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INTRODUCTION

Jessica Mindich designs sleek, delicately hammered bangle bracelets. Each bracelet is embossed with its own number and the word Newark: the serial number of the illegal gun from which it was made and the city where it was seized. Mindich created her jewelry line, the Caliber Collection, after hearing Newark, New Jersey, mayor speak on the devastating effects of gun violence to the city. With the mayor's support, Mindich began a program to salvage the brass and steel remains of illegal pistols, shotguns, and shell casings confiscated by Newark police and to repurpose the scraps as jewelry. She returns 20 percent of her proceeds to the Newark Police Department's gun buyback program.

*The bracelets are meant to be more than a fashion statement, or even a vehicle for fund-raising. Mindich designed the bangle to ensure that its structure reflects its source. The bracelet is oval, not round, to mirror the trigger cage of a gun. It arrives in an evidence bag—no ribbons or bows—imprinted with the story of the jewelry's origins, and the belief that repurposing weapons to raise both awareness and funds improves the caliber (double meaning intended) of the community. In an interview in *Time* magazine, Mindich quotes one of her customers, who aptly summarizes her project's purpose: "Caliber bracelets are real guns, real lives saved, literally leading to future guns coming off the streets. You have repurposed guns. The power of guns [has] always been associated with the hand of a shooter. Now people can use guns to make peace" (Nelson 2013).*

*

The Wellington Craftivism Collective is an online feminist community that melds crafting with community building and activism. The collective is part of the larger movement of craftivism, which emerged early in the twenty-first century as a response to consumerism, environmental destruction, and the general sense of hopelessness that surfaced after the 9/11 attacks (Greer 2007). As the name suggests, the movement

promotes a symbiotic relationship between crafting and activism, repurposing activities often relegated to the domestic sphere—knitting, quilting, baking—to public, activist ends.

The Wellington group hosts regular “Stitch N Bitch” sessions, where members talk politics, teach stitching, and work on projects like patches for their internationally traveling “Occupy” quilt. The collective sponsors workshops on sustainable construction, bike repair, and local food. And it organizes “Street Outreach,” delivering baked goods to local shelters. As Betsy Greer describes it, the movement aims both to engage creativity to serve political ends and to “bring back the personal into our daily lives to replace some of the mass produced” (Greer 2007, 401).

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*In Nancy Judd’s (2011) TEDx talk, she wears a dress fashioned from yellow plastic caution tape, recovered from the side of a road. Titled “Caution Dress,” it is one of many garments in Judd’s line, *Recycled Runway*, a collection of dresses that repurpose plastic bags, rusty nails, and broken glass to stunning ends. The gowns, however, are not just aesthetically compelling; they are educationally engaging—designed, as Judd says in her TED talk, to “help people see trash with new eyes.” Her aim is both to encourage conservation and to challenge consumerism. Fashion, she reasons, is a good way to broach the dialogue. “Most people respond well to a pretty dress,” she explains. “I really enjoy these ironies—a pretty dress that’s made out of trash that is commenting on the very system that it appears to belong to.”*

In order to reach a wide audience, Judd’s exhibitions are displayed in shopping malls and airports as well as museums. But her art is not limited to its products; she also makes dressmaking a communal, educational process, inviting her audiences—from schoolchildren to adults—to participate by writing a pledge about how they will “live lighter on the earth”: each pledge is later sewn to a dress. Her purpose is to help her audiences see trash differently: not as waste, but as wasted resources.

*

These projects are but three examples of feminist repurposing, a practice of locating and enacting imaginative possibilities for change and agency within—and often out of—prohibitive, and even damaging, cultural conditions. These examples are

contemporary incarnations of a long line of feminist resistance and resilience, where women find ways—overtly and covertly—to locate *kairos* within existing circumstances and to create their own available means of persuasion. Indeed, a look at women’s writing and social contributions across history shows that repurposing is an ancient practice.

