

DISCIPLINARITY AND POLITICS: JAMES BERLIN AND THE
POLITICAL TURN IN COMPOSITION

by

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To my girls.

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife Seokhee and my daughter Hannah.

Through doubts and despair, the two of you were always there.

. . . *sine qua non*

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ABSTRACT

The recent publication of *Composition, Rhetoric, and Disciplinarity* (2018)—a collection of essays addressing what the editors refer to as the “disciplinarity problem”—signals the return of a perennial concern in the field of rhetoric-composition studies. Contributors to this collection refer to a multitude of “turns” representing divergent interests that pull against desires to establish and maintain a more unified disciplinarity. These tensions seem most intense for “turns” focused on political agendas, such as “the public,” “the global,” and “the queer.” Interestingly, the idea of “turns” has also recently received field-wide attention as indicated not only in *Composition, Rhetoric, and Disciplinarity*, but also in a special issue of *College English* dedicated to “Reimagining the Social Turn” (2014). Contributors to that issue, as well as later respondents, have argued over the political origins and nature of the so-called “social turn,” again highlighting the tension between desires for a well-defined discipline and a kind of disciplinary fluidity (if not anti-disciplinarity) constantly reshaped by shifting political concerns.

This dissertation enters these recent discussions on “disciplinarity” and “the social turn,” making the case that rhetoric-composition studies still struggles with disciplinarity because, in part, the field has overlooked the presence of a *political turn* in the midst of what is now called “the social turn.” More specifically, the dissertation argues that the adoption of the phrase *social turn* may obfuscate an explicitly focused “political turn” that dominated the field during the period of 1987-1993, a turn largely enabled by James Berlin’s efforts to politicize composition classes and, thereby, the discipline of rhetoric

and composition studies. Thus, by elucidating this “political turn,” the dissertation complicates recent histories of composition studies; moreover, it suggests that current discussions of the field’s disciplinarity have been hampered by this incomplete understanding of its recent history.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION – DISCIPLINARITY AND POLITICS

As recently as 2018, Kathleen Blake Yancey asked the field of composition, “now that we qualify as a discipline, what *kind* of a discipline would we like to be?” (31). Yancey posed this question in the collection *Composition, Rhetoric, and Disciplinarity* and in the context of what she calls “the disciplinary turn.” By inviting the field to consider what “kind” of a discipline we would like to be, Yancey is addressing current anxieties in the field over the potentially restrictive nature of disciplinarity. The editors of the volume label the disagreements over composition’s move to disciplinarity as “the disciplinarity problem” and characterize it as, “a set of disagreements about whether or not we are, or should be, a discipline; and a nascent sense that at this particular moment in our history, Rhetoric and Composition is on the cusp of disciplinarity” (Malencyzk *et al.* 3). From a historical perspective, Yancey’s question and the existence of such a volume are quite intriguing. That is, if we recall the late 1970s and early 1980s, composition was, at the very least, on the cusp of disciplinarity. This was evidenced not only through the professionalization of the field and the proliferation of professional journals, but most clearly through the establishment of graduate programs in rhetoric and composition. These were discipline-establishing products of the so-called process paradigm. With that in mind, it seems rather striking that roughly thirty-five years later composition still wrestles over the status and nature of its disciplinarity. It would appear that composition has lingered on the cusp of disciplinarity for over thirty-five years.

The editors of *Composition, Rhetoric, and Disciplinarity* account for the resistance to disciplinarity in terms of several “exigences”: concerns over hierarchical

and limiting strictures, identity (how we name ourselves), the “pervasive service role of composition,” and lingering loyalty to the English department. Regarding these last two concerns, the editors strike chords reminiscent of Maxine Hairston’s 1985 CCCC address “Breaking Our Bonds.” In that address, Hairston raised concerns over the psychological bonds that kept composition within English departments, thus ensuring it would remain inferior *vis-à-vis* literary studies. Thirty-three years later, the editors of *Composition, Rhetoric, and Disciplinarity* point to concerns over “parity,” “equity,” and leaving the “nesting ground” (5). Here again, we see them addressing concerns similar to those Hairston addressed in 1985. Indeed, it is hard to miss the similarity between the editors’ metaphor of the “nesting ground” and Hairston’s 1985 admonition for us to “cut the cord” (275). Insofar as the problem of disciplinarity is concerned, then, it would seem that, in many ways, not much has changed since 1985.

There are, however, a few notable points missing from the account of disciplinary history offered by the editors of *Composition, Rhetoric, and Disciplinarity*. For one, they do not note these striking similarities in discourse between 2018 and 1985. Despite the similarities I have noted, Hairston is not mentioned. In addition, their introduction offers little discussion of the increasing role of sociopolitical concerns in composition that began in the late 1980s. While they cite several sources that discuss the role of politics in recent composition history, they themselves do not use the word *politics* even once in their account of the disciplinarity problem. The same is true for the word *social*. Neglecting the political and social concerns of compositionists, concerns that I will argue began to galvanize around 1987, leads the editors to miss what I will argue is a primary

disrupting force in composition's march toward disciplinarity: a "political turn." In that same volume, Elizabeth Wardle and Doug Downs come closer to the problem without actually accounting for its history. That is, Wardle and Downs recognize that "by 2001 ... compositionists had come to agree less and less about objects of study and research methods" (116). In explaining this, however, Wardle and Downs only gloss the "prevalence of critical theory during that time." In doing so, they point to arguments over "whether we should be about cultural studies or pedagogy or cognitivism or expressivism or resisting hegemony" (116-117). From here, Wardle and Downs return immediately to the value of disciplinarity.

So as with the editors of *Composition, Rhetoric, and Disciplinarity*, Wardle and Downs gloss the role of sociopolitical concerns in composition history. This is surprising not only when we consider the significant role of politics in composition studies during the late 1980s, but also when we consider the role it continues to play in the disciplinarity problem today. After all, it was only a few years before the publication of *Composition, Rhetoric, and Disciplinarity* when *College English* published the special issue *Reimagining the Social Turn* (2014). In that issue, scholars such as Steve Parks express concern that disciplinarity may be inimical to a political agenda for composition. In "Sinners Welcome," for example, Parks questions "whether collective political action is even possible under a disciplinary rubric" (507). In 2018, in *Then Comes Fall Activism, the Arab Spring, and the Necessity of Unruly Borders*, Parks and his coauthors argue that composition should focus on global political activism. Parks is hardly alone in this desire to focus composition on political transformation and activism. In "Rhetorical Education

and Student Activism” (2014) Susan C. Jarratt and Jonathan Alexander argue for studying student protest as a means of *renewing* the field (527). In 2015, Ben Kuebrich asked, in ““White Guys Who Send My Uncle to Prison,” “What good is rhetoric when Tamir Rice wasn’t given a second to speak?” (567). Interest in the political dimension of composition is not limited to research and pedagogy either. Two years after the *College English* special issue on the social turn, another special issue appeared on assessment: *Toward Writing Assessment as Social Justice*. Clearly, despite its virtual omission in the discussions by Yancey, Wardle, and Downs, the political possibilities of composition classes continues to be a center of interest for numerous compositionists today.

Of course, the interest in composition as a means of political transformation is hardly new. In fact, many of the politically interested in composition today march under the banner of New Materialism, thus revealing another similarity to composition studies in the late 1980s: the strong influence of Marxism. As recently as 2017, James Rushing Daniel discussed composition’s role in addressing class concerns in “Freshman Composition as a Precariat Enterprise.” Yet, when Wardle and Downs refer to the disagreement that arose from the prevalence of critical theory, one of the many facets they gloss over is the considerable influence Western Marxism began to wield in composition during the late 1980s. I would suggest, then, that the editors of *Composition, Rhetoric, and Disciplinarity*, as well Wardle and Downs, greatly underestimate the historical role of political interests, and especially Marxist interests, in disrupting composition’s disciplinary status.

In this dissertation, I will present composition's emerging political interest in the late 1980s as a disruptive force in the profession's aspirations for disciplinary unity. Regarding Wardle and Downs's assertion that, in the late 1980s and into the early 2000s, the field could not agree on its proper objects of study, I will argue that this became a significant issue after the publication of James Berlin's *Rhetoric and Reality* in 1987. Moreover, I will argue the field's recent adoption of *social turn* as a historiographical renaming of the post-process years has hidden the roots of the disciplinary disruption that composition continues to wrestle with today. That is, as a historiographical term, *social turn* appears to obfuscate two distinct movements by eliding them. As it is commonly used today, *social turn* denotes the foundational work of scholars such as Patricia Bizzell as beginning an inherently political movement. However, I hope to make the case that *social turn*, as a historiographical term, also ends up hiding a more overtly political turn that began in 1987. To make this case, I focus primarily on the work of James Berlin, presenting him as a key enabler of this political turn. This means, of course, that I will argue for significant distinctions between the social and political turns. In doing so, I will also argue that the disagreements Wardle and Downs point to actually took hold with the crystalizing of political interests within the field. Here, too, I will point to Berlin as a key figure in precipitating the debate over composition's proper subject matter and practice. Ultimately, I hope my argument will offer some insight into why, thirty-five years later, composition finds itself returning to many of the same issues Hairston raised in 1985 when pondering disciplinary status.

On the one hand, it appears perfectly sensible to include the field's early political inklings within the scope of the social turn. After all, as Donald Lazere points out in "Reimagining the Social Turn" (2015), one can espy political interest in the field well before post-process set in. On the other hand, despite the numerous signs of political interest before post-process (I nearly described that time as *pre-post-process*), the process model founded what is still commonly referred to as the process paradigm. As a paradigm, the process model was, for a time, the field's intellectual core, and we look back on it as the model that professionalized our field. This happened despite those earlier political concerns. Clearly, then, something important must have happened during the post-process years that turned those earlier inklings into a bona fide movement—a movement powerful enough to depose the process paradigm. Yet, when we elide the entirety of the post-process years into the social turn, we obscure the process by which that foundational change occurred. I will attempt to clarify this obscured history by arguing that the early social turn, as represented by Patricia Bizzell and others interested in the social dimensions of writing instruction, was not responsible for hastening the end of the process paradigm. Instead, it was the more overtly political shift in the late 1980s that brought about the end of that paradigm.

My project, then, is to recover the story of rhetoric and composition's political turn. Specifically, I am interested in *how* politics replaced "process": what forces served to undermine the process paradigm; how is the political turn distinct from the social turn; and how did the field finally *coalesce* around political interests? By zooming in on the years between 1987 and 1993, I hope to highlight not only how composition made the

move from process to politics, but also the significant influence of Berlin in this move. To summarize my goals, then, I will argue for two distinct turns: the social and the political. In doing so, I will point to fundamental differences between these turns: differences in objects of study, research methods, and pedagogical goals. In addition, I will argue that these differences reveal how disciplinary conflicts elicited by the political turn were unnecessary within the discourse of the social turn. Specifically, I will be arguing for the importance of recognizing the influence Berlin achieved in composition after the publication of *Rhetoric and Reality* in 1987. In doing so, I should note that I am not placing Berlin as a singular instigator of the political turn. As my dissertation will note, there were political interests in the field dating back considerably earlier than the publication of *Rhetoric and Reality*. However, I will argue that Berlin and, in particular, *Rhetoric and Reality* were largely responsible for crystalizing those political interests into a powerful political turn. Moreover, I will argue that references to his role in historical accounts of the field's political development have diminished. By arguing for the existence of the political turn, by revealing its nature and its effect on composition studies after 1987, I also hope to illuminate how the disciplinarity problem at the heart of *Composition, Rhetoric, and Disciplinarity* is actually rooted in the political turn that began in 1987 and, moreover, how these roots are hidden under the label *social turn*.

Exigence

In light of the pressing problems outlined in the “Exigences” section of the editors’ Introduction to *Composition, Rhetoric, and Disciplinarity*, this dissertation may be read as a contribution to one of three categories of problems defined by the editors.

The first of these categories is “our ambivalence, if not conflict, about the nature of who we are ...” (3). As the editors describe it, the very idea of disciplinarity evokes, for many, notions of a “fixed and hegemonic” area of study that is “often more interested in pursuing its own expertise than in teaching students, developing programs, or serving other purposes ...” (3). The editors then point to contributions in *Composition, Rhetoric, and Disciplinarity* that seek to assuage such concerns by exploring the nature of disciplinarity *per se*. In particular, they note Gwendolynne Reid and Carolyn R. Miller’s “Classification and its Discontents” as an example of this effort. In their contribution, Reid and Miller recall Stephen Toulmin’s assertion that disciplines are not distinguished by subject matter but, rather, by intellectual ideals (Reid and Miller 88). Clearly, much of this discussion centers on concern over assigning composition a singular, exclusive identity that would dictate proper subject matter. Not surprisingly, then, the editors connect this concern to recent debates over naming of the field.¹

The second category presented by the editors is “concerns about unintended consequences of our disposition toward service” (4). The editors observe that while some in the field find worthiness in a service role (they point to Doug Hesse’s contribution as an example of this), others fear that such a role may “overwhelm or even subsume research and scholarship” (4). Similarly, they cite widespread concern that acquiescing to the service role has led composition to “appear to have less legitimacy” than other disciplines (5).

¹ Specifically, the editors point to a double special issue of *Enculturation* (2014) and *Keywords in Writing Studies* (2015).

The final category the editors discuss is loyalty to the English department. As they put it, the English department has served as our “collective historical home” and as our “nesting ground.” Moreover, it is in English departments that “most of our classes, programs, and tenure still reside” (5). Given composition’s longstanding relationship with the English department, the editors report concerns in the field regarding how this history “might be newly understood were we to designate ourselves a discipline” (5).

While the editor’s discuss the stakes of disciplinarity under a different header in their introduction—Importance and Implications of Disciplinarity—it is worth considering why they and some of the contributors feel the disciplinarity problem is a primary concern for composition today. The editors state, “Although the disadvantages of claiming disciplinarity have enjoyed considerable discussion, we have not experienced a similarly robust or sustained discussion about the benefits of so claiming” (7). As a step toward resolving this imbalance, the editors list four specific benefits: “the opportunity to shape the discipline”; “the opportunity to be intentional in our actions”; aligning “pedagogical interest in writing-as-epistemology with a disciplinary exercise of it”; claiming the status from which to “speak more authoritatively on writing matters” and the ability to “widen our research efforts to include writing beyond the classroom” (7). The editors take further steps to address the conversational imbalance by including contributions that make similar claims regarding the advantages of disciplinarity. Here, too, Reid and Miller’s “Classification and its Discontents” is useful for getting a sense of how the volume presents the stakes in play. As Reid and Miller point out in their contribution, “there are powerful expectations about what disciplinary recognition for

Rhetoric and Composition could achieve, expectations related to both respect and resources” (88). In outlining some of the specific stakes, Reid and Miller refer to Louise Wetherbee Phelps and John Ackerman’s “Visibility Project” (2010) wherein Phelps and Ackerman point to disciplinarity as being necessary to achieve any significant “influence over higher education planning and assessment at both national and state levels, access to funding for research and educational reform, and visas for faculty and students” (qtd. in Reid and Miller 88). In addition, Reid and Miller point to the growing number of contingent faculty as representative of a decrease in equitable status (in terms of influence, work conditions, and pay) for composition faculty. As Reid and Miller succinctly put it,

The ongoing sense of urgency behind calls for disciplinarity among those in Rhetoric and Composition, however, suggests that many still see the achievement of disciplinarity as the key to achieving equitable working conditions for that discipline’s members” (88)

Reid and Miller, then, highlight equity and work conditions, a perennial concern in composition, when arguing for the importance of claiming disciplinarity.

I would like to comment on a couple facets of this discussion from the editors and some of the contributors and then to position my dissertation in relation to them. I will begin with their discussion of advantages. Clearly, the editors and some contributors focus on composition faculty claiming the power to control their own direction within academia. It is interesting that the editors, when referring to “the founders of Rhetoric and Composition,” do not specifically identify those founders. However, because their

discussion refers to professionalizing the field, it is difficult not to see this as a nod toward the process paradigm since that is the period typically credited with professionalizing the field of composition. After all, it was during that period when the field gained considerable academic standing as evidenced through the establishment of graduate programs in rhetoric and composition, tenure track lines for rhetoric and composition faculty, and the proliferation of scholarly journals and conferences. The editors present current efforts toward disciplinarity as a “parallel opportunity,” but one might instead see these efforts as more of a ‘next step’ where we may, borrowing the editors’ phrasings, consider “what kind of a discipline we would like to be” and then to “shape it” (7). Of course the editors are arguing that composition should take control of its own destiny rather than continuing to be largely at the mercy of administrations and legislatures that, very often, are unfamiliar with the actual scope of composition, both in terms of study and practice. Reid and Miller’s appeal to the working conditions and overall lack of equitable status for composition faculty is particularly compelling in asserting the importance of the disciplinarity problem and the need for the field to claim greater representation in positions of authority. It is this need for improving status and parity that, ultimately, underlies *Composition, Rhetoric, and Disciplinarity* and, indeed, the push for disciplinarity in general. Because I see these goals as essential to improving the status of composition faculty (which would also benefit composition students), I have chosen to join this conversation by questioning the characterization of a couple of the exigences presented by the editors.

Thus, I move to the second facet of the discussion. While the editors divide their exigences into three categories, it seems clear that all are related to disciplinary identity. That is, each of the exigences involves deciding who we are and/or what we do. Obviously, these are both essential elements of any disciplinary identity; indeed, in a professional sense, they are virtually synonymous concepts. In particular, then, I am interested in the first exigence: the conflict over the nature of who we are. While the editors present this as matter of how we might conceive and shape the nature of the discipline, their reports of widespread fear over rigid hegemony suggest the sort of forces that continue to disrupt efforts toward disciplinarity. That is, there are concerns over how disciplinarity might restrict ideas of what we should do. When reviewing *Composition, Rhetoric, and Disciplinarity* in light of this particular disruption, it becomes evident that the editors and contributors, despite pointing to the earlier professionalization of the field, pay scant attention to the *history* of disciplinary disruption in composition. Thus, I would like to posit the idea that in order to have a better understanding of *current* confusion over disciplinary disruption, we should perhaps consider how such confusion—such disagreement—may be seen as a continuance of a trend that has run through the field for quite some time. Let us consider, for example, how the editors position the current disciplinary push as a “parallel” to the earlier professionalization of the field. As I have suggested, it may be more accurate to consider the current push as a continuation that began under the process paradigm. That is, we might see that the push to finally formalize composition’s disciplinary status is a natural next step to the professionalization of the field. Along the same lines, I am proposing that current

tensions represented in the editors' description of the disciplinarity problem are also a continuation of a process and, moreover, that there is some linkage between these two trajectories. Specifically, this dissertation will present the forces that halted the march toward disciplinarity under the process paradigm as the same ones that continue to problematize disciplinarity today.

To a large degree, then, the exigences outlined by the editors and contributors of *Composition, Rhetoric, and Disciplinarity* serve as mine as well. However, I invite reconsideration of one of the primary questions asked in the title of the first chapter: "Why Are We Here?" I am proposing, as suggested by my earlier comparisons of the field's current discourse with the field's discourse from thirty-five years ago, and by my connecting of the disciplinarity problem today with the fall of the process paradigm, that we should perhaps be asking ask "Why Are We *Still* Here?" In short, I agree with many of the contributors that disciplinarity is a high stakes issue for composition, and I will argue that the current discussion of the disciplinarity problem is hampered by an incomplete view of the historical movements in composition that have bedeviled the field's efforts toward disciplinarity.

Approach

My dissertation relies on readings of reviews and comments on historically significant texts. In earlier chapters, these significant texts are books, although I do give some attention to journal articles in my later chapters. The significance I attribute to these texts arises from their value in tracing the galvanizing of political interests in

composition—what I am calling “the political turn.” In that light, the reviews and comments also take on historical significance.

My utilization of books and reviews is influenced by Ken Hyland’s *Disciplinary Discourses*. Referring to B.C. Griffith and H.G. Small’s *The Structure of the Social and Behavioral Sciences Literature*, Hyland points to their claim that “the journal article is, for many parts of social science, a poor vehicle of communication, ill-suited to discuss extremely complex issues. Books are, in fact, the medium through which change is really effected” (qtd. in Hyland 42). While I recognize that journal articles have played an enormously important role in composition studies, and that we might easily point to journal articles as a significant medium for change in composition, Griffith and Small’s claim suits my particular project very well. That is, my earlier chapters analyze two books that lay out rather sprawling visions of history and epistemology, and they do so in a fashion that would be difficult to replicate through a series of journal articles. Moreover, part of my argument is that Berlin’s *Rhetoric and Reality* was a significant force for change in composition during the late 1980s.

Given that changing the field was Berlin’s goal in *Rhetoric and Reality*, turning to reviews offer what I believe to be the best method for gauging the field’s reaction. Here, too, I am agreeing with Hyland by considering book reviews as a “crucial site of disciplinary engagement” (41). Hyland attributes value to reviews as providing space for a “direct, public, and often critical, encounter...” (41). That is, through reviews, we can witness the unfolding of disciplinary dialogue. This dialogue, Hyland continues to explain, “plays an important role in supporting both the manufacture of knowledge and

the social cohesiveness of disciplinary communities” (43). Here again, Hyland’s view of reviews is useful as I will argue that reviews of *Rhetoric and Reality*, particularly when compared with reviews of Stephen North’s *The Making of Knowledge in Composition*, reveal a strong enough degree of acceptance of Berlin’s politicized view of the field to signal the beginning of a political turn in composition studies.

Through this approach, then, I will attempt to establish an important movement in the field during the years 1987-1993 and to invite considerations of how that movement continues to influence the field today. While my source material is limited to books, reviews, and articles from professional journals, I hope that it provides a basis for future studies that might utilize other source materials such as interviews, graduate-course syllabi, and other dissertations.

Terms and Scope

By now, readers will have noticed my use of the phrase *political turn*. Although the phrase is used in literary studies, my focus is on its applicability in composition studies. While Laura R. Micciche uses this phrase in her 2014 “Writing Material,” it is a historical concept I have entertained for quite some time. I believe Micciche has in mind the same idea that I do although she dates the political turn closer to the turn of the twenty-first century (494). Specifically, I suspect Micciche turns to this phrase to indicate that something distinctive happened in composition near the turn of the century—something not effectively represented in the phrase *social turn*. Steve Parks, in “Sinners Welcome” (2014), also implicitly argues that some of the years encompassed by *social turn* were actually more directly focused on political transformation, and he, like

Micciche, appears to draw a distinction between the two when he complains, “we have turned to the social and away from the political” (507). Following the cue of Micciche and Parks, then, my use of the phrase *political turn* entails two important functions. First, I use the term to carve out and distinguish a movement from the larger arc of the social turn. Secondly, as the appellation hopefully suggests, I use the term to designate a shift in emphasis from writing instruction for writing instruction’s sake to sociopolitical transformation. It is through this distinction that I will attempt to trace the roots of the disagreement Wardle and Downs describe when they say compositionists began to disagree about the field’s object of study.

Since I am questioning the efficacy of *social turn* as a historiographical term and arguing for recognizing a more overtly political turn, I am clearly framing my project in the context of ‘turns.’ While my next chapter’s literature review will offer a more detailed treatment of how a turn is generally understood within the field today, I will take a moment here to detail how I will be using the term. On the one hand, and I would suggest this is a more recent application of the term, *turn* has been used to designate distinct areas of interest as they proliferate within the discipline (*i.e.*, the public, the global, the queer, the apocalyptic). These movements may exist simultaneously, as specializations often do, and may even compete with each other. On the other hand, and I would suggest this as the field’s initial use of the term, *turn* has also been used to trace larger movements in the field that serve as historical demarcations and which may themselves encompass smaller movements (*i.e.*, the social turn). As I discuss the social

and political turns in this dissertation, I will be relying on both senses of the term as presented here.

I should also clarify my occasional uses of the phrases *process paradigm* and *process model*. While many in the field have effectively argued that the process paradigm was not, in fact, an actual paradigm or that it did not represent an actual paradigm shift, I nonetheless use the phrase *process paradigm* as a historical marker.² One simple reason for this is that the phrase itself has become a common designation in composition parlance. This is likely due to the fact that, even today, *paradigm* connotes a degree of gravitas that is absent from *model*. That would appear to be the field's tacit manner of continuing to recognize that the movement arising from the advent of the process model was largely responsible for professionalizing the field. Though the substance of process's paradigmatic status is in doubt, its rhetorical influence in professionalizing the field is not. Thus, when referring to that model's methods of inquiry and pedagogy in writing instruction, I employ the phrase *process model*; however, when describing the movement, its broader rhetorical import and success in professionalizing the field, I resort to the phrase *process paradigm*. When I need to refer to both the model and the rhetorical movement, I again resort to *process paradigm*.

