aspects of the two groups' legislative and social justice agendas resemble one another. True, profound differences are apparent as well. But the similarities probably aren't accidental. And with Gere's book as a point of departure, it should be an interesting task to discover why.


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Nancy Welch's book argues that composition studies needs to rethink revision in writing instruction. She draws on the work of David Bartholomae, Lester Faigley, Linda Flower, Donald Murray, Nancy Sommers, and Stephen Witte, for example, and contends that although contemporary scholarship often calls for radical changes in writing, it continues to theorize revision as crafting a "complete," "contained," and "polished" text, excising any incoherence or inconsistency. This understanding of revision is not one Welch rejects; she believes that clarity, coherence, and consistency are important to teaching writing and that an "increasing orientation toward" a particular thesis, position, and audience is necessary for effective writing. She is, however, opposed to what she considers to be composition's limited view of revision: its preoccupation with technique. Welch claims that revising one's prose often involves more than correcting mistakes; it involves "voicing the conflicts" that create dissonance and questioning the forms of knowledge that are (re)produced in written discourse. That is, when problems are manifest in writing, they are often symptomatic of other conflicts: contradictions between writers' perception of their reality and their lived experiences; fissures between (or relations to) cultural representations of writers' identity and writers' self-image; writers' internalized anxieties about writing. In studying the moments when a text does not meet a writer's intentions, teachers and students can identify particular struggles and interrogate an array of competing desires for order and control. Revision, redefined here, resists neat and tidy prose. Instead, it encourages disorientation, "an act of getting restless with received meanings, familiar relationships, and prefigured disciplinary boundaries."

Since Welch believes that her own work should reflect her argument—"ought to resist a real tight structure"—her seven chapters and a postscript comprise case-study, ethnography, and autobiographical research in three academic settings: writing centers, composition classrooms, and a summer writing project. In all three areas and through her various modes of inquiry, Welch focuses on the dissonance that exceeds a paper's first draft—namely, a writer's personal narrative. She claims that the function of composition studies is to orient students in particular academic discourses. Consequently, their attention turns away from familiarization with the personal to "objective" forms
of knowledge: technique, theory, scientific discovery. In short, students learn systematically to suppress their emotions, “hushing-up whatever is unruly, eliminating it from the text altogether.” Welch argues that when composition studies forces students to obviate their experiences, it misses important opportunities to have students “open up” and “let out” their internal strife, opportunities not to make their writing more coherent but rather to examine the confusion, to recognize that seemingly loose texts contain more than an underprocessed piece of writing; they constitute a divided self. Her chapter “Collaborating with the Enemy,” for example, illustrates the struggles Lee, a former marine and Gulf War veteran, encounters while he revises a story in which a marine faces and passes the ultimate test of killing another human being. In her retelling of his ordeal, Welch demonstrates how Lee—over time and through self-reflexive questions—addresses his personal responses to the serious nature of this topic. Ultimately, Lee shifts the philosophical underpinning of his paper from “Can Captain Doe kill another person?” to “What does this killing mean?” suggesting that he not only moves from loyal marine to questioning student but that he also resolves (heals) his internal conflicts over the moral significance of killing. From her work with Lee, Welch concludes that students, while they write and revise, are exposed to a wide range of competing emotions—including aggressiveness, hostility, frustration, anger, and fear; therefore, composition studies needs to provide an environment where students can explore and articulate their feelings in writing. As might be expected, this kind of pedagogy produces an intensely personal account of revision, one that might be of interest to those who view writing as therapy.

For those who do not view writing as therapy, Welch’s “Revising a Writer’s Identity” advises that discipline-wide unease about linking academic writing with the personal may arise not so much from an ethical commitment to students as from a lack of professional currency: counseling-session pedagogy does not offer composition the quick path to legitimacy that distance and objectivity does. Welch challenges those teachings that seek to stabilize, center, and neutralize emotion, for they not only reproduce “the essence of Enlightenment rationality,” they also adapt models of writing that “clean up” and regulate students’ voices. I realize that she is introducing an affective dimension to the debates on revision and is thereby championing its import at the expense of the vast body of rhetorical theories that discuss the relationship between writer, text, and audience. But I am curious as to why she does not take this opportunity to complicate the connections between writing anxieties and the exigencies of writing situations. Without venturing into this type of investigation, Welch merely supplants one approach to revision with another, maintaining a “neat and tidy” argument.

