An Affirmative Theory of Desire

Christa Albrecht-Crane

Affect is itself a real condition, an intrinsic variable of the late-capitalist system, as infrastructural as a factory. Actually, it is beyond infrastructural, it is everywhere, in effect. Its ability to come secondhand, to switch domains and produce effects across them all, gives it a meta-factorial ubiquity.

—Brian Massumi

Desire must be liberated. We must find ways to better address the amalgam of feeling, intensity, richness, playfulness, desiring, passion, excitement, rage, suffering, life, becoming—in short, affect—that characterizes teaching and learning moments. We must think through and with affect because something valuable, critical, something political, happens when we relate affectively to each other across the spaces of the classroom. Consider what Lucia Perillo has to say about our inability to address affect. In an article in the Chronicle of Higher Education Online, she contemplates an “encounter” with a female student. The campus student newspaper contains news of a memorial service for a recently murdered student, and Perillo realizes that this student had taken an introductory poetry class from her. Perillo, shocked and haunted, writes, “she was by no means a person I knew well. I had only had her—‘had’ as we teachers say, an expression with implications both Victorian and sexual—in one class.” So here we are, then, right in the messy middle of making sense of something affective in this teaching moment. In recalling her experience of teaching this student, Perillo identifies familiar semantic and analytical tropes of sexuality, property, and morality. Perillo proceeds to write an essay about the student, “to protect what little I had before she passed from my memory altogether.” After reading the essay, her husband responds, “this sounds homoerotic,” and “maybe this is something you need to stock into a drawer.” Clearly, we know what he
means—as Perillo herself explains, “the moral complexity . . . in the relationship between teacher and pupil has only been made more tangled by the politics of our day.” The politics of our day—sexual harassment legislation, political turf battles along identity lines—complicate what is at stake in relations between teachers and students. Perillo remains frustrated, not being able to fully engage with and understand her myriad affective resonances with the student’s violent death, her vitality and expressiveness in life, and Perillo’s own sense of grief and deep appreciation of her student. At the end of her article, she writes, “The dead are not to be forgotten: that we should speak of their physical beauty, as my student was physically beautiful, and of their talents, as my student was talented, and of our love for them, as I loved my student, even though I didn’t know her all that well. If that’s homoerotic, then so be it.” The multi-layered encounter between this teacher and her student seems to demand an affective response that can take into account the contradictory and intense dynamic of this particular pedagogical moment: its beauty, its violence, its grief, its appreciation, its love. Perillo speaks to an urgent problem in the classroom. The discourses she has recourse to—mainly sexual harassment and eroticism—remain insufficient in addressing the more nagging and profound moves that take place in this teaching encounter.

This essay argues that affect, and what makes affect possible—namely desire—form the conceptual turning points through which individuals experience and in fact struggle with and against places of learning. As Lynn Worsham points out, in terms of how (writing) pedagogy operates, affective struggles form the central axis for both cultural domination and cultural change. By enlisting affective investments in ordering social space, Worsham explains, “pedagogy binds each individual to the social world through a complex and often contradictory affective life that remains, for the most part, just beyond the horizon of semantic availability, and its success depends on a mystification or misrecognition of its primary work” (223). In this essay, I address the problem of “semantic availability” and suggest ways to perhaps understand and convey better how affective struggles come to matter in the classroom. Connecting desire to a primary manifestation of an affective involvement with the world addresses what it means for human beings—and teachers and students—to exercise agency. Such an affirmative, encompassing, Nietzschean notion of “desire” can provide a (theoretical/cultural) vocabulary with which to animate the vitality, creativity, and passion of teaching and learning.
A focus on the affective dimension of pedagogy makes desire a serious political issue. As T.R. Johnson maintains in his recent article “School Sucks,” matters of affect, emotion, desire, and pleasure must be considered by compositionists because such matters appear to be at the heart of how students experience our pedagogy and respond to it. Both Johnson and Worsham, then, note the conceptual as well as discursive poverty of our educational languages to address the affective dimension in processes of teaching and learning. We have seen good work beginning to be published. As Johnson points out, however, the history of composition studies is still marked by “the relative absence” of any discussions of affective issues (624). Worsham also observes, in turn, that “the challenge for radical educators (feminist, critical, postmodern) is to offer that explanation [in terms of affect]” (240). Lisa Langstraat adds, “In general, compositionists lack a vocabulary to address affect in the classroom,” particularly a classroom informed by cultural studies approaches (304). And, as Laura Micciche further argues, “given the liberatory agenda of current composition pedagogies and theories, it is surprising that affect has not had more of a presence in our discipline” (439). I take up this challenge and offer here a discussion of affective issues that argues for an affirmative understanding of desire.

Liberating Desire
In an interview, Felix Guattari, the French psychoanalyst and political activist, was asked the question, “what is the best way to arrive at a true sexual liberation?” Guattari responded:

The problem as I see it is not a sexual liberation but a liberation of desire. Once desire is specified as sexuality, it enters into forms of particularized power, into the stratification of castes, of styles, of sexual classes. The sexual liberation—for example, of homosexuals, or transvestites, or sadomasochists—belongs to a series of other liberation problems among which there is an a priori and evident solidarity, the need to participate in a necessary fight. But I don’t consider that to be a liberation as such of desire, since in each of these groups and movements one finds repressive systems. (204; emphasis added)

Guattari here attends to a specific and unique cultural and political context in France in the 1970s, a context that seemingly remains distant to the kinds of concerns compositionists face at this time in North America. Surely, on a number of levels, that is true. And yet, at a
conceptual and philosophical level, Guattari speaks precisely about a theoretical lacuna that still persists in current discussions of pedagogy. In his comment, Guattari notes that in his view the issue at hand is not that of a “sexual liberation,” but a “liberation of desire.” Similarly, at an analytical/semantic/practical level the issue regarding pedagogy is not that of emotional, sexual, or even affective liberation of certain individuals or subjects, but rather a liberation of affect/desire as concepts, as generative energies. That is to say, what is at stake is not an individualized, programmatic sort of liberation of a subject’s desire (in the spirit of a liberal politics of transcending repressed subjectivities). Rather, at stake is the liberation of affect as such, as a force that both works in and through subjects to point to an affective energy that forms between them. This understanding of affect, and its economy, desire, allows for conceptualizing desire in teaching as an energy, a subfield of sorts, that permeates what we do and who we are to the extent that it underwrites and enables existence as such.

At the current time, teachers have available certain kinds of semantic and theoretical tools with which to address the affective dimension of teaching and to a large extent such tools define affect and desire in terms of sexuality: desire in teaching situations is largely seen as sexual and sexualized desire that operates in a logic of acquisition and lack. Such domestication of desire risks making claims that totalize and also harden binary ways of thinking. Guattari (and, it seems to me, Worsham and Johnson as well) appeal to an understanding of affect as primary, as omnipresent—as, in fact, an affirmative, generative energy that subsumes all life and existence.

