Theory in the Diaspora

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My point is not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous.

—Michel Foucault

In the March 2004 issue of College English, John Rouse published a review of three new books in English studies. The review, entitled "After Theory: The Next New Thing," begins with a large claim:

What will it be? Structuralism was exciting for a time, until it was superseded by poststructuralism, which in turn gave way to deconstruction and the charms of postmodernism, but these too are fading fast. The French thinkers who gave us so much of this, including Lacan, Barthes, Foucault, and Derrida, are being retired to the shelves, joining Lévi-Strauss, Freud, and Marx—for psychoanalysis and Marxism have also lost their cachet. The era of grand paradigms is almost over, their potential for generating new scholarship or influencing the polity having nearly been exhausted. (452)

Rouse connects this claim that theory is almost over with his review of three books on pedagogy and the larger mission of English: Elaine Showalter's Teaching Literature, Gerald Graff's Clueless in Academe, and Kurt Spellmeyer's Arts of Living. By presuming theory—or is it Theory?—is over, or soon will be over, Rouse has as his primary aim the discovery of the "next new thing" on our disciplinary horizon. In these texts, the next new trend in English studies is pedagogy, and more

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specifically composition pedagogy. Rouse provides careful overviews of these texts and the intellectual project espoused in each, and he gives reasonable criticisms of the blank spots that each argument creates and the shaky claims these texts make. I accept much of his argument regarding these texts and find the parts I do not accept to be provocative.

Still, Rouse's ending of this helpful, insightful, and stimulating review essay provides us (or at least me) with little reason for hope. Rouse finishes with what some might read as a disciplinary version of T.S. Eliot's famous view that the world will go out with a wimper, not a bang (despite the need of so many in and out of the university for a loud, dramatic apocalypse):

As the dark night slowly descends on literary studies, does the future of the English department belong to Kurt Spellmeyer's interdisciplinary "dialogues" community inspirted with New Age thinking, in which crises of our time are taught, or does it belong to Gerald Graff's interdisciplinary "learning community," where the conflicts are taught? In either case, the teaching of writing is central, and so perhaps the pedagogy of composition is already the new next thing. (465)

As a compositionist who has published theory and pedagogy for over twenty years, this ending seems narrow. The choices we face about what shape English will take are wider than this scenario suggests. To limit workers in English to Spellmeyer's new humanism pedagogy or Graff's imitatio composition pedagogy, or even to composition pedagogy, seems to suggest that not only is literary studies doomed, but English itself may be a dying profession. But that simply does not jibe with the current professional landscape, with a proliferation of ideas, controversies, viewpoints, publications, presentations, and professional activity—nor, even if ultimately true, does it give us any alternatives to act upon. It seems that if one does not like these alternatives, English is doomed; but if you do chose one of these alternatives, English is also probably doomed.

To be sure, this reading does not do justice to Rouse's more careful rendering of these texts, yet it does seem a fair read of the ending of this review essay. And, certainly, Rouse's rendition is somewhat question-
able if one does not accept the premise that starts this all off. The claim on which Rouse bases his search for the new next trend is that theory, now over two decades old in the U.S. academy, has had little impact, other than perhaps in establishing the careers of a few scholars, and is old and nearly over. Rouse puts it this way:

Yet despite all this trenchant commentary, very little has been changed in the world outside the academy, while within it the teaching of science and literature and all the rest goes on pretty much as before in most classrooms. We professors have only been talking among ourselves, and perhaps even we are tired at last of all that big thinking. We need something new to talk about. (453)

Much about Rouse’s review is admirable. It is readable. Its irreverent tone, as well as its historical sensibility in making connections to work done twenty and thirty years ago like that of Kenneth Koch and James Moffett, is refreshing, if unusual, when compared with most current academic discourse, which, despite all we know still strives for a cool detachment, a studied nonchalance, and rarely looks beyond even the last five years. Still, I wonder about many of Rouse’s assumptions. Is theory over? Is literature in college doomed? Is it accurate to claim that theory has had no consequences? What would it mean exactly to say that? Was theory supposed to have consequences? Is the world in and out of the university so unchanged? So unchanging? Is composition pedagogy really the new big thing? And what might it signify to use language that looks for—even expects—the “next new thing”? What wider discourse does that come from?

Let me focus simply on my first question about whether theory is over. To that question, Gary Olson might well respond most resoundingly, no. In the March 21, 2003 issue of the Chronicle of Higher Education, in an article titled “Deconstructing Composition,” Scott McLemme quotes Olson as saying that the field of composition is “on the verge of ‘what undoubtedly will come to be known as the new theory wars.'” Olson goes on to say, “In my work, I’ve been trying to expand the borders of composition and rhetoric, so that we can see that it’s really, in a larger sense, a discipline about how language works. Sometimes that
means you’re going to be looking at things that, for the moment, at least, don’t have anything to do with the teaching of writing.” Theory for Olson is an important part of what English does; it is alive and well even though contested, and increasingly contested by those who want to see it as the other of service. But let me underscore here the words that Olson uses to describe so-called theory-practice relations because I think they are important to this argument, and reasonable and precise. Olson says sometimes—not always, not inevitably, not necessarily, but sometimes—one does theoretical work that does not immediately feed into practice. Further, he says that theory may not relate directly to practice for the moment at least—again, not forever, not never. Olson goes on to argue that “[i]n recent years, however, composition has seen a revitalized backlash against theoretical scholarship.”

This sense of a new backlash against theory, rather than the end of theory, is also noted by Lynn Worsham, current editor of JAC, which is devoted to the interdisciplinary study of rhetoric, writing, multiple literacies and politics, including theory. Worsham argues that she has no interest in knowing anything about writing program administration work and its fiat that all composition must be service oriented. She writes, “For the past thirty years, people in the field have tried to define [composition studies] as an intellectual discipline, not a service component of the university. But now it seems like people are embracing it as a service component” (McLemee). McLemee claims that Worsham finds this overemphasis on the service component of composition studies to be having the effect of creating “a very chilly climate’ for those involved in theory—at least, the theory of the sort that she and Olson find interesting.”

