

**Building and Reflecting,  
Constructing and Questioning:  
The Legacy of Praxis in *Works and Days***

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It is worth searching for, analyzing and criticizing the various forms in which the concept of unity of theory and practice has been presented in the history of ideas, since it appears without doubt that every conception of the world and every philosophy has been concerned with this problem.—Antonio Gramsci

In the spring of 1979, the first volume of *Works and Days* was published, featuring a discourse between five prominent scholars and artists that took place during a 1978 symposium held at S.U.N.Y. Buffalo. Up for debate in this discussion: what is the relationship, and what ought to be the relationship, between the arts and the university? The interlocutors (Robert Buck, John Cage, Robert Creeley, Merce Cunningham, and Morton Feldman) discuss everything from personal experiences in education to the role of public art to the limited nature of academic freedom. In the course of this discussion, a central question begins to emerge: what is the role of the scholar in the production of knowledge, education, and the public?

In the spring of 2016, public activist Naomi Klein spoke at the University of Nevada, Reno's "Forum on Excellence," discussing her new book, *This Changes Everything*, and the pressing need for society to alter its path towards catastrophic climate change. In response to her work, fourteen prominent scholars from across the United States gathered to engage Klein's ideas. Up for debate in this discussion: what is the role of the rhetorical scholar in combating social and environmental issues? It was this 2016 gathering of scholars from across the fields of rhetoric, composition, and communication that inspired this closing volume of *Works and Days*. While the theme may have narrowed, the scholars may have grown in number, and the context

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may have expanded since the 1978 symposium, it is both fitting and appropriate that the first and last edition of this journal began in largely the same place: a room full of thoughtful and motivated scholars debating what it means *to be* a scholar.

“The University and the Arts” symposium of 1978 set the stage for what would become several decades worth of work in the journal, crafting themes that have endured all the way through to the 2016 gathering, “Capitalism, Climate, and Public Discourse: The Limits and Possibilities of Rhetorical Intervention.” The exploration of what it means to produce knowledge, teach, and serve the public tie together to unpack what the editors suggest in the first edition will be the goal of the journal (following its namesake from *Hesiod*): “to emphasize the social and historical consequences and responsibilities of the actions of human individuals” (i). This focus on action and individuals, on what we do and why and how, permeates the journal, and over time sheds layers of abstraction, growing more tangible as the publication passes through the social and public turns of scholarly work. A key theme in this progress has been praxis, which lies at the heart of scholarly life and its potential. Following *Works and Days* on this journey, I will trace the evolution of praxis from the opening to the closing symposium of the journal, as well as through all of the rich history and scholarship that lies in between.

Praxis is what allows us to transcend boundaries, to blur the distinction between the university and the public, to allow the scholar to function as intermediary between the two, and in doing so, push back against the limits of institutionalized knowledge and learning. While praxis has been theorized from many different angles, the authors of *Works and Days* often define the word in relation to action taken on the part of the individual in order to further their work in and amongst the social, historical, political, or pedagogical realms. With this understanding comes a central theme relating to praxis throughout *Works and Days*: rather than imagining praxis as a concept in tension with or defined in opposition to theory, one is merely the extension of the other. This is brought up for discussion very clearly (and very early) by Margaret Randall in the spring 1980 edition of the journal:

Struggles have come and gone over whether art should embody socialist realism or whether it can be abstract, or is it going to be this or is it going to be that. All of these questionings have basically ended in the realization that art must be all of it. False dichotomies simply

shouldn't be set up. Basically, the idea that if art is going to be revolutionary means first and foremost that it must be good, of good quality and increasingly better quality as time goes on. (3)

Theory and praxis, art and its articulations, form and function, are inseparable in terms of how we do our work and why. Praxis, acting on what we know and believe about the world as we experience and theorize it, is but one aspect of the complex and interwoven fabric of our ideas, theories, motivations, pedagogies, and actions.

