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Introduction

RECOGNIZING, INTERVENING, AMELIORATING

Responding to Violence in the Work of Composition

Scott Gage

The ensuing chapters of this collection introduce students grappling with violence in its myriad, pernicious forms. A Black undergraduate student compelled to suppress their voice, identity, and lived experiences by the dictates of a writing program's Eurocentric learning outcomes. Students entering the composition classroom classified, differentiated, and (de)valued by longitudinal assessments of their emotional and behavioral characteristics. Students required to engage with and through digital interfaces that both reify the white normative body and jeopardize student subjectivity. A white undergraduate student from a rural and impoverished background subtly coerced to conform to middle-class narrative expectations by editing and tempering their lived experiences. Graduate student tutors risking multiple forms of retraumatization—their own and others'—as they work with writing center clients struggling with disclosures of sexual violence.

The chapters here also introduce faculty, tenured and nontenured, contingent and graduate, grappling with ways to alleviate or mitigate the violence that infiltrates their students' academic lives. The composition instructor on Indigenous land listening to, learning from, and establishing relationships with local elders. The writing center director preparing tutors to resist linguistic imperialism. The writing program administrator (WPA) collaborating with faculty and graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) to develop nonviolent means to respond to violent student writing. Individually and collectively, these teachers and administrators identify instances and spaces of violence or the threat of violence in their own work. They, then, strive to avert it entirely, or to divert it in part.

Nor are these faculty safe from violence. Just as students are entangled in the coils of institutional and disciplinary violence, so too are

faculty, even if not always equitably. The instructor of an online composition course whose university's free speech policies silence their ability to respond to a student's anti-LGBTQ+ hate speech. The female WPA subject to a faculty member's increasingly overt and hostile misogyny. And, just as faculty are vulnerable to violence, we are equally at risk of perpetrating violence. As institutional agents, faculty are positioned (more so than students) to walk a razor's edge between suffering the ravages of violence and inflicting those ravages, unintentionally or not. The WPA whose disciplinary arguments about the value of multimodal composing ignore and negate students' access to and relationships with technology. The composition instructor who performs argumentative violence despite their pedagogical investment in nonviolent forms of argument.

These brief snapshots describe just a few of the students and teachers contending with violence in their lived experiences across our discipline. The snapshots also demonstrate the troubling extent to which violence both circulates through and structures our discipline and the labor that defines it. *Violence in the Work of Composition* takes such violence as its focus. The collection's many voices arise from spaces that contend with violence as it inflects and, perhaps, infects the work we perform across our most common disciplinary sites, namely our classrooms, writing programs, and writing centers. Understood across this collection as any influence limiting a living being's capacity to achieve full realization (Galtung 1969), violence is interwoven with our discipline in ways both overt and covert. Overt violence is Slavoj Žižek's (2008) "subjective violence" (1), Johan Galtung's (1969) "personal or direct" violence (170). It is violence involving "a clear subject-object relation" (Galtung 1969, 171) through which harm is exacted on flesh and/or psyche by "a clearly identifiable agent" (Žižek 2008, 1) who apparently intends to wound or, at worst, kill. It is visible as an "event" (Galtung 1990, 294), a seemingly "irrational explosion," a "perturbation of the 'normal,' peaceful state of things" (Žižek 2008, 2). Visible to "barefoot empiricism" (Galtung 1990, 294–95), overt violence appears quantifiable, subject to representation through the number, the percentage, the statistic.

Covert violent, in contrast, escapes and resists quantification; it escapes and resists visibility. It is Žižek's (2008) "objective violence" (1), Galtung's (1969) "structural violence" (171). It is the system that engenders "unequal power . . . and unequal life chances" (171) as well as the "subtle forms of coercion that sustain relations of domination and exploitation" (Žižek 2008, 9). It is the "invisible background" (10), the "tranquil waters" (Galtung 1969, 173), the "air . . . one learns how to breathe" (Lawrence and Karim 2007, 5). A product of the

institutionalization and normalization of unequal power distributions, covert violence provides a breeding ground for social injustice. That injustice, in turn, erupts into overt violence, binding both overt and covert violence in an insidious and often deadly feedback loop.

This book is a collection about both students and the faculty committed to their flourishing, despite our complicated relationship to violence, overt and covert. It is a book about the violence that circulates through our work as compositionists; the violence with which we are complicit without knowing; the violence to which we, as well as our students, are subject; and the violence which we individually and collectively seek to redress. But it is also a collection about the quotidian nature of violence within and across our disciplinary landscape. It is a book that understands violence as always already present both in our lives and in the lives of our students, always already cloaking itself in familiarity, in invisibility, in silence. *Violence in the Work of Composition* represents one effort to break through that silence and reclaim voices, selves, and worlds in the wake of their undoing.

