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# Literacy Crisis, Technology, and the Radical Reversal of Power

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LITERACY CRISIS, TECHNOLOGY, AND THE RADICAL REVERSAL OF POWER

by

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Louisiana State University, 2010

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DEDICATION

*For Mom & Dad*

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## ABSTRACT

As new media is changing the way individuals communicate, efforts have already been made within universities to, once again, construct new literacy standards in the digital age, producing the appearance of a literacy crisis. I argue that rather than producing another literacy crisis, the fundamental reversal of the power structure concerning who dominates standard literacy places greater expectations on composition scholars and practitioners--rather than students--ultimately providing the conditions of possibility for using power productively to imagine a new pedagogy of rhetorical dexterity that reverses the role of expectations from standards to invention. Such a pedagogy offers rhetoric and composition a way of theorizing literacy instruction in a way that embraces the richness of alternative literacies, which I argue invites scholars to revalue marginalized discourses. Ultimately, this makes room for pedagogies that use, understand, and accept the reversal of power, making this appearance of new literacy no longer a crisis.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

|           |                                       |
|-----------|---------------------------------------|
| D&P ..... | Discipline and Punish                 |
| ECH.....  | English Composition as a Happening    |
| K/P ..... | Knowledge/Power                       |
| SC.....   | Society of Control                    |
| PT.....   | The Politics of Truth                 |
| SP .....  | The Subject of Power                  |
| WIC.....  | What is Composition?...After Duchamp? |

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Willy-nilly, the U.S. educational system is spawning a generation of semiliterates.

"Why Johnny Can't Write" (*Newsweek* 58)

More than ever before, a great number of U.S. academic institutions are placing new demands on courses such as First-Year English by calling for additional learning outcomes specifically related to students' abilities to demonstrate competence in technological literacy skills. The motivational factors behind these institutional moves look familiar; after all it was an alleged literacy crisis in the late nineteenth century that set in motion the universal requirement of First-Year English in higher education. This course served the purpose of teaching incoming students basic skills in literacy, such as correctness in grammar, mechanics, punctuation, among other skills. English A, as the course was called at Harvard, placed greater expectations on students to demonstrate their fitness for the academy by speaking the language of the academy in a manner that was error free. But the declaration of a literacy crisis did not cease once the freshman course became universally required in the 1890s. It was only the beginning of many more alleged literacy crises to come, each contributing to shifting standards in notions of literacy. World War II brought an entirely new set of expectations to the freshman composition course, as the military began to send soldiers to college in 1943. The military's objectives for the English course was focused primarily on equipping their

students to write and speak efficiently with "clearness and correct language" (qtd. in Crowley 157). The motivating factor that drove these institutional changes in literacy instruction might be attributed to the military's preoccupation with developing the military personnel's use of language for the purpose of enabling an officer candidate to "function effectively in a position of command" (Crowley 157). With this goal in mind, students enlisted in the composition course were expected to learn how to think clearly, speak and write correctly and efficiently, as well as understand basic military communication. Such institutional changes to the course objectives of First-Year English are an example of the way power operates within academic institutions, creating a demand for greater expectations for what constitutes literacy. In this case, literacy was reduced to mere "correctness" because perfection was demanded. Deborah Brandt's *College English* article "Drafting U.S. Literacy" points out that WWII was a game changer for setting a new rationale for mass literacy; literacy was transformed into a "good" or a resource, if you will, vital to national security. As a result, literacy became something "measurable," ultimately changing, once again, what counts as literacy. Following Russia's Sputnik in the 1950s, the United States educational policy expanded these functional standards of correctness, which were geared toward the improvement of basic writing skills, to apply to all students--not just soldiers<sup>1</sup> These standards were aimed

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<sup>1</sup> In "Shifting Standards of Literacy--The Teacher's Catch-22," Miles Myers argues that "national policy has imposed on American public education four different standards of literacy, each one more demanding than the one that preceded it--signature, recitation, comprehension, and application...each standard has its root cause in the nation's economy and social structure" (26). These standards served a functional purpose and were concerned first and foremost with "basic" literacy skills. This standard was later found to be too concerned with "superficial" skills; thus, the demand for new standards of literacy became necessary. The shifts to varying standards of literacy, he argues, can be attributed to social changes, such as in the labor market. Depending on the job market, different standards may have required basic, functional literacy skills, while other jobs have demanded more advanced skills in literacy. Regardless of the causes for these shifts, the implications for English studies remain, since pedagogy has had to continually rearticulate its aims and conceptions of literacy in response to the demand (Myers 29).

at improving the overall quality of education in U.S. higher education. If the educational systems demonstrated success and proved to provide a quality education, it was believed such would reflect well on the nation as a whole. For this reason, basic literacy education rose to meet these newly established goals for the course through an emphasis on comprehension and correctness (Myers). Similar adjustments would later be made as university expectations for composition set out to meet the new demands of the emerging literacy crisis that followed in the 1960s to mid 1980s in response to national outcries of illiteracy: *A Nation at Risk*<sup>2</sup>, "Why Johnny Can't Write,"<sup>3</sup> and "The 1985 Young Adult Literacy Assessment."<sup>4</sup> Each of these reports of a literacy crisis during this time period played a critical role in setting up yet another framework of expectations in literacy instruction, creating a greater demand for Standard English. This time, literacy was connected to the values of citizenship. Instruction in basic literacy served in many ways as a means of preparing students to become citizens capable of functioning in society. By examining the appearance of the so-called literacy crisis in each of the aforementioned periods, what becomes clear is that each was a response to the growing middle class that emerged as industrial technology continued to expand across decades.

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<sup>2</sup> This 1983 report sounded the alarm for education reform. Based on 18 months of study, the content of this report revealed that nearly 23 million American adults were functionally illiterate.

<sup>3</sup> This 1975 *Newsweek* publication ridiculed higher education for not equipping students with adequate reading and writing skills during a time when the new professions demanded employees who were capable of demonstrating linguistic competence.

<sup>4</sup> According to the "National Center for Education Statistics," the 1985 Young Adult Literacy Assessment assessed 3,600 young adults between the ages of twenty-one and twenty-five. The survey results were used to both address and provide insight into the extent of illiteracy problems in America. Several years later, the same organization conducted the 1992 National Adult Literacy Study. This particular study surveyed only those sixteen and older residing in prisons or home from various states. The results from both studies indicated that strict problems of "illiteracy" was not exactly the issue. Instead, the studies found that nationwide improvement in skills of literacy was crucial for citizens to be able to "function in a complex society" (Hobbs and Berlin 283).

The emergence of new digital technologies has given rise to the new information literacy requirements for undergraduate students that is being enforced at universities across the nation. The new requirement is intended to help students hone their digital writing skills for the purpose of teaching students to incorporate research into their compositions. Such new standards may be attributed to the academic institution's redefinition of what counts as text and writing, which, as can be expected, has churned out new measures of assessment for digitally composed texts. Such institutional changes in the core curricula are more recent examples of greater expectations for literacy instruction, which have, once again, set off the *appearance* of a new literacy crisis. In response to this exigency, the National Council of Teachers of English offered a statement in 2008 on twenty-first century curriculum and assessment frameworks specifically addressing literacy. The intended purpose of this statement was to establish greater expectations for literacy skills and abilities that are conducive to a twenty-first century global community. Such shifting standards for literacy raise the bar of expectations for what it means for students to demonstrate competence in literacy skills.<sup>5</sup> According to the NCTE, the new standards require readers and writers to possess many literacies--and as I might add, only those literacies that fit neatly within the institutional

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<sup>5</sup> Concerning the shifting NCTE standards, Brannon Lil, in "The Problem of National Standards," takes a critical stance toward the so-called literacy crisis, saying, "The extent to which institutions are successful at maintaining the state of crisis, they will succeed in maintaining themselves'(3). The liberal impulse to offer solutions to such crisis is, according to Foucault, humanism's 'desire to change the ideological system without altering institutions' [...]" (441). In response to this realization, Brannon argues that the construction of national standards is one way the literacy crisis "is both managed and maintained" (441). More importantly, Brannon points out that it is the promise of access coupled with the fact capitalism depends upon such a system of a stratified workforce that feeds into this rhetoric of crisis. Most interestingly, though, is Brannon's gesture to the way the NCTE's development of the national standards with the International Reading Association has put members of the NCTE in a rather awkward position for wanting "to offer organized dissent" (442). Brannon criticizes the NCTE's articulation of national standards as an oversimplification of the "social nature of language and learning" (443). He charges NCTE with managing and maintaining the literacy crisis.

boundaries. For example, over time, students became responsible for not only mastering correct grammar, standard English, and argumentation skills, but students must also display competence in digital writing skills. Although there has been much attention to the shifting terrain of literacy instruction within U.S. higher education (Berlin, Crowley, Fleming, Graff, Lunsford, Rose) during the nineteenth and twentieth century, much of this past scholarship in English does not anticipate the role technology will play in the construction and expansion of new standards.

However, more recent scholarship has already begun to theorize how the emergence of new technologies offer an invitation for considering the importance of non-traditional literacies. Such considerations have already been taken seriously in the scholarship of Cynthia Selfe, Kathleen Blake Yancey, Katherine Hayles and Jeff Rice. In "Technology and Literacy: The Perils of Not Paying Attention," Selfe confronts the prejudices of many composition scholars that inform their decision to ignore technology, which she claims is both dangerous and short-sighted. Yancey, in "Made Not Only in Words: Composition in a New Key," urges scholars to expand the definition of literacy to account for the new forms of writing not tethered to the flat surface of the page, a form of reading and writing emerging with new technology. In *Electronic Literature: New Horizons for the Literary*, Hayles says that writing is in a state of "turmoil," for many in the field have been skeptical at best of electronic "literature." In response to this problem, she invites scholars to consider the rich possibilities that may potentially emerge in classroom practices if instructors choose to embrace electronic literature. Rice's *Rhetoric of Cool* urges for an expanded notion of literacy he calls "electracy," a term borrowed from Greg Ulmer, which establishes electronic writing as another "means of persuasion."

Turning to such scholarship is imperative for two reasons. First, these scholars are very much attuned to the way twenty-first century technologies are informing the way the field conceives of literacy. Second, these scholars offer new pedagogical practices that use emerging technologies productively as a space for reimagining composition. Such pedagogical moves are a response to the rise of new technology and a digital economy, expanding institutional standards that impose greater expectations on both teachers and students. These pedagogical approaches are important because they explore questions about what it means to be literate in the digital age.

