

WRITING IN THE NOW: CULTURAL CONSCIOUSNESS AND CRITICAL  
PEDAGOGY IN THE INFORMATION AGE OF COMPOSITION

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by  
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## **Abstract**

### **WRITING IN THE NOW: CULTURAL CONSCIOUSNESS AND CRITICAL PEDAGOGY IN THE INFORMATION AGE OF COMPOSITION**

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In the efforts to connect student writing with student living, cultural studies composition pedagogy integrates students' writing instruction with cultural analysis. This type of instruction is concerned with both individual and social processes of student writing through an intersection between composition and cultural studies, as well as a reconsideration of rhetoric. With modern considerations such as terrorism, greater multiculturalism, digital media, and consumerism, it is even more necessary that composition programs foster critical and reflective cultural and individual awareness, helping students to become more informed, empowered, and democratically-inclined citizens. A focus on social epistemic rhetoric can provide a methodology through which the cultural studies composition classroom can acknowledge and integrate new, and arguably untraditional, understandings of rhetoric.

### **Dedication**

To my mother and favorite person, Jaye Hendricks, thank you for your wisdom, guidance, and endless support, and for always encouraging me to foster my own critical literacy every day. You make all seem possible.

And, to Kevin, my best friend and love of my life, thank you for always being my knight in shining armor, and for making all my dreams come true.

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## **Chapter One:**

### **Introduction**

Education holds an undeniable importance to our daily functioning, influencing our opinions, attitudes, decisions, and actions. How we perceive our own academic experiences affects how we live and interact within our own culture. As Ralph Waldo Emerson states in his seminal “The American Scholar,” “Colleges...can only highly serve us when they aim not to drill, but to create” (94). Accordingly, the classroom, regardless of the discipline, should be a place that inspires its students to observe, think critically, and create for themselves. Cultural studies composition allows for student creation rooted in a greater cultural and critical consciousness, promoting understanding and critique of the academic and social systems we currently endorse.

In *Culture and Anarchy*, originally published in 1869, thirty-two years after Emerson’s “The American Scholar,” Matthew Arnold describes the necessity of cultural consciousness:

If we look at the world outside us we find a disquieting absence of sure authority; we discover that only in right reason can we get a source of sure authority, and culture brings us towards right reason. What we want is a fuller harmonious development of our humanity, a free play of thought upon our routine notions, spontaneity of consciousness, sweetness and light; and these are just what culture generates and fosters. (108-9)

Arnold more broadly defines culture as “a study of perfection,” a study of humanity and human processes (31). It is through this “study,” this reflection on one’s individual and cultural associations that we become aware of ourselves as subjective participants of a larger collective construct. Arnold advocates for not only a consumption or “study” of culture, but for a critical reflection and action on how such awareness can impact the efficacy of greater social and cultural processes. As Arnold advocates, critical analysis of the culture in which we live is necessary for our students’ development, regardless of the discipline or department in which the student finds herself. Cultural analysis becomes even more important in the composition classroom, in which students recognize the processes and potentials of their own writing. It is vital that we first encourage students to be more aware of how language is received within larger social settings. Composition can then become an instrument to reconcile discrepancies between the individual and the cultural, to navigate the ever-complicated world in which we currently live. Because our society is still confronted with an “absence of sure authority,” it remains important that we continue to encourage students’ critical analysis of the world and its language. Cultural studies composition provides students with a social apparatus to better understand and interact with the world, becoming more informed and active citizens of a democratic polis.

Composition studies prepares student writers to become more informed and critical participants of the academic cultures in which they will engage. While this preparation is a very necessary and valuable skill, it is important that compositionists also consider the possibilities of approaching instruction as an opportunity to provide our students with a transferable skill in order to better navigate their social and cultural



experiences. Approaching composition instruction through the lens of culturally critical pedagogies allows us to embrace our responsibility as instructors in order to help students discover the social products and processes through which they function and make meaning. We as instructors, and our students more importantly, are incapable of receiving and contributing to a genuine educational experience if we are unable to recognize the larger social and political interests within academia.

Understanding and critique of society within the composition classroom is made possible through the integration of cultural studies initiatives, such as Berlin's theory of social epistemic rhetoric. Berlin's approach provides today's instructors with a formula to present writing as a social and cultural instrument to critique and respond to the world. In *Rhetorics, Poetics, and Cultures*, Berlin states "Language in its positioning between the world and the individual, the object and the subject, contains within its shaping force the power to create humans as agents of action" (98). It is this greater goal of democratic education, to promote student agency, which cultural studies composition aims to satisfy. This agency stems from students' ability to analyze and utilize social products in which power is inscribed, such as language. Thus, by encouraging students to recognize and even complicate the social and cultural implications of rhetoric, we also elevate their potential for agency. In addition, we need to learn about how our students interact with language outside of the classroom in order to help them examine and intervene into a variety of discourses.

We as instructors must therefore aim to present composition as a means of understanding and responding to the world, enabling students to view our classrooms as a means to produce their own personal, yet culturally resonant composition. One aspect of

language use today is the relation between communication technologies and representations of reality. In fact, many students perceive these new technologies as unproblematically good. In order to combat student resistance amongst a populace seemingly more concerned with technology than language itself, we might communicate to our students that there is more to communication than technology, and that they can become active agents in society through a more holistic understanding of rhetoric as a social tool. In this way, we encourage students to become invested in instruction that will impact their interactions both within and outside of academia. Critical cultural studies composition works to combat the ever-present challenge of student resistance, a challenge that becomes more important in the increasingly complex and convoluted social milieu in which our students currently exist. With modern considerations such as terrorism, greater multiculturalism, digital media, and overwhelming consumerism, composition programs have many issues to address in order to continue fostering critical, as well as personally reflective, cultural awareness. Thus, helping students to become more informed and democratically inclined citizens.

## **Chapter Two:**

### **A Brief History of Cultural Studies**

#### **Background**

Influenced by a diverse array of theorists, literary and social movements, academic disciplines, and social processes, the field of cultural studies was most notably established as a school of criticism with the inception of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in the UK in 1964. Founded by a collection of British culturalists and sociologists, the center served as a beacon in academia for the legitimacy and value of cultural studies. Originally established for the purpose of cultural research, the program began as an interdisciplinary project aimed at investigating our social processes. More specifically, cultural studies is concerned with investigating, understanding and interpreting how we collectively construct meaning as a society, culture, or otherwise like-minded group of individuals. Theorist Richard Johnson describes the key of cultural studies “its openness and theoretical versatility, its reflexive even self-conscious mood, and, especially, the importance of critique” (1). Johnson describes the reflective critique that cultural studies encourages, not only of the social texts and institutions that it is analyzing, but of its own theoretical approaches as well. Ingrained in the investigation and interpretation of social processes of meaning making, cultural studies must accommodate the ever-changing norms by which we operate on a daily basis. The interdisciplinary nature of cultural studies results in the variety of individual and social texts to which its methods could be applied. To this end, the

Birmingham Centre promoted the field of cultural studies to such a degree that it is currently a well established and widely implemented academic field of study. Influenced by and integral to other schools of thought such as Marxism, anthropology, ethnic, gender and communication studies, and feminist theory, cultural studies continues to evolve in the social and academic landscapes through which our culture is constructed.

To better appreciate the interdisciplinary potential and influence of cultural studies as an academic discipline, we must first appreciate its history. Richard Hoggart, an influential theorist that helped to design the tenets of cultural studies still applied in today's classrooms, originally directed the Birmingham Centre. Hoggart promoted an understanding of culture that relies on our shared construction and collective comprehension of meaning, also known as a "mass culture." Hoggart's definition of culture signified "how working-class people spoke and thought, what language and common assumptions about life they shared, in speech and action, what social attitudes informed their daily practice, what moral categories they deployed, even if only aphoristically, to make judgments about their own behaviour and that of others" (Hall, "Richard Hoggart" 7). Herein lies one of the foremost goals of cultural studies, to destabilize public conceptions of culture, specifically of high and low culture. Aimed at expanding the general definition of what ought to be studied or appreciated, the Centre worked towards elevating the status of popular culture. According to Hoggart, our culture, our shared perspective, is constructed through our common interaction with one another. Through the establishment of norms, cultural codes, and signifiers, our "speech and action" inform the greater social processes of meaning making that we employ in our everyday lives. Influenced by Saussure's theory of semiotics, Hoggart, and cultural

studies in general, recognizes the implicit and explicit potential of language and the action it inspires. Raymond Williams also describes cultural studies as being “committed to the study of actual language...to the words and sequences of words which particular men and women have used in trying to give meaning to their experience” (*Culture and Society* xix). In general, the field recognizes and explores the intersection between linguistic and cultural studies as language dictates meaning, which in turn dictates the social processes and cultural norms by which we live. It is Hoggart’s appreciation of a “mass culture” that enables the cultural inquiry to which the Birmingham Centre aspired. Without the recognition of a basic or cultural commonality, we are unable to appreciate the similarities and differences that influence how we read and respond to the world around us. It is this appreciation that the field of cultural studies was founded on, notably influenced by the work of Richard Hoggart.

Although instrumental in the formation of the Birmingham Centre and the greater field of cultural studies, theorists well before Hoggart’s time began integrating cultural analysis into their pedagogies. Particularly, Raymond Williams articulated the importance of cultural studies over a decade earlier in his recognition that “*culture* is ordinary, in every society and in every mind” (“Culture is Ordinary” 54). By “ordinary,” Williams means the collective recognition or acceptance of even that which we take for granted. As a result, our collective meaning making also becomes subconscious and statutory to all those who are part of that particular group. It is this understanding of culture and meaning making that Hoggart builds on in his own recognition of a mass culture. In addition, the principles by which the Birmingham Centre was created also rely on a perception that collective, social processes of making meaning result in a cultural

coherence with which many of us identify and by which we operate. Furthermore, Williams perceived cultural analysis, which would later evolve into the recognized field of cultural studies, “as a mode of interpreting all our common experience, and, in this new interpretation, changing it” (Williams, *Culture and Society* xvii). With this definition in mind, cultural studies becomes a discipline devoted not only to understanding cultures, but also to critiquing their conventions and institutions. Both Hoggart and Williams presented cultural studies pedagogy as a means to “articulat[e] a notion of culture to replace the cultivation of sensibility implied in the high/low binaries of literary studies and mass culture critiques, on the one hand, and the reductionist sense of culture as an epiphenomenal superstructure of the economic base in mechanical Marxism, on the other,” presenting culture as “everyday practices linked in creative and consequential fashion to the social order and the formation of class consciousness” (George and Trimbur, “Cultural” 73). Hoggart and Williams’ reclaiming of “culture” within the academy is derived from influential philosophers such as Karl Marx, Michel Foucault and Antonio Gramsci.

Cultural studies at its foundation is rooted in Marxist critique of social institutions and the power dynamics they perpetuate. Being one of the key concepts of cultural studies, social critique enables us to not only investigate social processes of power, but to respond to and even incite change in the inequalities they may or may not perpetuate. In the comparison of social systems of construction required by cultural studies, it also inherently explores issues of power and equality within those systems, resulting in an often-Marxist inquiry. Early Marxism has often been charged with being overly deterministic, or strictly concerned with economic or political hierarchies of social

power. However, the Marxism applied in this type of study is more focused on a humanistic analysis as opposed to the structural, strictly commodity driven critique also associated with Marxist thought. Similarly, this critique is also influenced by Foucault's investigation and denunciation of social institutions that dictate and oppress. Specifically, Foucault is instrumental in that he identified humans as social and cultural subjects, subjects to the status quo. As subjects, we become sites of cultural analysis and investigation. Foucault describes this investigation as "creat[ing] a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects" ("The Subject" 777). Like Foucault, cultural studies encourages a critical exploration of the systems and doctrines that govern how we make meaning on a daily basis. Williams implies that cultural studies allows us to possibly "change the common experience," to affect difference in the greater institutions and norms that pervade not only our social interactions, but our personal development as well. This intersection between social and individual processes is accomplished by understanding the collective experience through the relation and relative perspective of the individual.

Arguably as influential to the construction of cultural studies as that of Foucault or even Marx is Antonio Gramsci, who argued that culture itself becomes an instrument of social and political control. Gramsci's definition of culture is dependent on his application of Marxist theories of hegemony and agency. According to Gramsci, hegemony is dictated and maintained by those in power, by the established intellectuals or ruling class. Hegemony then becomes a social tool of domination exercised by the elite over the working or proletariat class. Consequently, dominant processes of meaning making are often dictated by the status quo. The collective mode of thinking and being,

the hegemony, established by those in power is often positioned as in direct opposition to one's agency, as their active and critical potentials are quieted in the favor of social institutions. Like Marx and Foucault, Gramsci viewed dominant hegemonies as counterintuitive, and capable of being overthrown by the majority. As a result, "issues of culture were for him always at the heart of any revolutionary project since culture is, as it were, how [economic] class is lived. And how people see their world and how they live in it necessarily shapes their ability to imagine how it might be changed, and whether they see such changes as feasible or desirable" (Crehan 71). This understanding of culture illuminates the possibilities of an upheaval of oppressive social constructs, of an awareness and call to action that is capable of altering culture itself. Gramsci viewed cultural studies as an active pursuit of societal change, specifically to the constructs that control individual and collective values. In this sense, the field also becomes a hopeful inquiry into the social constructs that have and will continue to influence our individual and collective experiences. This revolutionary understanding of culture helped to inspire the formation of cultural studies as it continues to promote social awareness and action.

Another Marxist theorist influential to the understanding of culture as social production of meaning, and therefore to cultural studies, is that of Louis Althusser and his theory of ideology. Althusser endorsed a structuralist Marxist view of social institutions, exploring the influence of social hierarchies on collective beliefs and values, similar to that of Marx and Gramsci. While Althusser examines social production through an ideological analysis, Gramsci and later Williams promote a more humanistic understanding of cultural production and exchange. Althusser elaborates on the already established conceptions of the hegemonic landscape, asking how hegemony is



constructed and endorsed, and by what social and ideological apparatuses do hegemonies form. In “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation),” Althusser states “man is an ideological animal by nature” (217). Here, Althusser promotes a representation of man as a social animal that establishes and participates in collective ideologies. One of the most prevalent and widely recognized of Althusser’s apparatuses is that of education, as he investigates how our perceptions of academic culture either promote or stunt our individual agency against the hegemony. Althusser continues by describing ideology as a cultural production of sorts, one dependent on a shared endorsement of meaning and worth. It should be noted that Althusser’s definition of ideology is one more humanistic than that of early Marxism, in which those in power impose ideology. Like Gramsci, Althusser views ideology and hegemony as “more typically negotiated between rulers and the ruled in the arena of civil society, where social groups and class fractions struggle for political and moral leadership in education, religion, the mass media, and so on” (George and Trimbur, “Cultural Studies” 75). With this understanding, any ideology or discussion of ideology is collectively formed by a society or like-minded group. The field of cultural studies, influenced by understandings of collective consciousness such as Althusser’s, continues to illuminate and critique our understanding of culture itself.

These key concepts of society and culture outlined by those willing to explore and even critique the world around them, such as Marx, Foucault, Gramsci and Althusser, continue to influence the field today. Like Williams and Hoggart, Stuart Hall, the second director of the Birmingham Centre, continued to recognize the revolutionary power of cultural studies as it exposes and critiques everyday processes that we take for granted.

Hall defines such a practice as “conceptualiz[ing] culture as interwoven with all social practices; and those practices, in turn, as a common form of human activity: sensuous human praxis, the activity through which men and women make history” (“Cultural Studies” 63). Hall views culture as collaborative both in meaning making and critique, insinuating that by understating the cultural implications of one’s agency, we are better able to understand and respond to the cultures to which we belong. In addition, Gramsci’s encouragement of a humanistic Marxist approach to analyzing culture also influences Hall’s culturally critical pedagogy. Under Hall’s direction, the Birmingham Centre elevates academia’s conception of high and low culture in the efforts to expand curriculums to include cultural texts and artifacts outside of the status quo. Hall’s approach also serves as a proponent for race and ethnic studies as it provide students with alternative perspectives into experiences far removed from their own. Hall works to highlight and elaborate on our perspectives of cultural identity, appreciating the importance of individual and collective experience on the process of meaning making. Encoded with cultural meanings often dictated by those in power, cultural artifacts are read by individuals differently, while also enveloping a universally recognizable meaning. Consequently, as Hall argues, our cultural identity then influences the manner in which we receive and respond to the world, also influencing our culture, or collective experience. Inspired by the radical theories of Marx, Foucault and Gramsci, British culturalists like Williams, Hoggart and Hall continued to evolve cultural studies into an academic field of study that traverses discipline, context, origin, and medium.

More recently, and also influenced by the Birmingham Centre, there is a general call for an expansion of the understanding of culture and cultural artifacts. More

contemporary culturalists focus on widening the definition of cultural studies, with particular attention to the incorporation of popular culture. Designed to be self-reflective and recursive to the current social context, cultural studies continues to accommodate the cultural artifacts most prevalent in today's world. For example, theorist John Fiske has been integral in introducing popular culture into the theory and praxis of cultural studies. Fiske's work focuses on integrating everyday life into the practice of cultural studies, to "examine critically and to restructure the relationship between dominant and subordinated cultures" (164). In this way, cultural studies moves beyond the investigation of a dominant hegemony or ideology, as outlined by Gramsci and Althusser, and instead focuses on the minority pockets of culture that are just as illuminating as the greater collective consciousness. Fiske becomes even more focused on the experience of the individual, of the counterhegemonic, made possible through responsible cultural studies that considers varying perspectives of meaning making. In addition, John Storey continues to encourage the study of popular culture in cultural studies programs, ensuring that the field remains a method of inquiry ingrained in the current social consciousness.

