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ABSTRACT

Writing has always been connected to technology. Following the formation of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC), cultural studies flourished in writing and communications classrooms because of activities related to the nexus between rhetoric and composition, communication theory, emergent technological mediums and cultural politics. The idea that the rise of cultural studies is inextricably connected to rhetoric and composition studies comes directly from praxis: the composition classroom. For as every teacher knows, writing cannot be divorced from culture. According to Robert Connors, beginning in the 1940s, a "communications" movement in general education forged a relationship between Speech and English scholars, helping them to recognize that there was a rhetorical tradition. General categories of study in popular culture--magazines, comic books, film, radio and television--had been discussed at CCCC since the early 1950s. Barriss Mills' ground-breaking article "Writing as Process" (1953) emphasized the use of mass media as a vehicle for stimulus and response, particularly through "propaganda analysis." Further, he acknowledged C. Merton Babcock's notion that the communication process was governed by specific speech communities and by a total socio-cultural context. The trends in the teaching of mass communications and popular arts in composition and communications departments during the 1950s all indicate a shift in teaching methods and research areas that were to take hold in the following decades. (Contains 18 references.) (TB)

Rhetoric, Composition and Cultures of Technology

Writing has always been connected to technology. This notion is self-evident in the evolution of the ink well to the ball point cartridge, the stylus to the printing press, or the manual typewriter to the PC terminal. Rhetoric also has a long historical connection to technology, a point that Walter Ong stresses when describing the Sophists as "the first media buffs" (viii), who "technologized" public communication through the art and technique of orality (4). Similarly, technology has contributed to the rise of cultural studies in the academy in a number of ways; for example, to borrow a notion from Elizabeth Larsen, by increasing the number of people who can participate in the production of knowledge (4). And just as the technical procedures for reproducing works of art have accelerated with intensity since the age of mechanical reproduction (Benjamin 220), so too do changes in human sense perception mediate encounters between the political unconscious and a rapid proliferation of master tropes that create narratives of subjectivity. For example, one need only think of how, increasingly, we compose our multicultural identities by reflecting on a repertoire of verbal, print, sonic and visual texts.

Susan Miller maintains that while new technologies do change processes of writing and teaching over time, "to describe these. . . processes as a comprehensive theory of textual production. . . raises intellectual problems" (107). Nevertheless, I would like to place technology at the center of a mid-twentieth-century story that theorizes production, not necessarily of texts, but of disciplinarity. In so doing, I will argue that following the formation of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC), cultural studies flourished in writing and communications classrooms because of activities related to the nexus between rhetoric and composition, communication theory, emergent technological mediums and cultural politics.

The idea that the rise of cultural studies is inextricably connected to rhetoric and composition studies comes directly from praxis: the composition classroom. For as

every teacher of composition knows, writing can not be divorced from culture. Likewise, practitioners and researchers who work in rhetoric, composition and cultural studies often recognize how we have shared marginal status in the recent evolution of English. Struggles within these emerging disciplines reflect what I call "techno rhetoric," a recursive postmodern process involving the (re)creation of language, subjectivity or cultural memory with the aid of advanced reproduction technologies. For each self-identified "specialist" operates as a sub-particle—necessary for creating a collective image of a whole culture—by mediating all the discursive technologies connected to (re)producing her own identity. In other words, whether "writing teacher" or "cultural theorist," she struggles to construct and circulate meta-languages, master figures and genre-specific images through understanding and mediating computer terminals, electronic archives, audio signals and the like.

Just as Richard Ohmann calls technology a social process, saturated with power relations, "continually reshaped according to some people's intentions" (1987: 221), I mean to read "techno rhetoric" as a expansive metaphor for social interactions that create, manage and influence cultural meaning. For technological processes confront culture in differential ways, "serving as areas of interaction among classes, races and other groups of unequal power" (Ohmann 221).

In the United States, oppressed peoples have long formed political and cultural alliances in order to focus on, and disseminate power-knowledge directed at influencing or changing the status quo. Likewise, intellectual and pedagogical reform movements in education have coincided with the creation of professional organizations since the dawn of the modern university. The emergence of the subject of "English" itself occupied a position of "culpability" during the 1880s and 1890s in what Arthur Applebee describes as "part of one battle between the 'ancient' and the 'modern' subjects for control of the college preparatory curriculum" (ix), a schism that prompted the first meeting of the Modern Language Association (MLA), held at Columbia University on December 27,

1883, in a classroom. In the evolution of the modern English department, the "traditional literary canon" would replace the classics as the tyrannical center, and the teaching of literature would vie with rhetoric in prominence on the hierarchal ladder. So when 4C's formed in the late 1940s, "composition studies" (a term Robert Connors claims to have coined) was already engaged in a pedagogical struggle for the survival-of-the-fittest.