### 1979-1993: Setting the Stage

You can teach certain anatomical ideas but for a dancer learning is not through instruction or education but by experience.—Merce Cunningham

In its early stages, praxis is often merely a topic up for discussion, rather than an integral part of academic work appearing in its pages. Jay Robinson, writing in the spring 1986 journal, offers an explanation for why this was the case at the time. Reflecting on his own training in literary criticism, he suggests that “Literature could serve as a criticism of life, and criticism could be used to make it so serve, but only if it was a distanced, disinterested criticism; literary texts could bear no direct connection to life as lived. There was no room for praxis in such a criticism, nor in the kinds of reading it sought to promote; action upon the course could only contaminate” (19). Robinson’s sentiments align with what, at the time, was a shifting state of purpose in academic work and English departments more specifically. When *Works and Days* began, the locus of scholarship was still embedded within the walls of the academy, and institutional training was only just beginning to consider the importance of the social. With the rise of rhetoric and cultural studies, scholars started turning their attention to taking the next step towards acting on the rich tradition of theorizing that was foundational to the field. In this way, the theories of how praxis could work into scholarship was still new—an idea that was starting to be embraced and discussed, if not practiced to its fullest possible extent.

In the early years of the journal, authors begin to question the legitimacy of keeping action separate from theory, particularly since this distinction is something that scholars often attribute to institutional forces. Margaret Randall (1980) suggests that the theory/praxis dichotomy is “imposed by government and ideologies that consider art as a thing separate from life or separate from society” (3), while

Brian Caraher (1986) later adds that “the technical elaboration and mechanical reproduction of discourse has disenfranchised its purported agents and radically transformed its purposes and objects” (10). The desire to tend towards action is present in the beginning, even if scholars are still working through the institutional structures that manage their time and efforts. Seeing these emerging tensions between the university and the role of the individual scholar, in the spring of 1985 a special issue of *Works and Days* was created. According to life-long editor David Downing, this edition was designed to “explore from several perspectives the growing concern within the profession to transform the act of literary criticism into a more politically self-conscious cultural criticism” (7). This project is both essential to Downing’s own work as a respected scholar (and member of the “Rhetoric and Institutional Critiques” panel at the 2016 symposium), and to the field more generally, as it works to understand its history and expand the possibilities of the future. Embracing the movement of cultural studies working its way into the fabric of multiple disciplines across the university, this special issue asked authors to envision what a shift in focus would mean for scholarship, work in the academy, and the role of those working within a university setting.

In her response “Going Farther: Literary Theory and the Passage to Cultural Criticism,” Ellen Rooney explains how textuality can be seen as moving beyond theory, claiming that her “own theoretical practice aims in part to disrupt the stubborn opposition between theory and practice, which, despite numerous critiques, has been persistently re-inscribed in the discourse of literary studies” (51). Here, Rooney situates the role of the individual in the larger institution as key in breaking through the praxis/theory dichotomy through her work, even when its aim is textual analysis. The work of the scholar is the embodiment of both theory and praxis. This notion is echoed by David Shumway in the same special edition when he describes the work of major thinkers such as Fredric Jameson, Jacques Derrida, and Michel Foucault. “Intellectuals such as these,” he argues, “embody at the level of scholarship the fusion of theory and practice” (88-89). For Shumway, embodying both theory and practice happens when scholars go beyond explanation and into interpretation, showing how texts reflect a certain ideology connected to a certain time (a history, a discourse, a culture). In response to Downing’s question, then, it would seem that the challenge to take the *act* of criticism to

a more *self-aware* politics is a step towards making one's own praxis more explicit, which resonates for some scholars at the level of method, for others at the level of their pedagogy.

In the opening debate in *Works and Days*, the scholars entertain the idea of how to best train and teach students in the arts, a theme that is of central importance throughout the entire history of the publication. Merce Cunningham describes the phenomenon of learning to dance, arguing that "you can't teach dancing" (70). Dancing, like any other physical act, has to be experienced, experimented with, practiced. Teaching, in this view, is not about imparting knowledge from one individual to another, but rather is about allowing a student to experience working in that artistic medium. For Robert Buck, there is a link to be made here between experience and making art public, of going out into the real world. Without that kind of exposure or practice, Feldman suggests we merely "have 5,000 ministers who have no feeling for God quoting Kierkegaard. We've got half a million dentists with no feeling for mouths" (75). Concerns over what we should be teaching and how we should be teaching it get back to this central tension between what kind of learning can happen in what spaces. If learning can only be imagined as taking place at the university, if it has nowhere else to go, what have we really accomplished in the end, other than convincing like-minded individuals that we are right? Surely, our ability to act, and to make tangible change, involves seeking real life and diverse applications of our work.

