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I can remember vividly the first time I saw the f-word scrawled on some sidewalk near my grade school. I asked about ten people what it meant until someone told me. Something died that day, and something was born: the idea that words scrawled in public spaces could shock you. Somehow the anonymity of the writers made such acts exciting, and the inscriptions became as concrete to me as the surface of the sidewalk. In junior high, the practice became more sophisticated. I remember the mysterious "slam books" in which anonymous students wrote malicious remarks about all the stuck-ups and hoods—"Fat Mark loves himself," and "Debbie wears blue panties," et cetera, et cetera. In short, for my generation carving our names, scribbling our curses, our pithy poetry, and our political anti/festos on the blackboards of the classroom became a rite of passage, whether you lived in a ghetto or a conventional middle-class suburban neighborhood like I did.

These recollections are intended to evoke a certain nostalgia for and identification with the *style* of rebellious, impetuous youth for whom writing is a powerful form of resistance. These confessions also call for a temporary suspension of the "voice of authority" that may be whispering in your ear even now. Mostly, however, these ruminations are meant to transgress (and shuttle between) a series of boundaries that define our work in writing centers: classroom/writing center, tutor/student, essays/graffiti, and manifesto/love letter. If nothing else, my hope is that what follows will test the reading protocols of our profession, if not the reading experiences of each reader. It is time to carve/read against the grain, to carve a new relief on writing center doors. It is time to forge a new space in which to write—to

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move from the ghetto into the writing center, from the classroom into the world.

There is, then, a sense in which we want to move the outside in and the inside out. In my view, we are near the point of exhausting the styles of current composition pedagogy that more often than not also determine writing center pedagogy. But, my claim is in no way meant as a trivialization of the university, as a denigration of composition pedagogy, or as a demonology of the classroom. In more ways than one, these are all sites of contest, but it is not the goal of this essay to argue against the very sites that have spawned writing centers and that continue to endorse our work. On the contrary, what I seek is a new functional analogy, like graffiti, which can be used as a fresh source of power, analysis, and identity (cf. Worsham). What I want is an image that provokes new ways of seeing writing centers and that reconfigures the space they occupy between the institution and the student. Finally, what I hope to discover is a code or discourse that resists appropriation and domestication even as it mediates between the official style of classroom pedagogy and the unofficial style of writing center pedagogy.

Since the conceptual metaphor of graffiti will not figure as significantly in this essay as what actually grounds the style it symbolizes, let me first establish the grounds for the desires outlined above by explaining the necessity for defining writing centers as a subculture and for identifying a distinct writing center style. At the 1993 Conference on College Composition and Communication, Christina Murphy put forth the notion that writing centers must construct their own theory of pedagogy; they must redraw the contours of the shoreline of writing center theory. Reflecting on her challenge, I look at how I have been posturing our writing center since 1990 and realize that I have been engaged in a kind of writing center "apologetics." Like clockwork, each year I launch campaigns to educate students, faculty, and administrators about what we "really" do in the writing center and join with other regional and local writing center educators to share strategies and "war lore." In fact, I suspect that many writing center directors spend an inordinate amount of time as advocates rather than as scholars or researchers. Writing centers often seem embroiled in rhetorics of advocacy which fight everything from misperceptions of the center to misappropriations of its function. As such, many writing centers face a common identity problem: that is, students, tutors, teachers, and administrators perceive the writing center in radically different ways. Unfortunately because most writing directors are stretched very thin in terms of tutoring, training, teaching, research, and service, we often just lament the situation, then go on about our business, made easier (we believe) by more campaigning and explaining. Thus, when those outside the center assume that we all share the same perceptions of the writing center, or when such assumptions turn into attempts to bring the others into line with their own, we repeat the cycle of

apologetics and advocacy that (ironically) leaves less time to focus on more important issues like research, training, and pedagogy. In essence, writing centers are in the precarious position of having to put faith in a system of patronage that continues to subsidize and endorse our work, though that very system is often responsible for impeding the progress of an otherwise thriving field of inquiry. Our field, challenged by Murphy and by the frustrations of this double bind, needs something different with which to engage the imaginations of those who work in it, something that provides a fresh source of power, analysis, and identity. To be situated, then, within a double bind calls for an amphibian mentality. We must simultaneously keep one foot on land and one foot in the water. Or, to follow the graffiti analogy, we must become the wall upon which all manner of inscriptions live alongside each other.