So which is it? Is theory over? Are we watching the end of theory? Or are we on the verge of new theory wars in English? Surely, these two views differ; one might say they are even opposite interpretations of the same disciplinary landscape. There seems to be some evidence for both views. There appear to be elements in both views that describe our current predicament, but is there another way to conceptualize the place of theory and the future of the profession?

In this essay, I want to make the case for theory by providing another way of conceptualizing it in English, and more particularly in contempo-
rary rhetoric and composition. By first exploring the arguments of Olson and Worsham in a bit more depth, though acknowledging what Rouse, whom I respect for his long commitment to alternative pedagogical and disciplinary practices, says, I try to navigate between the Scylla of post-theory and the Charybdis of theory wars. I shall show that while it is true that much—including theory—has clearly changed since theory rose to prominence in the 1980s in the field, that quite in contrast to Rouse's claims, theory is still alive and well, having important effects on our work. Still, it is critical to admit that we live in a different time than that of theory's emergence and that there is a conflict, a struggle, between those who see the accomplishments and uses of theory as positive and ongoing, and those who want to return to service, however described. To acknowledge but also move beyond these seemingly antithetical positions that either rhetoric and composition is on the verge of "new theory wars" or that theory is at an end and that it is time to move on to the "next new thing," I argue that theory is both present and absent, in a decentralized but no less powerful form, in what might be called the "diaspora."

The very fact that scholars in so many dispersed areas of study have taken up theory is one indication that theory has had important effects on the intellectual work we do. More importantly, I argue that rhetoric and composition needs theory of varied sorts, including the insights of the poststructural and postmodern sort, perhaps now more than ever in its forty-year history. I shall tie this need for theory, specifically Foucault's discourse theory, to the need to account for the curious absence of work on social class in rhetoric and composition, as well as to the need for more scholarship on social class and writing. In short, we need something like Foucault's concept of discourse if we are ever going to understand what I take to be one of the most important forces at work in the field, in our intellectual work and in our service work (if we must use those terms), and that force is social class. If we are to make visible, let alone begin to understand, social class as an inherent part of our language, our discipline, and our work, we need Foucault's theory, which attends to regulated language practices. Finally, I shall close this essay by theorizing some of what this essay does by suggesting important limits to the tropes I use, the tropes of "diaspora" and "exile."
Deconstructing Composition: The Theory/Practice Split

For a more in-depth investigation of the arguments behind the headlines in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* about the impending theory wars in the field, we need to go back to the sources—in this case to the essays in the recent volume *Rhetoric and Composition as Intellectual Work*, edited by Gary Olson. This collection was an impetus for McLemee's interviews of professionals in the field and his description of current tensions in contemporary rhetoric and composition. This book includes nineteen essays from a wide range of scholarly and theoretical positions. Work in the volume is divided into disciplinary concerns, historical inquiry, ideological inquiry, philosophical inquiry, and new directions. In a sense, the collection asks the question, Is there any sort of work that rhetoric and composition does or should do beyond what might be called the will to service—that is, the constitution of our work and our identities as the teaching of writing to undergraduates, as “how to” or procedural knowledge with all the attending apparatus (writing program administrators, assessment technology, institutional research, and accompanying studies of pedagogy) to carry that off? The anthology answers in the affirmative: that while teaching writing as “how to” procedural knowledge may be important we should not limit ourselves to such work. Since theory emerged, there has been an alternative to this single focus. The anthology, which goes beyond claims only about theory, makes the argument for a wide assortment of intellectual work that is rigorous in its own right and not simply background or support for service.

As Olson notes in his “The Death of Composition as an Intellectual Discipline,” the arguments presented in the essays in the book are part of the larger struggle for hegemony going on within the discipline. This struggle is not new, nor does it necessarily have to be a bad thing, nor does it have to be mean spirited (30). Olson describes such hegemonic struggle almost as the method by which we create our collective disciplinary identity:

Since the beginning of composition as a field, we have all been struggling over how to define it, over its heart and soul. Certain people—with good intentions and pure motives—labored to make it a social science, drawing heavily on developmental psychology and related fields. Others—with
equally pure motives—disagreed, insisting that composition should be a more humanistic discipline that draws on the work of "creative" writers and on our own self-reflection about the writing process. . . . Those who wanted to define the field as one devoted not just to the teaching of writing but to all aspects of how discourse works turned to critical theory from a wider variety of disciplines including anthropology, feminist theory, philosophy, and sociology. (30)

Olson provides an historical example of this process of struggle for disciplinary hegemony within rhetoric and composition:

In every discipline, there is hegemonic struggle over the identity of that discipline. That is, one group of like-minded individuals attempts to further its vision of the field, while other groups do the same. For example, throughout the 1970s, the people that we have come to call "cognitivists," and those we have come to call "expressivists" battled between themselves over how the field should be defined, and in doing so, they both maintained tight control over the means of dissemination of scholarship: the few journals available to publish work in composition. (29)

The struggle for hegemony, then, is revealed at many sites, but one of them is the publishing apparatus of the discipline. The disciplinary discourse in the publishing institutions excludes as well as includes. Olson goes on:

Those of us who were interested in philosophical, critical, theoretical scholarship (and in broadening the disciplinary borders of composition to include such interests) were effectively excluded from the conversations. Research in the Teaching of English published only empirical work; under Dick Larson, College Composition and Communication had a decidedly cognitivist bent; College English, while it was venue for some "expressivist" work, was less a "composition" journal than it is today. And, of course, few presses in those days would take a chance on publishing a scholarly book on composition. (29)
It was only when publishing outlets for other sorts of intellectual work in rhetoric and composition opened up—including Pre/Text and JAC and later, Rhetoric Review—that theory in the discipline could get a hearing. With the expansion in journals and presses willing to publish theory in rhetoric and composition came a more intense conversation about what the discipline should become. This is one effect of theory that Berlin used to underscore—that such conversations were, in fact, good for the field. They brought it alive.

