

Introduction

Why Cultural Studies?

Expanding Technical Communication's Critical Toolbox

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How can reviewing technical communication pedagogy, research methods, and theoretical concepts through a cultural studies lens enhance our work and that of our students? The essays in this collection offer a provocative array of answers to this question. Because this question has so rarely been asked, we envision this collection as a sourcebook for the field, surveying a mostly unfamiliar scholarly terrain and providing other scholars the tools with which to continue this expedition. When we talked with colleagues about the idea of this collection, we often encountered the response, "It's long overdue." In most cases, people were responding to technical communication's still largely uncritical, pragmatic orientation, which we will discuss later.

This collection testifies and responds to our field's need for more research and teaching approaches that historicize technical communication's roles in hegemonic power relations—approaches that are openly critical of nonegalitarian, unethical practices and subject positions, that promote values other than conformity, efficiency, and effectiveness, and that account for technical communication's broader cultural conditions, circulation, and effects. In the process, the collection also challenges the disciplinary parameters that have defined and measured our profession and practice in terms of narrow pragmatics and economic success. In addition to being skilled communicators and successful professionals, we and our students must be virtuous citizens who ask critical questions for a sustainable democracy. By furthering this latter ideal, we hope to help heal the rupture in public trust by technical communication mobilized more for profit and greed than the public good (e.g., tobacco and pharmaceutical marketing, finance and accounting reports, energy regulatory standards).

Some readers might be uncomfortable with replacing pragmatic goals with these more normative ones. We are not arguing for total replacement as much as enhancement and redirection, however. The essays in this collection

powerfully illustrate how cultural approaches can advance both types of goals; in helping us create more egalitarian mechanisms for producing and assessing texts, for example, cultural studies approaches can better ensure that these texts accommodate their users. That said, we do not necessarily see discomfort as something to be avoided, as it can help us maintain self-reflexivity. Further, if our work were risk-free, it would not likely be transformative.

Readers might also worry about the impulse of some cultural studies work, including work in composition studies, to privilege critical, academic analysis over rhetorical production, an impulse that runs counter to our field's value of civic action. In his essay in the collection's final section, for example, Jim Henry laments cultural studies' "relentless insistence on forming students as critical discursive consumers all the while wholly ignoring their formation as critical discursive producers in any genre other than the academic essay" (215). Several other contributors, including Jeffrey T. Grabill and Michael J. Salvo, echo this healthy concern. Ultimately, however, the editors and contributors to this collection do not see critique/production or academic/civic as either-or issues. In the face of a global corporate culture that, ironically, seems to be narrowing the agency of technical communicators and other workers in the name of flexibility, we need to prepare our students to be both cultural critics and rhetorically effective producers.

Finally, some readers might have qualms about what they see as an imperialist tendency of cultural studies. Carl Herndl and Cynthia Nahrwold voice this concern when they warn against promulgating "theoretical imperialism in which the researcher's theoretical commitment dominates both the scene under study and the social actors in it—a theoretical procrustean bed" (289). Once again, we don't see a conflict of interest in having a theoretical and political commitment and remaining sensitive to the sociohistorical contexts and exigencies of technical communication. As Lawrence Grossberg explains, "Cultural studies is committed to the detour through theory even though it is not theory-driven: it is driven by its own sense of history and politics" (344). Indeed, Grossberg characterizes cultural studies as "radically contextual," though he also insists that the "contexts" it studies are, in part, "defined by the project, by the political question that is at stake" (255). Technical/professional communication scholars Patricia Sullivan and James Porter, in *Opening Spaces*, call for a combination of political commitment and a methodological openness that is shaped partly out of the specific relationships involved in the study. Critical research that aims for ethical action, they argue, must be attentive to the "distinctive nature of writing-as-situated practice" and must define this ethical action not beforehand but "in dialogic concert" with those involved and affected (42–43).

Now that we have explained what, in our view, cultural studies is not (e.g., concerned only with critical consumption, driven only by theory), let

us elaborate on how we might define it. Heeding Fredric Jameson's injunction to "always historicize," we begin by historicizing the concept of "culture" and some of the traditions for studying it (*Political* 9). We could start here with classical Marxist theory, the Frankfurt school's neo-Marxist critiques of mass communication and culture, the linguistic structuralisms that have driven so much of U.S. cultural studies, the critical pedagogy of Paulo Freire and other educational theorists, cultural anthropology and sociology, or a number of other places. Indeed, other technical communication scholars, including contributors to this collection, have grounded their explorations in one of more of these traditions.¹ In our framing, we start with Raymond Williams and then move to appropriations of him and others (especially Althusser, Gramsci, and Foucault) by the Birmingham school, as these appropriations serve as the strongest influence on our working definition and approach.