Although a long view of history may suggest a decrease in violence, specifically overt violence (Pinker 2011), a more immediate view suggests the opposite; we are increasingly harming one another overtly through word, fist, and gun, covertly through hierarchy, policy, and law. By addressing these forms of violence in composition studies, this book builds on and extends previous disciplinary work that pierces the silence of and on violence. For example, teacher-scholars such as Michael Blitz and C. Mark Hurlbert (Blitz and Hurlbert 1998) have wrestled with the burdens overt violence introduces into the classroom, while J. Elspeth Stuckey (1991) has interrogated the teaching of literacy as a covert violence regulating socioeconomic access. More recently, Paul Heilker (2015) has asked, “In how many ways, and to how great a degree, is writing instruction . . . violent?” (49–50). Asao Inoue (2019) provides one answer to Heilker’s question, arguing that the imposition of a single standard in writing classrooms “lead[s], if one pushes the logic far enough, to killing” (307). *Violence in the Work of Composition* is indebted to these teacher-scholars, who, among many others cited across the collection, have raised concerned voices demanding we pay attention to the interrelationship between violence and composition studies. Despite their efforts, their warnings and concerns, attention to violence in our discipline has not been focal, stable, or systematic. Rather, that attention tends to treat violence indirectly, frequently naming and addressing specific iterations of violence instead of also naming and addressing violence itself. Centering violence as its focus, this collection contributes

to three goals: first, recognizing and acknowledging the threads of overt and covert violence that weave through our work as teachers and administrators; second, devising strategies that intervene in violence to curtail its emergence, limit its scope, and diminish its effects; and third, considering new ways of thinking about violence that offer hope for mitigating it beyond the immediate classroom or programmatic initiative. In addressing these goals, *Violence in the Work of Composition* invites systematic scrutiny of violence, maps violence as event and process, and envisions concrete ways to redress the harmful material consequences of violence for our discipline, our programs, our students, and ourselves.

VIOLENCE: ITS MEANINGS AND COMPLEXITIES

What is “violence?” As academics, we have been disciplined to answer such questions by defining, examining, and/or critiquing a key term. This disciplining shapes us in profound ways, so I find it difficult to pursue other methods even though I know and *feel* that approaching a term like violence as I have been taught to is both a fraught and troubling process. Brad Evans and Terrell Carver (Evans and Carver 2017) go further, labeling such efforts “perilous and intellectually damaging.” “Violence is all about the violation of bodies and the destruction of human lives,” they write (5). As such, any effort to intellectualize violence, reducing the lived experience of pain and trauma to a definition, theory, or object of analysis, risks enacting its own violence by diminishing, and perhaps exploiting, the visceral reality of violence’s impact on people and communities. As Mark Vorobej (2016) writes, “violence hurts” (1), and examining violence jeopardizes perpetuating that hurt even as such examinations strive to lessen its severity. How, for example, might someone directly impacted by overt violence respond to an effort to fulfill genre convention by defining this collection’s key term? Might any effort—and by extension, the genre convention guiding it—exacerbate their grief and anguish, especially given the certainty that any definition of violence offered will fail to honor their experience of it? Fraught and troubling, indeed. Despite their warnings, Evans and Carver (2017) do not argue that we should not define or examine violence, only that violence should “never be studied in an objective or unimpassioned way” (5).

Adding to the challenges of defining violence is that violence is complicated, “a multilayered, complex phenomenon that is difficult to conceptualize” (Engels 2015, 145). Vorobej (2016) offers similar insight, writing that “violence remains a complex, unwieldy, and highly

contested concept” (1). Several factors contribute. For example, violence can “take ever new forms” (Bernstein 2013, 177), or as Han Byung-Chul (2018) asserts, “violence is simply protean” (vii). Additionally, violence is deeply paradoxical, encompassing both destruction and creation (Rae and Ingala 2019). Perhaps the most important factor contributing to the complexity of violence, and with it, the difficulty of wrangling it into an academic definition, is the range of actions and consequences that may be recognized as violent or nonviolent as well as those for which such labels are at best ambiguous: “‘Violence’ is a vague term because it has a fuzzy and indeterminate range of application. In other words, many acts . . . clearly qualify as being violent, and many acts are clearly disqualified as not being violent. But in between these two extremes, there exist a large number of borderline . . . cases where it’s just not clear . . . as to whether the act in question is violent” (Vorobej 2016, 3). What is clear is the following: limiting violence to physical harm and destruction alone is insufficient, and perhaps itself an act of violence or cruelty. Jon Pahl (2010) argues as much, contending that violence consists of bodily injury and “social and linguistic systems of exclusion and collective coercion, degradation, or destruction of property, persons, and the environment” (15). Gavin Rae and Emma Ingala (Rae and Ingala 2019) extend Pahl’s argument, writing that violence’s “physical variety is not the fundamental one.” Rather, violence is “constitutive of . . . institutions, language, logic, subjectivity” (1).

If the term “violence” only referred to physical harm, then all we could ever say of violence is that it occurs at the moment of wounding and incapacitation. Although clearly instantiations of violence, such moments are always already preceded by, and interwoven with, covert forms of violence. For this reason, and in hopeful respect to those who have suffered, and who are continuing to suffer, from violence in its myriad forms, *Violence in the Work of Composition* embraces a capacious understanding of violence as any influence that decreases a living being’s potential to thrive, flourish, and achieve full realization. The definition emerges from Galtung (1969), who writes, “*Violence is present when human beings are being influenced so that their actual somatic and mental realizations are below their potential realizations*” (168, emphasis original). Violence, he continues, is “*the cause of the difference between the potential and the actual, between what could have been and what is*” (168, emphasis original). In a later work, defining violence as “avoidable insults to basic human needs” (Galtung 1990, 292), or more simply as “needs-deprivation” (295), Galtung has, across his career, offered definitions of violence that, first, neither diminish nor exclude the range of

experiences people and communities have had with violence and that, second, create definitional space for violence's complexity, including its mutability, paradoxes, and ambiguities. Of course, each definition of violence "brings with it certain costs and benefits" (Vorobej 2016, 2), including areas of unawareness such as Galtung's failure to account for gender (Confortini 2006). Acknowledging Galtung's limitations, this collection sees in his definitions an important benefit: a framework through which to speak about violence in spaces where violence may not always be readily apparent, namely the composition classroom, the writing program, and the writing center, and to do so in ways sensitive to violence's multifaceted impact on living beings.