In the fourteenth and early fifteenth century, for instance, Julian of Norwich repurposed scripture, then deployed to limit women’s roles to procreation and child rearing, to rearticulate God as feminine and to name Jesus as “our true mother” (Julian of Norwich 2001, 27). In the seventeenth century, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz entered the convent to attain an intellectual life. There, she composed plays and poetry and advocated for women’s access to education. During the U.S. Civil War, women used quilts to communicate subversive political messages understood only by fellow quilters (Benson, Olson, and Rindfleisch 1987). And some scholars argue that African American slave women used quilts to encode maps to navigate the Underground Railroad (Sambol-Tosco 2004).

While the term *repurposing* certainly overlaps with and encompasses similar practices like revising, reclaiming, and reappropriating, I feature “repurposing” because of its relevance in both contemporary culture and the field of rhetoric and composition. In a time of economic strain, a Google search of “repurposing” yields a bounty of blogs written by women who describe ways to repurpose domestic and salvage items to new, and often innovative and beautiful, ends. This is not only a means to save money in a tight economy, it is also an ecologically sound practice designed to make use of what is available for new purposes. It is a practice that further involves illuminating, and working within and against, the conditions that characterize a given situation.

In composition and rhetoric classrooms, we want our students to explore and determine their own purposes for writing. We know that effective writing is tied to students’ investment in their own projects, in purposes that are student determined, not solely teacher determined. The field has also sought to

establish its own disciplinary and curricular purposes, challenging conceptions of itself as a feminized service provider. As I highlight in chapter 1, feminist scholars have played a key role in repurposing seemingly “neutral” practices and approaches to the rhetorical tradition, the composing process, and pedagogy so as to create more expansive understandings of writing and opportunities for writers. Now, as we face increased neoliberal pressures to streamline and standardize education—from prepackaged distance learning curricula to machine-scored writing—it is a crucial time for the field to argue for the value of purposes we determine based on our local work with students, our dialogue with one another, and our research.

And so just as the artists’ projects described above illuminate the problematic conditions to which they respond—cultures of violence, consumption, and isolation—this book aims to illuminate, and argue for repurposing, the problems and practices of neoliberal influences on postsecondary education.

NEOLIBERALISM AND THE UNIVERSITY

While the term *neoliberalism* may not yet readily populate our vocabularies, like most dominant ideologies, its influence is so prevalent as to be rendered invisible, or to seem inevitable—just “the way things are.” Indeed, neoliberal values are at work when students choose courses and place them in virtual “shopping carts” or quantify their instructors’ “easiness” and appearance on ratemyprofessors.com; when faculty must compete for external funds to support their regular work; and when private players like the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the Koch brothers, with their deep pockets and political sway, shape the direction of higher education.

Neoliberalism is a set of economic principles and cultural politics that positions the free market as a guide for all human action, substituting for, as Paul Treanor argues, “all previously existing ethical beliefs.” “Liberal” here references economic, not political, ideology; it seeks to remove all barriers to the free market, upholding an ideal in which entrepreneurs and private

enterprise—not the state or federal government—control the economy (Treanor 2005). Neoliberalism, then, also prizes individualism and individual responsibility. Individuals are regarded as rational economic actors who are expected to make choices that will maximize their human capital. To be rational, according to neoliberal logic, is to act in service of profit (Brulé 2004; Saunders 2010). There is no distinction between the economy and society; what’s best for one is considered best for the other.

Since neoliberalism privileges private interests, it encourages the privatization of public services and institutions (Welch 2005). The university is no exception. Since the late 1970s, when state and federal contributions to higher education were severely cut, universities have become ever more reliant on private funding sources (Readings 1996; Saunders 2010; Slaughter and Rhoades 2004). As a result, we see expanded university-corporate partnerships; outsourcing of dining halls, bookstores, and health centers to private vendors; and demand for applied research that commercializes its products.