Williams noted that the meaning of "culture" has been shaped by "changes in industry, democracy and class" (xvi) and changes in our "social, economic and political life" (xvii), documenting the shifts in meaning here:

the recognition of a separate body of moral and intellectual activities, and the offering of a court of human appeal, which comprise the early meanings of the word, are joined, and in themselves changed, by the growing assertion of a whole way of life, not only as a scale of integrity, but as a mode of interpreting all our common experience, and, in this new interpretation, changing it. (*Culture* xviii)

In this passage, Williams forwards a notion of culture that accounts for both modes of experiential living and modes of interpretation through which we make sense of our experiences (Hall, "Cultural Studies: Two" 35). As Stuart Hall elaborates, Williams's culturalist formulation—out of which much of British cultural studies developed—viewed culture

as *both* the meanings and values which arise amongst distinctive social groups and classes, on the basis of their given historical conditions and relationships, through which they "handle" and respond to the conditions of existence; *and* as the lived traditions and practices through which those "understandings" are expressed and in which they are embodied. ("Cultural Studies: Two" 39)

Williams's impulse to study the relations between material practices/production and meaning-making practices/symbolic production, also discussed in *Keywords*, was taken up by Hall and other critics of the Birmingham school

(90). Other impulses of the culturalist strand of cultural studies (alluded to in the passages from Williams and Hall above) include focusing on concrete, historically contingent practices and allowing for conscious struggle and action in response to “confrontation between opposed ways of life” (Hall, “Cultural Studies: Two” 37, 47).

Cultural studies’ (and, more specifically, the Birmingham school’s) emphasis on power-laden struggles over competing “ways of life,” meaning-making, and knowledge is also indebted to the work of Gramsci and Foucault. Gramsci theorized hegemony as ongoing, shifting power struggles through which certain social groups contingently dominate others. This domination is not just imposed, but won also on the ideological front through “intellectual and moral leadership” that enlists the consent and even participation of those who are subordinate (see *Prison* 57). Gramsci’s notion of hegemony enabled Birmingham school critics such as Hall to account for class and other social struggles without resorting to totalizing, universalizing versions of Marxism.

As Longo illustrates in *Spurious Coin*, Foucault’s archeological method and theory of knowledge/power provide a basis for assessing how “legitimated knowledges articulated in discourse embody historical [and institutional] struggles for their legitimation and conquest” (16). In addition, Foucault’s poststructuralist notion of power as productive rather than repressive has enabled cultural critics to reconfigure subjects as the effects of power rather than just the objects of it. Further, cultural critics have drawn on Foucault’s more specific theorizing of disciplinary power to critique the ways “institutional and interpersonal microprocesses” elicit knowledge about people to observe, classify, manage, and shape them as individuals and members of populations (Scott, *Risky* 7). Foucault’s later genealogical method built on his archeology by examining both discursive and extradiscursive operations of knowledge/power and by calling for the reactivation of subjugated knowledges. Thus, Foucault contributes to cultural studies’ dual emphasis on discourse and materiality as well as its impulse to intervene in hegemonic practices.

Hall points to another important contribution of Gramsci that is also echoed by Foucault. In “Cultural Studies and Its Theoretical Legacies,” Hall credits Gramsci’s notion and example of the “organic intellectual” with profoundly shaping the work of the Birmingham school. As Hall explains, Gramsci’s organic intellectual works “on two fronts at the same time”—the intellectual front and the more broadly civic one (“Cultural Studies and Its Theoretical” 268). We take this to indicate the importance of moving beyond academic critique to more broadly accessible arguments and political action.

The Birmingham school and some of its theoretical patrons (e.g., Foucault) were also influenced by structuralist strands of cultural studies,

which Hall contrasts to the culturalist strand. Developed, in part, out of Althusser's neo-Marxist notion of ideology and Levi-Strauss's notion of culture as the "categories and frameworks in thought and language through which different societies classified out their existence" (Hall, "Cultural Studies: Two" 41), structuralism helped cultural studies better recognize "the intertextuality of texts in their institutional positions, . . . texts as sources of power, . . . textuality as a site of representation and resistance" (Hall, "Cultural Studies and Its Theoretical" 271). Structuralism's linguistic turn also focused cultural critique on the productive power of and struggles over ideology in texts and discursive formations.