Some scholars (Coffman, Campbell, Heller, Horney, and Slater) have recognized that this alleged new literacy crisis means many professors are now teaching students who have grown up with technology. As a result, this change positions such students as "digital natives" while deeming less technologically savvy instructors as "digital immigrants."<sup>6</sup> However, such scholars have only recognized the widening digital divides between teachers and students--not the way recent technological advancements offer a reversal to who dominates "standard" literacy. Such scholarship fails to address the reversal of power for who dominates the standards or expectations concerning these new, digital literacies, thus producing the *appearance* of a new literacy crisis. This reversal

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<sup>6</sup> I think it is important to clarify here that Coffman et. al are quick to point out in "The New Literacy Crisis: Immigrants Teaching Natives in the Digital Age" that despite the fact many of these digital natives are comfortable with technology, it does not, by any means, ensure such students can competently use technology in a "critical" and "effective" way. Commenting on this new literacy crisis, the authors assert, "Teachers have the important job of using their traditional knowledge to expand students' 'native abilities' and cannot assume students are digital experts. Even with the technology skill set of a digital native, students still need teachers to teach them to be *literate* members of the information and technology-rich society of the 21st century" (Coffman et. al 2). In response to these changes, the authors emphasize that instructors need to understand that digital natives think and acquire knowledge in new ways and have become "self-directed learners", which means that instructional methods need to adapt to these new ways of making/learning knowledge (Coffman et. al 3). More specifically, instructors need to be flexible and be humble enough to learn from these digital natives. Concluding the essay, the authors acknowledge that emerging technologies have further widened the gap between digital natives and digital immigrants; however, what they do not seem to recognize is the way the power structure has completely reversed.

allows power to operate from the bottom-up, placing instructors' digital literacy skills under the gaze of the students. In part, the digital economy is outpacing the institutions' ability to adapt. This turn of events makes possible the reversal of the role of expectations from standards to invention, urging instructors to become digitally literate for the purpose of defamiliarizing students with the digital literacies they have grown up with. This defamiliarization, however, can potentially encourage students and instructors alike to do exciting work with new literacies.

Since power operates within institutional constructions of literate subjectivity, power relations inform the discipline's framing of course expectations and outcomes in composition classes. In this way, the production of knowledge concerning what constitutes literacy carries much weight in determining certain pedagogical moves within the field, such as the rise of the new information literacy standards. This critical investigation turns a microscopic lens to the way literacy instruction functioned and continues to function in the academy as a result of power relations. As my argument will show, economic and technological expansion throughout the 19th and 20th century have led to the rhetoric of "crisis" that attached itself to literacy instruction. In response to such declarations of a "literacy crisis," academic institutions have responded with higher expectations for the emergence of each appearance of a "crisis." A brief history of literacy instruction in America makes obvious the way such a response has become quite typical. What is important to point out is the way past declarations of a "crisis" have typically set in motion greater demands on composition students. However, the recent appearance of a "new literacy crisis" has shifted the target of these new standards. Instead of only placing greater expectations on students, the more recent declaration of a literacy

crisis has placed even greater demands on teachers as well. It is important to note that the appearance of each crisis is not actually a real crisis; it simply *seems* to be a crisis.

Instead of a new literacy crisis, I contend that the exigence is new--digital technologies have given rise to the radical reversal of the power structure on which the institutional responses to literacy crises are traditionally based. Although composition instructors remain in positions of power, what has changed in the emergence of the manifestation of this new "crisis" is the fact knowledge production now resides in the hands of those traditionally dominated. Extending the conversation surrounding the so-called literacy crises, I take seriously the reversal of the power structure that takes place. Since this problem is not just another "literacy crisis," it calls for a different response to the situation.

In order to develop this ulterior response to the so-called literacy crisis, I concentrate on the relationship between technology and literacy within three specific frameworks. First, I will focus on the way social changes in America led to the institutional construction of standard literacy, which ultimately reinforced social divides. Second, I will turn to Foucault to provide a theoretical perspective on the "disciplining" effects of standardization in literacy instruction. By turning to Foucault, I show how power operates everywhere and does not simply operate in a top-down manner. Instead, I will show how the resistance to disciplinary power relations arises from those who have been dominated by the institution's changing demands. Third, I argue that rather than producing another literacy crisis, the fundamental reversal of the power structure places greater expectations on composition scholars and practitioners — rather than students — ultimately providing the conditions of possibility for using power productively to imagine

a new pedagogy of rhetorical dexterity that reverses the role of expectations from standards to invention. Such a pedagogy offers rhetoric and composition a way of theorizing literacy instruction in a way that embraces the richness of alternative literacies, which I argue invites scholars to revalue those marginalized discourses that have since been rejected for resisting the constructed standards of traditional academic discourse. In other words, expansion is no longer a demand but an opportunity. Ultimately, this makes room for pedagogies that use, understand, and accept the reversal of power, making this appearance of new literacy no longer a crisis.

## CHAPTER 2

### STANDARDIZATION: A RESPONSE TO AN EMERGING MIDDLE-CLASS

In U.S. higher education, incoming students are required to take a course in freshman composition. The emergence of this universal requirement, in part, stems from changes taking place in American society from the mid 1800s to the turn of the century. Prior to the Civil War, the aim of a liberal education during this time was to equip students with cultural knowledge and refined taste. The primary aim of college education, according to the Yale Report of 1828, was solely geared toward preparing an elite class of citizens. This liberal education was concerned with distinguishing the merely literate from those with refined skills in language use. Unlike the modern university, the faculty of these classical American colleges were ordained ministers who were entrusted with the responsibility of "passing the religious and cultural values of the educated classes along to the young" (Crowley 48). Such an emphasis on the cultivation of refined taste is one that certainly marks this period of literacy instruction. Of course the field of rhetoric and composition is all too familiar with the way social changes influence literacy practices. Put simply, the notion of literacy is quite fluid, which is something the history of literacy instruction between the 19th and 20th century shows us. For instance, as industrial technology expanded in America, it allowed for the middle class to come into fruition. In fact, it was the surfacing of this new class of citizens that led to the

determination of the elite class to sustain a level of social stratification. This set the groundwork for what would become a series of literacy crises. The *appearance* of a literacy crisis, as declared by academic institutions, gave rise to greater expectations for what constitutes literacy. Following the emergence of each perceived crisis, the field has witnessed changing pedagogical standards for literacy instruction and assessment, as well as redefinitions of literacy. In light of these *disciplinary* changes within the field, such moves have led to greater social divides<sup>7</sup>.

The end of the nineteenth century was the mark of changing attitudes toward socioeconomic status, as the American Industrial Revolution brought about exciting technological advancements, which ultimately created changes in the economy. More specifically, the emerging technologies led to the development of new professions (Wright and Halloran 229). For this reason, new members of society seeking upward mobility were beginning to specialize in these emerging professions. This became possible through the United States Congress passage of the Morrill Act or the Land-Grant Colleges Act of 1862, which offered land grants to states. This set the stage for the establishment of many major state agricultural and mechanical colleges "designed to apply the findings of science to the managing of economic and social affairs" (Hobbs and Berlin 249). With the development of these universities, more individuals were gaining access to higher education, rather than just the elite (Connors). Since access to higher education was granted to a broader audience, this meant students were no longer earning

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<sup>7</sup> Burton Bledsten's *The Culture of Professionalism* closely examines the way popular American culture became aware of the behavior, skills, and language of the middle class. Bledsten calls attention to the way middle-class Americans "created its own language." Bledsten was astutely aware of the way language functioned as a kind of social currency — a means of advancing in society. No longer simply aimed at supporting the elite, U.S. higher education made curricular adjustments to account for the new population of students gaining access to the university. The student inflation was accompanied by standardization to reinforce social divides.

a college education for the sole purpose of attaining a prestigious career as a doctor, minister or lawyer; instead, many were attending college to later pursue work on farms, the office, the mill, and so on and so forth (Connors 80). Despite the wide-range of professional work, college students needed to learn to write effectively in their professions. The problem that arose, as you might imagine, is that many of the individuals gaining access to the university during this postwar era lacked basic literacy skills. More specifically, most of these students were ill equipped to write *correctly* as based on the academic standards. It was declared that many belonging to this new middle class, then, were functionally illiterate and were unable to meet the expectations for literacy skills. The problem was first addressed in 1874 by Harvard College, when Harvard declared the majority of entering freshman displayed inadequate skills in basic writing. According to Harvard, the failure to pass the entrance examination by the majority of entering students was proof of national illiteracy. This incredible need for grammar and writing instruction heightened the university's urgency to teach correctness, creating new pedagogical expectations.

Sharon Crowley's *Composition in the University* comments on the way correctness was elevated to a matter of importance within the academy to further establish the legitimacy of English studies in higher education. This ideal of correctness, she argues, swept across many American colleges, making it all the more important for students to demonstrate an in-depth understanding of the formal grammatical rules of the English language. Since many in academia argued that studies in the English language were not college-level studies, the English department had to distinguish itself as "serious" business in higher education. Crowley references Le Baron Russell Bragg, a

former composition instructor of Harvard, who argued for the place of English studies in the academy by saying, "English is not easy. Properly studied, it taxes the best powers of both pupil and master" (quoted in Crowley, 60). To prove itself as a worthy subject in U.S. higher education, Brigg's further argued that English must be defined "as a language from which its native speakers were alienated" (Crowley 60). Second, universities would have to require an entrance examination that would prove incredibly difficult to pass. Third, universities would require those who failed to pass the examination to enroll in a course of study focusing on "correctness." Those instructed in "correct" English would have the capacity to use language in a manner that is free from errors in grammar, punctuation and spelling.

And, as Crowley rightly points out, Harvard did raise entrance requirements and also set in place a mandatory entrance examination as a response to this perceived literacy problem. Those students who failed the examination were required to take a remedial composition course, thus establishing the very first required freshman composition course in the country. Harvard's mandatory course set a standard that other academic institutions followed in the 1890s, making the freshman composition course a universal requirement (Rose, Berlin, Connors). The 1880s and 1890s also witnessed a flux of textbooks designed to meet the needs of basic writers in the required course, teaching grammar, mechanics, and spelling through exercises (Connors 261). The new textbooks are indicative of greater changes in the whole structure of higher education that attempted to provide practical instruction to meet the increasing demands of specialization (Lunsford 246-47). In a sense, it advanced a kind of "assembly line" approach to composition as students "[worked] through standardized, graduated

'modules,' practicing discrete skills, most often in workbook, fill-in-the-blank fashion" (Lunsford 254). The consequence of this response is that it reduced the writing process to an obsession with mechanical correctness and also stigmatized those "remedial" writers as cognitively deficient (Berlin, Rose, Lunsford).

Most importantly, though, the academic institution's push for Standard English was a response to student inflation as a means of widening the social divides even within the academy (Bernstein, Wright, Halloran). Many at the time resisted the way the technological expansion was making it possible for the middle class to expand and gain a strong presence in the university. It sparked much controversy because open admissions seemed to be a clear threat to the dominance of the upper class in society. Since more were gaining access to the university—an opportunity once offered to only the privileged classes—the upper classes found ways to distinguish themselves from middle class citizens. Much of this social anxiety was filtered through the codification of language.