Even more dramatically, private foundations are increasingly moving in to reform education, often without the input of educators or public debate. At the K–12 level, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation both bankrolled the Common Core State Standards movement, to the tune of \$200 million, and built the political support necessary to convince state governments to make expensive changes to education (Layton 2014). Gates, along with the Lumina Foundation and billionaire brothers Charles and David Koch, are also making deep inroads in postsecondary education. Since 2006, for instance, the Gates Foundation has spent \$472 million on a neoliberal brand of education reform that favors “a system of education designed for maximum measurability, delivered increasingly through technology, and—[as] critics say—narrowly focused on equipping students for short-term employability” (Perry, Field, and Supiano 2013).

This is most evident in the push for competency-based education, a model gaining support from both the federal government and private foundations, which remakes education into

a low-cost, individually paced track without credit hours, seat time, or faculty. Students demonstrate their progress by showing mastery of 120 “competencies,” such as “can use logic, reasoning, and analysis to address a business problem” (Perry, Field, Supiano 2013). In place of in-class time with tenure-line faculty and peers, adjunct instructors act as individual “coaches,” guiding students to resources and assessing their progress. The result is what Debra Humphreys, vice president for policy and public engagement of the Association of American Colleges and Universities, describes as a “hyped-up get it done fast mentality” (Mangan 2013). This mentality applies not only to the time it takes to earn a degree but also to education reform, as it removes dialogue among educators and communities and restricts public conversations about the purpose and process of education.¹

A heightened pressure for efficiency also shapes how universities are administered. Top-down business models replace shared governance that incorporates faculty and student input into education decisions (Saunders 2010, 58). This shift is not only financial but also ideological, such that “revenue generation, efficiency, and competition” have come to define the priorities of higher education and, in turn, to alter the roles and practices of students and faculty members (56).

With higher tuition bills and student fees, combined with shifts in financial aid from grants to loans, students have come to be the “chief financiers” of their own education—a designation that translates their role into that of consumers of education. In efforts to attract students, institutions “advertise education as a service and a life style” (Slaughter and Rhoades 2004, 1), bombarding them with marketing materials—touting luxury dorms and espresso bars—as early as their sophomore year in high school. Parents, too, are encouraged to view college as a commodity, one whose features they can compare in periodicals like *Maclean’s* and *U.S. News and World Report*, just as they might when purchasing a car or laptop computer.

Students are not simply costumers in the academic marketplace, however. They are also considered both the “inputs” and “outputs” of their education (Slaughter and Rhoades 2004,

43). As Slaughter and Rhoades summarize, “Student identities are flexible, defined and redefined by institutional market behaviors.” For instance, universities seek students who are high scorers on standardized tests, because advertising these numbers increases the presumed prestige of the institution, and, in turn, makes recruitment of future students easier. Once enrolled, students are “captive markets” for the products provided by the universities’ corporate partners, found in union stores and restaurants, vending machines and at sporting event concession stands (2). Upon graduation, students become the products, or outputs, of their institutions, with student success—especially in terms of earnings—signaling institutional excellence (44). And then, of course, they become potential donors to the institutions.

Faculty roles are also altered. As universities mimic corporate structures, faculty labor is “unbundled,” with the bulk of undergraduate teaching assigned to part-time instructors, teaching assistants, and postdoctoral positions. This both lowers instructional costs and creates a flexible workforce, the members of which do not, typically, have a say in the governance of the university or, often, the curriculum they teach. Tenure-line faculty within a neoliberal climate are expected to compete and produce, with more emphasis placed on generating revenue and less on institutional decision making (Saunders 2010, 54). Patricia Harkin describes how this climate impacts compositionists, as we must increasingly compete for funds to “do the work that has been historically entrusted to us, work that used to be sustained by university and department operating budgets, work that, when grant applications are unsuccessful, no longer gets done” (Harkin 2006, 30–31). She draws from Althusser’s notion of interpellation, or being hailed, to argue that in the contemporary university, we are called as “funded researchers”—or, we might say, academic entrepreneurs (32). As a result, she argues, we are prompted to do work that is fundable rather than work that emerges out of problems or interests we encounter as teachers and administrators (33). We are guided, like good neoliberal subjects, by economics.

