Nancy Welch and Tony Scott, eds. *Composition in the Age of Austerity.* Logan: Utah State UP, 2016. 240pp.

If you work at a university in the U.S., you will have noticed the jargon of austerity trickling down. Maybe people are using mission statement terminology in their spoken discourse. Maybe you've noticed institutional insistence on the word "success," as though the word itself conveyed the ingredients for enacting its meaning. Or perhaps you yourself are spearheading a collaborative assessment project to improve teaching and learning at your institution. Whether on the horizon of your concerns, or as its conscious instrument, if you are involved in teaching or administering college-level composition, neoliberalism is on the scene and you have a part to play in navigating its managerial influence on writing programs. Because literacy is a lynchpin of students' chances in college, and writing courses constitute a large chunk of universities' core requirements, composition bears the weight of a great number of administrative initiatives. It therefore enacts and is subject to encroaching logics of economic efficiency, which increasingly govern the contemporary university. As Nancy Welch and Tony Scott, authors of *Composition in the Age of Austerity* suggest, composition serves as a "canary in the coalmine for a wide-scale restructuring of higher education as a whole" (5). Through the economic imperative that we all do more with less, the engines of educational reform demand streamlining, standardization, quantifiable results, and at the college-level, more contingent labor. Yet despite the wholesale incursion of such imperatives, the collection argues, composition has yet to develop an economic consciousness adequate to confront the impacts of neoliberalism upon the field.

The question for composition professionals is how to proceed in the context of austerity: what to affirm and what to resist in this transforming landscape? Should we refuse to participate in any project requiring the hiring of yet another adjunct? Should we boycott all assessment projects and course redesigns on the grounds of their complicity with encroaching neoliberal processes? The analysis offered in *Composition in the Age of Austerity* declines to offer such potentially absurd specifics, placing more emphasis upon coming to terms with what has happened.

Coming to terms with what has happened remains an urgent concern. Its urgency comes from the fact that we have found through experience that we are vulnerable to conning ourselves, and the language of neoliberalism is especially capable of helping us do so. Couched in the lingo of equal opportunity and generating its own rationalities of consent, neoliberal logics have taken hold in writing programs, partly through the desire of composition professionals to act as agents of equality. In touting composition as a pathway to the middle class, as a "ladder of opportunity," we perpetuate a self-serving myth, namely that literacy at the college level substantively answers the structural inequality that conditions students' advantages well before they enter college. Ann Larson's chapter in the collection, "Composition's

Dead," makes a related point, describing composition's familiar narrative of marginalization in the academy as having been co-opted by "relatively privileged composition scholars" who harnessed "popular anger against labor exploitation" and applied it to the field of composition as a whole. Though there is some justice in the narrative of composition's marginalization, its framing as "disciplinary discrimination" diverted attention from advancing adjunctification, which has created actual marginalization within composition's ranks.

Neoliberalism can be hard to see because it naturalizes itself. Neoliberalism and the cure it offers for its own harms, namely austerity, persuades us through intuitive coercion. As Margaret Thatcher famously asserted, There Is No Alternative. It is therefore particularly fitting that the collection touches upon incarceration. In "Austerity Behind Bars: The 'Cost' of Prison College Programs," Tobi Jacobi not only describes the logic of economic triage whittling away at prison education, (the same logic which eventually also came for publicly funded schools) but she also registers the role of recidivism, the lack of prison education programs, and the devastation of incarceration itself as a conditioning force in the landscape of austerity and neoliberalism. As Jacobi suggests, the punitive assumptions of just desserts go hand in hand with government retrenchment and perceived scarcity of resources, which by a logic of triage, justify the lack of publicly funded prison education programs. The argument suggests that "ideological regression in approaches to punishment" promotes the "sociopolitical austerity" that is rapidly reshaping higher education (108). Yet even though prison programs were the first to be cut under austerity's logic of triage, the prison education programs that have persisted have done so on the fumes of advocacy--there was no profit to be had, no shareholder to answer to, and so perhaps these programs provide a clue for the rest of us (111). Rather than grasping at discourses of triage, arguing for composition's instrumental payoff, the field would do well to reject the idea that There Is No Alternative.

If the most persuasive, specific avenues for action in the book include unionizing (Larson) and the defense of education as a public good (Welch; Scott), Jeanne Gunner's chapter, "What Happens When Ideological Narratives Lose their Force?" articulates the most unconventional possibilities. Positioning itself on the vanguard of resistance studies, Gunner's chapter asks us to take seriously the possibilities for an impure, complicit, unconscious, transhuman, non-verbal, non-ideological activist rhetoric. The chapter begins by surveying widespread demoralization, conveying the sense that we have critiqued and resisted the "hegemonic austerity narrative" and we have mostly lost all the battles, to the point that "Critique becomes gestural, and epideictic rhetoric that does not materially move. As ideological narratives lose their force academic Capital further diminishes, and the disciplinary power of rhetoric itself is called into question" (153). Within the hegemony of neoliberalism, traditional rhetorical processes of persuasion and consent have been weighted in favor of the status quo. Yet

all hope is not lost. According to Gunner, consent with hegemony "can take a creatively disruptive form of complicity, and indirectly consenting to comply with an austerity agenda might open up space for change" (154). For instance, Gunner points out, post-human, digital explorations happen to align with the needs of corporate America's managerial reimagining of literacy as managing information flows (155). Yet against the assumptions of ideological critique, Gunner suggests that resisting the current regime does not necessarily require exiting it and attacking it. Rather, being complicit with the corporate university, and by implication, being willing to work within the system, can generate possibilities for disruption. Gunner describes such non-ideological resistance as working within the capillaries of a system. Capillary resistance could well involve guerilla elements, but they are not unified. Such a resistance doesn't even necessarily know what it's doing. It functions as a cancer on the system.

To be clear, Gunner's argument does not exclude ideological critique or stepping outside of the status quo in order to attack it. Ideological critique remains an important means of resistance. Rather, she makes the point that ideological critique insists upon unnecessary purism. If neoliberalism is changing the university so that it operates more like an efficiency driven corporation, the purist wants us to get out of that model and stay out. But Gunner seems to say, we are better off stepping outside in order to attack the university's corporate modes some of the time, while pursuing capillary action from within some of the time as well.

If readers wonder, why should we care about resistance which takes the form of capillary action, if the thing we're interested in here is resistance that doesn't necessarily know what it's doing? Isn't activism according to such a scheme equivalent to giving political speeches from inside a bomb shelter on the surface of the moon and expecting people on the earth to do something about what's been said? Maybe so. Yet Gunner's point is not about rhetorical potency. She simply seems to be pointing out another avenue for hope. In that sense, Gunner's chapter is about feelings. And it's about doing something in the name of resistance without necessarily knowing the result.

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Bridget T. Chalk. *Modernism and Mobility. The Passport and Cosmopolitan Experience.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. 240p.

Bridget T. Chalk's *Modernism and Mobility: The Passport and Cosmopolitan Experience* is a study of modernist writers on the move, travelling as members of the international republic of letters yet having to negotiate the movement restrictions of the new international passport regime that emerged during the First World War. For Chalk, what is at stake in this conflict between