An Introduction: The Cultural Studies Question in Composition

Making connections between composition and cultural studies is not new. Jim Berlin, Diana George, John Trimbur, and many others have been working within and around that project for years. And it’s a project that makes sense: cultural studies has multiple historical, theoretical, and material interests for composition. Among these are a tradition of engagement with leftist politics, a preoccupation with popular texts and languages, an often ill-defined position within the academy, and an abiding interest in the ways in which the everyday is pedagogical.

I am troubled, however, by what appears to be the growing polarization of compositionists’ estimations of what cultural studies might mean for writing instruction. Much recent pedagogical practice, as seen locally and read in publication by many of us, focuses student effort on old-style, close readings of newer (read: popular culture) texts, and on transforming one’s self into a savvy reader/consumer—all under the auspices of cultural studies. Composition scholars have begun to comment on this trend, criticizing both the ways in which cultural studies and composition’s pedagogical theory are being linked in classroom practice, and cultural studies itself as a political and social project.1 For example, Victor Vitanza dismissed what he calls “cultural studies” as leading to “cynicism and fascism,” and to viewing students as both “objects” and “products” in his rather polemical address to the Research Network Forum at the 1998 Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) Convention in Chicago. Further, in “Technologies of Self-Formation,” Susan Miller argues that textual interpretation—“reading”—is not “writing” (499). Her concerns appear to stem from an assumption that pedagogies drawn from a cultural studies tradition teach students to interpret rather than to write.

Miller’s critique is an important one. Ignoring writing instruction for textual interpretation is certainly practiced in many classrooms; it may indeed be the larger part of the problem I address here. It does not
follow, however, that asking students to interpret rather than to write is an inevitable function of integrating cultural studies with composition. We fail students both when we incorporate into our pedagogical practices those aspects of cultural studies that do not further composition’s particular disciplinary goals, and when we react to such ineffective practices by dismissing cultural studies entirely.

Conversations about composition and cultural studies appear to be shaping up like this: emerging pedagogical methods in composition, as reflected in many scholarly articles, monographs and textbooks, and conference presentations focus, often exclusively, on the importation of popular culture texts for analysis by students. Some scholars are beginning to question the soundness of such practices for writing instruction and, further, to question the usefulness of cultural studies for composition. Both positions limit what we might offer students in writing classrooms. I hope in this article to offer an alternative take on the use-value of cultural studies for composition, a take that acknowledges both the benefit of analysis and interpretation from a cultural studies model, and the critique of close textual readings for writing instruction. I believe the way to accomplish this is to rethink process through cultural studies—specifically, to expand our notions of process to include particular hermeneutic practices. It is an attempt, really, to locate a more material connection between cultural studies and actual writing instruction.

I am not interested in asking whether some enterprise called “cultural studies” should be embraced or rejected by compositionists; that question is rather vague and the time to ask it, even in a more subtle form, has passed. We are already there. We might ask instead how composition classroom practices are (already) infused with particular aspects of cultural studies, how well those practices are meeting the needs of students and the discipline of writing, and how we might work collectively to improve them. Despite the pervasiveness of popular culture texts in composition classrooms, what may be most useful for those who theorize and teach writing is cultural studies’ unwavering insistence that analysis of the conditions in which discourse is produced contributes significantly to the possibility of producing effective, interventionist discourse.

Constructing a cultural studies/reading versus composition/writing binary is, quite simply, counterproductive. It is also avoidable. Declaiming for composition instruction and against cultural studies may be intended as a blow in the fight for teaching that is both performed and taken seriously, but it also serves to ignore the pedagogical value of cultural studies’ interest in the social conditions of textual production. Because, while textual analysis of the traditional literary sort certainly is a part of some cultural studies work, suggesting that cultural studies
is textual analysis does nothing more radical than re-insist that the acts of reading and interpreting literature do not make students better writers. It does even less to address the cultural studies question in composition.