A final prefatory qualifier regards the scope of my discussion of literary studies. One of the greater challenges of this dissertation has been my treatment of the relationship between literary studies and composition. It is certainly not revelatory to say that these areas of study, under the auspices of one department, have a long and storied

² See, for example, "The Subject of Composition" in Susan Miller's *Textual Carnivals*.

history. In *Rhetoric and Reality*, Berlin traces a history of intra-departmental tensions and machinations all the way back to composition's earliest inclusion in American colleges. In 1985 Maxine Hairston urged us to break our bonds with literary studies so that we might find true independence and success as a discipline. Lester Faigley's 1986 "Competing Theories of Process" takes an opposing stance, arguing by way of Stanley Aronowitz and Henry A. Giroux for the importance of composition remaining partnered with literary studies. In 2010 Melissa Ianetta, in "Disciplinarity, Divorce, and the Displacement of Labor Issues," reawakens the debate. In short, the relationship between composition and literary studies could form the basis for a dissertation in and of itself. Yet, because literary studies' political turn, as I will argue, greatly influenced composition's political turn, and because the two areas have shared an intimately proximal relationship within English departments, I have been forced to walk a fine line between analyzing relevant convergences and falling into an entirely different subject. By necessity, then, I have opted to restrict the scope of my discussion of literary studies to only those instances where it is most relevant to composition's political turn.

Structure

I have organized my project, for the most part, chronologically. There are two notable exceptions to this. First, I follow the tradition of beginning with a review of current research. Secondly, and perhaps more conspicuously, I have placed my analysis of Stephen North's *The Making of Knowledge in Composition* (*MKC* hereafter) prior to my treatment of *Rhetoric and Reality*. Although *Rhetoric and Reality* was published slightly before *MKC* (they were both published in 1987), there can be little if any doubt

that they were composed simultaneously. Yet, despite their shared interest in epistemic methods in composition, they present starkly different visions of the field.

Chapter II, then, presents a survey of current scholarship on the social turn. In particular, my literature review pays close attention to how scholars characterize the chronological and intellectual origins and development of the social turn. Chapter II also analyzes how current researchers characterize *turn* as used in current composition discourse. Given that current researchers document the existence of specialized turns within the larger arc of the social turn, it is useful to reach an understanding of how they understand these intellectual tangents—especially as such discourse relates to disciplinary focus. Finally, my second chapter further explores the field’s current disposition toward disciplinary status. After noting composition’s inclusion in the National Research Council’s taxonomy of research disciplines and in the federal Classification of Instructional Programs (Phelps and Ackerman 2010), I gauge the field’s reaction to that recognition. In particular, I examine to what degree such an indicator of disciplinary status is acknowledged and how it is problematized.

In Chapter III, I turn my attention to the shape of composition studies as the process paradigm was passing away. I begin by focusing on North’s *MKC*. My primary reason for analyzing *MKC* (and the reviews it received) before *Rhetoric and Reality* is to position it as a foil for my later discussions of Berlin’s work. In that sense, *MKC* offers a sort of baseline view of the context in which Berlin’s *Rhetoric and Reality* was published. North’s neglect of the political dimension of writing instruction in his survey of the field, along with the field’s response to that decision, helps to reveal the growing influence of

political interests in composition. In part, then, *MKC* will be analyzed as a form of early resistance to the political influences intruding into composition studies. Naturally, North's attempts to sever composition's relationship with literary studies, rhetoric, and political concerns will receive thorough attention. Most of my attention in that chapter, however, will be on the reviews of *MKC*. By thoroughly exploring those reviews, I hope to convey a sense of composition's developing political interests. Specifically, through the reviews of *MKC*, I will illuminate how the field began envisioning itself as political, and how was it defining *political*. Given that the field was still figuring out how it might expand beyond the process model, what directions were compositionists looking toward, and how did they envision moving forward? Another reason *MKC* operates as an intriguing foil for *Rhetoric and Reality* is that North covers many facets of composition that would become points of discussion as composition began wrestling with its political turn in the late 1980s. Specifically, I will be referring back to *MKC* when discussing how reviews of *Rhetoric and Reality* touched on issues such as teaching conditions, Berlin's greatly simplified taxonomy of rhetorics, and the importance of equitable treatment of diverse research methods and pedagogical practices.

As a final note on Chapter III, I would be remiss if I didn't explain my omission of *The Changing of Knowledge in Composition* (2011, *CKC* hereafter). The editors of *CKC*—Lance Massey and Richard Gebhardt—frame the volume as a reassessment of *MKC*'s “influence/impact, rhetoric, aims, and values—with an eye toward using such reassessments to comment on the present and future of composition studies” (1). Put simply, I did not become aware of this text until time constraints prevented me from

giving it thorough attention. On the one hand, this is regrettable as the introduction suggests some degree of disagreement over the influence of *MKC* during the years immediately after its publication. On the other hand, the editors and the table of contents suggest that the volume is largely concerned with *MKC*'s relevance in composition studies today. That being the case, it seems unlikely that *CKC* would have more than a passing relevance to my arguments in this dissertation.

Chapter IV will continue exploring many of the same questions as Chapter III through an analysis of Berlin's *Rhetoric and Reality* as well as the field's responses to that text's politicized view of composition's history. As with *MKC*, Berlin's *Rhetoric & Reality* illuminates the shape of the field as it began to hunger for more than the process model—particularly in regard to social and political engagement. My discussion of *Rhetoric and Reality* and the reviews it received will be situated in contrast with North's *MKC* and the reviews it received in order to develop an understanding of the field's turn toward political concerns. In analyzing Berlin's neo-Marxist view of composition history, Chapter IV also spotlights the growing influence of Continental philosophy in composition's political discourse. Ultimately, *Rhetoric and Reality* will be analyzed as Berlin's successful attempt to provide an Althusserian reading of the history of composition instruction, thereby persuading the field to pay more attention to the ideology of teaching composition. Chapter IV, then, works to establish the importance of Berlin in providing a theoretical framework that allowed the field to galvanize its political interests. Last, but certainly not least, Chapter IV will also point to nascent conflict elicited by the emerging role of ideological concerns in composition.

Chapter V traces Berlin's growing influence by focusing on his 1988 "Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class" as well as the responses to that article. In particular, Chapter V explores Berlin's more direct attack on objectivism and expressivism as ideological rhetorics that serve to reinforce capitalist structures. Thus, the chapter highlights Berlin's attempts to discredit such approaches while esteeming social-epistemic rhetoric as the best option for working toward social justice in writing classes. In analyzing the reviews of "Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class," I highlight two trends. First, I will show how compositionists began to defend their favored methods by arguing they, too, could support political inquiry in writing classes. In addition, I argue that the increasing conflict was really rooted in disagreement over composition's proper objects of study, as Wardle and Downs indicated in their study of contemporary concerns over disciplinarity.

Chapter VI will trace the escalation of conflict discussed in Chapters IV and V. To do so, I will focus on Maxine Hairston's 1992 "Diversity, Ideology, and Teaching Writing" as well as the responses her article provoked after its publication in *College English*. As the basis of Chapter VI, Hairston's article will serve multiple purposes. For one, "Diversity, Ideology, and Teaching Writing" offers compelling evidence that, by 1992, the field had fully engaged the political turn. In addition, by reviewing Hairston's argument and the responses from many in the field, we can again see the fundamental differences over objects of study that Wardle and Downs point to when discussing the disciplinarity problem today. Finally, the responses to Hairston's article exemplify the fierce and bitter treatment that could be expected by those who resisted a political

mission for composition. This resistance, as we shall see, was not limited to the authors, but extended to publishers of such material as well. Thus, Chapter VI provides a finalized view of the disruptive nature of the political turn in composition studies.

Through these chapters, I contend that we should view the post-process era not merely as a social turn. Instead, we should recognize the late 1980s and early 1990s as years when composition *galvanized* the political interests that had been, as Donald Lazere pointed out, bubbling up in the field since at least the 1960s. I am arguing that the years after 1987 should be considered as a *political turn*. By recognizing the existence of a political turn and Berlin's significant role in that turn, we may see how composition moved from the process model to a political model and, moreover, how the disruptions that problematize disciplinarity today initially took root in the field. I am making the case, then, that it was not the social turn of the early 1980s that undermined the process model and politicized the field; instead, I argue, it was the political turn of the late 1980s. Ultimately, then, I am claiming that in order to more fully understand the disruptive forces that hinder disciplinarity today, we might first try to make sense of the fall of process and the rise of politics in composition.

CHAPTER II: WHAT IS THE SOCIAL TURN?

A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

To provide context for my contention that current scholarship has overly diminished the role of James Berlin in the field's political development, and in the political turn in general, it is necessary to survey contemporary retrospectives of the post-process movement. While the term *post-process* is still in use, researchers today include that movement within the scope of the "social turn." One of the primary goals of this dissertation, however, is to suggest that *post-process* might be better understood not as a unified march away from the process paradigm but, rather, as period that includes two distinct turns: one that attempted to *supplement* the process model (the social turn), and one that attempted to *depose* it (the political turn). Therefore, my literature review focuses on recent scholarship dealing with the history of the social turn in composition. For the most part, I rely on current sources from the last decade of research regarding that history. However, I have also included John Trimbur's "Taking the Social Turn" (1994) since he is frequently credited as the first to articulate the idea of a social turn in composition. I found the special edition of *College English* "Reimagining the Social Turn" (2014), particularly useful for this research. After all, the dedication of an entire issue of a major journal in composition signals the field's interest in revisiting the idea of the social turn, and my dissertation aims to build on that interest by offering supplemental insights. I have organized my findings into three categories. First, I review how scholars characterize the history of the social turn—its chronological and intellectual roots. Part of this exploration entails an analysis of each term—*social* and *turn*—individually.

Specifically, I am interested in whether *social* is considered as generally synonymous with *political*. Second, I parse out the various ways in which scholars use *turn* in the context of composition. What constitutes a ‘turn,’ and how is it comparable to, or distinct from, a paradigm shift? Third, I explore reactions to composition’s disciplinary status as represented by its “recognition as an emerging field in the National Research Council’s taxonomy of research disciplines; and the assignment of a code series to rhetoric and composition/writing studies in the federal Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP)” (Phelps and Ackerman 180). Specifically, I highlight to what extent compositionists have acknowledged that designation and the ways some have problematized it by pointing to a plethora of divergent turns.

Characterizing the History of the “Social Turn”

In reviewing the reported history of the social turn, that is, when it began and in what ways it is social and/or political, we find disagreement among recent studies. For example, in “Reimagining the Social Turn” (2014), Jacqueline Rhodes and Jonathan Alexander cite Patricia Bizzell’s critiques of Linda Flower and John R. Hayes’s cognitive process model. Specifically, “Cognition, Convention, and Certainty” (1982) garners a lot of attention as instrumental in initiating the social turn. Rhodes and Alexander describe Bizzell’s debate with Flower and Hayes as “‘foundational’ texts in the formation of contemporary composition studies” (482). Much of Bizzell’s article is focused on the inadequacy of Flower and Hayes’s model in accounting for discourse communities—that is, the social dimension of writing. Initially, discussing how students move through various discourse communities and how studying these movements offers insights for writing instruction does not seem overtly political. However, Rhodes and Alexander

point out that Bizzell takes a political turn toward the end of her article. Actually, Bizzell briefly nods toward political concerns in the article's introduction where she declares "our teaching task is not only to convey information but also to transform students' whole world view. ... Otherwise, we risk burying ethical and political questions under supposedly neutral pedagogical critique" (75). It is these political nods that Rhodes and Alexander see as foundational in "composition's ongoing grappling with socioeconomic and cultural disparities" (482). In short, Rhodes and Alexander see in Bizzell's "Cognition, Convention, and Certainty" an early call to the politically critical pedagogy that would become a central practice in composition by the late 1980s.

Then there is William Duffy, who, in "Collaboration (in) Theory" (2014), declares that the social turn is "roughly coterminous with the emergence of process pedagogy. To support this, Duffy points to Kenneth Bruffee's "Collaborative Learning and the 'Conversation of Mankind'" (1984). While Duffy's article is more focused on expanding current understandings of "what collaboration is and how it works" (417), his citing of Bruffee's reliance on political theorist Michael Oakeshott offers support for dating the origins of a politically interested social turn slightly earlier than Rhodes and Alexander do. Interestingly, Alexander reinforces Duffy's dating when he teams up with Susan Jarratt in "Rhetorical Education and Student Activism" (2014), wherein he and Jarratt contend that "Even the focus on students as thinkers and problem solvers grounding the cognitive process theories of the 1970s and 1980s is arguably 'Social'" (525). This is a provocative assertion given Bizzell criticizes Flower and Hayes for not accounting for the social nature of writing, and given that Alexander shared that view in

the article he coauthored with Rhodes. Still, it indicates the difficulty the field has in specifically marking, historically or intellectually, the origins of the social turn.

Historical marking is a specific concern in Kathleen Blake Yancey's "Mapping the Turn to Disciplinarity" (2018). By citing Beth Daniell's "Narratives of Literacy" (1999), Yancey refers us to Lester Faigley as an early initiator of the social turn. Specifically, Yancey, through Daniell, points to Faigley's "Competing Theories of Process" (1986), wherein Faigley lays out three competing theories within the process movement: the expressive, the cognitive, and the social. As Daniell points out, Faigley clearly favors the social. Of course Faigley's article relies rather heavily on Marxist thinkers such as Henry Giroux and Stanley Aronowitz in doing so. Thus, Daniell and, by extension, Yancey share the idea that the social turn, as a politically interested movement, began somewhat later than the years suggested by Rhodes, Alexander, and Jarratt.

The Marxist interests evident in Faigley's "Competing Theories of Process" remain vibrant in recent composition studies. This is most evident through the strong emphasis on materialism in current publications.¹ However, while the previous authors all speak of the social and political dimensions of the early social turn as generally synonymous, new materialists discern debilitating consequences for failing to distinguish between the social and the political. According to Steve Parks, for example, the social is not synonymous with the political. In "Sinners Welcome" (2014) he contends that too much focus on the social dimension hinders political progress. Specifically, Parks argues that lacking actual political action, the social remains isolated to classroom critiques of

¹ See, for examples, Steve Parks "Sinners Welcome" (2014), Laura Micciche's "Writing Material" (2014), Tony Scott and Nancy Welch's "One Train Can Hide Another" (2014), and James R. Daniel's "Freshman Composition as a Precariat Enterprise" (2017).

sociopolitical relations. He argues that “we have turned to the social and away from the political” (507). His contention is that the field has abandoned “a longer history of structurally transformative political strategies” (506). In other words, the field’s tendency to conflate the terms has led to a politically ineffectual pedagogy.

When reviewing the *College English* special issue on the social turn, in which Parks’s article appeared, Donald Lazere singled out Parks’s contribution as the only article to discuss pedagogies of political change that were connected to activism. In particular, Lazere lauds Parks’s recounting of a community-activist project that involved community participation in economic development. Still, Lazere argues that the special issue’s contributors largely ignore earlier signs of political interest in composition studies. To prove his point he provides a rather lengthy list of evidence. His list is too extensive to include in its entirety here. However, it does merit at least an abridged review of some highlights:

- 1968. Protests against the Vietnam War at the MLA convention; formation of the Radical Caucus; production of the journal *Radical Teacher* in 1975 ...
- 1970. English translation of Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* ...
- 1971. NCTE resolution "Resolved, That the National Council of Teachers of English find means to study the relation of language to public policy...
- 1975. NCTE resolution "Resolved, that the National Council of Teachers of English support the efforts of English and related subjects to train students in a new literacy encompassing not only the decoding of print but

the critical reading, listening, viewing, and thinking skills necessary to enable students to cope with the sophisticated persuasion techniques found in political statements...

- 1976. Richard Ohmann, *English in America: A Radical View of the Profession*.
- 1977. Mina Shaughnessy, Errors and Expectations. ("The vocabulary of general literacy" that basic writers need to acquire included political words such as the French Revolution, Marx, and Gandhi) ...
- 1977. *CE* special issue, "Mass Culture, Political Consciousness, and English Studies." ...
- 1980. Ira Shor, *Critical Teaching and Everyday Life* ... (Lazere 578-579)

While I heartily agree with Lazere's contention that the 2014 *College English* special issue presents an incomplete view of the political impetus of the social turn, I do so for different reasons which I will lay out, of course, in later chapters of my dissertation.

Rhodes and Alexander's published response to Lazere's criticism (included at the end of the cited article) accuses him of defining the political in overly narrow terms—governmental control over the distribution of resources—and counters with the second-wave feminist contention that 'the personal is political,' thus implying that, even in its earliest interests in the social dimension of writing, the social turn was inherently political. What I find interesting in this exchange, however, is not the grappling over how to define the political but, rather, the lack of discussion over when the field began to *galvanize* around political interest. Clearly, despite the numerous events and publications cited by Lazere, the process model rose to dominance in the field during the late 1970s and

continued well into 1980s. However, I don't see Rhodes and Alexander, or any other recent research, despite talk of "flashpoints" such as Bizzell's and Faigley's publications, speaking of galvanizing moments or works. I suspect this is why Laura Micciche, in "Writing Material" (2014), refers to the turn of the twenty-first century as the "political turn" (494). Moreover, while publications and conference events addressing Parks's concern for "structurally transformative political strategies" had emerged in composition (as Lazere points out with his list), it was not until the mid-1980s that the field began to shed the process paradigm; and I will contend that it was even later when the field fully converted to a political mission.

Characterizing a *Turn*

Turning now to the other half of the phrase—*turn*—one finds that getting a sense of what a turn is and how many there have been can also be a tricky task. In fact, *Social Turn* has come to represent an historical trajectory from which several turns have emerged. For instance, Yancey's "Mapping the Turn to Disciplinarity" presents a list of turns that compete for attention, including the public, the queer, the archival, and the global (15). She also appends "the apocalyptic," referencing Paul Lynch's "Composition's New Thing" (2014). Derek N. Mueller presents an even more extensive list in his 2017 *Network Sense* (72). What these lists demonstrate through their plethora of turns rooted in the interests of respective compositionists, and what Lynch's title reinforces through his reference to the "New Thing," is that a 'turn' is used at times to describe an emerging interest or practice in the field. Yancey puts it thusly: "the expression 'x turn' is often employed simply as a quick reference, as a way of indicating that a new practice or theoretical orientation is gaining ground" (15). Of course, just

because a new interest is “gaining ground” doesn’t mean the field writ large is making a paradigmatic shift. That is, such turns do not point toward a disciplinary identity taking hold. If anything, their number and diversity suggest an opposing trend.

Yet, as her chapter title indicates, Yancey is specifically interested in disciplinarity. Thus, her alternative description of a turn is important because it attributes historical and disciplinary significance to the term: “Other times, however, the expression is used to articulate a shift of the Trimburian kind, that is, of a historical demarcation of the field” (15). This is a problematic alternative because it suggests, essentially, an opposing definition in that her first sense of *turn* represents contemporaneous movements (competing with each other); now, however, she defines *turn* as a means of chronologically separating movements. Yancey’s crediting of John Trimbur (“Taking the Social Turn” 1994) for establishing the idea of ‘the social turn’ as useful in discerning important historical shifts in the field is also puzzling because she ignores obvious historical roots for this concept.² While Yancey points to more recent uses of the concept, she cites only Trimbur for initiating this trend. Moreover, she makes no mention of Thomas Kuhn’s *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962). Trimbur mentions Kuhn, but only in the context of his use by “Baratholomae, Bruffee, and others” (including Bizzell), “to argue against the process movement...” (116). The essence of Kuhn’s counter-*history* of the sciences is that paradigm shifts represent historical markers (demarcations). Kuhn also describes paradigms as a way of demarcating disciplinary

² Trimbur’s was reviewing three books in composition studies: *Academic Discourse and Critical Consciousness*, by Patricia Bizzell (1992); *Critical Teaching and the Idea of Literacy* (1993), by C.H. Knoblauch and Lil Brannon; and *Common Ground: Dialogue, Understanding, and the Teaching of Composition* (1993), by Kurt Spellmeyer.

subject matter, practice, and history. Yet, although Yancey is clearly interested in the same idea for composition, she turns to Trimbur without mentioning Kuhn even though Kuhn's model had already been extremely influential in composition during the process movement. Susan Miller acknowledges this influence in her 1991 *Textual Carnivals*, wherein she dedicates considerable attention to Kuhn's lingering influence within composition studies. Still, what remains clear is that Yancey is interested in connecting the idea of a turn with the idea of disciplinarity.

Mueller's presentation of a turn appears to try and bridge the opposition present in Yancey's explanation. This is interesting when we consider that Mueller also discusses the nature and function of turns within the context of "visualizing a discipline." Unlike Yancey, Mueller *does* reference Kuhn when stating that turns which achieve "wider-spread transformations in thought and action" and "lasting diffusion and acceptance" are identified by some as paradigm shifts (71). Mueller suggests, however, that such large-scale turns are often accompanied by small-scale turns. In many regards, then, Mueller's discussion and defining of *turn* is similar to Yancey's. On the other hand, Mueller is more direct in claiming that a considerable number of smaller turns do not threaten disciplinarity, although he does question "how many turns a discipline can take while at once sustaining its coherence" (72). So even Mueller eventually questions whether turns may problematize disciplinarity if they grow too large in number.

Something else that is evident in these discussions by Yancey and Mueller is the coterminous existence of turns. Mueller refers to Jim Corder's 1985 essay "Turnings" to highlight the possible outcomes of such co-existence:

When divergent, non-isomorphic rhetorics come together—that is to say, when any two rhetorics come together—the consequence is sometimes happy. Insight and learning occur, and sometimes love and marriage. Sometimes, however, the consequence is not happy; or habits of competition are too strong. Sometimes one rhetoric expands to fill all available space, prevailing as the other is compressed into submission. Sometimes two rhetorics compromise, to no one's complete satisfaction. Sometimes they are paralyzed, as practitioners are unable to choose. Sometimes they go to war. (qtd. in Mueller 73)

While Corder was clearly discussing rhetorics, Mueller sees this discussion as compatible with the reality of turns. That is, sometimes they work well together, and sometimes the combat each other. This is an important point to consider when pondering an *x-turn* as a historiographic label. That is, the labeling of a turn is a rhetorical act.

This is where my dissertation enters into this particular conversation. I am interested in how labeling a larger turn, such as the social turn, may effectually mask other turns—even when those turns are large scale as well. In addition, I am interested in how turns may indeed disrupt disciplinarity. After all, when declaring a label for a specific turn, we are assigning a sort of identity to the work involved in that turn. If we consider large-scale turns as paradigmatic shifts, as Mueller says many in the field do, then we are coming eminently close to assigning an identity to the field at large—as in the phrase *social turn*. Indeed, when we consider all the turns listed by Yancey and Mueller, it seems clear that only the social turn has achieved this large-scale status that borders on a paradigm shift. This is interesting to consider when we ponder why *turn* has

replaced *paradigm*. It would seem that the use of *turn* is a way of attempting to identify significant movements without privileging any one of them, not matter how large in scale, with enough rhetorical dominance to threaten the flexibility and variety entailed in field-ness (as opposed to disciplinarity). Instead, *turn*, as it is discussed by Yancey and Mueller, and as it is used generally in the field, conveys the sense of openness and tolerance of diverging subject matter and practice. Yet, when we consider the historiographic consequences of a label such as *social turn*, it is clear that identifying a turn can do far more than identify a localized interest within the field. Instead, it may be used to portray a historical movement as so widespread as to broach paradigmatic status while stopping short of acknowledging it as a paradigm. Nonetheless, as I will argue, assigning such historic significance to a movement can still serve to efface other movements that may be equally large or even larger.

What Kind of Discipline Are We?

Yancey's effort toward disciplinarity raises other questions about the field. Namely, how has the field responded to declarations of composition's qualifying as a discipline? Referring to Phelps and Ackerman's "Making the Case for Disciplinarity in Rhetoric, Composition, and Writing Studies: The Visibility Project," we find that visibility refers to the perception of composition from the rest of academia and society. As the authors put it,

to be judged worthy or unworthy within the meritocracy of postsecondary education, it [a field] must first be seen or heard, not merely noticed but appreciated in terms that make it eligible for such judgements. At the most basic level, it's necessary for academic peers, administrators, or other

stakeholders to be aware of the material facts (programs, publications, faculty, and students) that give the field presence in the academy. (182)

Thus, the route taken by some ambitious compositionists was to lobby for composition's place in "the information codes and databases of higher education" (182). Phelps and Ackerman argue that, "since 1950, we have bootstrapped ourselves into a disciplinary identity..." (182). Yet, eight years after the publication of Phelps and Ackerman's celebratory article, Yancey suggests that composition studies is still unsure of its disciplinary identity—or even its status. This anxiety is further evidenced by the fact that Yancey's piece is a chapter in a larger volume specifically concerned with the problem of disciplinarity in composition. On the one hand, Yancey's title indicates that composition is, at least, *becoming* a discipline, yet she pointedly notes her initial labeling of composition as a field:

It's also worth noting my own usage here in referring to us as a field. By most accounts we are a field at least; in terms of categorization, it's easier to call ourselves a field precisely because field-ness requires a lower threshold than a discipline does. We might pursue a field of interest without the methodology of a discipline, for example ... (16)

Still, for Yancey, field-ness is clearly no longer sufficient for describing composition:

"without our being aware of it, we have begun to see the field as a discipline" (17).

Coming almost a decade after Phelps and Ackerman's declaration, this assertion seems to undermine their celebratory stance and to reinforce my introductory claim that composition has been lingering, for quite some time, on the cusp of disciplinarity.