And let me emphasize again that Olson here is not arguing for the dominance of theory, let alone for abolition of service work; he is simply putting forward an argument for tolerance for various kinds of intellectual work. Nowhere in this essay does Olson call into question teaching or the research that supports it. From the start of this debate, Olson has consistently framed his argument in a balanced way. He carefully claims, "[I] argued that while we all desire to learn more about the teaching of writing or about our own writing processes, these are not the only intellectual concerns we should have as a discipline" (24). This does not seem to me to be an unbalanced or unreasonable view. It is true that Olson does say that constituting rhetoric and composition as concerned only with furthering or refining the teaching of composition is "dangerously and unacceptably narrow, even in some people’s eyes anti-intellectual" (24). But the force of this point is not to denigrate or exclude what professionals committed to service do, but to clear a space for intellectual work that does not have to answer always, everywhere, and immediately to service. Again, that seems fair.

Given this argument, it should come as no surprise that Olson is disturbed by what he sees as a "revitalized backlash against theoretical scholarship," a backlash partly traced out by Rouse’s College English review essay and his claim that theory is over and has had no or little effect, but also, perhaps in more worrisome form, reflected in statements by powerful professionals in the field. Olson is justifiably alarmed given what we know about how discourse works in a discipline when people in positions of power within the discipline make public statements against theory. Let me distinguish between an exchange of different views among people and groups within the discipline and the argument against theory when it is put forward through disciplinary positions—that is, through
official journals, talks by chairs of national organizations, decisions made by editors selected in part by such organizations, decisions by chairs of conferences about what will and will not appear on programs. The exchange of views is certainly one of the things that intellectual work is about; it is what we do, and there is nothing wrong with questioning arguments and positions. But putting forward such views as part of the disciplinary power apparatus is not simply the exchange of differing views among groups or individual scholars. It is regulated language practice; it is discourse. As such, it needs to be treated very carefully because, as Foucault points out, it can be dangerous.

Given our history in the field and given what we know about how discourse works, Olson, then, is right to be wary of what at times looks like an officially sanctioned backlash. It also seems fair to wonder about the categories used for accomplishing this shift back to service, one of which is “theory versus practice.” In arguing that the discipline is more complex than this simple binary allows for, Olson is suggesting that we need to dismantle this binary and try to find other concepts to think with. In other words, such popular, even sanctioned binaries oversimplify complex situations and in themselves help create identities that accept the need for a backlash or for a “war.” Rhetoric and composition and the work we do in it has always been too complex for these sorts of simplistic categories and the resultant taxonomies. The idea that theory is not a practice has been debunked for decades; current theory has for over a decade described itself as practices of various sorts. The notion that practice, including teaching and writing practices, is not theoretical has also been long questioned. Even when theory emerged in the 1970s in a few university English departments, one of its observations was that New Criticism was no less theoretical than any of the new continental work, that it had simply over the decades made such theory invisible. And when we investigate the roots of New Criticism in the 1920s and 1930s in the work of scholars like John Crowe Ransom, we indeed discover that there was and is a philosophical rationale and practice, theory, for the very reading acts that were later forwarded as anti-theory (see Krieger, Jancovich).

In “Coming to Terms: Theory, Writing, Politics,” Lynn Worsham extends Olson’s argument and, specifically, the argument for theory in
rhetoric and composition. Worsham, like Olson, argues that all intellectual work should not be governed by and subordinated to service considerations. She also begins by questioning the way this debate constantly seems to be framed as the “theory-practice split.” Worsham says,

In short, composition like literary studies, has become an institution, one that’s more rather than less closed off by the social world in which it is situated by its own insular and professional disputes—the most consequential being the ongoing battle over the nature of “our” work. This dispute—often abbreviated as the “theory-practice split”—involves those who maintain that the field’s proper work must remain strictly limited to the teaching of writing and the research required for that project, and those who insist that the scope of composition includes anything that bears on literacy, broadly conceived, and the workings of written discourse. (102)

There follows from this way of conceptualizing the world, Worsham suggests, a dramaturgy—a sort of ritualized performance with the lines already scripted—with each side accusing the other of retarding the progress of the field either by failing to respond to our obligations to undergraduate students (service) or by remaining “blind to the forms of instrumental rationality shaping the field and by failing to meet the minimal obligations of scholarly work in the humanities” (theory). Worsham’s point is that this way of viewing the field is parochial and can have some very real negative effects:

I suggest that if we persist in allowing the “theory-practice split” to govern the social relations of the field—and ultimately the way we articulate our role in the university and in its relation to society—then we do so because we prefer to misperceive the nature of the task at hand: we must make the academic work of composition more vigorously, more resolutely intellectual. The sine qua none of intellectual work is theory; thus, the primary way to make the work of composition more seriously intellectual is to make it more seriously theoretical. (103)
Ideas matter; they have effects. The way we conceptualize the world has consequences in how we interact with each other and the world; our governing linguistic categories—including the theory-practice split—shut down many possibilities. Worsham suggests that the very terms of this debate are problematic, if not dangerous, and that we should try to move beyond them. In other words, the theory-practice binary is a product of a discourse that we must interrupt. This is a call heard before and often in the field. Kate Ronald and Hephzibah Roskelley presented an early call in their *Farther Along: Transforming Dichotomies in Rhetoric and Composition*, which is devoted to questioning the reigning categories of that time. In 1990, they noted:

The desire to categorize is understandable in a profession whose knowledge is proliferating at such a tremendous rate. Categories seem to organize and make sense of the confusing, often contradictory theories of what happens as writers compose. But categories tend to harden, to become exclusionary rather than revisionary, . . . [b]ecome ways of not seeing. (2)

What Worsham’s argument suggests is that the very production and reception of such “established” categories—ways of *not* seeing—is a rhetorical (and political) act and that the study of such discourse (or ideology) has, in fact, as one of its primary goals, freedom; that is, such study presents us with different ways of thinking, seeing the world, being and acting in the world (103, 104). Worsham develops this line of argument by positing that we need to theorize emotion, the “tight braid of affect and judgment that is socially and historically constructed and bodily lived” (105). But the point remains: it is not a matter of theory versus practice but of theorizing practices—that is, questioning and understanding in a deeper, more intellectually rigorous way the daily acts of teaching, writing, administration, even of feeling. Calling into question the practices of theory, accounting for their rhetorical and political contexts and effects, is part of what theory does. One might further this understanding by arguing that we need a field devoted to such conceptual and discursive analysis—and the practices of theory to do such intellectual work—a deconstructing (field of) composition, a field of composi-
tion that examines governing categories and provides suggested alternatives. That is, rhetoric and composition ought to be a discipline about how discourse works, including what effects it has.