James Milroy and Lesley Milroy address attitudes to language in *Authority in Language*. Those "guardians of language"—and, in this case I mean the academy—began to make value judgments on standard and non-standard English, esteeming the former as the *superior* language. Although the very term "standard English" was quite ambiguous, varying in many ways by different scholars, the authors argue that the general definition of standard language "is one which has minimal variation of form and maximal variation of function" (Milroy and Milroy 22). The standard variety, then, is chosen by those in power. Milroy and Milroy said it best when they compare language to a kind of "medium of exchange" similar to that of coinage, something with a fixed value. The aim of standardization, Milroy and Milroy astutely observe, is "to ensure fixed values for the

encounters in a system. In language, this means preventing variability in spelling and pronunciation by selecting fixed conventions uniquely regarded as 'correct', establishing 'correct' meanings of words [...], uniquely acceptable word-forms [...] and fixed conventions of sentence structure" (Milroy and Milroy, 19). Standardization, then, seeks to attain optimum efficiency in language use. Furthermore, the teaching of literacy has served a large role in maintaining the constructed norms of standardization. As the guardians of language tried to preserve a "superior" and more "valuable" standard language, those who did not speak the "language of power" were looked down upon. Those who deviated from Standard English were perceived by language guardians as incompetent for being unable to master the language rules.

If, as Milroy and Milroy point out, institutions have constructed a norm of "correct", Standard English to exclude the emerging middle class, then it is clear that language has served a critical role in maintaining class divides. The institution's new ideal of "correct" English served an intended purpose, making it difficult for the emerging middle class to compete with the more privileged classes of power. The construction of a national, standard English by those in influential positions was shaped by a "standard ideology", according to Milroy and Milroy. The effects of standardization were far reaching beyond the walls of the academic institution. Standard English was, in part, legitimized through the effects of codification (Milroy and Milroy 30). Drawing on Milroy and Milroy's observation, it can be argued that the codification of language caused universities to expand standards once again to teach students Standard English. This had important pedagogical implications, for the diffusion of Standard English

greatly shaped the composition classroom. Students were assessed by changing norms of performance that were reinforced through the constructed norms of standardization.

During the 1940s to 1950s, new demands for literacy instruction shaped the composition course. In 1944, the U.S. Congress passed the GI Bill, which was influential in the military's efforts to send soldiers to college (Lunsford 250). The GI Bill granted both new and old students the opportunity to attend universities. Since so many new students gained access to the university under the GI Bill, composition instruction found it necessary to reform its curriculum. In response to the needs of this new population in the academy, or so it was argued, new demands were imposed that reinforced standard language use through remedial exercises in writing. This post WWII period, then, was marked by a renewed interest in the functional aims of proper literacy instruction. This, once again, stressed the importance of basic writing. This time, the rationale for basic writing was based on national security, especially with the rise of propaganda during this time. For this reason, classroom activities centered on basic communication skills, reading comprehension, and mass media, specifically focused on propaganda, advertising, radio, and the press (Berlin 98). In addition, composition was also fueled by a demand for "correctness" in spelling, grammar, punctuation and sentence structure. The push for this communications emphasis in the post-war period was a response to America's attempt to "safeguard the American way of life" (Berlin). This curricular development was geared toward democratizing education, which was based on the premise that education was key for all citizens to engage in a democratic society. This was especially important in this post-war period. Following the Sputnik crisis in 1950, national measures were taken for educational reform, thereby focusing on greater basic

writing instruction for all students--not just soldiers (Myers). As a response to this renewed demand for "correctness," remedial instruction began to flourish again.

The 1960s to mid 1980s witnessed new social changes that sparked yet another alleged literacy crisis. According to Robert Connors, the "radical egalitarianism of the 1960s brought another new wave of college students" into U.S. higher education (Connors 264). Open admissions policies within academic institutions made literacy instruction all the more important. The 1970s was littered with reports of the widespread failing of educational institutions in literacy instruction. Without a doubt, one of the most famous declarations of the nation's dreadful educational status, was the 1975 *Newsweek* publication "Why Johnny Can't Write." What sparked so much attention from this article was the fact the university seemed to have failed in the teaching of reading and writing during a time when the new professions demanded employees who displayed linguistic competence. If higher education lacked the necessary means of training students in reading and writing skills, then businesses would resort to in-house writing programs. In response to this crisis, then, the freshman course gained increased recognition as a course of serious study.

The solution to this literacy crisis was the national standards movement (Brandt, Stedman, Myers, Brannon, and Mahyer). Such new standards are indicative of the growing concern among the American population and the academy about basic writing needs. According to Fleming, "The course was shaped instead by anxiety among the general public about the ability of young people to write correctly and well in the national language. This anxiety was the wellspring of freshman composition's nineteenth-century birth, and it is the main reason for the course's continuing presence in U.S. higher

education today" (Fleming 4). However, Fleming clarifies that the real anxiety is not only concerned with correctness in writing, but it is instead an anxiety that is marked with an obsession with "status and privilege"(7). What is of particular importance about these events is the way institutions responded to the emergence of the middle class by setting new standards for language competency that advocated a national, correct standard of English to reinforce social divides. Thus, such declarations of literacy crises are a prime example of the way power operates within academic institutions. The university's role as gatekeeper allows the institution to raise the bar of expectations for what constitutes literacy or the literate subject. It is this system that enables power--or, as I might say, *dominance*--to circulate within pedagogic relations.

Since 2000, there has been a proliferation of new technologies like flash technology, blogs, wikis, social networking sites, peer-to-peer programs, among other technological advancements. In response to the emergence of Web 2.0, many rhetoric and composition scholars have called for expanded notions of literacy that conceive of reading and writing beyond the flat surface of the page. Such scholars are astutely aware that more than ever before, students are composing on their own beyond the walls of the classroom. The everyday writings students are willingly composing in technological spaces actually offers a challenge to traditional notions of writing. The question institutions, instructors, and scholars must attend to is: What is writing in the digital era? In other words, how has the digital economy reconfigured what it means to compose? If composition pedagogy is truly interested in helping students compose in ways that enable them to be actively engaged in the public sphere, then it follows that institutional standards and composition pedagogy must reconsider its prejudices against digital

writing. Also invested in the way digital technology offers a challenge--and possibly more important, an opportunity--for composition pedagogy, Kathleen Blake Yancey, in her now famous article "Made Not Only in Words: Composition in a New Key," says more than ever before, the very idea of literacy is "in the midst of tectonic change" (Yancey 298). Yancey urges the field to rethink what constitutes reading and writing practices. Like Yancey, other scholars--Daley, Ulmer, Rice, Selfe, Hayles--have taken seriously the composition practices students are engaging in mostly outside of the classroom as a site for invention in the composition classroom.

By making room for new media in composition studies, this very move challenges the dominance of linear, print logic as the basis of reading and writing. As new technologies continue to emerge, the traditional privileging of printed text over other forms of text is held suspect. By moving away from traditional prejudices concerning literacy, what opens up is the possibility for thinking about literacy practices more broadly. In her article, "Expanding the Concept of Literacy," Elizabeth Daley engaged the field's on-going discussion of literacy by commenting on traditional notions of literacy, saying that it is no longer enough to have the capacity to simply learn to read and write print text. To do so would be to reject the possibilities of invention and new ways of making meaning that can be found in emerging technology. In the twenty-first century, what it means to be literate in contemporary society is to attain media literacy. However, the limitations restraining visual literacy in the composition classroom may, no doubt, be attributed to the overarching beliefs that new media has no place in the teaching of composition.

In response to this mindset that considers media literacy as external or outside to the rigorous work of traditional academic literacy (internal), Jeff Rice provides a defense of the literacies made possible by new technologies. He begins by expressing his discomfort with the way many scholars' historical narratives of the field have primarily dismissed scholarship that considered the role of technology in composition in the early stages of the field's development. By ignoring such important scholarship, he says the field consequentially has not given enough credit to the ways technology might offer composition new means of persuasion. As both Yancey and Daley pointed out, Rice attributes this problem to the way the printed text has maintained a position of privilege over the visual. This narrow way of thinking about literacy, Rice says, has caused composition scholars and instructors alike to miss out on sophisticated pedagogical moves. To further support his position, Rice draws on Jacques Derrida's famous essay "Plato's Pharmacy." Rice turns to this text to call attention to the parallel between society's transition from an oral society to a written society and society's transition from a written culture to one that is highly visual. Similar to the way writing was once dismissed by Plato as a mere copy of speech, so, too, has the visual been dismissed by traditional compositionists as Other (Rice 3). However, Rice complicates this binary that pits visual literacy against traditional academic literacy, arguing instead for a rhetoric of cool. For Rice, "cool" isn't simply an expression of that which is hip or even trendy. Instead, Rice wants to rupture this popular use of cool in exchange for a definition of cool that attends to the way rhetorical acts in the space of electronic media makes meaning (Rice 6). Cool, then, allows for the possibility of an invention of what Rice refers to as "electracy," which is a term Rice borrows from Gregory Ulmer (Rice xi; Ulmer xii).

Explaining his notion of “electracy,” Rice says, “To be electracy, that is, to compose electronically through the various rhetorical strategies...is to be cool” (Rice 154). Rice's work is particularly important because he complicates the value judgments that have been formed against the literacies that have emerged in electronic environments. Like Yancey and Daley, Rice offers the field a new opportunity for invention by embracing the new forms of reading and writing made possible by new technologies. However, some institutions have interpreted these calls for broadened understandings of what constitutes literacy with the same lens that has historically perceived of such changes as a sure sign of illiteracy, thus giving rise to declarations of a new literacy crisis.

Thus far, the response to the *appearance* of this new literacy crisis has been met with new standards for literacy, which is especially evident in the NCTE's "21st Century Curriculum and Assessment Framework." The aim of this framework is to enforce standards for literacy that enable students to communicate more effectively in the twenty-first century. For a student to be literate in the digital era, they must master more than traditional academic reading and writing, as the NCTE's framework indicates. Specifically, this framework sets in motion new standards and pedagogical moves in the composition classroom, insisting that students learn to use technology to design compositions for various audiences, evaluate and analyze multimedia texts, as well as attend to ethics when composing with multimedia. These new expectations not only place new demands on students, but they also impose greater demands on instructors because it implies that if students are to learn to use technology in more meaningful ways, composition instructors must also make strides to learn how to compose digitally (Vie). By doing so, instructors can find new ways to defamiliarize the technologies already

embraced by so many students. Although previous crises have, in the past, maintained the instructor's position of dominance in literacy instruction, the digital economy suspends the instructor's dominance over standard literacy. Instead, there has been a reversal of power. This radical shift in power creates the possibility for composition scholars and instructors to re-imagine literacy instruction in a way that oscillates between traditional academic literacies and the everyday literacies emerging in the digital realm.