To sustain such a balance is not an easy task. Although writing centers may define themselves as distinctly different from classrooms, they are consistently in danger of appropriation by the dominant discourses of composition theory and institutional politics. In other words, they straddle the boundary between "official" and "unofficial" writing, between authority and its "other." One way to manage or negotiate these boundaries is to work from the inside. Gayatri Spivak suggests that "one tries to change something that one is obliged to inhabit, since one is not working from the outside. . . . In order to keep one's effectiveness, one must also preserve those structures not cut them down completely" (72). On the other hand, Spivak warns that not all negotiations are positive. For example, institutions may negotiate with writing centers by foreclosing them, by declaring when we are absolutely crucial to them, that it is not so. Situated at the point of tension between convention and counterstatement, writing centers pose irreconcilable questions of style and strategy. If, however, we accept what Spivak proposes, it is more productive to sustain this tension rather than reconcile and appropriate toward either means or ends. Writing centers may be the illegitimate offspring of composition theory, but as Donna Haraway says, "illegitimate offspring are often exceedingly unfaithful to their origins" (151). Thus, I find it increasingly harder to argue for legitimation, which only brings something in line. I seek instead the best lever for maintaining a distinct stylistic space in which writing centers can construct and shift among their own identities.

The question to consider is how style functions to sustain the balance I envision. Some rhetorical theorists are borrowing from cultural studies theory in order to answer that question. For example, in Lynn Worsham's recent essay "Writing Against Writing" she draws upon Dick Hebdige's study Subculture: The Meaning of Style to argue that feminist theory is in danger of being appropriated (and emptied of its critical power) by certain factions of mainstream composition theory. If we bring her analysis to bear on my question for writing centers, we see that a new way of perceiving style must accompany a new way of perceiving writing centers, thereby preserving

their ability to move the field of composition ahead on the strength of their resistance to cooption by that very field.

How does style leverage against cooption? Worsham claims that "style communicates a 'refusal' of a way of life, a refusal that also affirms identity for a subordinate group" (85). In one sense, then, a distinct writing center style articulates a refusal of a particular way of managing writing instruction that encourages a "politics as usual" mentality. In another sense, our style affirms student identity and tutor identity through engaging in "unofficial" methodologies, "unorthodox" interpersonal dynamics, and "imperfect" discourse. In short, the stylistic space of the writing center subverts the institutionalization of writing at every opportunity.

For the moment, then, let us suspend our conventional perceptions of what can or should go on in the privacy of the tutoring session in order to draw out this notion of stylistic space. If nothing else, we know that the production of language occurs in tutoring. If, however, we focus on the "resistance discourse" we encounter in student writers, we might be able to define what I mean by writing center style. We are often not "receptive" to this discourse because our ears are tuned to the same classroom dynamics that demand conformity and discourage resistance. That is, in the classroom, regardless of efforts to fragment traditional dynamics (such as group work and peer critiques), students still feel the magnetic pull of conformity, a kind of "consensus terrorism" (Coupland 21) that leads to a false sense of community. In contrast, writing centers should create a space for students to talk about their writing outside of the classroom and the hearing of the teacher. Thus, unlike most classroom interaction, students and tutors may engage in a more palpable exchange, a combination of "consensual" and "resistance" discourse. Unfortunately, tutors are often trained to tolerate the "resistance discourse" and maneuver past it, rather than use it as leverage for gaining more ideas. In other words, tutors are trained, by the very machine that evokes the resistance, to suppress "resistance discourse" in favor of more "paper talk."

