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Introduction

MONEY CHANGES EVERYTHING

Riders taking the Megabus out of New York line up along West Thirty-Fourth Street. During my days as an adjunct, I was there a few times a week. Back then, the area held little of interest beyond a bar called the Frying Pan. Now the towers of Hudson Yards loom above the neighborhood, the tallest rising 1,296 feet. At a cost of \$20 billion, the site is the largest private real-estate project in US history (Wirthman 2018). In addition to nearly four thousand apartments (Nonko 2018) and 1.5 million feet of office space (Palmer 2019), the complex also boasts the largest Equinox health club in the world (Lushing 2019); the Shed, where avant-garde artists like Arca and Tomás Saraceno showcase new work; and Vessel, Thomas Heatherwick's interactive sculpture the *New Yorker's* Alexandra Schwartz (2019) called a "shawarma-shaped stairway to nowhere." At the cost of an additional billion dollars, 30 Hudson Yards also offers Edge (see figure 0.1), a 1,100-foot-high, cantilevered observation deck where visitors can look down on tenth Avenue and "sip champagne in the sky" (Hudson Yards n.d.). Apartments at the site went on the market in 2016 and were listed in the "relatively modest" (Plitt 2016) price range of \$2 million to \$32 million.

Just across the Hudson and the Passaic lies Newark, New Jersey, a majority Black city (United States Census Bureau n.d.) recently ranked the third neediest in the country (O'Sullivan 2018). The site of a brutal six-day race riot in 1967 sparked by the beating of John Smith, an African American, by white police (Mitter, *Guardian*, July 11, 2017), the city has endured decades of disinvestment, job flight, and political corruption (Newman 2004). The city also remains embroiled in an extended water contamination crisis that has drawn comparisons to Flint, Michigan. For years, city officials were aware lead had been leaching from the city's aging pipes into its water supply but had few financial resources to address the problem (Corasaniti, Kilgannon, and Schwartz, *New York Times*, September 23, 2019). The cascading failures resulting from subsequent cheap fixes are almost too calamitous to be believed. As a stopgap



Figure 0.1. Hudson Yards and Edge (Photograph by Rhododendrites. Licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International license. <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/deed.en.>)

measure, the city added sodium silicate to its water, but a 2015 decision to lower the pH levels of the city's water supply to reduce carcinogens neutralized the effects of the chemical; in 2016, elevated lead levels were found in half the city's public and charter schools. In an alternative solution, the city distributed faucet filters designed to remove lead from drinking water, but in 2018 the filters were found to be defective and the city was forced to distribute bottled water (Corasaniti, Kilgannon, and Schwartz, *New York Times*, September 23, 2019).

This brief sketch of these two radically distinct urban sites just thirteen miles apart dramatizes the conditions many of us currently live in, places where wealthy white enclaves bask in luxury and where racial minorities and other marginalized populations face a diminishing

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quality of life. Yet while I have depicted what may appear to be multiple crises—institutional racism, privatization, the neglect of infrastructure, and poverty in the midst of enormous privilege—these share a common relation insofar as they are all either deepened by or the direct consequence of capitalism. Capitalism, in these and other sites across the world, creates, maintains, and intensifies economic and racial inequality; incentivizes and protects political corruption; restricts opportunity; and hastens the developing climate crisis. As sociologists Mathieu Desan and Michael A. McCarthy (2018) contend, “Capitalism is the chief source of human suffering today and a system that promotes the worst of human behaviors.” In their view, capitalism’s production of hierarchy, its remapping of the world as a place of strife rather than kinship, its degradation of the climate, and its capacity to impoverish are fundamental to its project. They are features, not bugs.

Building on this assertion, this book advocates the adoption of an anticapitalist approach in the field of composition. My contention is that only by becoming an explicitly and avowedly anticapitalist field can composition hope to conceptualize, let alone confront, the enormity of capitalism’s contemporary harms and prepare students to encounter and resist them. While some in the discipline have long made similar claims,¹ for many of us, this shift would entail significant changes to our research practices, administrative work, and pedagogy. With respect to our research, we must strive to map the landscape of twenty-first-century capitalism, identify its relationship to writing and to the composition classroom, and isolate means of resisting this influence while abandoning support, both explicit and implicit, for unbridled and unregulated capitalist growth. We must approach our institutional work with the similar understanding that capitalist logics of austerity, casualization, and exploitation must be opposed through unionizing, fighting for secure positions and fair wages, and protecting faculty governance. We must additionally be fearless in our classrooms about tracing the history and effects of capitalism, teaching writing as a technology entangled in the global economy, and orienting our students toward analyzing and confronting capitalist hegemony. We must also not be content to limit our work to the university but must engage with broader publics on issues of economic inequality, austerity, and related social justice concerns.

My framing of this work as *anticapitalist* is a deliberately ambiguous gesture intended to signify a general critique of capitalism irrespective of credo and, accordingly, to offer compositionists a broad array of methods, texts, and theories to inform their work. Rather than bind

myself or the field to a single tradition, I adopt an expansive approach that unites numerous perspectives in the critique of capitalism and aim to build upon the disparate murmurs of economic dissatisfaction heard across the world. Because of this approach, I do not attempt to offer a precis of anticapitalist thought, leaving that to others,² but rather strive to begin a disciplinary conversation on anticapitalism rooted in contemporary conditions, activism, and theoretical interventions. In understanding emergent articulations of anticapitalism as rendering this conversation especially necessary, I follow David Harvey (2020), who observes a common critique emerging among unaffiliated movements: “What we now see is perhaps the beginnings of the coming together of all those who feel that there is something wrong with the basic economic model” (8). Anticapitalism, however, is not simply an ethos or position but, rather, following sociologist Erik Olin Wright (2019), “a practical stance toward building an alternative toward greater human flourishing” (3). It is, in other words, an active and engaged orientation contending that capitalism, as a set of material processes and conditions, an ideology, a constellation of arguments, and a litany of effects, must be broadly resisted, even from the marginal position of composition, and that such opposition is not simply an ethical obligation for those of us who teach writing but a practical means of improving local and global conditions. While many in composition are sympathetic to these concerns, our discipline, in general, has not evinced a strong anticapitalist position for some time. Despite our support of equality, social justice, and students’ well-being, composition, with some notable exceptions, has been quiet about capitalism’s demonstrable harms and has typically shied away from, as Geoffrey Clegg (2019) frames it, teaching students “to resist neoliberal policies of capitalist assent” (160).

I am certainly aware my advocacy of an anticapitalist approach in the field may raise questions. To what extent is composition capable of becoming anticapitalist? If composition is indeed concerned with preparing students to, as David Smit (2007) contends, realize “their purposes outside the classroom in the larger ‘marketplace’” (156), how can it reasonably oppose capitalism? Why should it? Furthermore, why is capitalism, of all potential issues, the one the field should devote itself to? And if anticapitalism is indeed the right direction for the field, what figures or critiques should orient this work?

