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1

INTRODUCTION

For Theory's Sake

I. DISJUNCTIVE IMPETUSES

Many of the ongoing difficulties teachers face revolve around the “translation” of disciplinary knowledge—especially critical theory—into pedagogical praxis. It often seems that our teaching lags behind our theoretical knowledge by about two decades, and sometimes we wonder if it will ever catch up. This sense of disjunction has been compounded by the difficulty of “teaching” postmodern understandings of subjectivity, truth, and epistemology in increasingly commodified teaching contexts, where consumers expect to purchase clear, identifiable, and literally usable products, and where “knowledge” often means easily digestible and repeatable content rather than analytic skills, critical understandings, or complex world views. Prescriptive “standards,” standardized testing, common syllabi, assessments, and outcomes become more important than ideas and dispositions.

Given the growing lag between theory and pedagogy, I am no longer surprised when the law students in my college composition classes believe that good judges are impartial judges, or when the journalism majors insist that effective journalists are objective, despite the fact that both the possibility and desirability of objectivity have been thoroughly discredited in recent and ongoing work in critical anthropology, critical legal studies, postcolonial theory, feminist theory, queer theory, and other fields and disciplines. Either my students’ learning in their law, journalism, or other classes is out of sync with cutting-edge scholarship in the disciplines, or their learning is not yet able to withstand the more powerful forces of students’ own and societal preassumptions.

This is not to say that writing instructors have been able to avoid theory-practice disjunctions. The order of business in many composition classrooms and textbooks seems to be business as usual. Despite the assaults on ethnographic disciplines and practices that have taken place for almost four decades now, ethnography-focused writing assignments continue unabated in many composition classrooms. And despite the force of postmodern composition theory—which has persuasively critiqued ubiquitous composition practices and notions like “freewriting” and “authentic voice”—there seems to be little let-up in admonitions to “freewrite” or appeals for “authentic voice” in composition classrooms.

These holdovers are not innocent, and have drawn fire as symptoms of composition’s intransigence and conservatism. In 1986, Mas’ud Zavarzadeh and Donald Morton denounced first-year composition as the “last bastion of defense of traditional humanism against radical postmodern critical theory” (Zavarzadeh and Morton 1986–87, 13). Five years later, Lester Faigley, after having cited Zavarzadeh and Morton’s acerbic observation, asked, “[I]f we have indeed entered the era of postmodernity, then why has there been so little change evident in the classroom conditions for teaching college writing?” (Faigley 1992, 165). My goals in writing this book were, in part, to find out if Zavarzadeh and Morton’s diagnosis still holds true twenty-five plus years later, and, if so, to attempt some answers to Faigley’s question.

Faigley noted the disjunctions between composition and postmodern theory, but also pointed to changes in composition that appeared to begin to address postmodern challenges to traditional humanism, and the theories, practices, and pedagogies of composition that aligned themselves with it. However, *Upsetting Composition Commonplaces* delivers the discouraging (though unsurprising) news that, twenty years after Faigley published his book, things haven’t changed that much. Hence, I use “upsetting” in my title in both senses of the word, to underscore the force of the discouraging news and urge along the much-needed revolution, as well as to signal my aim

of doing some upsetting with this book. Each of the following six chapters addresses one of six formative composition commonplaces: clarity, intent, voice, ethnography, audience, and objectivity. In each case, I have chosen a belief (system) and the practices it animates that inform common, often taken-for-granted or taken-as-axiomatic, understandings in composition and the undergirdings of composition pedagogy. And in each case I attempt to upset the commonplace by demonstrating its incoherence, whether in the context of its explicit or implicit execution of values and assumptions that have been discredited by poststructuralist theory¹, or in its incompatibility with the stated goals of composition studies itself. I also try to account for these disjunctions and offer alternative epistemologies for composition theory and pedagogy that are more theoretically informed and consistent.