Cultural Studies and Textual Production: Making Connections
The term cultural studies is, from the outset, highly contested: contested in name, contested in practice, contested in politics. Stuart Hall and others have reminded us repeatedly that cultural studies is not and has never been one thing, but has rather continued to adapt to its historical and geographical locations in and through various, interdisciplinary practices. It may be safe to say, however, that cultural studies has been preoccupied with certain general questions and methods; that it does, in fact, have both practical and theoretical traditions. Cary Nelson, who identifies some of those traditions, argues that cultural studies is primarily concerned with how "all cultural production is sustained and determined by (and in turn influences) the broad terrain of popular common sense," and with the "struggles over meaning that reshape and define the terrain of culture. It is devoted, among other things, to studying the politics of signification" as well as the "production, reception, and varied use of texts" ("Always" 31, 32). It is the "politics of signification," and the "production . . . of texts" that I want to focus on here. Others have already offered exhaustive and detailed accounts of the ever-expanding histories and projects of cultural studies; I am primarily concerned with the pronounced interest in the conditions of production exhibited in much cultural studies work, and how those interests might best inform composition pedagogy. Those who utilize a cultural studies method in examining cultural practices attempt to discover how social relations, cultural meaning, and identities are discursively produced. For writing theory, then, cultural studies analyses may discover how readers receive texts and what effects texts have on social relations and identity formation. But more than that, textual analyses conceived from a cultural studies tradition may also identify who writes particular texts, and what conditions (economic, geographic, linguistic, political, technological, social, and so on) are in play to construct those individuals as authors, and those texts as more or less significant. This is why suggesting that cultural studies analysis is merely close textual reading fails to enhance either our understanding of cultural studies' significance for writing, or our teaching practices.

Textual analysis can hardly be defined as one practice or set of practices; English studies has a complex tradition of textual analysis that is substantially different—although it may be a part of—a cultural studies analysis of text. Hall points out that in order to conduct a
cultural studies analysis, “you have to work on the text, but you also have to work on the context; you have to know something about the history of the society in which the institutions work, as well as about what the technologies of the media are and how they’re financed.” Language is, he notes, “discursive from beginning to end. But,” Hall insists, “it’s also something else: it’s also materialist, economic, political, social, technological. It’s not only textual because it is textual” (Drew 184).

The differences between traditional literary analysis and cultural studies analysis, and the difficulties inherent in attempting to simply appropriate a cultural studies tag for work that is decidedly literary are further noted by Nelson’s insistence that a scholarly discipline, like literature, cannot begin to do cultural studies simply by expanding its dominion to encompass specific cultural forms (western novels, say, or TV sitcoms, or rock and roll), social groups (working class youth, for example, or communities “on the margins,” or women’s rugby teams), practices (wilding, quilting, hacking), or periods (contemporary culture, for example, as opposed to historical work). Cultural studies involves how and why such work is done, not just its content. (“Introduction” 11)

According to Simon During, one of the purposes of such interpretation and analysis in cultural studies is to produce “liberating effects”—at best an ambiguous phrase, and thus seemingly meaningless for pedagogical application (“Introduction” 25). A potentially liberating effect of this type of analysis, however, can be located when that analysis is contextualized in a composition classroom and presented as part of the process of producing effective texts. Asking students to identify the conditions under which they produce texts, and to then use that knowledge in their rhetorical choices, may go a long way toward enabling students to both write academically successful texts, and to discursively intervene in social and political practices that they might wish to subvert. We are all familiar with students who labor, often with neither hope nor success, under the illusion that effective writing in any context is produced by talented writers, and the writing is effective precisely because of talent, because of some innate ability. Liberating students from that notion by educating them to both the theoretical concept of writing-within-competing-social-forces, and helping them to explicate the particular social forces within which they write, is one way to directly address the concerns of those who would teach writing as a democratic project.

Writing is a social act, and the success of particular rhetorical choices is, at least in part, relative to the consideration the writer takes of the context(s) of the writing s/he intends to produce. And, it is important to understand that the success of students’ rhetorical choices
may depend on both their skill in “manipulating genres” and in their “savvy about stylishness” (Miller “Technologies” 499). The context of producing effective written discourse is larger and more complex than a traditional construction of audience in composition pedagogy. Cultural studies theories and methods support contemporary composition theory in claiming that other forces besides a writer-subject and an identifiable audience are at work in the production of authors and texts. Competing social forces—forces that favor some and disadvantage others—certainly exist in institutional classroom settings where students labor to write essays, just as surely as in settings that produce popular culture texts such as films, romance novels, and rap music. Analyzing the cultural forces that intersect at the moment of student writing need not take the place of more traditional writing instruction. Such analyses, however, when coupled with writing instruction, might better enable students to develop the ability to actively and successfully engage, rather than passively interpret, their worlds.

Articulation and the Cultural Studies Circuit
Hall insists that for an analysis to be a cultural studies project it must identify and examine the complexities of what he calls the “cultural studies circuit.” A cultural studies circuit useful to composition theory and practice would consist of intersections of social forces from which discursive texts are produced. An analysis of such a circuit would, if we accept Hall’s account, allow not only for understanding how configurations of power are (re)produced, but also for political intervention, a point that is crucial for contemporary composition pedagogy. Complicating that the conjunctures of historical and material forces play a significant role in the production of both authors and texts might enable students to identify and examine the various forces at work in their own attempts to author texts.