More recent versions of structuralism (e.g., semiotics and deconstruction) have dominated U.S. cultural studies, especially in English departments. As Hall and several of this collection's contributors point out, these versions, partly through their institutionalization, tend to privilege academic critique over ethical action and to overlook the concrete, material exercises and connections of power (Hall, "Cultural Studies and Its Theoretical" 274).

Hall and other Birmingham school theorists have called for versions of cultural studies that draw on the best of both culturalist and structuralist insights and that recognize power as both discursive and material. Despite the continued dominance of semiotics in English studies, some U.S. critics have heeded this call. In their introduction to the collection *Cultural Studies*, Cary Nelson, Paula Treichler, and Grossberg offer a definition of culture as "the actual, grounded terrain of practices, representations, languages and customs of any specific historical society" as well as "the contradictory forms of 'common sense' which have taken root and helped to shape popular life" (5). In addition to referring to both material and discursive practices, here Nelson et al. refer to the ideological dimension of culture that is grounded in and helps to shape these practices. The essays in this collection work within this framing of culture, recognizing technical texts as connected to broader cultural practices, as always-already ideological, and as enmeshed in forms of power.

This incomplete overview of cultural studies has been pointing to our working definition, one that is flexible but not amorphous. Nelson, Treichler, and Grossberg describe cultural studies as a "bricolage," with its "choice of research practices depend[ing] upon the questions that are asked, and the questions depend[ing] on their context" (2). They also point out that cultural studies can't take just any form, however. As we're defining it, cultural studies involves critiquing and intervening in the conditions, circulation, and effects of discursive-material practices that are situated in concrete but dynamic sociohistorical formations, that participate in ideological struggles over knowledge legitimation, and that help shape identities. This definition emphasizes, then, the predispositions to account for technical communication's broader cultural conditions and power dynamics, to ethically critique its shifting functions and

effects (especially subjective ones), and to intervene in hegemonic forms of power. Each contributor offers a different spin on this definition, of course, depending partly on the cultural studies tradition(s) on which he or she draws, but all contributors demonstrate cultural studies' transformative potential.

TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION SCHOLARSHIP AT THE CROSSROADS OF CULTURAL STUDIES

In contrast to the relative abundance of work on cultural studies approaches to composition (for examples, see Berlin; Fitts and France), only a handful of technical communication scholars have tapped into cultural studies. That is why this collection is the first of its kind. Technical and professional communication scholars have been laying the groundwork for our collection for some time, however. Several have turned to classical rhetoric, radical pedagogy, feminist theory, and other critical traditions to emphasize the ethical, ideological, and political dimensions of technical communication. In two related articles, Steven B. Katz uses classical rhetoric to critique what he calls the "ethic of expediency" driving technical communication. Like Katz, Dale Sullivan argues that we must approach technical communication as *phronesis* (practical wisdom) as well as *praxis* (social action). As Sullivan points out, *phronesis* involves ethical deliberation about technical communication's effects, a concern shared by cultural studies (378). Indebted to radical educational theory, Herndl calls for research approaches and pedagogies that critique the broader relations of power inherent in professional communication and that enable ethical, public action based on this critique. Nancy Blyer takes up Herndl's invitation, developing a critical research perspective that borrows from feminist, radical educational, and participatory action methods to reshape the researcher-participant relationship in more egalitarian ways (33).

A few scholars have more directly drawn on critical cultural theory to account for technical communication's broader cultural conditions, power relations, and circulation. James E. Porter, Patricia Sullivan, Stuart Blythe, Jeffrey T. Grabill, and Libby Miles draw on cultural geography to develop a methodology for critiquing "institutions as rhetorical systems of decision making that exercise power through the design of space (both material and discursive)" (621). Here they expand and reconfigure our field's typical focus on studies of workplace culture within discrete organizations. In her seminal essay that begins section two of the collection, Bernadette Longo draws on Foucault to similarly move beyond uncritical, narrowly framed social constructionist research and advocate a cultural studies approach that critiques "how struggles for knowledge legitimation taking place within technical writing practices are influenced by institutional, political, economic, and/or

social relationships, pressures, and tensions within cultural contexts that transcend any one affiliated group" (61–62). In *Spurious Coin*, Longo's cultural history of technical writing in twentieth-century U.S. institutions, she employs a primarily Foucaultian cultural studies frame to examine how technical writing participated in economies of scientific knowledge legitimation and in management control systems. Through this participation, Longo explains, technical writing served as a hegemonic tool for maintaining cultural and material capital and for stabilizing the "social distinction between people who have technical knowledge and those who do not" (3).