My position on theory is very close to that of Olson and Worsham, as gleaned from *Rhetoric and Composition as Intellectual work* and the *Chronicle* interviews. I certainly support what Olson and Worsham say in their essays. Theory can expand the borders of English. It has. In retrospect, we can see that the work of Olson and Worsham has been very helpful in doing this. I have always been interested in theory-practice relations, feeling about as comfortable as a teacher as I am as a theorist or writer, and feeling the binary theory-practice to be inadequate to the complexities of life. And yet, like Olson and Worsham, I have always tried to be careful in attempting to describe what theory does and what it does not, even cannot, do. For instance, I do *not* believe that theory is the undergirding or underlying *basis* for teaching or any other practice; I do believe that theory is one *practice* in a "roundtable" of equal practices (see Zebroski, "Toward"). Obviously, I draw the roundtable metaphor from King Arthur's knights of the roundtable myth to signify an equality among practices that share some sort of wider community. But I also do not see any reason to *hide* theory from teachers or students. Quite the contrary, teachers and students are already doing theory, and the point is to provide them alternatives. I have tried to describe this complex relationship using Bakhtin's notion of "answerability" in terms that I believe—and hope—are like Olson's and Worsham's (*Thinking* 9–11, 1–7, 119–45).

Answerability is mostly agnostic. It begins by acknowledging our limits, what we do not know, what we cannot know. But the concept also insists on our historical and ethical being; Bakhtin said that there is no alibi for being. We act and in acting are historical, rhetorical, political, ethical. We are answerable even though we are limited in our knowledge and actions. We simply cannot know immediately and directly the effects of what we do. What are the effects of theory? We cannot know for sure, with certainty, not in the short term. We can guess at the effects—and perhaps with time our guesses will become more persuasive, seem to fit the facts better. I have made some guesses in this essay that theory in fact has had effects in ways that do not fit our governing categories. But, of
course, that claim will be made to answer. And we need to be answerable to others and to ourselves for such claims. We need on occasion to talk to each other about our work, to give our views, to present our work at what might be called the Harkin Conference, after Patricia Harkens' call in the early 1990s for such regular convocations. Harkin says, "Our problem is nothing less than getting the academy to change its understanding of knowledge production" (135). She calls for convocations that invite all:

The objective is not to achieve a totalizing metatheory, but rather to see where theories intersect, where they contradict, where they form constellations, and perhaps, what is most important, where they form lacunae, where they actually prevent us from doing something we deem necessary. (136)

As Harkin suggests, we need to tolerate differences, and tolerate different kinds of work and callings. We need people who do theory; we need people who do not do theory, people who do other things—teach, do historical scholarship, even serve as administrators. We even need some people who may see a relation among these practices. We need to see these as equal, if different, activities that nonetheless may be "connected" by virtue of at least two considerations: that they are parts of an institution—English—and they share a history, a common moment in time. The latter is especially important. I would say that it is significant that theory emerges at the moment when Post-Fordist regimes of capital arise: from about 1970 onward. We are living through a great transformation. It only makes sense that we need new ways of talking and thinking about the world. And at a time when corporate globalism is flourishing, I am loathe to give up any tool for understanding the bigger, global picture. It seems to me that theory helps us with that at a moment when other practices are so focused on the local and on the situated that we tend to make the global invisible—and we do so at a time when it is crucial not to.

Let me be pragmatic for a moment. I have taught at both research I universities and small liberal arts colleges, theory dens and high schools. I currently teach a four-four load of only undergraduates and teach mostly
what some would designate as service courses: three first-year writing courses every semester. Yet, I think Olson is right on the mark in his claims about the work of theory. Theory needs to exist and to play out regardless of what relationship it has or does not have to other practices. Drawing on thirty-two years of these sorts of varied and rich experiences, I believe that we need theory, that theory is in our interest, and that in the last instance, in ways we can never fully know in advance, theory pays off.

Theory in the Diaspora
If it is true that theory is dead, why were over seventy panels at the 2005 Conference on College Composition and Communication convention listed as theory? If theory is not dead, or is dying, then how do we describe its current situation? What role is theory playing in our disciplinary conversation? In this section, I draw on Janice Lauer’s recent description of work on rhetorical invention in which she claims that although invention seems to be a thing of the past and does not seem to be the hot topic in contemporary rhetoric and composition that it was a couple of decades ago, it is alive and well in the diaspora.¹ Lauer says that “rhetorical invention has migrated, entered, settled, and shaped many other areas of theory and practice in rhetoric and composition.” She continues: “Like invention in the medieval period, invention can be found in a diaspora of composition areas rather than in discussions labeled ‘invention’” (2). I think something similar is true of theory. Theory, theories, and sometimes even theorists are moving around, dispersing to a wider range of sites in and out of rhetoric and composition, no less pervasive or powerful for all that movement—though at times theory is harder to see and hear than it was in the late 1980s and early 1990s. There are several reasons for this.