It is not just writing, then, or reading, or even a combination of the two that would constitute a cultural studies approach to writing instruction. A cultural studies approach to writing instruction would also necessarily include acknowledgment and analysis of the circuit of communication that defines the moment of students writing—and of students’ writing. Such a circuit might include production (the nature of institutional writing); circulation (audience: peers, the instructor); consumption (how this text will be used: grades, degree requirements, literacy standards and their economic ramifications); and reproduction (the institutional practices, and hence larger social relations, that are supported by such writing) (Hall “Encoding”).

One way to better understand a notion of the cultural studies circuit, and how such a concept might benefit student writers, is to follow John Trimbur’s, Patricia Harkin’s and others’ lead in deliber-
ately locating the term “articulation” within textual production, and thus within composition pedagogy. Articulation is, as Patricia Harkin notes, “both a saying and a connecting. It describes an enactment of meaning, while simultaneously connecting that meaning to multiple discursive systems” (494). Articulation, then, as it pertains to cultural studies’ understanding of a circuit of communication, of simultaneously saying and connecting, enunciating and engaging, may be used to describe what happens when students produce texts in an academic setting. In other words, what compositionists have called process may be expanded to include not only students’ invention, drafting, and revising practices, but also the practice of analyzing the cultural forces that are necessarily constitutive of the academic texts they will produce.

Student-writing itself may then be viewed as an “enactment of meaning” but also, simultaneously, as a material connection among various forces at work in the moment of student authorship. When students write, they do so out of particular conjunctures of social and material forces, indicated by their very presence in the college classroom; they are also subsequently evaluated by instructors whose normalizing presence and judgement help students learn to enunciate—to write—in ways that support particular social relations. In this way, student writing and writing instruction are both saying and connecting, as their texts link, in the moments of both production and reception, the economic, political, social, and other forces that work to produce and reproduce cultural meaning.

The position of importance within cultural studies that is given to articulation theory, as both engendering meaning and making connections between various forces at a particular historical moment, further suggests the centrality of “production” in much cultural studies work. Thus, the possible value for composition in a classroom practice that draws on articulation theory and cultural studies analysis becomes further apparent when we understand two things. First, that in addition to its perhaps more easily visible work in reading and interpreting popular culture texts, cultural studies is deeply committed to developing both theoretical and practical explorations of the conditions of production and the ways in which social forces help to construct identities and other cultural meaning. And second, that these same concerns have been central to the theoretical and pedagogical work in composition for over three decades: the moment the field turned from product to process was the moment cultural studies had something to say to writing theorists and teachers.

As Trimbur notes, cultural studies’ “project is to produce useful knowledge by linking critique to political causes and movements,” and it is just this sort of link, this articulation, that opens up a dialogue between cultural studies and composition (10). Composition is, and
always has been, a political cause—in fact, an ever-changing site of conflicting political causes. At the center of our work in composition is the project of “helping adult learners achieve the kind and level of literacy that will allow them to participate effectively in the discourse of educated people, both within the academy and in the broader arena of public discourse. Our discipline is... about adult literacy” (Schwalm).

Pedagogies that include helping students understand how to identify the conditions of textual production—and why this might aid them in producing powerful texts—might enable them to work within and around the constraints embodied in those conditions in order to achieve particular aims. Such an articulation of composition and cultural studies might include a conviction that analyses of the conditions of textual production enable those who aspire to authorship that subverts particular social relations and supports or creates others to do so more effectively. The problem lies, not in attempting to form connections between cultural studies and composition, but in doing so hastily, carelessly, and ineffectively. Susan Miller’s worry about writing instruction based on asking students to reflect is a valid concern. Our publications and conference presentations indicate that many composition instructors are becoming increasingly interested in the objects of cultural studies analysis as texts for students to read and interpret; this trend may, as Miller implies, indicate a decrease in actual writing instruction. Instead of looking to cultural studies for texts to analyze, we might attempt to help students conduct and incorporate analyses of the conditions in which they themselves produce cultural meaning—academic texts—as an integral part of their writing process. Such a practice might better enable them to produce those texts competently and, not coincidentally, give them the skills to assess other, extra-academic sites of textual production in which they might participate in engaged and powerful ways.