The question is how to balance the two discourses and produce some hybrid discourse that manifests the elements of a meaningful critical essay, or (with growing popularity) a thought-provoking e-mail response. In other words, we need to find a strategy that permits the resistance to find its way into the paper and that will benefit students who have difficulty making the connection between thinking and writing that is so crucial to forming concepts for a written essay. In their popular book Thinking On Paper V. A. Howard and J. H. Barton explain that one of the greatest obstacles "to writing improvement is our tendency to dwell on either the final results or the mental origins of writing to the exclusion of the activity of writing, as if an empty gap separated writing from thinking" (19). To narrow this perceived gap, Howard and Barton define writing as "a symbolic activity of meaning-making" (20). The important point to consider here is that writing

does not come after thought; rather, we write to find out what we think, we "use words to pursue our thoughts" (24). Thus, while much recent composition theory suggests that the distinction between thinking and writing is false, students do not shift so readily from writing that reflects empty thinking to thinking that pursues reflective writing. Their internal production of meaning seems different from their external experience of writing. In other words, they may have strong opinions about their topic; yet, they are unable to transfer the intensity of their thinking into writing. They simply do not see the connection, or they do not allow themselves to express in writing what they are thinking. To complicate matters, many teachers assign writing ("the symbolic activity of meaning-making") without understanding the student's dilemma with this artificial distinction. This problem is compounded, then, when writing centers operate out of the same misperception about meaning production, that is, that students understand the relation between writing and thinking. Thus, the irony is that writing centers end up duplicating rather than subverting the ideological and institutional failures of the "classroom."

The lesson to be drawn from this scenario is one which has been studied by cultural theorists, like Hebdige, and now applied by rhetorical theorists, like Worsham, to composition pedagogy. Essentially, by understanding more about subcultures and how style works to express opposition to dominant values that threaten to coopt our power, writing centers can at least maintain an edge with students which we heretofore have lost to the magnetic pull of the dominant discourse of the composition classroom. If characterized as a subculture with a distinctly different style, writing centers could challenge that scenario, though there are problems associated with maintaining that status. While Worsham explains that a radical subculture is "essentially [a] phenomen[on] of style, disrupting the dominant order of meanings by expressing forbidden content . . . in forbidden terms" (86), the potential threat, she warns, is that "every spectacular subculture is destined to be brought back in line, incorporated, and located within the dominant framework of meanings" (94). Writing centers face this threat as well in two significant areas that should be priority points of investigation, research, and testing. Without using this essay to begin such an examination (though I am clearly issuing a challenge to others in our field to do so), let me explain briefly why we should be concerned about research and testing issues.

It is not my aim to question the benefits of writing research, but rather, to question the *appropriation* of writing centers *for* research. When perceived as "research centers," writing centers are often subjected to research studies underwritten by questionable motivations. Though writing centers emerged as a result of the perceived need to give students more one-on-one instruction, compositionists soon realized that they offered a convenient "setting for inquiry." When Stephen North proposed that writing centers can provide teachers of mainstream students the same kind of help that Mina Shaughnessy

suggested for teachers of Basic Writers, the die was cast, and the trend (begun in the late 1970s) to turn writing centers into "research centers" produced more dissertations, books, and articles each year. This is not to say that the substance of these publications is of questionable benefit to the field, but that behind the scenes, there are graduate students, tenure-track professors, and publishing houses who all stand to gain something perhaps unrelated to the results of their research, not to mention the improved functioning of writing centers in general and the improved writing of students in particular. North's claim that writing centers provide for teachers "the same long-term definition of problems, the intense study of causes, [and] the same freedom to move outside of standard lore for ideas about how to proceed" (44) raises an interesting question. If writing centers provide teachers the "freedom to move outside of standard lore for ideas about how to proceed," how much "freedom" do they provide tutors to move outside of standard ways of tutoring if we continue to reinforce the standard tutoring protocols? Please don't misunderstand me. I am not questioning the value of writing center research, but the use of writing centers by some for the purpose of "selfinterested" research.

Another way writing centers become appropriated concerns the use of writing centers as testing and diagnostic centers or as settings for non-coursebased remedial independent study. For example, in my state, students who fail the writing or reading portion of the Texas Academic Skills Program (TASP) test are required under state law to take a remedial course prior to the completion of their first nine credit hours. Initially, Texas colleges and universities offered these courses in conventional classroom settings until it was discovered that it cost less to remediate through independent study in a learning center or writing center. Yet no effort was made by the state advisory council to determine the effect of classroom remediation versus non-coursebased remediation on test scores, nor were writing center administrators consulted before decisions were made at many of the institutions now remediating in this way. To make matters worse, many writing centers in Texas receive no additional funding to add these responsibilities to their existing functions, though students pay full tuition for a three-hour credit course. This is not necessarily true for all writing centers currently handling non-course-based remediation in Texas. But enough North Texas Writing Center Association members felt it was a problem that a resolution voicing our concerns was sent to the advisory council on TASP of the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. That council is now conducting an audit to survey how remediation is being conducted and how funds are being spent. In addition, it is working on the study that will begin to answer the question of the effectiveness of remediation in the classroom versus the writing center. As a subculture, then, writing centers stand precariously on the brink of cooption, and these two areas of concern, research and testing, remind us that it is a slippery brink.