These alternatives are not meant to serve as prescriptive correctives, but rather to open up the possibilities of composition. In the introduction to his evocative readings of Derrida, Michael Naas reminds us of Derrida's influence:

And yes, each time we receive the tradition, each time we take it on, we are offered a chance to receive something unforeseeable and unprecedented within it. Although all our thinking, all our receptions, are illuminated in advance by the horizon of our tradition, our turning toward that horizon is not. Each day we turn toward the sun blindly: with each reading we receive the tradition anew and so are given the chance of encountering something that escapes the simple duality of "taking on the tradition"—the simple opposition between accepting or rejecting a tradition as our own. With each reception comes the possibility of rethinking what is our own by receiving it before either we or it have been wholly constituted. For although there may indeed be nothing new under the sun, there is no tradition, no sun even, before we have received it. (Naas 2003, xviii)

I use Naas's admonition to remind my own readers and myself that forms are formative, but not inevitable. I am interested in upsetting the sense of inevitability that often accompanies the composition commonplaces I play with—an inevitability that has been constructed by history, culture, and disciplinarity

(including disciplinary histories and the other places where these meaning makers inflect and mediate one another). Later, Naas adds that Derrida's own work analyzes philosophical traditions "in order to reveal something untraditional within them" (Naas 2003, xx). Naas's formulation speaks to dual attempts to resist binary logic in this book: exploding open composition commonplaces to show the differences they house (e.g., rescuing "audience" from expository reductiveness in chapter 6), and a deconstructive impetus to reveal the incoherences already constituted by these commonplaces (e.g., "clarity" meaning everything but clarity in chapter 2).

The diverse antecedents to my work in this book—both in terms of what I see as the central issues that thematize the disjunctions I have described above, as well as the specific scholars who have prompted my interventions—illustrate consistent concerns across sub-fields and theoretical affiliations in rhetoric and composition. In her essay in *An Introduction to Composition Studies*, Lisa Ede (1991) noted the gaps between theory and practice (and between theory and textbooks) in composition specifically, without going into much detail regarding these gaps. In 1992, Faigley gave a summary of the poststructuralist critique of enlightenment conceptions of subjectivity in *Fragments of Rationality* (chapter 4)—I will not recapitulate this well-known critique here, but I do briefly discuss some of the attendant motifs of *Upsetting Composition Commonplaces* in section II below. Faigley's introduction and first chapter provided an overview of the (lack of) impact of postmodern theory and postmodernity on composition studies. A few years later, John Schilb's *Between the Lines* traced the divergences between composition and literary theory, in particular, noting the differing views of subjectivity, language, and rhetoric in the two fields (Schilb 1996, especially chapter 2). Other scholars who have propelled my own work—primarily in their commentary on the relationship between poststructuralism (in some cases, deconstruction) and composition, on the disjunctions between critical theory and composition, and between composition theory and pedagogy—include Linda Brodkey (1996), Sharon Crowley

(1987, 1994), Min-Zhan Lu (1994), Jasper Neel (1988), Louise Wetherbee Phelps (1988), Brooke Rollins (2006), Raúl Sánchez (2005), and Kurt Spellmeyer (1993). *Upsetting Composition Commonplaces* builds on the work begun by these and other rhetoric and composition scholars by filling out their hunches, using some of their questions as starting points for further investigation, attempting to ask new questions, and using their frameworks to examine some of the composition commonplaces that they don't discuss.

The editors of the recent anthology *Beyond Postprocess* hint at the change in nuance that characterizes composition in the twenty-first century in their invocation of “the once sacrosanct gravitational pull of the writing subject” (Dobrin, Rice, and Vastola 2011b, 2). *Once* is the operative word here, pointing to the fact that, albeit quite late in the game, composition can no longer uncritically vaunt discredited humanist constructions of authorship and subjectivity as originating in a unified and autonomous writer. In contrast, gravity and the sacred do not lose their pull overnight; the pull is still there, even though it may no longer be sacrosanct (or gravitational). However, the loss of its power might mean the interrogations can finally be heard, and that the time is now ripe for some of these composition commonplaces to be upset. It is time for new questions to be asked, and new models of composing, teaching, and theorizing to be developed on the heels of these questions. As the *Beyond Postprocess* editors put it, “In defiance of the commonsensical recognition we may finally ask: Who or what is the subject of writing? What would it mean to understand the subject of writing as strictly textual? How is identity constructed and circulated in writing environments and postmodern writing practices?” (3). These are some of the additional questions that animate my critique of composition “commonplaces” in the following chapters, and which also indicate the continued resilience of discredited conceptualizations of subjectivity and indefensible epistemologies of composing.