What is particularly unique about this so-called new literacy crisis is how it differs from those of the past. To state the obvious, the nature of the new economic exigence is a shift from an industrial economy to a digital economy. Unlike the previous declarations of literacy crises that responded to an emerging middle class, the response to digital technology might even be considered a response to the declining middle class. In other words, as the industrial base is going global, it calls into question the middle class. In light of these socio-economic and technological changes in this digital era, then, literacy is continually reconfiguring itself, adapting to new practices over and over again. Literacy is caught up in a web of social practices, inviting teachers and students to engage in the coproduction of rhetorical activity in digital spaces. The focus is no longer about norms or the ideal of correctness; those are concerns of the past. Instead, in this digital economy, production slides from the periphery to the center. As a result of the reversal of power that takes place in the digital realm, composition scholars and instructors can move beyond standards to invention, making the crisis no longer a crisis but an opportunity for inventing new literate practices in the digital economy.

## CHAPTER 3

### A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE ON POWER: STANDARDIZATION AS DISCIPLINE AND REVERSAL

The individual, with his identity and characteristics, is the product of a relation of power exercised over bodies, multiplicities, movements, desires, and forces.

Michel Foucault (*Power/Knowledge* 74)

The shifting expectations specifically related to literacy instruction tell us something about the way literacy functioned in the academy and how it is currently undergoing a reversal or epistemological shift. In an attempt to avoid focusing solely on the negative effects of top-down exercises of power, I am interested in detaching the concept of "reversal" from a binary mode of thinking. Instead of only thinking of reversal as oppositional, I position reversal as a kind of dispersion--a movement. Reversal or dispersion, then, might be considered two movements of the same process. It is through an oscillation between these two movements that a moment of opportunity for reimagining invention becomes possible. In beginning to grapple with these important shifts, I'd note that Michel Foucault might provide us with the most insight into the way power operates within, through, and across institutions, producing and reproducing literate subjectivity over and over again. There are several important theoretical and pedagogical implications for weighing in on Foucault's genealogy of power to expand and reflect on the on-going conversation concerning the so-called literacy crisis. Since power operates within institutional constructions of literate subjectivity, power relations

inform the discipline's framing of course expectations and outcomes in composition classes. In this way, the production of knowledge concerning what constitutes literacy carries much weight in determining certain pedagogical moves within the field. Indeed, the more recent information literacy requirements embraced in higher education nationwide attests to the way constructions of literacy create greater demands for literacy instruction. My task in developing this project is to try to call attention to the way the construction of standard literacy has consequentially led to the privileging of a traditional model of academic literacy that is dismissive of other alternative literacies in literacy instruction. That is, previous institutional responses to the alleged national literacy crises in the past have placed greater demands on students to gain competence in literacy skills as dictated by disciplinary standards. But, most importantly for my project, the emergence of digital rhetorics has made possible a dispersal of power that has provoked a more productive use of power by offering composition instructors, scholars and students opportunities for invention through alternative literacies.

In beginning with Foucault's account of the workings of power, it is imperative to understand that power is not simply operating in a top-down manner, but power becomes capillary, operating from below (*P/K* 96). We are all participants in the workings of power. It's happening on the ground. It is always a dispersion of forces at work. Power doesn't only reside in a single entity, institution, or person. It circulates through different channels; it's not static. It is through networks of power that power is exercised. In short, power does not only reside in the hands of the few; it is everywhere. Foucault explains the network of power, saying, "And not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power.

They are not only its inert or consenting target; they are always also the elements of its articulation. In other words, individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application" (*P/K* 98). In this way, then, the workings of power are not merely repressive. Foucault characterizes these emergent relations as a system where individuals aren't simply acted on or crushed by power. Instead, individuals are effects of power *capable* of producing other effects. Capacity is important here, for it implies that those subject to power have the ability to both support and resist power often at the same time. In his book *Foucault Beyond Foucault*, Jeffrey T. Nealon provides an important rereading of Foucault's later work on power. In revisiting key moments in Foucault's later studies, Nealon points out the significance of the philosopher's capillary notion of power as grounded in the comings and goings of everyday lives. Nealon argues that it is in "the everyday" that power relations are intensified; this allows for resistance from below (107-108). Important is the fact that power relations are never fixed; they are ever changing—always capable of reversibility through the force of resistance. The potential for reversal is rooted in the fact the field of power relations are always "mobile" and "unstable" (Nilson 65). And as Nealon further explains,

Foucaultian power is not something *held* but something *practiced*; power is not imposed from 'above' a system or socius; there is no 'outside' of power, no place untouched by power; conversely, there is no place of liberation or absolute freedom from power; in the end, power *produces* desires, formations, objects of knowledge, and discourses, rather than primarily *repressing*, controlling, or canalizing the powers already held by preexisting subjects, knowledges, or formations. Resistance, then, doesn't primarily function 'against' power, trying to eradicate it altogether; rather, resistance attempts to harness power otherwise, in the production of different effects. (Nealon 24)

In this way, not only is the power structure always reversible, but reversal produces dispersal or varying effects of power that have the potential to be used productively. If we

take seriously Foucault's attention to dispersal and opposition, then it becomes clear that power isn't only a downward spiral. Far more than being repressive, power holds promising opportunity. This is what gives power its gripping force. In any case, if we are to explore the workings of power in literacy instruction, we must be attuned to both the repressive or disciplinary workings of power through standardization, as well as to the potential for using power productively as a strategy for invention through alternative literacies.

Let us, then, consider the important implications of Foucault's orientation toward the workings of power as it pertains to knowledge or the production of knowledge. According to Foucault, knowledge is intimately connected with power. This Foucaultian style of engagement with knowledge is closely aligned with Frederic Nietzsche's critique of essential views of knowledge. By this, I am referring to essential views of knowledge that stem from Antiquity, which tethers knowledge to ideals of truth, essence, origins, and other phenomena. Foucault offers his critique of the metaphysical logic that binds knowledge with ready-made ideas. The problem for Foucault is that such a logic assumes that such knowledge pre-exists. It is a traditional assumption about the nature of knowledge that is tied to an origin. Rejecting such transcendent views that hook essence into knowledge, Foucault shows that knowledge gets constituted. It is only through normalizing practices that one *forgets* it was constructed all along; there is no essence of knowledge. In other words, knowledge is an effect of power, a mere fiction. Thus, he abandons the whole metaphysical tradition that privileges a traditional, ideal model of knowledge (Downing 12). Considering the very idea of literacy, it is imperative to keep in mind that the very notion of literacy itself is entirely institutional. What I mean is that

institutions construct concepts of literacy, and it is through normalizing practices that it *pretends* to be a pre-existing idea. There is no essential notion of literacy before institutions. Thus, there is no autonomous model. Power produces knowledge of institutional literacy differently all of the time. As knowledge of literacy is produced within, through, and across disciplines, norms are set in motion.

Foucault's project calls attention to the way disciplines create knowledge concerning norms and standards for performance, which allows for the hierarchy of individuals centered around "a norm of performance," deeming some normal, healthy, or competent (Ransom 50). Thus, in addition to determining the given tasks for evaluation, disciplines also have the power to set the criteria for evaluating individuals by establishing such norms of performance. Through normalization, standards are enforced for the purpose of dictating how those subject to power may attain a stance of normalcy. Perhaps, what is important to recognize is that the construction of norms is not static, for they are ever changing; they can always be adjusted. In his book *Power/Knowledge*, Foucault investigates the power-knowledge relationship. In linking power and knowledge together, this nexus affirms that knowledge is also a form of power that is also derived from power. At the same time, power relations are enabled through a system of knowledge that is produced as an effect of power. Power relations only exist in correlation with the constitution of knowledge. The two forces are always perpetually and intimately intertwined. Knowledge cannot exist outside of power. The one implies the other. Foucault also discusses the relation between truth and power. He argues that the manifestations of power produce truth. In turn, the effects of truth enable the very workings of power (*K/P* 93). It is through the very exercises of power that knowledge

takes on an authority of truth. Continuing his discussion concerning the production of knowledge, Foucault focuses on the way knowledge gets marginalized. Subjugated knowledge, he says, might be conceived of as "a whole set of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated: naive knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity" (*P/K* 82). The point, for Foucault, is that it is through power that certain constructions of knowledge are privileged and others deemed unqualified or illegitimate. So, knowledges that do not fit neatly within the bounds of academic agendas may consequentially be dismissed or excluded.

Taking seriously Foucault's articulation of the way various forms of knowledge are marginalized, I want to show how the educational apparatus has privileged certain notions of literacies through normalization and disqualified or diminished alternative literacies. Institutional standards of literacy are derived from privileged knowledge about literacy. In other words, the privileged "high-ranking" constructions of literacy circulating within academic discourse have led to the domination of standard, traditional literacy within U.S. higher education. This is significant because institutions have used such privileged models of literacy to shape literate practices, as well as to dictate standards of performance to evaluate "competence" in literacy skills. This has marginalized alternative knowledges about literacy, deeming such "nonacademic", "unqualified", "inadequate" knowledges as unfit for proper academic work. As Foucault shows is the case with all knowledge production, the "norms of performance" are always on the move. This, I think, is especially evident when considering the way the educational apparatus continues to raise the bar of expectations for literacy to

accommodate shifting notions or models of privileged academic literacy. These disciplinary measures esteem standard literacy as *superior* to the other non-academic literacies. In this way, academic institutions devalue alternative literacies that do not fit the assumed autonomous literacy model of the academy.

The norms of performance, of course, are not only constructed by the rules of power, but they are also reinforced through the "gaze" of power within academic institutions. In fact, it is through the methods of discipline, Foucault shows us, that individuals are made into "docile bodies," which assures that these *disciplined* bodies "may be subjected, used, transformed, and improved" by the force of power relations (*D&P* 180). In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault discusses the birth of the prison, claiming prisoners were trained under "the gaze" of surveillance. As a representation of this new circulation of power, Foucault references Jeremy Bentham's proposal for the Panopticon, an architectural design that makes possible the *threat* of surveillance from a range of individuals, such as visitors, janitors, family members, or other observers. The effect of the Panopticon, Foucault says, is "to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power" (*DP* 201). Despite the fact the Panopticon was never actually built, Foucault says we now live in a society where "panopticism" reigns (*Power* 58). Foucault uses "panopticism" as a concept to describe power that is based on examination. Foucault takes this argument a step further and claims that "panopticism" paved the way for surveillance to permeate the social. For instance, Foucault points to the use of supervision and examination in institutions where those in power, such as schoolteachers and professors, are capable of "supervising and constituting a knowledge" over the subjects being observed (*Power* 58-59). This new

knowledge constituted by those in authoritative positions, Foucault warns, has consequentially led to a judgment of normality that seeks “*to impose a particular conduct*” on subjects (Deleuze 34). Individuals subjected to “the gaze” are often marginalized when acting in a manner that deviates from the norm. Furthermore, this demonstrates the way norms are produced through power. What is “normal” doesn’t preexist; it is constructed through the circulation of power.

