You Say You Want a Revolution?
“Happenings” and the Legacy of the 1960s for Composition Studies

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We don't need The '60s, NBC's recent movie schlockfest, to remind us that the 1960s are always with us. Nor do we need advertisers to use the Rolling Stones' “She's a Rainbow” to serenade the newest Apple computer, or the fashion world to reissue bell-bottom jeans and to update artfully stringy hair. It's abundantly clear that the past is always present. In composition studies, we need only consider some of the debates that have engaged our attention for the last few decades to detect the lingering patchouli scent of the social and cultural politics of the 1960s. We need only reflect on our efforts to reconfigure the classroom as a contact zone, a borderland, a complex cultural location crisscrossed by the mestiza identities of students and intersected by the politics of the community and the power structures of the university, and remember that this scholarly discipline came of age at a time when the classroom became a radicalized, democratic space. We need only consider the fact that we are still plagued by our own relations of power vis-à-vis students, that we are still reprising debates about expressivism and social constructionism and recall that composition studies was fashioning itself as a specialized profession at a time when the position of college professor became particularly fraught and politicized. Composition's obsession with the function and meaning of liberatory pedagogies, its painstaking critique of conflicts between activism and professionalization remind us of a time when we walked into the classroom either as part of the problem or as part of the solution—a time when we planned syllabi that would get students on track to outpace Sputnik, or we encouraged them to tune in, turn on, and drop out; a time when we taught in a way that was demonstrably relevant to the social conditions of the day, or we demonstrated that we had sold out.

In fact, the institutional structures of universities as well as writing programs, teachers, and student constituencies have all benefited enormously from the shaping influence of oppositional politics deriving from...
the way that composition studies defined itself as a profession, defined the
direction of its scholarly debates, and defined its goals in the classroom.
However, if our definitions of ourselves as teachers and scholars are
increasingly based on somewhat nostalgic assumptions about our
radicalized role in the classroom and on comfortably well-trodden histo­
ries of our own professional past, then we run the very real risk of allowing
those assumptions to become a self-limiting paradigm marking one of
what I might call the "no-passing zones" of our profession. The unspoken
(and in some ways unanswerable) question of whether we are living up to
an unrealized radical past seems to haunt the professional debates men­
tioned above and may be causing us to replay some of them on a seemingly
endless loop, one that ironically forestalls the possibility of real political
and institutional change.

In this sense, the underlying argument in this article is really just a
professional plea for more revisionist histories in composition, for ac­
counts that rake up that settled past and reopen to further question the
assumptions it makes possible, for accounts that resituate our professional
history in a richer political and cultural spectrum. This article makes a
modest contribution toward this effort—one already taken up in the well­
known work of Richard Ohmann, Sharon Crowley, Stephen North, and
Lester Faigley, among others—by examining the impact on composition
studies of the fact that in the 1960s the university became a breeding
ground for radical culture, while simultaneously it was complicitous with
the normative culture of an increasingly managerial and bureaucratic
state. The field of composition studies came of age in a period of intense
social and political change; we were, in a sense, radicalized at the moment
of our professional inception. 1 Yet, our determination to professional­
ize—to take our place as a recognized (and rewarded) field of specializa­
tion in the institutional reshuffling prompted by the cold war—created a
set of institutional and internal oppositions that we have yet to resolve. In
revisiting this history, I use a particular example from the 1960s, the
"happenings," to dramatize the oppositions set in play by the dual identity
of the university and composition in an effort to add texture and depth to
our perception of this period and to bring into fresh consideration some
of our current assumptions about the radicalized composition classroom
and its mythic past.

Writing the Revolution
The work of mythologizing the 1960s seems to have begun during the
decade itself, and the debate over the real story of student radicalism
continues to rage. *Ferment on Campus*, a study conducted by college students and administrators from seven western universities, gives an enthusiastic account of student activism in the period. As David Mallery observes,

The picture emerging right now is of college students on Freedom Rides and picket lines, rallying to the Peace Corps and helping register voters in Alabama, spending the summers tutoring in the slums or building a recreation hall in Uganda, blockading police in the center of campus riots, badgering university administrations for more freedom to organize, to agitate, to serve, to explode. (1)

Manifestations of campus activism such as these—along with familiar televised images of angry student picketers on campuses and in Washington, D.C. and the grim photographs of slain students at Kent State—have had an enormous power in shaping American cultural memory. Although fiercely debated, this peculiarly nostalgic and persistent public view of the 1960s casts college campuses as hotbeds of social change, with radical student groups at the activist forefront of the Civil Rights movement, the rise of the New Left, the Vietnam War protest movement, and the Women’s Liberation movement. Revisionary histories—for example, Stephen Macedo’s *Reassessing the Sixties: Debating the Political and Cultural Legacy*, David Farber’s *The Sixties: From Memory to History*, and Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin’s *America Divided: The Civil War of the 1960s*—have pointed out that the realities of campus life and of public perception were more complex than this portrait of committed radicalism implies, including some politically lackluster students, movement-defining schisms within and among radical groups, and the birth of the New Right. Yet, prevailing images on television and in film, along with earlier historical assessments (academic and popular), have fostered a lasting perception of the university in the 1960s as a leftist stronghold and a vision of student activism that served as a kind of radical public conscience in an era that exposed governmental corruption and military aggression.

Even as a perception of the (admired or decried) radicalizing function of college education caught the public attention in the sixties, most university departments benefited from, if not always worked directly for, the military-industrial complex. In this sense, the university was dependent on the cold war investment in a managed society and committed to training the expert citizens who would administer it. President John F. Kennedy defined that mission in 1963 in no uncertain terms:
In the new age of science and space, improved education is essential to give new meaning to our national purpose and power. In the last 20 years, mankind has acquired more scientific information than in all of previous history. Ninety per cent of all the scientists that ever lived are alive and working today. Vast stretches of the unknown are being explored every day for military, medical, commercial and other reasons. And finally, the twisting course of the cold war requires a citizenry that understands our principles and problems. It requires skilled manpower and brainpower to match the power of totalitarian discipline. It requires a scientific effort which demonstrates the superiority of freedom. And it requires an electorate in every State with sufficiently broad horizons and sufficient maturity of judgement to guide this Nation safely through whatever lies ahead. (3351)

Kennedy’s speech made apparent the pressure that Sputnik and the space race placed on American educational practices. However, he set forth the cold war imperative not only for higher education to produce scientific and other specialized knowledges, but also to foster the competence in American citizens for understanding the changing world enough to make informed electoral judgments. The cold war premium on the “military” exploration of the “unknown,” on the acquisition of new technologies, and on training the specialists who could understand and make use of those technologies had also spurred concern about the “ordinary” American citizen’s inability to function in the complex world that such specialists produced. For Kennedy, as for other cold war presidents, one such concern was the difficulty in explaining (or justifying) foreign policy decisions to a poorly educated public—thus, his reference to the “broad horizons and sufficient maturity” needed by the entire electorate. Education was emphasized in this speech and during this period not only as a right but also as a responsibility of citizens who hoped to keep up with a changing world. Although Kennedy emphasized the larger goals of democratic educational reform in this speech, the primary goal of his administration was the “scientific effort,” the production and control of specialized knowledge as a direct expression of international power. However, federal support of higher education, along with Kennedy’s own reliance on advisors drawn from an academic elite, proved to be an antidote to the rise in anti-intellectualism associated with the Eisenhower administration of the 1950s and to the damage wrought by McCarthyism. And the sentiments expressed in the speech were accompanied by an enormous investment of federal funds in higher education, an investment that the booming economy of the time could well afford.
The university’s complicity in this normative vision becomes evident in, for example, a response by the National Council of Teachers of English to the National Defense Education Act of 1958, which emphasized math and science as the key to specialized knowledge production. The NCTE pamphlet *The National Interest and the Teaching of English* made a plea for funding that stressed broad-based skills rather than specialized knowledge as the crucial weapon of democracy. It also advocated the important role for English studies in training citizens for the mission of extending a democratic front on an international level. As the pamphlet claimed,