Yancey bases her claims on four requirements:

(1) renewed research agenda, including continuing research into and theory about transfer of writing knowledge and practice; (2) the development of projects consolidating what the field has established as knowledge; (3) the continuing development of the major in Rhetoric and Composition (4) the changing location of Writing Studies within institutional structures. Based on this analysis, I conclude with several questions intended, first, to guide the reading of this volume speaking to Rhetoric and Composition's disciplinarity and, second, to frame the field's way forward. (17)

Even in her closing statement in this quotation, ambivalence remains—is the field a discipline, or have some simply *begun* to see it as such? Interestingly, the evidence Yancey provides mirrors the sort of evidence Phelps and Ackerman claim is not enough to claim disciplinary status: “we were perhaps, too complacent ... relying on the plain evidence of growth in the number of programs, tenure-stream faculty, publications, and administrative positions” (182). Nonetheless, Yancey runs with this evidence and, near the end of her chapter, asks, “now that we qualify as a discipline, what *kind* of a discipline would we like to be?” (31).

Yancey's question, and the fact that she poses it eight years after Phelps and Ackerman's article, points to polarizing movements within the field of composition as regards disciplinary status. Moreover, it calls into serious question the sort of unity suggested by Phelps and Ackerman's statement that we have “bootstrapped ourselves into disciplinary identity.” Rather than unity, what we find in current research is tension. This, however, is no surprise to Yancey, nor should it be to anyone who recognizes that

she is raising this concern so long after rhetoric and composition's inclusion in the CIP. As she states in her closing paragraph, "a turn doesn't dissipate tensions: it tends, rather, to bring them into focus" (30). Earlier in her chapter, she acknowledges that the issue of disciplinarity is "contentious" (16). Clearly, then, Yancey is acutely aware that composition has not managed to form a distinct disciplinary core. Moreover, current research suggests that many in the field are wary of doing so. Yancey alludes to this impediment when describing a "Trimburian" shift as a *demarcating* movement. Though she was speaking to historical demarcations, the real tension arises, as current research shows, in demarcating subject matter, theory, and practice. It seems that composition has, since the process model, tended view the concept of disciplinarity as synonymous with a paradigm and, thus, a determinant of proper subject matter and practice.

As an example of such polarization, I turn to Russell K. Durst's "British Invasion: James Britton, Composition Studies, and Anti-Disciplinarity" (2015). Durst's article is admirable in his effort to recover important lost voices, an effort he credits to David Gold. In Durst's case, he turns to James Britton's paradoxical influence on composition's disciplinary status—paradoxical because Britton was decidedly anti-disciplinary, yet (in Durst's view) his scholarship became instrumental in founding composition as a discipline (385). As Durst astutely points out, "this paradox reveals ongoing tensions in the field between pedagogy and scholarship, and it raises questions about the direction of disciplinarity for composition studies" (385). Thus, Durst more directly confronts the tensions Yancey alludes to when addressing disciplinarity for composition.

Durst's article is useful for getting a sense of how the field understands the idea of a discipline. When pointing to Joseph Harris's 2012 *A Teaching Subject*, Durst highlights

Harris's statement that Britton's "main contribution was to portray the field of English not as an academic body of knowledge, but rather as 'that space in the curriculum where students are encouraged to use language in more complex and expressive ways'" (385). The presentation of a discipline as "an academic body of knowledge" is, of course, a signal toward the sort of demarcation that Britton and some modern scholars, as Durst argues, find themselves wary of. In my third chapter, I discuss Stephen M. North as a similarly wary and paradoxical figure as represented in his 1987 *The Making of Knowledge*. He, too, opted to describe composition as a field rather than a paradigmatic discipline, yet he advocated for some strict demarcations in subject matter. Also like Britton, North favored teachers (Practitioners) more than scholars who he saw as frequently attempting to govern classroom practices. Durst, then, presents a rather traditional and ongoing tension in the field's view of disciplinarity and, by doing so, reveals why many in the field still shy away from it, favoring instead the theoretical and pedagogical flexibility of field-ness.

Laura Micciche also addresses the overbearing nature of disciplinarity when she begins "Writing Material" by declaring that, "If recent critical scholarship is any indication, the 'social turn' has hardened into a repressive orthodoxy" (488). Micciche's New Materialism is a call to return to classroom considerations with eyes that look beyond agency and subjectivity. Instead, she is interested in the physicality of writing, writing tools, and writing classrooms. Micciche's contention is that social turn theory increasingly moved attention away from the "minutia of producing texts" and toward *theories* of "superstructural forces—institutions, culture, politics" (492). That is certainly *not* to say, however, that Micciche doesn't have political interests in composition theory

and teaching. Rather, she is concerned with the narrow and overbearing nature of current theory within the social turn, seeing it as a tyrannous disciplinary rubric that hinders other theoretical approaches.

Parks reflects the same concern in “Sinners Welcome,” wherein he describes a “‘grand’ compromise” (507). Of course compromise presupposes tension, a tension he describes as arising from the pull between “the call of disciplinary identity and the need for collective politics” (506). The problem, according to Parks, is that collective politics is typically “articulated as a nuanced theory of antifoundationalist pragmatism but ... is actually a sign of the abandonment of a longer history of structurally transformative political strategies” (506). His stated goal for his essay is to pose the question of “whether collective political action is even possible under a disciplinary rubric” (507). Parks proffers an alternative to the failure of the grand compromise in the form of community partnerships, rooting his theory in Linda Flower’s work in community literacy. Specifically, Parks refer to Flower’s *Community Literacy and the Rhetoric of Public Engagement* (2008). Parks faults Flower, however, for failing to provide evidence of actual political change and for stopping at agency as arising in *discussion* which, he argues, diminishes the imperative for political change (509). This is the essence of the “disciplinary compromise” (511):

Such a model nicely intersects with the current neoliberal paradigm, where calls for collective action to readjust economic disparities are seen as old-fashioned (despite Occupy Wall Street) in the face of government-business partnerships designed to “empower” the poor as individuals.

Having done significant work within Flower's paradigm, however, I have

now come to see it as the “disciplinary compromise,” which allows us to invoke the political rhetoric of a [Cornel] West without having to engage in traditional forms of political organizing that his insights ultimately require. (511)

As an example of how it *should* be done, Parks contrasts Flowers allegedly stultified model with a community-activist effort he helped to mediate and manage while at Syracuse University—a project aimed specifically at organizing a partnership between scholars and the community with the goal of economic and social reform. It is unnecessary to here recount the successes and problems the initiative encountered. Instead, I want to call attention to how Parks questions the compatibility of disciplinary identity and transformative political action—just as Micciche does, and through the same materialist framework.

Alexander and Jarratt reflect on the same contrary urges in the current moment of the social turn in “Rhetorical Education and Student Activism.” Their article is responsive to the “Irvine 11” protest at the University of California-Irvine.³ For Alexander and Jarratt, as for Micciche and Parks, the possibility of integrating transformative political activity into disciplinary training serves as the driving question. They phrase the question differently, but the problem and goal remain the same:

Which strands of scholarship since the “social turn” in composition studies—the discipline in English studies perhaps most engaged with questions of rhetorical training and public engagement—might help us

³ UCI had invited Michael Oren, Israel’s ambassador to the US to speak. His presentation was repeatedly interrupted by members of the Muslim Student Union.

make sense of a completely self-sponsored public protest, organized by design to violate codes of civility and place itself outside the conventional genres of the deliberative democratic discourse that composition and rhetoric teachers most commonly theorize, teach, and subscribe to?

Alexander and Jarratt challenge the field (they refer to composition as both discipline and field) to consider how studying student activism outside the classroom might transform composition theory and pedagogy. They also clearly look toward activism as a basis for disciplinarity when they point to the social turn as “placing the writing class, its *grounding assumptions*, aims, and practices, within a larger world determined by economic and social forces” (526; emphasis added). As with Micciche and Parks, Alexander and Jarrett explore the possibility of incorporating public activism and social transformation into a disciplinary vision for composition. They describe their interviews of the Irvine 11 protestors as an opportunity for “change or renewal of our field” (528). They find the most useful insights from the interviews to be descriptions of pedagogical failure to connect with activism and conclude that current composition classes provide, at best, “limited opportunities to develop skills as activists” (504). They fault a “disconnect between theory and contemporary life” as the root of this failing (538).

Regarding this disciplinary dilemma, I will turn to one more example, Tony Scott and Nancy Welch’s “One Train Can Hide Another” (2014). Following in the vein of Parks and Micciche, Scott and Welch use the framework of materialism in advocating for more public activism within composition as a *field* (566). As they put it, “no matter the field’s recent emphases in composition and new media scholarship on embodied, affective, and unbounded composing practices within diverse rhetorical ecologies, our

pedagogies remain textually fixated...” (566). Scott and Welch critique the production of, and public reaction to, the *Kony 2012* video.⁴ Their overall argument is that fixation on the textuality of the video prevented scholars, and the public at large, from asking more penetrating questions about the video’s effectiveness—its political exploitation—in reinforcing existing US military buildup in Uganda. Moreover, as Scott and Welch point out, it is difficult not to see that buildup as part of US interest in Ugandan natural resources: “Although terrorism and peacekeeping provide the warrants for this buildup, policy analysts point to rivalry between China and the United States over the region’s resources, including oil and (essential for cell phone and other batteries) coltan” (564). The concept of textual fixation, then, becomes the central problem in composition’s inadequacy to contribute to social transformation. As they aptly phrase it, “the *idea* of public conversation *becomes* the conversation” (564). Interestingly, Scott and Welch characterize current composition theory and pedagogy as a return to New Criticism in composition classes: “In these classrooms, new critical just-the-text close readings are making a comeback, repackaged as civic engagement” (567). Following the example of Alexander and Jarratt, Scott and Welch turn to student activism’s potential to inform and transform the field. One example is their reference to Quebec college and university students who, through loud “pots-and-pans-banging marches” managed to stave off a tuition hike and an anti-protest law (575). So while not calling for wholesale abandonment of textual studies, Scott and Welch, like the other materialist authors discussed here, are far more concerned with public activism than with textual theory.

⁴ As of this publication, the video was still accessible at www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y4MnpzG5Sqc.

Moreover, their articles present profound concerns over how composition should frame and conduct itself as a discipline—or if disciplinarity should even be a priority.

What Is Said

My review of the literature finds that the social turn's historical and intellectual beginnings are not easily dated, and its development is not clearly traced. Some point to the turn of the twenty-first century, others point to the mid-1980s, and still others place the beginnings within the context of the process movement. Such disagreements, of course, are not uncommon when debating history. Nonetheless, when we find some dating the beginnings of the social turn within the process movement, and other dating it to the post-process movement, we should pause and consider that these two movements are generally considered as opposed to each other (though I shall argue for a more nuanced view in later chapters). After all, as some of these authors point out, the problem with the process model was that it did not consider social or political dimensions at all. What this discrepancy highlights is the continuing argument over how, exactly, to define *political*. It also, however, highlights the hazy rear view the field has of its own political development. Micciche offers an interesting insight on how the labels *post-process* and *social turn* figure into the historiographic perspective when she describes post-process as “a response to the tyranny of ‘process’ in the field’s vocabulary, vision, and sense of self... Anti-subject postprocess theory suffers from mission ambivalence; we know what the movement is against, but not what it’s for” (495). That is, *post-process* defined the field by negation—what it is *not*. Thus, it provided a clear sense of demarcation through contrast against the process model. *Social turn*, on the other hand, represents an attempt to provide a semantic description of what the field *wishes to be*. In the early post-process

years, however, the field was still figuring that out. But just when and how was that figured out? *Social turn*, as casually used in recent research and commentary, simply does not account for that process. Instead, it operates as a metonymic gloss (to borrow Mueller's phrasing) over some of the most shaping years in recent composition studies and practices. When we review current literature and note the recurring debates over disciplinarity and pedagogy, we find the phrase *social turn* simply does not indicate how that debate arose in composition studies. Only Durst comes close to revealing such origins, and he does so by looking considerably farther back in composition history—just as I plan to do.

What Is Unsaid

Despite acknowledging the complexity entailed in the idea of a turn, I argue that the casual use of *social turn* as a historiographic gloss of the post-process years—years of foundational changes and intense disciplinary conflict—hides more than it indicates. It may be more revealing to instead view the early development of the post-process era as a conflict between two paradigmatic visions—process vs. politics. Moreover, by zooming in on the years between 1987 and 1993, we can see how compositionists, led largely by the efforts of James Berlin, managed to not only wrest the field in a radically different direction, one in which theory problematized pedagogy, but to also galvanize the field around political interests. This fits very well with Micciche's dating and labeling of the "political turn." Yes, to a lesser degree the social turn was political in its earliest roots. As I have pointed out through the work of Rhodes and Alexander, Bizzell's early critiques of the cognitive process model were framed in political concerns. Yet, her critiques, along with the emergence of Bruffee's work in collaboration, were still largely focused on how

the social dimension of writing might inform pedagogy. That is, Bizzell and Bruffee did not politically problematize writing instruction *per se* so much as the theories that informed it.

Nonetheless, while the phrase *social turn* is generally understood to include the political within the social, a field can turn (as Parks points out) from the political toward the social and, as I am arguing in this dissertation, from the social to the political. Certainly the two are intimately related, but one may gain emphasis over the other. The current tension between the two mirrors the paradigmatic debate that took place as political concerns rose to challenge the process model. In both cases, disciplinary identity is at stake. While some scholars in my reviewed literature clearly yearn for an established disciplinary core, others argue for the flexibility of field-ness, or a core that is defined by *publicly engaged* political activism. Thus, we see compositionists beginning to make the case that disciplinarity can accommodate a multitude of divergent turns—just as some, in the early stages of the political turn, argued that their preferred theories and methodologies could accommodate political inquiry. I find it fascinating that the field, nearly forty years after the rise of the so-called process paradigm, still struggles to define itself as a discipline. The questions seem to have remained the same. In Elizabeth Wardle and Doug Downs's terms, what should our objects of study be?

To supplement the current understanding of composition's political turn, to fill in what I see as hidden by the historiographical label *social turn*, I will argue that two specific influences have not received the attention they warrant: James Berlin and literary studies. To begin, I was struck by how infrequently Berlin was referenced in current scholarship. When he *was* referenced, his work did not receive any extended discussion.

Instead, Bizzell is credited far more for initiating the social turn. If we stay fixated on the social dimension, as opposed to the political, then perhaps that is justly so. But if we want to speak of the *political* turn, as Micciche does, then we must look to the work of Berlin from 1987 to his posthumous 1996 *Rhetorics, Poetics, and Cultures*. Though he was not the originator of political thought in composition studies, Berlin was arguably the most important force in providing a means for the field to galvanize around political interests. If we recall Lazere's highlight list of political works published before and during the process paradigm's reign, and also consider Bizzell's political framing for her critiques of the process model, we can recognize that none of these succeeded in galvanizing the field in a political mission. Berlin's 1987 *Rhetoric and Reality*, on the other hand, seems to have been a watershed text in that regard. More than any other work of the decade, *Rhetoric and Reality* focused the field's political interest by presenting writing instruction squarely within a political framework. Even though Micciche and Parks never refer to Berlin, I see Micciche's reference to the turn of the twenty-first century and Parks reference to strategies of structural transformation as inevitably leading back to ideas championed by Berlin's from 1987 to 1996. To borrow a clichéd metaphor, with *Rhetoric and Reality*, the dam broke.

Berlin's *Rhetoric and Reality* had another accidental and ironic effect. Within the pages of *Rhetoric and Reality* Berlin recounts a troubled, even antagonistic history between composition and literary studies. This historical attitude was, of course, par for the course among many composition scholars—so common, in fact, that I was surprised to see it omitted altogether in current scholarship. *Rhetoric and Reality* expanded on what had already been expressed by scholars such as Maxine Hairston (it seems even

departmental politics can make for strange bedfellows) and what would be repeated by Susan Miller in *Textual Carnivals* (1991).⁵ Yet *Rhetoric and Reality*'s reliance on Continental philosophy, which had already been embraced within literary studies and was beginning to emerge in composition studies, led to immediate insecurities over whether or not composition was merely following literary studies and, thus, losing its recently won independence—returning to the status of a mere service field that did not produce knowledge on its own. According to Berlin, Hairston, and Miller, composition had a long history of feeling, and being viewed as, inferior *vis-à-vis* literary studies. As I will argue in later chapters, *Rhetoric and Reality* returned these tensions to the forefront of composition studies during the mid-to-late 1980s and coaxed the field into reckoning with its relationship with literary studies in order to solidify its own political turn.

The following chapters, then, will explore what I perceive as gaps in current scholarship on the social turn. Specifically, I will refer to two major surveys of the field in the earliest post-process years: Stephen M. North's *The Making of Knowledge in Composition* and James Berlin's *Rhetoric and Reality*. In addition, I will pay close attention to the field's responses to these dramatically different visions and expectations of the field. Doing so will allow me to provide a strong sense of the shape of the field as it began to envision how to move beyond the process model. Following my attention to these texts and the responses they drew, I will follow Berlin's work to move the field to a focus on ideological rhetorics as a means of equipping composition for political change. Once again, this will include close attention to how the field responded to his call. In

⁵ See for example, Hairston's 1982 "The Winds of Change: Thomas Kuhn and the Revolution in the Teaching of Writing"; her 1985 CCCC address "Breaking Our Bonds and Reaffirming Our Connections"; and "Diversity, Ideology, and Teaching Writing" (1992).

particular, I will pay close attention to how the respondents tried to balance existing desires to embrace the political dimension of writing instruction with desires to defend favored methods (*e.g.*, cognitivism, expressivism). Finally, I will turn to examples of how these two turns (process and political) eventually went to war based on their incompatible natures.

In tracing this trajectory, I will rely upon the idea of a *turn* as presented by both Yancey and Mueller. That is, although we currently use *social turn* in the more paradigmatic sense that both Yancey and Mueller elaborate, I will be making the case for instead seeing that movement as a smaller scale turn that worked alongside the process model. On the other hand, I make a case for seeing the political turn as the larger, more paradigmatic turn. While recognizing that there were political interests within the social turn, then, I will also be making a case for considering the social and political turns as distinct movements. Much of this will be argued, once again, by comparing Berlin's significant role in galvanizing the political turn with Bizzell's early research into the social dimension of writing processes. Finally, by attempting to distinguish between these turns, I hope to also reveal the roots of many of the tensions treated by current scholars when they consider the problem of disciplinarity today. To these ends, then, my next two chapters turn to the years when the process paradigm was on the cusp of collapsing and when politics began problematizing pedagogy.

CHAPTER III: PRACTITIONERS AND POLITICS – REVIEWING
STEPHEN M. NORTH’S *THE MAKING OF KNOWLEDGE IN
COMPOSITION*

In 1987 Stephen M. North published *The Making of Knowledge in Composition* (*MKC* hereafter). In that text, North provides a rich overview of the available epistemic approaches in the field of composition. *MKC*’s focus on epistemic methods represents a fundamental similarity to James Berlin’s *Rhetoric and Reality*, also published in 1987. In this chapter and the next, I will give careful attention to these two texts as well as the varied responses they provoked in order to highlight two points. For one, I would like to demonstrate that each of these writers engaged in similar projects insofar as they capitalized on the apparent differences in epistemological approaches in composition; that is, each of them began mapping the field into different epistemic camps. However, they did so in different terms. Moreover, their different approaches led to very different receptions in the field. It is these similarities and differences, and the underlying reasons for them, which I will focus on. The goal, then, of the next two chapters’ analyses is to illuminate how these two texts and their receptions in the field point to a growing struggle to define the proper objects of study and, thereby, purpose of composition. More specifically, I hope to show how the field began to transition from a discipline focused on researching writing instruction *per se* to a discipline more concerned with its own political conditions and its potential for political action.

When we consider the title of North’s text, we can see that he is boldly challenging—even disruptive—from the start. For instance, his use of the term *field*

signals his intent to treat composition as being made up of its own areas which are subject to analysis separately from English in general. However, by labeling composition as “an emerging field,” he also clearly proclaims that, despite the so-called process paradigm’s success in establishing composition as a discrete academic area, it was far from a settled state or identity—from a discipline. North opens *MKC* by pointing to disciplinary disunity as a central problem for composition as a field of study. Even when discussing the process vs. product debate, North categorizes the discussions as largely rhetorical—“more useful for generating the kinds of rhetoric that mark street corner debate than the kind of discourse one expects from serious inquiry” (iii). North also characterizes the oppositional slogan of *process vs. product* as seeming to identify political tendencies within a specific context. There was, as he points out, “no field-wide definition” provided by the movement. He offers a powerful anecdote to dramatize this shortcoming. Speaking of a graduate student whom he was helping to prepare for oral doctoral exams, North recounts,

As far as we could manage, he knew what I knew. And on the examination itself, it was clear he knew the individual works, and knew them well. But I asked, as did other examiners (who knew relatively little about Composition), questions which demanded ... *an overview, a synthesis*, that the student didn’t have— or, more accurately, *that Composition as a field seemed not to have*. What is the relationship between the claims, say, of Peter Elbow and those of Linda Flower and John Hayes? Is there a logical hierarchy of knowledge in the field? A method of establishing one? ... The examination was a disaster; that

student, who had also become my friend, failed. And I had failed him. (iv; emphases added)

North's closing sentence can be read as a revealing double entendre. As readers, we get the sense that North had not simply failed his student's performance on the exam, but that he, as well as the field at large, had also failed the student by not being able to provide him with the sort of overarching synthesis that any discipline should have. In short, there seemed to *be* no answer to what, in any other field, might seem a rather fundamental question. North then summarizes what he feels are the key questions for composition: "What exactly is the field of Composition? Where does it come from? Where is it going?" (iv). It is worth noting that North posed these questions to himself around 1978— a time when the process movement was well underway and the "paradigm" was being established.

However, in *MKC* we see North moving away from the notion of a paradigm—a notion he clearly felt was unsuitable given the continuing inability of composition, as a field, to answer basic questions regarding disciplinary identity. Ultimately, then, North eschews the concept of a paradigm and instead adopts Paul Diesing's approach from *Patterns of Discovery in the Social Sciences* (1971). Essentially, North attempts to obsolete the idea of a composition paradigm by instead focusing on subcultures (communities within a field) that exercise methods which are determined by the boundaries of a particular community. North maps out different groups within the composition community (*e.g.*, Practitioners, Scholars, and Researchers) based on their individual epistemic methodologies in order to demonstrate how each group attempts to increase available disciplinary knowledge. Practitioners, he argues, work to discover

“What do we do?”; Researchers toward discovering “What happened?”; and Scholars toward discovering “What does it mean?” (3). North provides eight methodological communities in all (Practitioners, Historians, Philosophers, Critics, Experimentalists, Clinicians, Formalists, and Ethnographers). A case-by-case review of each is unnecessary here. What is important is North’s contention that the various camps responded to the coalescing of composition toward a discrete discipline with a “methodological land rush” (17). This rush, North argues, was marked by scholars devaluing, even demeaning, the existing knowledge built up by practitioners in favor of more scientific modes of inquiry (or knowledge gathering). As a result, various factions within composition began forwarding their favored epistemic modes. I would suggest that this ‘methodological scramble,’ as North calls it, for disciplinary recognition was actually a continuation of the rhetorical debates that arose against the dominance of the process model.

Indeed, North’s portrait of the field actually represents an expansion of those early rhetorical skirmishes regarding the purview of composition research. *MKC* evidences North’s clear aversion to sociopolitical interests, the connections between literary studies and composition studies, and even rhetorical studies (or any studies that were not, in his view, directly related to composition pedagogy). In this regard, North’s position, somewhat surprisingly, shares some similarities with Maxine Hairston’s (one of the most ardent defenders of the process paradigm). In fact, his titular portrayal of composition as an “*emerging field*” not only challenges the notion of a paradigm, but also helps him begin the process of obfuscating the role rhetorical studies have played in composition history. North positions the study of Rhetoric as separate from the study of composition while conceding that there are points of overlap. Thus, when he discusses

scholars such as Edward P. J. Corbett, James Kinneavy, Walter Ong, *et al.*, he chooses not to classify them as Rhetoricians, and instead treats with their work only “as such inquiries are relevant to Composition” (64). This move to purge composition of what he saw as illegitimate influences is reminiscent of Hairston’s desire to separate composition from the influences of literary studies. While North recognizes a rich historical tradition in the study of Rhetoric, one cannot help but see his doubt of any pedagogically useful relationship between composition studies and Rhetoric. Its primary value for composition, as North describes it, is associational. That is, Rhetoric provided legitimacy to composition within the competitive English department:

As new modes of inquiry compete for power in Composition, they need to prove themselves, and a chief means for doing so is to demonstrate their ties to some already legitimate academic enterprise. One such enterprise—and one that sells particularly well in the English department, where many of these inquirers have had to worry about their academic survival—is Rhetoric. (64)

Rhetoric, then, according to North, was valuable because it brought a certain degree of academic credibility, even *gravitas*, to the emerging field of composition studies. Moreover, it just “*sounds better*” than “plain Composition” (65). This was obviously a grossly oversimplified summation of the relationship signified by the *Rhetoric and Composition* appellation. Still, such a move allowed North to somewhat circumvent the emerging roles of discourse theory, literary studies, and political interests in composition studies. As we might expect, and as we shall see in the reviews of *MKC*, the field took immediate notice.