But, we don’t see that yet. The pedagogical models we have at our theoretical and discursive disposal that address desire as a component of pedagogy include radical and feminist pedagogies of emotion, psychoanalytic approaches to desire in learning, sexual harassment discourses, and Jane Gallop’s arguments in favor of what I will label for now “erotic teaching.” These approaches, though certainly useful in their general concern with affective matters, fail to appreciate the constitutive role of desire that I argue for in this essay. The next part of the essay focuses on two of these models—sexual harassment discourses and Gallop’s pedagogy—to argue that they remain problematic. Even though many readers undoubtedly are familiar with both the theoretical impetus behind sexual harassment legislation and the goals of Jane Gallop’s pedagogy, it is worthwhile to deconstruct the logic behind these discourses because it remains dominant and largely exclusive in how we conceptualize desire.
Desire in Sexual Harassment Discourse
Both approaches link desire to subjects in a binary relation, privileging questions of epistemology and ontology—what is knowledge? What is a body? What is oppression? Who has power? Who is colonized? A sexual harassment discourse, for one, has become so dominant during the past several years (not just in administrative circles at institutions nationwide, but also in conversations, at conferences, in the classroom) to the extent that some people see it as the dominant paradigm through which student/teacher relationships in general have come to be viewed (Nelson, Rice). Joseph Litvak, for example, wryly identifies "the only two models of teacher/student relations that our culture seems to allow—namely melancholic heterosexuality and sexual harassment" (26). In other words, sexual harassment discourse has become one instrument through which to produce and maintain a conceptual vocabulary about desire and pedagogy. Moreover, "the language of sexual harassment," according to Robert Riggs and Philip Smith, "is a language of contentiousness. It is replete with legalities, conflict, adversarial relationships, and inequality. It tends to separate, to pit one person or one gender against another, and to devolve into issues of power, dominance, conquest, hierarchy, winning, and losing" (146). Embedded in this language of conflict and binaries is therefore an understanding of desire as highly deterministic and proprietary. Desire in sexual harassment discourse is all about ontology and a fixation on what something is. My analysis below is not aimed at discrediting efforts to struggle against sexual discrimination on our campuses, nor is my analysis intended to criticize sexual harassment legislation as such. Rather, I am concerned that a pervasive sexual harassment discourse provides one interpretation of desire that, unless supplemented by other views of desire in teaching situations, risks monopolizing and misrepresenting desire as potentially dangerous and contentious rather than as a constitutive component of teaching and learning (and life itself, for that matter).

In her Marxist-feminist reading, Catharine MacKinnon has offered the most fully theorized account of gender oppression and sexualized dominance that found its way directly into sexual harassment legislation. In the words of Kathryn Abrams, MacKinnon’s work forms “the ascendant feminist legal theory, shaping the socially transformative claim for sexual harassment” (304). Akin to Marx’s injunction that work in a capitalist system defines the identity of the worker and creates perpetual alienation, MacKinnon posits that the way sexuality is structured in Western culture defines the category “woman” and constructs that
identity as fundamentally oppressed. “Women are socially defined as women largely in sexual terms,” MacKinnon asserts (Sexual 182), thus setting up a deterministic chain of cause and effect through which she constructs the conceptual continuum of violent sexual activities by men against women. In other words, sexuality constructs sex and enables the identification of those who are sexually oppressed as “women.” MacKinnon’s understanding of feminism encompasses two levels: first, feminist analysis must begin with women’s experience; second, it must privilege that experience as authoritative and authentic. She explains, “Women’s lived-through experience, in as whole and truthful a fashion as can be approximated at this point, should begin to provide the starting point and context out of which is constructed the narrower forms of abuse that will be made illegal on their behalf” (26). In Feminism Unmodified, she urges women to “try thinking without apology with what you know from being victimized” (9). Embedded in the first assumption that women’s experience is central lies a second claim—namely, that as such, women’s experience has been characterized and defined by abuse. For MacKinnon, this is one epistemological unit: to value women on their own terms and to recognize that the category “woman” has been created through abuse.

Abuse, more specifically, is an expression of power that is clearly exercised in this culture through male sexuality. MacKinnon asserts, “Power is ultimately reducible to physical force, however mediated through social institutions, and sex is something, anything, else. Dominance thus takes sexual forms, but it does not have sexual sources” (Sexual 218). That is, dominance does not have to be practiced in sexual terms, but sexuality as we know it in this culture has always been practiced in relations of domination. “The institution of sexuality has defined force as a normal part of ‘the preliminaries,’” and has thus constructed sexuality, for both men and women, as integrally articulated to the dual effect of domination and oppression. This is why MacKinnon claims that “a crime of sex is a crime of power” (219, 220), and “gender is a power division and sexuality is one sphere of its expression” (220–21). MacKinnon sets up a constancy of sexual violence, “a theory of the sexual mechanism,” by which the list of abuses against women becomes absolute, thus territorializing the identity “woman”: “Force is sex, not just sexualized; force is the desire dynamic, not just a response to the desired object when desire’s expression is frustrated. Pressure, gender socialization, withholding benefits, extending indulgences, the how-to books, the sex therapy are
the soft end; the fuck, the fist, the street, the chains, the poverty are the hard end" (*Toward* 136).

In MacKinnon's account, desire is linked to those who dominate because they “participate in enforcing the hegemony of the social construct ‘desire,’ hence its product, ‘sexuality,’ hence its construct ‘woman,’ on the world” (*Toward* 129). That is to say, desire produces male sexuality, which in turn produces “woman.” MacKinnon coined the term “rape culture,” thus emphasizing the pervasive sexual domination in a starkly gendered system. In a much cited passage, she explains, “All women live in sexual objectification the way fish live in water. Given the statistical realities, all women live all the time under the shadow of the threat of sexual abuse. The question is, what can life as a woman mean, what can sex mean, to targeted survivors in a rape culture?” (149). At a conceptual level, then, MacKinnon understands agency to be shaped—better yet, determined—by her view of desire. In the current domination-based gender system MacKinnon argues that one cannot speak about women and agency in the same breath—“interpreting female sexuality as an expression of women’s agency and autonomy, as if sexism did not exist, is always denigrating and bizarre and reductive” (153), given that women “exist as they do because of lack of choice. They are created out of social conditions of oppression and exclusion” and “the institution of heterosexuality” (*Sexual* 147). Because MacKinnon defines sexual and gender oppression as systemic and institutionalized, she calls for legalistic intervention. She argues that women need law to redistribute the power differential between them and men. Typified in terms of ontology as *being women*, which is a “group defined character,” they require the intervention of law (132).6

MacKinnon’s approach, supported by a cause and effect structure of analysis, preempts seeing desire (and other elements pertaining to affect) as other than expressions of patriarchal oppression. As Christine Littleton argues, “What MacKinnon has thus far discovered, is, however, less a unified theory of women’s situation than a unified method of discovery” (751). Numerous other feminists have pointed to MacKinnon’s construction of desire as sexual and thus exploitative of women. They lament the fact that the logic of MacKinnon’s argument forestalls a recognition of women’s agency (see, for example, Abrams, Cornell, and Gallop, *Feminist*, and “Sex”). Moreover, MacKinnon’s claim that “woman” is always already a category created through oppression runs the risk of precluding further analysis. I borrow here from Diana Fuss, who argues that “the danger (and the usefulness) of ‘always already’ is that it implies essence,”
and thus imagines an irreducible and reified substance that need not be questioned further (17). The defining characteristic of "women" as a group rests on a condition that, according to MacKinnon, operates consistently across cultures and across the membership of the group. Judith Butler speaks to this issue as well: "We don't ever have to show the link to consequences because this [injurious content] is structurally the case. That scares me. It scares me because it means that we have no interpretation to perform" (qtd. in Olson and Worsham 763). Even though MacKinnon's analysis rightly identifies the existence of oppression and inequality (and I do not argue with this point), hers is also an approach that mystifies desire as a force that responds exclusively to the patriarchal calling through which it becomes a vehicle for subordinating women. In fact, MacKinnon's negative characterization of desire further removes women from the possibility of affirming any kind of positive political struggle through a deployment of desire. Paradoxically, in articulating desire to patriarchal structuration MacKinnon prevents a discussion of women's desire in any generative, positive manner that might counter its oppressive effect.

In this context, I worry about the consequences that sexual harassment discourses may produce in teaching situations. Following Michel Foucault's profound critique of discourse and the production of truth, Judith Butler writes, "Hate speech is produced by the law, and constitutes one of its more savory productions; it becomes the legal instrument through which to produce and further a discourse on race and sexuality under the rubric of combating racism and sexism" (97). Structurally, the same kind of argument can be made regarding sexual harassment discourse: "sexual harassment" becomes sexual harassment at the moment that it is affirmed by a court (or MacKinnon) as a discriminatory practice. Desire becomes articulated to sex discrimination and by this linkage it becomes desire as sex discrimination. Produced by law, sexual harassment discourse becomes the legal instrument through which to maintain a discourse on gender and sexuality in the name of overcoming sexism and gender discrimination. What this means for conceptualizing desire through a sexual harassment discourse is that as long as desire is subsumed as being constitutive of systemic gender and sex discrimination, it continues to be part of a discourse of sex and oppression. And, more importantly for my concerns here, desire in teaching situations continues to be linked to sexual harassment and thus to gender oppression.
Jane Gallop’s Eroticized Desire
A similar problematic that delimits desire into dualisms and an ontology of lack is suggested by Jane Gallop. She opposes banning or regulating sexual relationships between teachers and students, and she poses instead a pedagogy in which desire becomes mainly coded as eroticism, which she sees as not only a necessary component of teaching, but as a productive one as well. Even though Gallop disarticulates a notion of sexuality as contributing to gender oppression, she nonetheless rearticulates desire to a specific “dualism machine” that codes it as eroticism.

