do their work have somehow quit their job, framing workers as some sort of villain in an equation where they're doing exactly what they were told" (Kilpatrick, 2022). Workism–or work as a spiritual pursuit above most other elements of one's life–is associated with so many industries has become an object of increasing scrutiny, leading many to wonder if their work and the focus on it is in line with their actual values. While we acknowledge the controversial nature of the term, we invite readers to consider its rhetorical potency and the term's reclamation as a form of resistance itself.

Quiet quitting is an opportunity to examine our priorities as laborers: what is essential to our work, and what is ticking boxes? What can be done minimally or de-emphasized to make room for the sorts of labor we see as meaningful and that will lead to flourishing? Being mindful and purposive about that prioritization may also free up the time and emotional reserves necessary to do the sorts of metalabor we describe in other forms of eroding capitalism. Rather than seeing quiet quitting as a neglect of our duties, we see it as a call to quietly escape some of the more panoptic and regulatory forms of neoliberalism that have intruded on our work–a call to be able to define and pursue our duties on our terms.

Another–more pro-worker–term for quiet quitting is *work to rule*, which is a coordinated union action where workers follow their contracts to the letter and perform their duties and nothing more. This kind of approach ends up being disruptive because it slows down productivity–even though the workers are doing their jobs–because it demonstrates all the ways in which job descriptions and duties have been encroached upon and how additional duties creep into everyday work. In performing work to rule, workers (and unions) educate management on how it is only by the largess of workers, and perhaps because of their precarity, that work gets done at the speed and quality that we often come to expect. Unlike quiet quitting, which negatively connotes a worker's choice to only perform the core duties of their job, work to rule is an empowering action often used during contract negotiation.

It brings to the fore the fragile ecosystem of a workplace where fewer workers are expected to perform double or even triple duty because of cutbacks, efficiencies, or understaffing. Work to rule, however, need not be coordinated by a union–though collective worker action packs more of a punch to productivity. It can be done individually and, as opposed to quiet quitting, openly as a way to advocate for job position changes, additional staffing, and other workplace interventions.

So while many of the stories in this book discuss establishing work boundaries and work boundaries that are transgressed, work to rule can function as a guiding framework for setting firm, explicit boundaries around work and duties. Below, we share some practices common in work to rule that can be adopted even without collective action, though through collective action it is likely that more workplace demands will be met . . .

Guide to Work to Rule

- **Ensuring** that job descriptions are up-to-date and accurate, so that laborers perform only the essential and core functions of the job.
- **Knowing** what your contract says and sticking to it.
- **Refusing** additional uncompensated service, teaching, or administrative tasks.
- **Setting** hard work/life boundaries, with work taking up roughly 8 hours per weekday and no more.
- **Refusing** to respond to email during non-work hours or paid or sick leave.
- **Resisting** pressure to attend unpaid social or off-hours events.
- **Asking** for additional compensation to undertake additional work.
- **Making** use of vacation days, sick leave, and paid time off.
- **Refusing** to take on additional tasks without them being added to job descriptions.

We suspect that many directors post-pandemic have begun to interrogate their work-life balance and setting firmer work boundaries, as Johnston's story "The First Year: A New Director's Experience" shares, "What is more challenging is advocating for myself. That's the part I'm continually working on. I'm making appointments across campus with administrators to advocate for increased funding. I'm learning to be loud. I'm learning to say no" (this collection). Boundary-setting can be intimidating for workers, and it may mark workers as difficult or uncooperative. That said, we wonder what would happen if you said "no?" Would the potential loss of capital force the institution to see the center differently–to see *you* differently?

Leaving

Finally, we want to observe that leaving the job is an option for those seeking to escape the labor conditions inherent in writing center work in our contemporary

climate of neoliberalism and austerity. "From Dream Job to Unsustainable" (Anonymous, this collection) and Cheatle in "Moving On to Move Up" (this collection) share two different types of leaving–leaving the profession entirely or engaging in hyper-mobility within the profession to secure a more sustainable position. Though it may seem obvious, leaving a job can be one of the most empowering choices one can make. We've spoken about the Great Resignation at several points in this book, but it bears repeating here: once workers realized that their work was not compensating them what they were worth and began resigning en masse, *wages and benefits increased dramatically* (Bruner, 2022). Indeed, given the expanded opportunities in the private sphere as a consequence of the Great Resignation–or reshuffling as some have found most moved into other positions, eventually–higher education will have to compete if they wish to retain competent workers.

And though it may sound heretical, we ask: should a field that is sustained by exploitive practices be sustained? If administrators are not willing to adequately resource and support an apparatus that we know to provide them a return on investment through retention and other measures, why are we enabling it? Why are we taking on so much extra, uncompensated labor to perpetuate this system? In addition to some of the stories shared here–which detail the decision to leave or being forced to leave their jobs–we personally know of several friends and colleagues who have left the profession since we began this project, either leaving academia entirely or moving into other academic areas: some into administration and others returning to teaching. We do not yet know, however, if the positions they have left will be resourced or supported at the levels they were before or if those will be configured differently. We can only hope, at this point, that leaving may "move the needle," so to speak, on what is an acceptable job in our field.

Beyond the collective implications of leaving the job, leaving can also be the right, moral choice for individuals. Though workism has cultivated a disdain for so-called quitters and has glorified "hustle" culture, we ask here what it means for the dignity of the individuals toiling within these systems. Is alienation from one's labor a necessary prerequisite for the right to exist? If the Great Resignation has taught us anything, it is that there are alternatives that might lead to flourishing. Wright (2019) speaks of "flourishing," as follows:

> I use the idea of human flourishing as a way of capturing an all-around sense of a person's life going well. A flourishing life is one in which a person's capacities and talents have developed in ways which enable them to pursue their life goals, so that in some general sense they have been able to realize their potentials and purposes. It is easy to see what this means when we think of a person's health and physical condition: a flourishing life is more than just the absence of disease; it also embodies a positive idea of physical vitality that enables people to live

> energetically in the world. Similarly, for other aspects of one's life, flourishing implies a positive, robust realization of one's capacities, not just an absence of grave deficits. (p. 5)

If writing center work does not enable its workers to flourish–to "live energetically" and with a "robust realization of [their] capacities" (Wright, 2019, p. 5)–it is logical and just to leave it. We remain optimistic that if enough workers were to leave, such a migration may prompt administrators and institutions to adapt and to adequately compensate and support writing center practitioners as a whole, enabling them to flourish in that work.

That said, we also acknowledge that leaving isn't an option for all laborers. Debt has become an increasing prerequisite for pursuing a college degree, and college degrees are generally required to work in college writing centers. Accordingly, as Daniel (2022) has detailed, "For the average borrower, financial immobility and reduced choice . . . are typical consequences of this debt system" (p. 61). Leaving may not be an option for all laborers, but we hope that other tactics of dismantling, taming, resisting, and escaping may mitigate some of the labor conditions that would otherwise compel someone to leave.

So, ultimately, to further unpack the complexity of whether to leave, we believe it is critical to not only listen critically to co-workers and to administrators who encourage staying "for the good of others." You should also listen to yourself: to engage in radical honesty ("Radical Honesty," 2021) where you perform an honest assessment of feelings, experiences, attitudes, and needs about your work. Removing defensive stances from the equation is helpful in this process, as is closing out the "noise" of other signals outside of yours and your family's. If after engaging in radical honesty about this work and what keeps you in it and where you hope to be in the future, you decide to leave, we hope you feel acceptance in this conclusion.