The scholars in the late 1980s and early 1990s lay the foundation for imagining themselves as actors, with an individual and essential praxis, that stands in opposition to the false dichotomies imposed by the institutions they serve. While the embodied work of the scholar is discussed largely in the theoretical realm early on, praxis is often taken up when scholars are discussing their pedagogies. This serves to link their role as individual scholars back to the institution via an outlet that they control: student learning and knowledge production. Both the Fall 1990 special edition on *Theory and Pedagogy* and the spring 1991 edition that follows up on its work open the doors for scholars to consider the ways that their classrooms act as spaces of cultural circulation. While the journal's commitment to action remains clear, Paul Bové opens the Fall 1990 journal by suggesting that there is still "truth to the charge that 'high academics' do not give much attention to the daily matters that involve most teachers of English classes" (11). He suggests that there is an academic realm that remains

hidden from everyday action and use: academic theory for its own sake, without intention to be used in the pedagogical lives of those who have a powerful influence in shaping lives. In making this claim, Bové reaffirms the exigence of the special issue: the classroom is a space that invites scholars to make the erasure of the theory/praxis dichotomy a real possibility, and to consider the multiple roles that they play in doing so.

In his opening remarks about the spring 1991 edition of the journal, editor David Downing discusses the need to contest normative cultural and social narratives that “have often prevented rather than fostered democratic and collective social relations” (7). Responding to this, Don J. Kraemer agrees that a problem of the classroom is that it tends to re-inscribe distorted social relations. Kraemer suggests that the idea of “change” is at the complicated center of praxis: “Although the point is not only to understand these distorted relations but to change them, I have also tried to demonstrate that working at understanding this distortion does change it—and in unpredictable and occasionally hopeful ways” (26). In similar fashion to Shumway’s earlier commentary, learning about and naming social distortion in classroom settings and otherwise—in other words, doing the scholarly work of theorizing—leads to actual change. One cannot operate without the other, and the classroom becomes a space in which theory becomes praxis through the very experience of learning. When we can name issues in social relations, we can change them. When we ask our students to name these issues through learning about them, we ask them to go beyond the limitations of institutional knowledge and imagine what the real-world consequences of such decisions might be. Work like Kraemer’s and others represents the first step in a more realized version of praxis: re-envisioning our work as having real world consequences and sharing that work with students sets the stage for intervention.

#### **1994-2000: Embracing the Social**

If the university and the arts are not compatible, then I think that it would be a good idea for them to become compatible.—John Cage

If we fast-forward a decade later to a time when the full force of the social turn was in effect (Berlin; Bruffee), the flavor of the discussion surrounding praxis takes a more concrete turn towards considering the scholar as activist, rather than the scholar contem-

plating praxis through pedagogy alone. As Carol Becker suggests, historically this was “a time when many feel that much of the collective work of the sixties, seventies, and eighties—to rid society of conformism and prejudice, to introduce progressive legislation into labor, to change the way in which people are educated and the content of their education—is being eroded daily” (385). During this time, campus politics were shifting to a focus on identity politics, local issues, and the individual (Levine and Cureton). On trend with the needs of students, many in the field began to adjust pedagogies to account for this new focus.

From the beginning, and increasingly over time, *Works and Days* puts a great deal of focus on the individual scholar working to balance responsibilities to their disciplines, students, scholarship, publics, and selves. The individual scholar is situated as the locus of change and possibility, the central agent of acting against the systems that would compel us to act passively in ways that reify the power structures already in place. In the original symposium, Morton Feldman suggests that this progressive role is largely forfeited in exchange for the safety of the academy, others suggest that there is room for the individual to align the needs of the university with the needs of artists and the public (interestingly, Cunningham lists Feldman as an example of one who has successfully accomplished this). To a degree, Robert Buck finds that the creative and institutional roles are inseparable: “One is always in revolt in the creative arts, and the revolt is reflected on the campus as well” (74). From the campus protests of the 1970s surrounding civil rights and war to modern campus riots about race relations and immigration, it would seem that Buck’s sentiment has held true. Whatever the individual chooses to do in his or her work ultimately finds its way into the cultural fabric of the institution, even though the mechanisms that enable that transition might be complicated or easily critiqued.