> In our world, too, where East meets West in almost daily encounter, when travelers and businessmen represent our culture and our values no less than do our statesmen and military personnel—in a world in which the profile of the “Ugly American” is all too vividly etched—it is important that Americans everywhere fully understand their heritage and see themselves not only as bearers of aid, technology, and materialism, but also of ideas, of human dignity and freedom.” (17)

Here, the ultimate goal of education is a kind of training for good citizenship in a cold war state, the training to function effectively within existing institutions rather than to challenge them. Although NCTE may have hoped to emphasize a distinction that Kennedy did not emphasize—that is, between spreading ideas, especially ideas of human dignity and freedom, and spreading “technology, and materialism”—those differences were carefully swathed in the rhetoric of global representation and power. Because this argument constituted the basis for a plea for equal federal funding and support of English, it emphasized the communicative and analytical skills that would allow citizens a fully functioning political and social life, as these words from the pamphlet suggest: “Our democratic institutions depend upon intelligent, informed communication, which in turn depends upon the training of all persons to think critically and imaginatively, to express themselves clearly, and to read with understanding” (16). Where Kennedy emphasized the responsibility of citizens to take advantage of their access to education, NCTE (not surprisingly) emphasized the responsibility of the state to provide it. This ideology helped NCTE, working with other English Studies organizations, to rationalize the goals of higher education to large segments of the American public and to win federal support. Those same ideological goals—particularly the export of technology and materialism abroad—also became the vilified targets of radical students and faculty.
The subtext of both these documents was the growing public perception of a world of specialized knowledges to which the average citizen did not have access, a world increasingly dominated by professionalization and expertise. Richard Hofstadter's *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*, published in 1962 and awarded a Pulitzer Prize in 1964, testified to that perception of a widening cultural divide between the professional classes and the "general public." As Hofstadter writes,

> the complexity of modern life has steadily whittled away the functions the ordinary citizen can intelligently and comprehendingly perform for himself. In the original American populistic dream, the omnicompetence of the common man was fundamental and indispensable. It was believed that he could, without much special preparation, pursue the professions and run the government. Today he knows that he cannot even make his breakfast without using devices, more or less mysterious to him, which expertise has put at his disposal; and when he sits down to breakfast and looks at his morning newspaper, he reads about a whole range of vital and intricate issues and acknowledges, if he is candid with himself, that he has not acquired competence to judge most of them. (34)

Hofstadter's larger argument—that in a world of specialization, expertise became increasingly required and more "resented as a form of power or privilege"—underscored the perceived gap between an elite body of experts and the "ordinary citizen." This gap became apparent in the distinctions Kennedy's speech made between "scientists" and "citizenry"; this gap is what NCTE tried to address. As my juxtaposition of these documents suggests, the apparent democratic impulse of the university's mission to further national interests by allowing all citizens access to an increasingly specialized world went hand in hand with the often contradictory imperative to train a specialized body of experts who could produce and control knowledge to which the ordinary person did not have access.

The university's difficulty in reconciling those contradictions—the democratizing mission of open admissions with the march toward increased specialization—becomes evident in "The Port Huron Statement" of 1962, a document produced by the Students for a Democratic Society that became the rallying cry of the New Left. The statement condemned the university's role in exacerbating the rift between an apathetic and hesitant public and their correspondingly weakened and detached democratic institutions. As these students saw it, the university as a bureaucratic system structurally maintained and contributed to student apathy;
Rebecca Brittenham

it "prepared" the student for "citizenship" through the "emasculating of [the] creative spirit" of the individual. The statement also blamed "the specialization of function and knowledge, admittedly necessary to our complex technological and social structure, [which] has produced an exaggerated compartmentalization of study and understanding" (2857). While acknowledging the cultural premium on specialization, the SDS argued that in the process of becoming experts (of learning those specialized languages) students’ creative energy and radical politics were co-opted by the larger mission of an administered society. Involvement in the particular institution of the university and its specialized languages was clearly antithetical in these students’ minds to participation in radical political action or access to power. They called for a revolutionary campaign capable of “breaking the crust of apathy and overcoming the inner alienation” that had come to dominate college life (2856). Of course, many conservatives believed that the SDS made a communist-instigated attack on American institutions of power, an attack in which students had become unwitting dupes of “outside” agitators.

A pamphlet published in 1965 by the Free Speech movement at the University of California at Berkeley also condemned the enormously destructive impact of cold war funding on the university’s mission and testified to student resistance to that influence. It claimed: “Current federal and private support programs for the university have been compared to classic examples of imperialism and neocolonialism. The government has invested in underdeveloped, capital-starved institutions, and imposed a pattern of growth and development upon them.” This vision of a university colonized by the corporate regime, where research and training replace scholarship and learning, also held that the student was the exploited subject who was “pressed to specialize or endure huge, impersonal lectures” and was regarded as “a mercenary, paid off in grades, status, and degrees, all of which can eventually be cashed in for hard currency on the job market” (2862). The students argued that their professors were also being co-opted into research and publication tracks and thus lost contact with each other and with the students. The pamphlet’s call for resistance included the demand for a relevant curriculum: “We must now begin the demand of the right to know; to know the realities of the present world-in-revolution, and to have an opportunity to learn how to think clearly in an extended manner about the world. It is ours to demand meaning; we must insist upon meaning!” (2863).

Not surprisingly, the view expressed by these students about the failure of the university as a democratic institution and the failure of
specialized knowledge as a tool for citizenship affected the work of many composition teachers and theorists. As the discipline most crucially concerned with first-year writing courses, composition’s role in providing democratizing “access” to higher education as preparation for effective citizenship became deeply compounded by radical student scrutiny of what that access to the university as a co-opted and fundamentally antidemocratic institution might imply, and what “creative” or “revolutionary spirit” might be lost, “emasculated,” appropriated, or compartmentalized in the process. As purveyors of the first-year writing course, composition teachers, together with their students, often experienced the contradictions between the university’s democratizing admissions policies and the enforced momentum of specialization. Furthermore, the demand heard from some student groups for relevance and meaning in their college curricula put particular pressure on teachers of required courses such as composition. At the same time, composition studies was faced with a dilemma: How does a discipline, which is itself eagerly becoming a specialized field of study, deny the imperative of training students to produce and control expert knowledge? For teachers, this led to a related question: How do we teach students to critique the growing cultural power of professional specialization when we are equally determined to develop (and become part of) a profession that could compete for university and federal funding?

On one level, the choices we made as a profession are clear. As Richard Ohmann grimly concluded in English in America, English studies, in its eagerness to join the drive toward professionalization and increased specialization, took part in “conspiracies against the laity,” while the first-year composition course became complicitous with the state in teaching “the rhetoric of bureaucrats and technicians” (251, 205). As this astounding book makes clear, the revival of rhetoric in some ways became our ticket to ride. That is, even as the revival of the rhetorical tradition probably emerged from a genuine urgency to define our function within a historical trajectory and within the university’s institutional structure, and from a desire to develop more effective pedagogical approaches to first-year writing, the rhetorical turn also allowed us to set a scholarly research agenda that would establish composition studies as a recognized, professional field and a key player in the university’s cold war mission. In Rhetoric: Discovery and Change, Richard Young, Alton Becker, and Kenneth Pike hinted at this complex function. In the introduction, they write, “We have sought to develop a rhetoric that implies that we are all citizens of an extraordinarily diverse and disturbed world, that
the 'truths' we live by are tentative and subject to change, that we must be discoverers of new truths as well as preservers and transmitters of the old, and that enlightened cooperation is the preeminent ethical goal of communication" (9). It does not require an enormous imaginative leap to hear echoes of President Kennedy's concern that "the twisting course of the cold war requires a citizenry that understands our principles and problems" in this effort to provide an effective method of teaching writing that would also facilitate the student-citizen's relation to a culturally diverse and technologically complex world (3351).