Cultural studies is not the culprit in the kinds of ineffective pedagogical practices that ask students to read and interpret, merely substituting popular texts for more traditional literary texts. The reasons for such practices are twofold. First, composition’s interdisciplinary nature and burgeoning body of literature limits the degree to which we can achieve subject-mastery. Consequently, many of us proceed with only a partial knowledge, at best, of the depth and breadth of the theories and methodologies that constitute the enormous body of work called “cultural studies,” even while we often claim to be “doing” cultural studies. Second, that work in cultural studies that analyzes texts is immediately familiar to those trained in, and comfortable with, literary textual interpretation. The practice of textual interpretation is thus often (and incorrectly) declared to be cultural studies rather than one aspect of some cultural studies—an important distinction.
This misrecognition and subsequent misnaming leads not only to ineffective writing instruction, but also to an understandable reaction to such practices that "cultural studies" has little of value to offer writing instruction. What cultural studies has to offer composition pedagogy is not reading instead of writing, interpretive skills instead of rhetorical skills, political passivity instead of engagement. Rather, particular aspects of cultural studies offer a way, both theoretically and methodologically, for students to locate themselves within the complex and changing social structures that variously encourage or inhibit particular individuals in academic and social writing, and thus from effective, discursive participation and intervention. Students should be invited to view their instructor's pedagogical discourse, the essays and organizational frameworks of their handbooks, readers and other texts, and the writing that they themselves and their peers produce as sanctioned by particular sets of conditions. The degree to which a text exists as such and is deemed effective is directly linked to the historical and material conditions in which writers write and readers read. It is in the articulation of analyses of the conditions in which writing is produced, and in which writing is received, that may serve to expand our own and students' understanding of how texts are effective.

Cultural studies' tradition of textual and cultural analysis may benefit students enormously if that analysis is part of a writing process and thus firmly embedded in writing instruction. The pedagogical value for students in a first-year composition course of analyzing a text, whether it is a comic book, popular music lyric, or canonized work of literature, as a means to improve their writing is dubious. I refer, rather, to analyses of the context of the writing students are asked to produce. Asking students to analyze relevant cultural (con)texts and social relations as a part of their writing process may help them to understand the ways in which who counts as a writer and why, and which writing counts as effective are in fact determining subtexts of powerful, interventionist writing.

Reading (broadly conceived), interpretation, and analysis—all part of a cultural studies' tradition—may be included in a reinvigorated notion of process within composition without replacing writing. I share Miller's concern that this is too often the case. I do not, however, believe that such practices are inevitable when we include analytical and interpretive practices in writing instruction. Rather, writing instructors might put analysis in the service of actual writing practice within the classroom, as part of students' writing process. In order to do so, writing as such, and the conditions that make writing possible, must be the focus of analysis. Assuming that any classroom practice informed by a cultural studies methodology must neglect, perhaps abandon altogether, actual writing instruction is an understandable reaction to
some of the classroom practices we observe in our departments or that are described in conference presentations and scholarly publications. But that assumption also serves to shut down any possibility of imagining an alternative construction of the relationship between composition and cultural studies.

**Disciplinarity and Teaching**

Composition's disciplinary identity is central to this discussion of how compositionists incorporate cultural studies theories and practices into their classrooms, how effective those incorporations might be, and how they might be constructed in more useful ways. Whenever we ask, "What should we be doing in composition?" and "How should we be doing it?" we are asking questions about disciplinarity as well as methodology. Composition is identifiable as an academic discipline in part because the various practices employed by compositionists are different than those employed in other disciplines. In other words, as Stanley Fish has argued, "what we do here' is differential; it comes into view against a background of the practices it is not; and it must 'show' in that way—as something we, not others, do—because if it did not it could not sustain a challenge to its usefulness" (16). Further, it is "a requirement for the respectability of an enterprise that it be, or at least be able to present itself as, distinctive" (17).

The notion of composition's disciplinary distinctiveness may be a key factor in determining if and how cultural studies theories and methods are useful to composition. Such a notion entails regarding composition as both a distinct field of inquiry and instruction, and as a cultural practice. I discuss elsewhere in this essay the harmful effects for students of writing instruction that merely apes the work of cultural studies in analyzing popular culture without careful theoretical and practical consideration of what such instruction means for writing. Composition as a discipline is equally damaged by the hasty and careless adoption of the arguably prestigious mantel of cultural studies. Some of the work done in cultural studies does indeed offer in-depth interpretations of popular culture texts. But appropriating those texts for similar kinds of interpretation and analysis by students in first-year writing classes, regardless of the relevance of that project to aims that are unique to composition, reduces the possibility of effectively defending our work to those who challenge both our pedagogical practices and our scholarship.

By claiming that we are "doing cultural studies" in our classrooms, we run the risk of being heard to say that we are not "doing composition." The conservative push in recent years—often from within our own English departments—for composition to get back to basics and just teach writing skills should indicate that being understood to say we are
no longer teaching writing is no small matter, however inaccurate such an understanding might be. One may argue, of course, that allowing conservative critics to define the terms of the discussion merely reinforces conservative agendas for literacy and education in general. And yet, if we will turn to cultural studies for theoretical and methodological input, are we not obliged to make a clear and persuasive case, at least to ourselves, that incorporating some aspect of cultural studies into writing instruction benefits students in clearly defined ways? And wouldn't such a case be more likely to survive the onslaught of more conservative counter-arguments?