The white elephant on the page here is theory itself, the resistance to theory in general, and the resistance to theory in

composition, specifically among compositionists (scholars and teachers).² Kory Ching (2007) has, in fact, argued that anxiety over theory in composition can be attributed to theory's throwing of cherished composition commonplaces into question. I address the possible ideological stakes in antagonism toward theory—and the ways in which attacks on theory can serve as a cover for other projects—in chapter 2, but I want to briefly riff on Ching's tantalizing point here. Even an unconscious recognition of how the work of theory might undermine common pedagogical practices in composition, as well as the rationales for these practices (and for composition programs and policies as a whole), might instigate backlashes against theory, in addition to the more common fears of and attacks on theory as elitist, inaccessible, and irrelevant. The resistance to theory can also take the form of composition's pedagogical imperative, which I discuss in section IV below. While the insistence that work in composition studies should properly be about teaching can appear to operationalize (and frequently is presented as doing so) a concern for students—and translate composition's social justice disposition into action—it can mask 1) ideological and material antagonism to the arguments of theory, 2) anti-intellectualism (which itself can metonymize political distaste for theory), 3) a reluctance to interrogate and modify/upset one's own pedagogy, and 4) stasis and a resistance to change in general (whether for reasons of arrogance, familiarity, comfort, fear, overwork, or the appalling politics and materialities of contingent academic labor in the United States). If anything, these deferrals and displacements point to the urgency of working through theory and making apparent the often subterranean theoretical impasses in the teaching of composition.

II. COMMON THREADS

Several themes cut across the following chapters, and hence suture together the specific topics I address in *Upsetting Composition Commonplaces*. I highlight some of their foundations here,

in order to avoid unnecessary repetition in chapters 2–7, to lay ground for my critiques of composition theory and pedagogy in twenty-first century US, and for my own theoretical, political, compositional, and pedagogical affiliations in this book.

Axiom 1: The Humanist Subject Is Dead

In 1990, Andrea Lunsford and Lisa Ede predicted that “the challenge of responding to contemporary critiques of the author and of the subject comprises one of the most important tasks faced by those in composition in the coming years” (Lunsford and Ede 1990, 140). Although poststructuralism announced the death knell of the humanist subject, composition—for various reasons and in multifold incarnations that I will attempt to unpack in the following chapters—has been reluctant to let go. Lunsford and Ede’s yoking together of the concepts of author and subject hints at composition’s particular entanglement in the modernist self, given the difficulty of denying subjectivity to the living authors to which composition attends most closely—students in the classroom. And, as Jeff Rice (2005) suggests, expressivism and process pedagogy are attached to the modernist subject.

In the United States, composition’s historical ties to social justice movements—and, in particular, activism for educational equity—linked the idea of process to ideas of individualism, upliftment, and agency that belied poststructuralism’s more complicated postulations of subjectivity. However, composition’s balking at the evaporation of the liberal subject and its loyalty to romantic myths of the self-contained author also evince a refusal to recognize subjectivity’s social constitution and imbrications. As Bruce Horner suggests, “recognizing the social production of consciousness meets with resistance because it undermines the concept of the Author as a quintessentially autonomous individual on which English literary study specifically but also academic institutions and capitalist ideology generally depend” (Horner 2000, 217). I would argue that this is a *fortiori* the case for composition, as my explorations

around intent and voice in chapters 3 and 4 demonstrate. But bourgeois constructions of subjectivity are also intricated in the assumptions about objectivity that I interrogate in chapters 5 (Ethnography) and 7 (Objectivity), since a belief in the self-contained subject is a precursor to the conviction that the subject can get beyond or outside itself, a conviction that undergirds faith in the possibility and desirability of objectivity.³

Axiom 2: The Author Is Dead

See axiom 1. Also, cherished romantic constructions of the unitary, solitary author who is the sole originator of His writing have been displaced by the recognition of the culturally and historically contingent nature of authorship, especially in relation to ideologies of individualism and their emergence in bourgeois capitalism. The belief in the Author as sole originator of meaning belies poststructuralism's claims to language's determinations (and unpredictabilities), and to the social and political contexts that shape authorship and writing. What is composition's twenty-first century relationship to what Susan Miller (1989, 3) called "the now easily deniable claptrap of inspired, unitary 'authorship' that contemporary theorists in other fields have so thoroughly deconstructed"?