First, Foucault would argue that it is the nature (wrong word, of course) of discourse to disperse, to play out over a range of wider and wider sites and in ever more disparate forms. Intellectual work that theorizes such discourse—that is, work that is counter-discursive—will follow out the paths traced by the discourse. There is no center of discourse, so there can be no center of theory. Second, though we may look back on theory of the 1980s and it may seem unified, that unity may actually be more a product of the fact that there were so few theorists
working in a field almost completely inhabited by scholars doing other kinds of work. There were not many theorists back in the late 1980s in rhetoric and composition, and so it is not surprising that as the number of people working in theory increases (though, again, it is probably not that many people numerically) we should feel that there are more differences, less unity among theorists. We may feel that theory spoke with one voice in the 1980s, though this is hardly the case.

Another recent Chronicle of Higher Education article, "The Fragmentation of Literary Theory," seems to take this view. Jennifer Howard writes,

Theory, those reports make clear, is far from dead. But neither is it a unified kingdom. Theory today is a loose confederation of states with permeable boundaries, no universally recognized constitution, and not much in the way of lingua franca. It looks less like a superpower, in other words, and more like the fractious and ever-expanding European Union. (A–12)

The root metaphor here is revealing. The kingdom or state of theory is fragmented, contentious, fractious. It is fragmented, even though it still exists and (evidently) exerts some power. Yet, as helpful as this characterization may be, theory was never unified, by Foucault's definition, so it cannot be fragmented in a way that assumes earlier wholeness and unity. Find two theorists, and you will discover three views. Foucault notes,

We set out with an observation: with the unity of discourse like that of clinical medicine, or political economy, or Natural History, we are dealing with a dispersion of elements. This dispersion itself—with its gaps, its discontinuities, its entanglements, its incompatibilities, its replacements, and its substitutions—can be described in its uniqueness if one is able to determine the specific rules in accordance with which its objects, statements, concepts, theoretical options, have been formed: if there really is unity, it does not lie in the visible, horizontal coherence of the elements formed; it resides, well anterior to their formation, in the system that makes possible and governs that formation. (72)
Ultimately, of course, Foucault disavows this "unity," though that concept does allow us to look at "dis-unity" and other qualities and how (and why) they are produced in a network of governing power relations:

Paradoxically to define a group of statements in terms of its individuality would be to define the dispersion of these objects. To grasp all the interstices that separate them, to measure the distances that reign between them—in other words to formulate their law of division. (33)

If theory is a set of discourses, then from the start it is dispersive, even if we do not see that dispersion early on in the historical process. We may not see it because the background has changed and because there were relatively speaking few theorists in the 1980s. But if theory is not a discourse but a set of ways of interrogating or interrupting or disrupting discourse, then the apparent unity it seems to have is really simply a byproduct of the discourse that it critiques.

Theory was never unified and it was never a kingdom. There never was a king or queen. It never fragmented. It has not ended. It is not over. It simply has dispersed through time and space. This is one reason why Lauer's notion of diaspora seems a better metaphor than the kingdom/fragmentation trope. Theory now exists in many areas of rhetoric and composition. If we start with what our discipline calls theory, we find at least the following sites of theory in the diaspora of the discipline listed in the program to the 2005 CCCC convention:

- Genre theory, including narrative theory
- Gender studies, including feminist and queer theory
- Curriculum (writing centers, writing across the curriculum, literacies)
- Visual rhetorics
- Electronic and virtual rhetorics
- Public rhetoric and advocacy theory
- Multicultural rhetorics, including identity theory (Latino/a studies; Asian American studies)
- Disability studies
- Ecological rhetorics
- Globalism and Post-Fordism
But some might object that this concept of theory is too broad. The specific material work that theory has done since the 1980s may not be traced by the use of the word *theory* to arrange the program presentation. If that is the case, I would note that even adopting a restricted use of the concept of theory to signify intellectual work that follows the intellectual traditions established in the last two decades—postmodern or poststructuralist theory, if you will—there are still many current ongoing theoretical communities in the disciplinary diaspora. I would suggest at least the following:

- Genre theory (Devitt, Bawarshi)
- Activity theory—not poststructuralist, but certainly postmodern and postpositivist (Bazerman, Prior, Russell)
- Embodied rhetorics, including rhetorics of emotion (Worsham, Lindquist, Langstraat), rhetorics of the body (Crowley), and rhetorics of disability (Brueggeman, Dunn)
- Queer studies (Butler, Cooper, McRuen, Monson and Rhodes)
- Class studies (Lindquist, Mack, Robillard)

These are suggestive only and signify the lightest of tracings of a wider map of the discipline and the current and active theoretical communities in its diaspora. Such a map is inadequate on many scores. One problem is that theories cross even these borders. Lindquist’s work on emotion is also presented as work on social class. Russell’s use of activity theory is tied to genre theory. Butler’s discussion of post-Aids discourse and its relation to trauma and feeling is a contribution both to embodied rhetoric of emotion and to queer theory.

Especially in what it leaves out, this sketchy map is inadequate. Some of the exemplars of theory in the discipline—whether postmodern or not—do not fit or do not fit easily on this map. Susan Miller continues her archival, geneological and highly theoretical work. Victor Vitanza plays out his ideas on the Third Sophistic and the new electronic literacies. Steven Mailloux forwards his rhetorical hermeneutics. Louise Phelps theorizes disciplinary formation, literacies, and administration. Thomas Kent interprets paralogic rhetoric and argues for a post-process approach
to rhetoric and composition. So the map above is suggestive and incomplete. I present it less to do justice to the current theoretical topography than to provide some specific examples that support the claim that theory goes on in ways and places differing from the past but no less energetic—or persuasive—for that. These are theoretical communities that share some commitment to the thing we call rhetoric and composition but that inhabit worlds quite distant from each other and from whatever starting point(s) they may have shared. Of course, the unity among these communities may be more apparent than real and may well exist more in institutional affiliation and identification, more than any single set of practices. Yet, there does seem to be another common trait besides simple affiliation that characterizes theory. After more than twenty years, the one effect most regularly and frequently attributed in rhetoric and composition to theory, and to a surprising number of the works above, is that it still seems to be a threat.