The "clearly defined ways" in which students benefit from our pedagogical practices should speak to the distinctiveness of composition as a field of inquiry and instruction. Presumably, few would argue against the articulated aims of what is often called liberatory learning for students. An argument for a relationship among cultural studies and composition, however, based solely on the perceived commonality of left political interests and such concepts as critical consciousness, democratic participation, and pedagogy as politics and the inflated claims that often accompany such language are simply not good enough. Neither is a tradition of textual analysis. They are good places to start, reasons to further research the possibilities of cultural studies' usefulness to composition, but they hardly offer compelling evidence that the unique aims of composition instruction are furthered by an adoption of cultural studies methods.

A persuasive argument for the inclusion of some aspect(s) of cultural studies would, however, address the ways in which the disciplinary aims that are distinctive to composition, including and especially students' particular needs, are enhanced by the relationship. In other words, in addition to simply describing our cultural studies/composition classroom practices, we must also discuss their theoretical rationales, and their results as they pertain to students' abilities to "write powerfully" and to effectively "manipulate genres" (Miller "Technologies" 499). Otherwise, students' classroom experiences are less effective because ad hoc pedagogical practices are foisted upon them with little or no connection to actual writing. Further, the field of composition is less likely to overcome either the conservative backlash against contemporary pedagogical theories and practices, or the perception of those in our own academic communities that composition is merely a service component of real education. That perception often has very real effects on our work and on our professional advancement. In short, composition that does not devote careful and extensive thought to the theoretical and practical foundations of its pedagogical practices may be perceived by students, conservative critics, and colleagues—and rightly so—as no longer that discipline, but some other. Carefully considered incorporations of certain aspects of cultural studies may
indeed benefit writing instruction (I argue that they can), but in order to make that determination we must work through the relationship with an eye to composition’s disciplinary distinctiveness.

Relying on the easy but problematic term cultural studies leaves a great deal of space for slapping classroom practices together and calling them cultural studies with little or no theoretical rationale. The cultural capital currently afforded any academic endeavor associated with cultural studies is exceedingly high, making the tag even more attractive to theorists and practitioners alike. But composition is ill-served by constructing pedagogical practices that rely on traditional literary analysis and calling those practices “cultural studies.” Because English departments continue to address the role of reading in writing instruction, any theory or practice associated with cultural studies may be saddled with compositionists’ critique of the failure of interpretation to intervene in the world. In this case, that debate overlaps/intersects with debates about how to teach students to be better rhetoricians, better writers. And intervening in the world, from the work of Paulo Freire to Mina Shaughnessy to Min-Zhan Lu, and scores of others, plays a significant role in teaching and in writing. The question is, What political impacts are associated with particular classroom practices?

Many in the field assume for composition a more radically political role in culture than the role played by literary interpretation. For example, in an on-line discussion of the radical possibilities of textual interpretation, Raúl Sánchez writes, “I’m always puzzled at the implicit and explicit faith some seem to have in the power of hermeneutics, as if celebration or even proper postcolonial ‘interrogation’ of literary texts could represent anything remotely like radical political action.” Sánchez goes on to say that he prefers the “more humble,” but perhaps “more useful” task of teaching writing.

The implication here is that writing delivers and reading fails to deliver. Such comments, however, do not identify whether teaching and writing practices, however humble, will deliver the promised political utility, or how. What kind of writing instruction is likely to support intervention and “radical political action?” University writing instruction? State-funded curricula? Considering the range of possibly radical political acts, reading and writing are both potentially locatable there, even if they are often neither the best, nor the worst, nor mutually exclusive. To declare that teaching writing is more a “radical political act” than teaching reading seems unnecessarily agonistic, and oddly disingenuous when one considers the ways in which reading (assessment) in composition is often far more overtly and powerfully political than writing. Bruce Horner reminds us that “[m]uch that has been accomplished in composition has come from the practice of paying close attention to student writing; indeed, composition distinguishes itself from other fields by its attention to student writing, so defined” (523).
It is the connection, then, between that cultural studies theory and methodology which seeks to understand the conditions of textual and authorial production of cultural meaning and identity for the purposes of social intervention that makes sense for composition. And it makes sense for composition because it furthers the work of theorists and practitioners of rhetoric and writing and, more importantly, because it furthers the aims of students in writing classes. We can talk about liberatory education and still avoid the temptation to “manage students’ interiors” with imperatives to reflect and offerings of preferred readings. We can, instead, focus on how to provide for students the analytical and rhetorical tools with which they might succeed in the writing they must produce for us, and also succeed in situating themselves as authors outside of sites of academic writing. Composition can, as one of its unique disciplinary characteristics, offer students the theoretical and practical knowledge to attempt authorship and to succeed in that attempt, both within and outside of a classroom setting. What is distinctive about composition is served by a cultural studies approach to textual production.