The romantic visions of authorship persist in composition, as I discuss in chapter 3, despite composition's own investments in process, collaboration, and, now, technology, that seem—notwithstanding Rice (2005) in axiom 1 above—to run starkly counter to Romantic/romantic and modernist constructions of authorship. For poststructuralist theory, assumptions of authenticity—whether in reference to voices, texts, processes of writing, or writing subjects—are constructions that belie the non-self-subsistence of the non-foundational, decentered, and radically contingent subject, a subject that composition studies has often been reticent to embrace. As Faigley pointed out in *Fragments of Rationality*, composition studies has proven least receptive to postmodern theory in its refusal to surrender

its belief in the writer as an autonomous self, even at a time when extensive group collaboration is practiced in many writing classrooms. Since the beginning of composition teaching in the late nineteenth century, college writing teachers have been heavily invested in the stability of the self and the attendant beliefs that writing can be a means of self-discovery and intellectual self-realization. (Faigley 1992, 15)

Faigley's observations here are important on several counts. Not only does he identify a problematic composition precept, but the internal contradiction he describes in the first sentence quoted above also illustrates a field that is already at odds with itself, in addition to being out of step with postmodern theory. Faigley gestures toward the longevity and resilience of composition's outmoded values and assumptions, both in terms of their historical continuity and in the ways in which they inform, define, and even constitute the discipline. The beliefs that these values and assumptions inform and animate erupt all over composition, from processes like "freewriting" to personal narrative assignments to specialist and institutional rationales for composition courses and programs.

Axiom 3: Writing Is Writing

Postmodernism blurred previously taken-for-granted distinctions between high and low art, while deconstruction enabled the destabilization of all binaries, as well as the demonstration of the arbitrary and ideological formations that constitute (d) these binaries in the first place. I include binaries like creative/expository, fiction/nonfiction, literature/composition, and student/writer in this compass, all of which hold formative significance for composition studies, and whose parameters resonate from the high art/low art opposition. Distinctions between "literature" and nonfiction writing, in fact, are becoming ever more solidified as composition seeks to assert its distinctiveness and influence (especially in high school curricula, as I discuss in several of the following chapters in relation to California's Expository Reading and Writing Course for high

school students), even as these distinctions become more difficult to defend and sustain outside of composition.⁴ William Covino and Gary Olson both articulate axiom 3 pointedly for my purposes, each indicating a different set of consequences—both equally important—that should flow from it. Covino, commenting on postmodern literary theory and the breakdown of the category Literature, reminds us, “All texts being equal, so to speak, any genre—a freshman essay, lyric poem, casual conversation, scientific treatise, lab report—is legitimate game for the critic, and each is potentially rich in ‘symbolic action’” (Covino 1988a, 121). Covino’s reminder seems to align with composition’s attention to and legitimation of student writing as classroom text, text to be studied, and text to be worked on. However, as I explain in my discussions of clarity (chapter 2) and intent (chapter 3), we often don’t treat students’ texts the same way we treat professional writing in the composition classroom, especially writing categorized as “Literature.” We also often make unfounded distinctions between “creative” and “expository” writing that are more about preserving composition’s place than enabling student writers. Olson, in a review of Stanley Fish’s *How to Write a Sentence, and How to Read One*, concludes, “One effect of this book—and I believe it is intentional—is that through its performance it demonstrates the importance of not separating literary analysis from the teaching (and learning) of composition; discourse productions and discourse reception are two sides of the same coin” (Olson 2012, 446). My discussions of clarity, intent, and objectivity (chapter 7) also highlight the unconscious and explicit distinctions we often make between fiction and nonfiction texts—both in the field of composition and in the composition classroom—in terms of a disjunction between reception and production, between how and what we read versus how and what we teach (tell) students to write, and the ways in which these distinctions shore up composition’s humanist investments. The chapters that follow repeatedly note the uncritical recuperation of questionable distinctions between different types of texts in composition studies and

teaching, as well as my view of the unfortunate effects of this recuperation for student writing, students as writers, and for composition as a field of inquiry.

Axiom 4: Students Are Writers

Following my above interrogation of the student/writer binary, and notwithstanding axiom 2, this book affirms composition's breakthrough insistence that student writers are authors—or, as the popular composition textbook title puts it, “Everyone’s an Author” (Lunsford, Ede, Moss, et al. 2013)—and that this recognition is important and has consequences.⁵ However, I also chronicle the many ways in which composition fails to fulfill the promise of this axiom: it often resorts to an implicit reliance on hegemonic hierarchies that deauthorize student writers by distinguishing students from “real writers” and student texts from the published work of professionals. This is especially apparent in the invocation of clarity (chapter 2) and intent (chapter 3) in composition, usually with reference to students and student texts. I also address this inconsistency in the context of composition scholars' use and citation of student work (chapter 5), and the kinds of writing students are encouraged to read but not emulate in their own work (chapter 6). Min-Zhan Lu's devastating characterization of English studies as “a discipline which, on the one hand, has often proclaimed its concern to profess multiculturalism but, on the other hand, has done little to combat the ghettoization of two of its own cultures, namely composition teaching and student writing” (Lu 1994, 442) points to the political implications and consequences of composition's failure in this arena—the “ghettoization of student writing” denigrates the authority of student experience, denies students the right to their own language (chapter 7), and makes a mockery of our pretensions to enact critically conscious and social justice-oriented pedagogies in composition.⁶

