

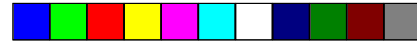
Toward a Cogent Analysis of Power: Transnational Rhetorical Studies

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Recently, the terms “global” and “transnational” have abounded almost synonymously in rhetoric and composition scholarship. There are several collections about “global” English, “teaching globalization,” and “the global spread of writing instruction.” What is of more concern for the purposes of this cluster, however, is how the term “global” has too easily translated into “transnational” in some places in the field. For example, the newly formed “Transnational” CCCC special interest group focuses on the “global” shifts in labor, writing instruction, and language acquisition at home and abroad. These foci are very much in line with the “global” studies recounted above, and they do not shift the conversations to include material or power laden exchanges that are implied by the term “transnational.”

For a discipline that focuses on terminology, the slippage between global and transnational is troubling. According to Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan, the transnational has been used in both the social sciences and humanities to denote migratory or diasporic patterns of bodies, or to eschew colonial histories and even pit “local” and “global” locations against one another in the name of “tradition” versus “modernity.” Ultimately, they see the proliferation of the term “transnational” as a substitution for a thin understanding of globalization wherein nation-state and neocolonial relationships are dissipated in the name of global exchange. Instead, Kaplan and Grewal “advocate a mode of study that adopts a more complicated model of transnational relations in which power structures, asymmetries, and inequalities become the conditions of possibility of new subjects” (673). In their work, when the transnational

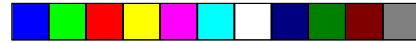
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is used, it is an active site of engagement, not a mere descriptor of the proliferation of globalism.

Following the definition set forth by Grewal and Kaplan, this cluster of articles seeks to define more narrowly transnational studies in general and then show how transnational studies shifts how we consider our own field of rhetoric and composition studies. In this introduction, we also seek to refine and specify transnational studies' theoretical and methodological aims by drawing attention to how transnational studies scholars engage concurrently with multiple scales as they consider how globalized power operates through a variety of linked scales—the economic, social, national, state, and political conditions of contemporary neoliberalism, neocolonialism and neo-imperialism. For example, transnational scholars investigate how various scales of power link diverse nations, regions, and people and shape them in similar and different ways (Alexander; Katz). In addition, transnational scholars explore how political and social life is organized in terms of intersections of economics, race, gender, ability, citizenship, and geopolitical location (Grewal and Kaplan 673; Duggan xvi, 15; Mohanty 191–93, 223–29). We find that few rhetorical scholars adequately address what we see as the spirit and intentions of transnational studies: namely a cogent analysis of globalized power—specifically, how global capital as well as state, sovereign, territorial, historical, and cultural power operate simultaneously and reinforce each other in different times, places, and contexts. Thus, in this cluster our interpretation of transnational studies is grounded in a political critique of this globalized power as it is manifested in a variety of public and national discourses and texts.

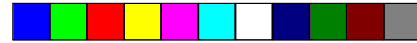
Instead of employing the term “transnational” as a way to denote global exchange or to designate rhetorical and literacy work that happens outside the U.S.'s borders or within those borders by those defined as “other,” we argue for a more comprehensive understanding of the transnational as a complex, networked understanding of power.¹ It is inadequate to understand power as a located phenomenon that is influenced by exchanges around the globe; we must see how sites across the globe are influenced by both the exchange of local and global all at once. Much like Rebecca Dingo argues in her essay in this cluster, it is not enough for transnational texts to stir emotions by bringing readers into



contact with those across the globe. To be responsible, authors and rhetoricians must show the inherent influence each site has on one-another. Affect cannot be the only connection articulated because it does not allow for a complete understanding of the complex exchange of power between both the audience and subject of the text.

As Dingo shows, we must situate particular histories, locations, or rhetorical situations within a narrative of power because it is the interaction between uneven structures and sites of power that is crucial to understanding how rhetoric works in an era of neoliberal globalization. Although current studies of the transnational turn within rhetoric and composition clearly offer new understandings of how globalization shifts rhetorical practices in specific locations, we believe that the lack of attention to the movement and broader influence of globalized power—economic, political, cultural, governmental, sovereign, disciplinary, biopolitical, all forms and mixes of forms at work—in fact misses how the very circulation and exchange of texts alter fundamental assumptions and understandings of rhetorical argument, audience, and situation(s).² In our work, when we talk about globalized power, we are talking about capitalism as a global system that extends neoliberal ideas of private property, free markets, and free trade; the idea that the state’s role is to preserve a national economy; and the ideology that valuable subjects are those who are part of a normative political economic system (Harvey 2, 66–86; Foucault, “Governmentality”; Kelly 3–4). Neoliberalism, as we demonstrate further below, is central to understanding contemporary globalization and transnational power relationships.