Gallop validates women’s experiences, including their sexuality and desires, as a source for agency, self-definition, and personal growth. The seeming attacks on sexuality in sexual harassment legislation manifest for Gallop a “dramatic reversal” of a feminist understanding of desire as liberating in both intellectual and personal ways (Feminist 1). Gallop fundamentally holds that desire is always constitutive of a subject’s agency. While she views sexual harassment policies as regulating sexuality rather than combating sexism, she links (women’s) agency to their willful exercise of sexuality. She identifies herself as a “pro-sex feminist,” focusing centrally on the problem of desire—that is, erotic desire (“Feminism” 22). As Gallop defines it, she is interested in the “sexual part of the relation between people,” including in teaching situations, and under “sexual” she groups “not of course . . . sex acts but rather the erotic dynamics which intertwine with other aspects of human interaction” (23). There is a sense here that “erotic dynamics” are understood as inclusive in the sense that they intersect with other affective dynamics, and that they allow for an expansive inclusion of various subjects—men, for instance—but then again, the majority of Gallop’s writing pulls this expansive understanding back to the sexual. In “The Teacher’s Breast,” for instance, she is at great pains to argue against a strand in feminist pedagogy that shifts the analysis from the political to the personal, emphasizing the maternal, asexual model of the “good woman” teacher who offers her students the maternal breast (note the singular). For Gallop this model of feminist pedagogy plays into and maintains a traditionally gendered system under the myth of female nurturance (87). What she wants to introduce into feminist discussions of pedagogy is the image of the “bad girl,” the teacher who is aware and uses the sexual energy she possesses, offering her students sexualized breasts (and here, then, the use of the plural) (87).
Thus, Gallop’s argument betrays the assumption that desire is something that exists as an ontological entity, something that is tangible, traceable, nameable, and thus locatable in subjects. Teachers have breasts, they possess desire, they are eroticized. Desire reposes on identity. Gallop writes,

Most of us would recognize that in our own sexual relationships (or those we would like to have) our partner is one of the people, if not the person, we take most seriously. While desire can indeed be demeaning and dehumanizing, it can also be the mark of profound esteem. The determining factor would seem to be whether the one who desires takes the desired other seriously as a person, as a subject with will of her own, whether desire can recognize in its object another desiring subject. (“Feminism” 23)

Gallop’s understanding of desire presupposes that subjecthood can be established in the process of desiring. That is, desire becomes coded as a quality bodies have or can attain. Writing about her early encounters with desire in feminism, Gallop states, “Within one whirlwind year I came to a sense of my sexual power, of my sexuality, as drive and energy” (Feminist 5). In other words, Gallop marks her desire, her sexual power, her sexuality. If one person recognizes another person as a self-determining subject with desire, then desire functions as a valuable possession that establishes relations of agency between willful individuals. What is at stake for Gallop, indeed, is to reveal the extent to which sexual harassment policies on campuses refuse to credit women as desiring subjects. Above all, in this argument desiring subjects are empowered subjects. She writes about her sexual awakening that intellectual and sexual change “made me both an engaged, productive student and a sexually energized, sexually confident woman” (5).

This understanding of desire as the catalyst for learning is articulated as well in Gallop’s essay “Knot a Love Story,” in which she discusses her relationship as a professor to a male graduate student. This relationship turned on the connection between physical desire and the desire to learn. In a two and a half hour interaction with the student in her office, Gallop observes, “This painstaking work, the sense of laboring together and building understanding, was enormously satisfying and totally engrossing” (210). As she explains, in the aftermath of this initial experience she developed “recognizably erotic” thoughts regarding her student, and the experience left her with either “feeling like a wonderful teacher to feeling myself a very bad teacher indeed” (211). The good teacher, as Gallop
argues in “The Teacher’s Breast,” would offer her students the traditional cultural script of the safe, maternal bosom. The “bad teacher,” in contrast, eroticizes the teaching moment and derives pleasure from it. What is interesting in this example is the construction of “good” and “bad” desire by the social agent embodied in the professor. Gallop continues with the binary structure, writing that hers “is a story of desire arising within the scene of pedagogy, where it is troublingly unclear whether this is really teaching or really sex” (212). The choices are to either identify teaching as devoid of desire, or to call it “sex” if desire is present. She observes that she felt compelled to make a decision among the two choices available to her—namely, whether she was a bad or a good teacher, whether she could put her desire “to pedagogical use,” or whether she “gave in to desire and abandoned duty” (213). Gallop contends that both these models of teaching remain inadequate to explain the productive role eroticism plays in pedagogy. She remarks that she felt “embarrassed” by the fact that she had to summon the romantic, idealistic language of romance novels to describe something in a professional setting. In the end, however, she upholds the binary between the erotic “bad” teacher and the dutiful “good” teacher in arguing that her use of romantic language over pedagogically proper language “is knotted to my persistent urge to interpret this experience and this relation as erotic rather than professional, a love story rather than a teaching experience” (213). In other words, Gallop’s astute identification of a meager dichotomous choice between proper, professional teaching and unacceptable, eroticized pedagogy remains fundamentally intact when she argues for the suppressed, sexual element of the binary in teaching situations.

I value the fact that Gallop addresses one affective dimension of teaching and learning—namely, the role desire might play in pedagogy. Her affirmative, positive understanding of desire goes a long way to rebut the reductionist and negating approach to desire that MacKinnon articulates. However, I am also struck by Gallop’s reductive logic. Desire for Gallop follows the ontological and epistemological pattern that has been long familiar in Western thinking; even though Gallop attempts to undo a body/mind split in arguing that teaching and learning involve not just the intellect, but especially the body (and bodies’ desires), she continues to entertain the binary pairs of the “good” and “bad” teacher, the teacher who uses her erotic power, and the teacher who denies that power. In effect, Gallop pursues what Richard Burt and Jeffrey Wallen call “a new pedagogical imperative that both eroticizes knowledge in the name of liberatory effects and takes every instance of desire as an
occasion for the production of knowledge” (74). In other words, the desiring subject achieves knowledge by fulfilling a certain sense of yearning and lack. In the end, Gallop thus contributes to rather than prevents a renewed focus on sexuality which she purports to be opposing in sexual harassment discourses. Gallop’s alternative argument—that teachers and students possess desire that they should use to gain self-fulfillment and knowledge—ultimately suggests a return to an Enlightenment model of agency, as Burt and Wallen rightly argue. In their words, “The student, the woman, or the disempowered is to be given agency by learning to know and assert their own desires: pedagogy is now to imply the sexual enlightenment of students” (79). And, Pamela Caughie further suggests, Gallop merely succeeds in maintaining the basic structure of the sexual harassment discourse, which “seduces us into taking sides and into assigning each protagonist a position” (232). Gallop reverses the protectionism of MacKinnonite sexual harassment policies to defend and advocate the making of agents via the acquisition and performance of erotic desire. In both models, desire is individualized, assigned positions of either a tool of oppression (MacKinnon) or empowerment (Gallop), connected to either a lack of agency (women, for MacKinnon) or an ownership of agency (Gallop).?”

