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## Institutional Critique: A Rhetorical Methodology for Change

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## Institutional Critique: A Rhetorical Methodology for Change

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## Institutional Critique: A Rhetorical Methodology for Change

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We offer institutional critique as an activist methodology for changing institutions. Since institutions are rhetorical entities, rhetoric can be deployed to change them. In its effort to counter oppressive institutional structures, the field of rhetoric and composition has focused its attention chiefly on the composition classroom, on the department of English, and on disciplinary forms of critique. Our focus shifts the scene of action and argument to professional writing and to public discourse, using spatial methods adapted from postmodern geography and critical theory.

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*Institutions, like all social contracts, can be  
rewritten. However this is not a simple process.*  
(Sosnoski 212)

**I**nstitutions are hard to change. (No kidding.) But they can be rewritten—or so we’ll argue—through rhetorical action. Here is a brief example from a workplace context that shows how a seemingly minor rhetorical adjustment aims to effect systemic change in a large institution. Mary Dieli, the first usability manager at Microsoft Corporation (and a graduate of the rhetoric Ph.D. program at Carnegie Mellon University), worked very hard to get the term “usability” included on the company’s generic product development chart.<sup>1</sup> This chart serves an important purpose at Microsoft, defining the process by which vari-

CCC 51:4 / JUNE 2000

ous products are designed, tested, and developed and also serving as a guiding standard for all projects. Inserting a usability process into the product development model was, on one level, a simple textual change, nothing more than a graphic revision. But on another level, it was an important political move, establishing users and user testing as a more integral part of the software development process in a company that is the world's leading developer of operating system software (Windows), Internet web browsers, and business software generally. Dieli also hired as usability designers people with degrees in rhetoric and professional writing, as well as with backgrounds in qualitative methodology. In general, her administrative efforts opened a space in a globally influential industry to establish as a value and a procedural norm two key rhetorical tenets: (1) awareness of audience matters, and (2) research on audience is an important stage of the writing (or production) process.

Has this seemingly minor change actually effected any large-scale change at Microsoft (which has now replaced the Soviet Union as a new, postcapitalist Evil Empire)? If Bill Gates' behavior is any indication, we think probably not yet. At the same time we see such rhetorical action as the means by which institutions can be changed. We hope that institutions can be sensitized to users, to people, systemically from within and that this sensitizing can potentially change the way an entire industry perceives its relationship to the public.

Our viewpoint is cautiously hopeful—though realistic, we think—about the possibility of changing institutions.<sup>2</sup> Our basic claim is this: Though institutions are certainly powerful, they are not monoliths; they are rhetorically constructed human designs (whose power is reinforced by buildings, laws, traditions, and knowledge-making practices) and so are changeable. In other words, we made 'em, we can fix 'em. Institutions R Us.

Further, for those of you who think such optimism is politically naive and hopelessly liberal and romantic, we believe that we (and you, too) have to commit to this hypothesis anyway, the alternative—political despair—being worse.<sup>3</sup>

Our interest in foregrounding institutional critique as an activity of rhetoric and composition is aimed at change.<sup>4</sup> We aim to change the practices of institutional representatives and to improve the conditions of those affected by and served by institutions: especially, within our own field, writers, students, part-time composition teachers, workers, local communities, and those not traditionally served by the university (e.g., the economically disadvantaged). We

**At the same time we see such rhetorical action as the means by which institutions can be changed.**

also aim to include institutional research in the realm of what counts as research in rhetoric and composition by theorizing it here.

We begin this article by briefly articulating our sense of institutional critique. Then we move to acknowledge some ways rhetoric and composition as a field already implements forms of institutional action, and we then express our dissatisfaction with the limits of those efforts. To be sure, there have been plentiful examples of related critical practices within the field: administrative critique, classroom critique, and disciplinary critique. However, for reasons we will explain, these related critical practices fall shy of what we propose as institutional critique. The heart of this article, then, is in describing and exemplifying our notion of institutional critique. As you will see, institutional critique is an unabashedly rhetorical practice mediating macro-level structures and micro-level actions rooted in a particular space and time.

### **Articulating institutional critique**

We see institutional critique as a methodology. Our view of it as a methodology arose out of our needs as writers and directors of dissertations, out of our frustration with established methodologies within the field, and out of our desire to humanize research practices. A number of rhetoric/composition Ph.D. students at Purdue University wanted to bridge empirical and theoretical work. Several wanted to work across the usually separate, often antagonistic areas of cultural studies and professional writing. Some were interested in studying specific organizational and technological structures—such as online writing labs, networked computer classrooms, corporate web sites, community literacy centers, and textbook publishing houses.

From one standpoint, these projects could have been framed as workplace studies or workplace ethnographies, as defined in the field of professional writing. But that frame did not have enough critical edge to it; its advocacy position seemed problematic. As we worked through several projects—Jeff's and Stuart's and Libby's among them—we felt a dissonance. The existing category systems and methodologies in the field—especially the binary that still divides theoretical from empirical research—were unsatisfactory. We weren't conducting classroom critique, as our inquiries extended beyond the borders of the university. Most forms of disciplinary critique we examined lacked material punch. We had to construct a somewhat new methodology to enable certain forms of research action to emerge and take shape.

And so collaboratively we articulated a pragmatic mechanism for change that extends the power of our field beyond the composition classroom—and

even beyond the university itself. We call this mechanism “institutional critique,”<sup>5</sup> a method that insists that institutions, as unchangeable as they may seem (and, indeed, often are), do contain spaces for reflection, resistance, revision, and productive action. This method insists that sometimes individuals (writing teachers, researchers, writers, students, citizens) can rewrite institutions through rhetorical action. We see institutional critique as a way to supplement the field’s current efforts and to extend the field into broader interrogations of discourse in society.

**We think that critique needs an action plan.**

Institutional critique is by no means new. Theorists such as Vincent Leitch, Henry Giroux, Michael Bérubé, and Jim Sosnoski invoke a type of institutional critique. We would say that Foucault invented it, if anybody did. But we have a particular spin on institutional critique. Our spin is more locally situated, more spatial, and more empirical than most theoretical discussions of institutions. Ultimately, we are looking for a rhetorical methodology that will lead to change and restructuring of institutions. We are not interested in simply reporting how evil institutions are; we think that critique needs an action plan.

The resources for our view of institutional critique arise out of a particular brand of postmodernism and critical action that eschews theoretical abstractions in favor of a materially and spatially situated form of analysis. We draw from the work of postmodern geographers such as Edward Soja, David Sibley, Doreen Massey, Michel de Certeau, and David Harvey as well as the critical research perspective of feminist methodologists such as Patti Lather, Liz Stanley, and Patricia Sullivan. The work of Michel Foucault, Pierre Bourdieu, and Donna Haraway is important to our position, as their work employs a visual and spatial methodology that is both critically shrewd and yet physically located. In other words, they are pragmatic theorists—and to us, that is the best kind. Though Foucault’s work is frequently cited in our field, and Bourdieu’s occasionally, most of the resources we draw on are unacknowledged within rhetoric and composition.<sup>6</sup>

Our understanding of institutional critique is also shaped by our positionality in the field of professional writing. More so than other areas of writing studies, professional writing has acknowledged the role of the organization and the importance of visual forms of thinking and representation. Professional writing has in fact given us a body of research about writing in workplaces and through various organizational frames has engaged institutional issues (though researchers typically use the terms “organization” or “workplace” rather than “institution”—see Odell and Goswami; Spilka; Blyler and

Thralls; Sullivan and Dautermann; and Duin and Hansen). And so our version of institutional critique is more material and tied to spatial and organizational structures than most articulations of institutional critique we see in the field.