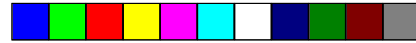
This lack of attention to global capitalism as a system and the specificities of its expansion is surprising given the other core conversations in our field that recognize how globalization has created more opportunity for intercultural awareness,³ how the economic shift to neoliberalism has changed our administrative, pedagogical, and scholarly work in rhetoric and composition,⁴ and then how globalization affects our understanding of literacy and English language learning.⁵ Yet some of these lines of scholarship in the field *still* hold to the transnational as a particular location and/or relationship between set locations and as such are not addressing geopolitical power. For example, although there may be an analysis of power embedded in the discussion of



teaching English overseas or the labor issues present across the U.S. and the globe with non-faculty labor positions, the transnational is often viewed not as a theoretical apparatus, but as a series of fixed locations and contexts that, although influenced by global power, are not participants within that exchange. In other words, often sites of global rhetorical analysis are seen, much like a traditional view of the rhetorical situation, as sites where power is inflicted *upon* them, not exchanged *with* them.

The phenomenon of connected and conjunctural, but not constitutive, global sites can be seen, for example, in Jenny Rice's introduction to the *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* special issue on "Regional Rhetorics." As Jennifer Wingard discusses in her essay in this cluster, Rice focuses on seemingly disparate global sites that can then be "folded together" as a means to analyze the often missed (because of time, distance, and particular histories) similarities of the sites in question. Wingard argues that however productive "folding" may be, it still assumes two fixed locations that are used not as a means of understanding greater current or historical global exchange; instead, the sites are used to illuminate particularities of each other. Thus, each fold becomes a lens through which to analyze the other, not a means to understand the exchanges of power *between* the folds. Part of what we argue in this cluster is that the centrality of fixed and/or centered (as in the modernist conception of the centered subject) locations can no longer fully explain how sites (rhetorical, historical, national) are constructed in an era of globalized neoliberalism and transnational exchange.

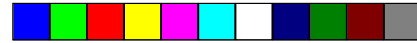
While there has been clear and concerted interest in transnational studies (and indeed there is a robust collection of scholarship that we specifically can identify as transnational rhetorical studies, for example, work done by Dingo, Wendy Hesford, Eileen E. Schell, J. Blake Scott, Rachel Riedner, Mary Queen, and Wingard), this scholarship has not had a significant influence on other areas of rhetorical theory.⁶ This lack of influence is also surprising because we see that other rhetorical theorists (such as Rice) have taken up terms employed by rhetorical scholars engaging transnational studies such as "linkage" and "assemblage."⁷ These terms are used to account for linkages and assemblages—a description of the apparatuses of globalized power—but not for how



transnational power relationships themselves work. Our work with transnational studies argues for a full and complex understanding of the active local and global processes and networks involved and executed daily *in terms of* transnational flows of capital and power.

We argue that transnational studies offers rhetoric and composition scholars much needed strategies for the more complex, and critical, analysis of power that, as we describe below, John Schlib recently called for in the inaugural issue of *Present/Tense*: namely, how power and agency are not always at the site of the sovereign individual. Rather, transnational studies offers methodologies to account for *how*, *where*, and through *what* mechanisms power works and then becomes manifested. We are calling for more work that does not reproduce, for example, what Schlib has aptly named the “drive-by Foucault moment” in which power is referenced (via Foucault), and a more complex discussion of multiple and intersecting forms of globalized power is left untouched.