The problem, as I see it, is how to resist cooption and the neutralization of our ability to self-determine the methods of our own effectiveness. In the section of her essay called "How to Take Out a Radical," Worsham calls upon Hebdige to explain how easily subcultures get neutralized. Hebdige claims that "subcultural styles, which begin as symbolic challenges to the dominant ideology, inevitably end by creating new conventions of meaning, new commodities, new industries or by renewing old ones. . . . What begins as a practice of resistance gets incorporated and ultimately trivialized as 'fashion'" (94). Hebdige identifies two ways that subcultures become the victim of appropriation, through commodification and domestication. In the commodity form, when "original innovations which signify 'subculture' are translated into commodities and made generally available, they become 'frozen'" (96). In other words, once removed from their subcultural context, the originality that signifies the subculture becomes "public property and profitable merchandise" (96). In writing center "history," we have seen similar cooption whereby certain "signs" of our original innovations have become drained of their significance, such as peer tutoring and social constructionism. The *domestication* form occurs when the subculture is seen as an ideological "Other" which threatens the existence of the dominant ideology. Hebdige describes two strategies that the dominant culture uses to deal with this ideological threat. It is not difficult to imagine the writing center as Other in this scenario. First, the Other can be "trivialized, naturalized, domesticated. Here, the difference is simply denied ('Otherness is reduced to sameness'). Second, the Other can be transformed into meaningless exotica, a 'pure object, a spectacle, a clown.' ... In this case, the difference is consigned to a place beyond analysis" (97). Hebdige's study shows, however, that the challenge to such appropriation is most often indirect. He observes that it is "expressed obliquely in style . . . that is, at the level of signs" (17). In other words, signs function as stylistic gestures of refusal, whether they are written on walls (graffiti) or carved on our bodies (tattoos, shaved heads that spell words, etc.). Thus, the style is a threat because it symbolizes people doing what they want to do.

The challenge we face as writing center educators in the thriving new "industry" of writing center associations, journals, and conferences is to protect the subculture from such incorporation, domestication, and, worse, neutralization of its power. What I am suggesting is that writing centers must actively construct and foster a style that signals a *Refusal*. Hebdige concludes that in the style of a subculture certain gestures of defiance "have some subversive value, even if, in the final analysis, they are . . . just the darker side of sets of regulations, just so much graffiti on a prison wall" (3). He goes on to say, however, that "graffiti can make fascinating reading" (3). As a conceptual metaphor, then, graffiti draws attention to the Refusal itself as both an expression of impotence and power. Norman Mailer calls graffiti:

"'Your presence on their Presence . . . hanging your alias on their scene'" (qtd in Hebdige 3).

To illustrate the power of graffiti, in July 1990, US News and World Report observed that when the Berlin wall was dismantled, "one of history's most bizarre works of art expropriated from another medium (political repression)" was gone (10). Graffiti writers "turned the Western face of the wall into a 15-foot-high, 102-mile-long frieze that exuberantly mocked the regimented society it enclosed. On its socialist side, the wall—prefab concrete ribbed with iron supports—remained puritanically white, except where temporarily flecked with blood" (10). If we extend this scenario and compare writing center graffiti with the Western side and assigned writing in the classroom with the socialist side, the analogy becomes frighteningly real: tutors often see papers returned to students permanently flecked with red ink. Lisa Lewis, a tutor in our center, put it like this: "Many times we offer a sounding board which the student writers use to hear their own ideas through someone else's ears. Sometimes, we are the wall that gets scribbled on in frustration." In short, graffiti can serve as a powerful sign for the resistance discourse that signals a refusal of the classroom and the dominant framework of meaning it represents.² A reminder is in order, however. The classroom, as a stylistic space with its own sets of resistance discourses, also harbors the latent signs of a refusal of the next highest order of dominant framework. This is the system we inhabit and within which our work to sustain the tension between two points of resistance will move the writing center field into its next phase of growth.