**Perhaps the most significant act of institutional action within writing program administration is a large-scale effort: the establishment of graduate programs in rhetoric and composition.**

We open with an overview of our vision in order to provide a context for discussing the work of others in rhetoric and composition. While we certainly acknowledge the various forms of institutional action that are currently practiced (administrative, classroom, disciplinary critique), we want to distinguish institutional critique from them. In this way, we hope to carve a space for enacting more substantive and far-reaching institutional change.

## **Institutional action in rhetoric and composition**

### ***Administrative critique***

Many forms of institutional action have been prominent in our field, especially in the work of writing program administrators (WPAs). As a field, we seem to be particularly good at critiquing our positionality and history (especially within departments of English), and we have a strong track record for enacting change (if nothing else, we now have a field where once there was none). Those of us who are WPAs contend (if not outright *fight*) on a daily basis with our academic institutions for material resources, control over processes, and disciplinary validity.

But institutional action in our field has not been limited to local impacts. Perhaps the most significant act of institutional action within writing program administration is a large-scale effort: the establishment of graduate programs in rhetoric and composition, a long-term and collective institutional action that has had the effect of professionalizing a field that, according to Janice Lauer, had too long languished in a second-class (or third-class) status in the university. Through the efforts of people such as Edward Corbett, James Kinneavy, Janice Lauer, Ross Winterowd, and Richard Young (among others), rhetoric and composition programs were established within departments of English beginning in the late 1970s and continuing into the 1980s. Thanks to these efforts, the field of rhetoric and composition studies now exists in its own right; it has professionalized writing instruction and has established the value of research in writing. Not that the struggle for respectability is by any means over, but rhetoric and composition undeniably has an established institutional



presence in the academy. When we start to get discouraged about the possibility of rewriting institutions, we should remember our own history.

A second significant institutional action has gone largely unnoticed in the field. The field defines itself primarily in terms of the first-year composition classroom without theorizing or even highlighting the teaching of writing to majors, even though the professional writing major has grown in size and success. There is such a thing as a writing major—a significant institutional acknowledgement that writing is a field of study and has a disciplinary status (Sullivan and Porter, “Remapping”). But that disciplinary concession granted to writing is not central to the curricular imagination of the field. Why does having a writing major matter? Because it invests our field with a disciplinary status that should allow us to claim equal treatment in the university when we ask for resources such as faculty lines. Why don’t we play this trump card more often? We suspect that the field’s identity is so immersed in first-year composition and graduate rhetoric programs that it overlooks an obvious strength that could be parlayed into institutional capital, certainly within the university but also outside it.

The work of WPAs presents a number of terms and angles for conceptualizing (even constructing) institutions. Some see the institution as an organizational structure with fissures that can be expanded and exploited for positive (albeit rather anonymous) change. Others, such as Louise Wetherbee Phelps and Charles Schuster, promote a type of administrative action that rethinks and reshapes the roles that each of us plays within institutional structures. Some craft documents—such as the WPA Executive Committee’s intellectual work document or the Wyoming Resolution, or the statements on ideal class sizes and the National Language Policy—that discursively construct guidelines that then become *part* of a national institution. Still other WPAs actively construct programs that in themselves *become* institutions (as is the case with graduate programs in rhetoric and composition and with undergraduate writing majors). And finally, WPAs such as Kristine Hansen seek ways to professionalize those who appear to be left out of the institution altogether, except in the most exploitative senses.

We are frustrated, however, with the gap between local actions and more global critiques (which are far more common in our disciplinary discourse). We are frustrated, in other words, when global critiques exist only in the form of ideal cases or statements, which all too often bracket off discussions of materiality and economic constraints in favor of working out the best case scenario—which, all too often, does not come to pass. For example, the draft of the intellectual work document written by the WPA Executive Committee articulates an ideal for

standards of tenure and promotion while ignoring other crucial factors. Don't get us wrong; we agree with the ideals articulated in the intellectual work document. What the document does not do, though, is offer *rhetorical strategies* that each WPA can use at his or her own institution in order to get those ideals adopted.<sup>7</sup> Efforts such as the Wyoming Resolution and the intellectual work document are by themselves not effective strategies for institutional change. Attacking institutional problems only at a global and disciplinary level doesn't work, because institutions can too easily ignore global arguments for local reasons (such as lack of available faculty). Universities are not likely to be swayed by arguments within particular fields and disciplines. Idealized wish lists are far too easy to dismiss using "budgetary realities" as a rationale.<sup>8</sup> In short, there exists a gap between global ideals and either local or systemic institutional change. Somewhere between the macro-level national critiques and the micro-level practices on individual campuses is space for an action plan informed by critique yet responsive to local conditions.

### ***Classroom critique***

The reported instances of micro-institutional action and resistance often center on the classroom or curriculum level. The power of classroom or curricular agency, in fact, is an unspoken assumption in much of our field's scholarship aimed at transforming (or reinventing) the university. For example, several cultural-studies-oriented, edited collections appearing in the 1990s are motivated by the appeal of changing classroom practices (see Hurlbert and Blitz's *Composition & Resistance*, Berlin and Vivion's *Cultural Studies in the English Classroom*, Downing's *Changing Classroom Practices*, Clifford and Schill's *Writing Theory and Critical Theory*, and Gere's *Into the Field*). In some of these collections, classroom change is explicitly singled out as the site for institutional (or perhaps institutionalized) resistance. As the argument goes, local action can foster change in the individual working within the system, aided by the relative autonomy of many writing classrooms and the anonymity granted by their low status in the institution.

This is a very appealing stance, one that locates agency within the classroom and enables teacher and students to envision local changes and micro-political action—rather than to succumb to paralysis at the specter of a large and untouchable institutional structure. As Downing writes in the introduction to his collection, "pedagogy is a form of social and political transaction" (xiii). He then writes that "[despite] our apparent sense of autonomy in our individual classrooms, our teaching practices have never really been isolated

from the curriculum, the institution, and the profession” (xiv). Thus, the Downing collection attempts to locate the specific classroom within the broader field. The bottom line, and a reassuring one at that, is that each of us can enact a type of institutional resistance by working within the interplay between classroom theory and practice and by listening to and learning from the lore of other resistant teachers. We all can do this.

This classroom focus is promoted as well by many feminist educators who focus on the classroom as the space of pedagogy and make the institution a shadowy (if powerful) presence. By assigning the institution a Big Brother status that operates outside the classroom yet forges certain classroom actions and relationships, feminists such as Luke and Gore can establish the classroom as a space where institutional forces and cultures “saturated with phallogocentric knowledges, in institutional structures ruled epistemologically and procedurally by men and masculinist signifiers,” can be held at bay (2). Because teaching is traditionally “women’s work—a caring profession,” the classroom can become a refuge from those male-constructed institutions (2).

Yet such moves often background and even demonize the institution because they set the struggle as against the institution and because they equate the institution with male (or masculinist) knowledge and control structures. Of course, critical feminists do not always take such a view (see Lewis, for instance, 188–89). But even when they do, their understanding of institutions in pedagogical moments smacks of travelogue description.<sup>9</sup> The institution is the geographic and historical coordinate at which the moment takes place. Thus, institutions are either a Big Brother or a backdrop for some travel snapshots, but in either case they are de-emphasized in the consideration of the main event, i.e., the classroom.<sup>10</sup> By focusing on the classroom without adequately theorizing the institution, such classroom critiques make institutions seem monolithic and beyond an individual’s power for change—except in a kind of liberal, trickle-up theory of change that pins political hopes on the enlightened, active individual. In Brian Street’s terms, such treatments “despair” of effecting any change in institutions and so focus “in the short term on changing the ‘victims’” (215).