In the pedagogical arena, J. Blake Scott adapts Richard Johnson's notion of the cultural circuit to develop a heuristic that helps students critique and respond to the broader effects of their work as it circulates and is transformed ("Tracking"). Others have mobilized cultural studies articulation theory to review technical communication as an ongoing cultural process of creating meaning through linkages of power. In their often-cited article reprinted in this volume's first section, Jennifer Daryl Slack, David James Miller, and Jeffrey Doak argue that we should teach our students that they are more than transmitters or translators, but active contributors to an ongoing process of articulation. Henry similarly prompts his students to examine constructs of technical authorship and to wield this analysis to reposition themselves in more empowering workplace roles ("Teaching").

The recent issue of the *Journal of Business and Technical Communication* guest edited by Herndl and dedicated to "critical practice" contains several articles that "understand technical and professional communication as a cultural activity and as a medium for producing knowledge that is always politically interested" and that "generate really useful knowledge that opens up possibilities for action, however circumscribed or local" (Herndl, "Introduction" 3). This special issue powerfully demonstrates the promise of critical cultural theory for interventive political action as well as critique.

Imaginative and inspiring, the work of these scholars and other precursors to this collection's contributors has set the stage for more specific applications of cultural studies, developed here. This collection is the first of its kind, the first book project to collect work on the cultural studies–technical communication intersection, previously scattered across various forums. We hope it will further advance a shift in our field from the social turn to the cultural one.

TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION'S HYPERPRAGMATIST LEGACY

The main exigency for this collection is our alarm about the hyperpragmatist trajectory of our field. Despite attempts to challenge it, hyperpragma-

tism continues to dominate technical communication research and teaching, even coopting those practices that could be transformative (see Scott's chapter on service-learning). Before we elaborate on the limitations of hyperpragmatism, we want to trace the former's legacy in technical communication.

The earliest technical communication courses, essentially English for engineering courses, were mechanical but not particularly pragmatic. As Katherine Adams points out in her history of professional writing instruction, they were heavily influenced by the current traditional writing paradigm of first-year composition (137). This meant that they focused on mechanical correctness, clarity, and the modes of exposition and description. Carolyn Miller and Longo have traced this focus to a "pervasive positivist view of science" (Miller 610). This pedagogy was mostly antirhetorical. Gradually, technical writing courses began combining current traditional rhetoric with more vocational, practical concerns, adding topics and forms (e.g., report forms) used in science, engineering, and management.

Unlike first-year composition, which merged current traditional rhetoric with humanist literary study, early technical writing pedagogy was marked by a tension between these two approaches. Teresa Kynell describes this as a tension between utilitarianism and humanism. Kynell goes on to explain that advocates of the latter sometimes referred to the study of literature, history, and other humanist subjects as "culture studies" (10). This term referred to something quite different from most forms of cultural studies today, of course. Instead of cultural critique, this type was concerned with the refinement of taste, a marker of the bourgeois class. Its advocates saw such refinement as a way to elevate the social and professional status of engineers (e.g., into management positions) and the field of engineering (see Longo, *Spurious* 140). Even advocates of more utilitarian approaches saw technical writing as a way to maintain and extend class privilege.

For a time, utilitarian approaches were not just in tension with humanist ones but in tension with scientific ones as well. Influential textbook author T. A. Rickard, for example, argued that technical writing must be kept "pure" from the practical demands of engineering in order to safeguard the privileged status of scientific knowledge (Longo, *Spurious* 66). Rickard even argued that technical writing's contribution to the "general fund" of scientific knowledge was crucial to the betterment of humankind (Longo 63).

Technical writing became less the province of science, however, as it developed alongside engineering management systems. Longo explains: "As engineers designed management systems to make workers as efficient as the machines with which they worked, they also designed intricate technical communication systems as the mechanism for effecting operations control for maximum efficiency" (79).

As Kynell's title of *Writing in a Milieu of Utility* suggests, utilitarian, vocational concerns overrode humanist ones (as well as scientific ones) in

most technical writing curricula, partly because of the persistent assessment of engineering graduates as poor writers. By the 1920s and 1930s, technical writing (i.e., English for engineering) courses were gradually becoming better suited to vocational needs, driven by the “engineer’s need for . . . practical, real-world writing” (Kynell 68). According to other historians of technical writing, namely Robert Connors and Longo, most curricula were still largely formalist, largely revolving around the modes, clarity and the “plain style,” and forms (see Longo, *Spurious* 146–47). At the same time, technical writing pedagogy included more report and letter forms along with basic attention to engineering audiences.