By now it should be apparent that, not only do the above axioms overlap and intersect, but there are also important hyper-textual epistemologies at work in this book. These categories,

and the frames that demarcate them from one another, are somewhat arbitrary. If writing is writing, then students must be writers. And if the subject is dead, then the author must be as well. The book's chapters, too, bleed into one another. We can only fetishize the (student) author's intent (chapter 3) if we believe in the autonomous composing subject, and humanist constructions of writerly voice so often go hand-in-hand with appeals to authorial intent that it seems intent and voice should interweave, should parallel and overlay one another. In his warning to teachers against co-opting student texts, Brooke Horvath suggests a relationship between intent and the problem of voice that I treat in chapter 4: "If this happens, students may too readily conclude that success depends not upon fully realizing one's intentions, fully conveying one's meaning, fully expressing one's feelings or actualizing one's voice, but upon aping the teacher" (Horvath 1994, 210). A unique voice becomes an expression of individual intent; in both cases, the liberal subject is unified and seemingly independent of the sociality that shapes it.

The topics I have written about also ripple out into connections with other topics I have not (explicitly) treated. Rebecca Moore Howard, for instance, makes a connection between, on the one hand, punitive and overly broad definitions of plagiarism and, on the other, the denial of students' status as authors:

If we faculty have difficulty comprehending and manipulating the language of the various academic cultures, how much more difficult a task do undergraduate students face as they are presented with a bewildering array of discourse, none of which resonates with the languages of their homes and secondary schools? How much more difficult is the task when students facing this cacophony are denied one of the basic tools—patchwriting—for sorting through and joining the conversations? If we can begin recognizing our students' work ("even" when it obviously includes patchwriting) as the work of authors, we will be helping them to become more successful authors. (Howard 1999, 137)

More on the borders of this book in section III below.

III. ROADS NOT TAKEN

I do not wish to imply that this book is exhaustive, and, certainly, there are other composition commonplaces and taken-for-granted assumptions in composition studies and pedagogy that seem to be at odds with what we have learned from critical theory, to which I might have devoted additional chapters in this book. I can only gesture toward some of those topics here. For instance, plagiarism, writing, English-only, students (as the subject of composition⁷), and identification (the assumption that students work best when they can “identify” with a reading or writing assignment) were some of the additional possibilities I considered. The first four already have a substantial and impressive body of scholarship devoted to them, and I didn’t see the need to replicate that work here, but I do want to briefly point toward some of the tantalizing possibilities of three of these areas of inquiry in terms of upsetting composition commonplaces

Plagiarism

Rebecca Moore Howard (1999), in addition to other scholars, has devoted considerable resources and passion to attacking the demonization of plagiarism in composition pedagogy (and in academia as a whole). She points out how composition’s conventional and uncritical representation of plagiarism is at odds, not only with poststructuralist and postmodern understandings of authorship and creativity, but also with the underlying impetus of work in composition that unpacks hypostatized conceptualizations of composing. This does not mean, of course, that these insights have substantially impacted composition classrooms (this is a fortiori the case outside of composition), or even that some of the most progressive teachers’ syllabi don’t continue to make ritual nods in the direction of moralistic and punitive humanist beliefs about plagiarism. Sean Zwagerman articulates this contradiction in his review of *Pluralizing Plagiarism*: “Poststructuralist thinkers suddenly forget everything they claim to believe about textuality and authorship

when the text in question is a student's essay: plagiarism is simply an empirical textual fact indicative of suspect authorial intentions" (Zwagerman 2009, 883).⁸ Fortunately, the works of Howard and other intellectual property scholars are slowly making their way into composition textbooks, which are now starting to nuance previously pat admonitions against plagiarism, some of which (Lunsford, Ede, Moss, et al. 2013; Howard 2014) even reference "patchwriting," the term Howard coined to explain the painful process by which student writers gain academic literacy through work with secondary sources.