Still a field firmly located in the social processes that drive our cultural production and interaction, cultural studies is currently undergoing a shift into what Scott Lash calls a "post-hegemonic turn" (55). Theorists like Lash continue to question whether traditional cultural studies are capable of accommodating the ever-changing, ever complex postmodern world in which we currently live. Specifically, Lash calls for a shift in the cultural studies paradigm from a "logic of reproduction" to one of "invention" (56). Lash associates this "reproduction" with the hegemonic order, the status quo, which dictates the dominant social constructions of meaning. Like Foucault, Lash argues for a

post-hegemonic power, a rising up of the mass culture that has generally been directed in their meaning making. This is crucial, Lash argues, as we are currently moving into a time of “intensive politics,” wherein power comes from within as opposed to being imposed from above (56). Based on the social critique and call to action within the works of Marx and Foucault, cultural studies should begin to view hegemony as oppressive, as becoming a form of domination. Cultural studies should also then respond to this domination, giving the counterhegemonic a method for responding to, even changing, oppressive social institutions. One of these institutions most critical to our collective processes of meaning making, as well as our vulnerability to oppression, is academia. Therefore, the evolution of cultural studies into pedagogy continues to be crucial to the field’s continued relevance and significance.

### **Pedagogy**

As a school of critical thought, cultural studies is most realized as pedagogy, implemented across academic disciplines and institutions. Founded as an interdisciplinary approach to analysis, the field is applicable to many different contexts and purposes. The application of cultural studies into academia was first introduced by Williams’s discussion of the benefits of cultural studies in adult education in the 1950s, as students are able to make connections between their personal and academic lives. Similarly, education became one of the first areas to which cultural studies was implemented. While cultural studies has been applied to many different disciplines, the humanities seems to be the most appropriate for this critical approach as it was most readily applied to literary analysis. Such pedagogy allows for the interpretation of texts for the social contexts from which they were created, and which they support or change. The field has always aimed

at altering the dominant conception of culture, to expand its definition to include that which is not regulated by the status quo. As a result, culturalists have influenced both the texts we read and how we read them. This upheaval of traditional definitions of culture “has always been concerned to interrogate the relationship between the academy and the rest of the social order” (Fiske 164). Inspired by the general desire in cultural studies to redefine culture itself, the cultural studies classroom focuses on expanding what it is we study. Like the greater cultural studies discussed by Hoggart, Williams, and Hall, its pedagogy calls for an upheaval of the dominant hegemony in academia, one that results in a greater diversity in texts and analytical approaches.

In addition to the redefinition and expansion of the material studied in academia, cultural studies pedagogy modifies how instructors and students view and respond to texts. As Richard Johnson describes, in cultural studies pedagogy, “the text is no longer studied for its own sake, nor even for the social effects it may be thought to produce, but rather for the subjective or cultural forms which it realizes and makes available” (26). In the cultural studies classroom, texts are read as products or symptoms of the culture in which they were created. Readers recognize that the social and cultural processes of meaning making influence the writing and reading of such texts. Thus, texts are studied for the cultural forms or “codes” inherent within their creation and reception; forms such as social injustice, and issues of egalitarianism, oppression, and power (Johnson 26). This form of study also results in a greater cultural awareness for both instructor and student, closely associated with the critical pedagogy as well. The critique encouraged by culturalists such as Williams, Hoggart and Hall is then applied to the particular texts of the course or discipline in question. As a result, students should gain a deeper

comprehension of the social context surrounding the creation, release, and reception of these texts, or cultural artifacts.

Henry Giroux, in particular, has been influential as he focused on utilizing texts as teaching tools for illuminating social issues within their cultural production. Giroux describes the cultural studies pedagogue as acutely aware of political and ideological implications of the texts their students encounter, as capable of “engag[ing] diverse cultural texts as a context for theorizing about social issues and wider political considerations” (Giroux, *Education and Cultural Studies* 3). The student’s cultural and critical literacy, elevated through their reading of diverse texts, is paramount in cultural studies composition. As a result, one of the disciplines most recently influenced by cultural studies is that of composition. As cultural studies itself is focused on exploring collective meaning making, and its pedagogy concerned with the reading and interpretation of cultural texts, how students respond to those texts, and produce their own cultural meanings is accomplished in the cultural studies composition classroom.

### **A Brief History of Cultural Studies**

Cultural studies composition pedagogy seeks to relate students’ reading and writing to the social and cultural realities in which they function. This intersection with composition is first recognized in a general social turn in composition towards critical pedagogy. Also influenced by radical theorists such as Foucault and Althusser, critical pedagogy in composition aimed at inspiring student writing that also promoted social consciousness and action. Compositionists such as Paulo Freire, Ira Shor, and David Bartholomae all draw connections between the literacy gained in the composition classroom and the students’ ability to affect social change. In his most seminal work,

*Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire criticizes the convention, “banking model” of education, in which students are seen as “receptacles” for the knowledge of the instructors, administrators, and the greater status quo. In addition, Freire calls for instruction that inspires, motivates, and instigates social consciousness in our students, while also advocating for greater student authority, freedom, and input. Like Freire, Ira Shor more directly applies this critical pedagogy to composition, positing student writing as an opportunity for allowing the student to critique, and even alter, the social institutions that govern their lives. In “Inventing the University,” David Bartholomae draws attention to the conventions of traditional academic discourse and how students successfully or unsuccessfully navigate such conventions. In his acknowledgement of traditional discourses, he also calls for a greater awareness of the students in an effort to promote critique and of and alteration to the expectations of academia, as well as other social apparatuses. When asked about the possibilities of this type of pedagogy, Bartholomae replies, “I do think writing instruction does require struggle, where you do put yourself in a questioning relationships to the culture that’s given you its forms and its assumptions. You learn as a writer to be present inside all of that” (*Writing* 267). Here, Bartholomae draws on the Foucauldian tradition, in which “every educational system is a political means of maintaining or of modifying the appropriation of discourse, with the knowledge and the powers it carries with it” (*Archaeology* 226). Like critical pedagogy, cultural studies within composition asks both students and instructors to examine their subjective positions within the greater culture and how such positions can be addressed and even utilized through composition as a means to critique and enact action on the greater social constructs by which we live.

Similar to Freire, Shor, Bartholomae, and Giroux, James A. Berlin also promotes an intersection between composition and cultural studies centered on a reconsideration of rhetoric by both instructor and student in an effort to provide a mode of instruction that is concerned with both individual and social aspects of the writing process. With the aim of stimulating more culturally conscious and critical composition programs, Berlin sought to foster the critical literacy of his students, a literacy that connects student writing with student living in a discernible and practical manner. In *Rhetorics, Poetics and Cultures: Refiguring College English Studies* (1996), Berlin promotes composition instruction that is concerned with students' critical literacy, both in reading and writing. Berlin describes this literacy as "most committed to egalitarianism in matters of race, gender, and class—an objective to be encouraged through education" (36). With this definition considered, one's critical literacy becomes greater than reading and writing in the composition classroom, translating into a democratic literacy outside of academia. Berlin's theory of critical literacy is first applied to the manner in which students receive, interpret, and react to the many texts they encounter. In the cultural studies composition classroom, this critical literacy should then be applied to considerations of the individual writer as well, connecting academic discourse with the realities of our students.

Influenced by the progenitors of cultural studies, and theorists such as Marx and Foucault, Berlin's concentration on developing democratic and critical literacy relies on the recognition that rhetoric and texts are socially and conventionally constructed. His approach came to be known as social-epistemic rhetoric. Berlin explains social-epistemic rhetoric as, "the study and critique of signifying practices in their relation to subject formation within the framework of economic, social, and political conditions" (83). With



this socially conscious understanding of rhetoric, which thereby informs one's critical literacy, students are then able to interpret and produce culturally relevant composition. This composition becomes culturally relevant in that it considers "the entire rhetorical context—writer, audience, topic, and social and linguistic environment—in arriving at a statement that engages the student's interests as well as the community's" (Berlin 36). As a result, composition studies becomes a vehicle for social and cultural reform.

Social-epistemic rhetoric provides students with a framework through which to combine rhetorical reading and collaborative analysis with the greater goal of producing rhetorically and culturally appropriate composition. Berlin defines the purpose of a cultural studies composition classroom as "provid[ing] methods for revealing semiotic codes enacted in the production and interpretation of texts that cut across the aesthetic, the economic and political, and the philosophical and scientific, enabling students to engage critically in the variety of reading and writing practices required of them" (95). The classroom then becomes a microcosm for culture itself, an environment of collaborative critique, cultural recovery and production. Berlin's introduction of such concepts has since influenced composition studies' focus on collaboration and critique as significant to students' academic and cultural development.

Berlin argues that during the formative years of composition and rhetoric (1960-1970s) compositionists were primarily concerned with accommodating the individual writing process. His introduction of concepts such as critical literacy and social-epistemic rhetoric into the field of composition has since influenced a trend towards cultural analysis within composition studies. One of the most influential of Berlin's concepts was that of student composition as cultural recovery and production. Theorist Henry A.

Giroux defines this type of student writing as “cultural recovery in which the production of knowledge, subjectivity, and agency can be addressed as ethical, political, and pedagogical issues” (3). As Giroux describes, and as Berlin encouraged, the individual is considered in terms of the social or cultural, allowing students to relate their writing with the cultural milieu in which they live. This investigation of cultural influence, both in the reading and writing of texts, enables students to utilize their writing as a vehicle for social understanding and change.

While cultural studies in composition encourages students’ understanding of social institutions that both liberate and oppress, it also calls for a heightened attention to controversial, and even ideological, discussion within the classroom. For example, investigations into cultural artifacts often require wider considerations of social justice issues. By understanding and responding to social justice issues, students are often asked to recognize and interpret the very social ideologies by which they themselves operate. In addition, discussions of social hierarchy and power, as well as hegemony and agency, will also often require investigations into ideology and social institution.

The presence of ideology in the classroom also raises concerns about a challenge always present in composition studies: student resistance. Although student resistance is common in any composition classroom, it is potentially more problematic in a classroom that integrates ideological discussion. Karen Kopelson articulates the continued challenge of student resistance in cultural studies composition stating, “student resistance has evolved from a rudimentary resistance to the writing course per se into resistance to the writing course as ‘inappropriately’ politicized” (116-17). This concern remains one of the key caveats to critical cultural studies in composition. In order to combat the issue of

student resistance, writing instructors have attempted to modify or restructure concepts of critical literacy and social-epistemic rhetoric.

Newer developments in cultural studies composition call for an understanding of the students' individual, as well as cultural standpoints. Instructors recognize and investigate students' emotional reception of and reaction to social stimulus as a learning tool for cultural recovery and production. Lisa Langstraat, for example, describes cultural and critical literacy as dependent on the individual perspective of the students themselves, drawing on the psychoanalytical approach known as the "affect theory." "Affect theory" focuses on the emotional responses, or "affect," of the student, encouraging students to first examine their own personal perspectives of the culture or society they are a part of. By beginning with a cultural analysis of the personal and familiar, Langstraat argues, students are less resistant to future considerations of cultural studies within the composition classroom. Instructors and administrators are also encouraged to study and accommodate students' individual and emotional standpoint. In turn, Langstraat's students are also better able to identify culture as something they are already immersed in, theoretically making student resistance and detachment less likely. Langstraat further argues that closer attention to the personal and emotional attachments, or "affect," of our students to the culture they already function within, is even more warranted as our society becomes more cynical and treacherous with the very real dangers that permeate our current milieu, such as terrorism and economic collapse.

Like its larger school of criticism, cultural studies composition continues to combat the ever-present challenges of the increasingly complex and convoluted social milieu in which our students currently exist. With modern considerations such as

terrorism, greater multiculturalism, digital media, and consumerism, it is even more necessary that composition programs foster critical and reflective cultural and individual awareness, helping students to become more informed and democratically inclined citizens. For instance, composition theorist Paul Lynch, much like Scott Lash, acknowledges the ever-changing social landscape, which in turn informs contemporary students' understanding of social epistemic rhetoric. Lynch notes an "apocalyptic turn" in the modern milieu, a turn that must be addressed in a cultural studies approach to composition. With threats such as "economic disruption, endless violence, and...environmental collapse," modern cultural studies composition must be augmented to address new concerns of student resistance (Lynch 458). Postmodern concerns also require a heightened awareness of mass communication technologies that continue to influence how today's student gains access to various cultures. As the field of composition studies continues to evolve and respond to shifts in the social and cultural consciousness of our students, we must include a consideration of these new technologies. With the plethora of information available to students today, it becomes more important that they are exposed to composition instruction that intersects with their personal, as well as social and cultural, realities.

Cultural studies writing instruction is prevalent across composition programs in the U.S., seen most notably in the profusion of composition textbooks that utilize interdisciplinary approaches to cultural artifacts to inspire more culturally relevant and critical composition. In *Reading Culture: Contexts for Critical Reading and Writing*, Diana George and John Trimbur present students with familiar cultural texts, such as popular music, advertising, and literature in an effort to encourage critical literacy and

discussion within the classroom. Similarly, the textbook *Rereading America: Cultural Contexts for Critical Thinking and Writing* also aims to “help students link their personal experiences with broader cultural perspectives and lead them to analyze, or ‘read,’ the cultural forces that have shaped and continue to shape their lives” (Colombo, Cullen, and Lisle v). These and countless other textbooks help students to read and write in critical and analytical ways.

Throughout these considerations of cultural studies in the composition classroom, one can recognize the continued relevance and significance of such an approach. In our efforts to inspire not only academically gifted students, but also culturally aware and critical citizens, contemporary compositionists must recognize and accommodate the ever-changing social and rhetorical landscape. In order for student writing to genuinely integrate with student living, compositionists must continue to encourage an intersection between critical cultural studies and composition instruction. As students learn to write, they also learn to analyze and respond to the diversified social discourses in which they function. As a result, current composition instruction must also address a variety of cultures and discourses, achievable through the integration of cultural studies pedagogy.

### **Chapter Three:**

#### **James Berlin and the Shift Towards Culturally Critical Composition**

While many theorists have influenced the social turn in composition studies towards cultural analysis and critique within the classroom, as demonstrated in chapter two, the innovations of James Berlin provide an effective approach to implementing such pedagogies in the contemporary composition classroom. In order to better appreciate the value and significance of Berlin's contribution to the field, one must first acknowledge the historical significance of social-epistemic rhetoric as a tool for culturally and socially relevant composition. In an effort to empower his students through culturally relevant and critical writing instruction, James A. Berlin altered the landscape of rhetoric and composition studies. Born in 1942 in Flint, Michigan to two working class parents, Berlin developed an acute awareness of and relation to the rhetoric of less affluent populations. As a result, Berlin aimed to expand and redefine traditional conceptions of culture and discourse in academia. He sought to introduce students of varying socioeconomic positions to a multitude of perspectives in an effort to develop and harness their critical literacy. Armed with experience in social arenas far removed from the ivy-covered walls of academia, Berlin provided his students with an appreciation for rhetoric as it functions outside of the classroom. After receiving his PhD in 1975, Berlin went on to teach and direct first-year English programs at the University of Cincinnati and Purdue University during the 1980s. During this time, Berlin began to envision a composition classroom

that encourages students to explore and critically respond to socially epistemic rhetoric, while still championing their individual, social and cultural standpoints. Throughout his career and up until his death in 1994, Berlin continued to foster his students' critical literacy by recognizing the personal and social implications of their everyday rhetoric.

Influenced by Greek progenitors of rhetoric such as Aristotle, Berlin associates the critical literacy ascertained in the classroom with the democratic citizenship students are capable of later in life. Classical Aristotelian rhetoric calls for "recognition of the social nature of writing," of the "rhetoric of public discourse," of "a transactional rhetoric" (Berlin, *Rhetoric and Reality* 81). Composition then becomes a skill necessary in order to navigate and influence the social and political landscape. To this end, one's rhetorical knowledge is in direct relation to their ability to function as an effective member of the polis, or democratic citizenry. Also motivated by Freire's anti-banking model of education, Berlin harnesses this collaborative understanding by emphasizing the social significance of rhetoric within writing instruction. Berlin also uses the Aristotelian model of rhetoric in an effort to draw connections between public and academic discourse through the recognition of collaborative rhetorical invention.

Influenced by the social significance of rhetoric outlined by theorists such as Aristotle, Berlin applies this focus on the social processes of rhetoric in terms of invention. One of the five tenets of Aristotelian rhetoric, invention refers to the information or content being provided by the rhetor, as well as the rhetor's awareness of the rhetorical situation from which they are operating. During the preliminary years of composition studies (1960s and 1970s), compositionists focused on the individual elements of invention such as arrangement or style, as well as collaborative group work.