Neoliberal values also encroach upon writing instruction. In a view of education as job training, writing becomes a masterable, commodified skill whose purpose is deployment in the workplace. Other purposes for writing—civic engagement, personal inquiry, exploration of unfamiliar perspectives—become ancillary to more “profitable” ends. And since neoliberal logics value a streamlined approach to predetermined outcomes or competencies, there is little tolerance for learning processes that entail engagement of (an often recursive) process, collaboration and dialogue among learners, and reflection—in other words, exactly the kind of learning research in composition and rhetoric promotes.

Indeed, neoliberal logic carves education into a narrow path, with a singular purpose: to prepare the future workforce and bolster the economy. While preparing students to find meaningful work and to earn a living is certainly a valid goal of education, I argue that it is not enough. We must also prepare students as civic participants and community members, as writers and thinkers who are able to listen to and engage tension and difference, and as agents in the local contexts that matter to them. This means repurposing education as a complex, relational practice, one that involves, as I argue in chapter 5, learning to respond well to others.

In response to this upsurge of neoliberal pressure, my project turns to feminist thought for two reasons. First, the neoliberal emphasis on rationalism, standardization, and efficiency places feminist values and practices at risk of containment, making it crucial to illuminate them. Second, contemporary and historical feminist scholarship in rhetoric, composition, and pedagogy offers some of the most visible and effectual repurposing efforts in our field, yielding rich examples of re-visioning and reenacting our classrooms, institutions, and intellectual traditions—and in so doing, makes room for new approaches to writing, knowing, collaborating, and assessing. Such efforts offer us both knowledge and practices needed to repurpose our work as writing teachers, sponsors of teacher development, and writing program administrators in the face of neoliberal pressure.

REPURPOSING THE UNIVERSITY

Even as contemporary universities are deeply entangled in neoliberal logic, there still exists possibility for change and movement. In fact, the central premise of this book is that university education, and the practices that comprise it, can be repurposed. Following Slaughter and Rhoades, I argue that an academic capitalist regime has not simply *replaced* a public-good regime; rather, “the two coexist, intersect, and overlap” (Slaughter and Rhoades 2004, 29). After all, even as universities are enmeshed in pressures of accountability, competition, and corporate accommodation, they also tout, and seek to enact, commitments to diversity, creativity, and outreach. While the two purposes of education are often at odds, their coexistence means that there is potential to reclaim and illuminate the public-good approach. This potential is realized only through our local actions. Indeed, academic subjects (professors, students, administrators, and so on) *enact* neoliberal values through specific practices. Or as Slaughter and Rhoades put it, the university is composed of actors who initiate academic capitalism; we are not merely “players being ‘corporatized’” (12). This means that by changing our practices, we can alter the purposes and values of our pedagogical sites.

Neoliberal ideology, however, tends to hide in the open, making it difficult at times to see. And so, the first step of repurposing neoliberal practices is to illuminate their very presence. Feminist scholarship is helpful in this regard, due to its long history of highlighting and challenging notions held to be natural and neutral, and instead pointing to how these constructs are ideologically, socially constructed, and—as contemporary scholars argue—*enacted* through specific practices (Jung 2005; Kopelson 2006; LeCourt and Napoleone 2011). For instance, Judith Butler famously frames gender as an identity “instituted through a stylized repetition of acts” that are so commonly repeated as to seem natural (Butler 1988, 519). When gender is understood as something that is enacted and repeated, possibilities emerge for “a different sort of repeating” that breaks or subverts the repetition (520). As a result, gender may be

(re)made anew. The first step of feminist repurposing, then, involves highlighting and critiquing existing conditions. We see this work in the examples above, wherein the Caliber bracelets illuminate the problem of gun violence and Judd's dresses highlight the problems of consumerism and waste. In the pages ahead, I show how illuminating normative neoliberal assumptions allows us to break familiar repetitions, working toward purposes and practices in keeping with feminist values.