Affirmative Desire

On March 8, 2002, National Public Radio re-aired an interview that Terry Gross had originally conducted with writer Gary Paulsen in 1992 on Gross’ radio talk show, Fresh Air. Paulsen, a prolific author of children’s books, has repeatedly participated in the grueling eleven-hundred-mile-long dog sled race in Alaska called the “Iditarod” running from Anchorage to Nome. In the interview with Gross, Paulsen talks about the challenging race and the discipline and courageousness it demands of both dogs and humans. Paulsen mentions that in order to be successful and complete the race, one has to bond with the dogs and become “purely human without the modern trapping.” He calls this a “very desirable state.” Asked by Terry Gross to elaborate on the kind of relationship he has with his dogs, Paulsen says the following:

Well, you’re just with them more [than with pet dogs]. And what happens is they learn to read your shoulder motions and the way you think, and the way your voice sounds. In fact, you growl after a while, you growl with them a lot. I mean, you talk that way—you just grrrrhh—and they
understand what you mean. And they become closer than other people. Lead dogs knew me better than my wife knows me. I mean really, seriously, and I'm very close to my wife. It's just that the bond that happens is extremely close.

What Paulsen talks about here is a certain notion of "affect," specifically the affect of work, of concentration, one might say, which is a quite nonpersonal and intense way of experiencing the world. Paulsen's growling with his dogs indicates a way of communicating and "feeling" between them that happens at a nonrepresentational level: Paulsen as a man, a particular subject, becomes a being that connects with the dogs at a level of a basic movement, of primary energy. Similarly, his dogs as dogs, as a kind of animal categorized as such by scientific notions of genus and species, become something else in their connection with the human's specific affective capacities. Man-becoming-dog, dog-becoming-man: boundaries become blurred, identities dissolve, bodies no longer are, but do. Both Paulsen and his dogs connect according to each other's respective thresholds of such affective feeling. This connection allows the dogs to read what their human partner tells them through his shoulder motions, and the human understands what the dogs think and want in a nonverbal manner as well. In Paulsen's view, this bond marks the most important element in a successful synergy between dogs and humans during the ten-day-long race. This bond that Paulsen addresses is an example of "affect" at work: a basic impulse, a primary energy that suffuses life. I want to animate this sense of connectivity and relation as the kind of affective link and mode of belonging that so far our pedagogical approaches to desire have not yet addressed.

Affect is ubiquitous, Brian Massumi says ("Autonomy" 107). It reveals itself in all those moments when the self, the I, stumbles across something, someone, that throws it off, momentarily, persistently. Think about the effect of certain pieces of music: they envelop you, tantalize your senses, make you lose yourself (even our language can make sense of affect). Movies can do that, too, and certain smells, tactile sensations, and a range of other stimuli. Consider the famous literary example in Marcel Proust's Remembrance on Things Past, where Proust's narrator, in the opening volume, bites into a madeleine that suddenly activates childhood memories, reeling him back into the past, where he relives old sensations and feelings. This flood of affective remembrance could probably not have happened by way of a willful action (that is, I will now remember that time when I was a child and ate a particular cake), but
rather the encounter between the madeleine and Proust’s narrator trig-
gerated affective energies that unleashed a wave of sensations. The narrator
ate similar cakes as a child, so his body’s senses remembered the taste,
feeling, and shape of the cake, and can set free affective resonances at that
moment of the interaction between the cake and the narrator’s body. In
his study on Proust, Deleuze terms this resonance “involuntary memory,”
a space of “virtuality,” because “this past does not represent some-
thing that has been, but simply something that is and that coexists with
itself as present” (Proust 58). In other words, the instant in which
Proust’s narrator bites in to the madeleine, past and present cease to
exist as separate defining entities and the narrator experiences a
virtual and involuntary (that is, de-subjectifying) remembrance that
escapes his confinement as a subject to the specific space and time of
his present.

Real pleasure and desiring are involved here, a sense of intense,
energetic resonance. Deleuze suggests, “These are true signs that imme-
diately give us an extraordinary joy, signs that are fulfilled, affirmative,
and joyous” (13). Such pleasure, such becoming-other marks ruptures
and slippages from subjectivity. Our everyday idiom “to lose oneself” is
quite apt in getting at the dynamic involved here. Before I go any further,
let me clarify to what extent the sort of affective connections I have been
describing are, in terms of their logic, quite different from what we
usually call “emotions.” Though the two concepts are clearly related,
emotion belongs to the terrain of the subject, while affect exceeds it.
Massumi observes, “Emotion is the intenest (most contracted) expres-
sion of that capture,” which is a capture of affect’s unbound intensity into
“formed, qualified, situated perceptions and cognitions” (“Autonomy”
96). I love, I hate, I suffer, are expressions of subjectified awareness and
knowledge, secured in a specific subject-driven standpoint of time, and
social and cultural location. I suffer, conjures a notion of personhood, of
being-as-subject in self-conscious presence. Love, hate, suffering—as
intensities, percepts, or sensations—exceed that confinement in one
specific body and retain, or regain, the feel of a force or primary energy
(think back to the Proust example: when Proust’s narrator experiences his
affective remembrance, he does not feel as if he is eating the cake, rather
the cake in its interaction with his body enables the affect of eating-cake-
becoming-child to emerge; that’s what the narrator feels). Again, Massumi
observes that in affect “something remains unactualized, inseparable
from but unassimilable to any particular, functionally anchored per-
spective” (96).
In effect, Massumi points to a notion of community-building and sharing that does not depend on indispensable notions of location and subjectified experience. Similarly, Giorgio Agamben develops an idea he calls "inessential commonality," a commonality not based on essentialist notions of group-belonging, but on inessential affective connections that do not depend on a person's particular identity (18). What I am working with here, then, is an understanding of affect as an unbound intensity that functions immanently as an excessive energy in those realms that exceed processes of capture, such as subject-formation. When Donna Haraway expresses her yearning for understandings of connectivity that exceed the paradigm of the traditional family, she also points in this direction of affective relationships. Haraway explains, "I am sick to death of bonding through kinship and 'the family,' and I long for models of solidarity and human unity and difference rooted in friendship, work, partially shared purposes, intractable collective pain, inescapable mortality, and persistent hope. It is time to theorize an 'unfamiliar' unconscious, a different primal scene, where everything does not stem from the dramas of identity and reproduction" (265). Harraway's understanding of human unity as embedded in friendship, work, shared purposes, pain, mortality, and hope describes affective unities, not subjectified emotions. Consider, again, Paulsen and his sled dogs: through work, they tease out their bodies' affective thresholds and connect at that level.

Affect, then, involves sensations and resonances we engage in, on a daily basis, that act on our bodies in such a way that we feel a sort of vibration with other bodies. In his work on affect, Gregory Seigworth concludes, "Affect is about the slow but steady, continual accumulation of seeming insignificances: the very stuff that slips underneath your consciousness because it's barely worth noticing, the stuff that registers without any particular emotion attached to it." Affect is powerful because it works incessantly and conjures up such strong sensations and connections. And, what makes affect function, what drives it, is desire. Deleuze and Guattari, who have done more than any other thinkers to understand affect, explain that desire drives bodies into affective states of resonance with other bodies; the examples of affective experiences above all bespeak of a joyous and pleasurable nature (though, certainly, affects are not always pleasurable), and what propels them is precisely desire. Desire is thus a capacity, or an expansiveness, that produces those affective connections and resonances I spoke of above. In this understanding, desire does not function ontologically as acquisition or lack, as the sexual harassment discourse and Jane Gallop suggest. Here, desire is
much more primary and positive than that, it is a body's potential and basic drive. In its capacity to produce affects, desire thus acts at the level of affective creation in bodies, quite literally as a machine, at a level that exceeds and undermines the making of selves, of subjectivities, and identities. Deleuze and Parnet clarify: "Far from presupposing a subject, desire cannot be attained except at the point where someone is deprived of the power of saying 'I'" (89). Desire's production of affective resonances, Deleuze and Guattari term the line of flight, the "break line, crack line, rupture line" (200). But, what gets ruptured?