The following pages attempt to answer these questions in calling for an anticapitalist (re)awakening in our discipline.

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CAN COMPOSITION BE ANTICAPITALIST?

Some readers might reasonably suggest that composition—because of its strict commitments to teaching the craft of writing—can simply not be anticapitalist. Such critics might argue that because composition has a defined set of obligations, many of them directly capitulating to the needs of the professional world, reconceptualizing the field as anticapitalist would be an ultimately untenable contradiction. Such a position is effectively evinced, often implicitly, by proponents of writing about writing (WAW), a position that advocates importing composition research into course curricula as a means of engaging students in the task and discipline of writing. In the introduction to their 2019 collection *Next Steps: New Directions for/in Writing about Writing*, Barbara Bird, Doug Downs, I. Moriah McCracken, and Jan Rieman defend the WAW approach, arguing that writing itself must be the subject of the composition classroom insofar as “it is in wrestling with writing concepts . . . that students think deeply about what writing is, does, and means to them, and it is in writing about these concepts that students form their writer identities and develop deep writing knowledge” (3). A parallel approach in the field, that of threshold concepts, similarly contends writing courses are obligated to introduce students to the common understandings, ideas, and assumptions that undergird writing. As Linda Adler-Kassner and Elizabeth Wardle (2015) argue, threshold concepts are “concepts critical for continued learning and participation in an area or within a community of practice” (2). As with WAW, threshold concepts are promoted as content, a subject of explicit inquiry, allowing writers to gain fluency with the norms and conventions of interpretive communities. As Adler-Kassner noted in her 2017 CCCC chair’s address, “Writers must recognize that to produce what’s considered ‘good writing’ requires the ability to analyze expectations in specific locations. To do this, writers must approach writing as a subject of study and an activity” (332).

While I am far from opposed to introducing composition theory into the classroom, and indeed believe introducing students to examples of disciplinary scholarship specifically concerned with labor, precarity, and social class (Carter et al. 2019b; Kahn, Lalicker, and Lynch-Binieck 2017; Welch and Scott 2016) could achieve some of the same learning outcomes I advocate here—the work of this book is consistent with several threshold concepts, particularly Tony Scott’s (2016b) notion that “Writing Enacts and Creates Identities and Ideologies” (48)—I depart from the restrictiveness of several of the positions described above. With other scholars of the field’s social turn, I conceptualize composition as

a field with profound and undeniable linkages to social and political concerns. In my view, composition, as Bruce Horner (2015) frames it, is a “material social practice” (451) rather than a defined set of aptitudes or, as Horner characterizes David Smit’s (2007) position, “information or skill transfer . . . knowledge as commodity” (457). Following Horner, I conceptualize composition as a site where an exploration of social and material conditions must be staged if students are to confront the real operation of language and, indeed, the ways language is entangled in social, political, and economic phenomena. WAW and threshold concept advocates, by contrast, often imply that the writing classroom, by focusing exclusively on the task and theory of writing, is, in some respects, capable of being bracketed from larger social and political concerns. In the preface to *Writing about Writing: A College Reader*, Wardle and Downs (2011) note, “In conventional composition courses, students are too often asked to write about an arbitrary topic unrelated to writing” (v). I question how Wardle and Downs can make such distinctions when social and material forces—white racial habitus (Inoue 2019), ableism (Kerschbaum 2014), and, indeed, capitalism—are so profoundly imbedded in all writing, language, and university instruction as to trouble any demarcation of writing’s boundaries. As Christian Marazzi (2011) contends, language in the post-Fordist context has become territorialized by capitalism’s unbridled expansion. As he claims, “The dichotomy between the instrumental and the communicative sphere has been upended” (41). The consequence of this blurring, for Marazzi, is that language no longer simply reflects and participates in the economic sphere but rather is itself a site of economic production. Following Marazzi’s logic, to exclude political economy from course content is to neglect the ways language and writing perpetuate, embody, and enact capitalism. Abandoning direct attention to language, I believe, positions students to be less cognizant of capitalism’s power and its role in the professional and social worlds.

Composition’s positionality as a paradigmatic site of economic exploitation offers further justification that the field is available to (and spectacularly in need of) anticapitalist intervention on the subject of labor. Marc Bousquet (2002) notoriously made this critique twenty years ago in his controversial article “Composition as Management Science: Toward a University without a WPA.” In the text, Bousquet critiques the extent to which “managerial subjectivity” (494) permeates the field and equates WPAs to “members of the working class whose particular labor is to directly administer the labor of other members of their class at the frontline of the extraction of surplus value” (498). While Bousquet

acknowledges most WPAs wish to improve conditions for their mostly contingent employees, he notes that, due to their own fidelity to the organizational system, they “understand that there is little they can do about the labor system” (507). He hence advocates the abolition of the WPA and the raising of class consciousness among exploited composition instructors. Bousquet’s article certainly impacted the disciplinary conversation (Abraham 2016), but the changes he advocates have not been implemented and the field continues to be a site of enormous precarity (Daniel 2017). While Seth Kahn (2020) acknowledges labor issues have become more prominent in composition scholarship in recent years—in addition to Kahn’s work, the contributions of Randall McClure, Dayna V. Goldstein, and Michael A. Pemberton (2017), Deborah Mutnick (2016), and Nancy Welch and Tony Scott (2016) bear this out—he contends composition teaching continues to be underpaid and intellectually undervalued, even *and especially* by compositionists themselves (Kahn 2020, 606). Following both Kahn and Bousquet (2002), I argue composition remains in need of anticapitalist intervention.

Some might also suggest that by advocating an anticapitalist writing pedagogy, I am untenably asking that writing instructors acquire and teach a secondary body of knowledge. My view, however, is that virtually any instructor with an interest in economic inequality or, for that matter, with the experience of precarity will be able to do this work. Beyond the fact that many in composition come to the field from working-class backgrounds, the pervasive precarity of writing instruction as a profession means this includes most of us. Those who patch together “scraps of teaching” (Clare 2020) certainly understand economic inequality and can begin an impactful anticapitalist conversation based solely on their experience. While some have cautioned that students may be resistant to such topics (Strickland 2007) or that such conversations have little relevance to composition’s learning goals, the experiences of Josh Carmony (2021), a college student and essential worker, may be illustrative. In a recent article for *Contingent Magazine*, Carmony describes shock at realizing what little job security his history professor had: “One of the most impactful and inspiring professors at my college was on the verge of unemployment, with seven students and a three-credit course on Vietnam separating her from delivering food for Grubhub.” This encounter with faculty precarity led Carmony to a broader realization of the culture of precarity operative in contemporary capitalism.

My college was hiring one full-time instructor in each department (perhaps more in some of the larger departments) and then filling in the remaining classes with adjuncts—often three, four, or more in a single

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department. It was a carbon copy of the corporate work-around that I experienced in the airline industry, where businesses exploit labor to avoid paying dignified wages and benefits.