### ***Disciplinary critique***

So far, we have argued that some (especially WPAs) work for institutional change while the majority in rhetoric and composition seem to focus on classroom

**By focusing on the classroom without adequately theorizing the institution, such classroom critiques make institutions seem monolithic and beyond an individual’s power for change.**

critique. However, what worries us about the work currently voiced as institutional critique is that much of it equates “institution” with “discipline.” Joseph Janangelo, for example, writes about “institutions” and “the Academy” using a primarily disciplinary lens. He uses literary theory (Derrida’s *differance* and Lyotard’s *differend*) to write about writing programs and their places/roles within institutions. The difference that Janangelo focuses on, however, is disciplinary (see also McLeod).

Such approaches to institutional critique in English studies generally (e.g., see Sullivan and Porter, “Remapping”; Nelson) are part of a healthy tradition of viewing disciplines in terms of institutional operations. James Sosnoski demonstrates the aim of institutional critique through his disciplinary critique in *Token Professionals and Master Critics*; he challenges the existing authorities and orthodoxies of power in literature and literary theory and argues for a refocusing of literary studies toward “persons situated in cultures [rather] than toward texts situated in archives” (xiv). Sosnoski’s disciplinary critique—which is at the same time historical, theoretical, and textual—starts with a critique of the existing practices of literary criticism and their reliance on a system of orthodoxy that promotes a Star Theorist system of mostly male authority. He eventually proposes a set of structural as well as attitudinal changes that would refocus the field’s work in more productive and less stifling ways, a shift away from the reverence of (Abstract) Theory and toward an acceptance of a post-disciplinary theorizing practice.

Because Sosnoski defines literary criticism as itself an institution, his definition of “institution” is much closer to what we think of as “discipline.” Of course, when doing educational critique, it is particularly difficult to divide institutional from disciplinary critique; the two forms of critique are intertwined.

**What worries us about the work currently voiced as institutional critique is that much of it equates “institution” with “discipline.”**

Nonetheless, we see Sosnoski’s work in *Token Professionals* as an instance of disciplinary critique—that is, it is focused on the research practices of an academic field of discourse. While these

practices are of course implicated with the structural organization of departments, the alignment of faculty within such organizations, and the material conditions of support for these practices, the structural and material and spatial conditions are by and large not Sosnoski’s focus. In Sosnoski’s theoretical framework, institutions by definition exist to maintain orthodoxy (99).

In his discussion of the graduate instructor strike at Yale University, Michael Bérubé also focuses on disciplines. He astutely points to the ways that influential faculty sided with the institution against the interests of their stu-

dents and their discipline and took that position into the disciplinary arena by trying to defend themselves through Modern Language Association missives. But Bérubé stops short of offering advice about the action that might have changed the institution, focusing instead on how that institutional action might have changed the discipline.

**Equating institution with discipline denies important physical dimensions and limits the potential for productive action.**

Both Sosnoski and Bérubé want to change institutional structure through the reform of disciplinary practice. We like this plan, but we also think that it is necessary to change disciplinary practices through the reform of institutional structures. The simple equation, discipline = institution, blocks consideration of material, economic, and organizational factors that are key to changing institutions.

We argue that equating institution with discipline denies important physical dimensions and limits the potential for productive action. Kristine Hansen hints at the importance of such dimensions when she writes about the significance of instructors' names being listed in the campus phone directory and course schedule, about their receiving parking privileges, and about how they are housed physically on a campus. In her narrative of her own experience as a WPA, Hansen claims that she slowly began to

realize the ethical implications of presiding rather comfortably from my third-floor office, with its window looking out on a noble mountain peak, over a staff of some sixty graduate students, who were crammed three and four per cubicle in two maze-like rooms in the basement, and twenty-plus part-timers, who were distributed among four or five offices in the same windowless basement. (35)

Hansen uses the relational ethics of Levinas and Nel Noddings to argue for spatial strategies that can help change conditions for part-timers. Administrators and instructors are more likely to work together productively for change, Hansen argues, if they come to know each other as individuals, which requires regular, face-to-face contact. Such relational ethics are difficult to enact if part-timers are rendered faceless by the material constraints in which they work. Hansen's account illustrates the need for the spatial critique of institutions in order to understand how material and spatial factors influence daily activities. In other words, office space matters, especially for those who don't have it.

### **Enacting institutional critique**

Certainly administrative and classroom critiques have been central to creating spaces for agency within educational institutions. In particular, we see

disciplinary critique as important to institutional critique—perhaps even necessary to it. But we also contend that institutional change requires attention to the material and spatial conditions of disciplinary practices inside a particular institution (for instance, the kind of attention Sosnoski and Downing apply in their revision of journal practices, discussed later). Because we argue that institutions are situated physically, that theories of change must account for such situatedness, and that attention to spatiality helps one fashion institutional change, we use spatial analysis of the type practiced in cultural geography as a partner with disciplinary, historical, and other frameworks we can use to examine institutions.<sup>11</sup>

We weave spatial analysis into this talk of institutional critique for both pragmatic and analytic reasons. Pragmatically, as members of educational institutions, we have always been struck by how important space is in the writing of institutional identity. Both physical and figurative space plays into the construction of a university: status is reflected in the location, size, and relative poshness of a program's offices; control of space is power; inclusion and placement on the institution's web page, newsletters, and so on reflects institutional identity, as does organizational chart placement. Like postmodern cultural geographers, we see these spaces as offering considerable potential for the interrogation of resistance and agency in institutions. We use some of the ways that they deploy visual analysis to question and destabilize institutions, to provide an alternative route to interrogating how power circulates in particular institutions, and to complicate our construction of institutions.

Postmodern cultural geographers (such as Soja, Harvey, Sibley, and Rose) help us assemble an arsenal that is useful for visual examination of institutions at varying levels of particularity—from the local to the abstract, from what we call the micro to the macro institution. Most theorists in our field are accustomed to thinking about institutions at the macro level—certainly most philosophers and political theorists conceptualize institutions as The Law, The

**Institutional change requires attention to the material and spatial conditions of disciplinary practices inside a particular institution.**

Family, Business, Government, Education, The Liberal Arts, and English Studies. The discussion of disciplinarity yields evidence that this macro level dominates the discussions of institution in composition studies

and English studies. Talking about institutions at this macro level is extremely important (as we argued earlier in respect to WPAs) because it is one way to discuss how our public lives are organized and conducted (both for us and by us). But limiting our analytic gaze to macro institutions also encourages a level of ab-

straction that can be unhelpful if it leads to a view of institutions as static, glacial, or even unchangeable (i.e., if it urges us to see change as requiring large-scale action that few people rarely have the power to enforce). If institutions are conceptualized exclusively on this macro level, we may be restricted to visualizing an abstraction of institution that makes change difficult to imagine.