Central to Galtung's work on violence is a three-part taxonomy including direct, structural, and cultural violence. Direct violence is the most overt form in Galtung's triad. This form of violence occurs interpersonally between people and communities and frequently involves physical injury, with killing its most extreme expression. Direct violence is, therefore, largely understood as a decidedly visible form of violence. It is violence in which the perpetrators may be seen, named, or observed; it is violence that "has an author" (Galtung and Høivik 1971, 73). Žižek (2008) concurs, writing that subjective violence, Žižek's term for violence that may be attributable to specific individuals or groups, is "the most visible" enactment of human violence (1). Although direct violence and its consequences may be readily observable as a wound upon a body, it may also result in harm that is less easily seen, marked, or recorded, such as psychological abuse or injury. As Galtung (1969) himself explains, the "borderline between physical and psychological personal violence is not very clear" (175). Nor does direct violence have to assume expression through fist or weapon; it can manifest through speech, including threats, which, Galtung (1990) argues, are "also violence" (292). No matter the form direct violence assumes, the impacts are similar: destruction, degradation, dehumanization. Those impacts resonate with Elaine Scarry's (1985) argument that physical pain erodes the world-making potential of the individual subjected to it. As Scarry contends, pain, whether inflicted through torture or some other means of direct violence, is "language-destroying" (20); it strangles the language potential of the body experiencing pain, frequently reducing that body "to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned" (4). In stripping the body's capacity for language, pain—and the direct violence producing it—undermines the body's capacity to assert subjectivity and to participate in world-creation. At stake in direct violence, then, whether realized through a gun or through a grade, is "the making and unmaking of the world" (23).

If direct violence is the most overt form of violence in Galtung's triad, then structural violence is the most covert. This form of violence emerges from systemic inequalities, "above all in the distribution of power" (Galtung 1969, 175). It involves granting and denying access, privilege, and opportunities to lead fully realized lives. Accruing over time, structural violence kills "slowly, and undramatically," whereas direct violence kills "quickly" (Galtung and Høivik 1971, 73). And because structural violence emanates from systems, hierarchies, and laws, identifying a single human agent, or even multiple human agents, responsible for the violence proves difficult if not impossible. As Galtung and Høivik (1971) argue, structural violence is "anonymous" (73). These aspects of structural violence render it a covert and largely invisible form of human violence. Put starkly in comparison to the physical wounding caused by direct violence, structural violence "does not show" (Galtung 1969, 173). Again, Žižek (2008) agrees, arguing that objective violence, his term for systemic forms of violence, is "invisible," a repercussion of "the smooth functioning of our economic and political systems" (2). For Žižek, then, structural, or objective, violence forms "the background which generates . . . outbursts" (1) of direct, or subjective, violence. This framing, therefore, presents explosions of direct violence not as anomalies in an otherwise peaceful world but as a violence engendered by larger systems and structures. Thus, structural violence appears to do more than distribute power and resources inequitably; it sets the material and political conditions in which some bodies are accepted while other bodies are rejected, some bodies are able to succeed while other bodies are more likely to fail, and some bodies live while others are killed or allowed to die.

The third form of violence in Galtung's taxonomy, cultural violence, stalks the boundary between overt and covert violence. This violence also lurks at the intersection of direct and structural violence, providing legitimacy and justification to both. As Hannah Arendt (1970) explains, violence, by its instrumental nature, "always stands in need of guidance and justification" (51). Cultural violence fulfills this need. Through internationalization (Galtung 1990), cultural violence renders direct and structural violence "acceptable in society" (292). Encompassing "the symbolic sphere of our existence" (291), including language, ideology, art, and so on, it "preaches, teaches, admonishes, eggs on, and dulls us into seeing exploitation and/or repression as normal and natural, or into not seeing them . . . at all" (295). Because cultural violence can manifest through rhetoric, it functions overtly as an act of violence we may read or hear and attribute to an identifiable actor at the same

time that it functions covertly since rhetoric itself does not produce visible injury. Rhetoric can, however, “encourage us to see the world in ways that lead to violence” (Engels 2015, 15). It can also “create an environment in which violence can seem logical, necessary, justifiable, and even righteous” (16). By generating such contexts, cultural violence inhibits the ability to recognize “the everyday forces that produce and promote violence” (3). If people cannot register those forces, then they may “no longer see[k] to eliminate [violence], nor even understand it” (Lawrence and Karim 2007, 5). We may, in fact, overlook or disregard violence, accepting it as normal, as “routine” (5). In cultural violence, then, is the possibility of forgetting violence both as it ravages communities and as it emerges from the ideologies, assumptions, and rhetorics informing our work as compositionists.

The voices in and across the chapters comprising *Violence in the Work of Composition* speak to each form of violence in Galtung’s triad as it both emerges from and circulates through the work we perform across our most common disciplinary sites, namely our classrooms, writing programs, and writing centers. In doing so, the chapters call us to treat violence as a central concern for compositionists teaching in a millennium marked heavily by violence (Lawrence and Karim 2007, 3). That call is even more exigent in a politically, economically, and culturally divisive moment where the efforts to dismantle structural and cultural violences are met with not only structural and cultural resistance but with direct violence. That is, the chapters, and the voices speaking through them, call us to hold steady and vigilant attention on violence as we perform the labor of our discipline, for, as the chapters remind us, violence is a presence and influence always already shaping and emerging from our work as compositionists; it is always already inevitable. However, although violence is inevitable, “it is not inexorable as an evil force” (13). The voices comprising and echoing across this book call us to remember that as well. Specifically, they call us to remember that we are “better served by limiting the harmful effects of violence” (13). The chapters here offer three responses that limit these effects.