Considering Foucault's conception of subjectivity, we might consider how this relates to the production of literate subjectivity within the academic institution. In the case of the university, written entrance examinations subject students to the "gaze" of those authority figures in the discipline who made the new rules concerning literacy. In the same way modern prisons disciplined society through routines and exercises under the watch of the discipliners, a similar disciplinary approach was taken in the composition classroom to instruct those who failed to pass the written examination (Crowley). Those who did not meet the new expectations for literacy were required to take the freshman composition course, which was based on a curriculum that insisted students undergo particular routines and exercises to make up for their lack of linguistic correctness. Crowley addresses the way the composition entrance examination continues to play a role in the production of subjectivity, when she asserts, "The entrance examination in English repeatedly and continually created appropriate subjects for the study of English—subjects who were visibly, graphically, unable to meet Harvard's standards" (Crowley 71). As the discipline of English set out to "make English strange", a phrase Crowley uses to describe the way the English language was established as a subject to be mastered that was alienated from native English speakers, two things

occurred. Aside from establishing English as a serious discipline of study fit for higher-level education, this "alienating approach" to the English language laid a foundation for English teachers "constructing students as people who did not enjoy sufficient mastery of their native tongue" (Crowley 60).

Commenting on this *disciplining* measure within the university, Crowley says, "The point of the required course is not to acquire some level of skill or knowledge that can be measured upon exit; it is instead to subject students to discipline, to force them to recognize the power of the institution to insist on conformity with its standards" (Crowley 74). These new expectations gave rise to the production of knowledge concerning what constitutes literacy or the literate subject. The literate subject, then, is both a kind of fabrication and an object of institutional power: the subject is an effect of power. With that said, the very classroom practices and rituals produced through a dispersal of knowledges, tasks, evaluations, exercises, and so on are all factors that contribute to the production of literate subjects. It is through this educational apparatus that academic institutions impose certain "truths" concerning what constitutes literacy. Instead of asking why domination occurs across institutions, the more appropriate question, perhaps, asks what practices of normalization produce subjects. Concerning the constitution of the subject, Foucault remarks, "In other words, rather than ask ourselves how the sovereign appears to us in his lofty isolation, we should try to discover how it is that subjects are gradually, progressively, really and materially constituted through a multiplicity of organisms, forces, energies, materials, desires, thoughts, etc..." (PK 97). In short, the literate subject is constituted over and over again through a dispersion of knowledges, standards, tasks, evaluations, exercises, just to name a few. The outcome of such

knowledge production, of course, follows that students are evaluated against each other according to the new expectations for literacy, deeming some "literate" and others "remedial" basic writers. Those assessing the entrance examinations, then, are assumed to have a conception of a "literate" student and an "illiterate" student based on shifting expectations or "norms of performance."

Returning to a theme mentioned previously, Foucault claims that knowledge is not derived from an origin. In rejecting traditional views of knowledge, Foucault argues that knowledge is produced socially through power relations, which has significant implications for thinking about subjectivity. By turning away from a Philosophy of the Subject, which is firmly embedded in essential notions of knowledge that view selves as whole, unified entities, Foucault is interested in the genealogy of the subject (PT 174). The self gets constituted through social practices, which have the capacity to produce categories of knowledge that give rise to new ideas and practices, as well as the formation of subjects (*Power* 2). According to Foucault, the self does not preexist. Commenting on Foucault's articulation of power, John Muckelbauer's article "On Reading Differently" stresses the way power reproduces the subject, when he says, "Power relations do not simply constrain subjects but are precisely the things that produce them" (77). The self is invented through power relations. The way we identify ourselves is invented. Thus, subjectivity gets constituted. The way the self is constituted is not only tied to top-down normalization practices. Instead, the self is produced through a form of coproduction from the bottom up. Building on Foucault's conception of subjectivity, Muckelbauer shows how selves are constructed again and again through power and truth. The subject doesn't exist first before power relations. The subject is produced by power. There is no

essential self before power. Just as Foucault argues power descends from multiple practices, subjects, too, are multiple. There is no self presence for the subject. Power produces subjects differently all the time by the way it circulates through various channels. Power is not transcendent, and there is no origin of power. It is happening everywhere. For this reason, subjects are “an effect of the multiple actions of power, meaning that the subject is not separate from (or opposed to) power, but is, in very real ways, a product of power” (Muckelbauer 85).

Again, Foucault's genealogy traces not only the production of truth or various epistemological shifts, but also *how* "human beings are made subjects" (SP 777). The subject, Foucault attempts to show, is a product of the effects of a complex network of power relations—both dominance and resistance. Foucault does stress that resistance factors into such relations of power and should be considered a working of power against the dominating or disciplinary *effects* of power that privilege particular kinds of knowledge linked with "competence" and "qualification." Such a resistance might be characterized by a suspicion of the way in which knowledge circulates and functions in its relations to power. This struggle, as Foucault deems it, is the site in which subjectivity is manufactured. Foucault writes, "This form of power applies itself to immediate everyday life which categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him. It is a form of power which makes individual subjects" (SP 781). So, the question of the subject, then, might be understood in two ways: one is made subject to power, and one is a subject of power (SP 781). This dual form of power, as a play of normalization, is marked by immanence, for it permeates the

entire socius. Foucault further explains, "That is to say, power relations are rooted deep in the social nexus, not reconstituted 'above' society..." (SP 791). This is crucial, for it shows that power is not only top-down; there must be room for resistance from subjects from the bottom up.

It is, however, in "Societies of Control" that Gilles Deleuze expands on Foucault's notion of "disciplinary societies" to show how power is perpetually changing. What Deleuze offers to this conversation concerning greater expectations for literacy instruction is a way of understanding shifts in institutional standards in light of emerging digital rhetorics. But first, I want to begin with Deleuze's commentary on disciplines like the school system. Concerning the workings of power in the educational apparatus, he says, "The administrations in charge never cease announcing supposedly necessary reforms: to reform schools. . . ." (SC 4). In other words, Deleuze acknowledges that there has been a shift from "disciplinary societies" to "societies of control"—something that Foucault recognized as our immediate future (SC 4). Within these *societies of control*, there is always a complex of forces at work. There is both domination and resistance in complex, shifting relations that complicate top-down bottom-up models. Deleuze says it best when he distinguishes disciplinary societies from societies of control. As Deleuze rightly points out, these societies of control are non disciplinary. In other words, societies of control might be thought of as enabling societies. Its primary interest is invested in the production of difference with an emphasis on heightened individualism. It's no longer about conforming to norms or correctness; it's about difference. Concerning the manifestations of power in each form of society, Deleuze remarks, "Enclosures are *molds*, distinct castings, but controls are a *modulation*, like a self-deforming cast that will

continuously change from one moment to the other, or like a sieve whose mesh will transmute from point to point" (SC 4). In societies of control, then, the standards enforced by power are never static; it is a continuous network of power.

To illustrate this perpetual change in the standards of power, one might look at the institutional response to the rise in digital rhetoric. When faced with the proliferation of digital rhetoric, U.S. higher education adopted new exercises of power by changing academic standards that pertained to "competence" and "qualifications" in literacy skills. New objectives set in motion the "maintenance of privileges" of knowledge. For instance, traditional academic discourse was primary and maintained a position of privilege above or superior to alternative discourse. In response to the emergence of digital rhetorics, what primarily underpinned these shifting institutional exercises of power was a struggle between power relations. Specifically, the emergence of digital rhetorics called attention to assumptions about writing: Who is counted as a writer? What makes writing worth studying? Who owns writing? As literacy was hooked into the digital, composition scholars, theorists, and practitioners began to wrestle with the tension between traditional assumptions about academic literacy and assumptions about alternative, nonacademic literacies. There were, of course, some scholars who responded harshly to the way emerging technologies changed the way individuals compose differently, dismissing electronic compositions altogether and arguing that such did not constitute writing. From this traditional perspective, writing is tethered to the flat surface of the page. Then, there were other responses to digital rhetorics that maintained a stance of hesitancy toward the idea of digital literacy without completely dismissing it. Recognizing that technology is ultimately changing the way individuals compose beyond the classroom, institutions

adapted new academic standards for literacy to accommodate for the reconfiguration of literacy as technologies emerged. This move placed new expectations on literacy instruction, ensuring that the new literacies would conform to the standards of academic discourse. But the story doesn't end here. In fact, there were some scholars (Yancey, Rice, Daley, Hayles, Ulmer) who championed a different response to digital rhetoric, a response that understood that digital rhetoric offered a moment of opportunity for reimagining composition. It had the potential to remove the binary between the expert and the clueless, allowing for a dispersal oriented toward collaboration. It allows for a transition from reversal to dispersal. It moves away from a teacher-centered model of literacy instruction and empowers students, placing them in a new position. This shift in positions of power might best be understood in light of Foucault's articulation of the reversal of power, when he comments, "Every power relationship implies, at least *in potentia*, a strategy of struggle, in which the two forces are not superimposed, do not lose their specific nature, or do not finally become confused. Each constitutes for the other a kind of permanent limit, a point of possible *reversal*" [my emphasis added] (SP 794). Ever present in networks of power lies the potential for a "perpetual reversal" of power. The power structure, then, is always marked by instability. This constant state of destabilization allows for change in the dominant norms and standards, even rupturing traditional notions of surveillance and normalization. Even more to the point, control in networks allows for a dispersal that offers a point of departure from norms and ideals, offering instead a site of production that is invested in difference. It's no longer about standards or correctness, it's about production.

However, if we are considering Foucault's notion of panopticism in light of the emergence of digital culture, it might also be argued that the appearance of a new literacy crisis has shifted the direction of the gaze. In other words, instead of instructors surveiling students for literacy skills, students, as digital natives, may place the instructor under surveillance. In other words, since students are so familiar with digital culture, this destabilizes traditional classroom notions of surveillance (Vie). In this turn of events, the power structure has been reversed, allowing power to operate from the bottom up. As such, this turn makes possible the reversal of the role of expectations from standards to invention. What is particularly interesting about the production of knowledge that arises from this reversal is that it blurs the line between academic and nonacademic knowledges or literacies. In this way, what students gain is a new power because many are already quite fluent in the digital literacies already familiar to them. As digital natives, students become the elite knowledge makers in the communities that they create. In hooking the digital into literacy instruction, it creates the conditions of possibility for students to engage in sophisticated knowledge creation with technologies grounded in everyday use. However, before exploring the way the reversal makes way for productive uses of power, I first explore the way composition scholars have responded to the emergence of new digital literacies with greater standards.