However, this apparently normative use of rhetorical theory as a pedagogical tool was accompanied by an often contingent shift to the radical view that in teaching writing we should also be teaching social and political critique. For instance, Ohmann's "In Lieu of a New Rhetoric" seemed to respond to the SDS in proposing a writing curriculum based on an understanding of rhetoric as political and social self-discovery, as a pursuit of knowledge rather than the transmission of accepted truths, as the means toward social cooperation between speaker and audience rather than the art of persuasion, and as an intellectual framework of diverse world-views capable of teaching the student to become "a voting citizen of his world, rather than a bound vassal to an inherited ontology" (22). However, for Ohmann and others, the concern was much more directed toward teaching those citizen-students to critique the institutions in which they participate, including (and perhaps in particular) the cold war machinery of the university. That is, just as rhetoric became the instrument of the normative, both professionally speaking and in the classroom, it also seemed to provide the means of radicalizing the student-citizen through a recognition of and resistance to the mechanisms of his or her vassalage. As I will show, our heightened awareness of the former led in some cases to a compensatory eagerness to use the first-year writing classroom as a conduit for social and cultural critique.

Thus far, this history follows James Berlin's account in Rhetoric and Reality, which also stresses the ways in which new scholarly and pedagogical uses of rhetoric influenced and were deeply influenced by student politics. Berlin writes that "all of the rhetorics considered ... [here] were inevitably a part of the political activism on college campuses during the sixties and seventies. They were in fact involved in a dialectical relationship with these uprisings, both shaped by them and in turn affecting their development. The demand for 'relevance' in the college curriculum was commonplace, and these rhetorics—particularly the classical, expressionistic, and epistemic varieties—were attempting to respond" (177–
However, in rehearsing Berlin’s well-known taxonomy of the rhetorics that emerged in this period, I would like to focus in more detail on the various levels at which composition teachers and scholars responded to students’ “demand for relevance,” and consider those responses within the larger context of the drive toward specialization and professionalization. Thus, I will identify a slightly different set of distinctions than those Berlin emphasizes in order to highlight how composition teachers positioned themselves and their students within this particular contradictory complex of radicalizing and normative pressures.

As the quotation above suggests, Berlin differentiates between expressivists such as Peter Elbow, Ken Macrorie, William Coles, and Donald Murray, who emphasized that writing is self-expression and reality is shaped through the individual consciousness of the writer, and the epistemic uses of rhetoric that characterized Ohmann and Young, Becker, and Pike, who worked from a language-based understanding of reality and emphasized that writing is a fundamentally social interaction, a transaction taking place within discourse communities (Berlin 153–55, 170–73). Berlin also differentiates between Ohmann and classical rhetorician Edward Corbett, who viewed rhetoric as the art of persuasion. Berlin characterizes Corbett’s approach as “transactional,” and claims that it did not share Ohmann’s “epistemic” emphasis on knowledge as a social construction shaped within socially defined discourse communities. Yet, a sampling of the articles published in *College Composition and Communication* in the late 1960s and early 1970s testifies to a revealing set of alliances between these different approaches as composition teachers used them to reimagine curricula that would allow for the dual pressures of institutional expectations and for student opposition to those expectations.

One articulation of the careful balance between those contradictory pressures appeared in Murray’s “Finding Your Own Voice: Teaching Composition in an Age of Dissent,” which proposed a series of negotiated freedoms and responsibilities for teacher and student. With a humorous dignity, Murray began by identifying his own position in relation to the university’s normative function: “I suppose I am one of the New Left’s enemy liberals, for I’ve been confronted, polarized, perhaps even co-opted. I am not over thirty; I’m over forty, and I feel it” (118). However, he argued that by encouraging students to work with each other to develop their own assignments, to find sources, and to target audiences, the teacher could both support students’ ideological and writerly initiatives and use those initiatives to sustain the meaningful function of the writing
Rebecca Brittenham

Finally, he pointed to the role of rhetoric in teaching the articulation and the responsibility of dissent:

The teacher of composition should welcome an age of dissent. He should glory in diversity, and he should discover that by giving his students freedom they will accept responsibility. Perhaps in this age when students are using their voices to attack and transform the educational establishment, the teacher of composition may return to his important educational role when rhetoric—the art of effective and responsible argument—was the foundation of a classical education. (123; emphasis added)

Here, Murray's proposal served the dual purpose of channeling oppositional ideologies toward a productive restructuring of the classroom and a reaffirmation of the value of rhetoric in providing a meaningful set of goals as well as a field of study for composition. In this article, Murray, the expressivist, sounded more like the classical rhetorician, Corbett, who made a similar point about teaching responsible dissent in "The Rhetoric of the Open Hand and the Rhetoric of the Closed Fist," also published in 1969. Corbett's analysis of the new style of "closed fist" rhetoric used by the Black Power movement classified it with the "muscular" or "body" rhetoric used during student demonstrations and sit-ins, and characterized it as participatory and slogan-oriented, nonverbal and nonnegotiable. Because it never seeks to persuade through reason, nor does it yield to reason in order to adopt a more conciliatory position, he concluded that "closed fist" rhetoric is ultimately "coercive," intending above all to "antagonize or alienate" its audience" (291–95). Here, as in "What Is Being Revived," Corbett called for a rapprochement between the two uses of rhetoric and urged the profession to become attuned to a McLuhanesque understanding of visual, participatory media and "the stop-and-go, give-and-take dialogue" or the "polylogue" that makes up students' experience as they develop a new rhetoric of process ("What" 172; "Open" 295). In this sense, both Murray and Corbett tried to address the dual function of the classroom and the corresponding contradictions of their positions by acknowledging the potentially normative role of rhetorical training, while arguing for its fundamentally radical capacity to empower students to voice oppositional politics.

This convergence between two fundamentally dissimilar pedagogical approaches is thrown into sharper focus through contrast with a workshop report entitled "Student Culture and the Freshman English Classroom," published in 1969, which presented a response to student demands without taking responsibility for the normative function of the
writing classroom. The report cited a presentation by two University of Detroit faculty who discussed their inclusion in a composition course of music, film, and film-making. Thus, for example, students in their course heard a tape of an SDS meeting and wrote a paper on SDS; they listened to a version of “Eleanor Rigby” by Joan Baez and wrote a composition on loneliness; they created their own film, “I Am a Sponge,” spoofing the university’s orientation session. As the presenters argued, “attempts to get students interested in characters who lived in unrealistic settings or in years past had never been successful.” They explain, “Students today feel that hypocrisy is all about them in the various forms of the Establishment, and they feel that they can change their world and not conform to standards set by this Establishment” (260). In this report, the teachers’ attempts to include “relevant” culture and oppositional politics within the goals of the writing classroom seemed to focus entirely on relevance itself as both the subject matter and goal of the curriculum, and in doing so, disregarded the professional responsibilities identified by Murray and the historical progression noted by Corbett. Instead, we see here and in many other documents from the period teachers recasting the role of composition as inherently opposed to the university’s professionalizing mission by inviting students to critique that mission as the central task of the course. In this sense, teachers offered the “Establishment” (the university orientation, for instance) as the subject matter for critique and aligned themselves against it, thus adopting a more comfortable role vis-à-vis students as the hip mediators of a “now” culture. They hoped to create a radicalized classroom by developing pedagogies that at least appeared to mitigate their complicity in the university’s function.