For Carmony, making connections between the adjunct crisis at his university and the broader conditions of the casualization of work led to deeper and more critical thinking on labor and twenty-first-century capitalism. In concluding his article, he notes, “As for students, I think it’s past time that we get a radical.” From Carmony’s testimony, it should be clear substantive knowledge of political economy on the part of instructors is not necessary to engage students in a critique of political economy. Moreover, such conversations are not ancillary to the work of writing. Just as Carmony’s realization of his teacher’s precarity extended his thinking on labor, the university, and contemporary capitalist conditions, anticapitalist inquiry offers to enhance students’ critical capacities.

WHAT’S SO WRONG WITH CAPITALISM?

Some who accept composition is at least nominally capable of adopting an anticapitalist position may question why such a turn is necessary. Those asking such a question may be attuned to issues of social justice but not necessarily convinced capitalism is acutely problematic or, indeed, the chief crisis our field must attend to. They may argue, for instance, that alternate issues—racism, genderism, homophobia, ableism, authoritarianism, declining democracy—are more significant and more worthy of our attention. I certainly don’t dispute the importance of these concerns. My response, however, is that capitalism also presents its own set of inimitably grave concerns and, more significantly, that capitalism plays a crucial role in deepening and sustaining virtually all other crises and inequities. In this section, I first discuss three of capitalism’s most pressing effects—economic inequality, the cultivation of human misery, and the degradation of the environment—before turning to a discussion of the ways capitalism intensifies ostensibly noneconomic forms of inequality. This discussion aims to illuminate that while numerous crises mark our era, capitalism is both the most significant and the most expansive.

One of the most visible crises of the last several decades is rising economic inequality (Piketty 2014, 2015, 2020; Milanović 2018). As economist Thomas Piketty (2014) contends, US inequality was high prior to World War II, with the top decile claiming 45–50 percent of national income between 1910 and 1930 (32), but fell significantly after the war, with the wealthiest decile claiming only 30–35 percent of national

income between 1950 and 1970 (32). Inequality, however, has exploded since 1980, with the top decile garnering nearly 50 percent of national income by 2018 (21). While, as Piketty argues, this surge in inequality was accompanied by enormous advancements in global wealth that have had some positive consequences—global life expectancy rose from twenty-six in 1820 to seventy-two in 2020 (16), the general health of the global population is now at its peak (17), and per capita income is ten times what it was in the 1900s (18)—these advancements have come at an enormous cost, particularly to the poorest 50 percent of the global population (21). The federal minimum wage “in real terms” (34) is below what it was in 1980, resulting in “the declining position of low wage workers” (531) and “decreased worker bargaining power” (531). Access to higher education in the United States has likewise become increasingly unequal (34) and is directly tied to parental income (535). Women and minority populations are also uniquely affected. Gender inequality, while declining, remains significant in economic terms (689). Racial inequality also remains stark. The Black poverty rate is more than twice that of white Americans (22 percent versus 9 percent, respectively), while the median household wealth of Black Americans is one-tenth that of white Americans (Rosalsky 2020).

A second deeply significant consequence of capitalist expansion is the rise in mortality among certain low-income population segments in the United States. In *Deaths of Despair and the Future of Capitalism*, economists Anne Case and Angus Deaton (2020) investigate the declining life expectancy of high school-educated, white, working-class Americans due to suicide, drugs, and alcohol, consequences propelled by economic inequality. As they detail, the United States is an increasingly unequal place where those without a college degree face a greater risk of death, a lower quality of life, “increases in their levels of pain, ill health, and serious mental distress, and declines in their ability to work and to socialize” (3). They cite a complex constellation of capitalist and social forces as responsible. Union membership has declined across the country, precipitating the decline of the working class (4). Workers have been both exploited by the US healthcare system (9) and overprescribed pain killers, leading to a devastating opioid epidemic (10). Perhaps most profoundly, Case and Deaton detail how the power of corporations has vastly outstripped workers, who have been variously consolidated and disempowered (10), finding themselves without agency or recourse in the twenty-first-century economic landscape. This is, crucially, not to suggest white people are unique in facing increased suffering in the twenty-first century. As Michelle Alexander (2019) argues, the abuses of

the Jim Crow era continue through juridical racism and the criminalization of Blackness. As she writes, “Once you’re labeled a felon, the old forms of discrimination . . . are legal” (2), specifically “employment discrimination, housing discrimination, denial of the right to vote, denial of educational opportunity, denial of food stamps and other public benefits, and exclusion from jury service” (2). Capitalism, of course, also plays a role here, as I discuss later in this introduction.

As troubling as these conditions are, capitalism’s environmental impact is arguably its most expansive and catastrophic effect. As environmental activist Paul Fleckenstein (2019) argues, “Rapidly changing climate conditions threaten to radically disrupt the plant, insect, and soil ecologies that make agriculture possible.” The role of capitalism in these events is increasingly impossible to deny. Indeed, some seeking to emphasize capitalism’s links to planetary harm have employed the term “the Capitalocene,” an alternative to the Anthropocene, to emphasize capitalism’s unique role in driving the new geologic era and inaugurating novel relations among humans, nonhumans, and the Earth. As Jason W. Moore (2016a) theorizes, the Capitalocene, “an ugly word for an ugly system” (5), strives to respond to the unanswered questions raised by the Anthropocene: “questions of power, capitalism, and class, anthropocentrism, dualist framings of ‘nature’ and ‘society,’ and the role of states and empires” (5). The term, he elaborates, “signifies capitalism as a way of organizing nature—as a multispecies, situated, capitalist world ecology” (6). For Moore (2016b), coming to terms with capitalism’s harmful relation to the planet entails a different order of anticapitalist solutions than have previously been proposed, namely combatting the “Cheap Nature strategy” (113), the notion that the world’s abundant natural resources are, indeed, free and available for exploitation without consequence. The term “Capitalocene” hence names and critiques capitalism’s absolute and catastrophic transformation of the physical world.

In addition to crises directly linked to its dominance, capitalism also plays a significant role in creating, deepening, and sustaining seemingly noneconomic forms of inequality. Disability, an issue extensively taken up in composition (Dolmage 2017; Kerschbaum 2014; Simpkins 2018), is one of many forms of inequality capitalism, in generally unacknowledged and invisible ways, informs. Disability rights activist Marta Russell and professor of law and rehabilitation sciences Ravi Malhotra (2019) critique the inadequacy of “the *minority* model of disability, which views it as the product of a disabling social and architectural environment” (2). Disability, in their view, is not an objective state but rather “a socially created category derived from labor relations, a product of the

exploitative economic structure of capitalist society” (2). They further assert that the most significant component of the subordination and marginalization of disabled people is their exclusion from the workforce (2) and not, as alternate models contend, “prejudicial and discriminatory attitudes” (2). They additionally argue disability, as a category, emerged in the context of industrial capitalism, in which those “who did not conform to the standard worker’s body and whose labor-power was effectively erased” (3) were barred from working and labeled a “social problem” (3). To be clear, I do not employ this critique to deny the enormous significance of prejudice. Rather, my purpose is to illustrate the extent to which capitalism is operative in all forms of social inequality and hence must be centered in our disciplinary work.