The field of rhetoric and composition has, for some time, lingered in a state of controversy about what actually counts as literacy. While traditional scholarship in composition studies has maintained a rigid understanding of literacy that is confined to alphabetic text on a page, emerging technologies are fundamentally eroding the very assumptions that have laid the foundation for the field's notions of literacy. As a result of

the ubiquity of technology that has been up-and-coming in the last two decades, discourse has circulated across the discipline calling for expanded definitions of reading and writing that encompass changing technology. Not surprisingly, efforts have already been made within universities to, once again, raise the bar on what constitutes literacy in the digital age, thus calling for more expansive views of writing, which is all too evident in the International Reading Association (IRA) and NCTE's changing position statements on literacy over the last two decades. In 2008, the NCTE and the IRA released the "21st Century Curriculum and Assessment Framework." The purpose of the literacy frameworks, as articulated by the organizations, is to establish national standards that anticipate "the more sophisticated literacy skills and abilities required for full participation in a global, 21st century community." As might be expected, the statement redefines literacy to reflect the ever changing technological and social practices as follows:

Because technology has increased the intensity and complexity of literate environments, the twenty-first century demands that a literate person possess a wide range of abilities and competences, many literacies. These literacies—from reading online newspapers to participating in virtual classrooms—are multiple, dynamic, and malleable. As in the past, they are inextricably linked with particular histories, life possibilities, and social trajectories of individuals and groups. ("NCTE Position Statement")

In order for students to become competent in these new literacies, then, it follows there are certain practices learners must master. The framework provides six standards to measure students' literacy competence based on proficiency with: technology tools; problem-solving; designing and sharing information for broad audiences; managing and synthesizing information; creating, evaluating and analyzing multimedia texts; and, attending to ethics when working with these new texts. Of course these new assessment

standards raise a multitude of questions—none of which are easy to answer. While I couldn't agree more with the NCTE's statement that "[w]hen learning experiences are grounded in well-informed teaching practices, the use of technology allows a wider range of voices to be heard, *exposing students to opinions and norms outside of their own*" [my emphasis added] ("NCTE Position Statement"); I am unconvinced that raising institutional expectations once again really provides an opening for students to be exposed to "norms outside of their own," especially since many alternative literacies do not fit neatly within the institutional norms of standard literacy. It is for this reason, composition scholars and instructors must rethink the field's theory and praxis. This calls for using power productively to envision a new pedagogy, one that allows for a pedagogy of difference that doesn't keep alive the binary between hegemonic and excluded discourse.

If we disregard the way this reversal of power radically alters the expectations from a focus on standards to a dispersal of opportunities for invention, we are missing out on the chance to use power productively to engage students in literacies already familiar to them, although such literacies may not be all too familiar with instructors. This also potentially encourages composition instructors to also become familiar with these alternative literacies so pervasive in digital culture that the majority of students have grown up with. As instructors become fluent in these new, digital literacies, such allows for a certain inventive force to permeate the composition classroom, allowing instructors to develop practices that allow students to use their familiarity with these emerging literacies in exciting ways. Such a response that makes use of this reversal of power, then, means that the field isn't simply doomed to repeat a literacy crisis. Instead, it completely

does away with this rhetoric of crisis our field has so often declared, meaning there is no crisis. Rather than a crisis, the field finds is given a continued emergent opportunity. One that involves a constant movement that blurs the boundaries between institutional literacies and alternative literacies. These two movements of change intersect in the classroom, expanding conditions of engagement. Rhetorical literacy in the digital realm allows for a new way of "seeing." Instead of narrowing down yet another disciplinary standard, it pushes back against demands of enforcement. It invites students and teachers to collaborate and challenge the familiar literacies of the academy with an engagement with digital rhetorics. It asserts the competence of nontraditional compositions by invoking alternative literacies stemming from everyday digital environments. It complicates the divide between normalized literate practices in the academy and those that fall outside these boundaries. Instead of situating digital literacy in the shadows of dominate academic literacy practices, a pedagogy of difference takes seriously the literate practices that manifest as students and teachers move beyond the academic and nonacademic dichotomy in exchange for a space of collaboration. Such pedagogical moves, I argue, create the opportunity for students to become co-producers of knowledge in the environments they craft.

## CHAPTER 4

### USING POWER PRODUCTIVELY IN A NEW PEDAGOGY

For Foucault, one cannot liberate by getting outside of power because, without power, there would, quite literally, be nothing to liberate. Power, in his formulation, is not merely repressive, but primarily productive.  
John Muckelbauer ("On Reading Differently" 75)

The technological explosion spanning over the last few decades has brought about new innovations that have radically altered the communications landscape as we once knew it. Such rapid changes cast new demands on the English profession and raise important questions about literacy. This holds important implications for the aims, practices, and purposes of our work in rhetoric and composition. It asks us to rethink our assumptions about knowledge (and knowledge-making), the goals of literacy instruction, and what it means to teach composition to students living in a world saturated with technology. The appearance of this new literacy crisis, as it is deemed by some, is unlike any before; thus, it requires a new way of thinking and a new style of engagement. Such a response would engage the reversal of power by challenging the dominance of traditional academic literacy with everyday literate practices. Rather than asserting the superiority of traditional notions of literacy, a response that understands the reversal as an oscillation and dispersion might assert the importance of alternative literacies. By invoking and taking seriously alternative literacies, composition teachers and scholars must grapple with new curricular and pedagogical practices in the classroom. Reshaping the core curriculum in composition would enable instructors to provide robust instruction in

changing literacies that will empower students to adapt their literacy skills beyond the classroom in their future endeavors. Important is technology's connection to the public sphere. Public deliberations are now taking shape in new ways in electronic environments. Keeping in line with rhetoric's ties to public discourse, the field of rhetoric and composition must consider new pedagogies that prepare students to think and communicate rhetorically in online public spaces, as well as to become skilled knowledge makers in the environments they create with the literacies already familiar to them.

In the context of this technological turn, we are faced with the pervasiveness of electronic texts—and I mean "text" in its most expansive form—that have shifted the terrain of the literacy debate away from only a focus on the linear, print dominated technologies. More than ever before, texts are intimately connected to the visual. What it means to write in this visually dominated culture is rapidly changing as new technologies emerge evolving into a kind of screen writing. I think this shift and expansion of what is considered writing and "text" is a telling example of the way the dominance of traditional conceptions of writing and literacy—that have long been upheld by standards—are being challenged by new modes of composing in everyday writing environments on the screen. With this in mind, our traditional theories and curricula concerning literacy are no longer sufficient. What might this mean for composition scholars? I will venture to say that it is far overdue for composition scholars and instructors to no longer simply teach and theorize writing within the limitations of academic standards. Put simply, we must embrace pedagogies that use, understand, and accept the reversal of power, making the appearance of new literacies no longer a crisis. By way of this reversal, there is inevitably a shift away from texts to an emphasis on practice(s).

But before moving any further, I think it is important to first weigh in on the implications of the destabilization of the very concept of literacy itself. This destabilization, I think, might be better understood when grappling with this shift from text to practice. What I mean here is that an emphasis on texts, as the history of this course illustrates, is guided by a curious insistence on norms. These norms, of course, are determined by the misguided assumption that there exists knowledge that is static. It assumes one definition and one set of practices that provide a unified, stable concept of literacy itself. It gives off the assumption that literacy is something we can pin down and recognize when we see it. Following this line of thinking, what we have settled on in the past concerning the norms of literacy are rigid standards to maintain and uphold the values, conventions, and authority of traditional academic discourse. However, any time this stable notion of literacy has been challenged from time-to-time by social, economic, and technological pressures, it has consequentially given off the *appearance* of a kind of crisis. As Foucault demonstrates in his genealogies of power, post-structuralism offers a point of departure from essential notions of knowledge to an awareness and understanding of the production of knowledge through discourse. In other words, what Foucault's theory of power-knowledge offers is a way of thinking differently about the changing forms of knowledge produced in everyday electronic environments (Cooper). Just as new technologies are constantly changing and evolving every day, so, too, are practices and conceptions of literacy. This is important, of course, because it entails that no longer can the English profession assume a stable, unified knowledge that undermines and informs our literate practices.

Transitioning away from the emphasis on texts to practices, then, would unreservedly leave behind this rhetoric of crisis. By thinking of literacy more expansively as a set of practices, it would guarantee movement. Put simply, such an orientation to literacy would reject the idea of a stable body of knowledge that is upheld through standards. Instead, it would welcome and invite change. So, changes in literate practices keeps knowledge moving. It is always being made over and over again, reshaping and conforming to new practices. For this reason, there's no longer a literacy crisis. The question becomes: What can you do with the evolving literate practices? Productivity moves from the periphery to the center.

As new technologies open up spaces for new literate practices, many scholars are becoming aware of the way electronic environments allow for a proliferation of rhetorical activity. Aware of the potential of these new rhetorical situations, Marilyn M Cooper, in her article "Postmodern Possibilities in Electronic Conversations," calls for a postmodern pedagogy for networked technologies. Shifting away from modernist assumptions about the stability of knowledge, the unity of the self, and truth, Cooper argues that postmodernism makes suspect assumptions about each and, instead, extends an invitation to *see* differently. In the context of the everyday writings in electronic environments, a postmodern pedagogy attends to the unique rhetorical situations that unfold in online spaces, demanding a new set of skills of engagement than traditional print technologies can offer to students (Cooper 141). Specifically, Cooper says that such a pedagogy calls out "privileged" perspectives in exchange for the revaluing of "different perspectives and different voices" (142). Diversity and connections across differences become central. Concerning actual classroom practices, Cooper says electronic environments have the

unique propensity to make visible the social construction of knowledge. This brings us to the question of the teacher's role in the classroom. If knowledge is not transferred in a top-down manner from teachers to students but is, instead, socially produced, then it follows that students become co-producers in knowledge creation (Cooper 144). Students are placed in a situation where they are invited to hold a dual role of both critics and creators alongside their teachers. In this way, Cooper explains, power isn't simply given or shared from the teacher with the student, for power is not owned by any entity but is an effect of practices. However, when teachers adapt pedagogical practices that move away from teacher-centered models to a focus on student-teacher collaboration, Cooper says it is through these actions that possibilities open up, especially in electronic environments.

Rather than taking for granted an autonomous, natural model of literacy, what we are left with are notions of literacy being made anew as students and teachers become co-producers of knowledge in electronic spaces. As a profession, we are no longer afforded the "intellectual comfort" of a stable body of knowledge about what it means to be literate (Hawisher and Selfe). Most importantly, though, we must understand that what it means to be literate continues to change. As mentioned before, only when it is assumed that a stable knowledge of literacy exists does a change in literate practices appear to be a crisis. Changing expectations in literate practices manifest themselves as a kind rupture to stability. This mindset contributes to the ongoing declaration of a "literacy crisis" that is all too familiar in our profession. But if we are to move beyond this familiar relationship between stability and crisis, we can develop a more dynamic approach that celebrates movement by rupturing all essential notions of a stable, unified knowledge of literacy. In

light of this movement or change in literacy practices, so, too, do things need to change in the profession and in our pedagogies. In "Dropping Bread Crumbs in the Intertextual Forest," Diana George and Diane Shoos attend to the unstable concept of literacy. In setting up a definition of literacy as a process, the authors explain the implications of hooking the digital into literacy. George and Shoos explain that "if literacy is henceforth linked to technology, it is by definition changing and changeable as technologies evolve" (124). Based on this understanding, then, literacy is never static or complete. It demands constant attention to the fluidity of literacy and renegotiations of the shifting terrain of texts and the reader's relationship to the emerging texts.