There are a great number of institutional pressures that make the role of the scholar difficult, and as writings within the publication shows, there is no one right way to navigate overlapping institutional, social, and political commitments. While the debate in the first edition tends towards skepticism in believing that the scholar and activist can coexist in the individual, over time this shifts towards an enthusiastic embrace of the possibilities of this role. Indeed, embracing the role that the rhetorician plays in addressing political issues like climate change is the rallying point around which the 2016 scholars gathered



in Reno to discuss. From presenting individual projects, pedagogies, or experiences to discussing the contributions that other scholars have made towards these ends, the role of the individual scholar is one of the core themes of the journal as it evolves over time.

While scholars were working through what it means to align their various scholarly commitments, a social and technological revolution was taking place that would change everything, including the trajectory of *Works and Days*: the Internet. The digital shift in composition practices presented a variety of new challenges for those working in the field: What will digital space mean for the nature of writing? Will the social dimension of composition shift given the removed nature of digital communication? Can our pedagogies adjust for a brand new medium? In the Spring/Fall 1994 edition of the journal, editors David Downing and James Sosnoski implement a sharp turn in the direction of the journal in "As the Culture Turns: Postmodern *Works and Days*." They point out that while social and historical consequences of actions will remain important, a reframing is necessary:

Our work now needs to be linked to the lives of citizens of the world because our discourse is often part of world-wide conversations that make up the cultures we inhabit. As the threads of our conversations intersect with others, they weave the fabric out of which cultures are made. From this perspective, our work is nothing less than the practice of everyday culture. (9)

This theoretical shift is joined by a visual shift in the journal as well. In a major departure from the previous editions of the journal (and from most scholarly journal formats), the new *Works and Days* implements features consistent with postmodern rejection of master narratives in exchange for localized, individual stories involving scholarly work. Therefore, each piece in the 1994 edition is paired with a picture of the scholar as well as informal information about who they are and where they are coming from in their orientation to scholarship and life more broadly. While some of the visual changes did not persist within the pages of the journal, they speak to the nature of the journal to embrace change, experiment, and publish scholarship in interesting and unique new mediums which speak to the needs of scholarship in the moment.

In line with the arguments of the day that composing is a socially mediated process, background images of maps and thematic arrows make a visual statement about the interconnectedness of physical space and being, literally weaving together stories from various schol-



ars with the work of others. The editors suggest that this move is to encourage a “person-oriented, rather than text-oriented” (19) focus that pushes the role of the scholars in an even more personal direction than the scholarship that came before it in *Works and Days*. The visual cue of the journal puts to end any discussion or doubt that the role of the individual scholar is front and center to the ideology of the journal. Downing and Sosnoski reject the impersonal and detached scholarship of the past in exchange for more engaged, decentralized, and connected work—work that destabilizes traditions of power and hierarchy produced in traditional formal publication spaces. In addition to re-imagining the role of the individual in this new series, this new stage of *Works and Days* also reimagines its relationship to knowledge, “changing from a disciplinary mode of research to produce *knowledge* to a post-disciplinary mode to produce *understanding*” (23). This move recognizes the limits of institutional knowledge because it sometimes lacks applicability to individual lived experience beyond the academy. In this way, this second stage of the journal goes a step further than the one before it. In the opening years of the journal, scholars question the presumption that their work need only take place in the realm of the theoretical, and the forces of praxis begin to take shape. In the new, postmodern *Works and Days*, there is a deliberate and physical shift in how knowledge is produced and for what purpose.

This major shift can be sensed most directly in two special editions of the journal in the mid 1990s: the Spring/Fall 1995 special edition, *CyberSpaces: Pedagogy and Performance on the Electronic Frontier*, and the Spring/Fall 1996 special edition, *Cultural Studies and Composition: Conversations in Honor of James Berlin*. In the 1995 edition, each central piece is followed by “discussions” which are published digital conversations (largely conducted via email) of different interlocutors discussing topics back and forth. In many ways, this edition of the journal seems like a throwback to the original symposium published in the first edition of *Works and Days*, updated for the digital moment from which it emerges. In his article “Unstable Conditions: Dynamics of Dissent in Electronic Discursive Communities,” David S. Hogsette picks up Kraemer’s discussion of working with classrooms as contested spaces, but does so for a digital age. Amongst a discussion of rhetoric, coding, and linguistics, Hogsette suggests that networks of dissent can serve as a tool for students to engage in “socio-political discursive negotiation” (75). Hogsette’s work both reinforces themes

emerging from previous journals concerning the role of the scholar in helping students imagine the power of their own praxis, along with offering specific tools to help them do so.