Rethinking Process through Cultural Studies
Despite composition’s difficult transition from product to process, and the competing theories that emerged in that movement, it did at last appear fairly obvious, as Victor Villanueva notes, that writing is a process, that “texts don’t appear magically on pages as whole products. There is a process in getting from mind to page” (1). Such processes, social construction theory tells us, involve more than just a direct link from autonomous mind to page, however. There are social forces at work both inside and outside of the author-subject. Those forces, or conditions, have material effects on not only the text itself, but on whether and to what extent those authors and texts are effective.12

Both the writing subject and the text itself are situated, constructed, political, historical.13 Instructors might ask students, then, to identify and analyze both the conditions that surround the production of similar texts deemed powerful and effective, and the conditions that surround the current task of writing. Such an activity might best be structured as an integral component of the writing process itself, essential in enabling student writers to make better choices as they proceed with the act of writing. In other words, traditional notions of process might be expanded to include contextual analysis — contextual in a much broader and more complex notion than familiar imperatives to “know one’s audience.”14 If working to understand how texts are produced and what forces are at work in the production of both authors and their texts is constructed as part of students’ writing processes, students may benefit in multiple ways. Such analyses, coupled with writing instruction and
extensive practice, may not only circumvent those conditions that serve as barriers to their ability to construct themselves as writers, but may result in more powerful writing as well.

Traditional process-based writing pedagogies often rely on an ill-defined “audience analysis” for contextualizing writing; contemporary, so-called cultural studies-based pedagogies often rely on a substitution of popular culture texts for literature. There are serious problems for students in both of these approaches. Classroom practices that do not include any real analysis of the conditions that produce writing that gets read and that intervenes fail to offer students a crucially important tool for understanding and negotiating textual production. Within the traditions of British cultural studies—specifically, an insistence on contextual, cultural analysis as a part of a politicized textual production—are a ground on which we may build a more useful concept of process for students writing in our classrooms. A carefully theorized and enacted pedagogy that attempts to draw from a cultural studies tradition might view writing and the production of cultural meaning as a thoroughly material and historically contextual matter, rather than simply relying on the use of films or ads as objects for close readings. And understanding writing as a production of cultural meaning makes analyses of the cultural context of writing the proper province of writing instruction.

Many recent pedagogical trends, however, have led us to classroom practices that appear to be about analyzing films or ads, or about bringing students to particular political consciousness. For example, Karen Fitts’s and Alan W. France’s Left Margins offers a collection of essays that ostensibly create a useful theoretical and practical connection between composition and cultural studies for use in teaching writing. A few of the essays, such as Henry Giroux’s “Who Writes in a Cultural Studies Class? Or, Where Is the Pedagogy?” address writing as pedagogy, and the central role of pedagogy in cultural studies (3-5). Giroux makes a similar argument that proponents of writing-across-the-curriculum have made about the pedagogical value of writing itself, but his version of this carefully constructed and well-supported argument is used to make a “case for the importance of pedagogy as a central aspect of cultural studies” (7).

This may indeed be important work; it is certainly work that Giroux is often engaged in. But while it may be related, it is not central to the work that is distinctive to composition. Giroux’s classroom practice as he describes it is a fine example of another discipline integrating composition theory (writing-to-learn) and practice (actual writing assignments that are collaborative in nature and that allow/require revision) into its work in order to accomplish unique, disciplinary-specific educational goals. But the act of writing is of secondary importance here
to bringing students to critical consciousness about how they might more fully participate as democratic citizens. Giroux assigns writing as a pedagogical tool aimed at enriching students' notions of democratic process and civic participation, and at bringing students to critical consciousness through analyses of cultural texts. Writing instructors might instead engage students in analyzing the structures that constitute the sites of students' own writing (Giroux more fully explores such practices and their pedagogical value in some of his other work), as well as in intensive practice in actual writing. There is no failure in Giroux's classroom practice as outlined in this essay; rather, the problem lies in its inclusion in a text that is purportedly a guide for writing instructors attempting to develop classroom practices based on cultural studies theories and methods. Giroux's essay illustrates a classroom practice that holds writing as a means to another, quite different, end than discursive and rhetorical ability and the understanding of how the conditions of production make such ability possible.