A more micro-level view of institutions (see Figure 1) operates within the spaces and landscapes that postmodern cultural geographers construct to focus on the local and micropolitical operations of social institutions. This view focuses on institutional actions or policies of places such as the Lafayette Adult Reading Academy, the Lafayette Public Schools, and the Purdue University campus server (as opposed to Community Literacy, K–12 education, and the Internet). By conceiving of institutions as *also* operating locally, we better situate ourselves in visible contexts within which we conduct our lives and, again, have our lives conducted for us. We can begin to locate agency more so in the micro conception. We believe, to be direct about it, that local institutions (and local manifestations of national or international ones) are important locations for written activity, and furthermore, we believe that constructing institutions as local and discursive spaces makes them more visible and dynamic and therefore more changeable.<sup>12</sup>

It may be difficult, however, to visualize the relationships between institutions and critique that we are suggesting. Figure 1 represents one map of institutional critique, a map structured by the critique/action continuum between abstract theory and local practice. There are productive tensions between abstract actions (e.g., disciplinary critiques), local actions (e.g., changing classroom practices), and the terrain (shaded) where we locate institutional critique. Institutional critique operates within the material and discursive spaces linking macro-level systems and more visible local spaces, such as classrooms, where critique and action in rhetoric and composition typically operate. Institutional critique examines particular institutional formations that are a local manifestation of more general social relations, nodal points in the rhetorical relationships between general social (if not sociological) processes and local practices. Therefore, the local institutions we are trying to visualize are not the same as either macro institutions or individual classrooms, but they are, most certainly, related. Institutional critique helps articulate these relationships.

We focus, then, on institutions as rhetorical systems of decision making that exercise power through the design of space (both material and discursive).

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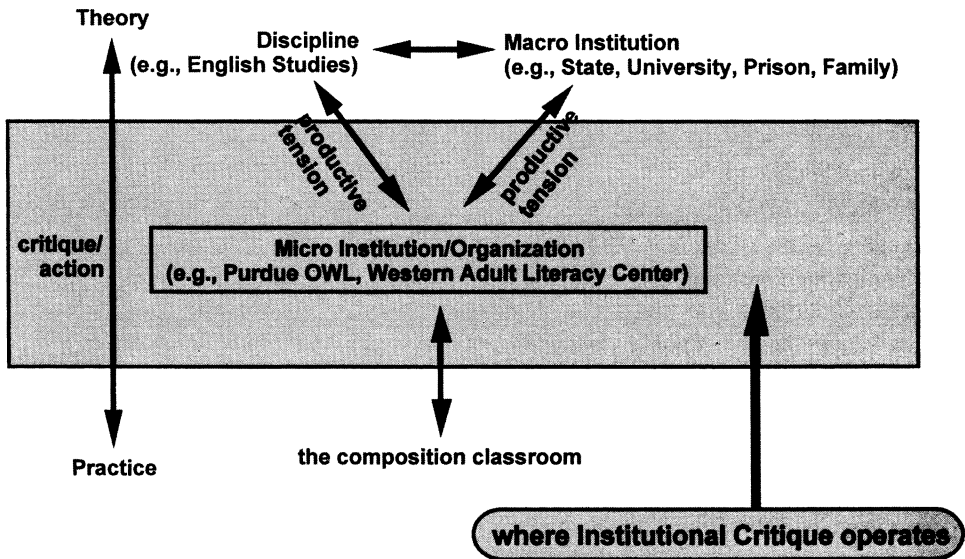


Figure 1. Site for Institutional Critique

Our focus raises the important issue of the relationship between the rhetorical and the spatial. For David Harvey, the discursive—for which we substitute “the rhetorical”—and spatial are integral and intertwined aspects of the social processes that organize our lives. Rhetorical acts are “institutionally based, materially constrained, experientially grounded manifestations of social and power relations” (80). What Harvey calls “the discursive moment” is itself institutional and material (and thus inherently spatial); at the same time, the spatial is rhetorically organized and constituted (at least in part). Harvey writes that institutions orchestrate semiotic systems, by which he indicates that the materiality of institutions (e.g., architecture, spaces, domains, organizations, landscapes) is symbolic, can be read, and can produce meaning. But Harvey also writes that institutions are “produced spaces,” thereby raising the issue of who is producing spaces and by what means.

A very good question, and one that calls for examination of the analytics cultural geographers offer to address the reading and writing of spaces/places. While a thorough discussion of how spatial methodology is used in cultural geography



is beyond the scope of this article, we describe two tactics that can operate at varying levels of analysis: postmodern mapping and boundary interrogation.

The first, postmodern mapping, a tactic for using spatial thinking to explore social, disciplinary, and institutional relationships in composition studies, has been discussed by two of us (Sullivan and Porter) elsewhere, most extensively in *Opening Spaces*. Showing how maps might be used to negotiate disputes arising among differing theoretical perspectives, to explain changes over time, to clarify the positions and values of various groups that relate to one another, and so on, *Opening Spaces*<sup>13</sup> argues that postmodern mapping aims to destabilize and retemporalize the map through a focus on its construction and the partiality of any one map's representation and through use of multiple maps used in discussions of a social space. Whether the mapping is local or global, its discourse is always a spatial, relational construction of its writers and readers that aims at communication.

Postmodern mapping is more local and bounded in its dreams than the modernist examples that are famous in composition.<sup>14</sup> In postmodern mapping there is always play among a number of elements: the uniqueness of a particular map playing against the global quality of the types of elements such a map normally includes; the static quality of a particular map playing against the dynamism it gains through comparison with other maps, other historical renderings, and other symbols standing for the space; the theoretical allegiances of certain mappings playing against the evidence of such relationships; the relationships depicted playing against the ones unvoiced. Yes, this type of approach emphasizes how space is both constructed and inhabited, designed to achieve certain purposes (and not others). Because there is not one, holy map that captures the relationships inherent to the understanding of an institution, all of these relationships exist simultaneously in the lived—actual, material—space of an institution. Further, it is in the differences that we find in this lived space that the keenest opportunities for institutional change reside.

A second tactic for interrogating how spaces are produced in institutions, boundary interrogation, is widely used by geographers in a number of venues; after all, they are in the business of establishing, monitoring, and changing cartographic representations of our worlds. David Sibley explicates this concern with boundaries in *Geographies of Exclusion* when he locates cultural geography's fascination with boundaries in power, namely, the ways that exclusionary practices and devices are used by groups to maintain or extend their group

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**As we uncover and probe the zones of ambiguity present in a system, we can articulate the power moves used to maintain or even extend control over boundaries.**

social identity and power. Sibley identifies “zones of ambiguity,” or spaces that house change, difference, or a clash of values or meanings. These zones of ambiguity, according to Sibley, are locations where change can take place because of

the boundary instability they highlight (33).

His identification process points to the tactics and processes involved in the inclusion, exclusion, and maintenance of boundaries for a culture (or, in our case, an institution).

As we uncover and probe the zones of ambiguity present in a system, we can articulate the power moves used to maintain or even extend control over boundaries. It is just the type of examination that can lead to institutional critique.

Boundary interrogation can operate in micro- or macro-level analyses. Take the exclusion of the marginalized from the current system of boundary-making and maintenance, the set of (non)relationships that actually motivates Sibley’s *Geographies of Exclusion*. We can talk about the marginalized in sweeping terms that lead to large-scale issue-making: The powerless have little or no ability to wield boundary power; they are normally excluded or marginalized from the process of boundary construction and maintenance. Further, we can acknowledge that the issues for the powerless, more often than not, are formulated by those in power and are based on how the empowered view the powerless and their “plight.” In a discussion of the voiceless, those with little or no power have limited or no input into the construction and maintenance of the borders of those cultures. Thus, if people seek to include their issues in boundary interrogation, questions might be posed about them using language that traditionally is used to characterize them: How is the institutional (or disciplinary) culture classed? Raced? Gendered? Aged? And so on. Certainly, those are the very questions asked in composition studies.