Briefly put, social organization. As Deleuze and Guattari see it, in our existence as human and social beings, we are always surrounded by lines that segment the spaces we inhabit. Some of these lines are affective, driven by desire, as I have sketched above. These lines are characterized by a multitude of directions, connections, and points of "origin," depending on the various ways bodies interact with each other (think back to Proust's narrator and the madeleine: any sort of bod—a flower, a ticking clock, someone's hand on his shoulder—could have triggered a range of affective resonances and does so in the course of Proust's novel). In other words, this affective line is supple, small-scale, molecular. Another kind of line, functioning as a different type of process, is much more rigid, in fact "arborescent": it has a center, a root, and branches that form strong, hierarchical and ordered segments. This rigid line, "molar" in character rather than molecular, works through all those processes we are all familiar with (but not always aware of) that organize our social world. Such processes include the mechanisms Foucault has described so forcefully: the organization of disciplinary societies in various locales ranging from the state to schools, to families, to work, to leisure spaces, and so on. What characterizes such organizational processes is both their production of social formations and the formation of subjects. These processes are accomplished by channeling and capturing desire into forms that give rise to the social organizations that sustain a particular society. Such molar processes also segment social space according to binary conceptions of subjectivity: man/woman, child/adult, white/black, and so on. As Deleuze and Guattari put it, society functions in terms of identity categories: "You will be organized, you will be an organism, you will articulate your body—otherwise you're just depraved. . . . You will be a subject, nailed down as one, . . . otherwise you're just a tramp" (Thousand 159).

Interestingly, this sort of social organization and repression is not just a process exercised by institutions or structures. As a process, a type of
organization, structuration applies to how institutional bodies as well as individual bodies can operate. That is to say, as Foucault explains in his preface to *Anti-Oedipus*, that book is about "the tracking down of all varieties of fascism, from the enormous ones that surround and crush us to the petty ones that constitute the tyrannical bitterness or our everyday lives" (xiv). Or, as Deleuze and Guattari themselves put it, the working and effects of molar, rigid lines of organization are "applicable not only to the imperial despotic regime but to all subjected, arborescent, hierarchical, centered groups: political parties, literary movements, psychoanalytic associations, families, conjugal units, etc." (*Thousand 116*). In fact, molarity will operate within us, in "the soldier inside me," the many varied controlling and certainly reassuring behaviors we engage in (225). I write "reassuring" because, after all, structure and organization give us security and a sense of power—"we desire all that" (227). When the ego is most threatened, it is most defensive, most confined. Fear "makes us retreat into the first line," the line of rigid segmentarity (227). We are at times trapped in our "traditions," our habitual dynamics of belonging that draw hard and unwieldy lines of demarcation and separation. After all, as teachers we might crave the rigid, hierarchical arrangement that comes with the possession of the red pen, with having the authority to assign grades, to decide what and how our students read on a given day. As academics we desire the social, collegial approval that accompanies our work in our institutions, our decision-making powers on curriculum committees, hiring committees, Ph.D. committees. The point is not to demean many of our efforts to honestly struggle against the power of ideology, but rather the point is that such processes of segmentation and blocking desire might happen despite our best efforts to fight the system. Again, Deleuze and Guattari write, "It’s too easy to be antifascist on the molar level, and not even see the fascist inside you, the fascist you yourself sustain and nourish and cherish with molecules both personal and collective" (215). In other words, it is never enough to proclaim a liberatory action to be liberatory, as long as the practice itself blocks or confines desire, in oneself or in others. Considering the theory of affect I have outlined here, a liberatory practice would take into account desire as a significant component in the making and remaking of culture and history. In fact, desire’s organization and channeling assures that social structures are produced and maintained. Above all, the most important element I want to draw from my analysis here is that no matter how complete and closed a social system might appear to be (fill in the blank: in a hospital, the army, an organized church, a classroom), the system
cannot contain the excess energy that manifests itself as affect, as bodies’ capacities to engage with desire. Deleuze insists, “There is no diagram [social system] that does not include, besides the points which it connects up, certain relatively free or unbound points, points of creativity, change and resistance, and it is perhaps with these that we ought to begin in order to understand the whole picture” (Foucault 44).

Yes, this brings me all the way back to my pedagogical concerns. I want to understand the whole picture of teaching and student/teacher interaction better and to what happens in the teaching moment when we meet other people, other bodies. When we try to make sense of desire in sexual harassment terms or the terms provided by a pedagogy of erotics, we merely bind up desire in explanations that operate in binary, hierarchical, and rigid ways. We still do not address the excessive, unbound points of creativity Deleuze talks about in the quote above. These points are there, all around us, and I think that re-conceptualizing desire opens up our horizon in terms of what actually happens in the classroom.

Briefly, we are talking about a huge area of analysis here. Richard Miller provides a fitting formulation: “Between the poles of these two representations of schooling as either radically liberating and empowering or ceaselessly oppressive and instrumentalist, one finds a vast, unexplored territory—the fraught, compromised world where all of our classes are actually convened” (23). I think that both representations of schooling Miller addresses involve the molar processes I mentioned above. Viewing education as either indoctrinating or as radically liberating is based on processes of rigid segmentation. In this sense, what remains unexplored are other processes, among them processes of affective production and creation. Such processes are driven by the desire to produce affective connections, resonances, and all sorts of affect-infused offshoots, movements, and relations. Just as Gary Paulsen and his sled dogs in Alaska desire affective connections in their communal attempt to run a sled race, so teachers and students desire affective engagements in innumerable, minute, diverse affective moves. Affect is ubiquitous, in the classroom as well.

Let us consider, for example, what Johnson describes in his article “School Sucks”:

On innumerable occasions, when I’ve halted class discussion and asked the students to scribble down their thoughts or begin drafting an essay, I’ve invariably seen at least a few of them, after a minute or two or five,
register that strange, highly positive surge of energy—and their pens begin to wiggle across the page more quickly than a moment before, their heads lower a notch, and they emanate a whole new kind of intensity, all of which signals that they have entered “the zone.” And, intuitively, I sense that the stuff they write while in this experiential mode is more engaged and engaging than the other stuff, which in comparison comes to feel like a mere warm-up. . . . They are growing and changing before my eyes, transgressing the realm of pat formulae and stock response, becoming other than what they are. (624; emphasis added).

In this description, Johnson puts affect into language, pointing to a powerful instance of affective creation. His students enter “the zone,” feeling rather than knowing the world, and translating that feeling into words on the page. For Johnson, this kind of intensive way of becoming marks a profoundly creative moment: not just in the writing his students produce, but especially in the way that they are becoming other than what they are, undermining their subjectivity and their bodies’ organization in the social system of culture and schooling. Johnson takes such a realization of creative production as a necessary first step in unlocking how students experience pedagogy affectively. He proposes what he calls a “renegade rhetoric” that would account for and indeed create this sort of affective resonance in our students. For Johnson, unless we open up our pedagogical repertoire to include and build a joyous, pleasurable sense of learning, our students remain lured by the passive, indeed painful experience that school systematically offers them. Johnson suggests that such an affirmation of pleasurable learning “implicitly asks us to accept the institution as more porous than we have heretofore, more available to the sorts of flights in which the pleasures of writing inhere” (637). In other words, the sense of pleasure and desire’s flight he earlier observed in his students is directly linked to, rather than outside of, the fabric of the school. It is immanent to it. In his work on affect, Charles Stivale speaks about “an affective rhythm within the teaching/learning process,” that might be felt “in front of the classroom, or around a seminar table with students and colleagues, or alone with pencil in hand or before the computer monitor, in those fleeting moments of creation and understanding” (247, 175).

**Immanence**

I want to dwell on affect’s immanence for a moment. We know that, as a disciplinary mechanism, school enacts and maintains systematic repression and domination. As part of the dynamic of capitalist economy, the
school also participates in overcoding students’ and teachers’ experiences. Critical and radical pedagogies have indeed been very successful at analyzing this part of the picture. As a case in point, take the following statement by Donald Morton and Mas’ud Zavarzadeh in their preface to the collection of essays, *Theory/Pedagogy/Politics*: “The goal of the dominant pedagogical practices is to situate people at posts of intelligibility from which the reigning economic, political, and ideological social arrangements are deemed to be uncontestably true” (vii). In other words, the process of positioning people to take up discursive posts of subjectivity to reproduce social organizations is precisely the sort of arborescent, rigid line of segmentation I outlined above. Within this system of organization, both teachers and students undoubtedly continue to play their part and maintain it, as long as we grade and test students, as long as we participate in tenure and promotion processes, and as long as students come to class prepared to listen to us. To a certain extent, we cannot escape, as David Tyack and Larry Cuban put it, such “organizational regularities, the grammar of schooling” (9). However, this normed and norming system is never leak-proof, sealed. It is porous. What escapes, then, is desire that manifests itself, for instance, in the kind of intensive/affective moments of writing Johnson so eloquently described above. This sort of desire comes from within the system, within the school, is immanent to it.