Writing

The twenty-first century necessity to move our understanding of composition beyond writing has received much attention from scholars working in digital and visual rhetoric and composition (e.g., Blair 2011; Hill and Helmers 2004; Ulmer 2003; Wysocki et al. 2004) and non-alphanumeric scripts that challenge the western rhetorical tradition (e.g., Baca 2008), and may in fact signal significant rethinking and reevaluation of the field itself, not to mention the ways in which hypertext and computer software programs unsettle traditional understandings of "writing" per se. This work, together with the new literacy technologies that have transformed the materiality of writing (both noun and verb) in the past forty years, have probably had a greater impact on the composition classroom than the scholarship around plagiarism, if all the new composition textbooks focusing on images (e.g., Faigley et al. 2004) and the curricula and syllabi moving toward blogging, websites, and e-portfolios are any indication. And the transformation of "writing" also impacts the commonplaces treated in the following chapters—for instance, the poster on "Digital Rhetoric" in the June 2013 issue of *CCC* points out, via James Zappen, that, as the lines between composer and audience blur in digital writing environments, so might collaboration supplant persuasion as the primary rhetorical impetus ("Digital Rhetoric" 2013). This usurpation formatively impacts the constructions of audience that I discuss in chapter 6.

Not surprisingly, there is still plenty of resistance—there are many composition teachers who will not accept digital papers and who grade only on paper—and the possibilities of tokenization and co-optation remind us that composition could continue uninterrupted and minimally changed, but with a fresh veneer and lip-service to fashionable new media. Cynthia Selfe (2009) warns that shifts in the direction of digital composition should not mean merely transferring existing writing assignments onto the web, but radically rethinking what composing means.

English-Only

The more recent critique of composition's "English-only" imperative (e.g., Horner, Lu, and Matsuda 2010; Horner and Trimbur 2002; Trimbur 1999) has come, belatedly, in the wake of postcolonial theory; a more critical interrogation of the field's US-centrism and imperialist collusions; increasing work in and attention to composition in transnational and international contexts; and more pointed interrogations of composition's processes, functions, and effects in a resolutely multilingual United States, as well as in the maelstrom of accelerating globalization in general. Related work on World Englishes (Canagarajah 2009) doesn't so much address English dominance in composition, but rather questions why, if we are composing in English, a prescriptive and monolithic US English should be privileged in US composition classrooms, given the various communities worldwide who now communicate in many varieties of English, some of whom outnumber metropolitan English speakers (not to mention the varieties of Englishes and hybrid languages used in the United States). The latter work certainly seems to complement composition scholarship and activism around "standard English" that has been taking place in the United States for decades now, leading up to—and as a result of—the Conference on College Composition and Communication's Students' Rights to Their Own Language resolution of 1974 (Conference 1974). This work has exposed

the lie of the naturalness of academic English—and the other linguistic conventions that are enforced in composition classrooms—and pointed to the privileging and exclusions these conventions produce (e.g., Brodkey 1996; Smitherman 1977; Spellmeyer 1993; Young 2009). But the question of “English-only” in the US composition curriculum doesn’t seem to have yet made much impact in actual classrooms. Certainly, at a large, comprehensive public university where I taught for ten years, and where first-year composition courses are dispersed across six departments and programs (only one of which is called “English”), no one yet seems to have thought to ask why students are required to write all their assignments in English, despite the richness of the school’s multicultural and multilingual student population. Or, perhaps everyone assumes that English-only is a given. This is another composition commonplace worth upsetting.

The brief discussions above of plagiarism, writing, and English-only provide a sampling of the other areas of inquiry that might connect with the work I undertake in this book. Indeed, many assumptions that inform the above commonplaces also undergird the ones I discuss in the following chapters, and, in some cases, the topics enticingly intersect and productively overlap. For instance, in chapter 7 (Objectivity) I note the ways in which dominant linguistic prescriptions are coded in terms of objectivity, a construction that resonates with my above observations on World Englishes and English-only composition. I hope these intersections also signal how so many precepts of composition are intricately intertwined in the theoretical inconsistencies I trace—and how thoroughly this entanglement has been affected—and I hope they offer pathways for my readers to use some of the principles of this book in other composition contexts, and in relation to other composition commonplaces. In this sense, the templates I provide should be envisaged as sample embodiments of theoretical arguments that point to the larger picture of composition’s incoherence and the other spaces that inhabit it.