To summarize, North's *MKC* focused on institutional (disciplinary and departmental) influences shaping composition with virtually no discussion of the larger society in which all of these operate. Moreover, *MKC* reflects a clear preference to isolate composition from influences North considers largely illegitimate in composition studies (e.g., literary studies, rhetorical studies). While he references literacy crises (a social influence), he treats them with a hefty dose of skepticism. As a result, North is able to frame his history in a largely apolitical context (excepting, of course, the institutional politics of the field). While he utilizes the terms *conservative* and *liberal*, he does not typically use them in an overtly political sense. Rather, *conservative* is used to reference practitioners who rely on pedagogical lore (traditional), and *liberal* references just about everyone else (compositionists attempting to implement new and wide-ranging research, philosophy, etc.).

Lastly, *MKC* illustrates North's attempts to instill field-wide defenses against the opposing, oppressive forces that surround the Practitioners. His primary rhetorical goal appears to be defending pedagogy as a legitimate method of research. *MKC* ultimately represents a bit of a balancing act. On the one hand, North is clearly trying to dispense with a monolithic paradigm that would place stifling limits on the Practitioners' ability to construct their pedagogical "House of Lore" (North 27). On the other hand, he is also laying out defenses against the methodological land-rushers who would disenfranchise the Practitioners as makers of knowledge and instead position them as mere technicians.

David Bartholomae

David Bartholomae's review of *MKC*, which was published in the 1988 spring edition of *Rhetoric Review*, was the earliest by a noted figure in composition. On the

whole, his review is decidedly negative. Indeed, Bartholome expresses outright impatience with North's chosen narrative framework, his analyses of the various methodological camps, and the project's various conclusions. At one point, Bartholomae complains, "I tired of his persistent, bogus surprise at discovering that methods are limited and limiting and that none of these researcher/scholars is telling the Truth about writing" (226). The capitalized *T* offers a clue to at least one aspect of Bartholomae's impatience. The permeating problem with North's text, according to Bartholomae, is the notion that any researcher can objectively describe, with any sort of scientific certainty, what a particular community does, why it does it, and what it means. The anti-scientism Bartholomae expresses toward North's approach is reminiscent of the ongoing battles between Hairston and those who opposed her desire to break the bonds between composition and literary studies. Bartholomae echoes this struggle when he analyzes North's report of the status of composition as "trying to maintain a unified front against a larger threat: the English department..." (224). For Bartholomae, North's *MKC* is an account of the "grand and petty politics of disciplinary life (cast in terms of right and wrong, truth and error)" (224). North's belief that he can position himself as an objective, all-seeing observer, according to Bartholomae, undermines the integrity of *MKC*.

The overriding criticism Bartholomae levels toward *MKC* involves North's blindness (willful or otherwise) to the larger cultural framework in which composition operates. On the one hand, he argues, North's attention to mere disciplinary politics results in an argument about "interestedness" that "we have heard before" (Bartholomae 226). He continues to by arguing that the *real problems* that need to be addressed, the ones' North ignores, are *cultural* in nature. He goes so far as to accuse North of

fabricating a fiction that he, as a researcher, is free from larger political interests. Bartholomae is happy, however, to provide an example of the missing political elements. He does so initially in his description of North's narrative choices, which he laces with a positively Marxist use of social class hallmarks. This sort of sardonic Marxist critique is somewhat odd coming from Bartholomae, whose interest is typically more focused on community cultures and discourse. Nonetheless, Bartholomae describes North's presentation of the competing methodological camps as a representation of "class war, with 'practitioners' as the working class, 'scholars' as the alienated intellectual class, and 'researchers' as the rising bourgeoisie, pocketing the capital generated by the growth in the Composition business" (224). The main plot, Bartholomae continues, is one of "struggle and revolution" (224). In describing North's chosen narrative perspective, Bartholomae complains, "This is the imperialist's representation of the native, and it is odious and, as always, untrue" (225). Clearly, Bartholomae is lacing his review with a political sense that he feels is missing from North's history, and is placing North on the wrong side. Indeed, one cannot help but suspect that, prior to reading and reviewing *MKC*, Bartholomae had already fully digested Berlin's *Rhetoric and Reality*.

This is important to Bartholomae because he feels North's "fiction" undermines the argument of the text. To drive this point home, Bartholomae hones in on the North's descriptions of practitioners. Not surprisingly, he draws attention to North's chosen mode of discourse:

he talks about teachers through a grid determined by a tired and corrupt "anthropological" way of speaking: They (the teachers/the others) belong to an oral culture, they can talk but not write or think, they deal in a

“mythic kind of truth,” they can barely rise of above the specifics of daily life ... they go to conferences the way we go to movies, for escape and to be entertained. (226)

This description of North’s view of practitioners seems, to me, inaccurate. Still, to be fair, Bartholomae is making a point about North’s chosen mode of discourse, which he sees as both misguided and ironic. As he rightly points out, North values the methodology of practitioners and was, in *MKC*, trying to defend their role as knowledge makers in composition. For Bartholomae, however, “the text ... is bound (at least here) to a derivative language in representing its point of view” (226). His argument is that such derivative language, from a larger political perspective, does practitioners no favors.

Bartholomae, then, sees *MKC* as offering nothing new to the field of Composition, despite its potential to do so; indeed, in his view, it even ends up being counterproductive at times. The *reason* it offers nothing new is North’s refusal to acknowledge any political or cultural considerations beyond the discipline itself. Moreover, Bartholomae questions whether the political forces *MKC does* refer to actually enjoy the sort of power North attributes to them. North should have been looking, according to Bartholomae, at the politics of discursive practices:

[His method] will not answer the question of what we should do to improve revision, since the accounts of what revision is will be driven by different representations of what good writing is, and representations of the good in writing are based on representations of the relationship between an individual and a culture, and these are representations of value and they exist only at the exclusion of other representations, which means

that you can't care about your work and not fail to do it at the expense of someone else's, at least not in this fallen world. (228)

So while Bartholomae concedes that North's text offers a means by which to reflect on methodological problems, he argues that it fails to address a more pressing need and, to some degree, to accomplish what North set out to do: "it finally leaves him unable to answer our most pressing questions about who we are, where we have come, and what we should do next" (228). This judgment is important in two ways. On the one hand, it illustrates a growing identity crisis within composition—one that North, according to Bartholomae, has ultimately been unable address with his portrait of the field. On the other hand, it also indicates, at least on Bartholomae's part thus far, a growing interest in political considerations when contemplating composition's disciplinary status and identity. Indeed, Bartholomae appears as passionately concerned with this as North was.

There are, of course, apparent rhetorical goals at work in Bartholomae's review. For example, he clearly rebuts the notion that discourse theory, Bartholomae's own area of interest, does not deserve a distinct place in North's accounting of the field's influences. Moreover, Bartholomae's irritated dismissal of North's account of institutional politics creates space for broader political concerns. This move also allows him to rhetorically deride the debate regarding composition's relationship to literary studies. He frames North's depiction of this relationship as the "petty politics of disciplinary life," where *petty* is read in the strict sense (*i.e.*, trivial), yet still carries connotation of contemptibility. Bartholomae's resistance to separating composition from literary studies is reminiscent of Lester Faigley's, who, in "Competing Theories of Process" (1986), argued that composition's connection to literary studies was central to

resisting the “technicization” of composition and to ensuring its position as a politically interested discipline (528). Bartholomae appears to share this interest insofar as he resists the idea that composition should be viewed as a discipline operating in a vacuum, and he clearly wants nothing to do with the idea that composition should be separate from literary studies. His own preference for discourse studies *demand*s that composition remain a socially interested discipline, and literary studies is an important avenue to that end. The summary sense one gets from Bartholomae’s review of *MKC* is that, as a result of willful political naiveté, North’s survey ends up being petty, unoriginal, and ultimately counterproductive.

James C. Raymond

One year after Bartholomae’s review of *MKC*, three others followed. It is worth considering that scholars, by this point, had two years to consume and compare North’s and Berlin’s visions of composition. James C. Raymond’s review appeared in the February, 1989 issue of *College Composition and Communication*. It is also worth remembering that Raymond was, at the time, the editor of *College English*. Initially, Raymond’s review appears far more positive than Bartholomae’s. With a careful read, though, it becomes clear that Raymond limits the value of North’s history and shares similar concerns with Bartholomae regarding *MKC*’s exclusionary tendencies.

Raymond opens by praising North for providing a useful map of the methodological territories in composition. This, however, appears to be nearly the only value Raymond finds for *MKC*. As a mapping project, he praises the bibliographical value of the text, and goes so far as to assert that it should become required reading for all graduate seminars; whether it did is questionable. Raymond goes on to praise the text’s

ability to impart research methods, as well as knowledge, to young scholars; but, curiously enough, he immediately attacks North's methodological analyses for their "merciless predictability" (93). This, of course, was exactly what Bartholomae "tired of" in his reading of *MKC*. So, in this regard, Raymond is implicitly suggesting, as Bartholomae did, that there was nothing new in *MKC* beyond a handy bibliographical map of the various methodological camps in composition.

The exclusive nature of *MKC*, however, becomes a major fault for Raymond, as it was for Bartholomae. Raymond is a bit more thorough than Bartholomae in pointing out which important theories and figures are excluded. While highlighting the oversimplified nature of North's methodological groupings, he pays special attention to North's decision to forego a Rhetoricians group altogether. He notes the "somewhat condescending view of the rhetoricians," and then suggests the decision is "almost ideological" (94). It is worth remembering here that ideology was a central concern of Berlin's *Rhetoric and Reality*. Raymond then argues that North's exclusion of Rhetoric is a profound problem because it precludes philosophical scholarship beyond composition circles, "specifically, isolation from the larger and more interesting senses of rhetoric that motivate people like Richard Rorty and Terry Eagleton and Frank Lentricchia to look to it as perhaps the only defensible methodology in a post-structuralist era" (94). This, of course, represents a clear rebutting of North's contention that considering rhetoricians *as* rhetoricians was not beneficial for a methodological inquiry (North 64). Raymond continues to challenge North's choice in this regard: "Derrida does not appear in the index. Neither does Barthes, or Saussure. Nor, in fact, does anyone who has elaborated a philosophy of language that might tell people within composition circles, if not how to conduct research, at least why

our research is hedged by certain limitations that we would do well to acknowledge” (94-95). Initially, we should notice that this is quite the about face for Raymond’s review. In the second paragraph, Raymond praised North’s text as a sort of research guide that offered “a clear paradigm . . . explaining how different sorts of researchers gather, examine, and disseminate knowledge—or at least how they *ought* to do these things” (93; emphasis added). Now, however, Raymond is clearly taking North to task for not being thorough enough, or even *open-minded* enough in his own research considerations. His references to Continental philosophers represent a not-so-veiled attempt to characterize *MKC* as lagging (willfully or otherwise) behind the times.

In addition, the names Raymond drops are worth taking serious note of. We should remember, again, that Berlin’s *Rhetoric and Reality* had also, by the time of Raymond’s review, been in circulation for two years. Considering Berlin’s work with ideology, rhetoric, and the Marxist interests he shares with scholars like Terry Eagleton (whom Raymond specifically mentions), and considering the political interests of some of the philosophers Raymond mentions (*e.g.*, Derrida, Rorty), it seems clear that Raymond is representing burgeoning political influences and interests in composition (and echoing, in this regard, some of Bartholomae’s concerns). Moreover, Raymond’s reference to Eagleton, and North’s exclusion of him, points to the continuing divide over the relationship between composition and literary studies. Raymond’s nod toward Eagleton offers us a chance to consider how the field’s growing political interests and the tension over the relationship between literary studies and composition studies might have been linked. Eagleton is, after all, a literary theorist as well as a Marxist scholar and activist. His 1983 *Literary Theory: an Introduction* (*LT* hereafter), which was quite well

received,¹ ends by imploring literature scholars to begin paying more attention to rhetoric. The timing of Eagleton's *LT* is also interesting in that it was published only four years before Berlin's *Rhetoric and Reality*. In *LT*, and then later in *Rhetoric and Reality*, we see representatives from both literary studies and composition raising these same concerns Raymond leverages against North's *MKC*. Raymond's review, coupled with Bartholomae's, suggests the degree to which these concerns were taking root in composition.

Richard L. Larson

Larson's review of *MKC*, appearing in the same issue of *College Composition and Communication* as Raymond's, continues the pattern that we've seen in the previous reviews. That is, he begins with faint praise of North's text by pointing to its bibliographic value. Unlike the previous reviews, however, Larson places North's accounting of the field a step below a ready bibliographic text and instead refers to it as a "trial framework" (95). The implication, of course, is that as a mapping project, North's text is academically useful, but, on the other hand, not accurate enough to warrant disciplinary approval. The rest of Larson's review describes the flaws which, according to him, lead *MKC* astray from the path of an honest accounting of composition studies. Indeed, despite North's assertion that "there is not ... any inherently Rhetorical mode of inquiry," Larson's review suggests that, ironically, North's inquiry into the field is

¹ In his review of the 2nd edition *LT*, for example, David Herman refers to the 1st edition's "large impact on an audience starved, apparently, for an accessible introduction to then-new developments in literary criticism and theory." He also points to the "robust sales and the plethora of praise it received from a wide range of sources (from the *New York Times Book Review* to *The Nation*) as attesting to "the power of Eagleton's story about literary theory and to the skill and persuasiveness with which he told that story" (139). It's also worth noting that despite Herman's somewhat critical review of the 2nd edition, *LT* went on to enjoy a 3rd edition in 2008.

specifically rhetorical in nature (North 64). Of course, with Berlin's *Rhetoric and Reality* in the academic air, we might well suspect that Larson, like Raymond, is suggesting that North's exclusion of Rhetoric is ideological in nature.

To make this case, Larson points to North's narrative positions, the rhetoric of his descriptions of the various methodological camps, and, finally, the presumed ulterior motives in *MKC*. Larson argues that North rather quickly "abandons the stance of the descriptive ethnographer" and instead adopts that of the "propaganda analyst" (96). Larson does not, by this phrase, mean to suggest that North engages in a rhetorical analysis of the field, exposing tendencies toward propaganda, but rather that North exercises extreme scrutiny in attempting to undermine the findings of scholars from various methodological approaches. The rhetoric, according to Larson, enters through North's "witheringly intense" scrutiny of the scholars whose work he attacks— which ends up being everyone's work except for the Practitioners.' On the one hand, Larson points to North's use of phrases like "colonization," a "Peace Corps aura," and "Power Play" (qtd. in Larson 97). He argues that virtually every camp North deals with (except the Practitioners) and several individuals are portrayed as attempting to dominate practitioners and to "claim power over what constitutes knowledge in Composition ..." (qtd. in Larson 97). Even individual scholars are not safe as North categorizes Clinton Burhan as "chauvinist" and Emig as condescending (Larson 97). Conversely, according to Larson, North's rhetoric toward practitioners resonates with "moving sympathy," and their work is described as a "rambling ... delightful old manse" (Larson 96-97). Through Larson's eyes, North rhetoricizes practitioners as victims *vis-à-vis* a rising tide of power-hungry academic land grabbers.

This last description leads to Larson's ultimate take on *MKC*— that it is rhetorically driven by a subtext. Larson argues that the real intent of *MKC* is to “nudge Practitioners toward methodological ‘self-consciousness,’ and to show the frailty of other knowledge-makers’ claims that their findings are worthier than those of Practitioners” (97). Here, then, Larson attempts to put the lie to North's assertion that there is no “inherently rhetorical mode of inquiry” (North 64). Clearly, Larson is demonstrating his objection to North's refusal to acknowledge rhetorical considerations when conducting his survey of methodologies by pointing out *MKC*'s inherent rhetorical agenda (and, thus, its ideological nature). Larson's frustration with North's choice to ignore rhetorical considerations places him, then, firmly in line with Raymond's perspective on *MKC*.

One final similarity worth noting between Larson's review and those of Bartholomae and Raymond is the assertion that there is nothing new to see in *MKC*, or, to use Larson's phrase, “one may not find the ultimate judgments illuminating” (96). Larson reaches this conclusion for the same reasons Bartholomae and Raymond do: *MKC*'s exclusion of rhetoric and ideological interests. As with Bartholomae's and Raymond's reviews, Larson ultimately faults North's unwillingness to embrace, to any genuinely positive degree, these new concerns in composition. However, while Bartholomae and Raymond were concerned with larger sociopolitical considerations, Larson, ironically, points to North's exclusion of even intra-disciplinary rhetoric. Put another way, because of North's unwillingness to embrace studies of rhetoric and ideology, *MKC* not only offers nothing new to composition studies, but also fails to fully explore the forces it claims to focus on: institutional politics. Regarding Larson's assertion that *MKC* offers a trial framework, his closing mention of Berlin's *Rhetoric and Reality* is telling. Following,

once again, the lines of Bartholomae and Raymond, Larson prefers Berlin's willingness to embrace sociopolitical influences when trying to understand composition's history, its present state, and its future (Larson 98).

Richard Lloyd-Jones

Richard Lloyd-Jones's review of *MKC* also appeared in the same 1989 issue of *College Composition and Communication* as Raymond's and Larson's, marking the third review of *MKC* in that issue. Initially, Lloyd-Jones's review appears as a stark contrast to the other reviews in its generally positive tone. There are, however, a few telling similarities. In fact, a thorough read of his review reveals a few ironies at work in his praise.

While Lloyd-Jones's review is not nearly as in depth as Bartholomae's, Raymond's, or Larson's, he shares the sense that North's *MKC* provides a "framework for understanding" the wide variety of research available in composition studies. Moreover, as with Raymond, he believes the text "will doubtless enter reading lists of every graduate student preparing to enter the field..." (98). Once again, we see *MKC* being lauded for its bibliographic value to graduate students who are trying to get a sense of the field. However, while the previous reviewers found fault in North's overly negative treatment of the Scholars and Researchers and with his rather insular view of legitimate composition research, Lloyd-Jones's praises *MKC* as "fair, and broadly inclusive" (100). Disagreeing with Bartholomae's presentation of North as somewhat superior in his narrative stance, Lloyd-Jones refers to him as "modest and open to challenge" (100). Somewhat frustratingly, Lloyd-Jones offers no real examples of this perceived graciousness on North's part. Instead, his examples and textual references

typically involve comparing North's field-wide study with his own (*Research in Written Composition*, by Braddock, Lloyd-Jones, and Schoer).

One irony of Lloyd-Jones's review, however, lies in his praising anticipation of the extra-disciplinary value of *MKC*. The previous reviewers all argued that *MKC* is overly exclusive in its consideration of relevant fields and influences for composition. Yet Lloyd-Jones feels North's text is, probably, "even more important for those opting to specialize in other English studies" (98). Of course these "other English studies" are clearly literary studies, and Lloyd-Jones becomes more explicit about this when he claims that a "Victorian scholar ought to know at least as much about Composition as a modernist needs to know about the Renaissance" (98). Given North's position on the relationship between composition and literary studies, we may not only find this assertion ironic, but we might also wonder how many literature scholars reading *MKC* (assuming that any *did*), would share Lloyd-Jones's sentiment.

Despite Lloyd-Jones's initially and generally positive review, his penultimate paragraph brings his response more in line with the previous reviewers and, in yet another irony, somewhat undermines his own assertions regarding North's inclusiveness:

In North's system, some kinds of collateral knowledge seem to be diminished, although not ignored. I wish for greater emphasis on the study of language, especially in its social dimensions. The philosophers are raising questions about language as a sign system and the ethnographers [*sic*], implicitly at least, must face issues of society So, too, I'd be more comfortable with additional material on learning theory, both in its

obvious relation to teaching and in its implicit connection with psycholinguistics

But I am riding my own hobby horses.... (100)

Recalling the critiques of Bartholomae, Raymond, and Larson, and their shared concerns over sociopolitical influences (“issues of society”), it is clear that Lloyd-Jones is not the only one riding those hobby horses.

Karen I. Spear

The final review to be analyzed is Karen Spear’s, which appeared in 1989 in the *Journal of Advanced Composition*. Of all the reviews here considered, hers is surely the most consistently positive and sympathetic. Indeed, Spear deploys some critical ironies in countering a few of the politically-minded assertions at work in the previously considered reviews. Unlike the other reviewers who predict that North’s *MKC* will become required reading for graduate students, Spear tells us how the text had already “come up in a conversation with a candidate for a rhetoric and composition position” at her university (295). So during the same year when other reviewers were predicting *MKC* would become useful for graduate students, Spear attempts to exhibit how it had already become useful for job seeking professionals. In addition, while Bartholomae and Larson find North’s tone and narrative framework to be, at times at least, distasteful, Spear argues that North is intentionally personal and conversational in his approach—that his tone is effectively vocative in nature. As she says, “He departs from the safe, scholarly tradition of detached, dispassionate neutrality to invite readers into his conversation about the meaning and value of our field” (207). She sees the “spirited” responses as a sign of

success on North's part and compares them with "our best seminars" (207). So one of the facets which Larson and Bartholomae label as flawed is, for Spear, a shining strength.

It is also important to note how Spear's praise in the previous quotation turns the conversation to "meaning and value in our field." As with Bartholomae, Spear engages what seems to be a serious underlying concern in *MKC* as well as the real source of contention between North and his critics: institutional politics. As Spear describes it, "The book is as much about the politics of composition as it is about its epistemology" (207). Spear recognizes how North sees composition, as a field, being "imperiled by a lack of coherence and methodological integrity" (206). However, she takes a position more in line with North's (as opposed to the other reviewers) in that rather than chastising North for not turning outward enough, she instead rushes to defend his concern for Practitioners. Her sympathy with North's belief that Practitioners are a central means of research in the discipline is made evident in her response to one of her chosen selections from *MKC*:

Practitioners, North argues, "have been responsible for Composition holding together as long as it has. ... What is required here, however, as the basis for a transformed Composition, is a full recognition of and appreciation for lore: an understanding of what it is and how it works such that other kinds of knowledge can *usefully* interact with it."

...

North's prognostications strike a responsive chord with Practitioners who—rightly, I think—understand the enduring importance of serious composition pedagogy to education. (Spear 207)

Practitioner's lore, then, is envisioned as an—or perhaps *the*—integrating force of composition. Moreover, to ensure composition's integrity, all other kinds of knowledge need to be integrated in a way that permits efficacious interaction with the lore (and practice) of Practitioners. What is implicit in this position is that, as is, extra-disciplinary influences are creating a centrifugal effect for composition as a discipline. Spear appears to fully embrace this position even though she labels herself as “part of the landrush” (207).

Given the critical approaches of the previous reviews, Spear's attention to sociopolitical rhetoric and realities in conveying the Practitioner's plight is of particular interest. She cleverly utilizes these to deploy an ironic twist in countering the criticisms of the previous reviewers. This is accomplished through her own paraphrasing of North, her selected quotation from one practitioner, and her analogical allusions to the institutional politics which threaten composition's disciplinarity. After highlighting North's position on the essential nature of lore, Spear ups the stakes of his politicized rhetoric describing the victimization of Practitioners. When referencing North's phrase “land rush” (the same sort of rhetoric Larson took issue with), she connects it to the more politically charged description of settlers *vs.* natives: “North argues the new settlers succeeded in disenfranchising the native population by assigning them the status of *technicians* and their knowledge to the stature of lore, dependent largely on folksy traditions of ritual and oral transmission for dissemination” (207; emphasis added). Here again we should recall Faigley's “Competing Theories of Process” wherein he argues against dividing composition from literary studies as a means of preventing the “technicization” of the discipline. Moreover, given that Faigley relies on the Marxist

thinkers Stanley Aronowitz and Henry A. Giroux when making this argument, it is clear that his resistance to technicization was meant to position composition as a politically interested discipline. By highlighting this passage, Spear is clearly painting such an argument as a rhetorical tool of disenfranchisement (as North did when addressing Emig's condescension) and ingeniously echoing North's argument that Practitioners are political victims rather than naïve technicians.

Spear continues to reinforce the theme of victors and victims in her chosen quotation from her interviews with teachers. It seems reasonable to assume, after all, that in gauging the response of Practitioners to North's text, she interviewed more than one of them; yet, she offers only one example response. The response, not surprisingly, mirrors her own agreement regarding the struggle she sees North revealing in his "dark vision" (Spear 207):

"To the victors..." is an apt subtitle for Chapter 11, implying that the victory will go to the swiftest movers in the writing wars. However, reflecting on the quote in its broader historical context, I find it perhaps even more incisive than North imagined. For the Romans at Carthage, the "spoils" were the ruins of war: the ransacked city with its burned out buildings and savaged populace, the salted fields where no living thing would grow for generations to come, the bitter rewards of conquest. Is this the fate Composition faces? Will we teachers of writing allow ourselves to be brutalized by the conquering hoards? Will we permit our spirits to be poisoned until we are no longer productive? How much longer can we

watch while what we have worked so hard to build is torn out from under us? (qtd. in Spear 208)

As with Spear's analogy involving settlers and natives, we see another writing teacher perceiving pressures against Practitioners as an assault and comparing institutional politics with larger, violent sociopolitical confrontations.