I want to look at one more example, but this one I have to pull apart more. In their most recent book together, *Letters for the Living*, Michael Blitz and Mark Hurlbert present a multifaceted analysis of writing classrooms, what goes on in them, and what goes on in the relationship between two writing teachers. The book is a mixture of traditional scholarly writing and an epistolary kind of exchange of experiences, ideas, questions, observations, and musings between the authors via e-mail messages. Overall, Blitz and Hurlbert are committed to a pedagogy of change, “making better neighborhoods, better communities, a better world” (2). Rather than look at the relationship between the two teachers (and it would be interesting to listen for affective resonances at this level), I want to look at a specific teacher/student interaction that one of the authors mentions. The context of the authors’ e-mails at this point in the book is the topic of suicide. Both authors are struck by how surprisingly frequently students will write about suicide, either as a possibility for themselves, or in people they know. One of the authors mentions in his e-mail that he has a student who writes about killing himself in “a directness . . . that has me on edge” (157). The teacher gets worried,
contemplating how to convince his student to go to the counseling center on campus. I need to quote a passage at length:

I had Bryan in my office to talk once. We talked about his book [in which the student-writer mentions suicide]; then I told him about the counseling center. I asked him if he wanted to go, especially as he had written about suicidal thoughts and because he had been through a lot and could probably use someone to talk to, someone who would help him understand and deal with his loss. But he said no. The odd thing is that Bryan has dropped by on other occasions as well. Each time he sort of sits there, quietly smiling at me. I guess I sense he is after something more significant than small talk, so I always turn the talk back to the counseling center.

He says, "Maybe, I'll go, but probably not."
I ask him why.
He says, "Because I'm stubborn."
I ask him what that has to do with going or not going. He shrugs and smiles.

Yesterday he came at the end of the day as I was packing to leave school. I sat down. He seemed to have nothing or something to say—I couldn't tell which. He sat, asked me a question about a class assignment, and then, again, just sort of sat there.

After what felt like a period of uncomfortable silence, I asked him if he had been to the counseling center.
He said, "No" and smiled.
I smiled back and said, "Well, let's go together right now."
"No, I can't. I've got to go meet someone for dinner."
"Well, let's go after class on Thursday."
"No, I can't. I will be meeting someone for lunch." Smile.
"Well, let me know when and if you want me to go with you."
"Ok." Smile.

There's nothing malicious in this smile. It's as if he enjoys—I don't know; I'm grasping for an understanding—this connection with me? this attention from a professor (I can imagine him trying to get as little attention as possible in his classes)? what? WHAT? Or better: WHY?

This is a marvelous passage that shows, I believe, an affective dynamic at work between the teacher and the student. To begin with, the teacher's
sense of loss of an understanding at the end of the passage—a sort of stuttering—already indicates an affective search for meaning. Clearly, this teacher cannot make sense of what happened in rational, traditional terms, and searches for other explanations, but so far remains baffled. If we think about the way Paulsen describes his relationship to his dogs, we might get closer to what happened here between teacher and student. The teacher senses that he and his student Bryan have a connection, one that Bryan seems to enjoy. If we trace this connection back, it is clear that the teacher begins his talking to Bryan after reading about suicide thoughts in Bryan’s writing. Here is a very first connection: the teacher’s particular body (shaped in specific ways by the lines of segmentarity in terms of race, gender, class, for instance) reacts to that detail in the student’s writing. In other words, his body is capable of a first affective reaction; he acts on it, calls the student to his office. They start a little “dance” of sorts, a game, whereby the teacher asks Bryan to visit the counseling center with him, and Bryan teases him, just sitting there quietly, smiling. In fact, the smile seems to be a purely affective behavior, nonverbal, and yet intense, that obviously has an effect on the teacher, who, in turn, asks his ever-present question, “Do you want to go to the counseling center with me,” to which Bryan, teasingly replies in the negative. The teacher’s question, then, also triggers an affective reaction in Bryan, who, shaped by his culture in a certain way, responds to those affective stimuli by way of playing the negation game. And both enjoy the exchange, Bryan perhaps more overtly, but the teacher also finds the repeated student visits pleasing, affirmative.

The point that matters the most here is that this teacher and student create something together through their desire for a connection, an affective call-and-response game that produces a particularly positive and generative bond. For the teacher, this bond leads to a deep sense of concern and caring for his student; he spends a lot of time thinking and writing about Bryan to his friend. Bryan certainly becomes a better writer in the process, as his final paper attests (parts of which are included in the book). Moreover, he goes to the teacher’s office, seeks out the mentor’s company, and eventually (as the teacher writes later), they make it to the counseling center. The remarkable thing that happens in this exchange lies in the seeming insignificance of what takes place and what both people say to each other. In fact, they don’t say much, and yet, on an affective level, the other language of affective resonances allows them to become other than they are, to connect momentarily and to create something quite stunning. As Deleuze suggests, “we never learn by doing
like someone, but by doing with someone, who bears no resemblance to what we are learning” (Proust 22).

Now, I could have read the passage above through the perspectives of desire we are more familiar with: I could have interpreted the connection between the teacher and Bryan as an erotic one—Bryan comes back to the student’s office because of an erotic desire and subliminal wish to fulfill it, and the teacher considers himself a better teacher because of the erotic dimension. Or, I could have seen a gender and power dynamic at work, whereby the teacher and student, both male, enact a homosexual connection that female students in the class perhaps are excluded from. Such explanations have their place and warrants, but, as I am arguing in this essay, cannot address a large and largely unexplored territory of classroom interaction.

Affect and Resistance
Considering affect in its political implications for pedagogy forms the crux of my discussion. For, aligning affective matters, in the manner suggested above, to a project of struggle within and against systems of oppression is to emphasize political resistance in the pedagogical moment of affirming the importance of affect. However, a focus and articulation of affective resistance remains to be fully recognized, since, as Suzanne Clark puts it, even though Marxist, liberal, and post-structuralist approaches to resistance in composition studies certainly differ from one another, they do share one proposition: that “the question of agency remains part of the problem of the subject” (125). In contradistinction to approaches that foreground and privilege the subject as the agent of resistance, affective resistance emerges at the moment that the subject begins to dissolve. Agency shifts from being something that subjects possess and control to something that emerges in moments that undermine subject-production. Such moments occur precisely as desire forms lines of flight.

“Resistance,” both as a working trope and distinct disciplinary discourse, has already earned a viable place in composition scholarship, to the extent, one might argue, that the term has indeed lost its poignancy and efficacy. Across the board—including feminist pedagogy and radical and critical approaches to teaching writing—scholars in rhetoric and composition have articulated a vested interest in fighting oppression and creating a better world, beginning in the writing classroom. For many compositionists, the meaning of this ubiquitous term “resistance” coalesces around the poststructuralist emphasis to resist seeing language as
something neutral and universal, and instead to problematize the extent
to which any discourse is always implicated in social, historical, and
political struggles for domination and power. At the same time, resistance
as a working concept also retains a marxist emphasis on oppositional
tactics. As Ian Hunter explains, in contemporary educational theories
resistance is conceptualized around “the famous image of the person as
a self-reflective and self-realising moral agent” (2). These assumptions
combine in a majority of efforts in composition studies to foreground
student agency, or, as James Berlin put it, “to enable students to become
active, critical agents of their experience rather than passive victims of
cultural codes” (104).