For this reason, this cluster of articles explores several crucial conjunctions between rhetorical theory and transnational studies. Based on this discussion, we argue that when transnational studies and analyses merge with rhetorical studies, the core conventions of rhetorical inquiry change. For example, as Eileen Schell has noted, when the nation-state is no longer the only, and often not the primary, organizing force of political power, our notions of civic, political, and democratic rhetoric must be interrogated. Likewise, as Wingard notes, when neoliberal capital is taken seriously as a force that influences rhetorical situations and the production and circulation of texts, our rhetorical methods must begin to shift as well.⁸ For us (and the work that is part of this cluster), what is most important in this transnational approach is that it broadens the charge of rhetoric by developing a more cogent analysis of globalized systems and neoliberal power *and* by taking into account responses to these systems and power. Transnational relationships tie people and places together across borders and necessitate and create opportunities to craft both effective analysis, ethical responses, and political opposition to the material ramifications of globalized power. Ultimately, our purpose in this cluster is threefold:

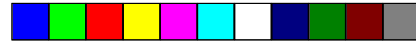


1. to detail key areas of intersection and engagement of transnational studies with rhetorical scholarship, specifically noting how transnational studies can push *all* areas of rhetorical studies in new ways;
2. to pointedly argue for the centrality of transnational rhetorical analysis to different areas of rhetorical scholarship; and
3. to offer these five essays as examples of conjunctions and contributions between rhetorical theory and transnational studies.

This introduction lays out an argument for a cogent engagement of key areas of rhetorical scholarship with transnational studies' complex analysis of globalized power. We continue by defining how the term "transnational" is central to understanding and articulating the specific material and rhetorics that are the results of contemporary globalization. And from there, we discuss how the texts in this cluster use this framework to articulate complex linkages between geopolitics, language, neoliberal economics, nation-state power, and material conditions. Finally, we argue that the work in this cluster demonstrates how essential it is that rhetoric and composition scholars attend to multiple forms of transnational power regardless of their sites of inquiry.

Transnational as Site of Global Exchange of Power

Transnational studies recognizes a long history of globalization but emphasizes that the last few decades demonstrate a new sort of globalization where players are not just states and nations but institutions legitimized by capital: corporations and supra-national agencies such as the IMF and the World Bank. Politically, contemporary globalization has been fueled by neoliberalism—an economic philosophy that now permeates many scales: economy, politics and policies, and culture. Neoliberalism, as an economic theory, values strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade as a means through which to assure individual and social freedom. As an economic policy and as a system of values, neoliberal discourses are often rhetorically framed in absolutist



terms, as beyond debate and common sense (Bedford 201–11). As an economic and political practice, neoliberalism means the global expansion of markets and service economies, the upward distribution of wealth, and the withdrawal of state services as well as smaller, less perceptible but no less significant micro transformations at the level of everyday life to meet the demands of neoliberal economic values, particularly the reformulation of subjectivities to produce specific kinds of workers for neoliberal economies (Kelly 18–19; Duggan 11–13; Bedford xiv–xv).

We might also add that, like other hegemonic formulations that present themselves as irrefutable, neoliberalism has been met with opposition at many different levels since its inception (Bedford 210). At the national level, there have been protests against neoliberal austerity measures in Argentina, Bolivia, South Africa, South Korea, and in the U.S. (for example, in Seattle and Washington, DC), among others. Global organizations such as the World Social forum have brought people together across global borders to protest neoliberal policies and culture. Political opposition groups such as the Zapatistas of Chiapas, Mexico, who organize around entrenched colonial inequalities, have organized locally, nationally, and globally against neoliberal power and institutions, which they see as another phase of colonial violence (Riedner). In the context of widespread social and political gendered violence and degradation of ecologies brought on by neoliberal policies, writer and activist Beverly Bell notes in her work on Haiti that oppositional cultural activity is contingent, strategic, and sometimes so quiet that it does not register as speech or action (7). Of particular interest for our field, then, is the precise ways that people (re)write and (re)read themselves into local and global contexts against and beyond the social relations, institutions, spaces, and economic processes of global capitalism and neoliberal governmentality.

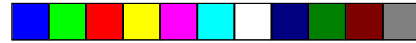
These responses to globalization, transnational studies scholars argue, are equally important to consider because they demonstrate how contemporary globalization has uneven and a wide variety of material affects. Some greatly benefit from new economic arrangements and geopolitical ties while others materially suffer. As Schell discusses in her essay in this cluster, the rhetoric of Wangari Maathai demon-



strates a clear knowledge of the uneven power distribution that influences development across the globe. Schell argues that Maathai's "Greenbelt Movement" and the rhetoric produced therein represents a clear understanding of the ever shifting and power laden contexts in which an activist must engage. Therefore, Maathai gives rhetorical scholars a model of how activists must become fluid and flexible rhetors in an era of neoliberalism.