Spear, then, sympathizes with North's umbrage over the reduction of Practitioners to technicians. Moreover, her chosen rhetoric (her analogy, her word choice, and her chosen Practitioner quotation) suggests that she also rejects the view of Practitioners as politically uninterested. Indeed, it is an intriguing irony that Spear places the non-Practitioners in the role of conquerors since, as political interests began to take hold in composition, it was usually those who were most politically interested portraying themselves as the real champions of social justice.

Clearly, Spear is also sympathetic with North's concerns regarding institutional politics, and she draws upon sociopolitical realities to analogize the Practitioners' plight. Indeed, her use of sociopolitical rhetoric is far more vigorous than the other reviewers,' who kept their rhetoric largely confined to academic boundaries rather than specific economic and social realities (save perhaps Bartholomae's Marxist excoriation of North's rhetoric). We should, however, take note that Spear does appear to agree, to one degree or another, with both camps. On the one hand, she sympathizes with the Practitioner's plight and champions their essential work in composition. On the other hand, her politicized rhetoric and her resistance to the idea that Practitioners are politically uninterested technicians suggest she believes composition should consider broader influences on the field *as well as* the disciplinary politics North points up. Her

admonition against the “land rushers” (among whom she includes herself) is really a double irony in that while it turns the political tables against those who demean Practitioners as mere technicians, it also recognizes the importance of considering the ideological origins and goals of *any* given position. Ultimately, she does a shrewd job of arguing for both positions and, thereby, attempting to bring some unity—some synthesis—to the field.

Summary Analysis of Reviews

I would like to begin my summary analysis of the reviews of *MKC* by noting, as Elizabeth Rankin noted in “Taking Practitioner Inquiry Seriously” (1990), that “It isn’t often that a new book in Composition studies merits three substantive reviews, by three well-known figures, in a single issue of a professional journal” (260). In particular, I think it is worth questioning why all three reviewers Rankin references (Raymond, Lloyd-Jones, and Larson) are, as she says, “unanimous in their assessment of [*MKC*’s] importance” (260). After all, after a careful read, it is difficult to say any of the reviewers here discussed, other than Spear, are overly positive in their assessment of North’s text. Instead, they all seem to focus on the bibliographic value of North’s mapping of the field into various camps, and then proceed to criticize the rhetorical scope of *MKC*. But why would this be the focal point of interest for composition as the process movement was passing away? I would posit two reasons.

One reason for the field’s appreciation may arise from the fact that North’s text adds impetus to a post-process push by shattering the illusion of disciplinary unity afforded by the rhetoric of the process paradigm. At this point in composition history, many were growing ever more leery of a singular, overarching theory that dominated the

field— especially one that pushed the field toward a supposedly objective scientism. North's *MKC* reveals the wide variety of methodologies active within the discipline. After process had accomplished the work of establishing composition as a respectable field with its own area of research, scholars of composition were anxious to see the potential areas of research diversified beyond the strict confines of process. Most of the praise for North's *MKC*, after all, is heaped upon his far-reaching mapping of the field's methodological camps. Its *historical* account goes, for the most part, undiscussed (save by, to some degree, Bartholomae, who disputes North's claims regarding the controlling political power of English departments). Pushing aside the idea of a paradigm and discussing, instead, how the field was rapidly expanding its intellectual territory by incorporating a variety of methods (in terms of research, philosophy, and theory), and how to value those various methods, was a conversation that composition scholars very much wanted to have.

In truth, though, it was not a new conversation, and perhaps that is why reviewers such as Bartholomae, Raymond, and Larson found nothing new being presented in North's account of the field. Initially, this may seem an odd assertion on their part. After all, who, prior to North, had offered, as these same reviewers point out, such a broad, detailed map of the various methodologies at work in composition studies? This, again, was the very point of praise that even Bartholomae ceded to *MKC*. How, then, can each of these reviewers assert there was nothing "new" or "illuminating" in *MKC*? Perhaps it is because *MKC* didn't actually start a new conversation. Instead, it expanded an existing one. What should the focus of composition be? Recall North's treatment of the rhetoricians when he says he will discuss their work only "as such inquiries are relevant

to Composition” (64). This qualifier from North may be viewed as a defining point of contention between adherents of the process paradigm and those pushing a post-process movement. That is, what inquiries *are* relevant to composition studies? It is a question that the field continues to wrestle over today (as I discussed in my introduction).

Interestingly enough, North’s position on this issue, coupled with his stern treatment of all methodological camps except the Practitioners, places him surprisingly close to Hairston’s rather focused expectations for composition studies. Certainly, North, at first glance, appears far removed from Hairston’s position given *MKC* represents a decisive stepping away from the idea of a paradigm in composition. However, North envisions the *purview* of composition very much as Hairston does, and *MKC* reveals a deep suspiciousness, perhaps even hostility, toward methodologies that would supplant pedagogy as the central interest of the field. Moreover, there are clear indications that North is leery of any sociopolitical interjections or accusations at work in the field. While this is not treated thoroughly in his text, his discussion of Emig’s treatment of Practitioners does provide an overt, albeit passing, example:

like Moss, Emig hints at a certain Practitioner malevolence, in this case with what seem to be political overtones: “One wonders at times if the shying away from reflexive writing is not an unconscious effort to keep the ‘average’ and ‘less able’ student from the kind of writing he can do best and, often, far better than the ‘able,’ since there is so marvelous a democracy in the distribution of feeling and imagination.” (North 326)

Again, social politics is not a major topic of discussion in *MKC*. North is far more interested in institutional politics. His point here, and the foundation of his suspicion

toward sociopolitical concerns in composition, is that such politically-minded accusations became one means, among many, for demeaning and discrediting the work of Practitioners.

Sociopolitical concerns were, however, a major point of concern for North's reviewers. This is particularly evident in the reviews of Bartholomae and Raymond. For Bartholomae, North's refusal to engage the cultural situation of composition underlies all of *MKC*'s faults (including North's narrative mode). Raymond faults North's ideological bias for the overly diminished scope regarding Rhetoric and rhetorical concerns. Even Spear draws heavily upon political narratives when defending North's treatment of Practitioners *vis-à-vis* the other methodological camps. Indeed, the lack of sociopolitical inquiry in *MKC* led all of its reviewers, except for Spear, to limit its professional use to graduate reading lists. This was damning a rather groundbreaking text with the faintest of praise. And, ironically, the fact that *MKC* garnered the sort of attention Rankin points to indicates how North's text became at least as important for professionals as it did for graduate students—arguably more so. Clearly, something big was at stake in *MKC*. In addition, when we consider just how focused many of North's reviewers were on politics, rhetoric, and ideology, as well as the names being dropped by some of its reviewers (*e.g.*, Eagleton, Rorty, Berlin), it appears quite evident that the two years of circulation that Berlin's *Rhetoric and Reality* had already enjoyed were influencing some, if not all, of the reviews of *MKC*. As we shall see in the following chapters, the place of sociopolitical concerns in composition would continue grow as a point of contention for the field.

While North, in *MKC*, goes along with the rising resistance to an overarching theory—a paradigm—he resists the increasing calls to look beyond concerns not directly

connected to writing instruction when defining the field. In using the term *define*, I include disciplinary identity. Thus, we might see the battles lines being drawn between the guardians of process, the post-process advocates such as North, and the more politically interested post-process scholars such as Bartholomae and Raymond, as representing a burgeoning identity crisis in the field—a disruption in the march toward disciplinarity. The process-paradigm had *seemingly* afforded the field a very clear identity by providing a specific area of research, well-defined methodologies, and clear connections between research and pedagogy. What, then, remained for disciplinary identity, for disciplinary purpose, when that paradigm was abandoned for something else—particularly when no-one in the field yet knew what that something else would be? This was the underlying question that drove reviewers to both value and criticize *MKC*.

CHAPTER IV: NEW RHETORICS, NEW DIRECTIVES

As I described in the previous chapter, the reviews of *The Making of Knowledge in Composition* (MKC hereafter) criticize Stephen North's neglect of the political dimension of composition instruction. With this firmly in mind, I would like to spend this chapter focusing on the work of James Berlin to make that case that he was arguably the most influential thinker in galvanizing composition's political turn. Moreover, reviewing Berlin's 1987 *Rhetoric and Reality* sets the stage for my remaining chapters. Through this text, Berlin took his first step in providing the field with a goal beyond merely preparing students to succeed in other academic fields and a capitalist economy; indeed, composition as a field of service was anathema to Berlin's political philosophy after his conversion to neo-Marxism. Instead, Berlin was primarily interested in establishing the inherently political nature of teaching composition, especially its historical role in maintaining the status quo of a capitalist democracy. He worked to convince his colleagues that composition pedagogy needed to acknowledge this conservative political 'reality' and, most importantly, that it needed to take part in a progressive resistance to this reality.

To elucidate how Berlin achieved this, I will discuss his *Rhetoric and Reality* as a progressive text aimed at politicizing the profession. I will, at times, also reference his 1988 "Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class" as a means of simplifying some of the arguments in *Rhetoric and Reality*. However, that article's influence will receive more focused attention in the following chapter. Ultimately, I plan to highlight how Berlin used these texts to present two of the dominant branches of the process model—cognitivism and expressivism—as serving to maintain a capitalist system and, thus, social injustice. In

this chapter, *Rhetoric and Reality* will be discussed as his foundational text in those efforts. Just as my previous chapter paid considerable attention to the field's reception of *MKC*, this chapter will pay careful attention to the reception of Berlin's *Rhetoric and Reality*. Part of my focus will include comparative references to the purposes of North's *MKC* and Berlin's *Rhetoric and Reality*, observations on how reviewers of Berlin's text ignored *MKC* even when it was pertinent to their discussions, and on how they responded to his political vision of the field.

As the reviews of *MKC* in the previous chapter indicate, North's persistent neglect of rhetoric or politics constituted a fatal flaw in his presentation of composition studies. This led reviewers such as David Bartholomae to conclude that *MKC* offered nothing new to the field. Moreover, Bartholomae's critique of *MKC* indicates that the profession had already become receptive to the kind of political considerations Berlin offers in *Rhetoric and Reality*. Thus, despite mapping all that the field had to offer in terms of research approaches, as well as the perceived strengths and weaknesses of each, *MKC* was relegated to a bibliographic guide for graduate students. This final judgment of *MKC*'s ostensible usefulness, then, gives us some idea of the field's disposition toward politics in the post-process era. As the reviews of *MKC* indicate, the field was becoming increasingly concerned with the political imbrications of writing instruction and even a little impatient with those who ignored them. This, then, provides the fundamental point of contrast between *MKC* and *Rhetoric and Reality*. While North openly attempted to dismiss the relevance of rhetoric and politics to composition studies, *Rhetoric and Reality* played into the field's emerging interest in the rhetorical dimension of language as a tool for the promotion of social justice through analysis of existing ruling-class structures.

In the scheme of my dissertation, the goal of this chapter is to show that composition's "social turn" became more interested in specifically political concerns as evidenced in Berlin's presentation of composition history and the subsequent reactions he elicited. Accordingly, I will pay close attention to Berlin's neo-Marxist philosophy and political goals, as well as how his three "rhetorics," as presented in *Rhetoric and Reality* and "Rhetoric and Ideology," are grounded within his Marxist conception of history. Another necessary discussion of this chapter will be the ways in which *Rhetoric and Reality* agitated ongoing tensions within the field over composition studies' relationship to literary studies. Because North had avoided political concerns altogether, because he looked inward when developing his taxonomy, *MKC* never broached such tensions. Other fields of influence were simply not considered. *Rhetoric and Reality*, however, relies heavily on schools of thought outside the discipline (especially Western Marxism and other branches of Continental philosophy). As a result, it draws on intellectual currents already surging through composition's departmental counterpart, literary studies. Indeed, by 1987, literary studies had already made the political turn Berlin was urging upon composition.

Berlin's Marxism

To understand how *Rhetoric and Reality* represents Berlin's political goals for the field, it is necessary to spend some time explicating Berlin's particular brand of Marxism. In "The Politics of Historiography" (1988; Octalog hereafter), Berlin labels himself a "neo-Marxist" (25). For Berlin, *neo-Marxism* represents an expansion of the traditional Marxist concerns with economic class to considerations of race and gender. Moreover, Berlin's brand of neo-Marxism entails a firm reliance on Louis Althusser's ideas on the

means of class reproduction. Specifically, Berlin was interested in Althusser's account of the means of reproducing the conditions political hierarchies within a society. As he puts it in the Octalog, "what we are engaged in is a conflict of forces in which some people want us to make the same mistakes again because they benefit from us making the same mistakes again" (20). Referring to literary scholar E.D. Hirsch's criticism of American universities, likely his 1987 *Cultural Literacy*, and speaking of the function of universities, Berlin continues,

I don't think that the period of early monopolistic capitalism is that radically different from the period of monopolistic capitalism we are in right now. In other words, the tests designed were then to serve particular purposes in the American democratic university and now we have a profession of composition teachers who are designed to serve the same purposes ... we're here to maintain these dominant class and gender and race relations. (20)

Berlin concludes, "I don't think we can repeat these mistakes exactly as he [Hirsch] would like us to repeat them and that's where we *intervene* in order to stop repeating these mistakes (20; emphasis added). It is this call for intervention that underlies Berlin's intentions in *Rhetoric and Reality*. Using Hirsch as a foil, Berlin makes clear he sees the goal of progressive education as reshaping the national understanding of "culture" and, thus, reshaping the sociopolitical structures that determine it. As these passages also make clear, capitalism is seen as a constantly reproduced obstacle to an equitable distribution of power in US society. This, of course, is not a revelation for anyone familiar with Marxism. However, the manner by which composition classes figured into

this system *was* a new consideration for the field. Moreover, how composition might figure into the distribution of political power was exactly the sort of discussion the field was yearning for. This was made abundantly clear in the reviews of *MKC*. This, then, is the significance of Berlin's Marxist critique of composition's history as presented in *Rhetoric and Reality*. It provided a vision of how composition functioned within the political structuring of US society.

To understand why and how, according to Berlin, composition served the power interests of a dominant class, we must turn more specifically to the development of Western Marxism. As a neo-Marxist, Berlin understandably leans heavily on Western Marxism in *Rhetoric and Reality*—especially, the work of Louis Althusser. Without delving too deep into the philosophy of Western Marxism, it is worth noting that early Western Marxists, being situated in countries wherein the populaces were largely content with capitalist structures of power, found themselves having to understand and undo the forces that bred such contentment. To do so, they increasingly turned their attention away from the economic base that captured the attention of traditional Marxists, and toward the superstructures responsible for reproducing culture. In particular, the Arts commanded considerable intellectual attention (Anderson 75-76). In *Rhetoric and Reality*, Berlin utilizes Althusser's idea of the Ideological State Apparatus (ISA hereafter). Althusser distinguishes between State Apparatuses of power (*e.g.*, the courts, the government, prisons) and ISAs (*e.g.*, churches, schools, family). The function of ISAs, according to Althusser and other Western Marxists, is to reproduce existing control over the means of production by perpetuating ideological realities for the masses. Althusser's notion of schools as an ISA, and thus a reproducer of ideology, guides Berlin's thinking and

agenda in *Rhetoric and Reality*. The primary goal of *Rhetoric and Reality*'s critique of composition history, then, is to reveal the profession as a locus of political power by way of ideological reproduction. With this realization in place, the means would then be open for achieving the teleological goal of Marxism—to displace capitalism with socialism and, ultimately, with communism. This, then, is the guiding philosophy of *Rhetoric and Reality*.

Ideological Rhetorics

Because Berlin's driving purpose in *Rhetoric and Reality* was to convince the field to see the history of American composition pedagogy as the history of a capitalist ISA, he needed to provide the groundwork for an Althusserian reading of the field's history. When analyzing how *Rhetoric and Reality* adapts composition history into this framework, two crucial discussions warrant attention: replacing the traditional term *rhetoric* with the term *rhetorics* and providing a taxonomic framework for the dominant epistemic methods in composition that reveals them as ideological functions. It is equally important to recognize the relationship among these discussions. That is, we should recognize Berlin's discussion of "rhetorics" as *the* necessary step to contextualizing epistemic stances within ideological frameworks and, thus, establishing a pedagogy that educates citizens as critics of ideologies used to maintain social injustices. In the context of the political turn, the semantic step of replacing *rhetoric* with *rhetorics* was one of the most significant, yet least discussed, moments in recent composition history.¹ For Berlin, and later for the field at large, moving from *rhetoric* to *rhetorics* was the keystone for

¹ A search of *CCC*, *Rhetoric Review*, and *College English* from 1987-1989 yields no articles on Berlin's use of this term. Moreover, it was not discussed in any of the reviews of his text, nor was it raised as a point of discussion during the 1989 CCCC panel The Politics of Historiography, on which Berlin participated.

moving the field of composition to a focus on ideology and, thus, political structures. Despite the utter dearth of professional analysis of this move, or perhaps because of that dearth, it remains a complex theoretical movement to untangle. This is in no small part due to the fact that in *Rhetoric and Reality* Berlin uses the term *rhetorics* in a polysemous fashion. As he moves from one context to another, *rhetorics* is used to refer to rhetorical theories (e.g., Aristotelian vs. Ciceronian), or epistemic methods (e.g., objective vs. expressivist), or simply ideological reflections of language (whether intentional or subconscious). If we adhere to a classical conception of rhetoric (say, for example, an Aristotelian model), then it is clearly problematic to conflate a theory of rhetoric with a rhetorical stance or perspective. From a classical standpoint, rhetoric *per se* does not maintain a position—no more than a hammer builds a house. Rather, as a system—a *tekhnē*—rhetoric is *used by a rhetor* in maintaining a position. As such, rhetoric serves equally to maintain or to refute a position, just as a hammer serves equally in building or destroying a house. Berlin makes his case for his *rhetorics*, however, by rooting any given rhetorical theory within epistemological assumptions: “literacy involves a particular variety of rhetoric—a way of speaking and writing within the confines of specific social sanctions. This is possible because every rhetorical system is based in epistemological assumptions about the nature of reality...” (4). Once this movement is made, it is a short step for Berlin to then connect epistemological assumptions with ideological stances. So while Berlin asserts early in *Rhetoric and Reality* that epistemology, rather than ideology, will serve as the basis for his taxonomy of rhetorics, he also reminds us that ideology is “always present by imbrication” (6). The pluralization of *rhetoric* to *rhetorics*, then, was a critical necessity—the *sine qua non*—of Berlin’s

rhetorical theory. It was also well tailored for the field's ongoing desire for a "new rhetoric" to replace classical rhetoric's narrow focus on argument (something *MKC* sorely lacked). Moving from a psychologically-oriented view of the singular *rhetoric* to a sociopolitical-oriented view entailed in the plural *rhetorics* allowed Berlin to tie various theories of rhetoric to ideological positions and, thus, to centralize ideology. Of course centralizing ideology means centralizing politics. Thus, the pluralized *rhetorics* offered just what the discipline had desperately been seeking: a modern and politicized way of thinking about rhetoric.

After taking that essential semantic step, Berlin then elaborates what he sees as the three fundamental rhetorics in composition studies. Here we see one example of his polysemous use of *rhetorics*. Rather than refer to actual theories of rhetoric, Berlin here refers to epistemic stances: Objective Rhetoric, Subjective Rhetoric, and Transactional Rhetoric. These categories represent the next crucial discussion in *Rhetoric and Reality*'s political aims for composition. For anyone who had read *MKC*, Berlin's three simplified categories must surely have been in striking contrast to North's considerably more nuanced taxonomy, and indeed critics would eventually begin to challenge Berlin's taxonomic groupings as grossly oversimplified. One of the more important distinctions worth noting for now, though, is how North's listing of epistemologies in composition paints a field reaching out from within to discover new pathways to knowledge; that's one reason North shows such favor for the Practitioners. For North, composition's epistemic approaches were largely *proactive*. Berlin's neo-Marxist conception of existing epistemologies, however, paints the field as constantly *reactive* to, and usually servicing, a particular ideology. This view of composition as a reactive discipline would also draw

some criticism from the field, but it would nonetheless lead to serious reconsiderations of research methods and practices.

Berlin's three ideological rhetorics—Objective Rhetoric, Subjective Rhetoric, and Transactional Rhetoric—are well enough known in the field that I need not rehearse them here. "Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class" offers a wonderfully pithy review of each of them, although he renames them to Cognitive Rhetoric, Expressionistic Rhetoric, and Social-Epistemic Rhetoric in that article. Indeed, the publication of "Rhetoric and Ideology" in *College English* a year after *Rhetoric and Reality* indicates the interest generated by *Rhetoric and Reality*. For now, though, I would like to briefly reference "Rhetoric and Ideology" to provide a more succinct version of Berlin's argument that each of these rhetorics "occupies a distinct position in its relation to ideology" and, thus, contributes to particular sociopolitical outcomes ("Rhetoric and Ideology" 478). One need only read to the second paragraph of that article to get a strong sense of his argument in this regard:

the rhetoric of cognitive psychology refuses the ideological question altogether, claiming for itself the transcendent neutrality of science. This rhetoric is nonetheless easily preempted by a particular ideological position now in ascendancy because it encourages discursive practices that are compatible with dominant economic, social, and political formations. Expressionistic rhetoric, on the other hand, has always openly admitted its ideological predilections, opposing itself in no uncertain terms to the scientism of current-traditional rhetoric and the ideology it encourages. This rhetoric is, however, open to appropriation by the very forces it

opposes in contradiction to its best intentions. Social-epistemic rhetoric is an alternative that is self-consciously aware of its ideological stand, making the very question of ideology the center of classroom activities, and in so doing providing itself a defense against preemption and a strategy for self-criticism and self-correction. (478).

Here we see in “Rhetoric and Ideology” a clear summary of the indictments of cognitivism (Objective Rhetoric) and expressivism (Subjective Rhetoric) that Berlin prefaced in *Rhetoric and Reality*. In no uncertain terms Berlin is essentially invalidating two dominant methods in the field as aiding, whether they will it or not, repressive power structures while extolling another (Social-Epistemic Rhetoric) as liberating.

There is, however, one distinction between the two texts that is worth noting here. On the one hand, Berlin is recalling his point from *Rhetoric and Reality* that Subjective Rhetoric and Objective Rhetoric both hold fast to the notion of non-contingent truths. In *Rhetoric and Reality* Berlin is quick to highlight this as a problem for Objective Rhetoric but, curiously, does not highlight it as a problem when discussing Subjective Rhetoric. Critics should reasonably expect that he would identify this shared trait as problematic for both. However, when considering Berlin’s desire for political change through writing courses, and his neo-Marxist stance, one can reasonably speculate that he avoids leveling this criticism toward Subjective Rhetoric, at least in *Rhetoric and Reality*, because expressivism shares a key goal with his Marxist agenda. Specifically, Subjective Rhetoric encourages realization of self-consciousness apart from society’s formative influences. In *Rhetoric and Reality*, Berlin explains this through a pedagogical example:

The keeping of a journal is important because it encourages the individual to record her observations of the world in her own unique way. Studying these observations, however, is designed not to promote learning about the external world, but to get the student to see the way she perceives and structures her experience. In other words, these observations allow the individual to study the extent to which her response to experience is unique or imitative, doing so in order to cultivate an original, creative perspective. This perspective at once enhances the quality of life and leads to private perception of ultimate truths, truths which the conventions of society prevent us from realizing. (*Rhetoric and Reality* 14)

The notion of being unconsciously “imitative,” coupled with a concern for how social conventions prevent individuals from realizing particular truths, clearly parallels the Marxist notion of false consciousness even though expressivism relies on the notion of ultimate truths. Still, the ideological influences of convention are clearly a foundational Western Marxist concern, and the substrata of Berlin’s rebuke of Objective Rhetoric. Yet, regarding Subjective Rhetoric’s stance on truth, Berlin’s critique in *Rhetoric and Reality* is noticeably softer. This is, perhaps, due to Subjective Rhetoric’s goal of revealing socially or institutionally induced *perceptions*—a goal that dovetails to some degree with Berlin’s neo-Marxist views. However, as we shall see in the next chapter’s discussion of “Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class,” Berlin eventually takes a firmer stance against Subjective Rhetoric. Because Subjective Rhetoric holds that truths are discovered by and within individuals, rather than through social construction, Berlin dismisses its potential for political change and it is rejected along with cognitivism as hopelessly

appropriable by those in power to maintain unjust economic and political systems.

Ultimately, then, Berlin argues that *both wings* of the previously dominant process model have served, through appropriation at least, to reproduce repressive political structures and should, therefore, be abandoned by the field.

While the historical appropriations and utilizations of particular rhetorics is clearly a central concern in *Rhetoric and Reality's* critique, it is also important to pay attention to Berlin's argument against objective truth—the fundamental fault of cognitivism and expressivism—because it underlies so much of Berlin's thinking in *Rhetoric and Reality*. Indeed, this element would eventually spark debates over the value of empiricism in composition research. For example, we should note Berlin's complaint regarding such truths when he references Descartes's *Discourse on Method*: "Every time that two men speaking of one and the same thing put forth opposite judgments, it is certain that one of them is wrong; and, what is more, neither knows the truth, for if one of them had a clear and distinct opinion, he would eventually force others to agree" (qtd. in Berlin 11). Contextually, Berlin is arguing that Descartes was discussing rhetoric as much as truth because, for Berlin, each is imbricated in the other. In other words, Berlin is here underscoring his view that truth is contingent rather than objective; thus, rhetoric is the arbiter of truth. Under such a critique, Objective and Subjective rhetorics become dangerous tools because they misrepresent the nature of truth as abstract rather than contextual. Such a view, however, appears to place Berlin into a rather classic trap for the skeptics. That is, if Berlin is arguing that truth is always contingent, isn't his own position a non-contingent truth?