Berlin draws attention to the social and collaborative invention integral to an epistemological understanding of rhetoric. According to him, rhetorical invention is a collaborative process, one that recognizes that “all institutions are social constructions continually open to revision” (*Rhetorics, Poetics* 36). And it is the social invention of rhetoric that enables this revision, that provides students and citizens with the means to recognize, explore, and even alter perceptions of language and rhetoric. For Berlin, this process of social invention, of “writing as discovery and invention, not mere reproduction and transmission,” relies on the exploration of rhetoric as its functions within public discourse, of a social-epistemic rhetoric (*Rhetorics, Poetics* 87). Berlin’s concentration on collaborative invention and critical literacy development relies on the exploration of rhetoric as it functions within society, the recognition of rhetoric as socially epistemic. As Berlin states in *Rhetorics, Poetics, and Cultures*, “Students learn to write in a manner that will prepare them for participation in the political life of a democratic society” (36). By seeing themselves as a member of a public discourse outside of the classroom, students are then able to appreciate the social and political power of composition, a power that Aristotle describes in terms of rhetoric. Berlin expands on Aristotle’s promotion of rhetoric as a means to critique and address social and political issues of the time, utilizing students’ individual and collective perspectives in composition as a vehicle for societal advancement. He recognizes that “given the democratic political commitments of the United States, it is impossible for us to separate literary and rhetorical texts from political life as it was for the citizens of ancient Athens” (*Rhetorics, Poetics* xiii). Borrowing from Aristotle’s view of rhetorical invention as inherently democratic, as we collectively create language and language creates democracy, Berlin works to elevate student investment by



presenting them with rhetoric that is rooted in social and political, as well as academic, realities.

Similar to Aristotle's influence, Berlin's understanding of rhetoric is also inspired by nineteenth century rhetorician Fred Newton Scott. Most influenced by Scott's aim to discredit current-traditional rhetoric, Berlin also explores how rhetoric is utilized within the public discourse of American democracy. Like Berlin, Scott is also inspired by Aristotle's focus on both the collaborative and political processes of rhetoric, viewing all rhetoric as social, as resulting from collaborative constructions of meaning. As a result, Scott's rhetoric highlights the dialectical exchange between rhetor and audience, between the individual and the collective. Scott criticizes traditional academia for "failing to ground education in the social experience of the [student]," as according to him "language is experience and experience is language" (Berlin, *Writing* 79). Berlin expands on Scott's views by grounding cultural and social considerations of language within the individual perspective of the student. Both Scott and Berlin utilize this experiential rhetoric as a means of seeking truth and criticizing the current social or political landscape.

In addition to the socially constructed views of Aristotle and Scott, Berlin also draws on Emerson's romantic notions of rhetoric. To accommodate both the individual and the greater social context, Emerson promoted a conception of rhetoric that was individualistic as well as epistemological. Focusing on the individual perceptions of social processes, Emerson describes language as an intersection between the rational and the ideal. Language then becomes a vehicle for social or political change, as well as a means for communicating the individual experience. Like Emerson, Berlin recognizes

that “despite its emphasis on the individual, [language] is social and democratic, combining the comprehensiveness of Aristotelian rhetoric with a post-Kantian epistemology” (*Writing* 43). Berlin marries Aristotle’s views of social rhetoric with Emerson’s individualistic conceptions in his promotion of a social-epistemic rhetoric. Most influenced by this recognition of rhetoric as being at the center of all social and political action, Berlin maintains that “in teaching students about the way they ought to use language we are teaching them something about how to conduct their lives” (*Writing* 92). To this end, Berlin utilizes this classical recognition of rhetoric as a bridge between the composition his students create in the classroom and the public discourse they regularly engage in.

Berlin’s recognition of the social and political significance of everyday rhetoric within the composition classroom relies on the recognition of rhetoric as a social-epistemic instrument. Influenced by Aristotle, Emerson and Scott, Berlin utilizes social-epistemic rhetoric as a bridge between academic and public discourse, one that recognizes and responds to the everyday rhetoric of our students. Berlin’s concept of rhetoric is inspired by an intersection between classical rhetoric and modern day society. For instance, through his study of Common Sense Realism, Berlin came to realize that we access reality through our own unique perception and that perception is then influenced by a collective knowledge of the world around us. Approaching rhetoric as a social process of meaning making provides students with an opportunity to consider the entire rhetorical situation. More specifically, Berlin concentrated on empowering students to understand the social power of rhetoric by first identifying “the entire rhetorical context—writer, audience, topic, and social and linguistic environment” within social

institutions with which they are familiar, thereby “arriving at a statement that engages the student’s interests as well as the community’s” (*Rhetorics, Poetics* 36). This exploration of the social and political context of language—of social-epistemic rhetoric—results in collaborative invention, which allows students to investigate and reflect on the greater cultural landscape. Accordingly, “in composing a text, a writer will engage in an analysis of the cultural codes operating in defining her role, the roles of the audience, and the constructions of the matter to be considered” (Berlin, “Poststructuralism” 22). Berlin promotes culturally critical composition through investigations rooted in the transformational power of language, as it is collaboratively constructed and as it is individually perceived or influenced. For example, Bruce McComiskey, a student of Berlin’s, articulates the seminal shift within Berlin’s culturally conscious composition, stating that Berlin maintains focus on “composing as a process,” yet widens our understanding of composition to include not only the individual writer, but also “composing as a *social* (emphasis added) process” (52-53). Berlin becomes more concerned with the social or cultural influences over individual processes of reading and writing. Through recognition of social-epistemic rhetoric, students are introduced not only to the traditional rhetorical situation, but also to the current social and political implications of rhetoric that most influence them. Berlin aims to recognize rhetoric as a social tool, being influenced and manipulated by the various social processes to which it is applied, a tool that “must be based on a holistic response, involving the total person, the ethical and aesthetic as well as the rational” (Berlin, *Writing* 81). It is Berlin’s “holistic” view of social-epistemic rhetoric that represents a seminal shift from the focus on the individual writing process common to composition studies at the time.

Much like Emerson and Scott, Berlin rejected the current-traditional rhetoric and its focus on the rational arrangement or final product of composition. In this understanding of rhetoric, discourse is delivered in a mechanized and predictable manner, one that identifies correctness and organization as the most important elements of effective composition. Berlin articulates the insufficiencies of current-traditional rhetoric as it “encourages a mode of behavior that helps students in their move up the corporate ladder—correctness in usage, grammar, clothing, thought, and a certain sterile objectivity and disinterestedness” (*Writing* 75). Similarly, Berlin criticized and rejected expressivist rhetoric as also lacking in attention to the social context of student composition. Expressivist rhetoric posited individual expression of the rhetor as the most important element in composition, ostensibly divorcing language from its social processes and effects. Accordingly, expressivist rhetors champion a writer's style or voice above other elements of the rhetorical situation. Also viewing this rhetoric as lacking, Berlin expands on this investigation of the personal and emotional to consider individual responses in relation to the social or ideological institution in which they participate.

Criticizing both schools as disregarding the social and individual aspects of rhetoric, Berlin introduces a rhetoric that accommodates the constituents of any rhetorical situation. While Berlin criticizes common perceptions of rhetoric such as current-traditional and expressivist, his formation of social-epistemic rhetoric is still rooted in the social and individual responses of our students. In this way, Berlin's rhetoric relies on traditional conceptions of rhetoric. Berlin describes social-epistemic rhetoric as possessing “roots in the social constructionist efforts of pragmatism” (*Rhetorics, Poetics* 83). It is not that Berlin completely rejects established forms of rhetoric, but instead that

he expands on them, combining the individual and the social. Berlin presents composition as a tool to confront and reflect on the social, cultural, and individual experiences of our students.

In addition to his shift from the individual to the collective processes of rhetoric, Berlin also alters the landscape of composition studies in his incorporation of ideology in the classroom. In “Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class,” Berlin states, “rhetoric can never be innocent, can never be a disinterested arbiter of the ideological claims of others because it is always already serving certain ideological claims” (Berlin 477). It is these “ideological claims” that Berlin wishes to expose and investigate through recognition of social-epistemic rhetoric, as well as a general intersection between cultural and composition studies. Influenced by theorists such as Gramsci, Berlin viewed ideology as collectively constructed, not imposed by the status quo. He recognizes that “ideology always brings with it strong social and cultural reinforcement, so that what we take to exist, to have value, and to be possible seems necessary, normal” (*Rhetorics, Poetics* 84). As a result, these ideologies themselves become cultural sites of inquiry, institutions that we can explore, critique and even alter. By incorporating ideological discussion in the classroom, Berlin aims to “enable students to become active, critical agents of their experience rather than passive victims of cultural codes” (*Rhetorics, Poetics* 113). Berlin strove to include communal ideological discussion, analysis, and exploration of ideology in an effort to reveal the individual and social processes by which we create and endorse meaning.

Grounded in the theories of Marx, Foucault, Gramsci, Therbon, and others, Berlin expanded traditional perceptions of rhetoric to combat the fact that “some rhetorics have

denied their imbrication in ideology” (“Rhetoric” 477). For example, compositionist Maxine Hairston criticizes the use of any ideology in the composition classroom, claiming that it detracts from the very important and demanding task of writing effectively. Hairston argues that encouraging ideological considerations will inevitably lead to dogmatic prescriptions, instructor bias, and most importantly student resistance. Hairston maintains that any composition classroom that focuses on ideological discussion “puts dogma before diversity, politics before craft, ideology before critical thinking, and the social goals of the teacher before the educational needs of the student” (698). However, Hairston’s position neglects to recognize the social processes of composition, the collaborative construction of meaning and ideology. It seems that Hairston approaches writing instruction as if it occurs in a virtual vacuum, segregated from our student’s social and individual perspectives. In addition, Hairston operates from a misconception of ideology itself. Perceiving ideology in the deterministic, Marxist form of being imposed upon those weaker than the status quo, Hairston criticizes Berlin’s heuristic. However, Berlin, informed by a collaboratively created sense of ideology as espoused by Gramsci and Therbon, aims to encourage discussion and self-reflection of collective ideologies. In this sense, language is explored for the ideological processes by which we collectively create and endorse its meaning, not for the dogmatic ideology it may be perpetuating, as Hairston seems to criticize. Berlin’s criticizes Hairston’s writing instruction as discarding the basic perception of rhetoric as a political act, and by doing so, disconnecting student writing from student living. According to Berlin, composition studies should “involve a dialectical interaction engaging the material, the social, and the individual writer, with language as the agency of mediation” (“Rhetoric” 488). Frustrated

by this circumvention of ideological considerations, Berlin produces a heuristic for the writing classroom that embraces our students' ideological experiences, asking them to question, confront, and even challenge the social norms imposed by such ideologies. To this end, social-epistemic rhetoric becomes "an alternative that is self-consciously aware of its ideological stand, making the very question of ideology the center of classroom activities" (Berlin, "Rhetoric" 478). In this cultural studies classroom, knowledges, practices, and even individuals are considered as saturated with ideology. This investigation of ideological influence, both in the reading and writing of texts, enables students to utilize their writing as a vehicle for social understanding and change.

Inspired by Berlin's concepts of social-epistemic rhetoric and critical literacy, twenty-first century composition studies should continue to consider the cultural significance of the literacy it encourages in its students. As Berlin states, "In teaching people to write and read, we are thus teaching them a way of experiencing the world" (*Rhetorics* 110). It is this consideration of literacy, along with his groundbreaking introduction of social-epistemic rhetoric, which has since made Berlin one of the most influential figures in cultural studies composition pedagogy. Although his concepts are often met with criticism, James A. Berlin provides a cultural and collaborative framework through which to explore and celebrate the social relevance of student writing. It is for reasons such as these that Berlin's concepts of social-epistemic rhetoric and critical literacy remain relevant and significant methods through which to empower students to create not only effective composition, but also culturally relevant and thought-provoking rhetoric.

## **Chapter Four:**

### **Heuristics for Critical Cultural Studies Composition**

In an effort to understand the continued relevance and significance of the incorporation of social-epistemic rhetoric into composition studies, we must also examine how such theories are put into practice. I will begin by examining what such a class, modeled on Berlin's framework, entails and what instructors might do in order to appreciate, and to motivate students to appreciate, the social power of rhetoric. One of the most integral elements of the critical cultural studies classroom is a destabilization of the traditional roles of student and instructor, which offers students more authority than conventional pedagogies. For example, Berlin calls for a decentering of the instructor's authority, creating a reflexive and student-driven classroom as students and instructors collaboratively make meaning within the social construct of the classroom. Lynn Searfoss, a current composition instructor and former student of Berlin, describes the importance of this cooperative setting as it enables "students to begin where they are, and to have more authority over what we were talking about." In this sense, the cultural studies composition classroom becomes "a community in which the instructor is learning from [the students] while they are learning from her" (Searfoss). Searfoss furthers the opportunity for student authority in her own cultural studies classroom, allowing her students to collaboratively create their own writing prompts and, later, grading guidelines collaboratively. The cultural studies composition classroom then becomes a space in which ideas, about course guidelines, reading topics, and general discussions, are



genuinely collaborative, being created by the social interaction between students and instructors. In this way, students are allotted input not only in the invention or planning stages of their writing process, but in the actual production and evaluation of it as well. Writing instructors and students become equal partners in understanding and creating rhetoric that is grounded in the collective experience shared by a group of students. Cultural studies composition instruction encourages “dialectical interaction, working out a rhetoric more adequate to the historical moment and the actual conditions of teachers and students” (Berlin, “Poststructuralism” 25). Students are able not only to appreciate the social significance of language, but also their own ability in crafting or influencing the dominant social discourses to which they belong. In fact, influenced by Freire’s avocation for a more collaborative classroom, critical cultural studies also requires that instructors are conscious of their own subjective positions within the greater social construct. As a result, in this type of classroom, both student and instructor are learning more about themselves, the class, and the greater society or culture surrounding it. Students then become invested in the language they create, in their communications within the classroom, as they become aware of the epistemology ingrained in all types of rhetoric.

Ideally, students are then able to create their own rhetoric, one that accommodates and empowers their individual perspective, simultaneously providing a voice to the whole. Approaching rhetoric as an instrument for social change results in a pedagogy and classroom that “is dedicated to making schools places for individual and social empowerment” (Berlin, “Poststructuralism” 26). This approach not only identifies social-epistemic rhetoric, but also utilizes that perception of rhetoric itself as a means for

reading, responding to, and inspiring composition that transcends traditional writing instruction that is often divorced from students' social realities. Instead of privileging one type of rhetoric or discourse over another, Berlin appreciates both social-constructionist and expressivist rhetorics, encouraging students to recognize themselves as subjects of a cultural construct before criticizing or enacting change upon it. This integration of social-epistemic studies results in a student's critical literacy, which ultimately becomes grounded in theories of classical rhetorical invention, also armed with the ability to craft composition that is both socially relevant and individually resonant.

Inspired by this desire to empower students and eventually prompt social change through rhetorical knowledge and awareness, Berlin created a heuristic for the social-epistemic composition course. This heuristic is most clearly described in "Poststructuralism, Cultural Studies, and the Composition Classroom: Postmodern Theory in Practice" (1992). Already encouraging a heightened awareness of epistemology and its effect on language, this heuristic aims at understanding and critiquing competing dominant epistemologies that govern social processes of making meaning. In fact, postmodernism, as Berlin understands it, requires that students challenge and resist hegemonic discourses through an understanding of and disillusionment with false dichotomies and hierarchies that continue to influence our everyday language. This understanding then inspires critical literacy in students by offering a writing course that focuses on "an examination of the cultural codes—the social semiotics—that are working themselves out in shaping consciousness in our students and ourselves" (Berlin, "Poststructuralism" 26). This course exposes students to a variety of literary and non-literary texts, asking them to investigate rhetorical strategies

of each text as it works to influence and create the dominant epistemology of the time. In essence, students are asked to consider the larger social and cultural context of a composition, while also considering how that text influences their own individual perspectives and processes of making meaning.

Berlin's heuristic first focuses on texts with which students are already familiar, using their social realities as a text for the composition classroom. He states, "We thus guide students to locate in their experience the points at which they are now engaging in resistance and negotiation with the cultural codes they daily encounter" (Berlin, "Poststructuralism" 27). Berlin begins with a discussion of cultural codes with which students are already familiar, such as a common advertisement. He then prompts students to discuss how they are already viewing and perceiving the advertisements both individually and as a group. By starting with a familiar discourse with familiar cultural codes, such as an advertisement, students become comfortable and even empowered in their rhetorical analysis of cultural codes, operating from within a frame of reference that they can genuinely claim. By beginning with a discourse that they can relate to, students become more able and inclined to comment on, criticize, and even resist the hegemonic landscapes of the discourse and its community. By beginning with the expectations and assumptions of the student, this pedagogy allows for collaborative and participatory invention activities that enable students to learn about the socially epistemic facets of rhetoric through their own discussion and composition. In this way, students are able to understand how meaning is collectively constructed, both inside and outside of the classroom. Students are then armed by their understandings of the social implications of language and meaning, allowing them to better resist the dangers of becoming mindless

and uninformed consumers of mass culture. Yet, according to Berlin, such resistance is futile if students are not able to first comprehend that they themselves are already influenced by social-epistemic rhetoric as an integral part of their realities. This understanding then leads to transference in knowledge between the academic and the non-academic discourse. The composition classroom then becomes its own culture of sorts; a culture that recovers and produces rhetoric geared towards understanding and changing the world. This approach results in student engagement with “topics that would have meaningful ramifications” on their everyday social realities (Searfoss). Berlin’s heuristic aims at fostering a more realistic and informed social awareness of our students.