As I have already stressed, we must be amphibians—one foot on land, one foot in the water. The question, then, keeps surfacing. How should writing centers position themselves when they are situated as a function of both the dominating and dominated discourses? Because the writing center functions as the mediating force between the students and the potential hegemony of "programs" of writing, how is it possible to negotiate between style as subversive and the "official style" it tries to subvert? The answer is to create our own style as the sign of our own subculture. According to Hebdige, subcultures "negotiate a meaningful intermediate space somewhere between the parent culture and the dominant ideology: a space where an alternative identity could be discovered and expressed" (88). In my view, this means that we might help students more by encouraging an identity for writing centers that meets the criteria of a subculture and by fostering that identity as a style that simultaneously subverts and coheres with the dominant discourse. Graffiti, it just so happens, is only one of many possible signs of such an identity.

I am not, however, suggesting that tutors begin wearing safety pins in their noses. Nor am I advocating papers that look like graffiti art (though it's not a bad idea). In the spirit of the analogy, I am suggesting that writing

center pedagogy (i.e., the styles of tutoring and the kinds of discourse we encourage and discourage) should be theoretically subversive, if not practically different from classroom pedagogy—graffiti as rhetorical invention, if you will. It is not necessary to encourage students who write "Paul Revere was an alarmist" but to acknowledge the force behind something like, "When I hear the word gun, I reach for my culture," or "Join the Marines. Intervene in the country of your choice." With these kinds of statements, students are communicating something powerful, something problematic to them. Hebdige maintains that the "communication of a significant difference . . . is the 'point' behind the style of all spectacular subcultures" (102). In the words of one graffiti writer, "Graffiti helps you out You do it to get out of the atmosphere of the ghetto [read university], where everyone is desperate" (Gablik 37). In Robert Reisner's study of graffiti, he claims that "the person who feels helpless against . . . an oppressive moral code, and considers (herself) in no position to tilt against these windmills for fear of being crushed ... turns to wall writing instead of open attack" (5-6). One writer says "if there hadn't been graffiti, there would have been a lot more violence" (44).

As a radical sign, then, graffiti is perhaps not so far-fetched as it might seem. Practically, however, it may be difficult to envision the direct benefits of this functional analogy on writing center practice, so I'll mention just a few. First, graffiti serves as a sign for expressing anger without violence in assigned writing. If students discover that we encourage this kind of writing in the center, it may foster a trust in us that is difficult to obtain. Second, to encourage resistance discourse (graffiti) is to also encourage a type of play or bricolage, a "structured improvisation" (Hebdige 104). The tutors and students become "subcultural bricoleurs" engaging in what Umberto Eco calls "semiotic guerilla warfare" (qtd in Hebdige 105) and in what Andre Breton calls "an assault on the syntax of everyday life" (qtd in Hebdige 105). In essence, tutors act as bricoleurs by juxtaposing two apparently incompatible realities (i.e., classroom discourse and resistance discourse) (Hebdige 106). The writing center becomes, then, both a center for "reading" these "anarchic discourses" and a place for creating and sustaining such discourses.

Too often, however, resistance discourse is perceived by teachers and tutors as strident or angry. Today, student resistance is more often expressed in the guise of empty thinking or complacency. In their recent book, 13th GEN: Abort, Retry, Ignore, Fail?, Neil Howe and Bill Strauss suggest that young people today "yearn for something that can drain the swamps of endless ambiguity, for a rule-breaking style that works amidst the discussand-review postures of a legalistic, therapeutic, overcomplicated society" (124). For these students, ambivalence is second nature, a survival reflex. Speaking to the generation accused of creating the "age of apathy," Howe and Strauss respond: "Well, that motto, of course, has YOUR mindless graffiti splattered all over it" (128). Thus, whether we may think it is mindless or subversive, apathetic or radical, student discourse resists in order to

validate an identity and in response to the authorities that determine their social conditions: television news, parents, textbooks, teachers, and universities.