New Conversations and New Struggles – Reviews of *Rhetoric and Reality*

If Berlin's goal was to redirect the conversation in composition studies to ideology and politics, then by any measure *Rhetoric and Reality* was smashing success. We can see this not only in the reviews of Berlin's text, but also in the 1988 CCCC panel—the Octalog—and through subsequent scholarly debates in published journals. For now, I would like to focus on the reviews of *Rhetoric and Reality* to show that despite their overall positive nature, they still fell short in predicting the influence *Rhetoric and Reality* would have on the field. *Rhetoric and Reality* was reviewed by four prominent figures in composition studies across the pages of four prominent journals: Sharon Crowley in *College Composition and Communication*, Theresa Enos in the *Journal of Advanced Composition*, Philip M. Keith in *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, and John Brereton in *College English*. The prominence of the reviewers as well as the journals signals the immediate interest the field took in *Rhetoric and Reality*. When reading these reviews, we find that despite some quibbling over his neo-Marxist perspective and some challenges to his oversimplified treatment of cognitivism and expressivism, there was little, if any, apparent resistance to politicizing the field's history or even to Berlin's political goals for the field's future. On the contrary, the reviews convey the sense that a political perspective was long overdue in composition. In addition, we can also see signs of the methodological scramble, as North called it, beginning to coalesce around political concerns. That is, as the field began to increase its focus on politics, various scholars found themselves having to demonstrate why their favored pedagogical approaches remained viable within a political framework.

Sharon Crowley

Sharon Crowley provided one of the earliest reviews of *Rhetoric and Reality* in the May, 1988 issue of *College Composition and Communication*. In some regards, Crowley's brief review takes a critical position toward *Rhetoric and Reality* but also offers caveats of praise. I will begin with one those caveats. Initially, Crowley agrees with Berlin's admonition that the historian must acknowledge personal point-of-view and interpretive strategies and then make them clear to the reader. However, she adds her own supplemental admonition that the historian ensure his or her chosen narrative not "take on a life of its own, driven by its own inner compulsion" (246). By "inner compulsion," Crowley refers to the underlying perspective (or agenda) of the narrator; for *Rhetoric and Reality*, that inner compulsion would clearly be Berlin's neo-Marxist agenda. For instance, she immediately moves to Berlin's focus on composition as, historically, a socially and politically reactive discipline. It is important to recognize, however, that Crowley "applaud[s] Berlin's attempt to write history which illuminates the relationship of pedagogy to social and educational politics" (246). Nonetheless, Crowley contends that Berlin's "theory of history" and "preferences among rhetorical theories" (no doubt formed by those inner compulsions) "cause him to distort history somewhat" (246). The word *somewhat* is interesting here because it suggests a degree of agreement with Berlin's history. Given her applauding of Berlin's attempt to illuminate the relationship between pedagogy and social politics, it seems clear that she welcomes increased professional interest in the historical relationship between the role of composition classes and sociopolitical structures.

What, then, does Crowley find fault in? She begins by taking aim at Berlin's presentation of rhetorical theory. Given her expertise in classical and contemporary rhetoric studies, this is no surprise. However, she does not focus on Berlin's pluralized *rhetorics*. Instead, her first point of contention is with Berlin's taxonomy of rhetorics (and the associated grouping of theorists). She points out that "The schema ... forces him to assign some unlikely bedmates" (246). Crowley provides, then, one of the earliest attacks on Berlin's oversimplified taxonomy—his attempt to reduce numerous rhetorical theories into a mere three groups. This critique of his groupings, though, is not her only concern regarding Berlin's rhetorics. She also challenges Berlin's use of the "search for truth" as the basis for rhetorical theory. This tactic, she argues, creates a distorted view of the nature of rhetorical theory by overlooking "the classical (and modern) schools of rhetorical thought which see the goals of rhetoric as adherence or affirmation of solidarity" (246). This is an interesting counter, and one might wonder if Berlin would not argue that "adherence," "affirmation," and "solidarity" are implicit in his discussion of each of his three rhetorics. Yet, Crowley's criticism is especially important because she points out Berlin's presumption that everything should be explained in terms of social epistemology. Thus, we should note how Crowley is challenging Berlin's representations of rhetorical theories, representations that result from his attempt to squeeze them into ideological boxes.

Crowley's last criticism is that Berlin's historical narrative also oversimplifies composition's development by presenting it as merely reactive to social and political forces while ignoring how it has, historically, also resisted ruling-class interests: "Berlin writes as if composition theorists and pedagogues have never been self-conscious about

their goals, as if composition theory and pedagogy have always developed in simple reaction to larger forces” (246). This, I think, is one of Crowley’s most insightful criticisms of *Rhetoric and Reality* and perfectly illustrates how she sees the inner compulsions of his narrative distorting composition history to detrimental effects. As an example of those detrimental effects, Crowley ties Berlin’s narrative of reaction to the perception of composition as a sort of gadfly field—constantly drawn to whatever happens to be trending: “his account will reinforce suspicions held by some teachers that the freshman course in particular, and twentieth century composition in general, have been susceptible to every pedagogical wind which blows their way” (246). Here, we should recall Spear’s review of North’s *MKC* wherein she addresses composition as being “imperiled by a lack of coherence and methodological integrity” (206). Crowley’s comment suggests that Berlin’s chosen narrative contributed not only to the gadfly reputation, but also to the disciplinary identity crisis I discussed when dealing with North’s *MKC* and Bartholomae’s and Spear’s review of that text.

Still, Crowley doesn’t see Berlin as getting it all wrong; instead, she argues that he misses a few important avenues because of his overly narrowed perspective. Ultimately, she exhibits obvious approval for Berlin’s exploration of political influences in composition theory and pedagogy. In fact, she closes her review with indications of how Berlin’s political inquiry might have been more usefully insightful, and of why political inquiry was of growing importance in composition:

He never questions the repressive institutional situations which have shaped composition instruction since its beginnings: what ideological strictures mandate that most teachers of composition are (and always have

been) part-time, untenured and untenurable instructors or graduate students? What ideological strictures have worked, historically, to confine research in composition to inferior status? And even more puzzling, Berlin never questions whether or not the freshman composition course, in any of its many guises, has ever done what he says it does: teach people to write.

(247)

Crowley's closing criticism highlights a paradox she sees between one of *Rhetoric and Reality's* premises and its political goal: namely, Berlin's presumption that because composition has always been required and present in English departments, there must be a social justification that explains its continuing presence and maintenance. This narrowed perception of composition, however, actually serves "to endorse the *status quo*" (Crowley 246). Nonetheless, we should not let her inquiry into pedagogical efficacy (whether measured by teaching people to write or by liberating them) lead us to missing Crowley's point here. Rather than chastising Berlin for focusing on politics, Crowley instead takes issue with Berlin's lack of attention to class structures, their relation to the economic base, and their relation to the value of writing instruction. In short, Crowley endorses a more traditional Marxist perspective. Her word choice in the phrase "repressive institutional situations which have shaped composition instruction since its beginnings" suggests a clear perception of how composition is, and has been, situated within a political arrangement and how it is indeed subject to political forces. Accordingly, her list of inquiries suggests other important areas for political inquiry. But her reminder that teachers are "self-conscious about their goals" indicates her

disagreement with presenting composition teachers as unwitting subjects of ideological manipulation who are in need of enlightenment.

Theresa Enos

Theresa Enos's review of *Rhetoric and Reality* (also appearing 1988) was published in the *Journal of Advanced Composition*. Initially, Enos pays strict attention to Berlin's rhetorical theory, and in this she clearly shares some of Crowley's interests. Like Crowley, Enos does not raise any objections to Berlin's pluralized *rhetorics*. Nor does she offer any of the criticisms of Berlin's presentation of rhetorical theory that Crowley does. Rather, Enos's review seems utterly approving. But what does it approve of?

While much of Enos's review ends up being a summary of *Rhetoric and Reality*, her rhetoric regarding Berlin's text is rather telling. She clearly favors Berlin's epistemic trio, seeing it as "analogous" to the rhetorical triangle (187). In discussing "current traditional rhetoric" (CTR hereafter), she writes, "built into its curriculum was a requirement for *training* students to develop their writing skills by formalistic, drill-for-skill exercises ... Supposedly, this approach implanted in students good language habits" (187). Her italicized "*training*," her "Supposedly," and her recalling of formalism and drilling all echo the field-wide distaste for CTR pedagogy. Moreover, this comment appears as she discusses CTR's roots in Objective Rhetoric and, thus, stands as an indictment of any lingering pedagogical practices rooted in that episteme (*i.e.*, cognitive or developmental psychology). This clearly places her in line with Berlin's argument that methods based in objectivism are no longer viable for the field.

As with Berlin, Enos is less critical of Subjective Rhetoric than Objective Rhetoric, and she seems to recognize and even share the sympathies Berlin shows toward

the expressivist bent of this rhetoric: “Berlin leans toward putting the expressionistic approach into epistemic rhetoric, but explains that its proponents’ view of truth arising only from oneself prevents him from the inclusion” (188). Given Enos’s evident distaste for Objective Rhetoric, we can easily understand her shared sympathies with a pedagogy that at least tries to encourage self-realization and political liberation—one that relies less on formalist assumptions of correctness and more on developing self-awareness and agency.

Enos’s approval of Berlin’s taxonomy continues as she moves to his epistemic rhetoric. She specifically points out that it represents truth as a social construction and the importance it places on language and rhetoric (188). Her most obvious and glowing praise for Berlin’s favored rhetoric (the rhetoric he argues is best equipped for understanding and combating social injustice) comes in her summary question: “Is epistemic rhetoric the ‘new’ rhetoric we’ve long been awaiting?” (189). This question is followed by a reference to the political power of writing instruction and to Berlin’s importance in understanding and pursuing that power: “writing, as Berlin argues, ‘is at the heart of education, one of its most *liberating* and *humanizing* agencies’” (189; emphasis added). She also, in another instance of praise, provides an example of how composition scholars in the 1980s were intensely interested in narrating the history of composition as a means of charting its future: “Study of the dynamics of change in the writing classes during the present century will serve as a guide in charting the course of composition instruction in the future” (189). Her closing remarks on *Rhetoric and Reality* involving student liberation evince an even more exuberant desire for a politically interested discipline than we saw running through Crowley’s review. When she closes by

declaring that “we *are* the agents of change” and then asking “what, then, do we want this future to be?”, she is clearly testifying to the disciplinary and socially transformative potential of Berlin’s ideological critique (189). Interestingly, she also appears to be asking a question closely connected to the one that Kathleen Blake Yancey poses thirty years later in *Composition, Rhetoric, and Disciplinarity* (2018) when she asks “what *kind* of a discipline would we like to be?” (31).

Philip M. Keith

Philip M. Keith’s review appeared in the *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* (1988). As with Crowley, Keith accuses Berlin of oversimplifying the discipline’s various rhetorical theories. While Keith *seems* to ignore the political aspects of Berlin’s text (at least, there is no explicit discussion of it), careful consideration suggests there is, as with Crowley’s and Enos’s reviews, an interested approval of Berlin’s politically-minded analysis of composition history and epistemic approach.

On the one hand, Keith hails *Rhetoric and Reality* as “a major event in the development of the theory and pedagogy of writing as a major academic discipline” (89). That statement alone should provide a sense of contrast between the receptions of *MKC* and *Rhetoric and Reality*. Keith’s praise reflects the field’s growing desire to understand (and build a narrative of) its history as a means of understanding its present and future. In that regard, Keith echoes Crowley and Enos. That is, Keith appreciates the historical context Berlin provides for developing theory and pedagogy. As Keith writes, “Berlin gives us the opportunity to see the past in relation to [composition’s] recent developments, both to evaluate the past and to evaluate the present research and teaching environment” (89). He continues, “His taxonomy is much richer than the commonplace

versions of most courses in the introduction to the teaching of writing” (89). Given this review was published a year after both *MKC* and *Rhetoric and Reality*, and given the existing disciplinary interest in histories and *research methods* (which Keith clearly shares), we are left to wonder why Berlin’s text alone is here lauded for being so “rich” when North’s text (which lays out a far more diverse and “rich” portrait of available research methods) is utterly ignored— a brief reference, at least, would seem in order here. This is even more striking when we consider that Keith refers specifically to graduate courses; as we saw, the *sole* common point of recommendation for *MKC* was as a bibliography of research approaches for graduate students. Moreover, North’s *MKC* pays specific attention to the “teaching environment” in the 1980s in his discussion of Practitioners versus the rest of the field. Despite all of this, Keith elevates *Rhetoric and Reality* as the important text for evaluating “the present research and teaching environment.” Given that *MKC* actually exceeds *Rhetoric and Reality* in some of the areas Keith’s praises, and that it at least offers important supplemental narratives in others, it becomes difficult not to surmise that Keith’s preference for *Rhetoric Reality* is rooted in its political framework.

However, we can also detect in Keith’s review an early manifestation of the disciplinary disruption brought on by the growing power of political interests in the field— a newer form of the methodological scramble discussed in *MKC*. We can discern this through Keith’s contending with Berlin’s treatment of Subjective Rhetoric. Although Keith does address other problems with Berlin’s taxonomies, thus mirroring some of Crowley’s criticism, much of his review becomes a defense of expressionism *vis-à-vis* Berlin’s taxonomic treatment of Subjective Rhetoric. *Ironically*, Keith here exhibits the

same competition between theories and research methods that *MKC* highlighted in such detail. The crucial difference is that North did not attribute such competition solely to social and political forces. In fact, when we consider North's detailed discussion of the methodological scramble versus Berlin's very narrow taxonomy, it should be no surprise that much of the contention against *Rhetoric and Reality*, and much of the praise for *MKC*, centered on just that area. As with Crowley, and a growing number of others in the field, Keith was unwilling to see the diversity and complexity of composition research methods reduced to three boxes and one overarching theory of composition's development. So while Keith, like Enos and Crowley, was clearly hungering for the political inquiry that Berlin provided for composition, he was steadfastly unwilling to see his favored theory placed into the wrong political box.

Keith's excitement over *Rhetoric and Reality* as a history and his disputes with Berlin's taxonomies offer important glimpses into growing trends of interest in the field. The methodological scramble would seem to have been exacerbated by an accompanying scramble for a historical narrative. History, after all, engenders identity. As these reviews suggest, composition scholars were beginning to envision historical narrative as the key to defining the field and its direction—just as those contributing to the 2014 special issue of *College English* did.² That is, any defining narrative would hold immense disciplinary power in determining what the field was really about and, therefore, what belonged in, and what belonged out. Thus, Berlin's and North's taxonomies (somewhat ironically in North's case) both served to stoke the methodological scramble.

² *College English*, vol. 76, no. 6, Special Issue: Reimagining the Social Turn, July 2014.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/24238198>

John Brereton

John Brereton's "Learning Who We Are," published in *College English* in 1991, is actually a review of three histories: Berlin's *Rhetoric and Reality*, Graff and Warner's *The Origins of Literary Study in America*, and Herron's *Universities and the Myth of Cultural Decline*. Given the number of selections for his review, one can understand why his analysis of *Rhetoric and Reality* is not as detailed as Crowley's, Enos's, and Keith's. Still, there are a few important reinforcing points to be gleaned from his brief treatment.

To begin, we should consider the title of Brereton's article—"Learning Who We Are"—as a clear signal of the value he places on these histories for understanding disciplinary development. Brereton's title highlights how composition was reformulating itself in a post-process era. This reformulation was strongly influenced by the infusion of political concerns—concerns nurtured by the anti-war and civil rights movements of the 1960s. As I am arguing, those with such concerns (like Berlin) found in Continental philosophy powerful theories and terminology for actualizing their political desires. In fact, it is telling that Brereton's selections include texts from composition, literary studies, and anthropology. What this suggests is that Brereton saw the phrase "Learning Who We Are" as indicating how Continental philosophy was creating an awakening across multiple disciplines—including composition. For Brereton, Berlin, and a growing number of others in the field during the 1980s, Continental philosophy was essential in understanding the political dynamics at play within and between English departments and society in general. When discussing the importance of understanding disciplinary history, Brereton writes, "English Studies have begun to look at their discipline's history in an attempt to understand and *fix* its relationship to other disciplines in the academy and with

the culture at large” (826; emphasis added). What could Brereton possibly mean by “fix”? Two possibilities are “to repair” or “to stabilize.” Still, whichever semantic path we choose, it is clear that something, according to Brereton, was broken in English Studies’ relationship to the other disciplines and the culture at large. Rather than fully explaining this, unfortunately, Brereton leaves the issue obscure. However, some degree of answer may be deduced from the comparisons he draws in the rest of his article.

Brereton sees Graff and Warner’s history, as well as Berlin’s, as being organized around conflict between traditionalists and reformers, and anyone who has read *MKC* will recognize this dichotomy. In applying this discussion to departmental power dynamics, Brereton asserts that there have been no clear victors between these historically warring camps (also a sentiment shared in *MKC*). Instead, the “professionals” have dominated in areas of administration, while the humanists have built their stronghold in the pedagogical arena:

In literature and composition alike the professionals have won the day when it comes to matters of faculty preparation, promotion, scholarly standards, and control of journals, learned societies, and funding agencies like ACLS and Guggenheim. Yet many would claim that in terms of teaching, text selection, and the ideals English faculty use to justify their work, the humanists and belletrists still wield enormous influence ...

English may have become a subject on the positivists German model, but a look at the composition or literature classrooms, catalogue descriptions, and reading canons reveals that liberal learning and appreciation have triumphed too. (829)

Brereton is here illustrating the ongoing conflicts resulting from differing purposes within English departments that we have seen in discussed in North and Berlin's texts and their respective reviews. For one, there is the tension between literary studies and composition. Yet, despite accusing Berlin of oversimplifying in terms of scope (as nearly all other critics of *Rhetoric and Reality* did), Brereton himself glosses over the tensions between these two fields and presents them as sharing common historical experiences of power. Brereton offers no glimpse into the competitive tensions *between* these fields that Berlin discusses in *Rhetoric and Reality*. Indeed, given just how much attention Berlin gave to that conflict, this is a rather striking omission on Brereton's part. However, the conflict, for Brereton, is not between literary studies and composition, but between "scholarship and humanism, or work and culture" (829). This sociopolitical perspective makes it obvious why Berlin would receive such favorable treatment (Brereton labels *Rhetoric and Reality* as a "pathbreaking effort") and why North's *MKC* would go, yet again, unmentioned even when issues that are prominent in North's text are the center of discussion.

Still, despite offering glimpses into how composition was attempting "fix" its relationship to the other disciplines, Brereton never fully explains what, exactly, was broken. Another hint, however, rests in his joining composition into a discussion of works that span literary studies and anthropology as well as in his assertion that English Studies have begun to review their histories as a means of understanding their relation to the larger culture. Much of this awakening occurred with the infusion of Continental philosophy into the humanities, and since literary studies had already made this turn roughly half a decade earlier, composition was still playing catch-up with the trend. Thus,

half of English Studies' had yet to "fix" its positioning in relation to other fields in the humanities, or even to its own departmental counterpart.

The Emerging Discourse and Struggles of the Political Turn

I chose *MKC* and *Rhetoric and Reality* as my initial comparative texts because they are generally recognized as the two major expositors of composition studies during the 1980s. As such, they offer the most comprehensive views of epistemologies at work in the field at that time. By virtue of their respective visions, goals, and their accompanying reviews, these two texts also provide the most detailed representations of how composition saw itself in 1987. Thus, by exploring these texts and the responses they provoked, I have tried to highlight the field's continuing concerns with development and purpose, and how political interests began to emerge as a driving force behind those concerns. The reviews of Berlin's *Rhetoric and Reality* reflect a stark contrast to those of North's *MKC*. While *MKC* evoked superficial and ultimately faint praise as a graduate level bibliography, *Rhetoric and Reality* was seen as having profound consequences for the field's perception of itself. Despite concerns over some of the specifics of *Rhetoric and Reality*, concerns that centered on Berlin's tendency to oversimplify rhetorical theory and composition history, there was clear attraction to his political considerations for writing instruction. In fact, after witnessing how widely *MKC* was criticized for its lack of political concern, it should come as no surprise that the single broadest point of praise for *Rhetoric and Reality* was its utterly political perspective. As we have seen through the reviews, there was no discernible resistance to Berlin's efforts to push the field toward political interests. Instead, *Rhetoric and Reality* helped to advance existing political interests and engendered new struggles in the field. That is, as the field began to respond

to political urgings, some compositionists found themselves having to balance their desire for a more politicized understanding of writing instruction with attempts to ensure their own pedagogical methods were not expelled from the emerging political framework.

Also, I should make clear that I am not arguing Berlin was solely responsible for instigating the political turn in composition. I *am* arguing, however, that Berlin was a primary force in *galvanizing* the political turn in composition, and *Rhetoric and Reality* played a crucial role in that process. It was *Rhetoric and Reality* that allowed the field to envision itself as having always been politically situated in regulating society as an ISA. However, that very positioning also means that composition could serve to liberate rather than subvert. In other words, rather than *servicing* other disciplines and unjust political structures by merely preparing students to transcribe accepted knowledge, composition could question its function in reproducing structures of power and, thereby, empower students as agents of change by helping them understand how such knowledge came to be. Thus, *Rhetoric and Reality* was a foundational text for Berlin's goal of mobilizing composition as a force for political change. If Theresa Enos's response that "We *are* the agents of change" is any indicator, then Berlin clearly enjoyed some success in his endeavor. And if current research on the relationship between disciplinarity and political activism is any indicator, than the political turn continues drive many in the field. Indeed, in my next chapter, I hope to show how *Rhetoric and Reality's* influence continued to resonate and expand as evidenced in the field's most prominent conferences and journals.

CHAPTER V: BRINGING THE POLITICAL INTO FOCUS

My last two chapters emphasize that two books, both published in 1987, offered the field significantly different visions of itself. *The Making of Knowledge in Composition* (*MKC* hereafter) presents the field as looking inward and developing a wide array of research methods for the purpose of understanding writing processes. Indeed, North zealously guarded against intruding interests that do not represent focused inquiry on writing processes. In *Rhetoric and Reality*, however, Berlin presents writing instruction as historically shaped by sociopolitical conditions and serving to reproduce ideological perspectives that, in turn, reproduce capitalist structures. Underlying North's *MKC*, then, is the assumption that writing classes should be focused on teaching students to write—writing instruction for writing instruction's sake. *Rhetoric and Reality*, on the other hand, establishes a base for arguing that writing classes should be aimed at interrogating ideologies for the sake of political transformation. Even though both of these books were published in the same year, the reviews they received clearly show that the profession was eager to embrace Berlin's political vision of composition pedagogy and, conversely, offered scant value to North's *MKC*. In focusing on these two texts, I have laid the groundwork for seeing 1987 as a key year in composition history insofar as that is when the field's political turn began to galvanize. Current studies of the profession's recent history, however, emphasize the social turn that began in the early 1980s and, thus, appear to overlook the political turn that began in 1987. Moreover, current scholarship tends to present the social turn as positioned against the process paradigm and, moreover, bringing it to end. I argue, however, that it was really the later political turn that brought about that end.

At this point, I would like to further elaborate how I am differentiating between the social and political turns since this chapter will highlight some of those distinctions. Currently, the field uses *social turn* as a historiographical conception of roughly the last thirty-five years of composition history. When using *social turn*, scholars are implying that one movement began around 1982 and continues today. As we saw in my literature review, current usage of *social turn* is typically rooted in John Trimbur's 1994 "Taking the Social Turn"—a review of *Academic Discourse and Critical Consciousness*, by Patricia Bizzell, *Critical Teaching and the Idea of Literacy*, by C. H. Knoblauch and Lil Brannon, and *Common Ground* by Kurt Spellmeyer. In his review, Trimbur observes that the three books "make their arguments not so much in terms of student's reading and writing processes but rather in terms of the cultural politics of literacy" (109). He goes on to state that together the books provide a chance to "look at ... the leftwing trajectory of the social turn and its political commitments" (109). This shift of interest from "student's reading and writing processes" to "cultural politics of literacy" and "political commitments" provides a reasonable representation of what current scholars mean when they speak of the social turn. That is, *social turn* generally means an abandonment of the process model in favor of cultural studies for the sake of political change. The work of Patricia Bizzell in particular is considered "foundational" in the social turn by many current scholars (*e.g.*, Jacqueline Rhodes and Jonathan Alexander). Thus, by relabeling the post-process years as *the social turn*, scholars are implicitly asserting that the early work of Bizzell and other researchers interested in the social dimension of writing brought about the end of the process paradigm and ushered in an era of political interest for the field.