Whereas Murray, Corbett, and the workshop presenters negotiated tenable positions for themselves professionally and in response to student pressure, others seemed to make student oppression the primary subject matter of the writing classroom and to risk crossing professional boundaries. For instance, Deena Metzger proposed a curriculum of readings, such as “The Student as Nigger” and “Children Writing,” that exposed “the inferior, oppressed status of the student” and “the stultifying effect of the educational system” (“Relevant” 341). Metzger also described a practice of inviting students to her home to spend a ten-hour day of silent meditation and writing in order to contemplate the value of silence (“Silence” 247–50). The way students were positioned in this example is worth noting. Whereas in the articles by Murray and Corbett students were presented as the agents of a new political discourse, one to which pressured teachers must respond, here students were presented as the
exploited subjects of institutional tyranny whose ideological naivete the teacher must dispel. Clearly, for Metzger and others, the traditional responsibilities and boundaries of the classroom were rightly jettisoned in favor of a pedagogy that would teach students their part in a social revolution. In contrast to other teachers' attempts to negotiate composition's contradictory role within the bounds of professionalism, Metzger seemed determined to occupy a radical role by awakening students to a consciousness of their own oppression, and, in doing so, tested the boundaries of the classroom to the point of institutional censure. In fact, Metzger was suspended from her teaching position at Los Angeles Valley College on charges of "immoral conduct" and "evident unfitness for service," charges that were based on the materials she assigned; she was only reinstated after a three-year court battle (see Irmscher).

One could say this example established a more politically "pure" position in that Metzger did not allow the pressures of professionalization to prevent her from carrying out her radicalizing mission. However, perhaps the "purer" responses came from straightforward revolutionaries, such as Louis Kampf, who proposed the abolition of the composition course because of the fundamentally co-opted nature of the university and composition's place in it. In "Must We Have a Cultural Revolution?" Kampf reiterated the modest proposal conveyed in his address to the Conference on College Composition and Communication: "Composition courses should be eliminated, not improved: eliminated, because they help to support an oppressive system" (248). Kampf condemned the cold war emphasis on the production of technical knowledge and blamed institutions of higher education for implementing the social stratification between credentialed experts, technicians, and service workers. He concluded with the alternative proposition that "Freshman English courses should become part of a resistance culture giving students a sense of a different world: of social arrangements which do not transform our skills—our very language—into a source of labor value," and argued that the responsibility of the first-year English teacher must be to "transform the culture which uses education to enforce social oppression" (249). In both examples, we can see these writers echoing the language of student manifestoes: Metzger, echoing the SDS, fought against the way that the university bureaucracy emasculated students' creative spirit; Kampf, echoing the Free Speech movement, identified the university as a capital-starved institution that became the tool of an imperialist government, with students functioning as exploited subjects and mercenaries within the system. In this sense, both Metzger and Kampf helped to define, in an
extreme form, the role of the teacher-activist that was to become a nostalgic touchstone in our profession. Yet, as the radical role of the teacher became more clearly defined here, the shift in emphasis from students’ political agency to students as the beneficiaries of the teacher’s political agency also became increasingly apparent. That is, many teachers intended not only to respond to student-based oppositional politics in restructuring the classroom but also intended to initiate students into social revolution.

Haunted by a Glorious Past

As I have argued, two shifts in emphasis that occurred during our professional coming-of-age in the 1960s had a formative influence on composition studies. First, although composition teachers for the most part followed the “normative” route of increasing professionalization, we retained a core assumption about the radicalizing role of the teacher, as if to compensate for our part in the particular “conspiracy against the laity” that shapes higher education. The second shift was in our sense of the composition classroom as the appropriate (and, in some ways, necessary) forum for social and cultural critique, as if our initiation of students into college must include the antidote of a healthy skepticism about cultural institutions. While both of these attitudes made political sense at the time, the imperative to turn students on to a revolution no longer in progress (and in fact no longer in sync with the diverse politics students now bring to the classroom) seems to operate today.

In this sense, we are arguably haunted by a glorious past, one that really was glorious in its rekindled sense of possibility, in the feeling that there was something people could do—in the classroom, in the street—that could change the world or change a world-view. However, as a profession composition studies seems to retain a core memory of this revolutionary spirit rather than being willing to return to it as a reality from which we can learn. In addition to calling attention to these lingering attitudes and assumptions, then, I want to revisit the cultural context in which they were formed. I believe it is useful to look at a particular group of teachers who attempted to infuse the classroom with a revolutionary spirit using particular oppositional events called “happenings.” Teachers who used classroom happenings in the 1960s often did so as a way to position themselves against the repressive aspects of the university and to prompt in students a new awareness of their social and institutional surroundings. These teachers tended to fall somewhat outside the margin of professional responsibility suggested by Murray and Corbett in the
examples above, and in some cases they fell just short of the abolitionist platform outlined by Kampf.

One of the few written descriptions we have of classroom happenings was offered by Charles Deemer, a fiction writer and former graduate student at the University of Oregon. In "English Composition As a Happening," Deemer proposed a pedagogical model based on the current theater- and art-world phenomenon, describing happenings as events that create "an asymmetrical network of surprise" that shocks the audience or participants into a renewed awareness of their environment. Deemer argued that rather than taking its structure from the university, the composition classroom can provide an ideal model of participatory education and, in fact, "preview" a new role for the university as it should aspire to be (125). For Deemer, the course's lack of a disciplinary content, which made it particularly vulnerable to co-option, also made it a particularly effective venue for allowing the immediacy of "clear experience" to teach students clarity of thought and writing:

The "teacher," having upset through surprise and shock the student's expectations of the organization of the classroom medium, should find it less of a problem than usual to get at the student's pat ideas and opinions and to inspire an experience, a happening, that will get the student to participate in the realization of his own awareness of his inadequacy. But such a drama in the classroom happening should never take the form in which a student changes an opinion because the "teacher" disagrees with him. With this, authority returns. Rather the student should experience the difficulty of holding any opinion. (124)

While Deemer refrained from providing an "explicit blueprint" for the happenings, citing the need for spontaneity, Michael Paull and Jack Kligerman provided a more detailed description of using happenings to "reeducate" students: "our students had lost their 'ability to look at the world directly'; they did not see that language, especially in this age of mass media, often forced them to look at the world through the veil of overly generalized concepts" (652). In one exercise, drawn from Wallace Kaufman's The Writer's Mind, they used index cards to randomly assign tasks for students to perform. One student might repeat "If I had the wings of an angel" at prescribed moments; another might push imaginary panels around on the black board; another might walk around the room patting each person lightly on the back, saying, "It's all right"; another might continue to write "I am, I am, I am" on a piece of paper (653). While these
classroom activities may appear somewhat absurd when considered outside their historical context, they were meant to prompt a series of spontaneous events, surprising students out of a prefabricated vision of education and of the world.

