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## Struggling over Composition

Gary A. Olson

Tim Mayers is absolutely correct: he and I "actually agree on many substantive issues" regarding the state and future of composition scholarship. So it would indeed be unfortunate if I had inadvertently "made enemies of those who should be friends."

He and I agree that "composition" is a slippery term, a "site of contention." We both agree that scholars have an obligation to critique "theories and pedagogies that seem flawed or inadequate." To do less would be to abdicate our responsibility to the discipline. What's more, neither of us advocates "a benign, fuzzy pluralism"; to do so is to cease to struggle for the professional and intellectual values we most cherish, to abandon the struggle over how the discipline should be defined.

That is, Tim and I both understand that in every discipline there is hegemonic struggle over the identity of that discipline: one group of like-

minded individuals attempts to further *its* vision of the field, while other groups do the same. So he does not object as much to my comment on the attempt of certain self-proclaimed expressivists to belittle theoretical scholarship and to swing the field back to an expressivist orientation as he does my characterizing the "entire issue" of CCC as taking part in that endeavor. I suppose he's right that I should have taken care to say that I didn't object to *every* piece in the issue or to *everything* that *every* author said. In fact, I have no quarrel with his piece. But I think that upon reflection, and understanding (as he clearly does) how hegemonic struggle works, he will nonetheless agree that that issue of the journal is in fact *implicated* in the struggle—even though he himself did not intend for his own piece to be used to make a political statement. That is, that particular issue of the journal makes a statement, regardless of the fact that Tim became an unwitting player. Let us not forget that this is a "special issue" not just of any journal; CCC is the "official" publication of the discipline's major professional organization. The lead essay in the issue in question was penned by the elected chair of that organization. No journal, journal editor, special issue, professional organization, organization chair, or CCC essay writer is "disinterested," innocent, detached from the hegemonic struggle over composition's identity—although some are more conscious of their role in the struggle than others.

In a plenary speech to the Research Network Forum at the CCCC Convention in Minneapolis, I outlined some of my objections to the CCC issue and to the larger question of the struggle over composition, including a kind of mean-spiritedness that I see characterizing the debate and to which I strongly object. This essay will be published in a few months, so I won't rehash its contents here. Suffice it to say that hegemonic struggle is not a bad thing; in fact, a democracy cannot function without it. Since the beginnings of composition as a field, we all have been struggling over how to define it, over its heart and soul. The issue of CCC, as a whole, makes a statement, has significance—just as the use of the symbol from the lead article in that issue as a dingbat to decorate the recent CCCC program book is a political statement. It is important that such acts be noticed, commented on, analyzed—and, if necessary, criticized. My only regret is that Tim, or any other unwitting participant in the CCC issue, may have felt that I was attacking him or her personally.

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