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**Review of Marc Bousquet, Tony Scott, and Leo Parascondola's (Eds.)  
Tenured Bosses and Disposable Teachers: Writing Instruction in  
the Managed University. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 2004.**

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The field of rhetoric and composition, a specialty within the field of English studies, occupies a unique position within the academic market. While tenure stream jobs in many fields are on the decline due to increased reliance on part-time and flexible labor, employability of rhetoric and composition Ph.D.s remains quite strong. While this trend could be construed as a positive signal, *Tenured Bosses and Disposable Teachers* demonstrates how this field actually “appears to exemplify the sad ideal of labor relations in the managed university” (4). In particular, the disciplinary and professional development of rhet-comp deserves especial scrutiny since it coincides with the conversion of composition teaching almost entirely to a system of flexible labor. Furthermore, those hired to tenure-track positions in rhet-comp often administer writing programs and manage labor. Thus, “the ‘professionalization’ of the field has gained [professional freedoms and protections] only for management” (4). This collection, then, “explores the nature, extent, and economics of the managed-labor problem in composition” (5). The focus of this study may look quite narrow to those who are not a part of literary studies, but as Marc Bousquet succinctly puts it in his introduction, “If rhet-comp is the canary in the mine for the academy more generally, what it tells us is that the professional jobs of the future are jobs for an increasingly managerial faculty” (4). Accordingly, *Tenured Bosses* addresses larger concerns about professionalism, disciplinarity, and labor in the managed university. In so doing, this collection raises questions about the extent to which individuals (and even disciplines) should embrace the bureaucratic mindset of business management; it looks historically and reflexively at the development of rhet-comp as a field within larger educational and social structures; and it brings to light the labor problems occluded in a field whose successes may be seen as fostering such practices (or at least not fully acknowledging them). Such a sobering look into this field by these essayists raises difficult questions about the role of writing instruction and its relationship to the field of composition itself. These questions, however, will also lead readers to re-examine the critical practices of their own disciplines and to situate these practices within an understanding of how historical and

material conditions have shaped their disciplines and continue to shape them within the managed university.

The collection is divided into four parts, and it begins with “Disciplinary and Capitalist Ideology,” which focuses on historicizing the development and professionalization of rhet-comp, thus leading to critiques of how rhet-comp sees itself but also offering possible solutions that may arise from such critical reevaluation. In particular, this section analyzes the material and ideological conditions that have contributed to the particular position within the managed university that rhet-comp now occupies. Whether they address the corporate models of universities, the effects of privatization of education, or the dominance of free market ideology and flexible capitalism, all of these essays are careful to situate the professionalization of rhet-comp as a field within these ideological and material conditions. Donna Strickland, for example, examines composition studies’ managerial unconscious—which conflates teaching and administration—and argues that such a critique may help create an alliance between composition specialists and composition teachers. Bousquet, who sees the necessity for “the organized voice and collective action of composition labor” (12), similarly interrogates the managerial subjectivity within composition studies, concluding that professionals and managers will have to learn institutional critique from their workers. Noting the discrepancy between the professionalization of composition studies and its front-line teachers, Richard Ohmann argues for the necessity of literacy workers “to unionize and to ally with other groups of university workers” (44). David B. Downing’s critique of disciplinarity and its hierarchical role further emphasizes how disciplinarity has led to “the crippling and devaluing of some of our most crucial concrete labor practices” (61), while Paul Lauter’s essay views the teaching of composition within a free market ideology but also cites how free market ideology has led to success neither in the academic nor corporate world. Together these essays recognize the incongruence between the professional gains for composition studies and the declining labor conditions for those who do the vast majority of composition teaching. This section also underscores the idea that a crucial first step toward collective action among literacy workers is acknowledging rather than ignoring the extent to which disciplinary and professional status can be complicit with managerial practices of the corporate university.