As a result, students become invested in composition, encouraged by the knowledge that not only do they already function within and around these cultural codes, but that these codes already influence the manner in which they form meaning both individually and collectively. Aimed at using student experience as a text itself, Berlin proposes a course that includes six units with which students already have some knowledge, “advertising, work, play, education, gender, and individuality” (“Poststructuralism” 27). Berlin uses these common areas of interest as a means of grounding students’ rhetorical analysis within shared experiences. Having encountered elements from each unit at some point in their lives, students are able to comfortably discuss concepts of rhetoric and the rhetorical situation through the interpretation of common cultural and social practices and institutions. While there is a common unit from which to operate, students are also encouraged to explore the difference in individual interpretation of such institutions. Here, Berlin, and the cultural studies composition course in general, harkens back to a Foucauldian analysis of the society, one that calls for

an agency that is gathered from within. By identifying areas in our students' lives in which they are already criticizing or resisting dominant ways of knowing, we enable them to transfer these skills to more complex discourses within the composition classroom. Students investigate the instances of conflict or disagreement within the analysis of the particular text and the discourse within the classroom. The composition classroom become a self-reflective culture of sorts, one that forms, discusses, and even alters the dominant discourse, all the while enabling students to become more aware of the rhetorical processes that continue to govern their social realities outside of the classroom.

Berlin promotes this rhetorical awareness in his students by first "provid[ing] students with a set of heuristics (invention strategies) that grow out of the interaction of rhetoric, structuralism, poststructuralism, semiotics, and cultural studies" ("Poststructuralism" 27). One of these invention strategies includes identifying key terms in a text and how such terms work to represent the larger discourse and the process of making meaning. Such invention strategies generally begin as a collaborative process, accomplished either in small or large group discussion. This focus on collaboration also represents another of Berlin's key contributions to composition, the idea of collective invention. Searfoss describes Berlin's instruction as moving away from the "idea that you invent on some deep soul level by yourself to [the deeper understanding] that we are all social creatures and that your meaning is created together." Through this understanding, students are able to construct their own social-epistemic rhetoric within the classroom while also better appreciating the social dynamic to a writing process previously presented as individualistic. And, it is this realization that further enables students to

grasp the greater goal of cultural studies composition, to inspire more informed and democratically-inclined citizens of the world.

By first focusing on the basic language being used, Berlin allows students to identify the importance of language and its cultural codes, ultimately transferring such awareness to future writing. Berlin expands on this strategy by then asking students to identify the binaries created by the discursive terms identified. He provides an example in which students read a 1981 essay from *The Wall Street Journal* titled, “The Days of a Cowboy are Marked by Danger, Drudgery, and Low Pay” by William Blundell. Through collaborative discussion, students identify the following terms to be further investigated, “country,” “cowboys,” “union,” and “civilization” (Berlin, “Poststructuralism” 28). Students then consider what the opposite of such terms would entail, what binaries or hierarchies they are able to recognize as influencing the text and their reading of it. In this interpretation, students are also required to consider their own individual perceptions of these terms and their binaries, as well as what preconceptions they hold about cowboys or the country. As a result, his students are able to identify the following binaries, such as “the opposition of nature/civilization, country/city, cowboy/urban cowboy” (Berlin, “Poststructuralism” 28). And as they identify the binaries in the original text, they begin to recognize how often the binaries are disrupted by their own experiential knowledge, ultimately realizing how “unstable these hierarchies can be” (Berlin, “Poststructuralism” 28). Such cultural analysis also calls for an exploration of the connotative and denotative properties of these terms, asking students to identify, compare, and analyze differences that occur. Here, they are able to appreciate the social power of language as it translates across discourses and cultures. This heuristic and critique can then be transferred to other

texts with which students are familiar, all in an effort to demonstrate the cultural codes created by language, and the manner in which rhetorical knowledge can elaborate on the inequity perpetuated by social hierarchy. When asked what Berlin's most valuable contribution to composition studies, Richard Morris, another former student of Berlin, replies, "he was really good at coming up with the methodology for teaching students critical thinking," and "his original heuristic is powerful, you can analyze anything with it." Morris refers to the universal applicability of the critical thinking skills promoted by Berlin's approach binary analysis within composition instruction. He stresses the importance of student reflection and awareness of their own processes of meaning making and how social and cultural institutions influence them. Morris modifies Berlin's binary analysis to focus on "cultural myths and stereotypes" as young writers, college freshman in particular, are often more interested in the application and result of cultural binaries in comparison to the terms or ideas that perpetuate them. In fact, Morris often found that beginning with a common myth or stereotype and then unpacking the binary terms or ideas resulted in more engaged students, helping them to apply this heuristic "to a wider range of topics."

Similarly, Searfoss explains the importance of pre-analytical discussion, stating, "it is in those conversations and discussions that students become aware that they are constructing meaning of different things based on social expectations and of how arbitrary, restrictive but sometimes enabling those expectations are." In essence, by recognizing the malleability of rhetoric, students become closer to the realization that they too can inflict personal and social change through rhetoric. In addition, this heuristic demonstrates the interconnectivity of critical reading and writing promoted in the cultural

studies composition classroom. Through activities such as these, Berlin utilizes students reading activities as an invention strategy for the greater analysis to be completed in their composition.

Cultural studies composition instruction returns to the personal and the familiar throughout, allowing students to “apply these heuristics to their personal experiences in order to analyze in essay form the effect of an important cultural code on their lives” (Berlin, “Poststructuralism” 29). To demonstrate this approach, Berlin provides an example from the education unit, asking students to describe some aspect of their educational experience that is particularly significant to them. Next, he asks them to identify instances of conflict or struggle in their educational experience, all the while allowing his students to examine the social apparatuses by which they form meaning. Through the reading and investigation of texts such as the Blundell article, students identify cultural codes or types of rhetoric that create binaries or hierarchies which thrive within their social interactions outside of the classroom. Finally, Berlin directs this transference of knowledge into student writing, encouraging both student responses to the texts they encounter as well as analysis of their own negotiation of cultural codes in the real world. Throughout these reading and writing heuristics, Berlin maintains focus on the ability of his students to “discover the culturally coded character of all parts of composing” (“Poststructuralism” 30). This discovery becomes necessary if Berlin’s students’ are able to comprehend the ability of rhetoric to inflict social change on dominant epistemologies. It is this revolutionary perception of rhetoric and composition that Berlin continues to foster in his students through the promotion of their critical literacy.



Now able to identify cultural codes and their influence on both texts and general epistemologies, students are prepared to comprehend rhetoric as a means of seeking and establishing a reliable truth based on genuine social interaction and experiential knowledge. Not only is rhetoric seen as epistemic, but is also “regard[ed] as a means of arriving at truth...plac[ing] language at the center of this truth-seeking, truth-creating enterprise” (Berlin, *Writing* 90). To this end, students are encouraged to criticize and destabilize dominant cultural codes of the time, all in an effort to empower students’ individual voices and agencies.

Similar to expressivists of the eighties and nineties, Berlin also champions the individual processes of the writer. However, Berlin focuses on invention as a socially collaborative process that students are able to comprehend as symptomatic of the greater hegemony. Symptomatic yes, incurable no; students are empowered with the knowledge that they can influence these codes, binaries and hierarchies through their own composition. It is this knowledge that Berlin identifies as a “truth,” a process of making meaning that recognizes the influence of domination ideology and epistemology; a “truth” that rises above such constrictions in an effort to create a new, more socially relevant, rhetoric. Fueling this desire to not only educate, but to empower, students through rhetoric are Berlin’s condemnation and general fear of rampant reification. With an understanding of ideology as being collectively created and endorsed, Berlin strives to combat students’ mindless perpetuation of oppressive social institutions. He describes this danger, stating,

In falling victim to reification, students begin to see the economic and social system that renders them powerless as an innate and unchangeable feature of the

natural order. They become convinced that change is impossible, and they support the very practices that victimize them—complying in their alienation from their work, their peers, and their very selves. (Berlin, “Rhetoric and Ideology” 490)

Collaborative and communicative invention thrives in this composition classroom, allowing students to appreciate the truth-seeking ability of rhetoric both in their personal lives and in their interaction with greater social institutions. Students are then able to differentiate between the real and constructed, able to “critically examine their quotidian experience in order to externalize false consciousness” (Berlin, “Rhetoric and Ideology” 491).

This type of writing also carries with it a deeper “civic purpose” (Searfoss), providing students with “ what they need to deal with society today” (Morris). This “civic purpose” distinguishes Berlin’s approach from the more traditional and expressivist composition instruction that focuses on the individual writing process and the proficiency of a final product. Berlin and his followers seem more interested with the deeper thought processes of their students, aimed at understanding not only what students think and write but also how their social and cultural standpoints influence how they think and write. With this more action-oriented view of rhetorical knowledge, Berlin describes the social-epistemic classroom as one for not only cultural recovery, but production as well. In this sense, students become compositionists armed with the revolutionary power of rhetoric. However, before this realization can take place, students must first be able to identify instances in which rhetoric becomes a social power able to sway the hegemonic processes of perceiving the world.

In *Rhetorics, Poetics, and Cultures* (1999), Berlin provides another heuristic for a culturally critical, rhetorically driven composition course, titled “The Discourse of Revolution” (131). Berlin outlines a classroom that continues to highlight the interchangeability of reading and writing through the rhetorical analysis of a variety of texts. Geared at enabling students’ appreciation of the social significance of rhetoric, Berlin organizes the course

around a consideration of signifying practices and their relation to subject formation within the context of power at one of these important moments in political and textual history, focusing on text and their contexts in England during the time of the two revolutions at the end of the eighteenth century—roughly between 1775 and 1800. (*Rhetorics* 131-32)

By providing a specific time and social context, students are given an opportunity to explore the political, social and cultural connections between a literary text and the milieu from which it originates. As a result, students are better able to recognize the cultural significance of their own composition, how it relates to their individual experience, society, and the possibly for social change or even revolution. This course begins with the reading of historical texts from the period, instructing students to first investigate the social and political events of the time. For example, Berlin suggests using *A History of Capitalism* (1983) by Michel Beaud to introduce students to the period’s cultural landscape. This introduction is framed in major political events, such as “England’s colonial domination,” “availability of labor,” “increased population,” and how they influenced the development of England’s economic progress (*Rhetorics* 133). Throughout this reading, students are given multiple opportunities to discuss these events, how they

contributed to the overall time period, and how rhetoric could have been influential to both the events and public reactions. Without the students having composed anything substantial at this point, Berlin provides an alternative account of the same events, suggesting Linda Colley's *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (1992). The key difference between these two texts lies in their format and presentation as Colley's is placed within a different narrative frame. Students are then encouraged to compare and contrast the Beaud and Colley pieces in an effort to "examine the effects of different narrative frames on the interpretation of specific historical events" (Berlin, *Rhetorics* 134). Through this comparison, Berlin directs students to consider the publication history of the time period as well, asking them to also examine the public response to such events and texts. They explore the conflicts between the two texts, while also investigating the power conflicts caused by the events described, ultimately gaining an understating of rhetoric that is conventional and revolutionary. This knowledge becomes conventional in that rhetoric is recognized as a product of the greater epistemology, and revolutionary in the fact that students realize such knowledge is power in that they themselves can exert change over the language, and in extension the epistemology.

Unlike the first course proposed, this second heuristic aims at integrating composition throughout every stage of the process from the reading of the texts and general class discussions. Again, in an effort to connect critical reading with critical writing, students "should keep journals, prepare position papers for the class, and even imitate and parody the materials of the late eighteenth century in an attempt to understand the methods of signification called upon and their relationship to economic, social, political, and cultural constructions" (Berlin, *Rhetorics* 136). By continuing to write and

respond to the cultural recovery taking place in the classroom, students become more aware of the similarities between the rhetoric they read and write, ultimately empowering their agency as individuals and citizens of society. This focus on writing also works as a transition into the next type of texts Berlin's students analyze: primary texts from the period. In an attempt to illustrate the significance of power conflicts to the period's dominant rhetoric, students are asked to read rhetorics of the emerging bourgeoisies, or of the minority. For instance, Berlin suggests using texts similar to Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792). In the examination of each of these texts, students are encouraged to focus on answering questions about the rhetorical situation, most importantly, "who is allowed to speak and who is allowed to listen and act on the message of the speaker?" (Berlin, *Rhetorics* 137). By answering questions such as this, students are able to gain an understanding not only of the significance of the rhetorical situation to a piece of writing, but also the revolutionary power of rhetoric.

As they grow to appreciate texts traditionally excluded from the canon, students can begin to explore why they were originally excluded. This in turn allows them to further appreciate the deep relation between a text and its sociopolitical milieu. Berlin ends the course with a unit of poetic texts in an effort to demonstrate the variety of different forms capable of influencing "literary, ideological, and socioeconomic developments" (*Rhetorics* 140). The accomplishments of this type of cultural studies composition course are two-fold; one, students are better versed in identifying the rhetorical situation and its effect on the text and the culture, and two, students are better able to recognize and embrace the fact that language can and will incite social revolution. The ultimate benefit of culturally critical and socially epistemic writing instruction lies in

the goal that “Students in such a course should thus become better writers and readers as citizens, workers, and critics of their cultures” (Berlin, *Rhetorics* 145). The revolutionary power of rhetoric must not be confined to the composition classroom, but instead should be transferred from the conventional academic discourse to a social discourse of action in the real world.

While heuristics for the culturally critical composition classroom have been highly received, some compositionists have criticized the critical cultural studies approach, especially as practiced by Berlin. Berlin himself acknowledges his critical reception, stating, “The charges have included willful obscurity, self-indulgence, elitism, pomposity, intellectual impoverishment, and a host of related offenses” (“Poststructuralism” 16). Throughout the many criticisms Berlin has received from compositionists, his pedagogy was generally disregarded for the reason of lack of praxis. Complaints range from the charge that his approach is not specific or direct enough for a practical and applicable pedagogy to the fact that his vocabulary does not pertain to the field of composition studies. While both criticisms are espoused many times, the detail of the two heuristics previously discussed works to counter this accusation. By providing a discernible praxis as well as examples of the social-epistemic composition course, Berlin quiets such critiques. In addition, the fact that Berlin is inspired by classical models of rhetoric, and that his approach is rhetoric-based, it seems unlikely and even impossible that his vernacular is not already rooted in the field of composition.

Former student Bruce McComiskey provides a practical heuristic for implementing Berlin’s social-epistemic approach into a real composition classroom. In *Teaching Composition as a Social Process* (2000), McComiskey applies Berlin’s holistic

approach to the entire rhetorical situation, encouraging his students to recognize and explore all elements of the rhetorical context, which influences the overall effectiveness of the composition. For instance, McComiskey focuses on introducing students to three levels of composing, the “textual, rhetorical, and discursive” by incorporating a greater focus on the social world of discourse and how students’ rhetorical knowledge can be transferred into critical discourse analysis (7). In addition, McComiskey is generally viewed as being more blatantly rhetorical than that of Berlin’s original heuristic. As a result, the integral connection between writing and reading the composition classroom is made even more important as students connect rhetoric with discourse, and discourse in the classroom with that which exists outside of academia. McComiskey utilizes a focus on rhetorical knowledge as a means to introduce students to a discourse community, and then to provide them access into that community. McComiskey reaffirms the cultural studies approach to composition instruction in that “the more the writer understands the entire semiotic context in which he or she functions, the greater the likelihood that the text will serve as an effective intervention in an ongoing discussion” (Berlin, *Rhetorics* 130). It is this discursive knowledge of the “semiotic context,” of the discourse community that McComiskey strives for in his own cultural studies composition classroom. In this sense, the cultural studies composition classroom becomes even more social and collaborative as it becomes a “process for transforming ‘useful knowledge’ into shared knowledge that influences the future production, distribution, and consumption of cultural values” (McComiskey 25).

McComiskey begins his proposed heuristic for encouraging his students’ critical discourse analysis with analyzing audiences in a variety of literary and non-literary texts.

Given many different pieces to work with, McComiskey provides his students with the same set of questions, to be filled out and applied to a general analysis of the rhetorical situation. Beginning with audience, McComiskey hopes to communicate to students their own ability to participate within discourse communities, and how to do so effectively. McComiskey calls for analysis of the “format, style, genre, writer’s role and purpose, audience attitudes, desired action, institutions, cultural and social values” of a text, as well as how a text is used to “call the audience into a specific role” (12). Students analyze these with particular attention to how each affects either the intended audience or the reader’s reception of the text.

In this heuristic, McComiskey recommends beginning with a familiar and non-literary text, even using student writing itself as a text to be analyzed. For instance, McComiskey instructs a student, “Bill,” to first write a letter to the head of their institution, explaining a problem that needs to be fixed and providing suggestions for improvement. After writing the letter, students analyze their own discourse, investigating the instances when they specifically call on conventions of the academic discourse community. Students investigate the format of Bill’s letter, the tone he uses, the vocabulary he uses, and, most importantly, who the intended audience may be, identified in this case as the administration. Once students have begun to consider these discursive elements and their overall effect, many begin to recognize flaws in the discourse, speculating on how rhetoric is both received and exchanged between like-minded individuals. For instance, in this example the students’ analysis of the Bill’s discourse led to the realization that “Bill’s rhetorical purpose might have been better served with a letter to members of his own community” (McComiskey 16). Through this exercise,



students are able to appreciate how the rhetorical situation functions within the social world of discourse, also empowering them to contribute to the ongoing discourse communities to which they have regular access.