This vision of political resistance has remained tied to notions of the
subject as the bearer of agency. Compositionists tend to assume that
agency operates at the level of subjectivity, at the level of some sort of
self-conscious activity involving our selves. For example, recently An­
drea Greenbaum has argued that politically inflected work in composition
studies has been shaped by pedagogical moves that center on subjectivity
(as Greenbaum explains, largely introduced by Paulo Freire, via Marx,
Hegel, and Fromm). Paraphrasing Stanley Aronowitz, Greenbaum privi­
leges “the quest for subjectivity” as “invariably a move toward emanci­
pation,” thus clearly linking agency to subjectivity (xiii). In another
recent study on resistance in composition studies, Joe Marshall Hardin
discusses resistance theories that center on student and teacher agency.
Hardin argues that teaching resistance is an ethical and necessary activity
that breaks down into two components: “one, that students learn to resist
the uncritical acceptance or cultural representations and institutional
practices by interrogating rhetoric to uncover its motives and values; and
two, that students learn to produce text that uses rhetoric and convention
to give voice to their own values and positions” (7). In other words, both
Greenbaum and Hardin emphasize the importance of articulating agency
to a subject position. Change and resistance is assumed to happen at the
site where subjects are positioned and constructed by culture.

Such a conception of resistance takes the subjec—and, certainly, in
the wake of poststructuralist theories, a fragmented and variously dis­
placed subject—as the necessary condition for political agency. The goal
often is to create empowered and liberated students and teachers. In this
formulation, the adjective liberated depends on and modifies the noun,
which takes me back all the way to Guattari’s insistence at the beginning
of this essay that political action should not only be circumscribed as
liberating subjects, but also as asking the question of agency differently,
to thus open up the semantic and conceptual terrain of agency. Instead of asking, *who has agency*, one might ask, *how is agency enabled?* Despite my recourse to the passive voice here, I recall, with Judith Butler, the habitual propensity of linguistic structures within the context of language to permit "the phantasmatic production of the culpable speaking subject" that "casts subjects as the only agents of power" (*Excitable 80*). The active voice performs that reduction readily, as it pronounces that subjects *do* things. What I am trying to consider through theorizing affect in this essay is to disarticulate the notion that subjects possess and consciously execute agency and instead to suggest that agency is also enabled and performed in quite non-subjective ways. That’s what Guattari gets at when he advocates “not a sexual liberation but a liberation of desire.” For Guattari, the task at hand is to liberate that primary energy of desire from all blockages, including its channeling into subject-production. Speaking of a liberation of desire, then, circumvents the language of subjectivity and instead employs a language (and concepts) of (non-subjective) affective relations between people. A critique of conceptualizing agency solely on the grounds of subjectivity does not disparage subject-centered approaches. It simply points out, as Massumi suggests, their “limited applicability” (*Parables 7*). According to Massumi, "cultural laws of positioning and ideology are accurate in a certain sphere," in a particular dimension (7). That dimension involves social organization by way of subject production. A different sphere of applicability, however, is suggested by the process of affective production. The language and logic of subjectivity simply do not apply here. That language misses the movement and dynamic of affect.

Considering an affective dynamic as a constitutive part of teaching and learning allows for a revised notion of community. As I have been at great pains to explain, affective linkages can form a strong, wondrous sense of vitality, potentiality, and creation. Such processes involve bodies in their interaction with each other, and through each other, as they engage with other students, with teachers, with the world around them. Think again about the example involving the potentially suicidal student Bryan: through an affective interaction with his teacher, both Bryan and the teacher created a sense of working-together, feeling-together that opened up a new, positively creative relation. As Davis explains in her essay on community, “sharing (that is: community) takes place not among similarly positioned subjecthoods—subjects share no/thing as subjects—but (only) at the extreme and exposed limit of subjectivity, where a (finite) being irrepressibly exceeds it Self” (124). Affect operates precisely as a
limit-experience, as a force that exceeds and escapes the subject. Affect allows for (communal) connections at a level within and yet outside of social organization. *Within* functions here in the sense that the molar line of social structuration works incessantly to order and categorize our social functions, and *outside* in the sense that this ordering has limits beyond which it crumbles.

Massumi writes, "A structure is defined by what escapes it" *(User's 57).* We can understand so much more about community and the dynamics of belonging by listening to affect and seeing how it operates in our teaching practices. Grossberg argues that in such a community (he refers specifically to the affective alliance of participants at Tiananmen Square) "there is no common identity, no property that defines [people] apart from the fact that they were there, together, in that place" *(372).* In that sense, an affirmative theory of desire that accounts for people's affective relations seems to provide an opening to grasping this moment of creation and community-building better. And, our currently fraught and disjointed political landscape seems to demand ethically responsible ways to search for more productive approaches to belonging and communitarian living.

A final note on the scope of this essay: I hope it provides an opening rather than a forced closure. If anything, it is meant to inspire and make us think beyond the horizons we have available at the moment for thinking about desire in teaching. The Deleuzian theory of affect I outline here certainly needs to be examined and experienced with caution because, as any theory, it cannot provide answers, but can only raise more (important) questions. Numerous critics have pointed out that Deleuze and Guattari's approach to social theory can engender problematic issues (see, among others, Best and Kellner 76--110; Christopher Miller 171--209; Jardine). Despite these critiques, or better yet, because of them, *because* they allow for more rigorous questioning of how desire might function in culture, I continue to think with and through this theory of affective resonances. More than any other contemporary theory of desire (and I singled out two in this essay, the discourse of sexual harassment and a pedagogy of erotics), Deleuze and Guattari offer much that can be useful. Regarding their philosophy of affect, Massumi asks, "what new thoughts does it make possible to think?" *(User's 8)*, and Michael Hardt wonders, "what are the useful tools we find in [Deleuze's] philosophy for furthering our own political endeavors?" *(119).* With these questions in mind, I have argued that something tremendous happens in the teaching moment that an affirmative theory of affect gets at, more so, much more so, than other
theories of emotion and affect we have available. This is important work because it seems to involve a most critical capacity: the capacity to create, together, affectively.

Let's return, finally, to Perillo's struggles at the opening of this essay to address an affective component of her relation to her now dead student. As Perillo shows, she has a hard time putting into words and thus contextualizing the affective dimension of this particular teaching moment. And yet, this teaching relationship matters because it involves both teacher and student at a significant pedagogical level that points to the social and political stakes involved. In retrospect, Perillo is aware of a teaching opportunity lost: as she describes in her article, in one-on-one conversations with her student in her office, Perillo commented on their similarities, but the student "never pursued this thread of our conversations; I assumed that she felt I was being too evasive. I was the teacher, and I was supposed to keep my distance." Also in retrospect, the teacher is reminded of some of her student’s poems, in which "she often wrote of male-female relations in a manner that was particularly fearless." The student died being brutally murdered by a retaliating lover. And Perillo is aware of the larger political significance. She mentions other students who write about violence, and students who engage in overt acts of violence, thus identifying a subculture of disaffection and abolition: "Recently, I’d had the sneaking feeling that something had gone wrong with some segment of my college audience, and the murder of my student by another student somehow cemented that notion." So, what are some useful tools we find in an affirmative theory of desire for furthering our own political endeavors? Perhaps Perillo and her now dead student could have been more aware of their desires, in those office conversations, and of their capacities to connect and relate affectively; perhaps as teachers we can listen to the tales of violence, despair, and also excitement and pleasure our students tell us and hear and feel affective moves so that perhaps we can all do something more productive with our desires. We can perhaps lose ourSelves, undermine who we are, in order to enable a becoming-together-other. Lest these words sound utopian, consider Jean Baudrillard’s reminder: "Utopia is never written for the future; it is always already present" (163). Affect is present, we can hear it, feel it, and see it in action.

Utah Valley State College
Orem, Utah
Notes

1. The entire essay hinges on developing a definition of affect that encompasses such varied responses and sensations as excitement, rage, passion, suffering, apathy, love, hate, and so on. The point of the essay is not to offer a definition so broad that it simply contains all these affective responses and thus in effect renders them meaningless again. As Lisa Langstraat explains, "The failure to distinguish between such diverse affective positions has, I think, contributed to the many charges that cultural studies compositionists tend to dismiss students’ feelings and values in the service of ‘imposing’ a ‘leftist’ viewpoint" (304). I attempt to articulate a progressive pedagogy that can distinguish between diverse affective positions by conceptualizing affect as a specific way of relating to the world. Thus, as I will explain in this essay, “affect” denotes a certain mode of existence—applicable to a range of affective responses—rather than a specific emotion or sensation per se.