Similarly, Peter Elias Sotiriou's undergraduate textbook, Critical Thinking and Popular Culture, making its debut at the 1998 CCCC Convention, includes an introduction to argument that offers traditional definitions and models of that genre. It includes types of evidence, how to "read critically," and how journals may be helpful to student writers. But Sotiriou misses an opportunity to situate students as producers of cultural meaning and instead develops a course that has popular culture as its object of analysis and leaves the context of student writing—the conditions of production of student texts within educational institutions—unidentified and unexamined. I do find it encouraging that the contributors to Left Margins, Sotiriou and others are working in this area; unfortunately, few seem to be working from within composition, but rather from within cultural criticism or literary analysis.

Classroom practices based on a theory of articulation, however, might be a productive way to advance Bruce Horner's call for a redefined process pedagogy. Articulation theory furthers our notions of a non-essential human subject without giving up entirely the possibility of agency. The human subject is not and cannot be an originary or unified self, but neither is the subject ever wholly or simply occupying her or his place reserved by social institutions and configurations of power. A pedagogy of articulation, then, would locate student-written texts at the matrix of a host of intersecting social forces that authorize students as writers and that simultaneously support, reproduce, or subvert particular social relations (a saying and a connection). A pedagogy of articulation might avoid the critique of extreme relativism by envisioning students as partial agents, never entirely occupying the subject positions made available to them by social configurations of
power. Further, through theorizing articulation for writing instruction, theorists and practitioners might avoid the equally hazardous assumption that writing in a college classroom is a space and a time outside of history, outside of economic and social forces. A pedagogy based on articulation theory and drawing on a cultural studies tradition of analysis of the conditions of production would ask students, as part of their writing process, to identify those forces that are working for and against their authorship. Students might explore forces such as their own linguistic backgrounds in relation to institutional discourse; gender differences in communication patterns; who and what may be silenced by various, competing genres that they must, nevertheless, emulate and manipulate; and the subjectivity of both peers and teachers in reading and evaluating writing. Recognition of both their authorship and the power of the conditions of that authorship would demand identification and analysis of those aspects of both the institutional process of literacy instruction and their own locations in culture that either aid or hinder their attempts to author interventionist texts. And, finally, those texts, authored by students, that have been deemed powerful and effective, or weak and unsuccessful, respectively, by the instructors and the institutional machinery that produces such evaluations and their consequences, would also be taken into account. Such analyses, coupled with intensive practice in writing, in making statements, in stylistics, and in manipulating genres, could avoid the urge to "manage students' interiors" in "composition courses that frame student writing in imperatives to reflect" (Miller "Technologies" 498).

A Conclusion: Imagining Cultural Composition

Working toward a pedagogy of articulation is in part a recognition that student agency operates from within a complex web of social forces; further, those forces may be negotiated through both practice in writing and analyses of a cultural studies circuit in which student writing may be located. The first part of that statement is certainly not a new idea, certainly. The second part is an attempt to persuade readers of two things. First, and somewhat ironically, that exactly the kind of intensive writing instruction that Susan Miller rightly calls for may be most effective for students if coupled with interpretation and analysis drawn from a cultural studies tradition and method. And second, that such classroom practices, locally constructed to reflect the diversity of students, instructors, and institutions, may form a relationship between composition and cultural studies that is both pedagogically sound and that maintains and strengthens composition as an academic discipline, and as a cultural practice.
And yet this is only a partial picture. This discussion might most logically and effectively continue by broaching programmatic issues. The relevance of cultural studies to composition is locatable in carefully constructed theoretical and methodological practices that focus on cultural studies' interest in the conditions of textual production. It is the overview possible in writing program administration, however, that might enable a series of possible courses that would work together to create for students a curriculum in rhetoric and writing that is at present rarely attempted. Such a program might offer courses that ask students to practice the writing skills with which they might create powerful texts. It might offer courses that present both historical and contemporary theories about how discourse works in the world. And, it might offer courses that teach students how to identify and analyze the contexts of their various authorships, and thus conceive the strategies with which to intervene in the world when and to what end they desire. Clearly, this is more than any one course, whether at the first-year level or higher, could possibly aspire to. It is in a series of carefully constructed, interrelated courses in discourse theories, methods, and practice that students may best learn to read the context in which they desire to write, and proceed to produce powerful, effective writing within that context. If our efforts in composition at the university level are aimed both at improving students' writing and at helping students understand the complex social power of discourse production as a means to that end, then it is not premature to also call for programmatic changes. Changes, I hasten to add, to a greater degree and a wider application than are currently exhibited in the field by other than a very few programs.\textsuperscript{15} The kinds of interrelated courses we could imagine might add up to a pretty fair conception of the discursive in social and political life, and simultaneously instruct students in the production of academic discourse, in whatever arena and from whatever political position they might wish.