McComiskey continues to tailor the critical cultural studies approach to the more contemporary composition classroom by moving from a focus on critical consumption to cultural production. Throughout his heuristics, McComiskey champions cultural production over critical consumption, arguing that being critical is not enough, that we must also instruct our students how to use rhetoric to respond, to produce their own culturally critical writing. McComiskey identifies this cultural production as “the creation of social values which manifest themselves in institutional practices and cultural artifacts” (22). To demonstrate this move from consumption to production, McComiskey provides a heuristic for the composition classroom titled “Writing in Context: Education.” In this assignment, McComiskey asks students to discuss the formal and hidden curriculum of their schools. Like Berlin, McComiskey begins with the familiar, having students describe their school, courses, teachers, and assignments. He then instructs students to consider how these elements have affected them, answering questions like “explain why some activities in your school are popular and others are not” (McComiskey 137). McComiskey moves from this critical consumption to cultural production, asking students to write about their experiences and responses, to consider how the hidden and formal curriculums relate or influence one another. This cultural production is achieved through writing, as students begin to “understand and critique the hidden curricula at work in the schools we attend, and we can work to make changes in these hidden curricula for the good of our school communities” (McComiskey 138).

McComiskey promotes the social power of rhetoric and language, encouraging students to empower themselves through their writing, through their own cultural production.

Like McComiskey, Morris and Searfoss have also modified Berlin's approach to better accommodate a "contemporary approach to composition" (Morris). For instance, Morris aims at expanding Berlin's praxis, blending different schools of rhetoric, such as current-traditional with expressivist, in an effort to better serve the ever-changing social realities of his contemporary students. He first calls for expressivist rhetoric as emotion is often needed "reach your audience," while current-traditional rhetoric is necessary for students as they must have "a pattern for writing" (Morris). These different types of rhetoric come together to promote students' "cultural awareness and analysis," as Berlin promoted in his original heuristic. Similarly, Searfoss modifies this approach in an effort to better accommodate the contemporary student's critical processes. Using the cultural studies model, Searfoss pairs more traditional texts and authors with "contemporary issues" discussed in popular texts such as "newspaper articles, movies, or music." Both Morris and Searfoss expand Berlin's original heuristic, better meeting the students where they are, which in turn provides a more accurate depiction of their expectations and assumptions as they enter the classroom.

In addition to being criticized for a perceived lack of praxis, Berlin was most readily criticized for his inclusion of ideology in the classroom. Believing that an ideological classroom of any kind would elevate the already present challenge of student resistance, critics of Berlin's work, such as Maxine Hairston, call for a composition classroom that does nothing but teach the basics of writing, purportedly keeping the threat of student distraction and instructor bias minimal. However, with the inherent

resistance to writing that many of our students struggle with, it becomes more important that we search for means to integrate ideology without alienating the diversity in our classrooms. And, Hairston seems to be operating from a different understanding of ideology than that which cultural studies composition promotes. For Hairston, ideology is inherently negative, dogmatic, and biased, being imposed by an authority figure of some sort. However, cultural studies promotes an understanding of ideology as collectively constructed and endorsed by a certain discourse community. Its pedagogy promotes an awareness of how these ideologies are constructed and in what ways they influence the individual and collaborative processes by which students understand and respond to their surroundings. In fact, Searfoss describes how Berlin in particular advised the composition instructor to “play the devil’s advocate, whatever the student says” regardless of “what they said, or what their position is,” or of “what you [as the instructor] believe.” As one can see here, Berlin encourages instruction that mediates and provides an open forum for the students’ own critical discussion and analysis, countering critics like Hairston that fail to appreciate how social, cultural, and ideological discussion help to build students’ “rhetorical skills” (Searfoss).

Compositionist Kathleen Dixon, inspired by a critical cultural studies approach to composition, works towards a “reinvention the university classroom as a pocket of ‘cultures’” (100). Dixon returns to the basics cultural studies while also appreciating the importance for critical discourse analysis and our students’ knowledge of a variety of discourse communities. To this end, the cultural studies classroom then becomes a “laboratory for studying cultural, and more specifically, for critiquing liberal discourse” (Dixon 100). In “Making and Taking Apart ‘Culture’ in the (Writing) Classroom,” Dixon

demonstrates the continued applicability of Berlin's approach and addresses the common challenge of student resistance by providing a heuristic for a course entitled "Reading Popular Culture." By focusing on popular culture, Dixon aims at integrating texts with which students are both familiar and interested. As a result, a greater investment in the text and analysis will hopefully lead to less student resistance. Dixon begins her course by instructing students to compose a description or narrative of a "cultural experience" they have had. By doing so, she encourages students to think about their experiences as cultural, as social, as having something to say about their own individual perspective as well as the greater social milieu. Next, Dixon instructs her students to write a short paper on a "popular cultural experience," for example listening to a song (101). In this composition, students are also asked to reflect on how the experience affected them overall. Dixon later uses these papers as a basis for more in-depth cultural critique later in the course. By considering cultural artifacts that are familiar and popular, Dixon's students are able to become "accustomed to describe experience specifically," and "we can only analyze culture when we know the specifics of how it is working" (Dixon 101). Aimed at achieving the critical literacy and rhetorical knowledge encouraged by cultural studies pedagogy, Dixon grounds the ideological considerations in the familiar, in the popular, working to alleviate the purported issue of student resistance in the writing classroom.

Heuristics similar to Dixon's also work to demonstrate the continued relevance of this approach in contemporary composition classrooms. For instance, both Morris and Searfoss modified Berlin's original heuristic to include more contemporary and non-literary texts for student analysis, such as music videos (Morris). This integration of the

popular and the personal continues in other composition classrooms as well, for instance John Storey promotes the use of popular music as texts, and theorist Lisa Langstraat melds Berlin's approach with the "affect theory," focusing on the emotional response of our students to the culture in which they live. Framed by the students' personal experiences with culture, this approach becomes reflective and malleable for the postmodern composition classroom.

As the years pass and we drift farther away from Berlin's original model of rhetoric as socially epistemic, we must consider where culturally critical composition goes from here. How do we accommodate the social realities of the postmodern student? Compositionist Paul Lynch calls attention to this question, asking, "what is composition's new thing?" I feel confident in speculating that our new thing has already arrived, has already been provided to us in heuristics similar to those discussed in this chapter. Berlin's perception of rhetoric as possessing a dialectical relationship with its greater culture provides contemporary writing instructors with a methodology for accommodating the current social landscape. As Lynch notes, the increasingly complicated social and cultural problems that our students face must also be addressed. We must return to a perception of our students' composition as potentially revolutionary.

To reach this goal, Lynch calls for a casuistry in the classroom, which "offers a pedagogy that can embrace the radical situatedness of postprocess while at the same time offering a methodology—as in a way of speaking about method—that continues the postprocess conversation as it pertains to classroom practice" ("Unprincipled" 259). In this way, Lynch promotes casuistry in the cultural studies classroom as a methodology for allowing students to compare and investigate seemingly disparate discourses. Faced

with a contention among similar discourses, students can employ this casuistry as a means of destabilizing traditional conventions of making meaning. For instance, instead of viewing one discourse or one type of rhetoric as “right,” Lynch encourages students to explore discrepancies and points of conflict, to investigate why rules or conventions apply in one rhetorical situation and not in the other. This approach, while it is very different from original cultural studies pedagogies, integrates the self-reflexivity that the cultural studies composition classroom should have, enabling student to respond to and even change the curriculum to suit their individual or collective needs. While this flexibility is integral to cultural studies, Lynch’s call for casuistry is only accomplished through recognition of Berlin’s theories of socially epistemic writing instruction. Within Lynch’s approach lies the ever growing need of socially relevant composition for today’s student, also representing the great call in composition studies to accommodate the contemporary student and the ever changing social landscape by which they operate. In other works, Lynch calls for composition that addresses the increasingly “apocalyptic” social milieu. In addition, other compositionists have begun calling for culturally critical composition that accommodates advancements in technology. Regardless of the purpose, contemporary composition studies must continue to apply critical cultural studies to today’s writing instruction as students’ cultural experiences continue to diversify.

When asked where cultural studies composition should go from here, both Morris and Searfoss discussed the need for composition instruction that accommodates the new medias and technologies that permeate the contemporary student’s everyday existence. Both express concern about the rampant use of technologies as students seem to be dwelling in an “empty utopian trope” (Searfoss), or a seemingly “two-dimensional

world” (Morris). As students come into contact with these new technologies, it becomes important that they are able to reflect critically on how their use of these technologies and how they influence how students think, live, and write. In particular, Searfoss calls for a greater understanding of “social media technologies” within the cultural studies composition classroom. Both compositionists encourage an application of Berlin’s original heuristic for the critical analysis of social-epistemic rhetoric to the ever-changing social realities of the contemporary students, using cultural studies composition as a bridge into the future of writing within and outside of the ivy-covered walls of academia.

As compositionists today, we continue to strive to connect student writing with student living, to teach our students the social and individual power of their language. The question then becomes how do we continue to accommodate the social and academic realities of our students while also teaching them to write effectively. We must bridge critical cultural studies composition with the ever-complicated challenges of the postmodern student. In a world where poverty, disaster, and rampant mediation is as ubiquitous as the air we breath, it becomes even more important that we, as composition instructors, enable our students to critically understand and participate in the many discourses to which they belong. In order to demonstrate the applicability of critical cultural studies in today’s composition classroom, I have provided my own heuristics in the subsequent chapter.

## **Chapter Five:**

### **Inspiring Culturally Relevant Composition in My Own Classroom**

The efficacy of a critical cultural studies approach to composition becomes more poignant when we consider how it is implemented in the contemporary writing classroom. Inspired by Berlin's call for socially aware and culturally critical students, as well as the praxis provided by compositionists such as Bruce McComiskey and Kathleen Dixon detailed in the previous chapter, I have created my own heuristic for the cultural studies composition classroom. Critical cultural studies composition pedagogy focuses on "reading and writing the daily experiences of culture, with culture considered in its broadest formulation" (Berlin, "Students (Re)Writing" 281). To this end, the definition of texts—that which can be read and analyzed—expands to include non-literary elements that influence our students' social realities. While this expansion includes different types of visual, audio, and kinetic media, principles of cultural studies remain applicable to virtually everything our students encounter. For example, the objects students consume and endorse, according to Berlin, are themselves indicative of the social paradigm from which students operate. In the following sections of this chapter, I will propose different assignments used in my own cultural studies composition courses that work to promote the students' critical literacy and cultural consciousness.



## Methodology

Before I begin describing the specific heuristics used in my own classroom, it is beneficial to address some of the general theories and methodologies that inform my own approach to critical cultural studies within composition. While the transference of knowledge from the experiential to the analytical encouraged by cultural studies composition can be difficult for students to grasp, there are methods for easing the transition. For instance, Berlin advocated “start[ing] with the personal experience of the students, with emphasis on the position of this experience within its formative context” (“Students (Re)Writing” 281). Beginning with the familiar allows students more authority, more freedom in their composition as they are able to quiet the anxiety of being incorrect or unfounded. For instance, the Object Narrative assignment, described in the next section, allows students to begin reflecting on their own personal experiences with a familiar object before moving on to analysis of said object’s social or cultural implications. By starting with a familiar object, these earlier drafts allow students to move from the simple description to complex analysis. In fact, one of my students recognizes that “in order to be a better writer we have to look deep into ourselves and discover who we are and what we stand for,” that “our voice comes from all the experience in our lives and what we have been through.” Countless compositionists argue for a sequencing of writing assignments that move from the personal or familiar to the complex or abstract. More contemporary compositionists such as James Britton, Peter Elbow, and feminist pedagogues like bell hooks and Adrienne Rich, apply this sequencing of assignments originally advocated by theorists such as Richard Larson and Marilyn Katz in the late seventies and early eighties. Partly influenced by Harold

Bloom's cognitive taxonomy, Katz also argues for a progression in writing assignments from the familiar to the complex. In fact, she specifically argues for the type of self-reflection, stating, as "self-analysis seems a logical place to begin to teach [students] about the process of abstract thinking and its relationship to writing" (Katz 289). I also use this sequence to enable students to recognize that "culture" itself is something that they are already familiar with, something they influence and co-construct on a regular basis. In my classroom, this "self-analysis" allows them to situate themselves in the greater culture before they can analyze and even change its hegemonic institutions. In this way, students reflect on their own experiences while simultaneously producing analytical writing; and it is this type of analysis that will then transfer to their wider considerations of cultural and social issues.

By situating themselves within the greater social context to which they will later be referring, students are better positioned to produce substantial abstract analysis. As Katz and Berlin promote, students begin analyzing an object or media for their own personal use, and for what it means to their everyday existence. By doing so, students use these earlier drafts as a means to model or practice the analytical thinking and writing needed for the cultural analysis in their final drafts, also "demonstrating to our students that the very process facilitates understanding" (Katz 292). In addition to this sequencing of analysis from the personal to the cultural and even critical, this methodology also provides means of access for the students to the actual writing subject. While many college writers are reluctant to compose, it is vital that we engage students in their writing on a personal and relative level. For instance, using objects or media that are personally significant to each student elevates the level of student investment in the writing process.

In his own avocation for moving from the simple to the complex in composition instruction, Richard Larson acknowledges that “the subject must be accessible to [the writer]; he must be able to locate the facts and other data needed in the development of his observations” (215). If we think of composition as our students’ “observations” of the world, it becomes impossible to neglect student experience with the familiar. As a result, student writing that involves more complex analysis of the cultural or social implications is grounded in their own unique view of the object or media, in turn providing a bridge to their own later criticisms about the issues perpetuated by that subject.

When fostering students’ critical literacy in the composition classroom, this sequencing of assignments from the familiar to the complex becomes even more important, as students begin to formulate their own authority as writers, and as critics of the world. Ira Shor, a critical pedagogue and proponent of the Freirean “anti-banking” model of instruction, argues that asking “questions on reconstructing self in society invite each of us to examine our own development, to reveal the subjective position from which we make sense of the world” (2). It is only after students are able to reflect, to define their “subjective position” that they are then able to foster a critical literacy. They must first be able to recognize language, rhetoric, objects, and media as products of social, yet also individual construction. As a result, students also begin to better understand how they are influenced by the greater culture, and how they can affect that influence through their writing. This sequencing also results in more student authority in the classroom, decentering the instructor’s authority, advocated by theorists such as Paulo Freire, feminist pedagogy in general, and most importantly Berlin. Influenced by Freirean pedagogy, which calls for collaborative composition instruction, in which students and

teachers learn together, Berlin also fostered his student's authority both in and outside the classroom. In a classroom in which students will be discussing their own personal experiences and criticisms of their surroundings, it becomes more important that they feel empowered and confident in sharing their experiences, without the overwhelming preoccupation of only gaining instructor approval. In this sense, no reaction or experience is deemed wrong or gratuitous; each is capable of providing unique insight on the greater culture and its effect on individual and collective meaning making. In my own heuristic discussed in this chapter, I scaffold assignments from the personal and familiar to the complex within paper sequences, as well as between the assignments and courses also described. In addition, I provide heuristics from two different types of composition courses in a greater effort to demonstrate the wide applicability of critical cultural studies within a variety of composition studies.

In *Writing Without Teachers*, Peter Elbow applies this decentering of instructor authority, advocating for peer writing groups and individual invention strategies, while aiming to present composition as a means for responding to both our personal and social realities. Like Berlin, Elbow also warns against the traditional model of composition instruction, which caters to the "main academic line in rhetorical taste: clan writing—writing that tries to call more attention to its message than to itself" (118). Placing too much focus on teacher response and authority results in a deterministic, just-add-water type of instruction, ostensibly quieting the individual perspectives of those student writers who fear instructor disapproval. Elbow proposes placing more emphasis on peer writing groups, elevating student authority as both readers and writers. This approach is made more important in a cultural studies composition classroom that promotes collaborative

invention throughout the course. In my own classroom, I too work at destabilizing the traditional authority of the instructor, enabling students to find their own cultural authority. In this sense, collaboration is used as a means of gaining access to diversified perspectives of culture and cultural artifacts. As a result, each student's individualized perspective is championed as providing another outlook into the cultural significance of our everyday rhetoric. This focus on student experience and authority results in more substantial considerations of composition as a social process.

Similar to the sequencing of assignments from the familiar to the complex, accomplished through the writing of multiple drafts, progressively building off writing skills and practices implemented earlier in the writing process is also vital in the cultural studies composition classroom. For instance, students are only asked to analyze the social or cultural implications of their writing subjects after they analyze their own personal use of objects or media. Each assignment provides a bridge from the simpler reflections to the larger analysis positioned in larger social contexts. Richard Larson describes this scaffolding of assignments as "The goal of each assignment as a true sequence should be to enlarge the student's powers of thinking, organizing, and expressing ideas so that he can cope with a more complex, more challenging problem in the next assignment" (212). As a result, each draft leads into the final product, which becomes a culmination of their individual perspective on the larger social or cultural construct being explored. For example, in the Rhetorical Analysis of a Place assignment described later, students begin by observing or simply describing a familiar place, analyzing its different attributes. In later drafts, I instruct students to narrow that focus, to begin considering different elements of the space, such as its audience or intended social purpose. In this sequencing

of assignments, students exercise similar analytical thinking and writing skills, progressively moving from the familiar or cultural to the critical. Throughout these assignments, they interject their own assumptions and experiences, later framing these reactions within the social or cultural construct. This scaffolding, which Larson describes and Berlin promotes, allows students to confidently move from the spectator role to that of the critic. In addition, this scaffolding of assignments also provides a necessary bridge from the personal to the cultural so integral to the critical cultural studies approach to composition.