RESPONDING TO VIOLENCE: RECOGNIZING, INTERVENING, AMELIORATING

The first response, recognizing, limits violence’s capacity to conceal itself and exact harm covertly. Although overt violence seems most prevalent because of its stark visibility, violence more often inflicts pain and suffering in ways both subtle and obscure. As Richard Bernstein (2013) explains,

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“Violence does not appear in the world ‘marked’ as violence. Violence disguises itself. It presents itself as something innocent, necessary, justified, legitimate” (178). Presenting itself in these ways, violence fades into the backgrounds of our everyday lived experiences; it becomes part of our normal, and so becomes difficult to see. Engels (2015) confirms the challenges of perceiving violence in everyday life, writing, “It is hard to see the violence inherent in what we take to be normal” (142). When we cannot clearly see violence, when we cannot clearly detail its presence and impact in our lives, then its damage persists, steady, without notice, and often without resistance. Thus, the effects of covert violence accumulate, killing gently over the course of our lives. Recognizing responds to these effects by revealing and illuminating covert violence, by exposing it as violence, bare and unmistakable. It does so through systematic critique and analysis, bringing violence to “public self-consciousness” (Bernstein 2013, 177). Exposing violence through recognizing is crucial, because “[w]e can only seriously consider a proper response to violence when we analyze and understand it” (177). Recognizing supports our understanding of violence; it helps us to see the myriad complex and ambiguous ways violence exists in our lives. In doing so, recognizing prepares us to answer, to take action, to intervene.

If recognizing supports our ability to see and understand the presence and influence of violence in our lives, then intervening supports our ability to disrupt the material consequences of violence. More specifically, intervening supports our ability to decrease or eliminate the distance Galtung (1969) argues that violence generates between a living being’s potential well-being and their actual well-being. Intervening is, therefore, a form of social action, which Kristie S. Fleckenstein (2010) defines as “behavior designed to increase individual and collective human dignity, value, and quality of life” (1). It is action “motivated by the desire to improve aspects of reality that harm individuals and communities” (5). Importantly, intervening as a form of social action is not separate from recognizing. Rather, it is a partner to recognizing. As Fleckenstein (2010) explains, social action “includes the recognition of oppression, deprivation, cruelty, and violence as well as the desire to change those ills” (5). Such desire is an essential counterpart to recognizing, since by itself recognizing offers no recourse for mitigating violence’s capacity to harm, raising challenging questions about the value and ethics of studying and critiquing violence. As Evans and Carver (2017) ask, “Why study violence, after all, unless more peaceful relations among people are to be imagined?” (3). Intervening supports our ability to imagine those more peaceful relations. Moreover, intervening

supports our ability to act so as to bring both those relations and the conditions fostering them into existence.

Although intervening helps us to limit or alleviate the harm violence inflicts, it is insufficient in and of itself to wholly remedy violence, necessitating a third form of response: ameliorating. Intervening is insufficient because the actions we take to redress violence are frequently limited to a specific instantiation of violence; they are frequently guided by the shape violence takes in a particular context. Thus, while intervening may redress that specific form of violence, it does not account for the ways that form is likely to morph and evolve. As Bernstein (2013) writes, “We cannot anticipate the ways in which violence will manifest itself in the course of history” (177). Because we cannot predict the forms violence will assume, including the harm that could emerge from our very efforts to intervene in violence, responding fully to violence requires constant engagement, including ongoing recognition of violence’s new forms as well as ongoing intervention in those forms. Ameliorating supports such persistence. Acknowledging that “there is no escape from violence” (Lawrence and Karim 2007, 13), this form of response treats violence as a permanence constantly unfolding into the future in new iterations. Thus, ameliorating prepares us to engage with violence in a sustained way; it asks us to consistently attend to violence as we move through the world, especially the world of our institutions, programs, and classrooms.

VIOLENCE IN THE WORK OF COMPOSITION: CHAPTER OVERVIEW

As the chapters here seek to recognize, intervene, and ameliorate, they also reveal four key patterns important to violence in our work as compositionists. First, the chapters show that violence in composition can be especially insidious, as it functions covertly, inflicting harm, for example, through disciplinary standards and programmatic or institutional policies. And even in moments when composition’s violence is more overt, the chapters remind us that its impact registers primarily at the level of emotion, psychology, or epistemology; it is violence that marks “the mind and the spirit” (Galtung 1990, 294).

Second, whether covert or overt, violence in the work of composition appears across the chapters to set limits on available forms of being and becoming. For students, these limits narrow the range of what is possible for them as humans developing perspective, self, and agency, in part through their composing practices. For compositionists, these limits constrain our potential to be nonviolent—or at least, less violent—in

our work, to listen deeply to our students and be present as teachers (O'Reilly 1998), for example, or to attend to our students with compassion (Inoue 2019). In fact, such constraints frequently cast us into roles that produce and promote violence, making us agents of harm despite our best intentions and desires. As Evans and Carver (2017) caution, "Violence is not carried out only by irrational monsters" (6). The chapters of this book confirm their warning, offering various examples of how compositionists can, however unintentionally, become complicit in violence at best, instruments of violence at worst.