The Threat of Theory
Perhaps the most trenchant critique of composition as service—as, in fact, a management science—is Marc Bousquet’s “Composition as a Management Science: Toward a University without a WPA,” which appeared in the theory journal JAC in 2002. Bousquet comments on the pervasive trope of writing program administrators having agency in a good deal of recent scholarship in rhetoric and composition. He argues for a labor theory of agency in rhetoric and composition. He says, “Despite the evident sincerity of this line of inquiry, I’m profoundly unconvincing that a management theory of agency and what I call the rhetoric of ‘pleasing the prince’ is particularly useful—much less necessary to the project of transforming institutions” (494). In a footnote, Bousquet adds, “In the big picture, my goal would be not to reform but rather to abolish the WPA as part of a more general abolition of the scene of managed labor in the academy” (519). What is important for my purposes here is not whether Bousquet is correct or even persuasive, but rather the effect this article had. The fact that there was a follow up issue of JAC that included many responses to Bousquet, matched with the buzz on listserves and conferences after its publication, supports the claim that this article was perceived by some as a threat. My point is that it is no coincidence that
it was not published in the other institutional journals of the field, but rather in a theory journal. Theory is one of the few spaces in rhetoric and composition where unpopular but crucial arguments in the discipline can be made.

Bousquet is only the most recent example of a larger pattern over the last two decades; theory has often been seen as threat. When poststructuralist theory first made its way into rhetoric and composition in the late 1980s, the establishment in and out of the field saw itself as threatened. The troubles at Texas in 1990, as Linda Brodkey tellingly called the political battle that followed the revision of the required first-year writing course into a course in argument and difference, was one of the more visible public attacks on theory. Brodkey, a self-identified "practicing theorist," admits that

While some theories of reading seem more friendly to production than others, none suffices because none is meant to account for writing. For some years now, I have argued that poststructuralism is the friendliest of the language theories to writing and writing pedagogy, if only because it deals with the part that language plays in constructions and representations of self and other, along with everything else we call reality (see Brodkey 1992a, 1989a). Anyone who teaches writing as more than set of rules that students should learn and follow is likely to find such a theory attractive, at least initially, for collapsing the distinction between form and content; [it]also suggests that an adequate theory of writing would account for the contingencies of what is said as well as how it is said, and from that it follows that an adequate theory of writing pedagogy would teach students how to deal with the theoretical inseparability of form and content in practice. (142)

There are, of course, multiple factors that contributed to the troubles at Texas, and Brodkey acknowledges this overdetermination and the impossibility of tracing that explosion to a single cause. But Brodkey also theorizes the role that prescriptivism plays in required composition courses and in middle class expectations about the work we do to reproduce social class. She provides a theoretical example of precisely the claim she made above that theory should account for form/content
effects. She argues that untheorized instruction functions to reproduce social class inequities:

It has always seemed to me gratuitous to regulate writing and writers via the contents of prompts and assignments, since a policy of coherence is already being “objectively” executed by assessing student writing on the form and format: the grammar, spelling, diction, and punctuation along with thesis sentence, body paragraphs, and conclusion. Perhaps both are necessary, however, because while form identifies class interlopers (working class, ethnic and black students), content singles out class malcontents. While it seems to take longer in some cases than others, composition instruction appears to have succeeded best at establishing in most people a lifelong aversion to writing. They have learned to associate the desire to write with a set of punishing exercises called writing in school: penmanship, spelling, punctuation, and vocabulary study in nearly all cases; grammar lessons, thesis sentences, paragraphs, themes, book reports, and library research papers in college preparatory and advanced placement courses. (135–36)

Brodkey in this bit of theoretical work begins to make visible the connections between established teaching practices and social class reproduction. Disturb those established practices by theorizing them and you disturb the entire machine for sorting out class interlopers and class malcontents. I would only add to this perspicacious insight that this is as true within rhetoric and composition as outside of the discipline. The people who run the discipline and who are admittedly well-intentioned, smart people (and often personal friends) are not for the most part class interlopers or class malcontents—or, if they are, they aren’t talking much about it.

Theory, it would seem, remains one of the few public sites where an unpopular claim can be made. So theory threatens the establishment inside and outside of rhetoric and composition. Even James Berlin’s work, which after his death quickly was almost canonized, threatens. One of the most challenging if not threatening passages that I have read in our scholarship and that I have marked to such an extent in my copy of his Rhetorics, Poetics, Cultures that it looks like a medieval illuminated manuscript goes like this:
The work of English studies is to reassess the place of discourse in shaping knowledge and consciousness, doing so within the contemporary context of theory in language, literature, and rhetoric. The teacher must call on recent discussions of discourse analysis to develop a terminology adequate to the complexity of signifying systems. While the various uses of semiotic theory in the work of Barthes, Eco, Hall, Fiske, Hodge, and Kress, and others have begun this work, it remains a central task of teachers to rethink theory through classroom practice and classroom practice through theory. ... Attempts to negotiate and resist semiotically enforced cultural codes can take place only when these codes can be named and interrogated in reading and writing, and this is a central role for the teacher in the classroom. (111–12; emphasis added)

Given my point earlier in this essay, I obviously see theory's relation to other practices in a much more mediated way than Berlin does in this passage; but what is central in this passage is the claim that teachers must do (poststructuralist) theory—or, more precisely, must call on theory to name, interrogate, negotiate, and resist cultural codes. That is quite a strong claim—one in effect challenged by the recent backlash to theory. Berlin's thinking was that we are living through a transformation in capitalist social relations from Fordist to post-Fordist regimes and we need a new language to make visible these new social relations as well as to suggest ways to imagine alternatives (see 41–56). Theory is one such new language. We need theory because we are in a new world. So theory remains a threat—no less in the long shadow of 9/11 than in the 1980s and 1990s. And sadly, theory evidently threatens to the point that at times theory, theories, and theorists have in a few places been exiled beyond the disciplinary gates.