Throughout all of these assignments, students participate in collaborative group work, such as invention strategies and general discussion. This collaborative invention, promoted by Berlin, serves as its own site of social epistemology as students collectively negotiate systems of meaning and value within a classroom designed as a mini-culture itself. In addition, we as a class briefly analyze certain types of media in an effort to model the writing that students complete individually. This collaboration is most important in considerations of how the object or media being discussed is perceived by those from different backgrounds. For instance, after describing their media to a small group, students are asked to describe how they would be perceived each other based solely on the type of media they consume. This exercise allows students to see that while media, and therefore language, is socially constructed, individual perspective skews our consumption and eventual cultural production of those media. This cooperation draws upon Berlin's focus on rhetorical invention as collaborative, allowing students to appreciate the similarities and differences in their cultural experiences. In addition, this collaboration is necessary in fostering the democratic citizenship of our students, as

argued by Berlin. In fact, the inclusion of group work in the classroom “will make for a diversity of discoveries,” which is a “part of students actively becoming agents of change in a democratic society” (Berlin, “Students (Re)Writing” 307). In order for the cultural studies composition classroom to be as telling as possible, students must engage in a dialectical relationship with one another, working together to form meaning as is done in the greater macrocosm. Each assignment described here incorporates collaboration in an effort to foster students’ awareness of composing as a social process. It is only with this awareness that students are able to exert command and authority over the rhetoric that influences their everyday cultural experiences.

### **Assignment 1: Object Narrative (*Appendix A*)**

In a first-year writing course, “Rhetoric of Everyday Culture,” I implemented cultural studies-inspired heuristics for expanding students’ perceptions of a text, while also keeping them grounded in that with which they are familiar, such as Berlin’s methodology for identifying rhetoric as socially epistemic. The overall goal of this course was to increase students’ rhetorical knowledge and consciousness, while also drawing wider connections to their social realities lived outside of the classroom. As a result, students were regularly encouraged to use elements from their own lives as material for the invention, arrangement, and production of their own culturally relevant, and sometimes critical, composition. In this course, students completed a narrative in which each student discussed a personal object of great significance.

### **Reading Selections**

In order to prepare students for the Object Narrative assignment, I first assign readings that focus on everyday objects as individually significant cultural artifacts.

Students complete this assignment while reading a unit of selections focused on the connection between personal objects and greater identities. Similar to every unit in my classroom, students begin with a general discussion of their readings, identifying how and why personal objects are connected to the larger social and cultural identities of the authors. While Berlin and other culturalists call for a more directed analysis of competing binaries or specific cultural codes within a greater theme, I allow student discussion to drive the direction of both the invention and production of the assignment. While this approach is arguably less directive than that of Berlin's, I believe it allows for even more opportunities for student critique and a greater reflexivity of the collaboration of the course. In this unit, students are introduced to the idea of objects as readable texts, as pieces of everyday rhetoric, and how such objects are reflective of a certain individual, group, or culture. Several of the selections in this unit also serve as models for the student's own Object Narratives. For instance, in a short self-reflective piece by Judith Ortiz Cofer, entitled "Silent Dancing," the author describes her attachment to her family's home movies. Cofer first describes how her home movies are representative of her family and in turn her own personal, and ethnic, identity. In selections such as Cofer's, students come in contact with other personal narratives that recognize the significance of everyday objects to the manner in which they are perceived by the world. As students move through the drafting process of the Object Narrative, they continue to read similar selections from *Convergences*, discussing their reactions to the text as a class and in small groups.

Later in the drafting process, as students begin to consider the cultural or social implications tied to their object, I begin assigning readings that introduce the concept of



culture as familiar and already experienced by the student. For instance, I often assign the introduction from Diana George and John Trimbur's cultural studies composition textbook, *Reading Culture: Contexts for Critical Reading and Writing*. In this selection, George and Trimbur present culture as constructed and influenced by the individuality of the student. This reading helps prepare students to "bring forward for analysis and reflection those commonplace aspects of everyday life that people normally think of as simply being there" (George and Trimbur, *Reading* 3). Students also read short selections from Dick Hebdige's *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. Here, Hebdige works to expose culture as not merely associated with academic or even anthropological studies, but something that is co-constructed by its constituents, the very students reading his work. Hebdige presents concepts such as ideology and Barthe's notion of cultural signs and myths in a digestible manner in which students can appreciate how they and their objects influence and are influenced by their greater culture. In class and small group discussions, students begin to draw connections between Hebdige's concepts and their own investigations into the social and cultural implications of their own personal objects.

### **Class Activities**

As briefly mentioned above, I lead regular class and small group discussions about the reading selections as they influences students' writing process. In addition to these discussions, students also complete individual and collaborative invention activities. For instance, I assign several in-class free writes throughout the paper sequence, asking students to brainstorm about the objects they may write about in their papers. One of these free writing prompts asks students to list three items that they would bring to a deserted island, and then later asking them to limit the list to two and then one

object. In addition, I will model the kind of analysis they will do independently by projecting images of people with everyday objects, asking students to first make assumptions about the person and then the greater culture they may come from. This is also done with the objects students have in the classroom at the time as well. For instance, I often draw attention to student t-shirts or backpacks with specific band logos on them. In one of these class discussions, students analyzed a young man's t-shirt with a logo for a relatively unknown Punk band. I first asked students to describe what they learned about the young man having otherwise not known him. They began with simple observations, such as "he enjoys music," "he attends concerts," "he likes wearing the color black" to more in-depth analyses, such as "he likes music that is not mainstream," "he identifies himself as a supporter of Punk music and perhaps Punk politics." These investigations then led to a greater discussion of the subculture of Punk and how it presents its views to the world, often through everyday objects, such as t-shirts.

Small group activities are also very helpful in preparing for the Object Narrative assignment, as they provide students with outside perspectives to characteristics of their object or themselves that they were previously unable to recognize. For instance, after students select an object and have completed their preliminary drafts, they divide into small groups and exchange photos of their object. Students are then asked to describe their reactions to the object by only looking at the image provided. They are asked to first describe the type of person that utilizes such an object and what culture and/or society that this object represents. After answering these questions, students return the image and their written reactions to the author, allowing students to compare their own reactions and that of those around them. This allows them to view their object and its personal

significance through a new lens, expectedly contributing to the analysis they complete in future drafts of the Object Narrative. Inventions strategies such as these continue to take place in class as students move through the paper sequence.

### **Writing Process**

To begin the paper sequence, students describe the object and its overall importance to them. These drafts are rather self-explanatory, focusing on self-reflection. Here, students focus on describing the object and its intended use, also focusing on how they use that object in their everyday experiences. They describe how that object influences their everyday routine, as well as how significant they believe this object to be to the efficiency of their existence. For instance, students are asked to describe an object that they could not live without and why they believe so. In this way, they begin with self-reflection and with their own investment in the object, keeping focus on their personal experiences. In addition to the basic description of the object or their personal use, other students were more introspective, describing how their preference for said object might define them in the eyes of their peers. These self-reflections allow students to approach everyday objects as texts that can be analyzed for social or cultural implications. In fact, following this reflection, students were then asked to describe how this object functions within the greater social reality. As a result, students move from considerations of the self to that of culture in general.

In later drafts, students move from the more familiar and simple reflection to consider what their object communicates about them both socially and individually. In these drafts, students progress from reflection to analysis within a larger social context. Students then consider the object and their use outside of themselves, bridging

considerations of the self to that of the society from which the object originated. Some students compose this section from the perspective of another, analyzing themselves through the use of their object. For example, several of my students write about iPods, or other radio-like technologies. When asked what their use of the iPod communicates about them personally and socially, many students identify themselves as being of higher socioeconomic classes as that is typically the population able to purchase said object. In addition, other students identify themselves with the particular genre of music they listen to the most. And, other students associate their object with the greater cultural and social significance, speculating as to how the technology of the iPod has influenced music industry and our greater perception of it. For instance, one student discusses how the iPod and other technological advances have “begun to destroy the musicality of our culture,” as “the raw talent of singers and artists has diminished,” in her opinion. While she identifies with the iPod, this student also uses this investigation of a personally significant object to criticize and comment on greater social institutions.

Armed by their own analyses of objects they find personally significant, students are equipped to investigate everyday objects as cultural artifacts. They begin to realize that these objects are not only influential in their own lives, but that they are significant to the greater society as well. In turn, they are better able to identify their own subjective roles within a larger culture, and to analyze, explore, and respond to that culture.

Throughout the course, I continually instruct students to consider both the positive and negative associations their objects have in society. For instance, what are the possible stereotypes or inequalities that could be associated with such an object? In this way, students begin to criticize culture as it either privileges or neglects. It is at this stage that

students are first able to appreciate the social power associated with objects, texts, and language in general. It is this move that enables them to move from the exploratory to the critical, to begin not only identifying objects as products of a larger cultural construct, but to criticize and respond to that construct. In fact, many students speculate on how they might alter general conceptions about their object or those that use the object. For example, one student writes about how her expensive ring made others view her as materialistic and focused on her outward appearance. She then discusses how her own sentimental experience with the ring defies such generalizations and stereotypes, how her own personality or demeanor can alter the common perceptions gained by simply viewing an expensive piece of jewelry. In this way, students are able to demystify and combat meaningless stereotypes, through an opportunity to reflect on their social positions. Another student had a similar experience in his analysis of his New Jersey license. After describing how his license had become a symbol for his identity and upbringing, he then describes how others react to this object, and how such reactions are embedded in regional stereotypes. He describes how “New Jersey residents are often perceived as hostile and inhospitable” by those not from the state. He continues, describing instances in which his interaction with others is influenced by this object, by the knowledge that he is a “hostile, impatient, and dangerous New Jersey driver.” As with the first student, he then uses his own experiences and self-reflection as a means to combat these stereotypes and generalizations, commenting on the continuing divide between those from the North and South of the East Coast. Through their analysis of everyday objects such as jewelry and a driver’s license, these students are able to recognize how everyday objects can be read as cultural artifacts.

By the end of the paper sequence, students combined personal reflection with social analysis through an investigation of familiar objects as cultural artifacts. In addition to fostering personal and cultural analysis, this course also works to present language and meaning making as symptomatic and constitutive of a greater social construct, drawing greater connections between academia and student living. By having the opportunity to write about something non-academic, something that is important to them outside of the classroom, students begin to recognize the interconnectivity of these two arenas, beginning to correlate student writing with student living. In fact, in a reflection at the end of the course, one of my students recognized that “the assignment and its guidelines helped [him] become a better writer and will continue to benefit him in areas that stretch far beyond the classroom.” In their analysis of themselves through their objects, students are then able to appreciate and criticize the common knowledge we draw from to create meaning, further empowering them to understand and utilize composition as both a social process and tool. Without this recognition, students are unable to step outside themselves and truly explore the ways in which they are influenced and perceived by the greater social milieu; in this recognition, they also acknowledge how socially constructed systems of language and value drive societal perceptions of iPods and/or iPod users, or expensive jewelry and those that wear it, or drivers from New Jersey. As a result of this writing assignment, students “begin to understand the coded nature of their daily behavior, and they begin to become active, critical subjects rather than passive objects of their experience,” also viewing composition, invention, and rhetoric as existing within social processes (Berlin, “Students (Re)Writing” 293). Students begin to perceive elements of their experience, such as everyday objects, as

being inherently social, influenced by collectively constructed codes of meaning, while still championing their own personal experience as indicative of a greater culture.

### **Assignment 2: Rhetorical Analysis of a Place (*Appendix B*)**

In the same first-year writing course, “Rhetoric of Everyday Culture,” students continue to situate themselves within their greater culture in the second major paper sequence, a rhetorical analysis of a familiar place. While many compositionists continue to use rhetorical analysis in cultural studies composition courses, the incorporation of place itself as a text helps to motivate students to appreciate the cultural codes embedded in all of society. In *The Rhetoric of Place*, Roger Hecht discusses the efficacy of utilizing rhetorical analyses of place to logically scaffold assignments for maximum student comprehension. Hecht argues, “the study of landscape and place serves as a conduit for students to explore design, intention, and audience—a rhetoric of place—in order to develop a comprehension which is then easily transferred to texts” (2). Hecht promotes rhetorical comprehension through the analysis of place as a text. Similarly, Sidney Dobrin also promotes students’ analysis of their environment. For Dobrin, the goal is to encourage students to “look closely at the role writing plays in how we perceive places, at how places affect our writing, and at how our writing affects those places,” in a larger effort to “consider these relationships in order that human consumption does not destroy those very places” (xi, xiii). While both Hecht and Dobrin acknowledge the need for a rhetorical knowledge of place and its social or cultural effects, my approach differs slightly. In my classroom, students focus less on how they influence the environment and more on how they, and their larger culture, are affected by the rhetoric of a place. With an integration of Berlin’s social-epistemic rhetoric, students are encouraged to recognize

how our language and meaning making shapes our reception of places and the various social dynamics they cause and are affected by. By first understanding that meaning itself is collectively constructed by society, students are more able to view place as social-epistemic rhetoric, as given value and meaning by those that contribute to the design, purpose, or use of that place. With this rhetorical knowledge of place, advocated by Hecht and Dobrin, my students then move on to the cultural or social implications of the argument being communicated by the rhetoric of common places. In this same way, my students begin with a place, describing and observing its basic attributes, eventually realizing that place influences and is influenced by the greater social construct from which it originated.

### **Reading Selections**

Much like the first assignment in this course, the Object Narrative, students begin the Rhetorical Analysis of a Place assignment by reading selections focused on the social and cultural characteristics of public and personal space. Throughout this unit, students are introduced to the concept of place as a text to be analyzed, to be understood for its effects on individuals and the greater society. For example, one of the first selections they read is Pico Iyer's "Nowhere Man," in which he acknowledges the importance of place to his own identity, describing how a public airport becomes a symbol for himself and those like him. Through readings like this, students are able to appreciate how the rhetoric of a place, such as an airport, becomes a symbol and sign for a greater culture, the subculture of transient individuals. Students are then able to see a model of how a rhetorical analysis of a place is accomplished, integrating both individual perceptions and wider cultural implications. After students read selections such as these, we hold class and small group



discussions, analyzing the readings for their approach to place and its affect on the individual and the social process of composition.

The next reading I assign is the more complex article, “Rhetorical Situations and Their Constituents” by Keith Grant-Davie. While the language and style of this article is more complex, Grant-Davie provides a schematic to the overall rhetorical situation, allowing students to appreciate that the wide applicability of rhetorical analysis to non-literary, and even unexpected, texts. With this knowledge and terminology, students are then better equipped to approach their writing holistically, to appreciate the rhetorical situation being created by the arrangement, style, and presentation of public places. They are also introduced to the idea of place as a visual argument, as designed to achieved a certain purpose or dynamic. It is at this point that students also are assigned readings from the *Project for Public Spaces* website. The PPS provides several articles on the effectiveness of public places, focusing on how the space of a place influences its rhetoric. With both of these readings, students begin to draw connections between place and text, enabling them to appreciate the importance of socially constructed language and its affects on collective meaning making. These readings are then paired with discussions and activities, enabling students to begin the writing assignment with a more inclusive rhetorical and cultural understanding of place as a rhetorical text.

### **Class Activities**

I implement this rhetorical analysis of a place using many classroom practices, including individual and collaborative invention activities, general class discussion, peer editing workshops, and radical revision. We begin our class discussions with a general discussion of visual rhetoric. Aided by the readings and the *PPS* website, students begin

recognizing the basic elements of visual rhetoric, such as arrangement, style, color, and design, and how these elements are used to make others think, act, or behave in a certain way, while satisfying larger social agendas and interests. This discussion is followed up by a series of rhetorical analysis activities done as a class and in small groups. For example, as a class students analyze the rhetoric of public advertisements, focusing on how images, and visuals in general, aim at satisfying a particular goal or purpose. It is this knowledge that is transferred to their analysis of place as well.