Third, the chapters included in this collection ask us to remember that violence in the work of composition is complex. For example, the forms of violence addressed in the chapters occur across various disciplinary sites, with reverberating consequences across time. Violence in composition is, therefore, complex, in part because it is fluid and distributed, circulating through and across both disciplinary and institutional contexts. This dispersal impedes any effort to localize violence in our work, to attempt to contain it and, in so doing, limit the damage and suffering it effects. A counterpart to this aspect of violence is its dependence on context. As Bruce Lawrence and Aisha Karim (Lawrence and Karim 2007) assert, "[Violence] is always contingent on specific structures and human agents situated in temporal-spatial contexts" (14). At the same moment in which the collection's chapters call us to perceive violence's capacity to move, to disperse, to circulate, they also invite us to understand that violence is always bound by the local, always shaping and shaped by the place and conditions in which it appears, as well as by the individuals acting upon and in response to one another in a given situation. Thus, composition's violence is a complexity not only because it is distributed across contexts but also because it is simultaneously situated within a given place and time. As a result, both what violence is and how violence functions in one context will not necessarily resemble what it is and how it functions in another. Violence's complexity introduces difficulty in naming consistent patterns both in the forms violence manifests and in the pain violence inflicts through the work of composition, contributing to equal difficulty preparing for future enactments of violence as well as difficulty developing sustained disciplinary responses. A final aspect of violence's complexity the chapters invite us to grapple with is the interrelation of its forms. The chapters together speak to "the porous boundaries of each violent act" (Lawrence and Karim 2007, 12), illustrating how no form of violence is ever singular, how no form ever operates in isolation. Indeed, the chapters show that violence "always spills over" (12) in the work of composition, with direct

forms in the classroom emerging from and reifying structural forms in the writing program, with cultural forms in the discipline legitimizing and perpetuating those structural forms, and so on. Such porosity necessarily complicates how compositionists might respond to the presence and influence of violence in our work, leading to a fourth realization.

Specifically, the chapters here invite awareness that any response to violence, whether in the form of recognizing, intervening, or ameliorating, is as complex as violence itself. To begin with, the responses to violence each chapter addresses often contain within them the potential both to generate new violences and to sustain or support existing violences. Substantiating Galtung's (1990) warning that "one type of violence may be reduced or controlled at the expense or increase or maintenance of another" (293), the chapters demonstrate that any response is always already fraught, always already capable of triggering additional, though unintended, harm. The latent potential of recognizing, intervening, and ameliorating themselves to enact violence signals the difficulty of redressing violence in the work of composition. Next, the chapters show that responding to violence in composition is complicated because any effort to respond presents a nearly insurmountable challenge. For example, structural forms of violence present a "certain stability," so they "may not very often be changed that quickly" (Galtung 1969, 173). As such, responding to structural violence in composition may require years of steadfast, patient, and emotionally taxing labor with sometimes disappointing results. Additionally, direct and structural violence "*seem* often to be coupled in such a way that it is very difficult to get rid of both evils" (185, emphasis original). As one example, a teacher-scholar attempting to address a form of direct violence they identify may be prevented from doing so because of the violence's entanglement with institutionally sanctioned power differentials between teachers and students. Lastly, the chapters reveal that response, like violence, is always multifaceted and intersecting; its forms never occur singularly or in isolation. Thus, recognizing always functions as a facet of intervening, which always entails new ways of recognizing, which can, however fleetingly, open possibilities for ameliorating, and so on. As evidence, the collection's chapters frequently enact multiple forms of response in conjunction with one another, most often moving back and forth between acts of recognition and acts of intervention.

Although recognizing, intervening, and ameliorating cannot be so easily demarcated and disentangled, we have arranged the chapters of *Violence in the Work of Composition* into three parts that emphasize the work specific to each response. This arrangement is not intended to

suggest that each response functions separately from the others. Rather, it is intended to help illuminate important characteristics about the ways each response functions, however messily, as an individual disruption in composition's continually unfolding violence. For example, the chapters in part 1, "Recognizing," emphasize that this particular response to violence requires (1) examining contexts beyond a given classroom, writing program, or writing center and (2) auditing the commonplace assumptions and practices informing the work that occurs in those spaces.

This work begins in part 1, "Recognizing," with Jamila Kareem's "Covert Racial Violence in National High-School-to-College Writing Transition Outcomes," in which the author addresses a critical moment in students' lives as writers: the transition from writing in high school to writing in college. Kareem argues that the disciplinary guidelines informing this transition, specifically the WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition, enact covert racial violence through their privileging of Eurocentric epistemological perspectives. These perspectives inhibit minoritized students from successfully transitioning into the composition classroom. Thus, Kareem demonstrates the need to extend recognizing beyond the context of a single composition classroom. By examining the moment of transition from high school to college, Kareem invites recognition of this moment as a temporal space marked by a racialized violence in which composition is directly implicated.