The 1940s and 1950s saw the establishment of the modern technical communication course, the move from engineering colleges to English departments, and the rise of technical communication as a field involved in research (we should note, too, that the discipline of composition began to emerge out of the communication skills movement during this same time period). World War II was the biggest influence on these developments, of course, as the technology boom during and after the war created a need for technical communication specialists. The new version of technical communication was more rhetorical but also more utilitarian than its predecessors. Audience and readability were given more presence, but typically in a fairly instrumental way; that is, more complex issues like ethics and the values and contexts of audiences were not addressed. Students were taught even more practical techniques and technical forms, such as the technical article, manual, and later, the proposal.

Longo notes that textbooks published just after World War II departed from their predecessors by straightforwardly interpellating technical writers as “individuals concerned with their own personal gain,” a move that technical writing textbooks have continued to make ever since (75). Despite this stronger concern for personal economic success, the newly established field of technical writing saw its practitioners largely relegated to “lower-paid help to relieve higher-paid engineers and scientists” (Longo 144).

It was out of these historical developments that a more fully developed hyperpragmatism emerged. As we’re defining it, hyperpragmatism is a hegemonic ideology and set of practices that privileges utilitarian efficiency and effectiveness, including rhetorical effectiveness, at the expense of sustained reflection, critique, or ethical action. In its more extreme forms, hyperpragmatism can be driven by an ethic of expediency, to use Katz’s term. Katz argues that in our capitalist, highly technological society, expediency can become “both a means and an end,” “a virtue itself” that subsumes all other ethical considerations (“Ethic” 270). The main goal of hyperpragmatist pedagogy is to ensure the technical writer’s (and technical writing student’s) professional assimilation and success as measured by vocational rather than more broadly civic terms.

In the last few decades of the past century, hyperpragmatism took more rhetorical and social forms as new theories were incorporated and technical writing was further institutionalized as a discipline. Early writing process theories were in many ways quite compatible with current traditional and other formalist ones, as Sharon Crowley explains, and therefore didn't transform composition pedagogy as much as our histories suggest they did (although they did help create the semester-long project course in technical communication) (211). Social process and social constructionist theory, influenced by pragmatism, did more to help the field move beyond purely utilitarian concerns with *techne* to include considerations of social praxis. These theories and pedagogies, which now seem commonplace, helped us view genres as social action, account for the conventions and values of discourse communities, and emphasize students' enculturation into these discourse communities. More teachers began using cases and real-world assignments that put students in workplace roles and presented them with concrete audiences and contexts. Numerous scholars began researching the rhetorical practices of various disciplinary and workplace discourse communities in order to better understand their dynamics and thereby help students more successfully conform to them.

Such developments are certainly improvements on more purely utilitarian or current traditional approaches, but they often stop short of enabling cultural critique and ethical intervention. Like their more utilitarian precursors, their rhetorical dimension can be narrowly vocational, and their main goals are to help students better understand, conform to, and succeed in their disciplinary and workplace discourse communities.

Although pragmatism and social constructionism mark an epistemological break from current traditional rhetoric, they don't mark a political break from it. These theories pretend to be apolitical but, like current traditional rhetoric, are largely conservative in that they value accommodation and conformity (to conventions, practices, and values) ahead of critique. Even work that touts innovation along with accommodation often narrowly defines this innovation in terms of rhetorical and organizational effectiveness and productivity (see, for example, Spilka 209). Newer forms of hyperpragmatism are not only conservative but also liberal in their emphasis on the student's professional formation and goals. As Crowley notes, liberal approaches see their primary aim as helping individuals get better at whatever they want to do (219). Whatever form it takes, hyperpragmatism is decidedly not radical.

The transformative potential of more robust rhetorical/social approaches can be squelched all too easily by hyperpragmatism. The corporatization of the university—including the move toward more (economically) efficient pedagogical models and the growing funding and curricular ties of technical communication programs to industry—can work to squelch critique on the

institutional level. As Jack Bushnell points out, we have become “training departments for corporate ‘clients’ who provide us with internships and fellowships...and ever increasing numbers of good-paying jobs” for our students (175–76). This corporatization has, not surprisingly, shaped our students’ attitudes about and expectations of their education, which can themselves be powerful forces for hyperpragmatism. Our own professional advancement is in many cases tied to how well we meet hyperpragmatist expectations of our students, administrators, corporate partners, and the larger public.