In order to further assist students in this transfer, we rhetorically analyze public places as a class. First, we briefly discuss the classroom as a place to be rhetorically analyzed. We discuss the power dynamics created by a lecture-style arrangement as opposed to arranging students in a large circle with no identifiable authority figure. Then, we begin discussing how students' learning is affected by these arrangements. While most students fail to recognize a difference in their learning based on arrangement of the classroom, they all acknowledge that arrangement itself is communicating an argument about the power dynamics of the traditional classroom setting. After this discussion, we move on to images of easily recognizable public places, rhetorically analyzing them as a large group. For instance, during class time, we rhetorically analyze images of the US House of Congress, doing so as if we were physically able to observe the place. In these discussions, students identify elements, such as the semi-circle arrangements of the seats, and the dominant placement of the American flag behind the podium. After describing these elements, I then ask students to speculate on the intended use of the place, its intended audiences, as well as the power structure implied by the general arrangement, which they have already identified. Similar to the discussion of the classroom as a place

to be analyzed, students notice the arrangement of the podium and its seats as establishing a power dynamic, placing the speaker at the podium as an authority figure. They also discuss the forefront placement of the American flag, resulting in the flag placement as a greater symbol of US government and the processes of the legislative system. All in all, students are able to draw connections between a place, its visual rhetoric, and how that rhetoric influences the proceedings within this place. As a result of this discussion, students are able to make connections between the rhetorical situation of a place and its overall argument or intended purpose, as well as general social or cultural relationships to meaning or value. After modeling exercises such as these, students are able to begin analyzing their chosen place for the first drafts of this assignment.

Similar to the group work conducted for the Object Narrative assignment, students also participate in collaborative invention activities in which they are able to come into contact with diversified perspectives of the place they have chosen to write about. Once in small groups, students exchange photos of their place, rhetorically analyzing its purpose, effects, and overall position in the greater culture from which it emerged. As a result, students are better able to view place as it affects the individual, not only themselves. This helps them to understand the wide influence of place on those who frequent it, as well as the larger social institution with which it may or may not be affiliated.

### **Writing Process**

To begin this assignment, students are first instructed to independently observe a familiar public place, again working from the students' experiential knowledge. While observing, I instruct students to consider the place as a visual text with an argument or

main point. Therefore, the place becomes in itself a form of social-epistemic rhetoric, influenced and constructed by the greater cultural or social knowledge surrounding it. Through their own experience of observation, in combination with class discussion, students begin to identify how their own perceptions work to influence the overall social purpose and process of the place as a form of rhetoric. Armed with the examples conducted together in class, students are also able to view the design, arrangement, and purpose of the place as being influenced by the greater social or cultural context in which it operates.

After being introduced to the rhetorical situation, as well as to the task of rhetorical analysis, students begin to analyze their places as texts to be read. For instance, I ask students to answer the following questions regarding their place: who is the intended audience for this place? What types of people are most likely to frequent this place? What is the intended or overall purpose of the place and why was it constructed? How do the arrangement, style, and general visual and physical elements of the place influence how you use or perceive it? By answering questions such as these, students begin to transfer the rhetorical knowledge of a text to elements of their everyday existence.

After they begin to investigate the rhetorical situation of place, aided by the readings and class discussions, students investigate how their place functions within the great society or culture, exploring the “ideological leaning” or “preferred reading” of the place (Berlin, “Students (Re)Writing” 289). Just as Berlin encourages reading literary and non-literary texts in order to understand cultural codes inscribed therein, students in this course begin to question what social or cultural purpose their chosen place may serve.

While Berlin does not directly advocate for the rhetorical analysis of place, his desire to communicate the concept of social-epistemic rhetoric is made more possible by this assignment. As students appreciate how language and value systems influence place, they also begin to appreciate how that language can be used to critique the social or cultural dynamics reaffirmed by a place's rhetoric.

For instance, one of my students writes about Sanford Mall, a common area on our campus here at Appalachian State University. During her investigations, this student speculates on how this place would function if removed from the college setting. She first acknowledged how "the designation of Mall itself changes on and off campus." Through this brief investigation of semantics, she recognizes the cultural codes inherent in the university environment, codes that in turn dictate how the place was utilized and received. In addition, this student considers how these academic settings have influenced her own experience and success in and outside of the classroom. For instance, she realizes that the place itself provided "a social function" with its own set of "social rules and norms." Noticing that students and members from the greater community gather to debate social, political, and religious beliefs, this student comments on how such actions might be less tolerated if the place was located on a busy street corner in the center of town. Through this assignment, this student came to the conclusion that "the purpose and perception of every place is influenced by its greater [social or cultural] environment." In fact, such considerations may also lead to criticisms toward more effective or representative arrangements of academic places in the future.

Similarly, another student rhetorically analyzes the 9/11 Memorial located at Ground Zero in New York City. While this student begins discussing the construction

and design of the memorial, he is soon able to appreciate what this place communicates to the rest of the world, and how its rhetoric influences others, as well as himself. In his analysis, he recognizes how “this small area in downtown New York City became a place of unity,” and how it is “now a symbol to Americans, and the world.” Another student, in his analysis of a university library, recognizes that its designer was in fact “influenced by social implications,” such as the traditional expectations of American higher education and its students. In addition, this student notes that “there are different ways society and the general culture can interpret a library.” He then uses this analysis to discuss the social turn towards digitized books, asking “why is so much time devoted to storing numerous books in quite expensive spaces, when the books are rarely used, and dominantly found online?” This student uses his rhetorical analysis of a library as a springboard into wider discussions of the social and/or cultural issues attached to such a place. As a result, the rhetorical knowledge and cultural analysis derived from this assignment can then be transferred to more conventional texts in more conventional writing assignments, all the while encouraging students to use their own expertise and cultural knowledge to critique and respond to their surroundings.

### **Assignment 3: Media Literacy Narrative (*Appendix C*)**

In a Writing Across the Curriculum course, “Cultural Literacies,” students are asked to expand on their knowledge of rhetoric as culturally and socially epistemic, and required to apply this knowledge to the analysis of social and academic discourses. One of the major writing assignments of the course is a Media Literacy Narrative, which requires that students describe, analyze, and reflect on their personal media consumption. While the ultimate goals of the course are similar to the first two assignments proposed in

this chapter, this assignment was completed in a Writing Across the Curriculum course. While both first year composition and WAC aim to raise our students' rhetorical knowledge and skills, WAC elevates such knowledge to accommodate a variety of academic disciplines and discourses. Susan McLeod describes the ultimate goals of WAC pedagogy as "aimed at transforming pedagogy at the college level, at moving away from the lecture mode of teaching to a mode of active student engagement with the material and with the genres of discipline through writing, not just in English classes but in all classes across the university" (150). Like cultural studies composition, WAC also promotes transference of knowledge and skills across different discourses, better preparing the student to navigate the world outside of the composition classroom. While the goals of WAC are not often discussed in terms of cultural studies, I argue that a critical cultural studies approach in WAC courses is more than applicable, as demonstrated by the following heuristic for the Media Literacy Narrative assignment. While this assignment does occur within the context of a WAC classroom, I do believe that such a heuristic could successfully be applied to a variety of composition courses. This assignment draws directly on Berlin's insistence that students analyze and reflect upon "their responses to a variety of cultural experiences, including music, painting, photography, film, literature, and sports" (*Rhetorics* 11).

### **Reading Selections**

In addition to some of the readings already discussed in the previous assignments from the "Rhetoric of Everyday Culture" course, students also read selections more concerned with the differences in rhetorical contexts, such as those from *Everything's an Argument* by Andrea Lunsford, John Ruszkiewicz, and Keith Walters. We begin the

preparation for this writing assignment by reading the first chapter of the text with the same title. In this selection, the authors introduce students to the concept that everything is a text with an identifiable agenda or goal. In fact, this selection provides examples of various literary and non-literary texts, describing how they present arguments through rhetoric. Students in this course also read the introduction to George and Trimbur's textbook, *Reading Culture: Contexts for Critical Reading and Writing* in an effort to draw connections between the different types of media they encounter and how they participate in defining and constructing "culture" itself. Selections from the introduction of David Buckingham's *Young People and Media* help to introduce students to media studies and how such an activity results in greater social and cultural analysis. In selections such as these, students begin to comprehend how media influence their overall perceptions, as well as how these perceptions are capable of being altered through the recognition and application of social-epistemic rhetoric, of language that is both restricted and empowered by larger social constructs at work.

Students also read Malcolm X's "Learning to Read." After reading this selection, students participate in discussion of how Malcolm X is influenced by the different types of media he comes into contact with, and how these influences affect the way he perceives and responds to the world around him. In addition, this selection also serves as a model for the Media Literacy Narrative they will be writing themselves.

### **Class Activities**

This course begins with a general discussion of "media," identifying it as texts, arguments, or objects consumed by students, also influencing their overall individual and



social perspectives. Once students are armed with this diverse definition of media, they begin describing those forms of media that they consume the most.

### **Writing Process**

In preliminary drafts, students focus on describing the media and their motivation for its consumption. In this writing, students begin to self-reflect, directing attention to their own experiences, and in turn allowing for more student-centered writing instruction. Again, by beginning with the familiar, with what students are already comfortable discussing, we are better able to foster the critical literacy of students not consumed with traditional conceptions of good writing. Composition then becomes rooted in the student's social or cultural experience, resulting in more original and interesting analyses. While Berlin's proposals are often seen as negating the significance of student experience in the writing process, I argue that social-epistemic rhetoric itself calls for an awareness of one's subjective position within the larger culture, requiring that both instructors and students recognize their social interactions as rhetorically powerful. Yes, Berlin does blatantly reject foundational conceptions of rhetoric, such as current-traditional or expressivist. However, I assert that social-epistemic rhetoric itself is more a combination of the two schools as opposed to an outright renunciation. After describing the media they consume, students interpret and reflect on their reactions to those media. Influenced by Langstraat's integration of the "affect theory" into composition studies, I instruct students to describe, consider, and analyze their own visceral reactions to specific media. Langstraat addressed the rampant cynicism encountered in much of composition instruction in the form of student resistance. Similarly, Derek Owens recognizes this common reaction among students as "hyperboredom" (68). Owens argues that "at the

root of this hyperboredom is the misconception that self and world are separate” (68). It is this cynicism and hyperboredom that I aim to combat through the Media Literacy Narrative. By meeting students where they are, by focusing on the media that most influences their everyday perceptions of the world, my students become active agents in their greater culture. They are able to appreciate how they participate and influence the rhetoric of places they frequent, and in turn the social dynamics associated with them. In addition, it is this cynicism and hyperboredom that we must also analyze. Students are better equipped to rhetorically and culturally respond to this social situations if they are more aware of their own visceral reactions and why they occur. They must self-reflect and question why they react in such a way to place, and to rhetoric, ultimately empowering them to understand and change both the dominant rhetoric and their own response to it. As a result, students are able to recognize the significance of their reactions, which are individualized, yet influenced by greater social epistemologies. It is this knowledge of both the personal and cultural experience that Berlin promotes throughout his career, and through the inclusion of social-epistemic rhetoric.

In the next drafts of the Media Literacy Narrative assignment, students are once again instructed to interpret and reflect, asking what their media consumption communicates about them as individual members of the polis. As students did in their Object Narratives, these students also explore how another would perceive them and their greater culture based on the media they regularly intake. Students are once again introduced to the idea that everything, all language, all media are social or culturally influenced. And from this recognition, they are better able to investigate how they and their media are situated within the greater social construct. For instance, one of my

students discussed smart phones and their effect on not only her own critical literacy, but that of others as well, describing “the social threats caused by the rampant use of smart phones.” She identifies this threat as “the loss of the richness of face-to-face communication,” as it can often result in miscommunication and even social alienation. Beginning with an analysis of her own media use, this student was able to make larger social and cultural connections to how a specific type of media is affecting the world in which she lives. This student concludes her Media Literacy Narrative with the realization that “social norms are now changing with the development of new technology, but it is up to us as consumers to choose how we want to approach it, responsibly or irresponsibly.” Similarly, another student, in his analysis of his online gaming habits, concluded that “online media has numerous negative effects on interpersonal communication including that it depersonalizes people, isolates people, and it reduces the amount of direct experiences one has.” Through this assignment, students move from the personal to the social as they begin investigating how others use the same media, as well as how the media is generally perceived in the greater society. Here, media are presented as a product of the culture, as a form of social-epistemic rhetoric, collectively constructed, but still objected to the individual perspective of each and every consumer.

This inclusion of media studies within cultural studies composition is not unique to my heuristic alone. In his own classroom, David Buckingham implements an intersection between media and cultural studies. Buckingham and his students explore and analyze popular media as indicative of or influential in the greater social constructs of meaning making. Like Berlin, Buckingham integrates texts from outside of the classroom, texts (media) that students interact with in their everyday lives. While he does

not limit this approach to composition instruction, Buckingham promotes culturally based media studies, as it “situates media use within the wider context of social relationships and activities” (13). While Buckingham focuses more on popular media, my approach is more rooted in the personal media experiences of my students, beginning with media that they themselves find most significant. While they often do discuss forms of popular media, they are not limited to such material as Buckingham does in his approach to media studies. In addition, I tailor Buckingham’s approach to the composition classroom, drawing further connection between the reception of media and the social process of composition. Like the recognition of rhetoric espoused by Berlin, this recognition of media as social also works to communicate to students the social power of language, as well as the power of their own personal perspectives on those social processes. In addition, students are encouraged to not only view media, but to analyze and respond to media as a product of social epistemology.

Students then begin to form an argument about their media literacy, whether within their own personal consumption of and response to media, as well as within the greater social context. For instance, some students use personal experience to demonstrate how certain media have a positive or negative effect on the greater society. In these drafts, students begin to analyze social and cultural implications of the media they consume, further situating themselves within the act of composing as a critical process. At the end of these Media Literacy Narratives, students critically analyze media in terms of their own consumption, as well as the greater cultural production inherent in all media. Media are then viewed as a product of culture, and in some cases students’

responses as a greater product of both media and the greater epistemology from which it originates.

All of the heuristics described here aim at one seminal goal, to encourage our students to read and respond to culture in a greater effort to foster agency and critical literacy. In the classroom, this allows our students to embrace a “view of communication that replaces the linear model of sender/message/receiver with relatively autonomous and variable negotiated moments of production and reception” (George and Trimbur, “Cultural” 78). Through these assignments, students are able to see themselves as active critics of and participants within the larger culture, and to understand how composition enables them to alter the traditional views of communication. Using George and Trimbur’s active approach to culture, I instruct students to engage with the texts they are working with, to analyze while also self-reflecting as members of the greater culture or society of such texts. In fact, one student reflected on her experience with this assignment, stating, “With the help of multiple drafts in media literacy, I have become more aware of my role as a consumer of technology and a member of the digital age.” Similarly, another student writes that this assignment “has definitely changed how [she] reads texts of all kinds.” Students in these courses are exposed not only to the social processes of language, but also to the social processes that most influence their everyday lives, promoting a critical literacy motivated by both cultural analysis as well as self-reflection.

Finally, it is also beneficial to acknowledge the flexibility required in any cultural studies composition courses. While these heuristics are very specific, the course and its assignments should be tailored to the unique group of students in each and every

classroom. As Berlin acknowledges, “students should be regarded as subjects of their experience, not empty receptacles to be filled with teacher-originated knowledge” (“Students (Re)Writing” 307). In this sense, the greatest text for the course becomes the students’ experiences with culture. It is these experiences that we must accommodate within the composition classroom, while also being prepared to alter or tailor our heuristics to these unique and diverse experiences. Berlin continues, stating, “Students should be encouraged to come to their own conclusions, the only provision being that they be prepared to support them and have them challenged” (“Students (Re)Writing” 307). It is not that we are teaching students one particular way to read or interpret culture, as many critics of this approach may claim, but that we are providing students with knowledge of rhetoric as socially epistemic. Through assignments like those described in this chapter, students are encouraged to acknowledge the power of their experience, while still recognizing that a greater epistemology or ideology influences such experience. After all, it is this experience that motivates students to criticize and even alter the greater hegemonic landscape, both in and out of the classroom.

## **Chapter Six:**

### **Conclusion**

While neither critical cultural studies in composition nor Berlin's social-epistemic rhetoric are new innovations to the field, they remain effective and relevant approaches to student instruction as our world continues to grow more complicated and dangerous. As discussed in previous chapters, the field of composition has undergone a "social turn," one geared towards an intersection between student writing and student living. As such, cultural critique offers students tools for facing their unique challenges and concerns, such as environmental threats, social injustice, multicultural concerns, technological advances, and rampant consumerism. While it is important that students feel empowered by composition, their ability to critically analyze and react to cultural commodities becomes more crucial in the volatile social landscape in which we live today. With the increase of new technologies, and with them, new modes of communication, it is important that our students are able to understand how such innovations alter the social resonance of language, in particular their own composition. Their language then becomes a way to enact and influence social change, providing a link between academic and non-academic discourses, while also promoting student investment in composition instruction that impacts their everyday social realities.

In his own critique of the current education system, Chris Hedges calls for the need "to train [students] to debate stoic, existential, theological, and humanist ways of grappling with reality" (103). Here, Hedges criticizes a "banking model of education,"

calling for instruction that nourishes the critical literacy of our students that enables them to navigate a diversity of discourses. This critical literacy also enables students to better understand and utilize the institutions that influence their ways of living and knowing. Cultural studies in the composition classroom allows us, as instructors, to empower students to form and interact with language on an individual and social level. We must continue to communicate to students the importance of culturally relevant and critical composition in an effort to nurture their own potential for becoming instruments of social change. In order to meet these challenges and to continue providing students with the most valuable instruction, we must advocate for a return to the culturally critical composition promoted by Berlin and his constituents. For instance, a societal alienation that is intensified through our dependence on technology can be better understood and combatted through social epistemic practices. We must apply his methodology, his understanding of social-epistemic rhetoric, in an effort to arm the contemporary student for success in an ever-changing, and often threatened, culture.

