

From the Editor: Embodiment and the Women's March

As so often happens, patterns emerge where they aren't sought. Across the contributions in this issue, themes of embodiment appear dominant, though I wouldn't have said so when working on individual pieces with authors. Articles address composing in and across multiple languages, including signed languages; grammar pedagogy as embodied simulation; experiential teaching and its effects on teachers; student identity and experience in the context of collaboration; celebrations of student writing and voice; emotion community membership among sorority sisters; and eating varieties of falafel. The included course designs, too, are populated with bodies that move between school and community, that are gendered and contested, that participate in classroom gamification.

I'm writing this at a moment when embodiment and identity are sources of open-ended grief, worry, and fear; when attitudes toward the most vulnerable among us have inspired calls for both sanctuary and resistance. While print journals can seldom keep up with cultural and political change, I use this space to say that *Composition Studies* is eager to receive submissions that address lived realities of Trump's America, especially as these realities bear on teaching, learning, researching, writing, and languaging.

Like many of you, my focus and productivity have been strained by the panic-inducing news cycle. Politics won't go into the background—whether listening to the radio, talking to family, driving to work, sleeping, or writing this editorial, there's no reprieve. So, letting politics in the foreground, I displace the usual editorial preface to offer some impressions of attending the women's march in Washington D.C. on January 21, 2017. At 9:30 p.m. on Friday, January 20, I was one of 174 people packed into three buses en route from Cincinnati, Ohio, to D.C. We traveled ten hours in a bus equipped with minimal legroom and a bathroom reserved for emergencies only, as if to underscore the urgency of getting there and being counted.

I'd put the median age of riders on my bus around 55. Sporting homemade pink hats, Hillary buttons, feminist t-shirts, and sensible shoes, these women were tough as hell. When we returned to Cincinnati, I watched one woman hobble down the aisle and slowly descend the bus steps. Turning back to her friend, she matter-of-factly announced that her hip was dead. Her t-shirt read "Nasty woman!"

Trump's sexist, racist rhetoric has awakened a sleeping giant. Millions of self-proclaimed nasty women (and their partners) and pussy power advocates around the world, spanning all identity categories, are building coalitions,

putting boots on the ground, giving money to endangered causes, and living out the truth that social change efforts are never complete. At the march I saw potent signs of hope and collective power, with the fissures between white women and women of color in full view. The humor and creativity of women’s resistance made me feel less despondent and made me laugh, the kind of laughter that hovers on the edge of mourning.

That joy-grief response was largely inspired by the subversive humor everywhere on display at the march. Upon arrival, we came across a woman dressed as a vagina performing the universal sign for cunnilingus (see fig. 1).



Fig. 1. Upon arriving at the Women’s March.

Her friend’s sign, “Don’t clutch your pearls, grab your pussy!” #Vagilante,” encouraged a refusal of feminine modesty and restraint.

The appropriation of pussy—word, image, and feline variety—was ubiquitous at the march. Mixing feline and nature references, for instance, one sign featuring a tabby cat and an image of earth read “Save Mother Earth’s Pussy” (see fig. 2).



Fig. 2. Save Mother Earth's Pussy.

Punning from Trump's adolescent braggadocio caught on tape (does any sexually experienced person really believe you can *grab* a pussy?), protesters depicted felines with claws and fangs prepared to pounce. One woman wore a walking billboard in the form of a litter box, complete with turds and a litter scoop dangling from the box (see fig. 3). Each turd represented the cabinet of curiosities Trump was assembling.

Social protest is a kind of art making, and there was no shortage on display at the women's march. As my friends and I wandered through different areas, we nearly entangled ourselves in generously sized bras hanging from trees, appreciated the simplicity and right-on quality of signs like "Vaginas: where you're really from," and saw more than one sign featuring lyrics from Beyoncé's *Lemonade*, including "Boy bye" and "Ok ladies now let's get in formation." We saw dark humor mixed with intelligent messaging and pop culture-inspired barbs. Feminist activists have a long tradition of recognizing the power of outrageousness and humor to animate an issue for a broad swath of people (think Lesbian Avengers, Guerrilla Girls, Karen Finley, Sarah Maple, or punk band Bikini Kill).

Meanwhile, as my friends and I walked to a lunch spot after the march, we watched as a sedan tore down the street. A middle-aged white woman hung out the passenger side window, middle finger in the air as she shouted,

“Yeah, baby, Trump’s president! Fuck you!” Her target: two women in their 60s holding a banner that read “Act like a president.”



Fig. 3. Trump’s cabinet members in the form of cat turds.

There’s much more to say beyond the obvious obliteration of civic discourse captured in that exchange. More, too, on the feebleness of sound ethical rhetoric and reasoned argumentation, both of which are daily on the losing end of policy and tweet-storms. In this environment, what constitutes a kairotic response? What is the responsibility of writing teachers and scholars? To what principles of language and action are we accountable? How can our work serve a greater good? And how can or should “we” (understanding this pronoun as an assumption I am making) address the personal toll of political and cultural anxiety as it invades our work and our work lives?

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