But we still need a more localized focus to effect institutional change. In the area of interactions with technology, for example, access is the first issue surfaced in relationship to a minority group; indeed it is practically the only issue that has had much discussion with regard to race/computers, and it continues to be prominent in the discussion of women/computers. Those with technology power see the powerless as outside the boundaries of technology use because they do not have the needed money or education or (in the case of women) socialization to gain access to the culture-changing technology. By articulating the boundary between groups as related to access, the neutrality and tool-like quality of technology can be preserved at the same time as political

critiques about institutional status or priorities can be launched with impunity. This articulation of boundary issues is controlled, not by those lacking technology, not by the marginalized, but instead by those who have abundant technology. A focus on how issue boundaries are constructed, maintained, expanded, and challenged helps us see their effects on those marginalized by technology access and use.

The zones of ambiguity within institutions can often (but not always) be found within the processes of decision making (people acting through institutions). Again, these processes (rhetorical systems) are the very structure of the institution itself. It is within these processes that people within an institutional space talk, listen, act, and confront differences. We suggest that not only do institutions orchestrate semiotic systems, but that semiotic systems (rhetoric) orchestrate institutions. Thus, institutions are both material and rhetorical spaces, and our definition of them must encompass these elements as well as our sense of spatial scales—our location of institutions at both macro and micro levels. In our case, we seek to change institutions through acts that constitute a critical rhetoric of institutional design.

**A focus on how issue boundaries are constructed, maintained, expanded, and challenged helps us see the contours of technology and its effects on those marginalized by technology access and use.**

Institutional critique is, fundamentally, a pragmatic effort to use rhetorical means to improve institutional systems. As a type of research, institutional critique focuses on the institutional space/structure as its principle focus of interest. Institutional critique employs a rhetorical and spatial methodology as it looks at institutions as discursively and materially constituted. That is, the materiality of institutions is constructed with the participation of rhetoric.

The focus of our interest is the localized institution (as Figure 1 suggests). We don't like forms of cultural or institutional critique that stay at a macro level of high-theory discussion, which makes the institution a monolith—easy to criticize but impossible to change. Of course, as we have said, in rhetoric/composition there is a long-standing and vigorous tradition of disciplinary critique. Yet we have been frustrated by how disciplinary critique and institutional action have typically operated in the field. For one thing, such critique usually focuses on a limited set of organizational spaces: the composition classroom, the first-year composition curriculum, the English department. Well, okay, that's where most of us live—but we are frustrated by the nearly *exclusive* focus on these organizational units to the neglect of others. We want to look at institutional writing spaces outside the university (where most composition research

focuses) and outside the corporate workplace (where most professional writing research focuses).

### ***Early examples of institutional critique***

Where do we find instances of institutional critique in our field? Nowhere, yet—at least not fully articulated examples. What we do find are projects that reveal dimensions of institutional study, where the institution is an important if not central component of the study and where the researchers attempt some form of institutional revision.

In his critique of adult community literacy centers, for example, Jeff Grabill found that studying classroom literacy activities alone did not shed any light on institutional structures.<sup>15</sup> To understand power and politics and to

**To change the meaning and values associated with literacy in a community literacy program demands changes at the institutional level—because significant decisions are made about classroom practices at those levels.**

locate spaces for changing relations, he had to trace funding lines as they related to literacy philosophies (e.g., mission statements) and to legislative initiatives (see also Swales). He had to study employer-client relations to see how programs developed to meet particular community needs.

What he found was that literacy tends to be constructed in relation to the mandates of funding and policy interests (largely from government and industry) and to the goals articulated in large part by those interests (e.g., getting a GED, attaining “life” and/or “basic” skills, or learning “work skills” for a particular workplace). To change the meaning and values associated with literacy in a community literacy program demands changes at the institutional level—because significant decisions are made about classroom practices at those levels. Such change necessitates a level of institutional critique—through curriculum writing, grant writing, teacher training, and public policy initiatives—that we are not used to enacting in rhetoric and composition but that are increasingly necessary to change such a community-based program.

What is apparent from Grabill’s project is that institutional critique should look at bureaucratic structures—for instance, at how law and policy create “value” for sites and influence discursive relations and at how organizational roles and responsibilities, work models (e.g., management philosophies, publishing models, collaboration practices), lines of authority and communication, and alignment of and interaction between personnel all affect institutional practices. One premise of institutional critique is that understanding the power and operation of such structures is important to developing strategies for changing them.

In addition to examining discursive bureaucratic practices, institutional critique focuses on the physical structures—economies, architectures, bureaucracies, interorganizational relations, and physical locations—supporting discursive practices. For example, Stuart Blythe’s study of the ways that the writing center has been positioned at his current institution (“Institutional Critique”) provides physical maps as well as maps of departmental goals and resources as a way to engage the physical spaces that reinforce, reflect, and resist the community’s perceptions of how the writing center fits into the university. The study provides a physical counterpoint to his dissertation (“Technologies”), which examines the ways in which the movement of writing centers to

provide online services—the move to the online writing lab, or OWL—changes the fundamental operating practices of those centers. The physical realignment of the tutor-student dynamic into an online environment changes that dynamic in dramatic ways, Blythe argues, and writing centers have to be conscious of the ways in which their fundamental relations with students (their ethical footing) will change in the online environment. Blythe highlights physical structures that have been neglected, assigned a status secondary to theory or to verbal statements or to the study of individual writers. As we have argued, the relations between the material and rhetorical is an important component of institutional critique.

Institutional critique may not lead to alterations that can be felt immediately, as Libby Miles’ research into composition textbook publishing suggests. Rather, institutional critique can lead to an examination of micro practices within the macro structures of an entire industry, which over time (and with the cooperation of others) can produce rhetorical and material change. Her study identified sites at which the publishing process for composition textbooks might be open to rhetorical revision. First, she had to situate textbook publishers within their own corporate and economic contexts. Second, she needed to render visible narratives and knowledge of processes that generally are invisible to outsiders (indeed, they circulate only orally). Ultimately, she offers an action plan with several moments of negotiated intervention for authors, reviewers, consultants, freelance writers, and textbook users. For example, she shows how the financial spreadsheets guiding production decisions are rhetorically constructed by the editors based on a range of scenarios and containing multiple contingent definitions for a book’s “success.” She argues that prospective authors can become involved in the rhetorical construction of this too often “invisible” document.

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Finally, Ellen Cushman's research (*Struggle*) on inner city residents in "Quayville" shows another form of institutional research.<sup>16</sup> Cushman focuses more on victims of institutional oppression than on gatekeepers. But her work acknowledges the key role that institutions play in defining literacy practices. The ability to negotiate those literacy borders is critical for community members, whose basic needs require the support of such institutions. For the women Cushman studies, basic necessities such as food, clothing, health, and shelter

**Changed practices must be incorporated into the very design of the research project.**

are connected integrally to their rhetorical skills. Cushman's project shows an important stage of institutional critique: analysis, or first-hand observation of institutional practices, focused particularly on client relations. The study shows how institutional structures both enable and discourage the progress of residents, and it shows writers working well outside the borders of the composition classroom. Despite their explicit mission to aid the disadvantaged, these institutions often oppress the clients they are supposed to be serving. This realization is an important stage in the critique of institutional practice.