BUT HAVEN’T WE DONE THIS ALL BEFORE?

Some readers at this point may contend that while capitalism may be a significant concern, composition has already explored the subject and, indeed, done so extensively. They might further note that critics in composition continue to take up issues of capitalism in their work and that, because of this attention, the field should continue to expand its purview into previously unexplored areas. Such a criticism would not be inaccurate—composition scholars, particularly in the 1980s and 1990s, engaged in an explicit and censorious critique of capitalism. A critique of capitalism, likewise, continues in the field in the work of Bruce Horner, Tony Scott, Nancy Welch, and many others. However, as I discuss, attention to and interest in this critique have declined over recent decades, with scholars increasingly moving into other areas, often situating themselves within critiques of identity with nominal relation to capitalism. This decline is occurring in the context of capitalism’s continued expansion and against a background of reawakening public sentiment recognizing that, as Katrina vanden Heuvel (*Washington Post*, December 19, 2019) argues, “capitalism as we’ve known it doesn’t work.” As I maintain, such conditions demonstrate that capitalism remains relevant and that the field faces a unique opportunity to engage students in criticism of twenty-first-century political-economic conditions.

In US popular culture and public discourse, socialism and Leftist ideas—once prominent in the flourishing American Communist Party in the 1940s and 1950s (Gornick 2020) and with the evanescent and embattled radicalism of the 1960s and 1970s (Davies 2017; Rosenfeld 2013)—are once again becoming normalized. In part thanks to the prominence and popularity of Bernie Sanders as a candidate for the

2020 Democratic presidential nomination and the role of progressive congresswomen like Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Ilhan Omar, Rashida Tlaib, and Ayanna Pressley, proposed policies like Medicare for All, student debt cancellation, and the Green New Deal, while they have not become policy, have nevertheless become mainstream. *Teen Vogue*, first with Elaine Welteroth and later with Lindsay Peoples Wagner and Versha Sharma, has become a prominent Leftist platform. Prominent celebrities like Lil Yachty, Cardi B, and Kim Gordon publicly defend Leftist ideas. Television shows like *Squid Game* and *The Dropout* and films such as *Judas and the Black Messiah*, about Black Panther Party chairman Fred Hampton (King 2021), are mainstream fare. Anticapitalist discourses have become particularly prominent during the COVID-19 crisis; strikes by essential workers at Amazon, McDonalds, Instacart, Whole Foods, and numerous other sites (Read 2020) have underscored the exploitation of workers and a growing willingness to organize. Several crucial union votes have been successful at Starbucks locations across the country and at an Amazon fulfillment center on Staten Island (Rosenblatt, *New York Times*, April 1, 2022). This radicalism, however, remains largely the province of the young and exists in the context of deepening conservatism and strengthening capitalist power. Donald Trump, among countless offenses, implemented policies favorable to the wealthiest Americans, while Republican leaders abdicated their role in checking his power (Chait 2017; Krugman, *New York Times*, April 22, 2019). Sanders, of course, lost the Democratic nomination to the far more moderate Joe Biden.³ Hate crimes and racist rhetoric continue to proliferate (Gerstmann 2020; Hassan, *New York Times*, November 12, 2019), notably with the killing of George Floyd by Minneapolis police, an event that sparked massive BIPOC liberation protests that roiled cities in the United States and across the world in May and June of 2020 (Booker et al. 2020). Hence, while radicalism and anticapitalist ideas are increasingly prominent in US and global life, their emergence coincides with the strengthening of capitalism and conservatism.

While academia, particularly the discipline of composition, remains engaged, often profoundly, with a variety of progressive issues, it appears increasingly ambivalent about anticapitalism. As previously noted, this ambivalence was not always the case. Several of composition's leading figures from the late 1970s to the 2000s—most centrally Richard Ohmann (1996, 1978, 1985), John Trimbur (1989, 1997, 2000), and James A. Berlin (2003)—were not only critical of capitalism's effects but frequently defended explicitly anticapitalist pedagogical stances in their work. Though diverse in their interests, they took up such related

concerns as social class, cultures of work, political conservatism, and technology, evincing a consistent and unambiguous critique of capitalism as antagonistic to critical thought and political life. They frequently framed writing as a highly political and critical enterprise. Ohmann in particular consistently declaimed the dangers of capitalism's postwar ascendancy and defended the writing classroom's potential to support class consciousness and critique. In *English in America: A Radical View of the Profession*, Ohmann (1996) offers a fervent attack on English departments' capitalist capitulation. Advancing a critique that remains relevant today, he excoriates the MLA as a politically reactionary "meritocracy of scholarship" (29), laments the banishment of Marxist literary criticism (89), and frames first-year composition as cultivating the language skills of "a governing class" (134). In his view, the way forward lies in revolutionary politics: "Much of what's wrong in the profession reflects the needs of advanced capitalism and is remedial only through deep social change" (304–305).

Scholars such as Nancy Welch, Seth Kahn, Marc Bousquet, Tony Scott, Deborah Mutnick, and Bruce Horner have continued to work in the anticapitalist tradition, though their critiques occupy a smaller corner of the field than similar work once did. Scott's *Dangerous Writing: Understanding the Political Economy of Composition* (2009) is a particularly essential text devoted to exploring the financial conditions of the scene of composition, specifically the political economy of textbook publishing and the realities of students who toil in part-time positions. Framed largely in response to critics of politicized writing like Joseph Harris, the work defends an approach to composition rooted in political economy, political engagement, and a politicized understanding of the social. Welch's *Living Room: Teaching Public Writing in a Privatized World* (2008) similarly considers the regime of privatization following the events of 9/11 and responds by theorizing a working-class pedagogy grounded in social action and public discourse primed to support students' agency. Welch and Scott's coedited collection (2016) likewise explores the impact of neoliberal policies and narratives, austerity specifically, on the scene of composition. In recent years, there have also been several notable engagements with the political economy of composition (Abraham 2016; Cox et al. 2016; Horner, Nordquist, and Ryan 2017; Kalbfleisch and Abraham 2016; Mutnick 2019b; Sano-Franchini 2016), many of which adopt an anticapitalist stance.