The Need for Theory: Discourse, Post-Fordism, Social Class
We need theory now more than ever, specifically Foucault's discourse theory, to at last begin to investigate the connection between rhetoric and composition and social class. In a sense, we can see that this all along has been in the last instance the aim of Bousquet, Brodkey, and Berlin. The passages I quote from their work begin to address the need for theory to make visible the discourses of this new economic world order called post-
Fordism. We need theory to make visible social class. Bousquet makes visible post-Fordist class relations in our own discipline and departments. Brodkey shows us the effects of post-Fordist discourses in constructing what is and what is not seen to be the proper social class role of our pedagogy. Berlin narrates the linkages between the new economic realm, new ideas including theory, new curricula in college English, and new practices in college English courses. Despite his extreme care in making that claim, Berlin both in his popularization of David Harvey's work, and through the form his own argument takes, suggests such linkages. By simply putting side by side these varied forces in separate chapters of his book, Berlin implies a connection between the need for theory and the new economic situation, and therefore social class.

Although Foucault (to my knowledge, at least) never mentioned let alone studied social class (itself a fascinating silence), he presents us with a new way to think about social class in rhetoric and composition. Without rehearsing his entire *Archaeology of Knowledge*, let me briefly note why his discourse theory is important. Discourse for the Foucault of the *Archaeology* is the power of language practices enabled by specific power relations to constitute the object of which they speak. Discourse is regulated language practices. Discourse is heuristic, as language is heuristic. Discourse creates by constructing, by constituting, our categories and concepts, but also—perhaps more importantly—by excluding, making invisible, prohibiting, silencing other possibilities. In this sense, discourse limits. The study of Foucault's discourse theory is not simply the tracking of a set of language practices, a corpus, at the local level. We distinguish here the sort of empirical linguistic study that is called "discourse analysis" from the discourse theory that Foucault (but also Berlin) does. As Sara Mills says about this second sort of discourse theory, "The main reason for conducting an analysis of the structures of discourse is to discover the support mechanisms which keep it in place" (49). The aim of Foucault's discourse theory, then, is to discover the power relations, and the network and mechanisms through which the power flows, that enable a certain way of speaking and writing while disallowing many others. The distinction between a linguistic analysis of discourse and Foucault's theorizing of discourse is a subtle but radical difference.
In fact, one of the primary values of Foucault's discourse is that it posits power *inside* of language use rather than outside of it or as something external to it. From its inception, Foucault's discourse entirely avoids another unproductive opposition between language versus politics: the teaching of language as marks on the page or as skill and the examination of power relations. Foucault simply does not accept the common sense notion that these are separate concepts and that the scholar (or teacher) has to choose either one or the other. He is only interested in the site of discourse where language effects are enabled or disabled by networks of power. The heuristic potential and limits of certain historically and culturally specific regulated language acts, then, is the object of his "discourse."

So Foucault's theory suggests that in order to map a discourse we need to know both how a set of regulated language practices not only constitute, or make possible, but also disallow. We then need to look for repeated and regularized absences, for what is regularly missing and invisible, as well as for what is visible. And we need to look for what is more explicitly taboo, forbidden, and anathematized. This approach when applied to rhetoric and composition would draw us to many things, but for our purposes here, it seems applicable to the relative lack of work from 1970 to 2000 on social class in rhetoric and composition. That absence may well be produced just as much as scholarship on process theory or the social turn during this time period. The absence of work done on social class, when most every scholar has acknowledged the centrality of social class to rhetoric and composition, is somewhat surprising (see Bloom). Despite a recent issue of *College English* (November 2005) on the theme of social class, and despite the scholarship of a few (Lindquist and Alberti, for example), this absence still exists for the most part.

Foucault might wonder if this regular, consistent, and repeated absence might well be an effect produced as part of the larger way we think about and look at language practices in rhetoric and composition—that is, by our disciplinary discourse. Perhaps the very discourse we are a part of and use regularly produces this effect. Perhaps this discourse has made social class invisible. How? When visible, social class has been visible only as an *external force on* language. The very idea that language is separate from the power relations that enable and disable it, separate
from social class, seems to work often to make social class something not really in our area of study and expertise. In this prevailing discourse in rhetoric and composition, then, social class is constituted in several ways, each quite helpful in its own right: we talk of social class as one’s location within certain quantifiable hierarchies (the income one makes, the amount of education one has, the type of occupation one is in), or we talk about social class as one’s cultural heritage (the culture and values one brings to the university, the stories one tells, the conflicts arising for the first generation of working class students between home discourse and academic discourse), or it is one’s individual affiliation (the individual’s choice of identity and values in these matters), or one’s individual emotional performance. Hence, in each case, the way we talk about and think about social class makes social class not a part of language, not a part of the discipline of English, of what we in English studies do, but more properly the domain of economics, anthropology, sociology, or psychology, respectively. So the ruling discourse constructs what is and is not appropriate or compelling to study or inquire into in the discipline by constituting categories in such a way as to be common sense and thus to exclude.

So, if there is a discursive aspect of work in the discipline of rhetoric and composition, then the study of social class as part of language is unlikely to occur or to advance without something like Foucault’s “discourse.” Without something like Foucault’s theory to question the binary of “language versus politics,” to ask what discourse produces that common sense opposition and how and why, class will always be inscribed as something not at that heart of what we do, as something that, while perhaps interesting is not really in the realm of the expertise and responsibility of those who teach and study English. Without theory that helps us to reconceptualize (even dismantle) the binary between language and politics—and that theory for me is Foucault’s theory of discourse—we are left to “add on” power. We, then, can expect that social class in rhetoric and composition will continue to be ignored because it is not language practices as defined by the language practices we are now in. By accepting the common sense categories that power is outside of language, we ensure that social class will remain for the most part invisible without the intervention of some “outside” force, like a huge influx of new people
into the field from the working class, an unlikely scenario that has occurred only once in my lifetime (in the late 1960s and early 1970s) and that also happened with the influx of veterans on the GI Bill into universities after World War II (see Dixon on how academe and English changes). So unless we want to sit and wait for a twice-in-a-century, external force to intervene in academe, we need theory to critique our concepts and raise questions about their limits. We need theory to help us see that social class is discourse and that as discourse it is among the proper objects of study for rhetoric and composition and English studies.