While Kareem asks us to consider the violence impacting students as they transition into the composition classroom, Kerry Banazek and Kellie Sharp-Hoskins invite consideration of the violence that occurs as disciplinary arguments traverse institutional levels, traveling both upward toward university administration and downward toward the composition classroom. In "Scalar Violence in Composition," Banazek and Sharp-Hoskins contend that violence in composition is always a function of scale, arising, in particular, as arguments travel across institutional levels without sensitivity to the values, subjectivities, and lived experiences of the people occupying each level. Demonstrating their argument through a hypothetical scenario in which a writing program administrator ushers arguments for digital composition up and down levels of scale, the authors emphasize the complexities involved with recognizing violence in the work of composition, especially as that violence emerges from various institutional locations. In this way, Banazek and Sharp-Hoskins exemplify the necessity of interrogating multiple contexts simultaneously when recognizing violence in composition.

Pushing the work of recognizing further, Lisa Dooley extends composition's relationship with violence beyond a single pedagogical

experience to the assessment practices students are subjected to as early as grade school. Focusing both on ACT's WorkKeys Suite and on ACT Engage, Dooley argues that these forms of neoliberal assessment, which measure and seek to remediate students' social and emotional behaviors, enact the violence of colonization as they wedge students into categories defining their potential for future workplace success. Such violence acts slowly, both accruing over time and shaping students in the years preceding their presence in our classrooms. Compositionists, Dooley argues, are responsible for addressing such violence not only because it impacts the students with whom we will one day work but also because it intersects with our disciplinary expertise on assessment. "Recognizing Slow Violences and Decolonizing Neoliberal Assessment Practices," therefore, presents an urgent call for compositionists to expand the work of recognizing violence by perceiving its presence across students' educational lives. Recognizing violence in composition, Dooley ultimately shows, requires an examination of students' lives to identify moments where the violence students experience long before entering our classrooms is surreptitiously interrelated with the very work we perform in those classrooms.

If the three chapters that open part 1 address contexts beyond but related to the composition classroom, the three chapters that close part 1 address readily familiar classroom practices. Addressing violence's dependence on specific contexts, rather than its movement across contexts, these chapters suggest that recognizing composition's violence involves deep and honest auditing of common assumptions and practices. Katherine Bridgman's chapter "By Design: Violence and Digital Interfaces" begins this work. In the chapter, Bridgman examines the inclusion of digital technologies in the composition classroom, specifically elucidating the cultural violence introduced through digital interfaces. Focusing on Blackboard, Bridgman reveals that such platforms, under the guise of transparency, privilege the normate body and, in doing so, both erase students' embodied subjectivities within the classroom and legitimate such erasures beyond the classroom. In the commonplace practice of teaching writing with digital technology, then, Bridgman helps us recognize the risk of introducing an insidious violence that, in eliding students' embodied subjectivities within the classroom, ripples outward from the classroom and justifies increasingly lethal forms of violence.

Just as Bridgman recognizes violence in a common pedagogical practice among compositionists—the teaching of writing with digital technology—Trevor C. Meyer recognizes violence in a common

pedagogical focus: the teaching of argument. In “The Productive Violence of Pedagogy: Argumentation and Change in the Writing Course,” Meyer reviews major theories of argumentation across our discipline’s history to reveal that our approaches to teaching argument have trapped us in a zero-sum game in which any orientation to argument results in pedagogical violence, even those most explicitly striving for nonviolence. Thus, Meyer argues for a new orientation to argument that embraces its inevitable partnership with violence as pedagogically productive. Such an orientation treats violence as generative, supporting students in their rhetorical ability to disagree effectively and to engage discursively with difference. Meyer’s chapter reveals the paradoxes involved in any effort to teach nonviolent forms of argument to achieve nonviolent ends. In doing so, it highlights the deep interrogations necessary for recognizing violence in our everyday classrooms practices.

Part 1 concludes with Cathryn Molloy and Jim Zimmerman’s chapter, “‘I’ve Gotten a Lot of Sympathy and That’s Not What I’m Looking For’: Epistemic and Ontological Violence in Writing as Healing Pedagogies.” This chapter, like the two that precede it, suggests a disconcerting potential for compositionists to inflict harm on students by asking them to engage in the most fundamental practice of our discipline: writing. Specifically, Molloy and Zimmerman expose the violence that can be enacted on students through one of the most common features of any composition classroom: the writing prompt. Focusing on classrooms that employ writing as healing pedagogical approaches, the authors argue that the prompts circulated in such classrooms risk enacting violence on students, especially when they include compulsory disclosures of pain. Drawing from a mixed-methods study, Molloy and Zimmerman invite recognition of two forms of violence resulting from such prompts: epistemic and ontological violence. Offering a third example of recognizing’s potential to uncover the violence lurking in routine classroom practices, Molloy and Zimmerman invite examination of even the most seemingly benign aspects of our work.

Whereas the chapters included in part 1 emphasize recognizing as a response to composition’s violence, presenting myriad forms of interrogation through which we may reveal this violence, the chapters included in part 2 emphasize intervening and present myriad disruptions in the violences that recognizing helps us to see. Despite the different forms of action and disruption they describe, the chapters included in part 2, “Intervening,” demonstrate striking consistency in their representation of what intervening is and how it functions as a response to composition’s violence. Specifically, all of the chapters affirm three important

features of intervening. First, the chapters suggest that intervening both emerges from and responds to local contexts. Thus, intervening in composition's violence necessitates intimate engagement with the locations in which we perform the work of our discipline. Second, the chapters show that intervening is itself subject to violence, specifically the structural violences emerging from institutions. Across part 2, the authors encounter institutional constraints, their efforts to intervene in composition's violence often frustrated by institutional culture and policy. Such moments show that intervening, always already set in opposition to a local status quo, is subversive and revolutionary (and by extension, that composition's violence persists through the maintenance of the status quo). Third, part 2's chapters highlight actions critical to, and constitutive of, intervening: collaboration, reflection, and narration.