Paull and Kligerman’s sense of the happening as a direct and material intervention into the overly generalized veil of language was extended by William Lutz in “Making Freshman English a Happening.” Lutz, then a teaching assistant at the University of Nevada at Reno, acknowledged his indebtedness to Deemer’s work and proposed a more ambitious and more detailed pedagogical model, emphasizing that the ultimate goal of the composition course was a “complete restructuring of the university” that should “break such academic chains as grading systems (including pass-fail) and the absolute authority of the teacher” (35). Lutz described a use of the happening similar to Paull and Kligerman’s. He suggested having students paint a poem or perform index card activities, including directives such as “Be an ice cream cone—change flavor,” or “Gently tap your forehead against your desk” (37). He suggested changing the physical location in which the class was held and teaching or playing music in the dark. Rather than perceiving these material events as piercing the veil of language, Lutz imagined a more direct fusion of language with material reality:

Juxtaposition of the sacred and profane, precisely because the profane can be sacred. We can do the same in another dimension—hard core pornography next to pictures and poems about real intense love. If it were legal, we should put joints in the binding. An essay on the birth control pill should include a birth control pill. The age is that of Aquarius, all right, everything is liquid, at least with the kids I see on Bascom Hill. They seem to flow into each other, and nobody seems to talk coherently anymore. It’s juxtaposition, not composition. English Juxtaposition 101. (35–36)

In Lutz’s view, the revolutionary potential of the happening—of “English Juxtaposition 101”—was the jarring disjuncture of language and reality that displaced the act of “drawing together” in traditional composition. Lutz drew this insight from Susan Sontag’s “Happenings: An Art of Radical Juxtaposition,” a key source for both his essay and Deemer’s. Sontag argued that the crucial elements of happenings were their treatment of the audience as often abused participants, the “deliberate impermanence” of the pieces and performances (which were often staged only once and tended to destroy or abandon materials and props),
and their use of Surrealist methods, such as "radical juxtapositions," to prompt new, often oppositional perceptions of those materials and their surroundings (268, 269). She took equal care to describe what happenings were not: they counteracted conventional staging; they had no plot; they shunned "continuous rational discourse" (263–64). Happenings were assembled and set in motion rather than designed; they were intended not to oppose the dominant political discourse or a particular world-view, because to oppose a system was to be defined by it. Rather, they were intended to shake people free from a systematized way of thinking in order to allow for a fresh encounter with the world.

The spirit of these radical juxtapositions imported into the university setting can be seen in a two-session workshop report, "Freshman English As a Happening," from the 1970 Conference on College Composition and Communication Convention. The participants defined the happening as a "bombardment of the senses, organized disorder, logical illogicality. It need not be sensational but it should disorient the students" (280). Like Deemer and Lutz, the workshop participants advocated use of the happening as a way to jar students into a new awareness of reality by providing "material so raw [that] students are pushed to communicate their reaction and that reaction burns through clichés that cover reality instead of matching experience" (280–81). The workshop's ultimate goals, however, went beyond Deemer's to advocate liberatory student enlightenment. When, for example, the group arrived at the question of whether happenings would help achieve the goals of first-year English, they responded by recasting those goals:

We wish to liberate students from undigested experience. First, we must liberate them from provincialism: purely social, moral habits. Each geographical area has a different narrowness to fight: career-mindedness, political apathy, financial security. We should nag at complacency, aim at openness and flexibility. If students are automatons, they can't transform experience into knowledge. Hence it will be useless for us to give the techniques that transform experience into knowledge.

(281)

This view of incoming students as provincial, complacent automatons emphasized the way in which happenings were being used less to incorporate student-based oppositional movements than to carry out the teachers' consciousness-raising agenda. The fact that "career mindedness" and "financial security" were portrayed as a kind of narrowness equivalent to political apathy suggests their particular agenda. Far from negoti-
ating institutional standards in order to accomplish these goals, this group of teachers seemed ready to dispense with all such oppressive structures. Indeed, they proposed the abolition of grades, degrees, and credentials, describing the “ultimate” happening in this way: “Have no class at all. The teacher simply states: ‘I’m here. If you want to bring me your writing to read or if you want to read a work with me, fine’” (281). Workshop participants explicitly opposed the mission of specialization and the value placed on the credentialing of expert knowledges. However, it is important to note that—unlike teaching a speech by the SDS, for example—happenings were used not to directly oppose the university’s credentializing mission but to shock students free of the entire rationale, the entire logic driving that mission.

Clearly, these teachers were working through these experiences of jarring sensory awareness to truly open up the liberating potential of the classroom—in effect, to cut it loose from the university structure. However, Deemer and Lutz in particular were explicit about also offering a positive view of the composition classroom as the ideal location for reconsidering the university’s mission, because the central subject matter of the course could become the act of radical reflection itself. Both of these writers attempted to use happenings, and the relatively marginalized position of this “service course” (and perhaps their own peripheral status in the institution), as the very grounds from which to reimagine the university’s educational methods and mission. Although neither writer developed an explicit case for the impact of these institutional changes—the consequences of abolishing all grading systems, for example—they both tried to reimagine a classroom structure that did not emerge from the internal institutional structure of the university but was a result of direct fusion with the world outside. In this sense, they hoped to enact a truly radical metamorphosis of the university system by trying to think—and to teach their students to think—completely outside a cold war rationale and indeed outside any prevailing system. Of course, because the happenings movement in higher education took its energy from the art-world happenings, from its fusion with the “real,” it was nearly impossible to programmatically maintain that metamorphosis; the happening as a classroom event had its own built-in expiration date and, as we already know, a limited impact on the university structure.

Berlin puts the happenings teachers, who ran the risk of being charged with either “solipsism or anarchy,” at the extreme margin of the expressivist camp—almost in outer space, as it were (152). Thus, as Berlin describes the situation, Elbow, Macrorie, Murray, Coles, and other expressivists
Rebecca Brittenham

possessed a broad understanding of the personal as political, but they distinguished between their approach and this more extreme fringe group, partly because they focused on writing itself as the key medium of discovery, something the happenings teachers did not necessarily emphasize (151–52). Geoffrey Sirc, who has written extensively about this subject in “English Composition As a Happening II,” argues, in contrast, that Coles and Macrorie both embodied the allegorical spirit of composition as a happening: Coles through his discontinuous sequencing of assignments in “The Teaching of Writing As Writing” and “The Sense of Nonsense As a Design for Sequential Writing Assignments”; and Macrorie through his subversion of the traditional rules and expectations governing the classroom. Sirc observes, “Macrorie summed up his entire happening aesthetic two years later in *Uptaught*, re-affirming his pedagogy-as-potlatch, where no one needs re-shaping...” (282, 280). While I agree with Sirc that the context of aesthetic surprise and reawakening that Macrorie and Coles brought to classroom practice was very much in keeping with the spirit of the happenings, both seem distinct from the teachers described above partly because they maintained an emphasis on writing as the key subject matter and occupation of the course and because neither seemed to view students as subjects of needed reform. For Macrorie in particular, it is the teachers not the students who needed to be shocked into fresh awareness. *Uptaught*—from its opening description of a scene set in April, 1969, in which the president of Macrorie’s university, accompanied by thirty policemen, marched to evict students from unauthorized use of the student union—sent a powerful political and pedagogical message that teachers needed to retrain not students but themselves in order to productively restructure the meaning and function of the university.

Yet Macrorie, like Metzger and Kampf, used the language of slavery to describe students’ entrapment in the institution and to emphasize the constant demeaning reminders delivered to them in classrooms everywhere about their own powerlessness and lack of worth. Macrorie’s gradual discovery that free-writing and the deferral of traditional assignments and judgments may allow students to discover what they have to say, and thus free them from the meaningless confinement of “Engfish,” seemed deliberately to resist a liberatory attitude toward students by directing it at teachers instead. Coles, whose assignment sequences do suggest a systematic attempt to import the happenings into the context of student writing, voiced an even more striking distinction between his approach and that of the happenings teachers. In “An Unpetty Pace,”
Coles began by identifying the classroom as a context of mutual responsibility and in doing so suggested the limits of that appropriation:

It is perfectly possible for teachers and students to meet another way, to meet one another as Human Beans outside a subject—to hold classes out of doors in the spring, to establish a group therapy-like familiarity with one another, to turn each other on. But then arises the question of how you define the teacher and the learner inside such a frame, and what the University then becomes. Why is the phrase “turn on” never used reflexively? What happens to education when a metaphor of the world is said to be the world itself? The New University, from this point of view, is but the Old Church writ large.