Our discussion raises an important question about the relationship between institutional action and *reports* of action. Can dissertations and other publications themselves be instances of institutional critique? Maybe, but as with idealized goals statements, we are suspicious of publications that do no more than *recommend* or *hope for* institutional change. To qualify as institutional critique, a research project has to actually enact the practice(s) it hopes for by demonstrating how the process of producing the publication or engaging in the research enacted some form of institutional change (Sullivan and Porter, *Opening Spaces*). This proposition is, of course, a difficult one. It necessitates that changed practices be incorporated into the very design of the research project (which is precisely our point and another reason why institutional critique needs to be seen as a methodology). This proposition also suggests that we be more patient in judging the effects of research practices and publication (which hopefully includes publication in a number of forums, not just the disciplinary forums that "count"). Institutions change slowly, and the results of a given project—and here we mean both the results of a researcher's interactions during a study as well as results seen as publication—may not be visible for some time.

The results of some actions can be seen more clearly than the research-based examples. David Downing and Jim Sosnoski's work for the journal *Works and Days* is a good example of theorizing-in-action. Sosnoski and Downing are reconstructing the conventions of academic publishing to push beyond the monologic

and contentious form of the conventional academic article to encourage a more dialogic form of scholarly interaction. They are experimenting with the development of new “protocols,” or discourse conventions, that will encourage cooperation, sharing, and mutual discovery. Electronic discourse plays a key part in the development of these new conventions. The special issue of *Works and Days* in honor of Jim Berlin (1996) offers a good example of this attempt. This issue includes transcripts of LISTSERV discussions by teachers working out the implications of cultural studies theorizing for classroom practice. In another article (“Multivalent”), Sosnoski and Downing experiment with the course diary as a format for exploring connections between theory, research, and teaching.

How does their work evidence institutional critique? Downing and Sosnoski are working within the parameters of conventional modes of production—for example, the academic print journal and the academic LISTSERV list—but attempting to reconstruct the protocols for those modes along different lines of rhetorical interaction. They are not just talking about their agenda; they are actually instantiating it in their multiple roles as editors, publishers, scholars, teachers, and LISTSERV facilitators.

A more typical institutional action, the establishment of a university research center, offers another example of theorizing-in-action. While trying to garner support and respect for the professional writing program at Purdue University, Pat Sullivan and Jim Porter expected that having a “usability lab” for the program was a key factor in gaining institutional recognition outside the university, but they also discovered that the center attracted institutional respect outside the Department of English. It began to pose an interesting dilemma. Inside the department, the attitude was, “A lab? What for?” The department viewed the lab not as an asset, but as a loss of valuable office space to an enterprise whose exact purpose was unclear if not suspect. Outside the department, however, the existence of the lab signaled that serious work was going on (in a department whose exact purpose was unclear if not suspect); the lab metaphor connected to the dominant scientific paradigm at Purdue, and usability was recognized as a legitimate focus of technology development.

The usability lab became a key argumentative lever in securing administrative support for professional writing. Along with Johndan Johnson-Eilola, Pat Sullivan and Jim Porter were able to get small grants to develop the lab, and those small grants led to larger grants supporting business writing instruction,

**They are not just talking about their agenda; they are actually instantiating it in their multiple roles as editors, publishers, scholars, teachers, and LISTSERV facilitators.**

a postdoctoral program, and a distance writing initiative. The Professional Writing Usability Lab became an important rhetorical space for changing institutional priorities in the direction of greater support for and recognition of writing at the university. But maintaining control over the space for the lab continues to be a time-consuming activity, because the professional writing program does not have stable control over its

**A simple spatial reordering, a micropolitical and rhetorical use of space, can constitute an effective political action.**

institutional resources. As each new monitor of departmental space questions the lab as wasted space, its use must be rejustified. This continuous rejustification process reminds us that our “rights” to space are not given or unassailable (as, say, the rights of the department’s journal in literary criticism). The process also connects us to the similar battles continuously waged by writing centers—as each new literature faculty member-cum-space-monitor asks us: “Why should our space be taken for this?” The spatial example underscores the intertwining of discipline and institution inside departments of English.

As with the Microsoft example cited at the beginning of this paper, a simple spatial reordering, a micropolitical and rhetorical use of space, can constitute an effective political action. Obviously spatial action is itself only part of a larger, coordinated strategy of multiple actions by agents who had developed a relative degree of power and access within an institution. But it’s important to understand our point: often, *space itself* is a major factor in achieving systemic change; timely deployment and construction of space (whether it be discursive or physical) can be a key rhetorical action affecting institutional change, and once created, the space can operate independently of the sponsoring agents. These examples point to our claim that seemingly minor rhetorical actions, especially spatial and organizational revision, can be dramatically effective ones, if they happen to hit the right kairotic institutional moment.

To sum up, institutional critique works as follows:

- **Institutional critique examines structures from a spatial, visual, and organizational perspective.** Such investigations may focus on boundaries in order to interrogate zones of ambiguity. It may employ the investigation of lines of action (e.g., legislation and policy paths or lines of communication in an organization), maps of decision making, or maps of authority (including organizational charts) and may focus on mismatches between the official story told by public relations and other narratives and the actual practices of the institution. It may also look at



how practices are codified over time, attending to historical dimensions of identity and change in an institution.

- **Institutional critique looks for gaps or fissures, places where resistance and change are possible.** Such gaps are often *discursive* (places where writing—e.g., policy writing—can be deployed to promote change). It is in the gaps, the ambiguities, and the mismatches that the system is flexible and open to change. This search for places where institutions can be changed wedges research and action.
- **Institutional critique undermines the binary between theory and empirical research by engaging in situated theorizing and relating that theorizing through stories of change and attempted change.** Although feminist interest in critical autobiography has spurred a number of important narratives about researchers' processes, the general relegation of storytelling in composition studies to the status of lore has downplayed the importance of the local story, even the one told critically. That move has helped to reinforce unhealthy boundaries between research and theory.

Institutional critique examines institutions as rhetorical designs—mapping the conflicted frameworks in these heterogeneous and contested spaces, articulating the hidden and seemingly silent voices of those marginalized by the powerful, and observing how power operates within institutional space—in order to expose and interrogate possibilities for institutional change through the practice of rhetoric. We are interested not only in how research practices themselves (including publication) can embody institutional critique, but also in connections between research and administrative action (institutional decision making), curriculum design, public policy initiatives, and other work called (and often minimized as) service and teaching.

**Institutional critique is a way to theorize and validate a set of institutional actions that our field has long respected but that others in the academy have thoughtlessly discredited or undervalued as *mere* service work.**

## Conclusion

Institutional critique is a way to theorize and validate a set of institutional actions that our field has long respected but that others in the academy have thoughtlessly discredited or undervalued as *mere* service work—our administrative efforts, our

community outreach, our consulting, our editorial activity, and our political lobbying. In this respect at least, our effort joins others' attempts to reinterpret the "intellectual work" of WPAs and composition teachers (see, for example, the MLA Commission on Professional Service).

But we are also urging much more. We want to retheorize the relationship of research to service in the fields of rhetoric and composition, professional writing, and computers and composition.

**What would happen if we reconceived ourselves as "writing experts" working in the public realm instead of "composition teachers" working within the university?**

We want to change the relationship between theory and action, using what we see as an action-oriented yet theoretically complex tool—spatial analysis. The strict divisions between research, teaching, and service, not

to mention the infamous theory-practice binary, do not work very well in the realm of spatial analysis. (Postmodern geographers have attracted us in large part because their critical efforts have seemed not to be caught up in the theory-practice problem that affects many other fields, rhetoric and composition included.) We want the field to define its institutional location more broadly than the composition classroom or the English department. We want future research to focus more on the institution as a unit of analysis. We want to encourage spatial critique as an analytic tool for changing institutions.