IV. THE PEDAGOGICAL IMPERATIVE

I take seriously Karen Kopelson's (2008) caveat against seeing theory as practice, as well as her general admonitions against always and only envisaging theory as something to "apply." In US literary studies, critical theory often gets reduced to a smorgasbord of "schools" that students sample (one school a week) from a prescribed anthology, with the goal of then "applying" one or more to one or more literary texts—the latter being the endpoint and the privileged object of study, of course. Theory, then, doesn't have value in and of itself. Hopefully composition can avoid subjecting theory to this tragic fate.

However, I understand that what I am doing in this book is both similar to and different from the problematic construction of theory articulated so insightfully by Kopelson. I'm not necessarily arguing that we should "apply" poststructuralist theory to/ in the composition classroom, but I am suggesting that we need to think through the implications of poststructuralist theory for pedagogy. In other words, I believe that poststructuralism has radical consequences for composition as a field—including the teaching of composition—and that the consequences of taking poststructuralism seriously could include rethinking many of the field's commonplaces, as well as its *raison d'être*. Mine is an analytic emphasis, rather than a calculus of "translating" theory into practice.

The pedagogical imperative can be another particularly coercive and ensnaring stick in the field of composition, and has been challenged by many well-regarded compositionists, including Gregory Colomb (2010), Sidney Dobrin (2011), Karen Kopelson (2008), Andrea Lunsford (1991), Gary Olson (1991; 2008), Bronwyn Williams (2010), Lynn Worsham (1991, 2002), and the new "school" of postprocess compositionists who question whether composition studies should even be about pedagogy in the first place (e.g., Dobrin, Rice, and Vastola 2011a).⁹ While some of these scholars do not deny the importance of studying student writing and the teaching of writing, they believe that making these subjects the field's only purview is reductive and denies composition's significance in attending to,

among other things, writing and other literacies and discourses inside and outside of academia. My insistence on the value of theory also leads me to be skeptical of and resistant to invariably having to apply theory to practice, especially when practice is conflated with teaching. This book is certainly replete with examples of what I see as both progressive and regressive composition teaching practices, and I offer suggestions for possible directions for a poststructuralist composition pedagogy. However, I want to forewarn readers who may be coming to this book in search of detailed syllabi, assignments, and fully developed pedagogical protocols that they are bound to be disappointed. My pedagogical suggestions are meant to be evocative, suggestive, invitational, and hopefully inspirational, but I have left them at the suggestive level precisely because my interest lies more in diagnosing the fault lines of composition's refusal of poststructuralism, rather than in providing "solutions" in the form of teaching templates, and because I want to signify the discussion of theory as interesting and important in its own right. Besides, I have every confidence that my readers will come up with much more inventive and effective poststructuralist composition pedagogical practices than the ones I offer in the pages that follow.

NOTES

1. Although poststructuralism usually refers to the conglomeration of philosophical challenges to humanist epistemologies and conceptualizations of language as referential, and postmodernism to new formations (or, at least, new understandings of old formations) in art and society, I sometimes use these terms interchangeably to reflect my sources' use of the terms, and to signal the ways in which poststructuralist theoretical precepts undergird many postmodern dispositions toward and understandings of art, history, creation, and language, and vice versa.
2. See McLemee (2003) and Olson (2002, 2008) for some accounts of the "theory wars" in composition. See Dobrin (2011) for a discussion of composition's hostility toward theory.
3. For further discussions of the subject in the context of rhetoric and composition, see Miller (1989) and Sánchez (2005). For a critique of the subject from the perspective of posthumanism, see Dobrin (2011, especially chapter 3).

4. For further critique of the fiction/nonfiction distinction, see Lanham (2007, 94–95, 139).
5. For some arguments about constructing composition (and other) students as writers, see Barnard (2002), Brodkey (1996, 203), Elbow (1995), Horner (1997, 2000), Howard (2006), Isaacs and Jackson (2001), Lu (1994), and Miller (1991).
6. See Spellmeyer (1993) for a discussion of the demeaning treatment accorded to student-authored texts in composition classes.
7. See Dobrin (2011) for a discussion of this commonplace and an overview of some of the other scholarship that has addressed this topic.
8. See Rebecca Moore Howard (1999, xxii) for further discussion of the disjunctions between theory and practice regarding plagiarism policies.
9. See Worsham (2002, 102) for an explanation of this dispute in composition studies.