Put most simply, I do not believe that formal education can be life and be formal education at the same time, not any more than art can be, or than science can be. Education does more, and . . . [at the same time less than] experience. It supplies a number of ways of making sense of the world of experience and is, therefore, in the best sense of the term, artificial. (380)

Coles’ argument here is that the framework of formal education and the respective roles of teacher and student involve a level of artificiality that need not be rendered synonymous with superficiality or misunderstood as life, and implies a belief in the structures that the happenings tried to dislodge. In fact, happenings teachers, in their efforts to create a direct fusion of experience with education, and in their reconstitution of the university as the “real,” seem less aptly placed at the extreme margin of an “expressivist” camp (since their motivation was not primarily writers’ self-exploration) and more interestingly connected to “transactional-epistemic” uses of rhetoric. Seen in relation to the work of Ohmann and Corbett, for instance, happenings teachers were profoundly interested in the new meanings produced when social interactions are dislodged from their predictable explanatory contexts, though what is produced in those interactions may not be instantly recognizable as meaningful rhetorical exchange. In this sense, happenings teachers seemed to take seriously Corbett’s challenge to make Marshall McLuhan’s book *Understanding Media* “required reading for all teachers of English” and to use his insights “in fashioning a rhetoric that is relevant to our age” (“What” 172). On one level, that is exactly what happenings teachers of writing did; they created a rhetoric from the media of the art world, one that signified neither the “open hand” nor necessarily the “closed fist,” but took as its subject matter the discontinuous “messages” of the classroom itself.
In order to understand that rhetoric, it is useful to consider the art-world context of the happenings from which Deemer, Lutz, and others derived their conceptual inspiration. At Rutgers University in 1957, Allan Kaprow created what is considered to be the first happening when he inaugurated the annual lecture series (which had mandatory student attendance) with a sensory carnival that included banners descending from the balconies, colored balls rolling down the aisles, someone playing with alphabet blocks, someone squeezing oranges, and Kaprow himself delivering a lecture on “communication,” which was then a buzzword, while a cacophony of sounds (including taped sections of Kaprow’s own lecture blaring discordantly from loudspeakers) offered a meditation on miscommunication. However, happenings in no way settled on the university as the institution of particular focus. Composer John Cage recorded everyday sounds and performed 4’33” of staged “silence.” Kaprow’s art exhibit, Fluids, placed gigantic rectangular ice structures in twenty places throughout Los Angeles where they were left to melt over a three-day period. Kaprow’s Self-Service was a collection of random activities performed in Boston, New York, and Los Angeles in the summer of 1967; it included shoppers whistling in supermarkets, couples making love in hotel rooms and then covering everything in the room with large sheets of black plastic film, and automobile owners driving into gas stations then causing white foam to pour from car windows (Sandford 230, 232). Claes Oldenburg’s ten-part theatrical piece Washes was performed in a health-club pool. The Living Theatre’s Mysteries and Smaller Pieces involved the “fugal chanting . . . of the words found on the one-dollar bill,” and ended with “the gradual formation of a drilling platoon and a final incomprehensible harangue by the commander, saluted with a roar of ‘Yes, Sir!’” (Sandford 290). Kaprow’s A Spring Happening confined the audience in a box-shaped cattle car and drove them out at the end of the performance with a power lawnmower (see Sontag 265). In Oldenburg’s Autobodys, spectators’ automobiles were positioned in a parking lot with their headlights switched on to illuminate a performance that involved smashed milk bottles, flares, dramatic music from old television soundtracks, a cement mixer, a man in a wheelchair, scattered “bodies,” ice cubes, and various maneuvers involving vehicles such as a Plymouth, a motorcycle, and a white Jaguar convertible (see Kirby).

The larger social function of these happenings—and by implication the function of happenings in the classroom and in the university—must also be understood through the influence of McLuhan (whose work
Deemer quotes at length). By giving an expanded sense of the total environment produced by the "informational deluge" of postwar technology, McLuhan offered a broader understanding of why attention in itself might be the goal: "Since Sputnik and the satellites, the planet is enclosed in a man-made environment that ends 'Nature' and turns the globe into a repertory theater to be programmed" (9). In this theater, happenings were a performance that drew the audience's attention to their surroundings without attempting to synthesize or attach a particular message to that environment. Thus, where narrative selects from the total environment, McLuhan observed that the happening accepts "the environment, unmodified, as a colossal Gestalt that can be repeated, as an object for repetition and contemplation" (197). For McLuhan, the effect of that repetition was to move away from the clichéd and overly familiar world toward an experience that had archetypal significance. The transformative function of the happening was to make the "invisible" in those surroundings visible and meaningful, and thus to allow the invisible environment—"the most invincible of teaching machines, and the most neglected"—to do its work (McLuhan 199). As Kaprow explained in a discussion of McLuhan's influence, "I'm interested in what happens after a person pays attention to the informational deluge. Does he go to the supermarket in the same way? What happens when his eye becomes a wide-angle lens that takes in the whole scene and not just the box of cornflakes? What happens when he flips the TV dial from station to station?" (Schechner, "Extensions" 156). Similarly, we can see how teachers who used happenings attempted to turn that wide-angle lens on the whole scene of the classroom and the university in an effort to draw attention to their surroundings in a way that would allow students to see them for the first time and to make independent sense of them.

While the function of social rediscovery was undoubtedly the primary attraction of happenings for composition teachers, the political resemblances between happenings phenomena and the campaigns of oppositional student groups also appealed to teachers who were trying to respond to students' politics and to the larger political momentum of the New Left. On the one hand, happenings appeared to circumvent direct, oppositional politics, since to be oppositional was to allow the logic of the dominant culture to define you. In this sense, happenings teachers attempted to place themselves outside both the normative mission of the university and the countervailing radical response to that mission. On the other hand, some aspects of student activism shared an affinity with happenings. For example, in "Speculations on Radicalism, Sexuality, and
Performance,” Richard Schechner mused on the relationship between campus activism and his own radical performance work in the theater. Initially skeptical about the seriousness of the student movement, Schechner described his gradual recognition of the powerful performative effect of student actions:

The police always represent the status quo—they were created to do that. And the students forcefully put forth the claims of the ideal. But students cannot match police guns, clubs, or muscle. Or administration commissions, chains-of-command, or reports. The radical students turn to actions that expose rather than defeat, disarm rather than overcome, ridicule rather than destroy. These indirect weapons should not be underestimated—especially when they are used in a struggle that seeks the liberation of pleasure. (102)

Schechner employed Herbert Marcuse’s work to show that happenings, like some oppositional student actions, worked not just by making an invisible environment visible, but also by calling attention to the inappropriate or tabooed potential of that environment. One example that Schechner explored was the student occupation of the president’s office at Columbia University, where the student activists gleefully took photos of themselves with their feet on the president’s desk, smoking his cigars. For Schechner, their ridicule was the ultimate weapon of the less powerful, of the “amateur,” in the face of a seemingly impervious system of “expertise” (“Speculations” 99). Although the action may have raised questions about how they planned to achieve a restructuring of the university, it dramatized the students’ refusal to take part in the very systematizing process of the university that they were there to oppose. In Into the Light of Things, George Leonard argues that happenings constituted a much larger “dionysiac religious revivalism” that included “Be-Ins” and other antiwar protests such as the attempt by Vietnam War protestors “to hum and chant the Pentagon building into the air” (189). In the larger frame of politics in the 1960s, then, happenings were part of an impetus to see beyond the logic of American society, to think outside the rationalizations that led us into Vietnam and that justified environmental pollution, patriarchy, and racism.