Part 2 begins with Allison Hargreaves's "kn k'ek'niya? / *I'm listening*: Rhetorical Sovereignty and the Composition Classroom." Hargreaves's chapter offers a compelling portrait of a scholar-practitioner responding to local context. Specifically, Hargreaves demonstrates the power of listening in her effort to teach, as a non-Indigenous woman, in ways that honor and heal on land wounded by settler colonialism. Listening, Hargreaves shows, entails making students of ourselves so that we may learn from the land on which we teach, including its knowledges, languages, histories, and people. Hargreaves shares what she has learned about intervening: composition's ongoing involvement in the violence of settler colonialism cannot be redressed simply by adding Indigenous writers to a course reading list or by fostering more inclusive classrooms; it must involve positioning ourselves as guests on native lands and localizing writing instruction in collaboration with Indigenous stakeholders.

While Hargreaves shows how intervening can emerge from the local contexts in which we work, provided we both listen to and learn from those contexts, Joshua L. Daniel and Lynn Lewis show how broader national contexts can infuse the local with violence and set limits on intervention. Noting an alarming uptick in the circulation of hate speech and incidents of violence on our campuses since the 2016 US presidential election, the authors present a local context marred by national politics, fear and anger, and, most significantly, a felt sense of acceleration, leaving them always hurried, always harried, and barely able to keep up with the work of administrating a composition program. Across "In the Weeds," Daniel and Lewis share their experiences through four anecdotes narrating their efforts to perform the day-to-day work of writing program administration in the midst of increasingly explicit expressions of misogyny and unsettling suggestions of direct violence on campus.

Importantly, the authors accompany their narratives with moments of individual and collective reflection. These moments offer Daniel and Lewis opportunities to stop, breathe, and process their experiences. The moments, then, offer us insight into reflection's potential to support intervening by supporting deceleration.

"In the Weeds" emphasizes reflection's capacity to help us slow down and process the experience of violence in our work, offering compositionists a moment, however fleeting, to re-center and to carry ourselves forward. The next chapter in part 2, "Antiracism is Antiviolence: Utilizing Antiracist Writing Assessment Theory to Mitigate Violence in Writing Centers," emphasizes reflection's capacity to support intervening through self-interrogation. In this chapter, Eric Camarillo recognizes academia's emphasis on correcting student writing as a form of imperialist violence reifying white language supremacy. Concerned that the writing center he directs at a Hispanic-Serving Institution may be participating in this violence, Camarillo draws on Asao Inoue and Nancy Grimm to argue for an antiracist ecological model of assessment through which the writing center may make imperialism's violence explicit and through which both tutor and student may confront dominant academic discourses.

If the chapters comprising part 2 show that intervening always occurs within specific contexts shaped by institutional cultures and policies, then Elizabeth Powers's chapter, "Cultivating Response to Hate Speech in the Digital Classroom," shows the structural violence such policies can inflict on intervening itself. Specifically, her chapter addresses the severe limitations that one institution's student free speech policy set on Powers's ability to intervene in the circulation of anti-LGBTQ+ hate speech in an online classroom. Powers's chapter presents a troubling narrative in which a student was able to continue trolling their class, posting anti-trans messaging to the class's discussion board, not in spite of institutional policy but because of it. Powers's chapter highlights the structural violence that can arise from the tense dance between on-the-ground needs in the classroom and institutional policies that are often far removed from such spaces. The chapter also shows how Powers adapts "rhetorical looking" to develop a set of protocols for communication and community-building in the online classroom.

Powers reminds us that institutions can inflict structural violence on compositionists seeking interventions against violence within their classrooms. In contrast, Thomas Sura and Ellen Skirvin show what interventions may be possible when administrators at the programmatic level take violence seriously, both in student writing and in teacher response,

and actively pursue tactics for mitigating such violence. In “Rhetorical In(ter)vention: Teacher Guides for Responding to Covert Violence in Student Writing,” Sura and Skirvin address the covert violence that emerges when students argue in ways that deny the immanent value of others. Sura specifically highlights the ways invitational rhetoric may support compositionists, especially new and developing teachers, both in identifying covert violence in student argumentation and in cultivating responses that neither replicate nor exacerbate that violence. As the author contends, compositionists have a responsibility to respond to covert violence when it appears in students’ arguments, but, if we fail to employ nonviolent means in our response, we risk perpetuating the very violence in which we hope to intervene. Importantly, Sura and Skirvin extend this responsibility to writing programs, showing that programs, like the teachers laboring within them, bear a responsibility to demonstrate alternatives to covert violence in student argumentation.

The final chapter of part 2, Krista Sarraf’s “Training Tutors to Respond: The Potential Violence of Addressing Sexual Violence Disclosures in the Writing Center,” takes up Sura and Skirvin’s concerns about response to student writing and extends them to students’ disclosures of sexual violence during writing center consultations. Sarraf examines the various forms of violence entangled with such disclosures, from policies that strip survivors of control over the terms and locations of disclosure, to writing center sessions that risk retraumatizing both student and tutor alike, and from reporting mandates that cast students as plaintiffs instead of survivors, to the limits those same mandates set on how tutors are able to respond to students who disclose. Sarraf reveals the complex violences involved with sexual violence disclosures in the writing center and argues for a trauma-informed approach to tutor training. This approach seeks a twofold intervention in the violences interwoven with disclosure: the violences tutors risk inflicting on students through their responses to disclosure and the violences writing centers risk inflicting on tutors through training and preparation.