LIMITATIONS OF HYPERPRAGMATISM, CONTRIBUTIONS OF CULTURAL STUDIES

It is tempting, we admit, to succumb to the cultural pressures that keep hyperpragmatism in place, and we hold some pragmatist values ourselves (e.g., we want our students to get good jobs, etc.). But we believe hyperpragmatism—even in its more robustly rhetorical, social forms—can be limiting in several key ways. We are not the first to point these out, but we think that collectively they point to the need for cultural studies. As the chapters in this collection demonstrate, cultural studies holds much promise for correcting the following limitations of hyperpragmatism.

First, hyperpragmatism overlooks the broader web of conditions, relations, and power dynamics of which technical communication is part. Longo and Herndl critique dominant technical and professional communication research for its narrow focus on the production processes of discrete discourse communities. The limitation of this research, in the words of Herndl, is that it “describes the production of meaning but not the social, political, and economic sources of power which authorize this production or the cultural work such discourse performs” (351). Hyperpragmatist pedagogy follows the lead of this research, typically focusing students’ invention on practical elements of textual production. Common invention heuristics such as the rhetorical triangle or forum analysis often encourage students to examine their immediate rhetorical situations and discourse communities but not look further into the cross-cultural and postproduction trajectories of their work.

Reviewing technical communication as more broadly cultural first entails accounting for its broader, shifting conditions of possibility. The cultural studies notion of articulation can be useful here, as Slack et al. demonstrate. Citing Hall, Slack et al. explain articulation as the ongoing process by which coherent cultural forms (e.g., technical texts) are produced out of nonnecessary linkages of various cultural elements, including ideologies and material forms (25, 28). Another concept that can extend our thinking about techni-

cal communication is Richard Johnson's notion of the cultural circuit, which emphasizes the broader circulation and transformations of technical communication and its effects as it is produced, textually embodied, distributed, regulated, consumed, and integrated into lived experience.

Hyperpragmatism can also look past the regulatory power that conditions (and is reinforced by) technical communication, partly by pretending to be apolitical. Guided by a still lingering positivism, some of our field's research and pedagogy continues to treat technical communication as somehow separate from the political and ideological dimensions of culture, a demarcation Jameson warns against:

the convenient working distinction between cultural texts that are . . . political and those that are not becomes something worse than an error: namely, a symptom and a reinforcement of the reification and privatization of contemporary life. Such a distinction reconfirms that structural, experiential, and conceptual gap between . . . the political and the poetic [or technical] . . . which . . . alienates us from our speech itself. (20)

When we view technical texts as apolitical and nonideological, Jameson suggests, we misunderstand them and limit our ability to transform them for civic good.

Even some social constructionist research, despite moving beyond positivism, avoids questions about the politics of knowledge legitimation and the exclusionary effects of power (Longo, "Approach" 54). Pedagogy based on such research, adds Herndl, "will produce students . . . who cannot perceive the cultural consequences of a dominant discourse or the alternate understandings it excludes" (350). Recognizing the social dimension of technical communication is a starting point but can stop short of understanding technical communication as part of power/knowledge formations that include ideologies, institutional constraints, economic pressures, and other cultural forces.

The ideologies that regulate technical communication can be difficult to recognize when these networks of interpretations function as defaults, as what Vincent Leitch calls "regimes of reason." Leitch explains that "the conscious and unconscious oppositional and ruling values within social formations, however contradictorily compacted, comprise 'regimes of reason' or 'unreason,' as the case may be" (1). Because regimes of reason seem commonsensical, they often go unnoticed. An important goal of cultural studies, and an important goal of the essays in this volume, is to make common sense about technical communication uncommon again in order to interrogate its values, functions, and effects.

Cultural studies approaches can help us and our students review technical communication as regulated by and enacted as power. As Grossberg explains, “Cultural studies is always interested in how power infiltrates, contaminates, limits, and empowers the possibilities that people have to live their lives in dignified and secure ways” (257). Although the approaches we advocate follow Foucault in resisting totalizing and repressive notions of power, instead viewing it as disbursed and productive, they do recognize that power can disable as well as enable, exclude as well as include, delegitimize knowledge as well as legitimate it. Cultural studies can help us as researchers and teachers reframe pragmatic questions about how to reproduce knowledge with more Foucaultian questions about why only certain knowledges are legitimated and to whose benefit. Longo recommends starting with Foucault’s basic archaeological question: “How is it that one particular statement appeared rather than another?” (27; cited in Longo 120; 62 in original).