At its best, compositionists construct what they do as literacy work, and often it is just that. Cultural studies, too, attempts to provide those who are in multiple ways excluded from access to the national culture with strategies and resources for both resistance and inclusion (Hall "Legacies"). Cultural studies has at its core an insistence that the act of textual production is intimately and irrevocably linked with the cultural forces that construct social relations and institutions of power. Separating out the act of writing from the act of identifying and negotiating those forces is to participate in protecting and perpetuating national/cultural identity against those whom it excludes.\textsuperscript{16}

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Notes

1 Stuart Hall notes that critiques of cultural studies are emerging from various academic fields, including rhetoric and composition: "[W]e're hearing all over that people are becoming disillusioned. We're past the point where people are mesmerized by the ascendancy of cultural studies" (Drew 183).

2 See my discussion of specific examples later in this piece.

3 Certainly two scholars who are critical of linking cultural studies with composition do not constitute a backlash. However, at the risk of being accused of constructing a strawman for this argument, I contend that the professional and intellectual standing of both Susan Miller and Victor Vitanz suggests a greater potential for persuading others in the field than might be assumed for two less accomplished individuals.

4 For examples of detailed histories of British cultural studies see, for example, During, Grossberg, Hall, Nelson.

5 For a discussion of the ways in which undergraduate composition supports and reproduces particular social relations see, for example, Bloom and Miller "Artifact".

6 Stuart Hall notes that "there is something to the criticism that a lot of what is going on is not much more than old-style practical criticism, close textual reading of a good old Leavisian kind. . . . The text is abstracted from its institutional context, from its historical context—that form of what I would call 'literary cultural studies' is deeply troubling" (Drew 184).

7 This is not to say that British cultural studies should or could lay claim to some sort of pure and originary past that is inviolable. My point here is that the choice by some instructors to focus a writing class on reading popular culture texts is often based on an assumption that such work is, in fact, "cultural studies." The phrase "cultural studies" carries enormous cultural capital in American universities, a point I address later, and while academics can and ought to adapt various teaching methods to their purposes, careless and ill-informed adoption of complex and theoretically sound methods can be problematic.

8 Miller asserts that, "By teaching texts rather than their making, by teaching awareness rather than rhetoric, and by teaching the power of meanings rather than the making of statements, we inadvertently reproduce a politics that is aware but passive. . . . Writing taught as reading, that is, accomplishes political stasis" ("Technologies" 499). I agree that if writing instructors teach interpretation rather than how to manipulate genres, require reading and reflection rather than practice in writing, offer preferred readings rather than demonstrations of powerful writing, we do indeed create an aware but passive student population that leads to political stasis. I do not, however, agree with the implication that reading and interpretation are oppositionally situated to effective writing instruction, and necessarily produce political passivity whereas writing instruction necessarily produces political activism.

9 For discussions of how composition's disciplinary identity and methodologies are inextricably bound in historical, material conditions, see, for example, Berlin and Miller.

10 The major focus of our efforts in asking and attempting to answer the cultural studies question in composition should be students' needs. It would be disingenuous, however, to ignore the reality that there are disciplinary and career concerns tied into these efforts as well. So, while I do not wish to give the impression that I am in any way privileging disciplinary issues over student needs, disciplinary issues need to be addressed. Such discussions are crucial in that they might enable deliberate and successful strategizing in order to accomplish individual and collective professional goals and, more importantly, they bring to light professional concerns whose agendas might, if left unexamined, work against students' best interests.
Nelson writes, "[O]f all the intellectual movements that have swept the humanities in America over the last twenty years, none will be taken up so shallowly, so opportunistically, so unreflectively, and so ahistorically as cultural studies. . . . One . . . hears graduate students and faculty members talk frankly about repackaging themselves as cultural studies people. The academic job market, to be sure, encourages that sort of anxious cynicism about how one markets one's self. . . ." (25, 26).

For a discussion of social construction theory as it pertains to composition see, for example, Berlin, George.

For a discussion of the historical formation of the author-subject see, for example, Foucault.

Certainly the field of composition has a rich and expanding body of work regarding the notion of writing process(es); I do not mean to imply that process is simple, uncontested, or understood by compositionists in the same ways. Limited space prohibits me from either a lengthy discussion or a review of the literature regarding process. I am left, somewhat uncomfortably, with the hope that readers will understand me to mean that while notions of writing process take various shapes within the field, those shapes constitute a great deal of pedagogical practice and can perhaps be addressed usefully as simply "writing processes."

For examples of undergraduate degree programs that focus on Discourse Studies see, for example, descriptions of their programs at East Oregon University and Trinity College, respectively, at the following URLs: http://bshepard.eosc.osshe.edu/catalog/14$ENGL.HTM and http://www.trincoll.edu/~writcent/minor.html.

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