It is our contention that dramatic and far-reaching social and institutional change cannot occur through innovative classroom practices alone or through curricular or departmental adjustments or through unsituated theorizing. The classroom certainly is one significant site for change, but some changes need to happen in order to influence how the classroom is constituted. What about other sites and institutions that shape the structure of those classrooms: What about the software development industry, adult basic education centers, and online writing centers? Law and public policy, government agencies, and courtrooms? Mass media, the publishing industry, the Internet, and World Wide Web? And what about alternate identities for ourselves? What would happen if we reconceived ourselves as "writing experts" working in the public realm instead of "composition teachers" working within the university? Or if we identified ourselves as the field of "rhetoric and writing" instead of "rhetoric and composition" or "composition studies"? Is our continued self-identity as *composition* teachers helping ensure our continued subordinate status?

To enact the kind of change our field hopes for—and to change our field's institutional status so that we can begin providing *writers* (not just *students*)

with adequate institutional writing instruction—we must rewrite our own disciplinary and institutional frames. Institutional critique promotes this revision.

## Acknowledgments

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## Notes

1. Usability refers to research that studies how users—that is, real people in actual working situations—interact with products such as instructional manuals, computer interfaces, and controls (e.g., airplane instrument panels). Usability assumes that “the human factor” should be integral in product design. Usability thus aims to humanize system design, especially in the computer industry.

2. Generally, if one looks for the term “institution” while reading multidisciplinary work that touches on the production and consumption of writing (e.g., sociology, sociolinguistics), the term appears frequently. But as with Leitch’s definition (cited later), institutions often appear either as an evil and unchangeable macro power or as a vague backdrop or a static system that somehow “produces” knowledge, belief, and identities. Sociologists have provided some well-known conceptualizations of institutional structures (e.g., Goffman, Giddens, and DuBois), but their accounts neglect the spatial and rhetorical aspects of institutions. Erving Goffman’s notion of the “total institution” refers to a more or less isolated, cloistered, and private organization that is certainly oppressive in its practices (such as a prison) (xiii). Goffman’s harsh view represents a common antagonism toward institutions, indeed toward the very word. Institutions are prisons, boarding schools, mental institutions, and convents, where individual freedoms are constrained, where lives are radically ordered by rules and regulations, and where typical human freedoms and choices are to a great extent denied. Goffman’s conception of total institution does not offer much hope for agency or resistance and is a construct that overlooks the rhetorical and spatial nature of institutions. Anthony Giddens’ “structuration theory” is an attempt to model the relationship between individuals and institutions. We find Giddens’ account problematic in its treatment of individuals. Which individuals are capable of resisting or changing the institution? Giddens’ level of abstraction is the problem. We think that there needs to be a distinction between rhetorical positions that afford the potential for agency and those that don’t. Giddens doesn’t consider rhetorical situations as a variable in his construct, and so we don’t find his model particularly helpful. W.E.B. DuBois practices a form of institutional analysis in his 1901 essay on the Freedman’s Bureau, a federal agency created in 1864 to administer to the needs of freed slaves in the South in the early years of Reconstruction. DuBois’ disciplinary orientation is

more sociological and organizational than it is rhetorical: language and writing practices are not the center of his study.

3. Who are the “we” who so confidently proclaim the possibility for institutional change in this article? We are academics whose notion of agency might well be tied to a professional class status that allows us to make claims about the changeability of institutions. In effect, we are assuming that individuals and groups/communities can indeed change institutions. But we are also assuming an agent of fairly powerful status already working within an institution: probably a member of the managerial or professional class who has entered an institution (e.g., the corporation) in some employee status that allows him or her to begin to make changes at least at a local level. What about those “outside” institutional systems? Are they powerless? We’re suspicious of inside work, because it can too easily become collaborative in the negative sense of the word. But we’re even less hopeful about outside work, since it often amounts to futile gestures of protest (e.g., academics railing against monopoly capitalism). Somehow we need to circumvent that inside-outside binary altogether and make productive action possible.

4. Our version of “critical” picks up on the central themes of traditional Critical Theory, but we are conscious of the limitations of that theoretical frame (e.g., its masculinist assumptions and its propensity toward theoretical posturing). Our version of critical merges traditional critical theory with several other areas that have provided critiques of that theory, especially the cultural and disciplinary postmodernism of Foucault, postmodern geography, and feminist theory, particularly as regards geography (e.g., Rose), methodology (e.g., Lather; Stanley; Luke and Gore), and ethics (e.g., Benhabib; Porter; Young). Our use of the term “critical” pushes toward the sense of critical reflection on, challenge to, and then positive situated action. In the case of institutional critique, the positive action we seek is to engage in the rhetorical practices necessary to design (and redesign) institutional systems. Institutional critique is, as we have framed it, a kind of “postcritical” methodology, in Lather’s sense (see Sullivan and Porter). That is, it posits a liberatory aim, but it has a critical reflexiveness (even irony) about its own position as it focuses on material forms of production.

5. Gregory Clark and Stephen Doheny-Farina are perhaps the first in the field of rhetoric and composition to employ the actual term “institutional critique” as a description for the disciplinary critique they articulate through Doheny-Farina’s “Anna” case (“Response”).

6. Foucault’s work is cited frequently, but the visual and spatial aspects of his work are largely undervalued. Even though reference to Foucault’s discussion of the panopticon is ubiquitous, the field has not fully appreciated the spatial and architectural implications of Foucault’s discussion in *Discipline and Punish* (see also “Of Other Spaces”). For example, Bentham’s panopticon as an architectural space was

created by a discursive organization, a manner of configuring the materiality of bricks and bars and mortars with the perceived need to discipline the human body. The panopticon as a prison design was born out of an argument for the need for such a design. Postmodern geographers such as Soja appreciate this aspect of Foucault's work.

Pierre Bourdieu's work is also important to our construction of institutional critique. In *Homo Academicus*, he provides a postmodern example of mapping that bridges institutional and disciplinary inquiry as he traces how the members of the French academy of 1968 responded to the educational crisis of that same year in ways that fit its network of affiliations. His strategy is to map the positions, backgrounds, notoriety, and cultures of the faculty in the main Parisian institutions. Bourdieu examines the faculty of several institutions in order to determine the state of the French academic world (*Homo academicus gallicus*). In this examination the specific institutions become a variable at some times (as do disciplines, publishing, schooling, organizational position, and so on). We would argue that this analytical method is an example of the use of spatial devices (e.g., postmodern mapping) to support a disciplinary critique. After all, Bourdieu is focused on the faculty members (including himself) and on how their affiliations—and most important in those affiliations are disciplinary ones—might explain their political positioning in the 1968 educational crisis. But his view of institution is limited to the faculty: in Bourdieu's work, the faculty equal the institution; no other institutional factors are foregrounded. Further, his view of the institution equates the French academic world with key institutions in Paris, which is understandable from the position of understanding the riots in Paris but not from the position of examining all institutions in France. His examination of the political, cultural, and disciplinary valences at work in seemingly analytic academic pronouncements breathes a life into the analysis of institutions. For instance, he uses mapping procedures to situate faculty according to their disciplinary areas, economic class, and educational pedigree. In this respect, we see his work as moving toward institutional critique. His tendency to equate institution with its faculty and all of French schooling with certain Parisian institutions blinds him to precisely the types of institutional analysis that his work suggests to us. But his connection of political positions with a tissue of disciplinary, institutional, and cultural positioning affords us a lucid example of how multiple mapping can work as a form of spatial analysis.