The field has also engaged in numerous valuable critiques of the capitalist foundations of contemporary higher education and academic labor (Bousquet 2002, 2008; Bousquet, Scott, and Parascondola

2009; Kahn, Lalicker, and Lynch-Binieck 2017; McClure, Goldstein, and Pemberton 2017). Foremost among these critics is Bousquet, whose *How the University Works: Higher Education and the Low-Wage Nation* (2008) critiques the trend of underpaid and disposable academic labor, noting that “the university under managerial domination is an accumulation machine” (7). Bousquet’s most scathing remarks are reserved for the rhetorical construction of the job market; he argues that the capitalist logics favoring cheap labor and a disposable workforce have come to govern graduate education: “In the full ripening apogee of second-wave knowledge, the system of graduate education is no longer understood as being ‘like’ a market; it is generally understood, simply and self-evidently, that graduate education *is* a market” (206).

Another valence of this critique is the field’s attention to the way US colleges and universities have expanded across the globe and extended their financial project in often destructive and exploitative ways. In Rebecca Dingo, Rachel Riedner, and Jennifer Wingard’s (2015) article “Disposable Drudgery: Outsourcing Goes to College,” the authors use the case of the University of Houston’s outsourcing of grading to an offshore company (265) to explore the ways the global university relies on devalued labor. In his article “‘Globalist Scumbags’: Composition’s Global Turn in the Time of Fake News, Globalist Conspiracy, and Nationalist Literacy,” Christopher Minnix (2017) contrasts the expanding educational scope of the university “aimed at preparing students for disciplinary, vocational, ethical, and political participation in an era of globalization” (64) with isolationist reactionaries. Insofar as these critics have employed the term *globalism* to critique the liberal perspective, Minnix writes that “globalism becomes, in its more extreme versions, indicative of a Leftist conspiracy to promote a one-world government” (64).

Relatedly, scholars have also sought to understand the capitalist valence of the spread of English education globally and, concomitantly, the maintenance of Standard English. LuMing Mao (2014), for example, has argued capitalism is behind both the global spread of English and the emergence of Chinese “cultural nationalism” (87), a form of “indigenous rhetoric” (82) that “stakes out an explicit claim to recover and reconstitute ‘native knowledge’ or what has been referred to as ‘national learning’” (79) and engages with a variety of other forms of contemporary discourse (79). In a similarly critical analysis, Min-Zhan Lu (2005) critiques the capitalist valence of monolingual ideology, the result of “the global extension of market modes of operation and of the logic of flexible accumulation to all areas of life” (20). Countering essentialist definitions, Lu defines English as an unstable territory existing in the conflict

“between and across English and diverse languages (peripheralized by the power of English under fast capitalism) and between and across diverse standardized englishes and their Othered, peripheralized englishes” (24).

In the last few years, there have also been a number of direct, albeit sporadic, engagements with composition’s relation to political economy. *Economies of Writing: Revaluations in Rhetoric and Composition* (Horner, Nordquist, and Ryan 2017) makes important strides in highlighting the significance of structural and material concerns in composition. As the editors acknowledge, there is a need in the field for scholarship exploring “how the economic defines, limits, and thereby shapes the work we do, how we do it, and to what ends and with what effects we do it” (3). *Writing Democracy: The Political Turn in and Beyond the Trump Era* (Carter et al. 2019a) even more vehemently argues for a disciplinary critique of neoliberalism. As the authors note, neoliberalism “strips ‘democracy’ of values such as the ‘public good,’ human and civil rights, and relative economic equality” (5). They exhort “left-leaning scholars and activists who may have renounced Marxism to reconsider a historical materialist perspective” (3). In constructing my own anticapitalist critique, I particularly respond to the call for a composition that “explains and continues to investigate historical material realities in all forms and across disciplines, including the current crises of overaccumulation, environmental devastation, and intensifying global inequality” (Mutnick et al. 2019, 261).

Despite these works’ persuasive call for greater attention to political economy in the context of teaching writing, in recent years many in the field have turned their attention to other matters, namely the experiences, values, and discourses of marginalized subjects, while often glossing over the economic conditions that contribute to such marginalization. While identity is an important construct for understanding and combatting inequality and is a crucial means of uniting mass movements, scholars in composition have tended to individualize identity in ways that sideline rather than promote substantive engagement with political economy. While this is visible in many areas, the discipline’s encounter with social class is particularly guilty of this tendency.⁴

In discussing how composition pedagogy might better attend to social class, Irvin Peckham (2010) employs Pierre Bourdieu to make several generalizations about working-class identity, detailing how working-class students feel, think, and act in order to make characterizations about what they need. He writes, “Working-class people value predictable and traditional gender roles. Men are supposed to be men and women, women. . . . Labor means physical work, which in turn means muscle, masculinity” (121). This portrayal supports an argument against critical

pedagogy on the grounds that such a focus is dissonant, and paternalistic, with respect to working-class values: “Working-class students, in particular, do not expect and may not appreciate attempts to get them to rethink their religious, social, and political convictions” (142). James T. Zebroski (2017) similarly characterizes the working class by way of cultural generalizations, observing how English departments tend to denigrate or ignore working-class values (331). He likewise recounts how some working-class students have been alienated by his department’s focus: “Some of them tell me they do not feel comfortable with the culture of the department and what they see as its embrace of elite values” (333).

The point I wish to make here is not about the accuracy or validity of these characterizations of the working class⁵ but rather about the tendency of both Peckham (2010) and Zebroski (2017) to frame social class by way of identity and individual experience rather than as a product of economic inequality. To better understand class and how economically disadvantaged students might be better served by our pedagogy, we must turn to and engage in the kind of historical class analysis sociologist Göran Therborn (2012) offers in his *New Left Review* article “Class in the Twenty-First Century.” In the text, Therborn traces the long decline of working-class power, from a time in the twentieth century in which “working people who lacked property became a major and sustained political force” to the current period of poverty and political marginality. For Therborn, modern Left-wing political parties, while they may offer marginal progressive goods, have sided with capitalists, undermined the political potency of the working class, and “essentially capitulated to liberalism of one kind or another in the field of economic policy.” Therborn notes that the twentieth-century working class was once able to draw upon an “extensive pre-industrial literacy and craft traditions of guild organization” but that it now faces “soaring inequality and recurrent economic crises” as well as the reproduction of “capitalist exploitation and imperialism.” In the realm of composition, such conditions cannot be neglected as the field considers how to better meet the needs of working-class students. Likewise, issues of capitalism and political economy must also be considered when the field addresses other areas of exclusion and inequality insofar as capitalist conditions are indispensable when attempting to understand contemporary sites of inequality. This is, of course, not to suggest that all forms of inequality are due entirely to capitalism or that individual experiences should be neglected but, rather, to insist the kind of analysis Therborn engages in cannot be written out of any substantive consideration of composition’s role, particularly when it comes to identity.

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In the following section, I approach this issue through the framework of race, arguing the field's movement toward antiracism has often served to deprioritize political economic critique.

WHAT ABOUT ANTIRACISM?