Without some way to imagine the site where language is power (is knowledge), where power is part and parcel of language, we are condemned to leave the study of social class—but also race, gender, sexualities, nationalism, postcolonialism, and any other so-called “political issues,” including post-9/11 discourse—to those in other disciplines. At the least, without Foucault's theory and the concept of discourse, such matters will tend to be marginalized as identity theory of either a local or global sort. Perhaps more importantly, any formalist theory of language that refuses to include context and power is not even a complete and accurate study of language. It is anti-rhetorical; it does not do justice to the complexity, dynamism, and centrality of language activity in everyday life. Without theory, we are left with only wider or narrower versions of what Brodkey describes as prescriptivism. But in addition to this project of dismantling the common sense, positivist notion that language is only the marks on the page or the sounds in the air, and opening up a space to make visible the ways that power regulates what can be said and written and what cannot be said and written, theory has other benefits. Theory has a reflexive side that we can turn to our own language as well. We need theory to help us ask questions, to help keep theory and theorists answerable.

The Dangers of “Diaspora” and “Exile”
A curious thing happens when I write “diaspora” in the word processing program on my laptop. It is underlined in red. My essay looks as if it is bleeding because every time I use the word “diaspora,” I am told by a computer program that there is something wrong. I assume that the
problem for the word processing program—and its programmers—is that I do not capitalize Diaspora. To capitalize Diaspora erases the trace of red underneath it. According to Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary, "diaspora" is capitalized when referring to Jewish people living outside of Palestine after the Babylonian exile, while diaspora in its other uses (my dictionary lists two, the great migration of African Americans from the U.S. South to the cities of the industrial north in the early twentieth century, and any people settled far from their homeland, the example given being the African diaspora—in these cases, "diaspora" is not capitalized). This small trace just begins to suggest a troubled history that comes with the word. Using the word and even deciding whether to capitalize it is a political and historical act. Let me return then to the trope of theory in the diaspora—to examine my own discourse so far. I want to retract a little of what I have argued here, reflecting on the discourse this essay emerges from. My use—our use—of the concept of diaspora is troubled. Paul Butler points out, quoting Margaret Himley's perceptive observation, that in our work with this diaspora trope we need to be very careful (119–20). Foucault might say that it is not a bad, but a dangerous trope. It is violence we do on the forming of the world as well as a violence against communities of people. Foucault says that, "We must conceive of discourse as the violence we do to things, or at all events, as a practice we impose upon them; it is in this practice that the events of discourse find the principle of their regularity" (229).

What is the violence we do when we use "diaspora"? What are the effects of using the term? For one thing, we need to be careful of eliding the very real violence that often goes along with the concrete act of creating a diaspora. Diaspora, after all, is often forced and signifies exile. The Jewish diaspora came about because the homeland was conquered by Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, and Romans. The enslavement and importation across the Atlantic—the Middle Passage—of African peoples is one of the most horrific passages in human history. Even the migration of African Americans to the industrial north in the early twentieth century was done at the point of economic and racial violence (like sharecropping and lynching) for those who stayed in the South. So when we talk of these diasporas, we need to acknowledge this sense of forced and violent expulsion and migration. Let me add that the diaspora tends to be what we
see after this forced removal—that is, after exile. It is not often in these cases about choice or freedom but, rather, continuing violence. In some cases, the violence is in the staying; in others, the violence is in the removal. Either way, violence precipitates exile. Who do we talk about when we say “diaspora” and who do we not include in that concept? Is there, for instance a Palestinian diaspora inside our use of the term? Is there a gay diaspora? How would that change our use of the trope? When we say that theory (or style or invention) is in the diaspora, which sort of diaspora do we signify?

In his stunning essay “Reflections on Exile,” Edward Said makes some apt cautions about the trope of exile. He illustrates the dangers of these tropes: “Exile [is] strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience.... The achievement of exile permanently [is] undermined by the loss of something left behind forever.” Said goes on to map out this contradictory concept:

Modern Western culture is in large part the work of exiles, emigres, refugees. In the United States, academic, intellectual, and aesthetic thought is what it is today because of refugees from fascism, communism, and other regimes given to the oppression and expulsion of dissidents. (173)

And yet, Said warns us to not romanticize the exile or, by implication, the diaspora:

Exile can not be made to serve notions of humanism.... Exile is neither aesthetically nor humanistically comprehensible.... To think of the exile informing this literature as beneficially humanistic is to banalize its mutilations, the losses it inflicts on those who suffer them. (174)

So, too, theory may well now be located in something like the diaspora. And some theorists may well experience something like exile. But we must always remind ourselves that this very trope, the very language and discourse we are in that describes and inscribes ourselves and our world, breaks down. It emerges from a network of power relations that reveals, but also hides. Theory renders language, including the language of
theory; language is always a matter of the power relations that make it possible. Theory is not over. Theory is not bad. But like any other language practice, it is dangerous and so we must be cautious.

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Notes

1. I want to thank Paul Butler for bringing Lauer’s work using the concept of diaspora to my attention. In his dissertation, Out of Style, Butler insightfully applies Lauer’s ideas to style studies as well. Butler argues that style, which was actually an important part of the process movement of the 1960s and 1970s, was made invisible in later renderings of that movement in the late 1980s. By making style invisible, Butler points out, the post-process discourse of the discipline lost an important resource for both the study and the teaching of writing. Butler’s research, a sort of revisionist history, should encourage others to return to our sources, both primary documents and informants, to study more closely and carefully rhetoric and composition’s relatively recent past. This point about the crucial responsibility of talking with participants of events in the 1960s and 1970s who are still with us, is also powerfully made by Gilyard. We need more genealogical work of this sort on the emergence of American rhetoric and composition as we know it in the 1960s and 1970s. I also want to thank Butler for his careful reading of several versions of this essay and for his very helpful suggestions for improving this text.

Works Cited