Though she may resist affiliating the personal with the rhetorical, she does initiate psychoanalytic readings to question the relation between emotion and narrative conventions. Examining one’s feelings, claims Welch, can lead to a more complex understanding of the interaction among individuals, social dynamics, “cultural scripts,” and writing. At their best, psychoanalytic theories
can be “one of self- and other-consciousness, of social critique that emphasizes rather than eclipses the possibilities of society’s members.” I am not sure what kind of critique Welch hopes to accomplish, especially since she advocates the necessity of psychoanalysis within the context of feminist theory but is neither interested in exploring students’ psyches vis-à-vis reconceptualizing a more equitable society nor concerned with advancing a gender analysis of the power relations involved in revision. For example, in her chapter “Worlds in the Making,” Welch appropriates Jane Flax’s interpretation of child psychologist D.W. Winnicott’s theory of “potential spaces,” a site where individuals come together to imagine ways of intervening in, speaking back to, and shaping their institutions through storytelling, story questioning, and story revising. Flax explicitly politicizes Winnicott’s work to illustrate the radical potential of feminist consciousness-raising groups. She contends that his theory names a place of activity that “enables us to see how women can creatively transform what is given rather than view Women as the uncontested product of technologies of gender” (emphasis added). Yet, Welch revises Flax’s argument to read: “potential spaces enable us to see how teachers can creatively transform what is given rather than view Teachers as the uncontested product of technologies of educational systems” (emphasis added). This sentence may offer a way to rethink teachers’ involvement in institutional practices, but, ironically, it suppresses feminist politics and eliminates the possibility of encountering ruptures between one’s sense of self and one’s written self. I think a more useful approach to Flax’s work would include a discussion of how the expression of emotion is an important way by which we come to know and gain the ability to change the world we live in. This discussion might also suggest that emotions—our understanding of them, the forms of expression they take, and the way we experience them—are products of and responses to social structures.

Another chapter I find troublesome is “From Silence to Noise.” Here Welch explains her own struggles with the impulse to stress revision as “management and containment” when she works with Margie, a woman seeking to write about her experience with workplace sexual harassment. Welch becomes unsettled because she recognizes the psychological peril of probing into Margie’s emotional state. Yet the demands of Margie’s situation (she was invited to participate in a panel discussion on sexual harassment during the university’s annual Women’s Week) necessitate that they directly confront this very private and public issue. One might anticipate a feminist consideration of this predicament. One, however, may be surprised with Welch’s observations. She draws on Julia Kristeva’s idea of “exile”—the creation of a space in which one interrogates and intervenes in the language, connections, and belief systems that constitute our texts, sense of self, and notions of “common sense”—to create a place where she and Margie can address the implications of their work. I am keenly aware of both the personal necessity to make sense of this dehumanizing experience and the political ramifications of workplace sexual harassment, so I hesitate to criticize the feminist particulars of Welch’s analysis. But I am
genuinely perplexed by her inward and marginal approach to an issue with political consequences. Though I appreciate Welch’s (and Margie’s) courage to write about this topic and understand the need to develop a safe space from which to enter public discourse, I think Welch’s suggestion implies a retreat from the social, a way to avoid the practical and political significance of writing. What occurs to me is that Welch’s assertions undermine her best attempts to get restless with the authority of subordination, coherence, and control. Since she adamantly advocates dissonance, I wonder why she does not pause here to situate herself in feminist politics that would disrupt the workings of power in language.

*Getting Restless: Rethinking Revision in Writing Instruction* may be easy to criticize for its methodology, but it is also easy to admire for its ambitious look at how revision may be (re)conceptualized through self-reflexive theorizing. I admire Welch’s willingness to share the personal failures and successes of her teaching experiences in such a revealing and honest manner. In fact, this type of critical honesty makes Welch’s book interesting and valuable to those who hope to inform their teaching with psychoanalytic theory and a strong sense of personal issues. *Getting Restless* is also valuable because it illustrates how a sense of dissonance, a sense that reacts to the rituals and conventions of academic discourse, can be affirmative as writers come up against the limits of one discourse to re-vision a text’s meaning and intention.

Another strength of Welch’s argument is her thoroughness: she does not simply offer a critique—pointing out composition studies’ pitfalls—and then move on. Instead, she provides substantial suggestions or models for further investigation. For example, in “Toward an Excess-ive Theory of Revision,” Welch acknowledges the limits of her own work when she writes, “there’s a great deal missing, a great deal more” that could be said. She compiles a list of questions that might inspire others to fill-out her omissions. I only provide a few of her questions to outline the direction of her thought:

1. Where and when do teachers begin to feel restless with their ways of responding to students’ texts?
2. Where and when do teachers begin to ask, “Something missing, something else?” of their response?
3. What happens when teachers bring their reading of students’ texts into dialogue with their reading of other writers whose work pushes against any single “Ideal Text”? Or, given that many teachers have argued precisely for such an intersection, what works against this happening or against this happening more?
4. To what extent do practices of assessment in particular institutional contexts continue to perpetuate the ideal of complete, contained, disciplined texts?

As Welch’s questions suggest, *Getting Restless* is a necessary disruption in our traditional ideas of revision. Her book may not be of interest to those committed to social theories and political approaches to writing, but it is a must for those committed to voicing the personal conflicts writers experience and to turning those confusing and sometimes dismaying moments into productive sites for questioning textual relations.