Over the past several years, disciplinary attention to race and antiracism has become one of the most animated areas of composition. Antiracist theory (Condon and Young 2017; Inoue 2015, 2017, 2019; Inoue and Poe 2012), analysis of whiteness (Kennedy, Middleton, and Ratcliffe 2017; Ratcliffe 2005), and studies of racial justice activism (Epps-Robertson 2018; Hurlbert 2012; Kynard 2013; Lamos 2011) have been extensive and are increasingly central in the field. Regarding these interventions, while many may be persuaded that concern for political economy should inform composition's engagement with identity more substantively, they may nevertheless argue that our primary responsibilities lie with responding to racism and militating against the "White racial habitus" (Inoue 2019, 360) that courses through higher education and attitudes towards language more generally. Many may indeed argue composition holds a responsibility to attend to race *prior* to any additional social justice concerns and may, relatedly, believe that adopting an anticapitalist stance would unacceptably relegate race to a secondary concern. With rampant police violence against minorities and the proliferation of hate crimes and white supremacist groups (Porterfield 2020), the necessity of confronting racism and racist violence is abundantly clear. Nevertheless, the belief that race must somehow take precedence over the concerns of class difference and political economy, implicit in much of contemporary antiracist discourse, neglects the extensive role that political economy plays in deepening racial inequality. While the contemporary discourse of antiracism has, at times, gestured toward such a materialist critique,⁶ its general disinterest in economic inequality has, at others, diluted its impact.

There are, importantly, scholars beyond the field who have given equal attention to racism and economic inequality.⁷ Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor's *Race for Profit: How Banks and the Real Estate Industry Undermined Black Homeownership* (2019) critiques racism while exploring the decimation of Black wealth by way of predatory banking and lending practices. As Taylor details, the move of the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) to end redlining and promote Black homeownership in the 1970s, an ostensibly progressive and empowering change, heralded a more pernicious policy of "predatory inclusion" (5) in which

“homebuyers were granted access to conventional real estate practices and mortgage financing, built on more expensive and comparatively unequal terms” (5). As Taylor notes, these policies had the dual function of legitimizing racism and exposing Black homeowners to capitalist predation (6). Such a study demonstrates the complex and deep linkages between capitalism and race—economic exploitation can frequently serve to excuse and intensify racism while racism is consistently enacted through economic means. The centering of the entanglement of racism and capitalism present in Taylor’s work, however, is typically absent in composition studies. While scholars in this area certainly acknowledge structural racism, many, not unlike the field’s critics of social class, tend to subordinate relevant political-economic issues.

To begin with a prominent example, in the introduction to their edited collection *Performing Antiracist Pedagogy in Rhetoric, Writing, and Communication*, Frankie Condon and Vershawn Ashanti Young (2017) contend the pervasive disregard of racism in the context of higher education underscores the need for antiracist interventions in the teaching of writing. They specifically exhort readers to pay attention to conservative currents in US political discourse that seek to “de-trope race, to unlink remarks, policies, perceptions, and practices clearly designed to stigmatize, berate, and oppress people of color from the perpetuating legacies of white privilege” (11). Such an approach implies that in addition to racist discourses, minorities are harmed by a specific set of practices and policies that can be read as racist (and combatted) after cutting through conservative discourses with an antiracist lens. This is, at least in part, the case with respect to such issues as high minority incarceration rates (Leonhardt, *New York Times*, June 3, 2020). Such a critique, however, neglects how capitalism broadly functions to subordinate minorities in ways not legible to antiracist critique or responsive to antiracist action. The decline of unions and the stagnant minimum wage are examples of policies that disproportionately harm minority populations but are not necessarily legible as racism. Rather, insofar as these comprehensive economic policies impact white workers as well as minority populations, they require a political-economic lens.

In his 2019 CCCC chair’s address, “How Do We Language So People Stop Killing Each Other, or What Do We Do about White Language Supremacy?,” Asao B. Inoue more conspicuously rejects the lens of political economy in exhorting compositionists to interrogate the structures of white supremacy that undergird language and the work of writing instruction. Inoue specifically calls for revising our models of assessment to combat the racism implicit in our language and disciplinary practices: “If you

use a single standard to grade your students' languaging, you engage in racism" (359). One method of such work, for Inoue, lies in labor-based grading contracts insofar as they address "teachers who are by necessity steeped in a White racial habitus" (360). More expansively, he argues this work requires an aggressive process of self-interrogation insofar as instructors, particularly white instructors, must understand how they have benefitted from and perpetuate white supremacy. This process, he cautions, is a matter of public as well as individual change, arguing we must transform "the way power moves through White racial biases, through standards of English that make White language supremacy" (364).

Inoue's argument is undercut by an uncompromising and, at times, ungenerous rejection of political-economic perspectives. In one significant argument, Inoue glosses the Left's critique of the political economy of racial inequality: "many White folks wish to make the racist problems we experience, such as prison and educational racism, and the White bias of those systems, as about something else, about mostly economics, laziness, or bad values" (354). In this assessment, while he does acknowledge that prison and educational racism are "are interconnected and intersectional dimensions" (354), Inoue nevertheless rejects perspectives based in economic exploitation and economic inequality, suggesting that racism must be the dominant lens through which racial inequality is understood. In this assertion, Inoue conflates the Left's long-standing criticism of the prison-industrial complex with the reactionary arguments of such figures as Daniel Patrick Moynihan (Geary 2015), who rationalize minority poverty as a defect of Black culture. Such a conflation unfairly mischaracterizes the work of many leading Leftist scholars and activists and, moreover, suggests that tracing the economic roots of social and political problems is simply the self-serving project of white people.⁸ On this point, we should remember the work of activist and academic Angela Y. Davis, the keynote presenter at CCCC 2014. For Davis, prisons are an economic *and* racial formation. As she argues, prisons remove "the responsibility of seriously engaging with the problems of our society, especially those produced by racism and, increasingly, global capitalism" (2003, 16).

Inoue deemphasizes potential links between race and political economy elsewhere in his address, even in instances where resonances between the two are palpable and ready-to-hand. He references Max Weber's "iron cage" metaphor from *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (2002), a concept Weber employs to refer to capitalism's coercive power. Inoue uses Weber's concept to argue white supremacy functions analogously, as an economy in the context of language: "The

market I call your attention to today is the market of White language preferences in schools, although it is also not hard to find the connections between it and the flows of capital” (2019, 354). Here, Inoue contends that white language preferences function as a market but only alludes to the further point that white language preferences and white supremacy are deepened and sustained by literal market forces.⁹ Later in the address, Inoue turns to Marx in a further indictment of white supremacy’s systems of valuation, asking, “Who owns the means of opportunity production in the classroom?” (367). As Inoue notes, teachers perpetuate racist systems of valuation when they tell students who “may be starving with pockets and purses full of useless coins in the bustling market of your classrooms” (367) to adopt white language practices. As with his previous reference to Weber, Inoue uses Marx to highlight the devaluation of nonwhite discourse practices in the context of the classroom but brackets Marx’s larger critique of capitalist exploitation. In so doing, he neglects capitalism’s role in devaluing nonwhite language practices or, more extensively, in exploiting minority workers.¹⁰ Despite utilizing Weber and Marx to discuss race, Inoue fails to address how capitalism itself is disempowering to minorities.