Feminist repurposing also involves inquiring into and analyzing social context to consider where possibilities exist for working both within and against current structures, systems, and practices. Judd's dresses, made from consumer waste, offer a vivid example of this practice, as she taps into public interest in fashion and consumption in order to challenge the systems that spur these cultural habits. The Wellington Craftivism Collective repurposes the domestic sphere, once considered a "natural" feminine—and thus devalued—domain, into a site of feminist activism. These projects invoke familiar systems and repurpose them, and in so doing, they ask us to view dominant perspectives differently.

Another practice of feminist repurposing is to reclaim what has been cast off or suppressed to be used for new ends. We see this literally in Mindich's repurposing of gun remains or Judd's reuse of plastic caution tape, and repurposing metaphorical "excess" is also a trope in feminist rhetoric and pedagogy. In her 1975 theory of *écriture féminine*, second-wave feminist Hélène Cixous contends that within traditional rhetoric, "the orator is asked to unwind a thin thread, dry and taut." (Cixous 2001, 285). Women, on the other hand, "like uneasiness, questioning. There is waste in what we say. We need that waste" (285). Referring simultaneously to the female voice and the female body, which she sees as intimately connected, Cixous embraces what is typically deemed "excess"—words, digressions, flesh, emotion.

In their article "Excessive Moments and Educational Discourses That Try to Contain Them" Mimi Orner, Elizabeth Ellsworth, and Janet Miller call attention to "excess" pedagogical moments that highlight the relationship between educational

discourses and repression (Orner, Miller, and Ellsworth 1996). By considering the excess, they underscore what has been occluded, tamped down, or ignored in dominant educational conversations. The excess—which evokes multiple readings—allows us to see the normative differently, and to locate new possibilities within that which is typically deemed “waste.” As Judd contends, waste may be a wasted resource.

Finally, feminist repurposing locates and enacts new possibilities for teaching and learning, for relating to one another, and for enacting cultural change. It creates something new out of existing conditions. The above examples show these possibilities, which include beautiful dresses, quilts, and bracelets, but also extend beyond these products to include opportunity for conversation, sharpened awareness, and seeds for further change.

In the pages ahead, I show how these tactics may be used to repurpose our classroom pedagogies, to work with new teachers, and to enact assessment. Illuminating the act of repurposing is important to my project, since neoliberalism often presents itself as the only viable option. For instance, in her study of new faculty members’ construction of professional identities in neoliberal contexts, Louise Archer finds that at the same time the faculty she interviews are critical of the managerial, product-oriented contexts they work within, they simultaneously begin to view neoliberal culture as the only “thinkable” context (Archer 2008, 272). As a result of neoliberalism’s pervasiveness, it becomes difficult for these new faculty members to establish a common language of critique that highlights what is lost and to imagine possibilities for an “otherwise” (282). My hope is that my book helps contribute in both ways—to elucidate and critique neoliberal culture and to render visible possibilities for repurposing. Archer reminds us that important moments of resistance often occur at the microlevel, and as I illuminate practices of repurposing in classroom moments, student writing, and assessment work, my hope is to spur readers to consider how resistance and repurposing do or can occur in their own contexts, so that a new repetition might be created—one that disrupts the entrenched mode of neoliberalism.

LOOKING AHEAD

Chapter 1 traces the specific methods through which feminist scholars in rhetoric, composition, and pedagogy have repurposed conceptions of the rhetorical tradition, composition pedagogy, and writing subjects. As I examine their tactics, I build the definition of feminist repurposing that carries throughout the project.

