

Part 2. Local

“[T]he crucial question for exploitation concerns the justice of the distribution of the means of production.”

– G. A. *Cohen*, *History, Labour, and Freedom: Themes from Marx* (1988)

Disciplines are the universities’ designated “means of production.” Disciplines represent distinct areas of investigation dedicated to a set of primary questions, the answers to which are meant to have not only scholarly but public import as well. It is in this sense that disciplines are also frequently understood as “fields,” designated areas which demarcate what questions belong and what questions can be set aside. For most of my professional career, composition and rhetoric has been attempting to establish itself as a field, attempting to settle on a primary set of questions that could convince the university to provide “the means of production” required to find answers. Think faculty lines, research support, majors, doctoral programs. (Don’t forget to think exploited adjunct labor as well.)

The most recent attempt at such disciplinary land grabs was probably “writing about writing,” one of the more aggressive attempts to establish “private property” rights to what is inherently a cross-disciplinary enterprise, which the university is at best a restrictive force on the proliferation of literacies. Indeed, I have come to understand that the value produced by community-literacy and community-engagement work is its opening up the means of production to those communities too often intentionally denied the means to claim the public space required to have their needs and aspirations addressed. In this way, I have always understood the work of community literacy and engagement to be an attempt to throw a “wrench into the works.”

Here the goal is not so much to dismiss the knowledge produced within composition and rhetoric as a discipline. Instead, I imagine the “wrench” of community literacy/engagement to be a consistent reminder to the field (and myself) that its conveyor belt of scholarly journals and “writing classrooms” does not necessarily represent the needs of those making the machines work, whether those individuals are adjunct laborers, custodial workers, bus drivers, or restaurant workers. It does not represent the needs of refugees, displaced families, and intentionally as well as marginalized communities. And in the spirit of much engagement work, the “wrench” is often also a call to listen to such communities outside the normative and narrowing framings associated with the “academic researcher.”

Indeed, the essays that follow begin with my own failures to recognize the need to expand ownership of a community project, a failure that also speaks to issues of race and class. In the essay, “Strategic Speculations,” I enact many of

the attitudes critiqued above, resulting in a community feeling betrayed by the process. It is attempting to repair this relationship that I came to a deeper understanding of what such work involved. Building out from this framework, the essay “Emergent Strategies” focused on the Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers (FWWCP) To argue that there are existing models for community-control of the means of literacy production from which we can model more ethical partnership practices. This argument of community control is then utilized to reframe the scholarly work of building an archive, again with the focus on the FWWC.

At a certain point, however, the question shifts from building equitable partnership to the actual goals of that partnership. It is at this point that the essay “Sinners Welcome” becomes a space to argue that community partnerships must also engage in supporting residents as they organize for economic and cultural rights. That is, community engaged work needs to do more than apply band-aids to long festering wounds; engagement must entail walking with the community as they address root causes of their exclusion and marginalization. And, finally, the associate ease and comfort of the word “community” itself is called into question through “Dreams and Nightmares,” a publication focused the personal narrative of a 14-year-old Guatemalan girl who travelled alone from her rural village to the United States. The language used to describe her identity, such as “alien,” becomes a way to trouble the ease with which our sense of community has often failed to assume citizenship, equal rights, and national “belonging.” It asks us to consider the field upon which composition and rhetoric enacts its work as necessarily implicated in the international context.

As such, “Dreams and Nightmares” also serves as the tipping point that moves this collection of essays into the global considerations.

Featured Essays

- “Strategic Speculations on the Question of Value,” *College English*, vol. 71, no. 5, May 2009, pp. 506-27.
- “Emergent Strategies for an Established Field: Worker Writer Collectives,” with Nick Pollard, *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 61, no.3, 2010, pp. 476-509.
- “Sinners Welcome: The Limits of Rhetorical Agency,” *College English*, vol. 76, no. 6, Jul. 2014, pp. 506-24.
- “Dreams and Nightmares. The Legal Legacy that Authorized Civil Detention Centers in the US,” with Aaron Moss and Lori Shorr, *Tortura e migrazioni/ Torture and Migration*, Edizioni Ca’ Foscari - Digital Publishing, 2019.
- “Alliances, Assemblages, and Affects: Three Moments of Building Collective Working-Class Literacies,” with Jessica Pauszek, Nicholas Pollard, and Jennifer Harding. *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 70, no. 1, Sep. 2018, pp. 6-29.