Beyond this critique of disciplinary limitations, I further argue, controversially perhaps, that anticapitalism offers the most significant and emancipatory potential for marginalized populations and, accordingly, should occupy a much more central position in composition’s social justice efforts. While minority populations experience a broad array of harms not all primarily or necessarily economic, either in nature or in cause, one aspect of inequality affects all minority populations with devastating consequences—economic inequality. Black and Hispanic workers report significantly lower income than white workers and are more likely to live in poverty than whites or Asian Americans (Wilson 2020). The inequality African Americans experience, as Taylor (2016) contends, is largely the product of “government policy and private institutions that not only impoverish African Americans but also demonize and criminalize them.” While Taylor acknowledges that racism, in its entanglement with capitalism, is also secured by belief, she nevertheless claims political-economic interventions are vital for redressing many of the causes of racial inequality and the lived realities of minority populations, particularly the ways centuries of racism and predatory economic practices have created chronic—and deepening—wealth and wage gaps. I likewise contend studying and responding to the political-economic conditions that created and maintain these inequities is one of our most pressing tasks.

In an October 25, 2020, *New York Times* article, economists Ellora Derenoncourt and Claire Montialoux similarly claim that raising and expanding the minimum wage will substantively narrow the wage gap among white and minority workers. Touré F. Reed (2020) likewise argues that solutions to racial inequality lie in the institution of a “public-good model of governance” (14), noting that “those of us who want to eliminate contemporary black poverty and inequality must insist on addressing the material sources of poor and even working-class African Americans’ disadvantage” (171–172). This is also the position Heather McGee (2021), former president of Demos, defends in *The Sum of Us: What Racism Costs Everyone and How We Can Prosper Together*, a text decrying the pervasive and racist “zero-sum story” (xxi) that reductions in racism will entail fewer opportunities for everyone. According to McGee, racism not only harms minorities but also disadvantages “non-wealthy white Americans” (38) by reducing their support for programs they would benefit from and motivating them to vote for politicians whose policies do not align with their class interests (38). As a solution, McGee contends we need to cultivate “a new formula of cross-racial solidarity” (xxii) that will “refill the pool of public goods, for everyone” (271).

In addition to holding broad capacity to address the marginalization of all minority populations, anticapitalism also has an expansive potential to attract and unite excluded and marginalized subjects into a single political struggle. Political scientist Adolph L. Reed Jr. (2000) offers such an assessment: “The goal of building a mass movement . . . requires proceeding from those identities that unite as much of the society as possible around a vision and program that most directly challenge the current power relations” (xxvii). For Reed, issues of economic marginalization, regardless of race, gender, or other markers of difference, are comprehensively disempowering and thus most capable of being framed as sites of collective struggle. “For the vast majority of people in this country,” he writes, “the common frame of reference is the employment relation, the fact of working, or being expected to work, a job” (xxvii). He argues that economic struggles associated with the essential act of working—“finding, keeping or advancing in a job with a living wage, keeping or attaining access to decent healthcare, securing decent, affordable housing . . . being able to seek or keep the protection of a union, having time for quality of life” (xxvii)—are universal desires affecting the broadest swath of people. These amount, for Reed, to “a concrete, material basis for solidarity” (xxvii). Importantly, while Reed certainly acknowledges the stain of racism and racist violence—and indeed discusses its personal impact in his autoethnography on growing

up in Louisiana during the Jim Crow era (2022)—he nevertheless defends an expansive materialist framework for conceptualizing race:

Defeating the white supremacist regime was a tremendous victory for social justice and egalitarian interests. At the same time, that victory left the undergirding class system untouched and in practical terms affirmed it. . . . The larger takeaway from this reality is that a simple racism/anti-racism framework isn't adequate for making sense of the segregation era, and it certainly isn't up to the task of interpreting what has succeeded it or challenging the forms of inequality and injustice that persist. (140)

Regarding Reed's defense of unions, many have additionally argued that unions and labor activism directly combat racism. As Paul Frymer and Jacob M. Grumbach (2021) found in a study of union membership, white members of unions are "less racially resentful" (233) than nonunion members. Such a finding supports the argument of *Jacobin* associate editor Meagan Day (2020), who contends unions are a crucial means of opposing racism. As she writes, unions offer "opportunities for people of different racial backgrounds and identities to not merely work side by side . . . but to *work toward a common goal* together." It is important to note here that unions are not the sites of gender and racial exclusion they are frequently believed to be. As the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported in 2021, Black workers have the highest rate of union membership, with 12.3 percent (3). Unions are also, notably, becoming *more* diverse—union membership among Black workers is up 1.1 percent from 2019, while for white workers the number is only up 0.4 percent (3). Men remain slightly more represented in unions, with 11 percent membership, but women are not far behind, with 10.5 percent membership (2). The gender gap is likewise narrowing (6).

As I attempt to argue in this section, the field's turn toward antiracism has marginalized political-economic criticism, a critique of enormous significance and utility with respect to racial inequality. To utilize McGee's (2021) assertion, combatting racism and critiquing capitalism are not zero-sum propositions. Scholars and activists can, and have, addressed both simultaneously. But many, particularly in composition, have neglected the latter. If the field is to move toward greater equity and inclusion, it needs anticapitalism.

HOW SHOULD COMPOSITION ADDRESS CAPITALISM?

The following chapters attempt to delineate an approach to anticapitalist composition and, more broadly, to indicate both what is valuable in such a stance and what is risked. While, as I previously noted, this work

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is not indebted to a single anticapitalist tradition but, rather, is more expansively focused to include the broadest number of orientations and perspectives, it is nevertheless guided by a powerful anticapitalist concept: *the common*.¹¹ As I employ the term, the common is an attitude of solidarity that opposes the divisive and destructive project of capitalist accumulation. It is useful for composition insofar as it informs writing, specifically collaborative writing, as a collective, anticapitalist practice. As philosopher Pierre Dardot and sociologist Christian Laval (2019a) theorize it, the common is not “so much a matter of isolating and protecting some natural ‘good’ or ‘resource’ . . . as it is a matter of profoundly transforming the economy and society *by overthrowing the system of norms that now directly threatens nature and humanity itself*” (2). While this abstraction does not deny the consequence of physical spaces and material labor, it suggests a vastly more dynamic and expansive praxis is necessary beyond mere reclamation of privatized sites. Rather, Dardot and Laval frame the common as an insurgent, anticapitalist political theory centered on the notion of “collective work” (336). The concept, in their construction, names “the political principal of *co-obligation* for all those engaged in the same *activity*” (10). As I contend, this intervention is an invaluable resource for the anticapitalist composition classroom insofar as it responds to capitalist hegemony through imagining anticapitalism as a broadly inclusive articulation of solidarity and collective work. Cumulatively, the common presents composition with a deeply needed model of anticapitalist thought applicable to contexts of capitalism’s exclusionary and hierarchical function, its instantiation of immense inequality and division, and its appropriation and destruction of natural spaces.¹² However, the common also offers the field something beyond mere functionality. Conceptualizing political engagement through the common emphasizes anticapitalist action as a site of vital togetherness. The common, in other words, can also be a place of encounter, sociality, even laughter. In viewing this as an essential part of progressive political work, I follow Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez’s (2021) comments regarding the need for vibrant organizing: “But who’s gonna join your book club if it sucks? Who’s gonna join your reading group if they feel judged? So the important thing we need to do is to really create something . . . excuse my language . . . but that’s fucking fun.” The common is such a mechanism of collaboration, critique, and exhilaration that gathers subjects in communities as much social as they are political. This social brio is both what animates activist communities and what allows them to challenge capitalism’s forces of division and hierarchy. As a means of orienting composition classes critical of capitalism’s expansion, the common