Chapter 2 explores the neoliberal privileging of rationalism by examining dominant cultural tropes for understanding emotion which, in turn, shape educational settings. In particular, I feature the “emotional intelligence” movement as one example of mainstream response to emotion that influences both corporate and pedagogical sites. Alternatively, I challenge approaches that rely on rationalism to discipline—and make efficient—emotion. Building upon the growing body of feminist scholarship that argues for emotion as epistemological (Boler 1999; Micciche 2007; Quandahl 2003; and Worsham 1998), I argue for a pedagogy that repurposes emotion as a crucial part of rhetorical education. I insist we must not stop at analyzing pathos as a rhetorical appeal, but also repurpose emotion as a source of knowledge production—to value what is deemed “excessive” as a resource. To argue for this pedagogy, I show how we can use public texts—in this case, media responses to emotion portrayed by Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton—to illuminate and challenge naturalized conceptions of emotion. I then move on to the text of my classroom to offer examples of engaging emotion as intellectual, rhetorical work.

Chapter 3 examines how neoliberal values shape listening as it relates to argument and dialogue in our culture and, subsequently, in our classrooms. I begin by investigating a trend in corporate culture to value listening—and listening training—which is marketed as a deployable skill that can promote individual agendas and, ultimately, corporate gains. This is a model embraced not only in business but also in educational settings; in fact, I contend that it shapes our teaching of argument, where others’ perspectives are used rather than engaged. Here, listening is derived from a divided notion of *logos* that privileges

speech above listening, with listening as a means to sharpen one's ability to persuade (Fiumara 1995; Ratcliffe 1999). In contrast, feminist scholarship repurposes listening to strive toward a restored *logos*, where listening and speech/writing function in productive interplay. Drawing from classroom moments and student writing, I show how rhetorical listening (Ratcliffe 1999) can alter the way teachers and learners conceive of and practice our engagement with others, how we understand our own positions, and how we compose arguments.

I then move to examine conceptions of teacher agency and belonging in a neoliberal climate that removes teachers' bodies, knowledge, and commitments from the scene of education. Chapter 4 elucidates neoliberal discourse as constitutive and gendered; it teaches us whom to be and how to belong in (and to) academic settings, where self-commodification and acclimation serve as the pathway to agency. For marginalized subjects, then, to attain neoliberal agency often requires the denial of embodied locations, knowledge, and history. In contrast, feminist scholars have long argued that the margins offer a revealing lens through which to view dominant culture (Collins 1986; hooks 1990), such that embodied knowledge is a channel both to clarify epistemological possibilities and to take responsibility for the partiality of one's perspective. These arguments offer a revised mode of *enacting* agency that insists upon illuminating traits covered by neoliberalism: embodiment, location, and responsibility to and connection with one another.

In the final chapter, I rely on the feminist ethic I've established throughout the book to argue for repurposing responsibility as a commitment to students, teachers, the field, and our communities. Here I examine how responsibility is typically framed within an accountability logic that is heavily influenced by neoliberal values. Accountability claims a "view from everywhere" but does not often include the views of teachers and learners or consider local contexts (Fleckenstein 2008). In contrast, I call for repurposing educational responsibility as necessarily relational, context sensitive, and evocative of the question "How can we respond well?" (Adler-Kassner and Harrington 2010; Thiem 2008).

This notion of responsibility forwards the feminist values, knowledges, and practices I articulate in the preceding chapters: situated, reflexive knowledge; careful listening and genuine dialogue; and acknowledgment of learning as complex and affective. In so doing, I offer examples of institutions, programs, and individuals that demonstrate a responsibility approach to teaching and learning as an alternative to a top-down accountability logic.

One of the most powerful consequences of neoliberal ideology and tactics is its tendency to exclude alternatives and rival forms of thought (Saunders 2010, 49). Feminist perspectives, on the other hand, aim to expand our collective view, to support more inclusive knowledge practices and purposes, and to insist that teaching and learning are relational, embodied, and affective processes. In the pages ahead, I aim to offer practices and perspectives that provide alternatives to neoliberal logic and that help illuminate possibilities for our daily local work with students, new teachers, and one another.

NOTE

1. For a fuller discussion of the consequences of competency-based education and its relationship to composition and rhetoric, see Gallagher (2016), "Our Trojan Horse: How Compositionists Were Duped into Promoting Competency-Based Education (and Our Own Irrelevance) through Outcomes Assessment and What We Can Do about It Now."