In addition to the power dynamics of the technical communication that we and our students produce, cultural studies can help us be more aware of and responsive to the power dynamics of our research and teaching practices. Cultural studies is nothing if not self-reflexive about its goals and methods. In *Opening Spaces*, Sullivan and Porter develop several ways of operationalizing this reflexivity. They suggest that technical and professional communication researchers map their positionality in relation to others in research scene maps, for example, and make their agendas explicit in advocacy charts. Some of these same strategies could be undertaken by teachers, students, and practitioners as well.

Yet another related limitation of hyperpragmatism is its explanatory rather than critical stance, a stance driven by the goal of accommodation rather than transformation. The goals of hyperpragmatism are conformity, expediency, and success, narrowly defined. These goals can co-opt as well as foreclose critique, as Henry and Katz point out, replacing ethical standards with those of economic expediency. Henry laments that “quality writing” is too often defined as “writing that maximizes investors’ returns on investments, and one can imagine writerly sensibility being shaped to this end, if only to maintain one’s current job as long as possible.” “Eliminated from the equation,” he adds, “are issues of ethics, of workers’ interrelationships with colleagues, of the quality of life in the local work culture, and of the ultimate effects on other populations of the writing in which one is engaged” (8). Even when ethics are involved, explains Katz, they “can be based as much on realpolitick and power as they are ideals of participation and pluralism” (“Aristotle’s” 50). Katz challenges us to make sure that the phronesis or ethical judgment that we teach students is based on more than narrow corporate values.

Cultural studies can push our research, pedagogy, and practice to critically assess and problematize the hegemonic values and functions of technical

communication. Instead of only seeking to explain technical communication, we should evaluate the ethics of its functions and effects, asking such questions as “Whose values does technical communication privilege?” “Who is included and who is excluded by these practices and how?” “Who benefits and who loses?” and “How are these practices beneficial and/or harmful?”

Johnson, Grossberg, and other critics assert that cultural studies is particularly concerned with assessing subject-related effects of power. In this respect we might critique the ways technical communication positions and interpellates users and the ways it helps shape their lived experience. We might also critique, as Henry has his students do, how the identities and work lives of technical communicators are institutionally and socially constructed. Greg Wilson similarly exhorts us to help students develop more expansive views of their agency, to “think differently about the relationships between technical concepts and to critique their relationships as communicators and social actors to technology and authority” (74).

Although researchers and teachers may not always agree on the ethical principles guiding their critiques, we echo Sullivan and Porter’s belief that these goals should begin with respecting difference, being attentive and responsive to others, creating more egalitarian and just practices, and empowering those affected by our work (110). Others, too, namely Blyler, Robert Johnson, and Michael J. Salvo, have similarly argued for technical communication practices that are more inclusive of and empowering to users and others affected by them.

Along with devaluing critique, hyperpragmatism devalues ethical intervention. Many technical communication teacher-scholars, practitioners, and students are content with reproducing the status quo rather than revising it. Henry Giroux cynically argues that corporate culture portrays citizenship “as an utterly privatized affair whose aim is to produce competitive self-interested individuals vying for their own material and ideological gain” (30). We too rarely take on the role of citizen-advocate in our own research and writing, and we rarely ask students to take on such a role. Even when we push students toward civic critique, we often don’t encourage them to develop plans for enacting this critique through policy changes and other initiatives. As Herndl points out, most technical communication courses spend “relatively little energy analyzing the modes and possibilities for dissent, resistance, and revision” (349). Instead, students spend their time accommodating “consumers” or “users” of specific products or services.

In reproducing hegemonic power structures, from the regulatory mechanisms of scientific institutions to the management practices of transnational corporations, hyperpragmatic technical communication runs the risk of disempowering or even harming many, including technical communicators

themselves. Herndl and Dale Sullivan have critiqued technical communication research and pedagogy, respectively, on this count, Sullivan asking “if we enculturate students in the technical writing classroom, at least in part by teaching technical genres that reinforce the dominance of the technological system, how can we then call them to responsible social action?” (377). Many of our students may go on to create discourse for industries (e.g., financial consulting, insurance, pharmaceutical, energy, and high-tech weapons industries) that in some cases exploit, dismiss the needs of, or threaten to directly harm groups of people. If trained only in hyperpragmatist approaches, however, these students might find it difficult to ethically respond to problematic functions and effects of the discourses in which they’re implicated, especially given that current corporate culture often positions them and their expertise as “marginal in the organization’s life” (Henry 9).