Part Two, “Putting Labor First,” further explores the gap between those who manage composition labor and theorize about its practices and those who actually teach composition. Bill Hendricks contends that composition theory and practice have greatly ignored labor and unions and proposes how greater involvement in organized labor can benefit composition teachers. The actual effects of what happens when the effective teaching of composition—the labor of composition—becomes divorced from the aims of management is explored in two essays, one by Eric Marshall and the other by William H. Thelin and Leann Bertoncini. Marshall’s narrative of his work in composition labor for eleven years within the CUNY system provides a firsthand account of how “composition remains a primary site of managerial opportunism and labor exploitation” (116). His essay closes with the admonition for part- and full-timers to be educated about exploitative conditions so that they can mobilize around and ameliorate those conditions. Thelin and Bertoncini’s essay, “When Critical Pedagogy Becomes Bad Teaching: Blunders in Adjunct Review,” examines how the working conditions of faculty can undermine critical pedagogy. As they conclude, “The plight of adjuncts, then, is not only

an egregious demonstration of exploited labor; it is a labor situation that threatens progress in the field of composition” (142). This unit thus further illuminates the discrepancy between managers and teachers of composition and shows how composition as a field (and a course) may look quite different when we put labor first. Thus, these essays also encourage us to recognize our conditions for what they are, so that faculty will be led to organize for change.

Part of the solution lies in collective action among faculty, but Eileen E. Schell, Ruth Kiefson, and Steve Parks also articulate a wider perspective of collective action. Schell traces opportunities for collective action from the local campus, through the municipality and the state, to national and finally international coalitions. Such coalition building, Schell maintains, will help break down the divisions between types of faculty and between academic and other workers, thus creating a “rhetoric of common cause” (109). Similarly, Kiefson places the exploitation of adjuncts into a larger social and political context and also asks for more solidarity among full- and part-time faculty, students, and fellow workers. Parks uses the specific example of a writing program that can “serve both a social and pedagogical goal” by emphasizing “collective effort” (125). Again, the result of such effort is a “recognition of our collective identity with . . . fellow laborers” (129). This cluster of essays, then, foregrounds the problem of labor for composition studies. Only by exposing the blindness of theory and practice to the reality of labor will faculty recognize the imperatives of changing this situation, and this change can be brought about by coalition building and collective identity.

The essays in “Critiques of Managerialism” tackle head-on the business-management logic within composition studies that is particularly exemplified by calls for embracing the managerial perspective and for bureaucratic acceptance of the financial limitations of educational institutions. Tony Scott sees this management model as a “significant shift” in composition’s “disciplinary identity,” a move away from a “focus on progressive, innovative pedagogy, and our identification with the needs of students” (163). To foreground this identity, as well as the labor conditions within composition, Scott calls for research that fosters a historical disciplinary understanding that recognizes “the material conditions and economic dynamics within which postsecondary literacy instruction is typically situated” (161). William Vaughn’s account of his stint as an adjunct administrator shows how the “failure of administration in the managed university is also an invitation to organize another sort of university altogether” (169). Thus, administrative roles can be used as a means to “collaborate with and radicalize one’s peers” (165) rather than just to manage them efficiently. Amanda Godley and Jennifer Seibel Trainor examine how two campuses dealt with the possibility of outsourcing their basic-writing courses to community colleges. Their findings reveal the complications of embracing a critical pragmatism that is limited by the hierarchy of the university and the difficulties inherent in establishing a second-tier instructorate. Christopher Carter similarly contends that teacher-scholars should “resist urges toward bureaucratic role perception” but also that “we should expose the cultural and economic machinery that perpetuates the myth that bureaucratic selfhood is inevitable” (187) because such attitudes within composition administration foster “systems of inequitable labor” (188). Walter Jacobsohn likewise argues against the logic of bureaucratic acceptance of the inevitability of any system and endorses the need for collective action. Finally, Katherine V. Wills uses the notion of “psychic income” to examine critically myths about

contingent labor and to outline the need for organizers “to diminish the psychic value of mental labor to contingent faculty” (206). This section resoundingly rejects the managerial logic of composition theory by closely scrutinizing its claims and questioning the positive nature of the results it bears.