On the one hand, it is accurate to consider Bizzell's work as indicative of composition's desire to move beyond cognitive psychology as the *sole* source of informing writing instruction. On the other hand, I argue that it is *inaccurate* to see her work as wholly post-process insofar she was not trying, in 1982, to displace cognitivism but, rather, to supplement it. In addition, during that time Bizzell was still very much interested in students' writing processes. My contention, then, is that current usage of *social turn* seems largely oblivious to a more overt political turn that began in 1987. In this chapter, then, I will establish key differences between these two movements—the social turn and the political turn. Specifically, I will argue that the political turn was a later movement that began to in crystalize in 1987 after the publication of Berlin's *Rhetoric and Reality* and, moreover, that there are distinguishing characteristics between these two movements. In drawing out the distinctions between the social and political turns, I shall discuss the disparate theoretical roots of these movements (*i.e.*, sociolinguistics *versus* Continental philosophy), composition's reaction to literary studies' influence, and attempts to exclude approaches that did not pay due attention to the political dimension of writing instruction. In all of these discussions, Berlin will be presented as a key figure.

Surprisingly, current scholarship on the social turn takes little notice of James Berlin's *Rhetoric and Reality* or his "Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class" ("Rhetoric and Ideology" hereafter), much less the responses to those texts or their wide ranging influence in rhetoric and composition. Yet, these two texts served as catalysts for galvanizing the field's political turn by presenting a framework for understanding the political ramifications of writing instruction. Of course, some might counter with the

second-wave feminist contention that the personal is political and, thus, that the social and political are largely synonymous. This is exactly what Jaqueline Rhodes and Jonathan Alexander did when confronting Donald Lazere's critique of their "Reimagining the Social Turn" (2014). Lazere, in "Reimagining the Social Turn" (2015), takes issue with Rhodes and Alexander's characterizing of Bizzell's early 1980s critique of Flower and Hayes's cognitive process model as a flashpoint of political interest because there is, he writes, "little direct discussion of teaching about socioeconomic disparities in their account of Bizzell or, indeed, in her work itself..." (577). The disagreement between these compositionists is over how to define the political. Rhodes and Alexander clearly see the early work of the social turn as inherently political and, eventually, expanding beyond the strict Marxist consideration of economic disparities. Lazere, however, contends that the early social turn, as represented by Bizzell, is simply not political enough. This notion of difference is echoed by Steve Parks in "Sinners Welcome," wherein he too draws distinctions between the social and the political. Referring to Flower's *Community Literacy and the Rhetoric of Public Engagement*, Parks ultimately concludes that Flower's work contents itself with the development of agency through discourse while not actually recording any specific examples of social transformation. While Parks recognizes the political potential of Flower's model, he argues that it simply does not go far enough. Parks sees this as a broader trend in current composition practice, writing that "we have turned to the social and away from the political" (507). For Parks and Lazere, then, seeing the social as virtually synonymous with the political is not merely misleading, but also an obstacle to social transformation.

I share this concern over the misleading nature of considering *social* and *political* as virtually synonymous. Indeed, Parks's "Sinners Welcome" helped to inspire my project to distinguish between the social turn often credited to Bizzell's work in the early 1980s and the political turn encouraged by Berlin in 1987. However, unlike Parks, my interest is not in the political ramifications of the semantics; instead, I am interested in how *social turn*, as a historiographic designation, distorts rhetoric and composition history. To give some idea of the distinctions I am attempting to draw out, we can turn again to Rhodes and Alexander's contention that Bizzell's 1982 "Cognition, Convention, and Certainty" is foundational in the social turn (482). As Lazere points out, in that article Bizzell does not address socioeconomic or cultural disparities. While Bizzell makes political overtures in her introduction and conclusion, the body of her article presents an argument for joining outer-directed theory with inner-directed theory in order to more fully inform writing instruction—that is, Bizzell was focused on teaching students to compose. Indeed, while the social turn is generally considered an early manifestation of the post-process movement, a careful read of "Cognition, Convention, and Certainty" reveals that Bizzell is more interested in *supplementing* rather than *replacing* the cognitive model. Current usage of *social turn* appears to overlook this particular disposition and instead frames the period as a politically interested turn that broke with earlier theoretical models for writing instruction—wholly post-process. However, it wasn't until 1987 that composition began turning fully toward political concerns; as a result, rather than calling for a joining of theoretical models (*e.g.*, supplementing inner-directed with outer-directed), politically interested compositionists such as Berlin began arguing for the *displacement* of the process model (both cognitivism

and expressivism). This is a rather crucial difference as the interests of the political turn would inevitably evoke a conflict that was not necessitated by the goals of the social turn.

Another seeming gap in the vision of history presented under the usage of *social turn* is the lack of an accurate account of how composition studies actually galvanized around political interests. As Lazere points out in “Reimagining the Social Turn,” political interests had surfaced in composition quite some time before the early 1980s. Lazere provides examples dating as far back as 1968 (578-579). Yet, despite such interest, the process model rose to the status of a paradigm and served as the foundation for professionalizing the field. Current histories of the social turn appear to lack any account of how the field finally galvanized those pre-existing political interests to such a degree that the process model was eventually deposed. Instead, there seems to be a quiet, implicit acceptance by many current compositionists that it started with Bizzell’s critiques of process theory. I would argue that this is simply false. Instead, I would point to the work of Berlin in 1987 and 1988 as providing the impetus for finally displacing process theory with an actual political turn that was more interested in, as Parks puts it, “structurally transformative political strategies” (506). Thus, I am arguing that Berlin was one of the most central figures in a genuine political turn in composition.

I would suggest, then, that if we are going to rename the post-process era, it might be more useful, when pondering the current disciplinarity problem, to do so in a manner that accounts for the differing natures of Bizzell’s early social interests (in 1982) and the more focused political interest of Berlin and others that began to take hold in 1987. The diminished attention to Berlin’s influence is arguably one of the most glaring gaps in accounts of the last thirty-five years of rhetoric and composition history—despite

whatever influence his political work might still exert in graduate course seminars. By diminishing Berlin's influence from 1987-1993, the field obscures a significant force in formalizing the political turn, the sometimes fierce conflict evoked by the political turn, and some clear distinctions between the social turn and the political turn. To be clear, I am not arguing that we should replace *social turn* with *political turn*. Instead, I am arguing that we need to utilize both terms to describe two movements—movements that have clear differences between them.

To make the case for distinguishing between these movements this chapter will examine the 1988 CCCC panel “The Politics of Historiography,” Berlin's 1988 “Rhetoric and Ideology,” and “Three Comments on Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class,” by Karen Scriven, Linda Flower, and John Schilb (“Three Comments” hereafter). The CCCC panel will be used to show how concerns over ideology, as forwarded in Berlin's *Rhetoric and Reality*, quickly moved to the forefront of composition discourse. In addition, the panel also helps to highlight concern over composition's mirroring of literary studies as the field began to galvanize its political turn. I will argue this concern would not have been provoked under the social turn. Instead, it was the emphasis of the political, as established by literary studies and followed by composition, which led inevitably to anxiety over composition's following of literary studies. In that regard, the CCCC panel helps to highlight one distinguishing characteristic between the social and political turns.

My discussion of “Rhetoric and Ideology” and “Three Comments” focuses on how the political turn, as encouraged by Berlin, led to conflict over acceptable and unacceptable theories and practices in composition. Here too, I will show that this

struggle had no apparent roots within the social turn but was *necessitated* by the political turn. Of course, both of these discussions also serve to demonstrate Berlin's importance in composition's political turn.

Politics Takes the Stage – The Octalog

One of the strongest testaments to *Rhetoric and Reality*'s rather immediate impact on the field was the convening of a CCCC panel on “The Politics of Historiography” the very next year (1988; Octalog hereafter). The panel participants were some of the most accomplished scholars in composition studies: James A. Berlin, Robert J. Connors, Sharon Crowley, Victor J. Vitanza, Susan C. Jarratt, Nan Johnson, Jan Swearingen, and Richard Enos—with James J. Murphy serving as moderator and Theresa Enos recording the proceedings. Thus, when publishing the proceedings, *Rhetoric Review* opted for the term *Octalog* to indicate the shared contributions of the panel's participants. The list of noteworthy scholars doesn't just end with the panelists though. In the transcript, Murphy reports more than one hundred in attendance. Among that number were Janice Lauer, Linda Flower, and Bob Johnson. We might also note that David Bartholomae, who, when reviewing *MKC*, used Berlin's *Rhetoric and Reality* as a foil to indicate what was lacking in North's text, served as the chair for the conference that year. The theme of the 1988 CCCC convention was “Language, Self, and Society”; yet, if we judge by the transcript of the Octalog, the most popular panel was actually on politics and historiography. Given the importance of the CCCC in composition studies, the list of panelists, the attendance numbers and noteworthy attendees, the Octalog serves as a clear indicator that politics and ideology were, by 1988, front-and-center in composition studies.

In 1997, Kevin Brooks examined the proceedings of the Octalog in “Reviewing and Redescribing ‘The Politics of Historiography.’” My examination of the Octalog, however, is distinctly different. Brooks utilized the recorded proceedings to place himself into an indirect conversation with the panelists. His purpose was to supplement the largely dialectic conception of history writing that he saw being presented in the Octalog with an intersubjective one. Thus, Brooks is interested in the Octalog as a conversation on historiography. While I am also interested in the Octalog’s discussion of historiography, my interest arises from what that discussion reveals about the field’s early wrestling with Berlin’s politicization of discipline’s history. Thus, I pay more attention to the panel’s discussion of ideology and the role of literary studies. So whereas Brooks uses the Octalog in a conversational fashion, I utilize it as an artifact of history. Therefore, unlike Brooks, I will not offer a critique of the categories of histories provided in the Octalog. Instead, I am interested in how the panel’s discussion offers a view of the field as it began to formalize its political turn.

We may find further evidence of *Rhetoric and Reality* serving as a major impetus for the convening of the Octalog panel in the fact that ideology was the immediate issue of discussion. Indeed, many of the fundamental issues of *Rhetoric and Reality*—ideology, politics, and the contingency of truth—became central elements of discussion for the panel. Reading the transcribed proceedings, we can see that Berlin quickly sets the stage by essentially rehearsing his argument from *Rhetoric and Reality* in his opening philosophical statement: “A rhetoric is a set of rules that attempts to naturalize—an ideology—to make one particular arrangement of economic, social, and political conditions appear to be inevitable, inscribed in the very nature of things” (Octalog 11).

Clearly, Berlin recognized the connections between this panel and his work in *Rhetoric and Reality*.

One of the more striking aspects of the panel's discussion of ideology is how some of the panelists characterized it as a paralyzing force in the production of history and, as we shall see, for the advancement of knowledge in general. Robert Connors addresses the problematizing nature of ideological concerns first when he states, "to live I must act; otherwise, ideologies competing within me can create an endless hall of mirrors that will prevent any action on my part" (13). Sharon Crowley echoes this sentiment when she says "I feel almost paralyzed by the impossibility of writing history" (14). Crowley, however, takes the concerns deeper by expressing her fear that her histories would be reified. She goes on to explain that there is always the potential for a given history to become canon and, whether the historian wills it or not, to privilege a particular world view. This, of course, is a clear echo of Berlin's argument in *Rhetoric and Reality*. Jan Swearingen also acknowledges the paralyzing potential of "a radical ideology of illusoriness," but declares her resistance to it: "my ideology is an aggressive naiveté and ... I embrace the metaphysics of authenticity" (18). Swearingen launches her critique of ideological historiography from the perspective of a scholar who works to uncover the history of women in rhetoric and literacy. From that position, a position that recognizes that there are groups of people for whom a history is yet unwritten, she challenges the ability of the ideological model to offer a wide enough framework for understanding history. As she aptly puts it,

before you ideologically question your history in different fields and different areas, first you have to have a history. I for one am not

comfortable with the idea of leaving a group of women philosophers, or sophists, or whatever the excluded group is, just lying there unresearched, unknown, on the grounds of a modern ideology that says history is a fiction. (22)

What is interesting about these critiques of the ideological position is that they all address Berlin's treatment of objectivity in *Rhetoric and Reality*. That is, Connors, Crowley, and Swearingen are wrestling with the ways in which ideology problematizes composition scholarship. Moreover, some of the panelists, concurring with Berlin's stance, acknowledge that blind acceptance of a particular narrative serves particular structures of power. Susan Jarratt makes this evident when she contextualizes the panel's discussion in a "particular moment in the history of our discipline." As she states, "there have been histories in which the presuppositions were so well accepted, they were kind of blind, so we got the sense that there was a bunch of fact that we're being delivered. And now we're beginning to realize what those suppositions are and the kind of economic and political ramifications of them" (26). So through Crowley and Jarratt, we see the very classist concerns Berlin placed before the field in *Rhetoric and Reality*. That is, history is always an ideological product that serves particular distributions of power. The key, as Jarratt is pointing out in the Octalog, and which Berlin argued in *Rhetoric and Reality*, is realizing the ideological nature of "truth" so that, as an ISA, composition no longer blindly serves unjust power structures.

There is, of course, another implicit concern in the panel's discussion of ideology. As I pointed out in my previous chapter, mapping a disciplinary history is a means of mapping a disciplinary future. That is, our view of the field's history can inform the

field's purpose and practice. Richard Enos offers an indication of this when he addresses the advancement of knowledge, which, in the context of composition, would clearly be theories of writing instruction. Responding to the notion that history is always an ideological fiction, he laments, "sometimes there is almost a cynicism or a folly to think that you might advance knowledge" (27). Thus, Enos extends the ideological concerns raised by Connors and Crowley from history into theory. Enos's observation wonderfully captures what is at stake in the panel's conversation about ideology—how the conception of history impacts the development of theory and practice. Of course, this is exactly what Berlin was working toward in *Rhetoric and Reality*. He was not just problematizing history, but also current and future theory and pedagogy.

The Octalog offers one other intriguing discussion, one that reveals an area of distinction between the social turn and the political turn. As the panel turned to the Q&A phase, Bob Johnson brought forth the specter that had been lurking behind the pages of *Rhetoric and Reality* and looming over the panel's discussion of the politics of historiography: literary studies. By questioning the role of literary studies in the political considerations being discussed by the panel, Johnson opened up a rather contentious discussion about composition's academic independence. In the interests of conveying the substance and mood of the exchange, I am providing an extensive excerpt with a few intermittent observations:

Bob Johnson: In terms of the politics we find ourselves, most of us are rhetoricians, in, in our own departments—few of us are in departments of rhetoric; many of us are in departments of English—there's a politics that

goes on there. And I find much of the historiography that's going on there is a turn toward interpreting history through literary criticism. And I would like to know what your view is. Is this going to open up, or is this going to do something else?

James Berlin: What do you mean? I'm not sure what you mean by "interpreting through literary criticism." Do you mean using categories that are being used in literary theory now?

Bob Johnson: Well, using categories and also using the literary criticism as the basis for the theoretical interpretation of what we are doing now.

James Berlin: There's one good reason for that: They've discovered rhetoric. They're struggling for language that we have. Sometimes I feel like I live in a ghetto. I've lived in a ghetto for ten years and it's humble but at least it's *mine*, and now people in power have said, "This property's worth something." And so I'm going to be moved. It seems our terrain is being co-opted. (29-30)

Johnson's questioning of "is this going to do something else" indicates a concern that composition was merely mimicking literary studies rather than continuing to expand its own intellectual territory. His probing of this issue opened up a fascinating discussion that reveals acute disciplinary insecurities within composition while also providing an important glimpse into another source of composition's political turn. Indeed, any account of composition's political turn would be grossly remiss in omitting the fact that by 1987 literary studies had already undergone the sort of political turn composition was just beginning. Johnson's concern that composition was simply following literary studies

immediately turned the discussion toward disciplinary insecurities, which surely helps to explain why it was the liveliest portion of the panel. Robert Connors immediately responded by claiming composition had, for the previous 35 or 40 years, suffered from an “inferiority complex” that pushed the field to look beyond itself and into other disciplines, to “validate what we do” (30). It is worth remembering that North did no such thing in *MKC*. After Connors’s comment, Victor Vitanza (the editor of *PRE/TEXT*) responds,

I don’t think that we have to validate what we’re doing. We are 25 hundred years old or more ... *We are not a discipline. We are a meta-discipline.* If we teach writing across the curriculum, doesn’t that tell us, isn’t that a self-evident experience, that we are a meta-discipline. *We inform all the other disciplines. They don’t inform us.* (31)

Clearly, Vitanza is pushing back against the notion that this new political push, based in the study of rhetoric and ideology, was flowing into composition from literary studies. Rather, he argues the reverse is actually true. His reference to our twenty-five-hundred-year history is undoubtedly a reference to classical rhetoric (and all theories of rhetoric since) as being part and parcel of composition’s natural territory, and, in that regard, he directly echoes the sentiment conveyed through Berlin’s reference to “our terrain.”

Interestingly, in *Literary Theory: an Introduction* (1983) Terry Eagleton had already taken steps to preempt such an exclusive claim to rhetoric by, as Berlin described it, co-opting rhetoric for literary criticism. In speaking of discourse analysis, Eagleton argues, “It is, in fact, probably the oldest form of ‘literary criticism’ in the world, known as rhetoric. Rhetoric, which was the received form of critical analysis all the way from

ancient society to the eighteenth century, examined the way discourses are constructed in order to achieve certain effects” (179). We should recall that Eagleton’s *Literary Theory* was published four years before Berlin’s *Rhetoric and Reality* and had already become a standard primer for undergraduate and graduate students of literary studies. What we see in this exchange, then, is not only a territorial dispute over rhetoric, but also a dispute over whether composition was simply surrendering its own theories and goals and adopting those of literary studies instead.

What is worth noticing here is how this particular conflict was not necessary under the rhetoric of the social turn as represented by the work of Bizzell and others in the early 1980s. If we look at composition research in the early 1980s, the period frequently associated with the emergence of the social turn, we find researchers working to understand writing processes by accounting for the social contexts of thinking and writing—discourse communities. In the context of the social turn, part of the writing teacher’s job was to figure out how to help students adapt to new discourse communities. Interestingly, within the discourse of the social turn we find comfortable references to literary studies and composition sharing in the making of knowledge as well as in some pedagogical practices. If we turn to Bizzell’s “Cognition, Convention, and Certainty” (1982) and Kenneth Bruffee’s “Collaborative Learning and the ‘Conversation of Mankind’” (1984), we see that both of these articles comfortably refer to overlap between composition studies and literary studies. Bizzell, for example, cites Stanley Fish when defining the “main business of English studies” and pointing out what was lacking from Flower and Hayes’s cognitive model (89). Bruffee points out that collaborative learning was being picked up in literary studies as well as composition studies (635). There is no

apparent discomfort in either of these acknowledgements. Why should there be? While recognizing how the fields borrowed from and shared with each other, Bizzell and Bruffee also inherently recognize that the fields have some goals that are similar, and some goals that are different. As writing instructors, the disciplinary goal for Bizzell and Bruffee was teaching students to write. Nonetheless, there is a clear and comfortable sense of mutual contributions between the two areas. Bizzell's reference to Fish is particularly worth noting because Fish has repeatedly argued *against* politicizing the classroom. To be sure, by 1989 Bizzell had fully embraced ideological concerns, but in 1982 she was still largely focused on writing instruction.¹ While that remained true, there was nothing to provoke insecurities over goals and practices. However, the Octalog clearly portrays a different attitude among composition scholars—one that reflects rising anxiety not just from departmental power relations, but also from fears over disciplinary discreteness. As the political turn began to shift composition's emphasis from writing processes to political change—from the social considerations of Bizzell in 1982 to the political interests of Berlin in 1987 and beyond—the field realized it was no longer simply sharing some means with literary studies as it had for much of its history; instead, it was essentially *doing the same thing* as literary studies: cultural criticism for the sake of political transformation. As a result, the political turn alarmed many in composition in a way the early social turn never did.

If we want to see a distinction between the social turn and the political turn, the Octalog exchange over the role of literary studies is a good place to look. In this

¹ See, for example, “‘Cultural Criticism’: A Social Approach to Studying Writing,” *Rhetoric Review*, vol. 7, no. 2, 1989, pp. 224-230.

exchange we can see one of the earliest examples of the field contending with the idea that it was no longer following its own path, as it was under the process model and the social turn as, again, represented by the work of Bizzell in the early 1980s, but was instead following the path of literary studies under the political turn. This new path represented a shift in emphasis from the personal and social dimensions of writing processes to the political dimensions of writing instruction—from teaching students to write, to using composition classrooms as a locus of political transformation. This concern for disciplinary discreteness and purpose would become a point of fierce contention in the next few years as compositionists considered how or even whether to move forward with the political turn—a debate I will continue tracing in the next chapter. Before following the development of that conflict, however, I would like to go a little further into 1988. Specifically, I wish to turn to Berlin’s “Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class” and the responses that article provoked to explore another manifestation of the disruption engendered by the political turn. Moreover, as with the conflict over the role of literary studies in composition’s political turn, this conflict also reveals important distinctions between the social turn and the political turn.

Skirmishing Rhetorics – “Rhetoric and Ideology” and “Three Comments”

Only a few months after the CCCC panel (and perhaps urged on by the success the panel signaled for his ideas), Berlin published “Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class” (1988) in *College English*. The publication of such a rapid return to the central discussion of *Rhetoric and Reality* in the pages of a prominent journal, coupled with the publication of responses from other prominent compositionists in the same journal, indicates the field’s continuing interest in Berlin’s efforts to politicize the field. A quick

search of JSTOR reveals that “Rhetoric and Ideology” has been cited 188 times, with interest peaking between 1990 and 1993. In the article, Berlin presents a refined and updated version of the rhetorics outlined in *Rhetoric and Reality* accompanied by a more direct and succinct argument regarding the roles of Objective and Subjective rhetorics in maintaining capitalist structures. It is also worth noting that while *Rhetoric and Reality* examined the socio-historical forces that engendered the three rhetorics (*i.e.*, Objective Rhetoric, Subjective Rhetoric, and Transactional Rhetoric), “Rhetoric and Ideology” is set in the *present* tense. In addition, Berlin renames the three rhetorics to Cognitive Rhetoric, Expressionistic Rhetoric, and Social-Epistemic Rhetoric. On the one hand, we might attribute this renaming to a desire to utilize more modern terminology. However, given this was only one year after *Rhetoric and Reality*, a more plausible explanation might be that renaming the rhetorics signals a more direct assault on two branches of the process model—cognitivism and expressivism.

In “Rhetoric and Ideology,” Berlin charges these two branches with being too appropriable by capitalist forces. When describing cognitivist rhetoric, and referring specifically to the work of Linda Flower and John Hayes in doing so, Berlin claims, “It is possible, however, to see this rhetoric as being eminently suited to appropriation by the proponents of a particular ideological stance, a stance consistent with the modern college’s commitment to preparing students for the world of corporate capitalism” (482). This is largely true, he claims, because cognitivist rhetoric fails to consider values: “Nowhere, for example, do Flower and Hayes question the worth of the goals pursued by the manager, scientist, or writer. The business of cognitive psychology is to enable us to learn to think in a way that will realize goals, not deliberate about their value” (482). Of

course, for Berlin, value is measured by contributions to working class interests. Turning to expressionistic rhetoric, Berlin concedes that expressivism “includes a denunciation of economic, political, and social pressures to conform—to engage in various forms of corporate-sponsored thought, feeling, and behavior.” However, he claims that its focus on the individual leads it to be “inherently and debilitatingly divisive of political protest, suggesting that effective resistance can only be offered by individuals, each acting alone” (487). As with cognitivist rhetoric, then, Berlin claims expressionistic rhetoric is open to appropriation “by the very capitalist forces it opposes” because, “After all, this rhetoric can be used to reinforce the entrepreneurial virtues capitalism most values: individualism, private initiative, the confidence for risk taking, the right to be contentious with authority (especially the state)” (487). By moving his project to the present tense and directly attacking cognitivism and expressivism for reproducing rhetorics that are serviceable to capitalism, Berlin clearly argues for the displacement of such approaches from composition.

It’s not surprising that “Rhetoric and Ideology” provoked contentious reactions. Immediate responses came in the form of Karen Scriven, Linda Flower, and John Schilb’s “Three Comments on ‘Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class’ and ‘Problem Solving Reconsidered’” (1989; “Three Comments” hereafter). Signaling once again the importance *College English* placed on this subject, Berlin’s counter-response to “Three Comments” is included in the same issue. I have a few primary goals in focusing on the responses of these particular critics. For one, they help to show that the conflict elicited by the political turn did not just play out in discussions of history (how the political turn got started), but also in discussions of current (and future) theory and practice. As part of

that discussion, we may also glean how compositionists began defending their favored methods by pointing to their usefulness in understanding writing processes and, in the case of Flower and Schilb, also arguing for their value in politically interested writing instruction—a clear sign that the field was coalescing around political interests.