2. As John Trimbur reminded readers of *JAC* recently, questions of agency remain constitutive in composition studies. Trimbur links understandings of agency to Marx’s dictum in “The Eighteenth Brumaire” that individuals make history, but not under circumstances they have created themselves. Thus, for Trimbur agency points to “the way people live the history of the contemporary, the way they articulate (in the double sense of the term) their desires, needs and projects, giving voice to their lived experience as they join their productive labors to the institutions and social structures they live within” (“Agency” 287). Drawing on this definition of agency, I further emphasize the direct articulation of desire (and affect, more generally) to how individuals experience agency.

3. Besides Johnson, Worsham, Micciche, and Langstraat, affective issues have been taken up by McLeod, Welch, and the collection by Brand and Graves. Moreover, Victor Vitanza has argued for a number of years for a “sub/versive” historiography of rhetoric, one informed by the Sophists, Nietzsche, Bataille, Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari, Derrida, Lyotard, Butler, and Cixous. My argument here is sympathetic to Vitanza, D. Diane Davis and Michele Baliff, whose varied work foregrounds the role of non-subjective dynamics for political agency from a postmodern, posthumanist perspective.

4. For a critique of how “radical” pedagogies remystify a subordination of affect-as-pleasure to reason, see Worsham (“Going” 232–37, “Emotion” 139–42). See also Elizabeth Ellsworth's now famous critique of radical pedagogy. Worsham also argues that feminist pedagogies of emotion continue to support a “sex/affective system” (“Going” 238) that sustains gender dualism; Jennifer Gore also criticizes critical and feminist discourses, as does Davis in *Breaking up [at] Totality*. However, I do not cite these critiques to dismiss feminist theorizing on emotion; with Megan Boler I do appreciate that feminist theory developed “the first collectively articulated, politicized analysis of emotions as the basis for challenging gendered oppression” (108). Psychoanalytic ap-
approaches in composition studies that address desire ground subjectivity in lack and thus conceptually remain lodged in the lack/abundance binary (for an example of this tendency, see Alcorn).

5. In the September 2001 issue of Harper's, Cristina Nehring in fact identifies a "pervasive climate of fear" (67) within which teachers operate these days. Nehring writes, "In our enlightened contemporary university, men walk on eggshells and women run from shadows." She supports a more permissive atmosphere in which students and teachers can express (sexual) desire.

6. Here is an important qualification: MacKinnon worked within the existing constraints of a legal structure that views identity as a simple and unequivocal concept. What is interesting, then, is how traditional humanist notions of selfhood in law continue to be upheld in a seemingly progressive discourse such as sexual harassment. By extension, such a discourse remains one of the dominant perspectives in how we understanding desire.

7. Of course, one cannot mention Gallop's name without also noting her entanglement in a sexual harassment case that has been widely publicized. In November 1992, two women graduate students in the English Department at the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, where Gallop holds a distinguished professorship in English and Comparative Literature, filed a sexual harassment complaint against her accusing her of "quid pro quo" harassment, of overstepping her boundaries as a professor in trying to engage in unwanted sexual relations, gaining sexual advances from the two students, and retaliating against them professionally when they refused her propositions. Gallop was exonerated completely in one case by the university's Office of Affirmative Action, and was officially reprimanded in the other case for violating the university's sexual harassment policy prohibiting consensual sexual relations between teachers and students. These incidents have prompted Gallop to publish Feminist Accused of Sexual Harassment and "Sex and Sexism: Feminism and Harassment Policy." For more information about the case, see also Talbot. A fascinating interview/discussion, in which Gallop as well as one of her accusers speak up, occurred as part of the Pre/Text "re-interview" series in 1998 (http://www.pre-text.com/pftlist/reinvw.html).

8. Gilles Deleuze writes that a "body can be anything; it can be an animal, a body of sounds, a mind or an idea: it can be a linguistic corpus, a social body, a collectivity" (Spinoza 127).

9. The conceptual affinity between this Deleuzian notion of desire and its philosophical predecessor in Nietzsche becomes readily apparent (see Deleuze and Parnet 91). Nietzsche's notion of "will to power" is desire, "the spontaneous, aggressive, expansive, form-giving forces that give new interpretations and directions" (515), "the instinct to freedom" (523), and "the strongest, most life-affirming drive" (571). However, I also need to qualify that desire is not some sort of primordial, pre-existent, essential, or completely free-flowing substance. As Deleuze and Guattari point out, desire always emerges and depends on social organizations: "Desire is never an undifferentiated instinctual energy, but itself
results from a highly developed, engineered setup rich in interactions" (Thou-
sand 215). That is to say, desire emerges within systems of organization (what
Deleuze and Guattari call "assemblages") and coexists with forces of control in
relations of mutual presupposition: "It is not that these lines are pre-existent;
you are traced out, they are formed, immanent to each other, mixed up in each
other, at the same time as the assemblage of desire is formed" (Deleuze and
Parnet 133). That is to say, social structures enable both social structuration and
the production of desire as complementary parts.

10. Deleuze and Guattari are particularly interested in analyzing how
capitalism functions. In Anti-Oedipus, they explain, "Capitalism is in fact born
of the encounter of two sorts of flows: the decoded flows of production in the
form of money-capital, and the decoded flows of labor in the form of the 'free
worker'" (33). That is to say, these two flows, desiring-flows, characterize the
dynamics of the capitalist economy. Out of these two flows, then, the molar
processes of organization channel desire into the familiar rigid structures of the
state, family, law, consumerism, labor, and so forth.

11. A resonance: Foucault speaks about liberty being realized as a practice
rather than as an ideal. He says, "There may, in fact, be a certain number of
projects whose aim is to modify some constraints, to loosen, or even break them,
but none of these projects can, simply by its nature, assure that people will have
liberty automatically: that it will be established by the project itself... 'Liberty'
is what must be exercised" ("Ethics" 264).

12. Tyack and Cuban specify that schooling has been organized around
"such familiar practices as the age-grading of students, the division of
knowledge into separate subjects, and the self-contained classroom with one
teacher" (9).

13. Trimbur argues that the term "resistance" seems "to slide across the field
of composition, a kind of floating signifier that everyone recognizes in its
contexts of use but that is hard, nonetheless, to pin down" (3).

14. In fact, Butler criticizes MacKinnon's approach to prosecuting pornog-
raphy as assuming that subjects always control and intend what they utter.
Butler writes that MacKinnon's (rhetorical and philosophical) conception of
agency assumes "a normative view of a person with the ability and power to
exercise speech in a straightforward way" (84). Such ready implication of the
subject as an active and conscious being, according to Butler, remains problem-
atic because it sets up a normative and immutable understanding of language as
being merely an effect of reality, when in fact, language norms reality. In a
very helpful formulation, Butler also points to the need to tease out and
experiment with new linguistic meanings: "It would constitute a form of
linguistic quietism to conclude that however grammar is currently used is the
way that it must be used, as if the forms of life encoded there are not
problematically restrictive, as if new forms of life have not challenged
grammar to permit something other than what already firmly exists within its
terms" ("Agencies" 30).
15. Both Worsham and Johnson address this culture of violence and urge us to consider the affective component of violent student responses. Thomas Rickert also offers a helpful critique of what he calls "modernist" approaches to writing instruction that risk further alienating students in terms of their violent and cynical reactions to so-called liberatory pedagogies. Space does not allow to elaborate on the generative potential of a Deleuzian concept of affect to understanding violence and hostility; that issue is partly taken up in my "Toward a Pedagogy of Affect" (with Jennifer Daryl Slack), forthcoming from Peter Lang in *Animations of Deleuze and Guattari*.

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**Works Cited**