weaves through the structure of this book and is the mechanism I utilize to situate composition in the anticapitalist conversation.

In chapter 1, “Gathering,” I examine the threat to democratic culture expressed by twenty-first-century political nativism and argue composition might resist this process by teaching collaborative writing as a political, solidaristic, and anticapitalist endeavor. Acknowledging that composition holds a robust history of collaboration and collaborative writing, I contend that scholars, with some notable exceptions (Holt 2018; Trimbur 1989), have yet to substantively explore collaboration’s extensive political and anticapitalist potential. Building upon Jodi Dean’s (2019) concept of the comrade, the chapter reframes collaborative writing as both a *common* anticapitalist praxis and a democratic endeavor capable of opposing the divisive tendencies of global capitalism. As the chapter ultimately argues, collaborative writing can be a site of cultivating political comrades across lines of difference in defiance of capitalist logics of disunity.

Chapter 2, “Debt,” offers an anticapitalist approach to teaching the issue of student debt, focusing on its devastation of graduates’ financial lives and social agency, its assault on American families, and its perpetuation of the myth of US meritocracy. As the chapter argues, if it is to confront one of the most pernicious capitalist threats, anticapitalist composition must address debt’s rhetorical and material influence and prepare students to do the same. Drawing upon an essay by Jean-Luc Nancy (2017), the chapter contends the rhetoric of debt operates by submitting the breadth of social interaction to the calculus of the financial insofar as the “uses of debt disregard every recognition other than that of the debt itself.” The chapter develops pedagogical methods to center these conditions in the classroom and to prepare students to critically negotiate them.

In chapter 3, “Work,” I address how writing instruction can support students’ resistance to some of the most harmful aspects of the contemporary working world: exploitation, casualization, overwork, and the blurring of the professional and the personal. I exhort composition instructors to examine how declining working conditions exist within a rhetorical context that privileges burnout and absolute fidelity to one’s employer. Drawing upon leading scholars of neoliberal labor and philosopher Isabelle Stengers’s (2015) analysis of institutional “stupidity” (119), discourses and logics that annihilate “the capacity for thinking and imagining of those who envisioned ways of doing things differently” (119), the chapter argues the twenty-first-century working world has become increasingly dominated by regimes of thought that thwart employee

resistance and repurpose collectivity to support capitalist ends. Against these misuses of collaborative potential, this chapter theorizes the teaching of collaborative practice as a mode of resistance against the neoliberal workplace. More specifically, it advocates engaging students in collaborative criticism of the contemporary discourses of work to enhance students' capacity to parse work's narratives and resist its conditions.

Chapter 4, "Data," explores anticapitalist approaches to digital writing and multimedia composition. Contending the field of composition has largely neglected the significance of what Shoshana Zuboff (2019) terms "surveillance capitalism" (9), the transformation of internet users' "data exhaust" (68) into capital, I argue the field has missed an opportunity to position students to parse the political economy of the digital world and resist its influence. Drawing from Bernard Stiegler's (2019) theory of "disruption" (7), the chapter elaborates on how digital capitalism threatens the health of communities. I propose a digital pedagogy based in Stieglerian "dreaming" (199) that orients students to the work of collaboration, invention, and anticapitalist resistance in digital contexts. Regarding composition courses, the chapter advocates teaching students to interrogate the political economy of the data industry and social media discourse to more effectively read and resist Silicon Valley's techno-utopian narratives and the exploitation of the data industry.

The final chapter, "Action," moves to the site of the university and considers anticapitalist writing pedagogy's vulnerable place within contemporary higher education. Specifically reflecting on the decline of academic freedom (Reichman 2019) and the precarity of contingent faculty, the chapter outlines how anticapitalist composition stands in conflict with the conservative, capitalist orientation of the contemporary university, how contingent faculty who practice it risk censure, and how institutional changes must be made to make anticapitalist pedagogy more secure. The chapter draws upon Dardot and Laval's (2019a) analysis of the common and their concept of "insituent praxis" (298) to define three sites of struggle to better safeguard anticapitalist pedagogy and progressive faculty at the financialized university: (1) resistance to the university's capitalist entanglements, (2) the democratization of the university, particularly regarding institutional bodies and boards, and (3) the reduction of faculty hierarchies. The chapter concludes with a defense of faculty unions, which I contend are the sites where institutional change can and must begin.

I wish to close this introduction by acknowledging my positionality relative to these arguments. I am a contingent faculty member. In 2017, I moved across the country to take my current position as a

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non-tenure-track lecturer (now teaching professor) at the University of Washington–Seattle, a job that offers reasonable pay and security in an expensive city. My position is not an undesirable one. I have the respect of my colleagues, the confidence of my chair, and some opportunities for advancement. I live in a city many people would consider desirable. I am not commuting across state lines to eke out a living as I used to. I have an office to myself. And I have time, just a little, to write. And while I am contingent, I have been assured my position will be renewed. Nevertheless, this life is precarious and uncertain. And yet I am far more secure than most who teach composition.

These circumstances, and those of my contingent friends and colleagues, inspired me to write this book. Prior to taking contingent work, I naïvely did not yet understand the extent to which capitalism has unmade the university and proletarianized most academics. Nor did I comprehend the amount of debt most students take on or the exploitative and unforgiving economic conditions they face when they graduate (if, indeed, they do).¹³ Understanding these conditions, however, has moved me to defend centering anticapitalism in our disciplinary work. I argue we must take this on if we wish to deal with the most substantial force disempowering students, faculty, and (really) everyone else. In large part, we are not having this conversation in composition. And things are deteriorating. Economic inequality is deepening, climate change marches along, and students are sinking further into debt. Anticapitalist interventions are needed to address these crises. Composition, of course, represents just a small part of the academic scene—and a neglected and maligned one at that—but prioritizing capitalism's harms and attending to them in our classrooms, research, and labor struggles is, nevertheless, a hugely important task. And it is one we can take on now.