Seen in this larger political context of student radicalism, the more drastic pedagogical proposals to end the credentialing system of grades and degrees and to “have no class at all” clearly acquired a performative function. As in Schechner’s suggestion that the function of some student radicalism was theater, such proposals challenged the university’s ulti-
mate taboo, the abandonment of the classroom, and used it to make “visible,” to “expose,” and perhaps even to “disarm” the hidden structures of the classroom. Furthermore, as with the relatively powerless student groups in Schechner’s example, marginalized teachers who employed happenings as a radical pedagogical practice were not able ultimately to create a role for composition studies as the radical conscience of the university or to prompt a widespread refusal of its cold war mission. However, teachers and students were successful in calling attention to the university as an environment with invisible structures, an environment that could be encountered in unpredictable and newly meaningful ways. Thus, in importing happenings into the composition classroom, teachers were in many ways acting on the SDS’s proposed revolutionary campaign to break through the apathy and alienation of college life. They used a new aesthetic and rhetoric, not overt political instruction, as a way to reimagine rather than directly oppose the function of the institution. Self-consciously alogical activities—such as the index card game, the lack of specified outcomes for student writing, and the sense of what Sontag called the “deliberate impermanence” supplied by altering the physical setting or location of the classroom—can thus be seen as a faithful rendering of the deliberately nonprescriptive function of happenings. Importing happenings into the classroom was largely about rediscovering its relevance, its “reality,” but it was also about what didn’t get done there—that is, the radical refusal to participate in the university’s business as usual.

The fact that Schechner relied on Marcuse’s work (and the widespread reliance on Marcuse’s thought by other happenings theorists) provides further insight into the implicit function of happenings as social protest. In his introduction to One-Dimensional Man, Marcuse pointed to the circular logic through which the threat of an atomic catastrophe ends up providing a cold war rationale that in turn governs and supports the very forces of industrial society that created and continue to perpetuate that threat:

If we attempt to relate the causes of the danger [of atomic catastrophe] to the way in which society is organized and organizes its members, we are immediately confronted with the fact that advanced industrial society becomes richer, bigger, and better as it perpetuates the danger. The defense structure makes life easier for a greater number of people and extends man’s mastery of nature. Under these circumstances, our mass media have little difficulty in selling particular interests as those of all sensible men. The political needs of society become individual needs and
aspirations, their satisfaction promotes business and the commonweal, and the whole appears to be the very embodiment of Reason. (ix)

Thus, in a society governed by a great and self-perpetuating irrationality, by a closed and faulty system of logic, the refusal of happenings to participate in that logic, the determined unreason of their performative acts, became a radical refusal to accept the governing cold war rationale. Sontag’s description of the happenings makes sense in this context—their “deliberate impermanence,” their “asymmetrical network of surprises, without climax or consummation,” their “alogic of dreams rather than the logic of most art” (266). The “alogic” of happenings acquired a far more radical and forceful character simply through their implied determination not to take part in a faulty social system. As Schechner put it, “We are asked not simply to look at things from a new perspective, but to disengage what is being shown us from the ‘information structure’ that usually makes images meaningful” (Public 154). As he pointed out, in creating a renewed awareness of their surroundings, an awareness that was deliberately freed from the systematic logic of the cold war, happenings artists sought to reinfuse those surroundings with new meaning and with the possibility of new connections and relationships.

I see that liberating sense of disengagement from the “information structure” as the great accomplishment of the happenings movement in composition, however brief a movement it might have been. Documents from the period also evoke the inspiring impression of individuals who felt that they could make a difference, who envisioned the possibility of changing the course of the world. However, I am in no way proposing a kind of historical reenactment here. Rather, I want to use this account to point out that since this period we have gradually allowed our profession to be repositioned within that systematic cold war logic and its radical antithesis, and we have learned, to some extent, to understand ourselves and our business on those contradictory terms. Thus, whereas Sirc engages in a self-avowed salvage mission, an effort to reacquaint us with a vibrant and transgressive past in an effort to recapture its spirit and to graft the living tissue of the past onto a lifeless present, I have a different mission. I want to reacquaint us with a vibrant and transgressive past in an effort to dispel some of its influences and to make room for a fresh perspective informed by the current political and social context. I want to disentangle the tracery of the past and its influence on the present and make conscious that repressed core in a way that will allow us to decide clearly what institutional existence we might have in a post-cold war
world. However, I see both efforts—the one represented by Sirc and the one engaged here—as infinitely preferable to allowing this rich and powerful history to languish as a pleasant and pervasive nostalgia for a buried past. I would argue that just by becoming conscious of this kernel of our history, we can glimpse the living tissue of the past as it was then, not as we would like it to be and not grafted onto the present in some palatable form.

**Concluding Thoughts**

The perspective supplied by the happenings is important for composition studies because of what it can tell us about the larger impact of the 1960s on our goals and methods as teachers. For instance, as all these examples show, negotiating the university's dual function during the 1960s certainly instigated what might be called a reawakening among teachers—that is, a greater degree of scrutiny about their pedagogical assumptions and about the implications of their classroom practices. In fact, that legacy has provided us with a heightened awareness (and increased policing) of the political ramifications of our teaching methods and goals and a level of pedagogical awareness that surpasses almost any other discipline. The identity of composition studies as a discipline was formed by forces both inside and outside the academy, and the situation encouraged the sometimes schizophrenic but productive technique of maintaining contradictory identities. Given this legacy, we continue to evolve a complex body of critical literature on the role of composition programs as the point of institutional and pedagogical access to specialized languages and knowledges. Furthermore, we have learned to resist artificially imposed distinctions between an “inside,” consisting of a closed, academic community, and the “outside” world of political, social, aesthetic, and cybernetic change.

However, the lingering emphases that I have identified—the role of the teacher as activist and reformer and the perceived goal of liberating students in first-year composition by awakening them to their proper role in the mission of cultural critique—continue to supply what I will call the collective id that drives some of our debates. For example, unlike Deemer’s and Lutz’s attempts to reconnect the composition classroom and the university through the radical campus and art-world politics of their own time, we have tried to adapt the revolutionary campaign of the sixties through the borrowed terms of Paulo Freire in an effort to rationalize the contemporary liberatory mission and methods of American higher education. In defining ourselves as teacher-activists, we have
sometimes mistaken our nostalgia for a version of sixties-style politics for a radical mission: the need to protest, to teach students to resist an oppressive system, to give them the “freedom to organize, to agitate, to serve, to explode” (see Mallery 1). In “Critical Teaching and Dominant Culture,” C.H. Knoblauch points to some of the contradictions inherent in the position of the comfortably middle-class teacher attempting to radicalize his or her students:

What is the meaning of “radical teacher” for faculty in such privileged institutions—paid by the capitalist state, protected from many of the obligations as well as the consequences of social action by the speculativeness of academic commitment, engaged in a seemingly trivial dramatization of utopian thought, which the university itself blandly sponsors as satisfying testimony to its own open-mindedness? (Composition 16)

As Knoblauch suggests, the subtext of that teacher’s role is the meaningless conversion of students to a political position and a course of action for which the teacher may no longer be ready to suffer. In my view, a key element that makes the position of the “radical teacher” false rather than admirable is the shift in the source of political agency from the student to the teacher, a shift we see occurring in some of the examples discussed above. Today, we might notice that many of the best of those pedagogical approaches from the 1960s were created in response to the pressure of students’ actual politics, rather than stemming from a radicalized profes­sorate determined to use writing courses to inspire oppositional con­sciousness and action.