Like many of the contributions to part 2, Sarraf’s chapter details the complicated ways intervening can itself become subject to violence. Importantly, Sarraf’s chapter also details the complicated ways intervening can itself become a *form* of violence. This blurred differentiation between violence and intervening—between violence and nonviolence—becomes focal in part 3, “Ameliorating.” Consisting of a single culminating chapter, part 3 explores violence and nonviolence not as clearly delineated and opposing realms of human action but as two paradoxically aligned human experiences, each always already

distinct from the other, each always already contained within the other. Thus, the third and final part of *Violence in the Work of Composition* emphasizes what may be ameliorating's most troubling but important feature: its embodiment as a necessarily incomplete and imperfect process rife with ambiguity.

Kristie S. Fleckenstein shares one pathway through this ambiguity in her chapter, "Vigilant Amelioration through Critical Love: Lessons My Students Taught Me." Fleckenstein begins with the distressing recognition that education, an enterprise she once envisioned as an ideal means for peacefully mitigating violence, is frequently a source of violence. Despite this recognition, and the easy despair and cynicism to which it could give rise, Fleckenstein persists in the hope of education's potential as a corrective to violence. Acknowledging that, alone, our good intentions are inadequate for redressing violence, Fleckenstein offers "critical love" as a means not only to navigate the ambiguous dynamic between violence and nonviolence but also to secure education's capacity to ameliorate violence. As Fleckenstein explains, critical love is an orientation toward others that combines love's openness and care with reason's caution and rationality. Such a stance leads to "vigilant amelioration," a response to violence requiring persistent scrutiny and revision. Examining an experience in which an icebreaker activity produced radically different outcomes, Fleckenstein presents two dynamics in critical love facilitating the emergence of vigilant amelioration: vulnerability and calculability. Together, these dynamics reveal ameliorating to be an emergent practice and offer hope that continually becoming nonviolent in our work as compositionists may be possible even if achieving a stable state of nonviolence is not.

Again, the three parts organizing *Violence in the Work of Composition* are not intended to suggest that recognizing, intervening, and ameliorating function separately from one another. Similarly, the three parts are also not intended to suggest that responding to composition's violence is a linear process that may be pursued in step-by-step fashion. Rather, the arrangement of chapters is intended to offer readers pathways through a charged and complicated conversation about a charged and complicated reality. These pathways invite inter- and intra-organizational relationships among the collection's contents. For example, proceeding in a linear way from beginning to end presents an *interrelationship* among the chapters, especially those within parts I and II. Following this path through those sections of the book invites readers to track violence in composition as it moves from the level of discipline and program down to the level of the classroom, the writing center, and the writing

assignment. As readers track composition's violence downward, they may also track a movement within parts I and II from covert expressions of violence in composition to moments when the covert risks becoming overt. For example, Kareem's chapter addresses the disciplinary racialized violence latent within the WPA Outcomes Statement 3.0 while Molloy and Zimmerman focus on the violent constraints writing assignments can set on students' ways of knowing and being.

If reading from beginning to end introduces an interrelationship among the collection's chapters, then reading back and forth across the collection presents an *intrarelationship*. Indeed, all chapters comprising *Violence in the Work of Composition* echo one another as they address violence across similar locations and contexts. More specifically, though, the collection generates pairings between the chapters that resonate with one another most loudly across the collection's individual parts, amplifying the voices speaking about similar forms of violence and response. One example of this dialogue occurs when reading Banazek and Sharp-Hoskins's chapter together with Daniel and Lewis's. Both chapters offer perspectives on the violences that emerge and circulate when writing program administrators traverse institutional and programmatic contexts. If Banazek and Sharp-Hoskins ask us to recognize scalar violence as constitutive of the violence shaping and operating through the work of composition, then Daniel and Lewis offer a lived account of what such violence can look like in everyday practice, including the steady emotional exhaustion scalar violence can wring from writing program administrators engaged in fulfilling basic responsibilities. Together, these chapters illustrate the subtle and ever-present impact violence exerts on compositionists generally, and on writing program administrators specifically, as it accrues daily in our professional lives.

Collectively, the chapters included in *Violence in the Work of Composition* offer hope that violence, however deeply embedded in our lives, may be lessened, its harms reduced or at least stayed. As in all work on violence, the "questions proliferate, and the answers provided are provisional" (Lawrence and Karim 2007, 10). Indeed, like Evans and Carver's (2017) collection, *Violence in the Work of Composition* does not "ai[m] to offer definitive conclusions to the problem of violence." At the same time, the chapters here do not "blink at violence" (Lawrence and Karim 2007, 11). Rather, they do the urgent, challenging, and brave work of confronting violence, an act of hope that invites us "to wrestle with [violence's] force and to find ways to transform its potential for destruction into options for growth, if not peace" (14). To be sure, the chapters here are a "provocation to thought" (Evans and Carver 2017, 12), but they

are also an instantiation of hope, for it is through hope that this book's voices—students and faculty—can both speak about the myriad violences interwoven with our work and reaffirm our capacity to respond, whether by recognizing, intervening, or ameliorating. It is through hope that we can even assert this capacity. Importantly, *Violence in the Work of Composition* shows that we not only have the capacity to respond to violence but also the obligation to respond, that we have a duty to ease the severity of violence's pain, to dull the sharp edge of its cut. Lives depend on our doing so.

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