Like George and Shoos, Kathleen Blake Yancey is all too aware of the shifting landscape of literacy in the digital era. In the often cited key note address "Made Not Only in Words: Composition in a New Key," Yancey offers a compelling charge to composition scholars to expand the definition of literacy to account for the new forms of writing that are emerging as technology continues to flourish. Yancey says more than ever before, the very idea of literacy is "in the midst of tectonic change" (Yancey 298). Due to these changes, Yancey says our profession is facing a moment like none ever before. This is largely due to changing assumptions about what it means to write. Yancey explains,

Never before has the proliferation of writings outside of the academy so counterpointed the composition inside. Never before have the technologies of writing contributed so greatly to the creation of new genres. The consequence of these two factors is the creation of a writing public that, in development and in linkage to technology, parallels the development of a reading public in the 19th century. And these parallels, they raise good questions, suggest ways that literacy is created across spaces, across time. (298)

As technologies begin to emerge, new public spheres are created on the networks, calling for a participatory public to communicate in new ways. With so much deliberation taking place in electronic environments (e.g. online public forums, social networks, blogs, etc.), the field must now consider what new literacies might offer to these emerging public spheres for contemporary audiences. To be an active participant in these online communities, one must learn to think differently about reading and communities of practice. Specifically, if composition scholars take seriously our role in teaching students to become engaged citizens who can advance positive change in the public sphere, then our pedagogy ought to be centered on teaching students how to create and critique rhetorical acts in electronic spaces.

Since literacy is taking shape in new ways, it is now time for the profession to pay attention and to begin to consider what these changes mean for instruction and conceptions of writing in the academy. Yancey further explains changing definitions of writing, when she says,

[...] writing IS ‘words on paper,’ composed on the page with a pen or pencil by students who write words on paper, yes—*but* who *also* compose words and images and create audio files on Web logs (blogs), in Word processors, with video editors and Web editors and in e-mail and on presentation software and in instant messaging and on listservs and on bulletin boards—and no doubt in whatever genre will emerge in the next ten minutes. (298)

This passage is compelling because Yancey shines light on the way much of the current writing practices students engage in occur beyond the walls of the composition classroom. In fact, Yancey underscores that students are composing more often and in a variety of ways than ever before. The digital writing students *willingly* compose are the forms of everyday writing that are challenging traditional definitions of writing. The

question here is: What is writing? What is more, Yancey asks, “What if writing were interfacing? What does that add to our definition of writing” (299). If the definition of writing does pertain to new forms of writing with technology students are taking part in, might there be strong implications for composition pedagogy? What is maybe most troubling for Yancey, though, is that this emerging writing public (consisting of individuals composing with technology) is evolving and expanding, she says, “largely without instruction and, more to the point here, largely without *our* instruction” (Yancey 301). Have composition instructors, Yancey wonders, become anachronistic? In order for composition pedagogy to remain relevant, though, so must the definition of literacy. Yancey refers to Daley’s claim that literacy must take into account new media, “‘No longer,’ [Daley] declares, ‘can students be considered truly educated by mastering reading and writing alone. The ability to negotiate through life by combining words with pictures with audio and video to express thoughts will be the mark of the educated student’” (Yancey 305). In other words, classroom pedagogy must adapt to the new ways individuals are composing. If the field’s pedagogies and practices are to remain relevant, the field must pay attention to the shift from writing to practice. In addition to teaching students to read and write print text, writing instructors must, themselves, become familiar with reading and writing digitally in order to train students to become competent with such mediums.

Nine years have passed since Yancey's challenge to adopt new pedagogical practices that are relevant to the everyday writing practices that take place in online spaces. In response to Yancey's call, the question must be asked: In what ways have compositionists risen to meet the challenge to prepare students as writers of electronic

compositions? One way that some scholars have responded to Yancey's call is by adopting new pedagogies that move beyond teaching the prized writings of the academy. This, of course, does not mean outright rejecting academic literacies, but it does entail blurring the boundaries between academic and nonacademic literacies—boundaries which have been reinforced through standardization. Such a pedagogy understands and makes use of the reversal of who dominates the standard for even technological literacy. It takes seriously the fact that no longer are those in academia the only individuals able to set the bar, for many of those in younger generations—both students and outside of the university—are often more capable of using technology to engage in rhetorical activity. It is through embracing literacy practices such as these that actually facilitates the movement toward a reversal of power. Only by accepting the oscillation that occurs between high and low exercises of power can we arrive at a dispersal of literate practices that are not restricted to traditional conceptions of writing.

Stemming from this reversal and dispersal, the field of composition is facing two different problems. First, although students may be growing up with technology, composition instructors must discover new pedagogies that help students to use these technologies in meaningful ways. Second, instructors must be aware of the reversal of power that has taken place. Since instructors are now being surveilled by students in terms of technology, it is imperative that instructors become literate in these new technologies. This reversal does not cause power to cease, but it does call attention to the way power is exercised from the bottom up.

If we disregard the way this reversal of power radically alters the expectations from a focus on standards to a dispersal of opportunities for invention, we are missing out

on the chance to use power productively to engage students in literacies already familiar to them, although such literacies may not be all too familiar with instructors. To echo Patricia Bizzell's call for an embrace of alternative discourse in the classroom, compositionists must make allowances for alternative discourse.<sup>8</sup> In line with Bizzell's push for alternative discourse, we have to make allowances for student writing that doesn't fit so carefully within the institution's standards for literacy. This means that more than simply imposing a new framework of institutional standards and assessment, we need a new pedagogy that calls out the misguided assumptions that standard, academic literacy is naturally *superior* to alternative literacies. For this reason, I turn to Shannon Carter's move toward a new pedagogy of rhetorical dexterity in *The Way Literacy Lives*. The pedagogy is based on a notion of literacy as a "community of practice" that is constrained and deeply embedded in social constructions of knowledge. Such communities of practice, she claims, are comprised of social relations with others whose understandings and concerns are shared (21). Carter's contempt for standardized approaches to literacy stems from the privileging of only one particular dominating literacy at the expense of marginalizing the other literacies that fall outside of these bounds (2). In response to this assumed autonomous model of literacy, Carter proposes a new model that takes into account the constraints on literacy education. This pedagogy of rhetorical dexterity takes a situated approach to literacy that "attempts to force to the

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<sup>8</sup> Bizzell is acutely aware that discourse—whether alternative or academic—is never fixed. As the academic community becomes more diverse—and it will—with more students gaining access variations of alternative discourse will take shape reproducing itself in new ways over and over again. Bizzell refers to this as the mixing of traditional academic discourse with alternative discourse. She asserts that such mixed discourse still has the potential to be rigorous and do "the academic work of the academy" (2).

surface the intellectual viability of alternative literacies" (Carter 16).<sup>9</sup> Rhetorical dexterity offers writers the opportunity to "negotiate the school literacies celebrated in the current social order in ways that are as ethical and meta-aware as possible" (Carter 18). It is informed by a "situated perspective" of literacy that does not privilege academic literacy as being naturally superior to alternative literacies.<sup>10</sup> Carter explains that if literacy is a "community of practice", then one might find herself fluent in one community of practice whether academic (dominant) or vernacular (marginalized) and less literate in the other. For the sake of clarity, I want to stress that there does not exist a main model of alternative literacies; it's only a situated practice that reconfigures itself differently in a variety of situations. Most importantly, though, understanding this situation in terms of technology is a move from the social turn toward the material turn, for it includes technology as a central part of communities of practice.

One of the central characteristics of communities of practice is the insistence on the value and importance of a multiplicity of modes in situated practices. No single mode, then, remains in a privileged position above other modes. What matters is how a variety of modes can be used and adapted to the particular occasion, time, place, purpose and audience. Under the umbrella of vernacular literacies, what this might look like in terms of alternative new literacies could be what Jody Shipka identifies as an embrace of

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<sup>9</sup> Rather than conforming to standard-based theories and practices of literacy, Shannon Carter's "pedagogy of rhetorical dexterity" offers a model "to help learners (1) recognize 'other,' 'vernacular,' or 'marginalized' literacies as valid so they can begin to (2) draw from them as they learn what it means to write for college audiences—audiences far less unified or predictable than the literacy-as-universal-standard model allows" (16).

<sup>10</sup> For a pedagogy based on such an idea, this would mean, according to Carter, that the starting point would begin between the two spaces of academic and non academic literacies. It would demand that one develop an understanding of and acceptance of the literacies the student finds relevant and important in their everyday composing practices. It allows for a sense of agency because it gives students a chance to "identify contexts in which she is already highly literate, mapping similarities, and competency" (Carter 114).

multimodality in *A Composition Made Whole*. In favor of offering students a pedagogy based on multimodality, Shipka argues for "the importance of curricula that treat all modes, materials, methods, and technologies (both old and new) 'as equally significant for meaning and communication, potentially so at least' (85). Shipka recounts a project of a previous student who choreographed a dance routine and used video as a means of recording the "composition." This particular student sketched drawings to illustrate how she arrived at making decisions for her project instead of writing a more traditional academic essay we all too often come to expect in the composition class. We might also see this pedagogy at work in Geoffrey Sirc's *English Composition as a Happening*. Sirc argues for a conception of composition that replaces the modernist push for expert writing that is rules-oriented in exchange for a composition pedagogy that is invested in the human heart, Happenings. Sirc's interest in composition is grounded in everyday writing. To illustrate his point, he draws attention to Duchamp who, as an artist during the Modernist era, was dismissed as a failure. Sirc, in his alternative history of composition, wants to reimagine an alternative Modernism "one that constantly [puts] in *check* forms, materials, and contexts" (WIC 179). Put simply, Sirc is not interested in the traditional modes of writing. But probably more important, he has a problem with the curious way the field has conceived of the dominant modes of writing as unproblematic. He wants to tease out the way an alternative Modernism holds suspect these unchallenged modes, materials, technologies, and contexts for writing.