A key element in being able to rewrite oneself into or against neoliberal governmentality, as Schell argues Maathai does, is understanding what Dingo and Scott call the "vectors of power" that operate in rhetorical situations such as colonial histories and nation-state power, and the operations of global capital. Globalized power works at the micro-level to produce subjects whose behavior, forms of citizenship, and choices of economic activity are aligned with economic and political policies of neoliberalism (Duggan 3; Dingo 44; Bedford xviii–xix). Therefore, as Christa Olson's essay in this cluster demonstrates, it is not enough to merely chart the systems of power in place or understand the development of an individual actor's agency or lack of agency. Instead, there must be a concerted mediation between the complex, and multiple, forces of systemic power and the actions and choices of individuals and groups. In her analysis of Ecuadorian *costumbrista* images, Olson argues that these images circulate a narrative of progress and modernity that is constituted through interaction between different levels and sites of social experience. Moreover, differentiated levels and sites of social experience are opportunities for rhetoricians to explore who makes arguments, how they are made, how arguments move beyond and return to their immediate contexts, how and where they are circulated, and how they are appropriated for new uses in new locales. In Olson's essay this transnational focus enables us to understand how ideas of the nation and practices of national sovereignty are circulated and how they achieve rhetorical force.

Because of the attention that must be paid to the interchange between the individual and groups and their contexts, rhetoricians are well positioned to incorporate this expanded notion of power in a transnational context. Historically, rhetoricians have worked to understand both the individual act of speaking/writing and the exigency within which it



happens. Therefore, combining rhetorical theory and transnational theory enables us to connect unexamined neoliberal theories, policies, and public discourses to the lived experiences of neoliberalism. For example, rhetorical scholarship can explore specific circumstances of cultural enunciation—who is allowed to speak, who belongs to a community, whose work is valued, and what can be said about the conditions of movement and the conditions of life—and investigate how these specific circumstances are informed and altered by new geopolitical arrangements.

For example, Rachel Riedner in her essay in this cluster demonstrates the rhetorical possibilities when one employs a transnational reading practice that considers the absences in regularly circulating news alerts. Through the analysis of nation-state power and gendered violence that is embedded in news stories, Riedner articulates a rhetorical reading practice that reveals complex power relationships present in ordinary, seemingly minor, texts. She argues that it is through analysis of, and not mere consumption of, this minor archive of news stories that scholars and students of rhetoric can better understand, and respond to, the consolidation of nation-state power that is consonant with expansion of regional and global markets and gendered ideology.

Part of the goal of the essays in this cluster, then, is to demonstrate how rhetorical studies can be a powerful ally in exposing all forms and mixes of globalized power through the identification and analysis of texts, spaces, and bodies upon which geopolitics are written. Our call to the field of rhetoric and composition is to consider what transnational relationships can be made visible. If the goal of rhetoric is not merely to critique but to determine the most effective modes of intervention, then what new rhetorics and literacies are necessarily called forth (Riedner and Mahoney)? And what potentialities do transnational rhetorical analyses create for global communication and activism? Finally, if we accept the premise set forth by Jim Berlin that the writing classroom is a space to create “democratic citizens,” what is the strategic role of pedagogy in bringing transnational relationships to the foreground? And how does that pedagogy necessarily challenge our assumptions of what a “democratic citizen” is? Ultimately, this cluster seeks to explore what

happens when rhetorical scholars take the term “transnational” seriously and engage with all the difficult, power-laden relationships it calls forth.

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Notes

1. During last May’s RSA biennial conference super panel on “Transnationalism and Rhetoric,” it became apparent that even in a complementary group of scholars, there were many that saw the transnational as a site of analysis, not a process.

2. For example, see Prendergast.

3. For example, see De Los Santos; Ornatowski.

4. For example, see Thaiss, et al.

5. For example, see Horner, Lu, and Matsuda.

6. For example, Dingo in her work adopts terms of transnational feminists as rhetorical terms and in doing so offers rhetorical scholars a vocabulary and method for tracing how rhetorics shift and change depending upon contexts—especially geopolitical and historical. Schell and Scott each have likewise demonstrated how to use traditional rhetorical concepts such as kairos and epideictic to better understand the creation of discourses about global epidemics (see essays in *Megarhetorics*). Additionally, Hesford uses a transnational feminist lens to demonstrate how visual rhetorics impact for women and children’s human rights arguments.

7. For example, see Dingo, “Linking”; Wingard, “Discovering.”

8. For further discussion of this point, see Wingard.

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