A scholar who undoubtedly guided conversations of this moment was James Berlin, who became the inspiration for a special edition published after his sudden passing in 1994. That same year, Berlin had written the forward to a collection edited by David Downing entitled *Changing Classroom Practices*, a book dedicated to new directions for teachers grappling with the same cultural shift that scholars publishing in *Works and Days* were working through. The 1996 special edition *Cultural Studies and Composition: Conversations in Honor of James Berlin*, (1,500 copies of which sold out in the first two days of the College Composition and Communication Conference that spring) became not only a place for colleagues and friends to celebrate his memory, but also a place to continue these conversations. Writing in the special edition, Joanne Addison relates praxis to her pedagogy, but further explores the possibilities rather than exposing the limitations as in Robinson's definition: "Suggesting political activism as a pedagogical method is what this is all about—connecting our teaching to our theoretical concerns and political commitments in ways that model the praxis available to our students and helping them to understand the ways in which they can transform the world through meanings they give it" (194). Here, there is a full commitment to praxis as a means of connecting the social, political, and academic.

Addison's article explores the ways that work as an instructor, scholar, and activist comes together to define individual praxis for herself and for her students. Much like Hogsette, Addison takes a step in the direction of praxis by weaving together theories about the self and identity of herself as a teacher with the practice of helping students developing a motivation for social action. "In order for students to develop an impetus for theorizing their own lives as well as to see writing as social action," she argues, "our own praxis must be evident in our classrooms" (198). In this way, Addison locates a way to blend the theory and practice discussed in earlier journal editions in the material practices of the classroom, offering assignments that help students develop an "impetus" for creating their own praxis oriented towards social change. Not only can theory and praxis exist in the same space, but they must: forfeiting the responsibility to make one's own praxis clear jeopardizes the potential that students have to do the same.

Taken together, these examples illustrate key shifts in *Works and Days* during the 90s and early 2000s. First, there is a much stronger push to consider the role of the scholar as absolutely central in creating social change, both as scholars and as individuals in the larger social fabric. Second, there is a stronger sense of interdisciplinary work included in the journal, even if there is still a strong thread and connection to English and writing scholarship. Finally, the new *Works and Days* redraws the epistemological boundaries towards understanding, and a grounding of knowledge in concrete social and political narratives and practices. While all of these new directions move the journal closer towards its goal of examining social and historical consequences of individual actions, it largely still does so from the standpoint of the university. In the last ten years of the journal, this focus grows again to account for work outside of the university.

### 2000-2018: Going Public

Literally people work, and I dare say day and night, in a context which they understand very little indeed.—  
Robert Creeley

In the beginning of “The University and the Arts: A Symposium,” the participating scholars go back and forth between whether or not art and the university can coexist. The ideas range from an insistence that the radicalism required of art can never coexist with institutions to the practical concern that without institutional structures, art could not exist in the first place. Robert Buck and Robert Creeley make the leap from the university to the public, suggesting that at least one feature of this issue that we might be able to solve involves making works of art public. Here, there is a sharp distinction drawn between what happens within the university and beyond the university, as well as a sharp critique that those working in the university have not been able to bridge this gap. As Creeley suggests, the problem is that failure to do so leads to a disconnect between the knowledge that we produce as scholars and the contexts in which this knowledge should ultimately be useful.

While these scholars were questioning this role in the late 1970s, they anticipated what would be labeled as the public turn of the early 2000s (Mortensen; Mathieu; Hauser; Farmer). Writing in their 2010 collection *The Public Work of Rhetoric: Citizen Scholars and Civic Engagement*, Ackerman and Coogan confirm that the public has always been an important aspect of our field:

Then and now, the measure of rhetoric's responsibility to and involvement in public and political life has always been a question of distance. How close do we get to political discourse when it is consumed with violence? How close do we get when solutions to social injustice transcend the limits of scholarly discourse and criticism? How close do we get when the interlocutor is our neighbor, and that neighbor is in trouble? (3)

The 1979 debate, as well as the material constructed around it by the editors, in many ways anticipates or imagines the importance of our turn to public concerns, a trajectory which can be traced through the journal from its first to its final issue. One of the most important factors in ensuring the relationship between the university and the public remains intact is the individual scholar, the tethering force around which many of these debates emerge in the pages of *Works and Days*.

