Book Review

Metaphors That Move Us in the Right Direction

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Wilkes, Lydia, Lillian W. Mina, and Patti Poblete, eds. *Toward More Sustainable Metaphors of Writing Program Administration.* Utah State UP, 2023.

The metaphors we use to help ourselves and others better understand WPA work at a given time provide a snapshot of WPA life at the time. For example, the metaphors in Diana George's 1999 edited collection *Kitchen Cooks, Plate twirlers, and Troubadours: Writing Program Administrators Tell Their Stories* drew attention to the difficult and often invisible labors of WPA work: heavy workloads, lofty expectations, and complicated intellectual, physical, and relational demands. Over the past few years, WPAs and faculty have responded to uncertainty, precarity, danger, and bigotry, including pandemics, mass shootings, sexual violence, and attacks on BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ communities, reproductive rights, and our curriculums, we have (understandably) in our scholarship and in conversations with one another compared our roles to those of first responders, therapists, firefighters, and people at war to name a few (Adams Wooten, Babb, Costello, and Navickas; Clinnin; Bishop). However, as Lydia Wilkes, Lilian W. Mina, and Patti Poblete's recent edited collection *Toward More Sustainable Metaphors of Writing Program Administration* illustrates, some of the metaphors we have used to describe our work, high-alert metaphors in particular, may not be sustainable or healthy long term.

The collection is divided into three parts: "Organic Relationships," "Institutional Landscapes," and "Performance Crafts." It begins with a preface and introduction from the editors and a foreword from Susan Miller-Cochran and concludes with an afterword by Doug Hesse. Each section consists of several chapters that cover an extensive range of topics, from quantum physics to artisanal making.

In the introduction, the editors effectively tie the chapters together by emphasizing the evolving and contextual nature of WPA work and the importance of sustainability in our changing academic landscapes. But more importantly, the introduction models for the readers sustainable ways of moving forward in the field together through the amplification of diverse voices and solidarity with labor. They acknowledge problematic histories, particularly evidenced through their footnotes and acknowledgement of

critiques of "sustainability" shared by Seth Kahn in his 2015 CWPA plenary address, recognizing the need to push back against the idea of "sustainable" when it means upholding the status quo and exploitative practices in many institutions.

Section I: Organic Relationships focuses on the interconnectedness of WPA work—the ways in which WPAs are inextricably linked to the people in their programs, department, and institution, as well as to the larger WPA community and the field. The chapters in this section encourage WPAs to be mindful of these connections as a way to consider how to situate themselves in the complex and diverse roles that WPAs occupy and how to make these positions sustainable. The book starts with a call for WPAs to "nurture sparks of equity and justice" and the first chapter, "From Putting Out Fires to Managing Fires: Lessons for WPAs from Indigenous Fire Managers," by Lydia Wilkes does just that. It sets the tone for the collection. In her piece, she shares a rich counternarrative to existing WPA fire metaphors, moving us from settler-colonist narratives of the firefighter, to Indigenous understandings about land caretaking and being a fire manager.

The other three chapters in the section build on the idea of interconnectedness Wilkes posits in Chapter 1. The chapter that follows, "Seeing the Forest and the Trees: A Rhizomatic Metaphor for Writing Program Administration," by Jacob Babb, captures this idea best when he says, "WPA Work is most sustainable when we are mindful of our connections to those we work with and for—to see the roots that are often invisible in our daily work" (37). Babb focuses on five case studies of WPAs, focusing on "the kinds of relationships they found most important to their work" (40) and offers useful ways for WPAs to consider their work and their relationships to others on their campus, including undergraduate students, and the ways WPAs make connections professionally outside of their institutions. Babb reminds WPAs that while improvement is important, nurturing the relationships that sustain us and help us grow is just as important. Andrew Hollinger & Manny Piña's chapter, "Light and the Quantum Physics of WPA Work," fascinatingly compares WPA work to light, challenging classical ways of understanding WPA work and embracing that WPA work is emergent and diverse. Rounding out the first section, Ryan J. Dippre's chapter, "Grounding WPA Work: A Phenomenology of Program Development as a Liminal WPA," also centers the local and contextualized needs of a program and the people that make up the program. He argues that it was grounding himself in the contextualized data of interviews, observations, and needs of those who are a part of his program that allowed him to make decisions, especially since he started his WPA work in an already successful writing program.