Once again, cultural studies offers a possible correction. Perhaps the most important function of cultural studies is to translate critique into ethical civic action. As Foucault illustrated in his life and built into his notion of genealogy, critical intellectual work can inform tactical interventions in ongoing symbolic and material struggles. De Certeau also advocated the subversion of dominant knowledge systems by engaging in unsanctioned, unofficial, tactical activities. Like Gramsci and Foucault, de Certeau held the hope that even subjugated groups of people help transform culture over time through their actions:

The purpose of this [unsanctioned] work is to make explicit the systems of operational combination . . . which also compose a “culture,” and to bring to light the models of action characteristic of users whose status as the dominated element in a society (a status that does not mean that they are either passive or docile) is concealed by the euphemistic term “consumers.” Everyday life invents itself by poaching in countless ways on the property of others. (xi-xii)

Part of de Certeau’s message here is that culture does not simply render us docile, but we respond to and transform culture. Sometimes cultural transformations can be abrupt and large-scale, and such events provide rich sites for study. Yet cultural studies can also focus on ongoing, local struggles over knowledge-power structures in and across institutions, organizations, and daily life. The studies in this collection take up such struggles at a variety of sites, including government agencies, corporations, community initiatives, academic programs, and individual classrooms. They show that far from being a negative or simply deconstructive enterprise, critical cultural study can work to restore the ethical promise of technical communication, too often squelched by economically and technologically expedient elements of our culture.

The chapters in this collection point to a more visible cultural turn in our field's trajectory. Although they do not all draw from the same theories or traditions of cultural studies or apply them in the same ways, their divergences attest to the richness of cultural studies and the expansive potential for its cross-fertilization with technical communication. Taken together, the chapters offer a broad but certainly not complete repertoire of approaches. Despite their differences, this collection's chapters all demonstrate the basic cultural studies moves that we outlined earlier: situating technical communication in concrete but dynamic sociohistorical formations; accounting for technical communication's broader cultural conditions, relations, and effects; self-reflexively critiquing technical communication's functions in ideological, power-laden struggles over knowledge; laying the groundwork for ethically intervening in disempowering or otherwise harmful practices.

Demonstrating the cross-fertilization of cultural studies and technical communication is quite different than offering the former as a panacea for the latter. The collection's chapters are careful to explain the potential pitfalls of cultural studies applications, to adapt cultural studies approaches to technical communication concerns, and to show how technical communication research can inform cultural studies. Beverly Sauer, for example, explains how the cultural studies impulse to radically contextualize may not always work in the interest of workers engaged in risk communication. Just as compositionists' applications of liberatory pedagogy have fed back into and informed this movement, we hope that the applications offered here can inform the larger enterprise of cultural studies.

We have divided the collection into three (overlapping) sections—theory, research, and pedagogy—based on the primary emphasis of the chapters that fall under them. The chapters in the theory section complicate and reconceptualize common technical communication concepts and practices—such as usability and email—through a cultural studies lens. The chapters in the research section critique, refocus, and extend methods for studying various types of technical communication. The chapters in the pedagogy section explore ways that cultural studies principles can enhance and redirect curricula and pedagogical approaches. These are somewhat arbitrary distinctions, we admit, as the three categories and their chapters necessarily overlap. The theory chapters have clear implications for technical communication practice, research methods, and pedagogy, for example, and the research methods and pedagogical approaches certainly inform each other.

In addition to the original essays, we have begun each section with an already-published essay. These reprinted chapters are among the field's first and most important explorations into the cultural studies-technical communication intersection. As such, they have helped to initiate the conversation that the other chapters join. We offer this collection of chapters

not as a set of models but as a tribute to the earlier critical work by Herndl, Katz, Dale Sullivan, and others, and as a dialogue that practitioners, scholars, teachers, and students alike can build on, learn from, and even challenge. As Nelson, Treichler, and Grossberg point out, cultural studies is not and should never be a static, homogeneous enterprise. We therefore hope that this collection will spark a dynamic conversation that explores still more pathways to and from the cultural studies-technical communication intersection.

NOTE

1. In this collection, both Britt and Grabill ground their arguments in theories from critical anthropology and sociology. In his groundbreaking essay critiquing professional writing research and pedagogy, Herndl draws largely on the tradition of critical or liberatory pedagogy. Demonstrating yet another cultural studies approach, Longaker uses neo-Marxist, macroeconomic theory to call our attention back to the broader capitalist contexts of technical communication practices.

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