According to Connors, beginning in the 1940s, a "Communications" movement in general education forged a relationship between Speech and English scholars, helping them to recognize that there *was* a rhetorical tradition (xiv). In February of 1947, about two hundred members of the National Council of English Teachers (NCTE) and the Speech Association of America met at an informal conference held in Chicago to discuss the shared interests of both groups, primarily the teaching of reading, writing, and speech to first-year college students. A permanent organization (CCCC) came into being following the November 1949 NCTE Convention at Buffalo, and the Conference was authorized to elect its own officers and to publish its own magazine, a quarterly, *College Composition and Communication* (*CCC*) (Gerber 17). Despite the founding of the organization, debates still current in our discipline—rhetoric vs. poetics, literary studies vs. writing, the dominant vs. the marginalized, us vs. them—continued to roam the pages of the major NCTE journals, *CCC*, *College English* (*CE*), and *The English Journal* (*EJ*). Yet also at this time, the pages of these same journals suggested a future disciplinary alliance was forming, for they show a rise in the interest of cultural studies in both the composition and communications classrooms, and in allied work places such as the language laboratory. When The Popular Culture Association was founded out of Bowling Green State University in 1969, academic "radicals" had been challenging the existing order of English departments for more than two decades, questioning educational results of a curriculum in the humanities rooted in that idea of culture (Ohmann 1987: 206).

General categories of study in popular culture—magazines, comic books, film, radio and television—had been discussed at 4C's meetings beginning in the early 1950s; first-year composition teachers, as well as speech and communications teachers, brought the "discipline" to their classrooms around the same time. Articles recommending that students use radio, music, movies and magazines as writing and communications texts began to skyrocket. By 1950, "Audio-Visual Aids" was a standard feature in the topical index of most NCTE journals, and the use of audio-visual aids became an explosive pedagogical practice and wide-spread research topic. Teaching practices within the composition and communications classroom also began to parallel article recommendations. Reading and writing laboratories that came into being at several colleges and universities emphasized technologies such as the tachistoscope (called by its folk name, the "speed reading machine"), and audio visual aids—film strips, moving pictures and animated cartoons—in instructional practices. As reproduction technologies, both at the instructional and research levels, entered writing and speech departments in significant ways, debates about the appropriateness of these trends surfaced.

Barriss Mills articulated several concerns in "'Communication' vs. 'Composition'," a 1952 article that appeared in *Education*. Confronting perennial struggles in our discipline, Mills did not entirely break with other practitioners, researchers, and scholars who were calling for a split between the "composition" and the "speech" (or "communications") course. Yet nevertheless he argued that mass media and communications studies should remain in the composition classroom. Indeed, he called for an "integrated" course in which the study of journalism, the movies, advertising, television and propaganda analysis might lead to effective writing. Mills' ground-breaking article that appeared during the next year, "Writing as Process," outlined several ideas that would have a profound effect on cultural studies within the rhetoric and composition discipline: the appropriateness of "colloquialisms" relative to purpose; the use of mass media as a vehicle for stimulus and response, particularly through

"propaganda analysis," and the need for individualized instruction and laboratory methods. Mills' article acknowledged the influence of theorists like C. Merton Babcock, who defined the communications process as governed both by specific speech communities, and by a total socio-cultural context; this theory of "living language"—a social configuration for the purposes of communicating ideas—emphasized cultural differences and the varied demands of society. Finally, in his seminal article on writing as process, Mills defined culture as fluid and complex, thereby grafting a social dimension to the concept of purpose, a dimension that not only evolved in later process theories, but which remains dominant today in the strand of rhetoric and composition studies that merges categories of study, methodology, and practice with cultural studies.

Meanwhile, urging the study of "daily life," "culture," and "civilization," numerous articles published during the 1950s surrounded a "lived experience" model of teaching writing and communications that emphasized the social function of discourse; for example, one practitioner advocated that vocational training students discuss "the vocabulary of their trades" by seeking magazines, pamphlets, trade and industry journals that reflected the language of what many scholars at the time recognized as discourse communities.

Around the time that Barriss Mills advocated the study of advertising, sales talks, political speeches, editorials and news stories in teaching writing—techniques that today might fall under the category of cultural studies in the composition classroom—articles bearing titles such as "How to Interest Students in a Variety of Better Magazines," "Mass Pressure on Radio and Journalism," and "Learning to Read Newspapers with Discrimination" circulated. *Magazines in the United States*, an historical treatment of the rise of popular magazines in America by James Playsted Wood (1950), was hailed in the pages of *The English Journal* as "the reference book teachers have long needed as a background for using periodicals in the English class" (49.6: 351). As critical magazine reading became a subject of debate in the major disciplinary journals, announcements of

general interests books, such as *Nation's Heritage*, illustrated the trend of substituting pictures for print texts; some practitioners began to advocate teaching writing by using direct-mail advertising and "textless" magazine advertisements. Still other voices raised during the early 1950s discussed using comic books, film and television for the teaching of reading and writing. Titles to appear in *The English Journal* alone included "Comic Books—a Challenge," "Comic Books Have a Place," Comic Books?", "What Can We Do about Movies, Radio, Television?", "A Classroom Use of Film," "Motion-Picture Appreciation and School Composition," "The Antidote to Television," "Television Is a Fine Tool," and "Having a Television Set." Though writing instructors claimed to have success in teaching spelling and punctuation by using newspapers and magazines, a 1952 4C's workshop, "Newspapers, Periodicals, and Motion Pictures as Materials for the Communication Course," raised questions concerning the use of mass media in teaching. The following year, a workshop called "The Mass Media of Communication" was held.