In the 90s, the editors of *Works and Days* made decisions that aligned the work of the journal with the larger postmodern trend towards the social by embracing personal narratives, discussing specific strategies for bringing praxis to life, and examining how scholarship could embrace the political. After the turn of the century, the journal expanded again to incorporate a more robust engagement with life outside of the university. While the university and the public is a theme that informs the journal from the outset, the last twenty years of the journal have witnessed many scholars bringing their theory and work from the academy to projects, interactions, and public works. If a hallmark of the first decade of journals involved re-theorizing the boundaries of individual scholarship, and the second iteration involved incorporating that work into pedagogy, the third was indicative of a broad trend wherein scholars brought a new sense of praxis with them beyond the boundaries of the university.

In 2001, *Works and Days* ran a special issue edited by Sosnoski and Carter on the Virtual Harlem Project that would later be re-edited by Sosnoski et al. into the book *Configuring History: Teaching the Harlem Renaissance through Virtual Reality Cityscapes*, published in 2006. The thread of emergent technologies and the role they play in pedagogy and public outreach is carried over from the postmodern era of the journal, yet there is a distinct turn towards project based special editions in the editions following the turn of the century. The special edition on Virtual Harlem and the promise of virtual reality as an educational tool was followed by special editions about radical exchanges of the 1960s, the information university, and the politics of

computer gaming, to name a few. While these editions still reference the digital realities of composition and learning, the papers examine these topics with a wider scope towards institutional critique.

In the 2003 special edition, *Information University: Rise of the Education Management Organization*, the journal turns to one of its central foci: institutional reproduction and labor. Like the Virtual Harlem special edition, the four essays by Marc Bousquet and responses to his work would be revised and expanded for Bousquet's landmark text *How the University Works* in 2008. The journal begins with a call from Cary Nelson that "Resistance is not Futile," and suggests that we are at a critical point in considering our roles in the institution: "We will need to theorize our institutions and reflect on our practices more tenaciously than we have done before and to take up activism on many fronts. We will need to expand the notion of an academic community and define new subject positions for faculty and students within it" (18). While previous editions examined the role that our personal subjectivities can play in activism, this edition expands that scope once more. A piece from Christopher Carter asks us to consider our students as organic intellectuals following Gramsci, while Randy Martin starts with the central question, "And just what are the uses of the university?" (301). While the journal has a history of over twenty years, tensions are similar to those that emerge from the initial debate concerning what our roles are in the university, and where the limits of institutional knowledge leave us as scholars and students, though the content and context of these tensions have shifted shape.

Over the years, the focus on action and praxis grow to be commonplaces of the journal and evolve into fully articulated (and often public) projects concerning human interventions that were first only theorized when the journal began in 1979. In the 2008–2009 edition, *Academic Freedom and Intellectual Activism in the Post-9/11 University*, there is a strong focus on what actions scholars should take to respond to the constraints of a new world of security and regulation. Given its focus on the highly visible academic freedom cases of Ward Churchill and Norman Finkelstein, as well as discussion of academic freedom from many prolific intellectuals (Noam Chomsky, Cornel West, and Gayatri Spivak among them), this volume drew a good deal of public attention. In addition to an interview in *InsideHigherEd*, Stanley Fish reviewed the volume for the *New York Times* online, where he mentioned it again after David Downing and Edward Carvalho re-edited it into the 2010 book, *Academic Freedom in the Post-9/11 Era*. Summa-

rizing an important aspect of the volume, Robert F. Barsky mentions the exigent need to combine theory and practice: “My objective is to set out some of the sources that feed into the current atmosphere and at the end of this essay to offer some tactics that can be employed to combat it from inside university classrooms” (97). This need for action is echoed almost a decade later in two special editions co-published with the online journal, *Cultural Logic: Marxist Theory and Practice: Education as Revolution* (2013) and *Scholactivism: Reflections on Transforming Praxis in and beyond the Classroom* (2016–17). The later volume on Scholactivism is explicitly about praxis and its articulations and it breaks the theory/practice divide with every article, poem, and piece contained within its pages.