Tutors can negotiate with student resistance and writing centers can affirm resistance discourse through its own particular sign, whether it is graffiti or something else. In my center, we have recently issued our first newsletter entitled *Graffiti*. Produced primarily by the tutors, *Graffiti* is a stylistic refusal of conventional newsletters and mirrors the affect of the anarchic discourse that the tutors deal with each day. That is, the tutors, who are also students, turn their own resistance into short stories about students who resist coming to the center, or essays (like Lisa's) against the banking model of education. Hebdige calls such publications "an alternative critical space within the subculture itself [used] to counteract the hostile or at least ideologically inflected coverage" that the dominant culture often inflicts. In non-academic subcultures, Hebdige explains, these journals are called "fanzines" and are produced on a small scale as cheaply as possible, stapled together and distributed to a small number of people. The language is

determinedly "working class" (i.e., it was liberally peppered with swear words) and typing errors and grammatical mistakes, misspellings and jumbled pagination . . . left uncorrected in the final proof The overwhelming impression was one of urgency and immediacy, of a paper produced in indecent haste, of memos from the front line. (111)

Although we haven't mustered the courage to produce an issue with misspellings and typos (due to my "one foot on land" philosophy), we are experimenting with form and style and with ways to convey the latest news from the front line. We are also planning a project to paint eight large panels of graffiti that will hang in the hall of the center. Each panel will be painted like a pink brick wall; then we will paint the graffiti we have been collecting from students, tutors, faculty, and alumni on each panel. We plan, then, to hold a gallery opening reception and invite the university staff and students to drop in and write their own graffiti on a blank panel in the front foyer.

Admittedly, the potential effects of these stylistic gestures (graffiti, resistance discourse, and newsletters) on future writing center practices are speculative at this point. But of this, I am sure: we stand to be coopted if we opt not to stand with one foot on land and one foot in the water. Hebdige reminds us that "subcultures are therefore expressive forms but what they express is, in the last instance, a fundamental tension between those in power and those condemned to subordinate positions and second-class lives" (132). What we seek is, "in Sartre's words, to acknowledge the right of the subordinate class . . . to 'make something of what is made of (them)' . . ." (Hebdige 139). Writing centers need not give in to the temptation to align their identity with either the dominant culture of composition or the

dominated subculture. It is just as important to promote fluency and correctness in student writing as it is to encourage resistance discourse. My aim has been to show that our institutional responsibilities need not be incompatible with anarchic discourse. It is, after all, "the students" that constructs our identity as institutions and as teachers, not the other way around. For when they leave, what they become collectively beyond the university constitutes its identity today. One graffiti artist/writer suggests that "if you've got everybody collaborating on a mass scale, you can't be stopped. You can do anything, man. You can move mountains. If all the kids in this estate were piecing [drawing on walls], can you imagine what a beautiful place it would be?" (Reisner 65). Whether it's mass collaboration or the singular imagination of one student, we are all recipients of Nietzsche's legacy, captured for posterity in his modest appeal, "Pardon me, my friends, I have ventured to paint my happiness on the wall." In other words, whether students scrawl their name on some subway wall or their name appears on some Wall Street office directory, their power to name themselves is our power. "In the case of graffiti writers, their name is their destiny in shorthand, the organizing pattern of their lives" (Gablik 40). In the case of students, their education is our identity in shorthand, the organizing pattern of our destiny.3

Notes

¹For example, some of the most influential members in the field of composition conducted studies of writing centers and/or writing remediation for their dissertations. See Andrea Lunsford, "An Historical, Descriptive, and Evaluative Study of Remedial English in American Colleges and Universities," Diss. Ohio State University, 1977; Stephen North, "Writing Centers: A Sourcebook," Diss. State University of New York-Albany, 1979; and Sondra Perl, "Five Writers Writing: Case Studies of the Composing Processes of Unskilled Writers," Diss. New York University, 1978. For an excellent source of numerous early research-based publications on writing centers, see Gary Olson's select bibliography.

²I want to thank Chris Atwood and Lisa Lewis, both former undergraduate tutors in the UTA Writing Center, for their invaluable contributions to this paper. I also want to thank Margaret Morrision, my predecessor, whose style set the tone for my own resistance and whose emphasis on play has remained the touchstone of our writing center.

³An abbreviated version of this essay was presented at the 1993 South Central Writing Centers Association Conference in Stillwater, Oklahoma.

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