Soon after, Ken Macrorie, a well-known composition theorist who rose to prominence during the 1960s, a period in which he also served as editor of *CCC*, was instrumental in recognizing the link between composition, communication and the strand of cultural studies that came to be known as "Popular Culture." As early as 1959, his textbook, *The Perceptive Writer, Reader, and Speaker* sought to connect composing processes with critical approaches to "reading" mass communication, a nexus Macrorie acknowledged in the book by casting radio, television, film, books, magazines, newspapers and advertising as meaningful subjects in which student writers and speakers could take an interest. When Emery, Ault and Agee's *Introduction to Mass Communications* appeared the following year, its table of contents divided the subject into categories which included "Technological Growth" (in the print media, film, radio and television), "Magazines," "Newspapers" and "Book Publishing." By 1964, Stuart Hall, best known for his work in cultural studies, published *The Popular Arts*, a book that examines the relationship between mass culture and society. Subjects in this study

include teenage dancing, film, images of war, folk and popular art. Hall also recognized the importance of teaching mass culture in the classroom; part four of the book, "Education," traces the connection between "The Curriculum and the Popular Arts" and includes projects for teaching.

Just as there is no specific history that marks the rise of composition studies or mass communication studies within university English departments, the "birth" of cultural studies (and the sub-category "Popular Culture") also arose out of contested sites of ideological domination, roughly coinciding with the rise of communication theory in the 1940s and 1950s. Stuart Hall maintains: "Cultural studies is a discursive formation, in Foucault's sense. It has no simple origins. . ." (1992: 278). Grossberg, Nelson and Treichler write that "the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at Birmingham [founded in Great Britain] . . . adopted, constructed, and formalized the term cultural studies as a name for its own unique project"; yet many academics in the United States who generalize about cultural studies are ignorant of this early history (9), knowledge vital for understanding institutional, political and social struggles, as well as survival.

In general, cultural studies has been historically aligned with the academic left that emerged in Great Britain during the middle years of the century, a movement that sought to extend the limitations of Marxism in the changing face of the politics of difference: racial, sexual, cultural, transnational (Grossberg, Nelson and Treichler 1). Often citing Raymond Williams' *Culture and Society* (1958) and Richard Hoggart's *The Use of Literacy* (1958) as "founding" texts of the cultural studies discipline, historians also post the "early history" of cultural studies as coinciding with the formation of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, which was founded in the mid-1960s.

Presently, both composition studies and cultural studies may be considered both interdisciplinary and antidisciplinary fields—that is, both have commitments to remaining *attached* to the politics of their research and practice. Thus cultural studies, similar to composition studies, needs to remain open to unimagined, even uninvited possibilities

(Grossberg, Nelson and Treichler 3); in the words of the composition theorist Donald Murray, to "expect the unexpected" by blurring the boundaries of its activities and sites of inquiry.

The trends in the teaching of mass communications and popular arts in composition and communications departments during the 1950s all indicate a shift in teaching methods and research areas that were to take hold in the following decades. In the 1960s and 70s, these disciplinary practices retained a continuous presence in the emerging field of cultural studies, and often were aligned with the study of discourse communities and social codes. For example, rhetoric and composition specialists like Lee Odell and Dixie Goswami conducted research on writing in nonacademic settings during the late 1970s and early 1980s, confronting activities that negotiate communications and meaning in the concrete social terrain outside of the academy—the greater province of cultural studies.

As a contributor to Odell and Goswami's 1985 essay collection, *Writing in Nonacademic Settings*, Lester Faigley called for continuing research in the study of technologies used to create texts, stating that "[t]he technologies include not only writing implements, but also symbol systems and the knowledge to interpret those systems" (242). In an article published a year later Faigley extended this notion, grafting it onto cultural identity politics when he claimed that "[h]ow the possibilities for individual expression will be affected by major technological changes in process should become one of the most important areas of research for those who study writing" (538). Recent trends in teaching and research within the fields of rhetoric, composition and cultural studies should continue to reflect how the articulation of social identity formation is influenced by technology.

Not surprisingly, as the century closes, students in writing and cultural studies courses analyze, speak and write about the function of sonic, symbolic or telematic languages. Or as Warner Rice predicted in 1959, English instructors today teach cultures

of technology, a site where postmodern identity is negotiated, and society possibly transformed.

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