At this stage, praxis becomes a form of pedagogical modeling of how to be a political actor, to be a force towards “making a difference” in the real world. From the early nineties forward, scholars published not only on how we can combine theory and praxis, but also on how *they did* combine these elements in the same work abounds. In 2016-17, Joseph G. Ramsey defined praxis outright in the special double volume on *Schol-Activism* (Scholar activism), claiming that “praxis is thought-inspired action—based upon action-informed thought—which leaves both the world and the agent working upon it different than they were before” (10). This new form of praxis, one that involves a process of thinking and doing in society as well as in the academy, has become the end point of the evolution of praxis as it has developed in the journal. Ramsey begins with the provocative statement, “Change the world through praxis, yes! But how? By what means, from what vantage point, upon what terrain, using which tools, towards what end?” (9). In this statement, Ramsey effectively summarizes what the conversation regarding praxis has been over the multiple decades of *Works and Days*, showing how far the journal has come. The reflections on what it means to be an activist, how praxis can challenge the neoliberal university, and how we might consider overlapping subject positions in our roles as educators are all key in the life of a scholar—the debate about whether or not praxis is important has made the transition from *if* to *how*.

The themes emerging in the journal from 2010 forward were largely reflected in the 2016 symposium on “Capitalism, Climate, and Public Discourse,” as well as in this final edition of the journal. In addressing questions regarding the role of the rhetorical scholar in the climate change debate, scholars were arranged in four panels:

Rhetoric, Science, and Public Deliberation; Publics, Counterpublics, and Social Activism; Rhetoric and Institutional Critiques; and Rhetoric and Political Economy. The importance of publics, the role of scholar as activist, the need for interdisciplinary problem solving, and the complicated role of institutions all played a major role in the discussion that took place during the symposium. In many ways, this symposium was the expression of decades worth of debate (from *Works and Days* and beyond) about the role of scholars, contextualized within the current moment. The symposium participants addressed pressing needs of our time: a world of increasingly volatile political discourse, a new trend of “alternate facts,” language that polarizes and inhibits action, and the impending fear that we can never go back from the way we are engaging with the environment. While the context changed from the 1979 symposium, the need to address what we should do, how, and why, has not. Our relationship to praxis and how it shapes our role in negotiating these major concerns has evolved, but the need to carefully consider how we shape our words and actions has endured as a central focus.

#### **Conclusion: New Roles, New Directions**

As far as I'm concerned, academic freedom is the freedom to be academic, and not much more.—Morton Feldman

In the seminal debate in *Works and Days*, Morton Feldman suggests that academic freedom is nothing more than the freedom to be academic. In the 35 years of its operation, the scholars, editors, and contributors of *Works and Days* have been pushing back against that idea, imagining ways that scholarship can surpass the boundaries of the academy. The decades long history of the journal stands as a testament to how a powerful idea within a community can take root, work itself out through multiple tensions, and ultimately produce action and progress. The pages of the journal represent the duality between the power of thematic cohesion and the imperative of a constantly changing and dynamic world, a reality that remains always exigent given our roles, our relationship to the institutions (both public and private) that we circulate within, and the knowledge and understandings of the world that we help create daily. The scholarly life of the journal shows that tensions can be overcome with growth, that deliberation can show strength, that powerful and everyday ac-



tions based in theory—praxis—can sustain our work across time and context.

These issues are complicated, and fifty years from now, it is likely that the next generations of engaged scholars will be gathering together and considering what our emerging problems will require of us. And so we ask ourselves, what major problems are likely to mark that next chapter of work in the fields that matter to the readers and writers of *Works and Days*? While much of this paper has examined this publication as it has anticipated, written within, and explored the major epochs of academic studies since its inception, identifying these trends is always easier to do in hindsight. In his book *After the Public Turn: Composition, Counterpublics, and the Citizen Bricoleur*, Frank Farmer cautions that in composition (and indeed, in scholarship more generally), our work is too complicated to adhere to a perfectly linear history:

While our discipline advances as a result of the many turns it makes, composition studies remains too varied and too complex for any one turn to supplant or govern all others. Rather, in the busy intersection that is composition, a number of turns are being made, executed in a more or less orderly fashion but not always with the knowledge of where exactly our turns may be taking us” (2)

As the history of *Works and Days* shows, we tend to circle back to ideas, to return to the same questions brought forth and made new by exigencies and contexts. What matters in the end is that we remain flexible and ready to take up our projects in their new and emergent contexts, remaining aware of our past while preparing for our future.

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