Another example of such critique is evident in Bourdieu and Passeron's *Reproduction in Education, Society, and Culture*. Conventional sociological analysis rejoices in the "democratization" of higher education in France, based on the increasing number of students entering higher education. Bourdieu and Passeron's critical analysis maps these numbers against class variables to conclude something very different: though access to higher education rose for all classes, they rose in proportion. Thus, students from middle- and upper-class backgrounds continued to

hold an edge in terms of access to education relative to students from farming and working class backgrounds (*Reproduction* 224). The class disparity becomes even more evident when one realizes that the children of farmers and manual workers tended to enroll in arts or sciences, while a higher proportion of upper-class students “took up Law or Medicine” (228). So while there may have been increased access to higher education for the working classes, that access was channeled into “the bottom of the academic hierarchy” (229). Bourdieu and Passeron’s conclusion: Academic institutions are based firmly on a system of access and privilege that caters to the professional and managerial middle and upper classes; in their mode of operation academic institutions help maintain and reproduce existing class structures and differences. (A comparable, though less concretely situated, form of analysis can be found in Giroux’s *Theory and Resistance in Education*.)

7. Consider the fact that the intellectual work document envisions change within departments of English (rather than encouraging writing programs to break away from those departments). An academic department usually is not the only institutional entity involved in tenure and promotion—as Roen illustrates (46–47). Typically, such decisions must be cleared at levels beyond the department, and it’s quite possible for other committees or deans to reject recommendations from departments (e.g., when the work is not accepted as satisfactory outside a department or other material and economic factors intervene). Therefore, a draft that convinces departments of English to reconceive the work of WPAs still may leave others outside the discipline unconvinced of the value of the new conception of intellectual work.

8. So what does work? What forces do universities respond to? One idea: What if institutional action were nationwide, yet focused in particular ways, so that it was both global and local at the same time? An example of this is to be found in the ways that the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) and the NCAA handle institutional violations. The AAUP, for instance, puts university administrations under censure when they violate the rights of faculty or otherwise undermine standards of academic freedom and academic due process. In other words, they localize their global action by identifying violations in a very detailed way (i.e., they publish thorough reports of the university’s violations). The NCAA of course has much more clout, as it is able to impose economic sanctions that affect the bottom-line athletic budget of universities who violate standards for recruiting and for support of student athletes. What if our field published a list of universities whose administrations grievously violated the standards our field sets for responsible use of part-time faculty, for writing class size, and so on? What if our field’s standards could be instituted in the way that affects university and program accreditation?

9. This problem is not unique to critical feminists. Other feminist pedagogical research displays this same filtering of the institution. Frances Maher and Mary Kay Thompson Tetreault, for instance, focus on classrooms in their book-length study

*Feminist Classrooms*. They do use the words “institution” and “institutional” but in ways that relegate the institution to an uninterrogated setting. Maher and Thompson do not pursue extended examinations of particular institutions, nor do they foreground and problematize institution in a study that argues for positional feminist pedagogies. (One clear bit of evidence that institution is not a category for them is that there is no entry for institution/al in their extensive subject index.)

10. This focus on classroom critique is not unique to feminist and cultural studies. One can find similar critiques in computers and composition and in professional writing. The 1995 and 1996 volumes of *Computers and Composition*, for example, reveal that most studies in computers and composition focus on the classroom level. Though one can find hints about non-classroom influences, few studies in computers and composition focus on forces outside the classroom or even on the effect those forces may have on classroom practice and design.

11. A spatial view such as ours involves institutional culture, and cultural studies best addresses culture in composition theorizing. While we will not be calling on the usual cultural studies sources—Grossberg, or Hall, or Berlin, or Giroux—as we advance our notions, we are invoking a number of cultural studies geographers who help us articulate spatial questions we think are key to achieving institutional critique. Recently, scholars within rhetoric and composition have started to consider issues of space as well. See Nedra Reynold’s work for an important discussion of space and the identity of rhetoric and composition.

12. As Vincent Leitch articulates this point, institutions are comprised of discursive modes of production; they are an entire discursive system:

through various discursive and technical means, institutions constitute and disseminate systems of rules, conventions, and practices that condition the creation, circulation, and use of resources, information, knowledge, and belief. Institutions include, therefore, both material forms and mechanisms of production, distribution, and consumption and ideological norms and protocols shaping the reception, comprehension, and application of discourse. (127–28)

Leitch’s view derives from Foucault’s. Even though Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish* is frequently cited in support of a determining view of institutions—institutions are “complete and austere”; they are panopticons; they exert an unrelenting control over bodies—he does not see institutions as innately oppressive or as necessarily unchangeable: “No matter how terrifying a given system may be, there always remain the possibilities of resistance, disobedience, and oppositional groupings . . . almost all of these laws and institutions are capable of being turned around” (Foucault, “Space, Knowledge, Power” 245).

13. In *Opening Spaces* Sullivan and Porter argue for a critical methodology for the study of computers and writing. Addressing topics key to a critical methodology

for the study of writing in technological settings (e.g., framing of research projects, decision making during the research process, and ethical and political dimensions of research projects), *Opening Spaces* examines how to operate within critical research premises. Sullivan and Porter's approach is also a form of disciplinary critique, as it shows how to change disciplines through changing knowledge-making practices. (The spatial approach of postmodern mapping is addressed in Chapters 4 and 7.)

14. Of course diagrams are not new to rhetoric and composition. James Kinneavy's rhetorical triangle, for example, has generated considerable attention across generations by identifying important rhetorical elements in communication. Because he asserts in *A Theory of Discourse* that certain genres emphasize differing elements, Kinneavy's diagram cannot be seen as totally static, but it is modernist in its assumptions that the key elements are present and have been represented by the diagram and in its assumptions that an abstract diagram covers the matters worth theorizing about a particular discourse. In the early 1980s Linda Flower and John R. Hayes produced a writing process diagram that built field coherence around another diagram, this time a depiction of the writing process. Their picturing of the cognitive elements of the writing process, modeled after analogous drawings of cognitive processes in psychology, helped to articulate important claims (e.g., we should begin the study of a text before it is finished; the stages of the writing process are not necessarily linear; writing is a worthy subject of research). The modernist use of their drawing by the field can be demonstrated through the myriad of drawings that used elements from Flower and Hayes' work as canonical lenses through which to view new writing research situations. Yes, the field is already involved in some forms of mapping—but modernist ones.

15. Grabill's project examines a "community literacy center," that is, an adult basic education program. The project seeks to understand what literacy is (how it was defined in this particular institution), who took part in literacy decision-making processes, and in whose interests these decisions were made. In an attempt to answer these local questions, Grabill constructed an "institutional case," collecting documents related to the setup and maintenance of the program (e.g., funding legislation and requirements), the conduct of the program (e.g., policies, grants, and assessments), and other observations and documents related to classroom practices (e.g., pedagogical practices, interviews).

16. Cushman, who identifies her work as an ethnographic study of "institutional literacy" (*Struggle*; see also "Critical Literacy" and "Rhetorician"), observed how inner-city community members (mainly poor African American women) negotiated their status with "institutional gatekeepers"—that is, representatives of social service institutions such as the Department of Social Services, the Department of Housing and Urban Development, and various philanthropic groups. Cushman's conclusion was that the inner-city residents, far from being inadequate discourse users, actu-



ally engaged in sophisticated border-crossing literacy practices; they used advanced rhetorical techniques to negotiate their status even within “asymmetrical power relations.” They did not always meet with success, but their lack of success was due more to the power of the institution rather than their own lack of literacy skills.

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