Central to Sirc's project is his relentless attention to the way alternative technologies push back against conventions and standards, which he believes raise fundamental questions about traditional composition practices. In one sentence, Sirc sums

up his interest in composition: "I'm interested, for example, in failures that really aren't, in works barred from gaining the prize which end up changing the world. Brief, personal jottings that become a litany for posterity; the apparently impoverished composition that proves a rich text...writing done by anyone-whoever: useless, failed, nothing-writing by some nobody that turns out to be really something" (WIC 179). His attitude toward composition finds value in the everyday writings of students that are often devalued, dismissed, and overlooked in the academic classroom. Sirc directly responds to David Bartholomae, whose influence in composition, Sirc argues, has placed certain constraints on student production and invention in writing. He specifically refers to Bartholomae's "What is Composition?" —a piece Sirc attributes to the field's obsession with the prized writings of the academy. These writings—not alternative, everyday compositions—Bartholomae asserts are "official" compositions (WIC 180-181). Such views privilege and allow for the dominance of academic literacies, leaving no room for alternative literacies. In response to these assumptions, Sirc draws on Duchamp's perspective that art ought to be rid of privilege. Valuing only prize-winning writings, Sirc says, invites only limited possibilities. Instead, Sirc argues that moving away from traditional standards and conventions creates an opportunity for embracing a new aesthetic in composition—one that welcomes a dispersion of rhetorical activities. With this in mind, Sirc asks the following question: What does it look like to write beyond the bounds of classroom composition? In answering this question, Sirc argues that writing must blur the boundaries between academic compositions and everyday writings. It is marked by destabilization; a movement between the two. It ruptures boundaries, allowing for invention. Sharing with his readers about his basic writing course focused on hip hop, he

includes e-mails from his students, which he says shows the voice and heart of his students that is so often hiding in their formal academic essays. Sirc has an investment in the kind of pre-writing or compositions that are not, at least traditionally, considered “prized” writings. By glossing over such compositions, Sirc argues teachers miss the opportunity to discover texts written by just anybody that turn out to be rich compositions (*ECH 271*).

By blurring the lines between the "prized writing" of the academy and the everyday writings composed in technological environments, Sirc says we are able to move away from a focus on the finished product to an emphasis on invention. Explaining the value of everyday writings, Sirc says teachers must be willing to see and look for value in these compositions, when he says,

Only those who don't choose to read the anything-whatever, the document, feel there's no critical project here. What would it mean to have a document pose as composition, to have the everyday pose as a 'difficult text'? This validates not only the readymade composition (to which only a new use or perception has been brought), but its textual concomitants, however ruptured. (*WIC 189*)

Sirc scoffs at the field's long history of centering pedagogical practices on canonical texts and assessing student writing on the basis of how effectively students can imitate or reproduce the master's craft. In an effort to move past the limits of a standardized approach to composition, Sirc urges compositionists to embrace a pedagogy that is informed by Duchamp's approach to art, one that Sirc says is "idea-generative, not product-oriented" (*WIC 195*). The imperfect, as well as the writings that encompass the intensities of the heart, is what Sirc is after. In relation to composition, Sirc's engagement

with commonplace textures and materials can help us conceive of the richness alternative literacies offers to a new pedagogy of rhetorical dexterity.

It is at this point that I want to focus on a few examples of the way teachers can use technology within communities of practice. One of the most valuable aspects technology offers to composition is that it enables students to become both critics and creators in the digital era. It allows for the invention of a whole host of rhetorical activities, including remix, mash-ups, and cut-ups to provide students with another "available means of persuasion." Of these, remix is one popular way individuals are doing something with text. Lawrence Lessig discusses the significance of remix culture and its value for learning processes. Remix is simply a kind of collage. Essentially, remix involves taking a preexisting text, such as print, audio, video, music, art, as well as other forms of text, for the purpose of compiling the various mediums together to create something new. For Lessig, this form of composing is "writing beyond words" (Lessig 53). The point, obviously, is that the idea of writing can no longer be reduced to print text. Writing beyond words entails pulling together a multiplicity of texts to write visually. Remix writers can "quote sounds over images, or video over text, or text over sounds" (Lessig 69). What is particularly interesting about this type of composition is that there are various levels of complexity that can be attained when remixing. For example, one may develop a simple video with images, audio and text (Lessig 69-70). Remix can either be produced individually or in collaboration with others. What is more, remix is a powerful tool that individuals can use to make effective arguments. This allows students to see what one can *do* with language. When introduced into the writing classroom, remix

narrows the gap between educational aims and extracurricular writing that is often used for entertainment value.

Teaching students to remix can be valuable for several reasons. It can make learning fun and interesting in new ways. It can teach students to engage with new media in a way that involves complex thinking and rigorous work. Rhetorically speaking, remix provides students with another means of using language, visuals, media, and writing to persuade. In her article, "Authentic Hybridity: Remix and Appropriation as Multimodal Composition," Marina Hassapopoulou discusses her personal uses of remix in her composition classroom. Hassapopoulou talks about the ways her students use multimedia to engage in a variety of practices that hone their critical and creative thinking skills. To illustrate how remix might be used in the composition classroom, she provides a sample assignment that requires students to choose either a video or image that best represents them. She asks students to write reflections to explain why they chose the specific video or image to represent their identity, as well as to provide an explanation of how they can remix it to do something new. For instance, she explains that she does allow some students to use Photoshop or iMovie to remix the videos or images. The reflections are then posted on a blog, and the students are required to use the appropriate citations for their findings. The objective of this assignment, she says, is rooted in teaching students about publishing platforms (i.e. WordPress.com), as well as introducing students to remix culture. She foregrounds the assignment by having students read scholarly articles about ethics in remix culture. Concerning the objective of this assignment, she writes,

The guidelines are simple and theoretically straightforward, but the practical approach tends to trigger complex questions of self-definition, self-expression, and identity compartmentalization. Students are faced with the twofold challenge of fusing a personal mode of reflective writing

*[who am I and how do these objects represent me?] with argumentative reasoning [why did I specifically pick these two objects from a potentially infinite database, and how can I make a compelling case for my particular selection?]. (Hassapopoulou)*

Since she allows students to freely choose the media for their project. The reflection asks students to think critically about the selections they make. Taken together, this assignment asks students to take a variety of fragmented texts and remix them in a way that presents "the fragments of one's self." Through this assignment, Hassapopoulou allows students to do something with media rather than simply offering commentary about the power of media.

Other composition instructors are inventing similar assignments to ask students to use multimedia for research purposes in the composition classroom. In the article, "Designing Accidents: Advocating Aleatory Research Methods in New Media Pedagogy," Kyle P. Vealey and Jeffrey M. Gerding provide an account of an assignment sequence they developed to teach students about research methodology as an inventive practice. The authors are particularly interested in the way chance factors in the making of meaningful compositions. The authors are aware that students and instructors often stumble upon connections by accidental "surprises, mistakes and chance associations" when conducting research (Vealey and Gerding). For this sequence of assignments, the authors seek to make both teachers and students aware of the way accidents are a key component to the way both develop strategies for invention and research. The focus is on the practices that emerge as students and teachers cultivate "electracy." As an example, the authors designed an assignment called "The Wikipedia Challenge" to facilitate unique and insightful literacy practices. The assignment asks students to use Wikipedia to trace connections between seemingly unrelated ideas. The instructor must prepare a list of

categories for each group of students to use when navigating the site. The challenge is that students must identify and mark the movements made to get from one category to the next, as specified by the instructor's list of categories. Students must pay attention to the various links followed, which allows them to arrive at each category specified on the assignment sheet. The objective is to make students aware of the associations that may be discovered in seemingly disparate ideas or categories. Students are then asked to compose a reflection and presentation that explains the movement that occurred while conducting the activity. Wandering, in this activity, is valuable as a way of understanding and drawing connections among a multiplicity of ideas (Vealey and Gerding). I draw upon the above examples to reiterate the importance and value of a dispersal of literate practices in the composition classroom. Far beyond teaching students to navigate academic discourse, a pedagogy that oscillates between academic literacies and alternative literacies paves the way for invention and creativity in electronic spaces. It allows students to generate new ideas in sophisticated ways to create and critique a multiplicity of rhetorical acts, rather than demanding that students reproduce the master's craft, as a traditional focus on standards so often privileges as primary.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

In many ways, this project stands as a response to the conversations surrounding the so-called literacy crises, particularly the ways in which literacy instruction has responded to the rhetoric of crisis. This study has tried to make sense of the way power reconfigures notions of literacy and calls into question the privileged assumptions about literacy that often go unchecked. More importantly, this project begins to grapple with the way literacy, technology, and rhetorical theory intersect within the classroom, inviting compositionists to attend to the myriad of ways new communities of practice are made possible through emerging technologies, thus opening up new spaces for invention.

Throughout this project, I have emphasized the way the digital economy has radically altered the landscape of literacy instruction. It is for this very reason that it is absolutely crucial that compositionists begin to realize that we are facing an important moment in our field. In other words, since the digital era has allowed for a reversal of the power structure concerning who dominates standard literacy, it is only by recognizing and accepting this reversal that the field can begin to consider the ways the movement between dominant literacies and everyday literacies in electronic environments can create a dispersal oriented toward collaboration. In this way, power is not only negative or repressive, but it can manifest itself in positive ways, fostering new literate practices. In this way, the standards enforced by power are no longer static, but they are continually reconfiguring themselves over and over again. It's no longer about keeping the binary

alive between traditional, standard literacies and everyday literacies; it's about production. Such workings of power, then, are no longer geared toward maintaining the norms of performance that have shaped literacy instruction for so long. Instead, norms are left behind in exchange for production that is invested in difference.

How, then, might such an understanding of power hold important ramifications for the way the field responds to the *appearance* of a new literacy crisis? This question evokes an important theme that runs throughout this project: that power produces knowledge about literacy differently, which means what constitutes literacy changes over time. It is only by assuming a stable knowledge of literacy exists that changes in literate practices appear to give rise to a crisis. It is only by forgetting the very idea of literacy was constructed all along that we assume to have a stable, standard for what constitutes natural or even standard literacy. However, as the field recognizes the way power produces literacy differently all of the time, then it follows that the field isn't simply doomed to repeat a literacy crisis. Instead, and most importantly, it does mean that the field can leave behind the rhetoric of crisis, since there is no crisis. Rather than a crisis, we are given a moment of continued emergent opportunities.

Although my argument is not exhaustive by any means, what it seeks to accomplish is a way in which composition scholars can begin to problematize these expanding demands on literacy. By analyzing the way power operates within the university's varying standards and conceptions of literacy, I have suggested that scholars might begin to reexamine its theory and praxis. More importantly, by pointing to the way power operates in constructed standards of literacy, I have shown that power, as Foucault says, is not only repressive. The reversal of the power structure provides a space for

thinking about the way power can be used productively to imagine a new pedagogy that allows for an interplay between varying communities of practice. The implications of such a pedagogy means that the field must begin to take seriously the richness of alternative literacies rather than simply dismissing such works as "non academic" for not conforming to the rigid barriers of institutional assessment and frameworks. For those composition scholars and instructors theorizing and teaching the new digital literacy, the appearance of this new literacy crisis merits attention because it places greater expectations on literacy instructors. Such expectations for composition instructors create the conditions of possibility for imagining a new pedagogy that welcomes alternative literacies. This approach builds upon the literacies already familiar to students in meaningful ways. For composition instructors, the challenge remains for each to become fluent in the new technological literacies. As this project argues, reframing the emergence of new, digital literacies in the composition classroom in light of the reversal of power is imperative because it leaves behind the rhetoric of crisis. By accepting this reversal, there is no longer a crisis. What remains is the challenge to embrace this reversal to foster an inventive pedagogy that welcomes literacies already familiar to students who have been immersed in digital culture.

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