Section II: Institutional Landscapes continues the thread of interconnectedness, expanding on the necessity for WPAs to map their institutional contexts and advocate for their programs, the people within it, and themselves because as Katherine Daily O'Meara points out in her chapter, "Learning, Representing, and Endorsing the Landscape: WPA as Cartographer," "WPAs are frequently called upon to represent and advocate for the ever-changing landscape of their writing program and its position in the larger university" (97). In the first two chapters of this section, the authors share replicable methods for mapping and decision-making. O'Meara encourages WPAs to use mapmaking as a way to make visible all the work they and those in their writing programs do, and John Belk, in his chapter, "The WPA as Labor Activist" calls on WPAs to consider adopting a metaphorical framework that prioritizes "radical collectivity, anti-exploitation, and diversity" as a decision-making heuristic for WPAs (83). Then, Christy I. Wenger's "Approaching WPA Labor with Ahimsa: Mapping Emotional Geographies through Sustainable Leadership" builds on Belk's heuristic by also taking into account emotional well-being in the decision making process, invoking the metaphor of *ahimsa*, or "nonviolent, mindful consideration for oneself and for others" (123) as a way for WPAs to practice mindfulness and work towards "increased emotional well-being" (125)—in other words, a way for us to care for ourselves, as well as those in our writing programs. In the chapter that follows, Alexis Teagarden's "Representing the Basement" puts into practice Wenger's metaphor and provides a refreshing look at the common metaphor of our field and programs as located in the basement as she demonstrates new possibilities for such a location metaphor by considering fantasy literature and engineering approaches to basements. Finally, Cynthia D. Mwenja's chapter, "Interlocking Circles," brings the section back to considerations of interconnectedness through restorative practice since WPAs "are well positioned to engage in dialogue to nurture ideals of inclusivity and egalitarianism within the interlocking circles of stakeholders" (159).

Section III: Performance Crafts considers performance metaphors for WPA work recognizing the chaotic, unscripted, and surprise moments we may encounter in WPA work. The chapters demonstrate the ways metaphors can work for us, while also urging us to be aware of the impact and potential risks certain metaphors can evoke. The authors employ metaphors that compare WPA work to artisanal production, building a plane while flying it, and improv. Robyn Tasaka's framing of WPA as artisanal in her chapter, "The Affordances and Risks of Artisanal Production as a Metaphor for Writing Program Administration," sustainably values quality over efficiency. Rona Kaufman and Scott Rogers emphasize the improvisational

nature of WPA work in their chapter, "'Building the Plane as We Fly It': Revising Our Thinking about Our First-Year Experience Program," noting that the "unfinished airplane captures the dynamic, protean nature of writing programs" (200). In the final chapter of the section, "I'm Just Playin': Directing Writing Programs as Improv," Kim Gunter highlights the kairotic moments of WPA work and emphasizes that like improv, WPA work is "marked by rules, and it is negotiation of these rules that result in virtuoso performances" (217).

Since the book was "composed, reviewed, and revised prior to summer 2020" vii), as the editors are quick to note, there are ongoing, emerging, and important events not explicitly responded to in the text, such as the senseless murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and other people of color, and the pandemic as well as the recent calls to action in the field for inclusion, representation, and equity. Of course, this is not a critique or the fault of the editors or the authors but instead the reality of the relative sluggishness of book publishing; we mention it only because we find ourselves wondering about how the authors might have incorporated these issues into their chapters if only the book's development had come just a little later (as Doug Hesse did in the afterword) and wishing that we could be privy to those insights.

Perhaps our favorite result of reading this text was a reminder of something we recall thinking the first time we read George's text: WPAs are typically masterful rhetoricians, interesting people, and compelling storytellers. The chapters are well written and well organized with tones that often seem to mirror conversations among engaging, experienced colleagues rather than the overreliance on jargon-laden displays of bravado and expertise so frequently encountered on college campuses. The inclusions of humorous and surprising moments throughout the chapters add a sense of personality and levity, making the text enjoyable to read, from Dippre's "I have joked that I 'earned' that award the same way that Reagan 'won' the Cold War: after others" (77) to Babb's "We may never attain the Zen-like status of Bob Ross's 'happy little trees'" (47). Further, we found ourselves thinking about how we might arrange the readings throughout the semester in a WPA graduate seminar; for instance, Hollinger and Piña's chapter would make a wonderful first week reading, we imagined assigning Wilkes' chapter mid semester, and Gunter's chapter could make a great reading near the end of the semester. In sum, Wilkes, Mina, and Poblete's edited collection did exactly what it set out to do. It has us considering and re-considering how we view, frame, and discuss WPA work. Even more importantly, their book comes at a kairotic time when WPAs are no longer interested in

finding out how to manage the status quo but are instead looking to reject it entirely, asking ourselves, *how do we do this work in sustainable ways*?

Works Cited

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