Another example that may indicate the lingering effects of the 1960s is the longevity of various influential debates—for example, the debate about expressivist and social constructionist rhetorics, and about personal writing and academic discourse. The confrontation between Peter Elbow and David Bartholomae has been one instance of these debates, a confrontation that Don Bialostosky dates back to “the two-hundred-year debate opened by romanticism” between the poet and the man of science (93–95). This confrontation has been replayed and referred to so often that it has become a landmark debate in composition studies. As Kurt Spellmeyer has argued, both participants have been made to stand for a grander drama of self versus society, of our discarded professional past versus our ultra­professionalized present, than is warranted by the actual complexities and commonalities of their positions (272–73). I would add that the enduring power of the conflict they have come to represent also has to do with the
conflict between the radical and normative roles through which we continue to identify ourselves. Thus, broadly speaking, today the profession’s normative induction of students into academic discourse is unfairly characterized, if I may use the words of the SDS in this context, as an “emasculating of what creative spirit there is in the individual,” while expressivist writing theory and practice is unfairly portrayed (with nostalgia or disdain) as a remnant of our pre-professionalized past. Our investment in this debate (a debate that is too often replayed without a single reference to the original texts) may indicate the very real sense in which we continue to feel compromised by what has become an institutionalized dichotomy.

For composition studies, then, the legacy of the 1960s can be read in an increased involvement in the university’s normative mission complicated by its desire to play the role of the university’s radical conscience. In some ways, we may have allowed that radicalism to be defined through a (now) false opposition to the norms of the cold war imperative. Consequently, our lines of resistance tend to be predetermined in part by a dominant order; we still abide by a cold war logic that no longer controls our global environment. The task we face is to find an educational mission for our own time, one that emerges from the communities of our students rather than from our own liberal nostalgia for a radical past. More than any other discipline, we may have the potential to use the lessons learned outside the university to effect institutional change and to reject what, in my view, is an artificial split between a radical past and a normative present as the unexamined basis for our debates. We may now have the opportunity to help define the terrain of the future and use our disciplinary history to negotiate a newly productive place for higher education in the public imagination.  

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Notes

1. For example, Connors claims that “the awakening” came in 1963. In his view, it was a professional rebirth marked by a CCCC meeting in which “there was actually a different feeling in the air, a sense that the field had changed, grown” (99). Connors’ explanation of this development emphasizes factors including the revival of rhetoric, the work of a new generation of composition theorists and practitioners who were able to take stock of the history of English studies and to apply its lessons to the pedagogical research of the present,
and the growing status of composition studies in English departments. In this article, I emphasize the often contradictory placement of that awakening in a period marked by opposition to this growing machinery of professionalization.

2. Although President Eisenhower was later to distrust the military-industrial (and academic) "complex," the eight hundred and forty million dollar program of scholarships, loans, and research funds he initiated by signing the National Defense Education Act of 1958 (NDEA) was just the first allotment of federal funds that his and successive administrations invested in higher education in an effort to ensure "the very survival of our free country" (United States 2). Boyer cites the Higher Education Act, passed in 1965, a year in which federal spending on education "topped $4 billion," and from which it continued to rise (225). See also Lewontin who shows the increases in federal research and development funds to colleges and universities (21, 23). Collins makes the larger political point that the "Great Society" optimism and overreaching liberalism of this era were dependent on economic expansion and unraveled with the economic recessions of the 1970s (37).

3. Kaprow, the originator of the term *happening* pointed to prevailing misunderstandings about its meaning: "The name 'Happening' is unfortunate. It was not intended to stand for an art form, originally. It was merely a neutral word that was part of a title of one of my projected ideas in 1958–59. It was a word which I thought would get me out of the trouble of calling it a 'theatre piece,' a 'performance,' a 'game,' a 'total art,' or whatever, that would evoke associations with known sports, theatre and so on. But then it was taken up by other artists and the press to the point where now all over the world it is used in conversation by people unaware of me, and who do not know what a Happening is" (47).

4. In a telephone conversation, Lutz emphasized that his intention at the time was to help students connect the intense sensory focus apparent in the art and music of the period to their writing, to make them aware of the many different possibilities for organizing the colors, forms, patterns, sights, smells of the sensory world. When asked about the political agenda involved in using happenings in the classroom, he responded "I was just trying to keep up with them, with their politics."

5. This account comes from Kaprow's panel discussion on March 10, 1999, as part of Rutgers University's *Off Limits* exhibition and the lecture series at the Newark Museum with events at Douglass Campus. Kaprow and others on the panel emphasized how much their art in this period was a committed resistance to the seriousness of art as cultural icon and to the conventional expectations about containing art within museum-like settings. Letty Eisenhauer, a performer in many of the happenings (often appearing as the iconic "nude") reminded the audience that this was the era in which Douglass students were expected to wear hats and white gloves to formal functions such as the inaugural lecture (see Marter).
6. The title of my article refers to another kind of happening that occurred during the recording sessions for the Beatles' song "Revolution." The song was recorded between May 30 and June 25, 1968, and released in two versions on the White Album as "Revolution 1" and "Revolution 9." Lewison's description in "The Official Abbey Road Studio Session Notes" of the recording session that resulted in the second version is so much in keeping with the spirit of the happenings that I include it here:

On this first day [Thursday, May 30], takes one through to 18 were recorded of the "Revolution" (ie, "Revolution 1"), rhythm track—piano, acoustic guitar and drums—each of varying length but averaging about five minutes. . . .

Take 18 was different, substantially different, and it was the basis of the final LP version. It began so soon after the previous take that Geoff Emerick [the balance engineer], in punching the talkback button simultaneously with the start of the song, announced "Take 18" over John Lennon's vocal, the first take with vocals, in fact. John deliberately kept Emerick's words as part of the song and thus they appear on the album. Secondly, this take did not stop after five minutes. It kept on and on and on, eventually running out at 10'17" with John's shout to the others and to the control room "OK, I've had enough!" The last six minutes were pure chaos—the sound of a "Revolution", if you like—with discordant instrumental jamming, plenty of feedback, John Lennon repeatedly screaming 'all right' and then, simply, repeatedly screaming, with lots of on-microphone moaning by John and his new girlfriend Yoko Ono, with Yoko talking and saying such off-the-wall phrases as 'you become naked' and with the overlay of miscellaneous, home-made sound effects tapes.

There can be no doubt: take 18 of "Revolution 1" was riveting. But in its present length there was no way it could be released as a single, something the Beatles were actively considering at this point. Before very long the last six minutes would be hived off to form the basis for "Revolution 9." (135)

7. See Miller, who tracks the hold that liberatory pedagogies have had on writing teachers and scholars and begins the work of problematizing the ongoing attraction of liberatory roles for teachers. Miller writes, "If we aren't in the business of liberation, uplift and movement, however slow, towards a better social world, what is it we're doing in our classrooms?" (12).

8. I would like to thank readers of various versions of this article, especially Richard Miller, Ken Smith, Kurt Spellmeyer, Jonathan Nashel (my guide to the 1960s) and members of my IUSB reading group—Linda Chen, Louise Collins, April Lidinsky, Betsy Lucal, Monica Tetzlaff, Rebecca Torstrick, and Lesley Walker—who helped me finish.
Works Cited


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