Many compositionists and academics have taken notice of the increasingly complicated world in which our students are currently living, asking how composition instruction can accommodate the challenges of the postmodern world. Of these inquisitors, Paul Lynch is one of the most outspoken, repeatedly recognizing that “something major is happening in the world outside the academy, and the work of teaching writing ought to take that something into account” (459). He continues, stating “the usual modes of response are unfit for present crises” (Lynch 473). This “something major” to which Lynch refers encapsulates the unpredictable social landscape brought on by personal and collective instability, “the present crises.” It is true that today’s student is



facing far different challenges than those of the students for whom Berlin instructed; however, his social epistemic approach to composition will help today's students appreciate how composition can be a point of access and action in the world outside of the classroom. In a world in which we can change our online status every other second, it is important to acknowledge how these new technologies affect consciousness and alter our students' perception of rhetoric.

Today's composition student grew up in a world of terrorist attacks and video games, in a world of consumerism and rampant misinformation. While it is necessary that composition instruction address these contemporary issues, such an approach often elevates concerns of student resistance. It is vital that we, as instructors, create a classroom environment that increases student success in courses that compete with real life concerns for time and attention, even if we cannot change the cultural, social, individual, and academic circumstances that impact the lives of our students. It becomes more important that today's composition instruction is able to accommodate these new concerns, to enable students to appreciate and harness the social power of language.

This contemporary understanding of writing must also evolve to accommodate the innovation of the new medias and technologies that continue to shape how our students interact with and make meaning of the greater culture in which they are located. In the increasing technology-dependent world in which we live, the majority of students' daily communication embodies both convenience and instant gratification, as well as a general lack of reflective thought. It seems that our knowledge and interactions with one another are now being valued for their technology and convenience rather than their content or motivation. In a world of ever-changing technologies and growing social media,

composition instructors must learn to adapt their pedagogies to the discursive mediums that students are most influenced by. We must not only address how these technologies are being used or why, but how these technologies influence our students' abilities to critically understand and analyze the social and cultural expectations that permeate today's world. In fact, in *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains*, Nicholas Carr calls for a deeper understanding of not only the new technologies themselves, but of how meaning-making processes are overtly affected by them. He describes the importance of this comprehension, stating, "Every technology is an expression of human will. Through our tools, we seek to expand our power and control over our circumstances—over nature, over time and distance, over one another" (44). Accordingly, we must be able to comprehend, analyze, and even alter how these technologies motivate our current social realities. Carr not only calls for an exploration of these technologies' physical and mental effects, but of their influence over our ability to think and read critically as well. It is only after we become reflective and analytical about our use of and dependence on these technologies that we are better able to appreciate how social processes of language and communication are genuinely affected. According to Carr, these technologies alter our perceptions on a molecular level, "play[ing] an important part in shaping the neural circuits inside our brains" ("Is Google," 58). Carr warns against a world in which "our intelligence flattens into artificial intelligence," caused by our over reliance on technologies such as the Internet ("Is Google," 63). Similar to Carr, cultural studies composition aims at recognizing and analyzing how cultural innovations and commodities influence social and individual processes of language and meaning-making.

Armed with a critical literacy that transfers beyond the walls of academia, students are able to achieve a culturally resonant and personally reflective consciousness. A contemporary approach to composition requires that we apply critical cultural studies pedagogies such as Berlin's in order to better inform and arm our students to navigate the ever growing detachment of a communications paradigm spawned from the advent of text messaging, MySpace, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. We must strive to elevate our students' rhetorical knowledge through an accommodation and problematization of their use of or over reliance on such technologies, in turn inspiring more informed, aware and civically minded rhetoricians.

The question then becomes, what next? How do we use this methodology of culturally critical composition to enable students to better understand not only the social power of rhetoric, but also how they themselves can use that rhetoric to make a difference in their world, to view themselves not only as student writers, but also as active agents through composition? The next move in this model then becomes one that "turn[s] away from critique toward some other form of engagement" (Lynch 463). Berlin's focus on social-epistemic rhetoric begins this turn as language is presented as something collectively constructed, with the subject (the student) being capable of enacting change on the greater social process of meaning making. We must now push this realization even further, encouraging students to use this knowledge of language as a means to inspire greater change in their own social realities. Derek Owens promotes composition that accommodates the very present need for sustainability and greater consciousness of our local environments, identifying the composition instructor's job as "an obligation to help our students develop the ability to maintain ethical health in a sick culture while

anticipating and surviving an uncertain future” (131). In this sense, it is not that we must alter or change the approaches of Freire, Shor, and Berlin, but instead that we revive these pedagogies in an effort to connect composition with the manner in which our students continue to navigate the ever-changing and ever complicated terrain of today’s social and cultural landscape.

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## *Appendix A*

### Assignment 1: Object Narrative

#### ***Object Narrative, Draft #1*** ***(1.1)***

Your first major writing assignment will be a personal narrative. This assignment calls for a “composition that focuses on the author’s individual experiences.”

For draft one of this narrative, examine an object of close personal significance to you. (For example, an object that reflects your personality; an object of sentimental value; something you use daily; something you could not live without, etc.) Your object must be non-living and small enough to carry.

This draft should aim at answering the following questions:

**\*\*What is the object?**

-Describe it. What are its characteristics? How does it look, sound, smell, feel, and taste? Literally describe what you see and feel when looking at and holding the object. Where is it found? What is its main use? What is the object’s story?

**\*\*What is the object’s personal value to you?**

-Why is it significant to you? Why did you choose it for this writing assignment?

**\*\*What is your response to the object?**

-What emotions does it evoke in you? What stands out about it? Who or what does it remind you of?

Your ultimate goal in this draft is to describe the object in such a manner that your reader can experience both the object and its significance to you. For this draft, you should focus on narration and description. Details, emotion, unusual points of view, and humor are all techniques that can make your narrative more interesting and original.

#### ***Object Narrative, Draft #2*** ***(1.2)***

For draft two of your personal narrative, examine the social and/or cultural associations of the object described in your first draft. Yes, this draft DOES call for an entirely different essay than the first draft.

This draft should answer the follow questions:

**\*\*What is the social and/or cultural value of my object?**

-What does your object mean to other people? How is it used in the world? Is its value intrinsic, extrinsic, economic, spiritual, educational, political, etc? Does the object visually, literally, or figuratively represent a larger society, cultural, or general mindset?

**\*\*What is a social and/or cultural issue that is or can be connected to your object?**

-Does your object evoke morals, ethics, or any other value systems? Is the object associated with a specific industry? Is there any controversy that could surround this object? How indicative is it of the society or culture you live in, and how? (Be sure to support any cultural claims made with specific and concrete explanations as to why and how.)

**\*\*Do these cultural and/or social connections alter your feelings toward or experience with the object?**

-Reflect back on your writing experience with this object. After considering the social implications of your object, is it still as significant to you (more, less, or the same), and why? What personal connections do you have with the social or cultural issue that you have associated with your object?

For this draft, your cultural and/or social claim should serve as your central idea, point, or thesis, as you focus on analyzing and interpreting the larger social elements of your object. In addition, you should also spend a significant amount of time reflectively writing on how this experience altered your perceptions of the object and/or cultural considerations you have made.

***Object Narrative, Draft #3  
(1.3)***

For your third draft of the personal narrative, combine and revise your first two drafts into a concise, organized, thoughtful, and inspired essay. First, review and reflect on your first two drafts, rearranging and clarifying your stronger points, while deleting and/or revising the weaker elements. Second, devise an organizational strategy for your third draft. (For example, you could group paragraphs based on purpose, such as description and then analysis.) Your organization should be logical and understandable for both you and your reader. Draft three should also include a clear thesis, introduction, and conclusion that effectively communicate the purpose of your writing.

*Appendix B:*

Assignment 2: Rhetorical Analysis of a Place

***Rhetorical Analysis of a Place, Draft #1***

**(2.1)**

For this assignment, you will choose a public space and describe, in detail, its purpose, design and “audience,” considering how well this space achieves its aims. Your purpose in writing the paper is to identify the connections between the design of the physical space, its stated purpose, the people who use the space and the activities that go on there. The public space you choose should be restricted to a certain area such as the Solarium in the Student Union, the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor in the library, a food court in a mall, a certain store in the mall, Sanford mall, etc. In addition, you should be able to regularly visit and observe this space throughout this paper sequence. As in all course assignments, I reserve the right to veto your choice for any reason. NOTE: I will require you to bring in a snapshot of the space for the one of the Writing Workshops, so please choose a space that you can photograph.

This draft should be a *description* of the place you choose, the people who use it, and the activities that take place there.

Your paper should contain vivid and detailed descriptions of the place, describing its physical features. Some questions to consider: What are the colors and shapes that define the space? What kind of access does it allow for users of the space? What kind of natural and artificial light illuminates the space? What kind of furniture or other fixtures are part of the space?

Describe the people who interact with the space, and how it affects them. Can you categorize the users of the space according to specific categories of age, race, ethnicity, occupation, etc.? Do they use the space for things other than its intended purpose? What activities typically occur in the space? What kind of effect does the space seem to have on them? Are they enjoying the space? How can you tell?

Your purpose in this draft is to describe the space in order to give your audience a new understanding of the space, its characteristics, as well as the people and activities that frequent it. After reading your essay, the reader should feel that they have learned something new about the space and about how the design of spaces can influence the interactions within it.

## ***Rhetorical Analysis of a Place, Draft #2***

**(2.2)**

A rhetorical analysis of a text (written or visual) asks *HOW* a text uses various devices of language or design to achieve its purpose. A rhetorical analysis also considers how successful the text is in achieving its purpose.

For this draft, you will rhetorically analyze the space that you chose for its purpose, design and “audience,” considering how well this space achieves its aims. As with the first draft, your purpose in writing the paper is to identify the connections between the design of the physical space, its stated purpose, the people who use the space, and the activities that go on there.

This draft should switch focus from simply a *description* of your space to an *analysis* of the usefulness of the space for its intended purpose. Consider the elements of the rhetorical triangle as you develop your descriptions and analysis:

***In this draft, I would like you also focus on:***

-The designer of the space, or its author (ethos): What was the intended use of the space? What seem to be the environmental, social and cultural implications of the space as it is designed? That is, what does it seem that the designer intended by creating the space in a particular way? Or, did the designer seem to neglect to consider certain elements you think are important?

In addition, what are the social and/or cultural implications of this space? Does it happen to represent or embody a certain culture in some way? Are the activities that take place there indicative of any larger social or cultural institutions? For instance, are there any specific types of consumerism, tourism, ideologies, stereotypes, or other representations of society within your space? (HINT: These considerations are similar to those in your second draft of the object narrative.)

## ***Rhetorical Analysis of a Place, Draft #3***

**(2.3)**

For your third draft of the rhetorical analysis of a space, combine and revise your first two drafts into a concise, organized, thoughtful, and inspired essay. First, review and reflect on your first two drafts, rearranging and clarifying your stronger points, while deleting and/or revising the weaker elements of your writing. Second, devise an organizational strategy for your third draft. (For example, you could group paragraphs based on purpose, such as description and then analysis.) Your organization should be logical and understandable for both you and your reader.

Draft three should also include a clear thesis, introduction, and conclusion that effectively communicate the purpose of your writing.

In addition, your third draft should incorporate at least three sources, with one of those sources being electronic, and one being a print source.

*Appendix C:*

Assignment 3: Media Literacy Narrative

***Media Literacy Narrative, Draft #1***  
**(3.1)**

*“Media literacy provides a framework to access, analyze, evaluate, create and participate with messages in a variety of forms. Media literacy builds an understanding of the role of media in society as well as essential skills of inquiry and self-expression” (medialit.org).*

As we have and will discuss many times throughout this semester, everything, regardless of form or medium, is a text or argument. Everything we come into contact with (audial, visual, or otherwise) communicates something, an agenda, point, thesis, point of view, explanation, etc. Encoded with specific messages, these arguments or agendas can then influence how we perceive, critique, and respond to our surroundings. As consumers we experience (or decode) these texts in diverse and individualized ways.

Our first writing assignment for this course will be a media literacy narrative of your experience as a consumer of media of various forms. This paper may take many different forms: you may want to focus on one experience or type of media, or weave together several related experiences or types of media, or to use your personal experience to reflect on some topic focused on your media literacy. To aid in writing this paper, we will conduct several invention exercises, and will thoroughly discuss different types of media, argument, rhetoric, critical analysis, and literacy. (I have also provided a summary of the key concepts of media literacy at the end of this assignment sheet.)

*\*\*Please keep in mind that our use of the term “media” is not limited to news or public and broadcasting services, but is more in reference to the general media (texts) that you encounter on a regular basis.*

For draft one of your media literacy narrative, ***describe*** your experiences as a consumer of media. You should focus on introducing the types, mediums, and characteristics of the media that you come into contact with on a regular basis. (Such as books, movies, television, news or public broadcasting services, music, games, online activities, etc.) You may choose to discuss several different examples of the media you consume, or a certain type you use the most. What are they? Why are you attracted to them? Did someone recommend them, or do the different types of media relate to or remind you of anyone in particular? What are the benefits of consuming these types of media, i.e. enjoyment, entertainment, gossip, information, etc.? In sum, describe the media you consume and why.



**For this draft, you should focus on narration and description.** Details, emotion, unusual points of view, and humor are all techniques that can make your narrative more interesting and original.

***Media Literacy Narrative, Draft #2***  
**(3.2)**

For draft two of your media literacy narrative, **interpret and reflect** on your experience with the media you wrote about in the first draft. Once again, you may choose to discuss several different examples of the media you consume, or a certain type you use the most. This draft should aim at answering some of the following (or similar) questions: what does your experiences with media (how you chose them, the type you use, etc.) communicate about you, your personality, your point of view, past experiences, background, etc.? How do you typically analyze or “read” the media you most frequently come into contact with? What does it communicate about how your process and respond to the world around you? What does it communicate about your character as a consumer? Have you learned anything new or surprising about yourself or the media you consume through this reflection? Pay attention to any patterns, abnormalities, or uncertainties in your history of media consumption. Throughout this reflection, try to explain what this narrative communicates, or “argues,” about you, society, literacy, media, learning, etc. And finally, what “arguments” is your narrative trying to make about you and your media?

**For this draft, you should focus on reflection, analysis and interpretation.** Details, emotion, unusual points of view, and humor are all techniques that can make your narrative more interesting and original.

***Media Literacy Narrative, Draft #3***  
**(3.3)**

For draft three of this assignment, you should focus on turning your narrative into an **argument**. For this draft, you should aim to describe your experience, showing your reader what happened (much like draft one), but this time, your aim is to write a version of the story that highlights the “argument” you want to make about your literate experience. The point, though, is not to tell your reader what the argument is but to show your argument through selection of particular details of the story that show the reader what you want them to see, think, feel about your experience. Also, try making one of the following “moves” in this draft:

**Limit time or scope:** What are the key moments in your narrative? How might you limit time or scope to make these key moments central? How might you sequence the events in (or parts of) your story?

**Add detail:** Add in as much material as you can think of that seems relevant to your story. This will probably mean adding in whole new sections. Again, don’t censor your ideas yet in order to make your story neater. You still want to explore your experience(s) as fully as you can.

Change the perspective: Write from the point of view of another person connected with the experience or of a narrator. Actually take on the voice of that person, describing yourself from the third person point of view. This new perspective will give you a different way of looking at yourself and the experience.

Try a new form: Most likely your first draft is in the form of an essay. Consider writing about your experience in the form of a play, a journal (one entry or a series of several), a letter (or an exchange of letters), a poem, etc.

As you try these experiments, as you read and reread your material, keep thinking about what your story means, and what comment it makes about your beliefs, perspectives, and values surrounding the work of your writing. What is the implicit “argument” your story is making, and how can you select appropriate moments and details from the story to convey that argument to your readers?

For this draft, you should focus on argumentation. Details, emotion, unusual points of view, and humor are all techniques that can make your narrative more interesting and original.

#### ***Media Literacy Narrative, Draft #4 (3.4)***

For your fourth draft of the media literacy narrative, combine and revise your first three drafts into a concise, organized, thoughtful, and inspired essay. First, review and reflect on your first three drafts, rearranging and clarifying your stronger points, while deleting and/or revising the weaker elements. Then, devise an organizational strategy for your third draft. (For example, you could group paragraphs based on purpose, such as description and then analysis.) Your organization should be logical and understandable for both you and your reader. Draft four should also include a clear thesis, introduction, and conclusion that effectively communicate the purpose of your writing. In addition, this thesis should consider how the elements of your paper relate to your overall media literacy.

## Vita

Crystal R. Hendricks was born on the eastern coast of North Carolina. She graduated from the University of North Carolina with a Baccalaureate degree in Fine Arts in 2008 and a Master's degree in Liberal Studies in 2011. In the fall of 2011, Ms. Hendricks began her study at Appalachian State University toward a Master of Arts degree in English, awarded in May of 2013.

During her time at Appalachian State University, she was awarded research assistantships in Higher Education as well as a teaching assistantship in Composition. As a Teaching Assistant at Appalachian State University, Ms. Hendricks was able to transform her training and scholarship into actual classroom practice. Ms. Hendricks currently plans to continue working as an instructor in the Composition program at Appalachian State University before entering a Ph. D. Program in Rhetoric and Composition.