Many of the essays in the first three sections highlight the split between composition theory and management, practiced by full-time tenure track Ph.D.s, and the labor-intensive teaching of composition, which is performed primarily by flexible labor. The final section, “Pedagogy and Possibility,” builds on an understanding of this situation as well as upon the knowledge of how the disciplinary identity of composition is tied to the discourses of the managed university. Therefore, it outlines teaching practices that evolve from such realizations about the historical and material conditions of composition as a field and a course. Leo Parascondola, for example, examines how the business and education alliance that has developed affects writing instruction—particularly how “write-to-learn” rhetoric intersects with “write-to-earn” management discourses. For Parascondola, the cultural logic of capitalism that informs universities requires a “managerial logic” that “replicate[s] the kinds of vertical organization models” (215) found in business. In such a model, “pedagogy built upon critical reflection and inquiry . . . has metamorphosed into a search for knowledge circumscribed by the search for profits” (218)—a point emphasized by Thelin and Bertoni’s essay in Part Two. Ray Watkins provides “a historical account of the place of business and professional writing in the curriculum of English departments” in order “to explain [the] intellectual neglect of professional writing as pedagogy and as an academic literate practice” (220). Watkins wants to deconstruct the hierarchical binary between the two different epistemologies (objectivist and formalist aesthetic) within English departments, so that students can benefit from knowledge of both codes. In “The Righting of Writing,” Robin Truth Goodman critiques the value of self-expression in writing, exposing the ideological assumptions behind this model that can be linked to consumerist logic. She calls for a renewed emphasis on critical pedagogy that takes into account how “the macro-organization of college composition and academic labor [is] caught in the same ideological structure as the rhetoric of composition pedagogy” (237) and thus allows students to challenge corporate neoliberalism. Donald Lazere similarly questions the expressivist, therapeutic concept of composition writing, but he also stresses how critical pedagogy can and should be brought back into the classroom. He emphasizes, though—as do Parascondola and Thelin and Bertoni—that this mode of teaching depends on its practitioners having security in employment. Rather than embracing the professional, managerial identity of composition, Christopher Ferry calls for composition to return to “its reformist roots” (246) that valued being a teaching subject and discipline by recognizing its “complicity . . . in maintaining an institutional culture that assigns little value, and even less dignity, to teaching work” (249). By viewing pedagogical practices through these larger institutional and disciplinary discourses, these authors continue the focus on pedagogy in composition studies, but by situating their various foci historically and materially they provide examples of reflective and informed practices that also take into account the problem of managed labor.

*Tenured Bosses and Disposable Teachers* closes with an afterword by Gary Rhoades, whose influential *Managed Professionals: Unionized Faculty and Restructuring Academic Labor* provides part of the overall frame of this collection and

informs many of the individual selections. Since Rhoades is outside of the field of composition, his perspectives on how these essays address literacy education, professionalization, and collective action are especially thought-provoking and insightful. Moreover, the inclusion of Rhoades at the end of this volume also signals the wider readership that can benefit from the book. To be sure, for those within the field of rhetoric and composition—both those teaching composition (the “disposable teachers”) and those who contribute to the research of composition and who manage those teaching composition (the “tenured bosses”)—this collection offers a necessary critical examination of how composition theory and practice can either be co-opted by or resist a managerial logic that systematizes inequitable labor practices. Yet this book also offers important models of how different disciplines can benefit from a similar scrutiny. The field of rhet-comp may indeed show us what the future will be like in the managed university—thus, its problems and solutions may become important for a much larger group of education workers. Furthermore, these essays also highlight the need for all academics to consider the historical, ideological, and material conditions that have contributed to their own professional and disciplinary identities. Also, *Tenured Bosses* provides stark warnings about how those in tenure-line positions need to be aware of how their own critical theories and methodologies may be used to stimulate collective action or twisted to further enable exploitative practices. Finally, these essays provide hope by deconstructing the supposed inevitability of current conditions and by envisioning the changes that can be wrought by collective action.