“Three Comments on ‘Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class’ and ‘Problem Solving Reconsidered’” actually responds to two articles: Berlin’s “Rhetoric and Ideology” and Michael Carter’s 1988 “Problem Solving Reconsidered.” We can understand why Carter’s article would be coupled with Berlin’s because Carter addresses many of the criticisms lodged by Berlin and other post-process advocates against the problem-solving model (*e.g.*, too reliant on scientism, too positivistic, and too inner-directed). What emerges from the responses is a view of the growing struggle between Berlin’s vision of politically purposed writing classes and the process model’s focus on writing processes. Both Flower’s and Schilb’s responses offer indications of the growing popularity of ideological considerations in composition studies as well as detailed examples of how critics began challenging Berlin’s taxonomy of rhetorics as oversimplified. Scriven’s response also reveals the subtle distinctions between emphasizing the social dimensions of writing instruction versus the political dimensions. Finally, Schilb’s contribution, when considered alongside Berlin’s counter-response, offers an early sign of the more confrontational tone that would begin to taint the discourse of the political turn—another element that was not present in the discourse of the social turn.

Scriven takes the lead with what was by 1989 starting to become a common disclaimer regarding the importance of ideological considerations: “While I do not

disagree with James Berlin's larger point about the ideological nature of learning and teaching..." (764). After acknowledging the importance of ideological concerns, Scriven takes issue with Berlin's conflating of "cognitive rhetoric," "cognitive psychology," and "the rhetoric of cognitive psychology" (764). Scriven stresses that cognitive psychology is neither goal-centered (as Berlin claimed it is) nor value-centered and, further, acknowledges that "goals and values are ideologically determined" (764). Moreover, she claims these influences are studied in relation to, quoting Berlin's words, "cognitive skills leading to *success*" (qtd. in Scriven 764; emphasis added). Scriven's borrowing of Berlin's phrase is interesting, especially as regards the word *success*. While in "Rhetoric and Ideology" Berlin clearly means for *success* to imply misguided capitalist values and goals, Scriven implicitly accept these goals as approved by society and, at the same time, implies that the task of the writing teacher is to help students acquire the communication skills necessary for success as defined by society. On the one hand, that would seem to support Berlin's argument that cognitive psychology does not question goals and values as opposed to merely taking them into account. That is, Scriven's counter suggests that cognitive psychology *does* consider goals and values, but not for the politically interested ends Berlin desires.

Once taking this stance, though, Scriven is obliged to defend it, and she does so by arguing for the usefulness of empirical research in understanding writing processes. In taking this approach, however, Scriven side-steps the Marxist consideration of values. So although Scriven acknowledges the importance of ideological considerations, she nonetheless attempts to defend the value of empirical research. Thus, she closes with an appeal for *mutuality* in composition research: "to misrepresent by simplification ... those

fields such as cognitive psychology with empirical insights potentially vital to *inquiry in writing* is, even if unintentional, false to the spirit of *open inquiry* marking humanistic endeavors” (765; emphases added). This is a very packed appeal.

Foremost, I want call attention to Scriven’s focus on “inquiry in writing.” While acknowledging the importance of the social dimensions of writing, Scriven remains interested in how empirical research in cognitive psychology might still be put to use in helping students understand and master their writing processes. Thus, Scriven’s argument reflects an aligning of the sort argued for by Bizzell in “Cognition, Convention, and Certainty.” That is, Scriven reflects a desire for open inquiry into writing processes. As I pointed out in the introduction to this chapter though, Berlin, after 1987, is not actually interested in understanding writing processes; he is interested in cultural critique and political change. So even though both authors reference ideology and social constructivism, they do so in the service of fundamentally different, even *opposed* visions of writing classes. With this in mind, it seems problematic that Scriven chooses not to engage Berlin’s larger Marxist argument. One might suspect that her usage of *goals* and *values* represents an implicit rebuttal of Berlin’s Marxist approach, but the overall impression is that she tries to ignore the proverbial elephant in the room.

Linda Flower is more direct than Scriven in confronting Berlin’s neo-Marxism. In doing so, she relies on some of the same tactics as Scriven; that is, she challenges Berlin’s oversimplified taxonomy: “for me this article raised two general questions about the popularity of the ‘ideological thumbnail sketch’ as a form of inquiry and method of argument” (766). While admiring Flower’s rhetorical jab at the sophistication of Berlin’s theory (the “thumbnail sketch”) and wondering if the word *sketch* is a subtle comparison

to North's *Portrait*, we should also note her nod toward the growing popularity of Berlin's ideas. The point she is making, of course, is that Berlin's account of cognitive rhetoric lacks detail. As with Crowley's review of *Rhetoric and Reality*, Flower suggests that Berlin's arguments are biased by his agenda to displace rhetorics focused on writing processes with one focused on political change. "I wonder what happens," she writes, "when (with care and good faith) we package the ideology of others in order to make a comparison and a case for our own?" (766). The question is clearly rhetorical, and I suspect that Flower feels that she has placed Berlin into his own ideological trap. That is, she questions whether Berlin, by seeing only through his neo-Marxist perspective, has misunderstood and misrepresented the ideological perspectives and practices he has attacked.

Still, Flower seems more willing to engage the growing divide between the social turn and the political turn than Scriven, and she attempts to strike a balance between helping students "reflect on their own thinking" (presumably through writing) and being open to the political potentials of the classroom. As she puts it, "I am not claiming these efforts will achieve the ideal of a cognitive/social rhetoric (or achieve Berlin's social/political goals), but a focus on cognition does not preclude the effort" (767). As with Scriven then, Flower argues for openness and inclusion. Thus, while arguing for the potential usefulness of the "cognitive/social" in political enlightenment, she cautions against relying solely on political desires. This is perhaps best evidenced when she asks, "is our current image of writing as a social act based primarily on speculation and political values, or is it adequately grounded in the experience of individual writers and students?" (767). Flower here seems to be drawing a distinction between the social

dimensions of writing instruction as presented by Bizzell, who in “Cognition, Convention, and Certainty” relies on sociolinguistics and the developmental theories of Lev Vygotsky, and Berlin, who would clearly be her example of someone relying on “speculation and political values.”

In making her case for the political potential of cognitive rhetoric, Flower goes so far as to invoke some of the same politically interested figures Berlin references in *Rhetoric and Reality*. She questions, for example, how Berlin’s analogy (wherein the rhetoric of goal-directed cognitivism mirrors the rhetoric of capitalism) would look if capitalist goals were replaced with the goals of Ira Shor. “I think,” she writes, “Paulo Freire has shown that the goals of problem-finding, problem-solving, and reflective self-awareness associated with Cognitive Rhetoric can operate for the good in many social contexts” (766). Here we should note that Flower is again attempting to defend her research methods by asserting that cognitivism can encompass the sort of sociopolitical inquiry that Berlin has argued for; this time, by drawing on Shor and Freire, she does so in terms which speak more directly to political arrangements. However, she doesn’t follow up her argument regarding problem-solving and Freire with any supporting examples. Nonetheless, we should recognize that Flower’s defense of cognitivism against Berlin’s neo-Marxist attack relies not only on its usefulness in teaching students to improve their writing process, but also in suggesting it has a place in a politically interested pedagogy as well. So while Flower more directly confronts Berlin’s Marxism, she does so for the same ultimate purpose as Scriven—mutual inclusion.

John Schilb offers the third response. As with the previous respondents, Schilb acknowledges the importance of political considerations and then argues that his favored

theory deserves inclusion. While Flower and Scriven defend cognitivism, Schilb is concerned with Berlin's treatment of expressivism. He opens with the same sort of nod toward the value of ideology that Scriven offered: "Those of us exploring the relationships of rhetoric, ideology, and historiography are often indebted to James Berlin" (769). That, however, is the extent of Schilb's praise. From there, he launches into a series of criticisms meant to challenge Berlin's portrayal of Expressionistic Rhetoric. As with Scriven and Flower, Schilb questions Berlin's attempt to categorize rhetorics into political boxes:

For me he [Berlin] lapses here into connected assumptions all too common in English studies nowadays: that a wide range of theorists can be yoked under the aegis of one particular worldview, and that the political correctness of said worldview can then be decisively gauged by zeroing in on particular institutions or movements who've shared it. (769)

Schilb's criticism clearly points to the oversimplification problem that so many others, by this point, had highlighted in Berlin's taxonomy. Of course we should also take note of his phrase "all too common in English studies nowadays," which highlights, as Flower's review did, the rapidly growing influence of political concerns in composition studies.

Despite his evident distaste for Berlin's politically derived taxonomy, Schilb's response is even more focused on political considerations than Flower's. In particular he takes issue with Berlin's claim that expressionistic rhetoric is inherently divisive and, therefore, impotent to enact political protest or change: "Berlin ignores how appeals to individual integrity and freedom have in fact proven revolutionary in certain historical junctures" (769). Turning the coin, Schilb moves from Berlin's lack of support for his

political argument against expressivism to his lack of support when extolling the liberating nature of social-epistemic rhetoric. “I am puzzled even more,” he writes, “when Berlin goes on to claim that ... ‘social-epistemic rhetoric’ inevitably supports economic, social, political, and cultural democracy.” He wonders how “Berlin can speak with such prophetic authority about the future incarnations of a theory.” This dubiousness is also partly rooted in Berlin’s oversimplifications. He has, as Schilb reminds us, “pool[ed] fourteen theorists, who he admits display ‘obvious disagreements’ and ‘many conflicts’” (769). Given the disparity between the pooled theorists, Schilb muses that perhaps positions on the political spectrum and theories of history are ultimately irrelevant. This appears to be hyperbolic and sarcastic criticism, but what remains clear is that Schilb has profound doubts regarding the adequacy of Berlin’s taxonomy in accounting for the variety and complexity of rhetorical theories at work in composition during the 1980s. Moreover, because Berlin’s taxonomy is so problematic, Schilb and other critics question whether using it to dispel competing approaches from the field is justified. Put another way, Scriven, Flower, and Schilb all argue against exclusion—especially at the hands of a theory that is not particularly interested in writing processes but, rather, in using composition classrooms as a political platform. Given this concern over exclusion, prevalent in all of these responses to Berlin’s work, we should wonder, once more, why no one is even mentioning North’s *MKC*.

Berlin Responds

In responding to Scriven’s critique, Berlin addresses the charge that he failed to distinguish between cognitive psychology and cognitive rhetoric. However, while Berlin concedes that there are important distinctions he glossed over, he nonetheless stands firm

in his conviction that cognitive psychology's assumptions about the human mind are still bound by cultural assumptions; that is, they remain ideological in nature:

I am convinced that when investigators examine 'the structures of the human mind' (Scriven's terms), they are situated in a value-inscribed cultural sphere that is inescapable. Thus, generalizations asserting that the mind is "an almost identical structure in all individuals, or that there is a clear distinction between 'universal attributes' of knowledge and 'culturally bound attributes' are always already culturally bound and ideologically invested (Berlin 770).

Thus, Berlin brings to bear the neo-Marxist critique that Scriven virtually ignored in her response. On the one hand, this conveys the sense that these two are talking past each other, and, to some degree, they are. Scriven neglects to engage the Marxist argument, preferring instead to base her argument on the assumption that writing instruction should be concerned with helping students understand their writing processes.

Berlin carries his concern for ideological awareness over to his response to Flower as well. As we saw, Flower took issue with Berlin attacking cognitive rhetoric on the grounds that it serves to maintain a capitalist system. Berlin's defense is that he did not charge cognitive rhetoric *per se* with doing this, but rather charged that its refusal to consider ideology leaves it open to appropriation by forces interested in maintaining unjust systems—a somewhat academic response, particularly from a neo-Marxist perspective. Indeed, he immediately expresses dismay over Flower's assertion that she is "simply not convinced that problem-solving epistemic acts, reflective thought, and social

consciousness should be placed in different boxes at all” (qtd. in Berlin 772). “This is curious,” he responds, “since it is cognitive rhetoric that has continually isolated the task environment—the social context—from writing processes that take place in the writer’s consciousness” (772). Thus, Flower and Berlin both accuse each other of ideologically induced blindness. Yet, this constitutes a sort of ultimate victory for Berlin insofar as the conversation is clearly rooted in ideology and politics—that is, the discourse is unfolding in his terms.

What is particularly interesting about Scriven’s and Flower’s comments, as well as Berlin’s response to them, is how, beyond the focus on ideology, we see two assumptions about writing classes coming into conflict. On the one hand, the cognitivists were largely concerned with how empirical research in cognitive psychology could inform the teaching of writing. Thus, when defending against Berlin’s attacks, we see a tendency to lean on considerations of the cognitive and social dimensions of writing, as Scriven does when defending empiricism and referencing “the experiences of social groups.” In doing so, Scriven addresses concerns more commonly associated with the work of Patricia Bizzell in the early 1980s, and Flower draws a similar distinction when weighing political values against individual experience. Yet, recalling once again Crowley’s review of *Rhetoric and Reality*, Berlin is not really questioning whether cognitivism (or expressivism for that matter) actually helps students learn to write—he certainly never argues that it does not. Instead, Berlin is interested in how writing classes may be utilized for political change. In that regard, then, we see Scriven and Berlin carrying on fundamentally different arguments. Flower, for her part, straddles the line between the social and the political, refuting the claim that cognitivism is “socially

blinded.” Of course, once Flower brings in Shor and Freire, she is clearly stepping into the political dimension. Still, it is worth recognizing how the debate reveals fundamentally different expectations for writing classes and, moreover, how these divisions arise from emphasizing either the social or the political.

Berlin’s response to Schilb is, unfortunately, not nearly so rewarding as he attempts to demonstrate the weaknesses of Schilb’s critique by imitating them. It certainly doesn’t provide the sort of useful insights we find in his responses to Scriven and Flower. There is, however, one passage worth reviewing. I have noted that many reviewers of *Rhetoric and Reality* and “Rhetoric and Ideology” charged Berlin with using an oversimplified taxonomy and relying on it to unjustly dismiss cognitivism and expressivism. In responding to Schilb, Berlin argues, with apparent frustration, that offering a more thorough account of rhetorical theories would itself be politically debilitating for the field:

Finally, I would like to comment on the political consequences of the kind of skeptical critique Schilb offers, consequences which would result in a paralyzed acquiescence in the status quo. From this perspective, until we have clearly identified all the myriad differences among all the hundreds of rhetoricians working today, until we determine all of the possible and impossible permutations of the politics of these positions, until we determine exactly the multifarious potentialities of the interactions of these politics with institutional arrangements within and outside the university, and until we arrive at an indisputable conception of ideology to call upon in these discussions, we must postpone any sort of general

statements about the relation of rhetoric to the political. Meanwhile, of course, scholars in rhetoric will have much to do, fiddling with these intricate distinctions, no doubt earning praise for their scholarly rigor along with tenure, promotions, and salary raises. And meanwhile our students will, of course, pursue their burning visions of the unique, independent, and self-directed individual in the corporate fast lane. (777)

Of course no-one was actually calling for such exhaustive studies. Critics had simply pointed out that Berlin was on the other end of the extreme. What I find most interesting about this *enumeratio ad nauseam*, though, is how it conveys Berlin's sense of impatience with the constant charges of oversimplification. Yet his insistence that his political goals justify using an oversimplified taxonomy is problematic, even a little disturbing in light of the professional and academic concerns at stake. As I have tried to highlight, cognitivists and expressivists were arguing that their methods should be included in composition studies because they can help students. Berlin, though, was determined to delineate between politically proper and improper practices for composition; that is, Berlin's vision of writing classes was exclusive in terms of theory and pedagogy. What becomes clear through reviewing these texts, then, is not merely a conflict between two visions of writing instruction, but also between mutuality and exclusion. This is a hallmark of the political turn, one that distinguishes it from the social turn. To make this point, I recall once again Bizzell's "Cognition, Convention, and Certainty" as an example of how the early social turn was not an exclusionary movement. In that article, Bizzell writes, "Answers to what we need to know about writing will have to come from both the inner-directed and the outer-directed theoretical schools if we wish

to have a complete picture of the composing process” (81). While noting Bizzell’s focus on “the composing process,” we should also recognize her call for mutuality in producing knowledge. Conversely, Berlin argues that cognitivism and expressivism are politically debilitating approaches and, therefore, should be *displaced* by social-epistemic rhetoric. This is only so because the political turn, as represented by Berlin, was simply not interested in the same goals as the social turn typically credited to Bizzell.

This trend toward exclusion was rather quickly discerned by others in the field as leading inevitably to conflict—a conflict that appears unnecessary under the rhetoric of the social turn. In particular, Jan Swearingen and Linda Flower appeared to be keenly aware of how this conflict would escalate. Swearingen titled her reflections statement for the Octalog “Reflections in a Time of War.” Of all the panelists and audience members who participated in the Octalog, only Swearingen seemed sensitive to the inevitable conflict entailed in the trajectory of Berlin’s project. Indeed, when explaining her reflections title, she points rather directly to Berlin’s neo-Marxism:

Why “in a time of war”? Because there have been too many lately, and because I believe our conceptualizations and praxis of historiography and theory sometimes contribute to them. Polarization and confrontation are a kind of dialectical argument. ... I think of Kenneth Burke's epigraph, *per bellum purificandum* and then I listen to polemics enjoining us to divorce ourselves from English departments, shun literary study, denounce naive history, stop deluding ourselves with outworn beliefs in facts, and launch neo-Marxist attacks on academic institutions and their discourse. (Octalog 48)

It is very much worth remembering that Linda Flower was an attendee of this panel because we may then notice that Swearingen's reference to "Polarization" is echoed in Flower's comment on "Rhetoric and Ideology" when she refers to Berlin's project as creating "The rhetoric of polarities." It is, she writes, "a strong political move in an academic forum, and insofar as Professor Berlin's goal is to move us to embrace an ethic or take a political stance it may succeed" (768). As we have seen, Flower tried to counter this trend toward polarities by arguing that what is really needed in composition is openness rather than exclusion. Berlin, on the other hand, was clearly intent on exclusion.

Battle Lines

When considering these series of texts we can identify some important strands of discourse that developed after the publication and reception of *Rhetoric and Reality*: the problematizing nature of ideological considerations for history, theory, and pedagogy; the merits of cognitivism and expressivism in cultural critique; and the beginnings of a conflict to determine which theories and practices belong in the field, and which ones do not belong. In this regard alone, these texts demonstrate Berlin's premier influence in the proliferation of composition's political turn.

These texts also reveal, however, the incipient conflict engendered by the emerging political turn. In fact, I have tried to locate some of the distinctions between the social turn and the political turn in the very foundations of the conflicts discussed in this chapter. As we saw in my literature review, arguments over how to define *social* and *political* remain ongoing in the field. In particular, Parks's "Sinners Welcome" (2014) offers a prime example of current compositionists arguing that if the field is interested in political change, then it must reckon with the distinctions between the *merely* social and

the *actually* politically. Parks complains that the field has recently “turned to the social and away from the political” (507). When reviewing the texts so far covered in this dissertation, however, I have tried to make a case for seeing the opposite occurring from 1987 to 1988. By examining the neo-Marxist attack of Berlin and the defenses by cognitivists and expressivists, I have tried to show that although some attempted to justify the value of their methods within Berlin’s political qualifications, there were clear tensions, as well as attempts at reconciliation, between the social dimensions of writing processes and the political potential of writing instruction. I have argued that these arguments represent diverging visions of the field’s *fundamental* purpose and, thus, its disciplinary identity. As I hope to show in the next chapter, this conflict over disciplinary purpose would become far more glaring as the political turn solidified. Holdouts from the process model (be they cognitivist or expressivist) and early researchers of the social turn were still concerned, as the process model in general was, with how their theories could inform the practice of writing instruction. Those rallying to the political purposing of composition, on the other hand, were concerned with how writing classes can actualize political change. Thus, I have tried in this chapter to present this emerging conflict as the root of the disciplinary disagreement that Elizabeth Wardle and Doug Downs refer to in *Composition, Rhetoric, and Disciplinarity* (2018) when they say that “compositionists had come to agree less and less about objects of study and research methods” (116). Moreover, I have tried to make that case that this seemingly irreconcilable difference is one reason that, when we consider how composition history developed during the post-process era, we should consider distinguishing between the social turn and the political turn—particularly when current scholars are beginning to once again wrestle over the

difference between the social and the political (*e.g.* Rhodes and Alexander, Donald Lazere, Steve Parks, and Laura R. Micciche).

Through this chapter, then, I have tried to present the disciplinary conflict that emerged in the late 1980s, the conflict Wardle and Downs point to, as arising from an overtly political turn rather than from the earlier social turn as represented by Bizzell. In doing so, I am also arguing that that failing to distinguish between the social and political turn obfuscates the actual roots of that conflict—some of the most intense and consequential conflict in recent composition history. To that end, this chapter has presented a view of early skirmishes. In my next chapter, we will see these skirmishes escalate, with attacks becoming more personal in nature and with clear attempts to altogether exclude opposing viewpoints from the field's discourse.

CHAPTER VI: THE POLITICAL GETS PERSONAL

My previous two chapters highlighted how James Berlin's 1987 *Rhetoric and Reality* and his 1988 "Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class" ("Rhetoric and Ideology" hereafter) placed ideology at the forefront of the field's discourse as evidenced in the 1988 CCCC panel "The Politics of Historiography" (Octalog hereafter) and through debates carried out by prominent figures in the pages of *College English*. In discussing those debates, I also argued that Berlin's politically based attacks on cognitivism and expressivism provoked conflict that revealed important distinctions between the social and political turns in composition. In this chapter, I will follow the proliferation of that conflict to reveal how the discourse of the field became increasingly personal in terms of political conflict and increasingly exclusive in terms of allowable pedagogies—edging even into censorship. That is, beyond dismissing the merits of theories and practices that did not support political transformation, compositionists began impugning the motives of colleagues who did not adhere to a liberatory mission. This chapter will also argue that despite the increased intensity of the field's political discourse, by 1993 the political turn had essentially taken hold in composition. Once again, I will be contending that the ideas Berlin championed in *Rhetoric and Reality* and "Rhetoric and Ideology" served as a base for composition's political turn and the internecine conflict that turn entailed.

In tracing how Berlin's work continued to influence the field and led to increased conflict, I have chosen to explore Maxine Hairston's 1992 "Diversity, Ideology, and Teaching Writing." This choice may initially seem peculiar since Hairston receives precious little attention in current scholarship. However, by focusing on Hairston's

“Diversity, Ideology and Teaching Writing,” as well as the responses her article provoked, we can see the bitter underbelly of the political turn that is covered up by current usage of *social turn*. The early nineties was a period when politically minded compositionists did not just attack colleagues’ approaches (as Berlin had in 1988), but colleagues themselves—impugning their character and attempting to censor any resistance to liberatory pedagogy from the field’s journals. While covering the contentious discourse surrounding Hairston’s resistance to composition’s new direction, I will offer evidence that her attempts were not only too late to stop the momentum of the political turn, but also noticeably lacking in support from colleagues. Thus, Hairston’s vociferous resistance was more of a last gasp than an actual debate. Another goal of this chapter will be to further the case that the political turn disrupted the march toward disciplinarity that had begun under the process paradigm, and here, too, Hairston’s piece is quite helpful.

The Hairston “Debates”

With the exception of my discussion of the Octalog, my analyses in the previous two chapters have focused on direct responses to Berlin’s *Rhetoric and Reality* and “Rhetoric and Ideology.” In this chapter, I will provide a few more examples of how ideology became a central and lasting concern in the field. To that end, I turn not only to Maxine Hairston’s “Diversity, Ideology, and Teaching Writing,” but also to the published responses of John Trimbur, Robert G. Wood, Ron Strickland, William H. Thelin, William J. Rouster and Toni Mester. Hairston was one of the most ardent champions of the process paradigm and perhaps the staunchest opponent of the political turn. We may actually view her 1985 CCCC address “Breaking Our Bonds and Reaffirming Our Connections” (“Breaking Our Bonds” hereafter) and her 1992 “Diversity, Ideology, and

Teaching Writing” as bookends for the political turn in composition. In 1985, through her address as Chair of the CCCC, Hairston celebrated the success of the process paradigm in establishing new courses, new faculty positions, and new graduate programs. Given that these are typically considered important hallmarks of a discipline, we may see Hairston’s address as also celebrating composition’s significant steps toward that status. Yet, by 1992 she felt compelled to write “Diversity, Ideology, and Teaching Writing,” an article decrying how the political turn was undermining that progress. Moreover, *College English* felt the issue was still central enough to warrant publication of not only her article, but also the replies of half a dozen respondents, as well as her counter-response. Clearly, in 1992, ideology and politics remained central in composition studies. In fact, Hairston offers considerably more evidence for this in her article.

In “Diversity, Ideology, and Teaching Writing,” Hairston attacks the political turn on three fronts: it does not value writing instruction for writing instruction’s sake; it returns composition to a subordinate status *vis-à-vis* literary studies; and it leads to unethical treatment of students. Her first task, though, is to make the case that leftist political interests were disrupting the field. Hairston does this by offering select quotations from leading journals and figures in composition studies as well as references to prominent conventions. She points to James Laditka, who, in a 1990 edition of the *Journal of Advanced Composition* (*JAC* hereafter) declared, “All teaching supposes ideology; there simply is no value free pedagogy. For these reasons, my paradigm of composition is changing to one of critical literacy, a literacy of political consciousness and social action” (qtd. in Hairston 180). It is not difficult, of course, to hear this declaration as a clear echo of Berlin’s philosophy and goals for writing instruction. To

further Hairston's point, and of course my own, it is worth noting that the issue of *JAC* which Hairston draws upon was a special issue on gender, culture, and ideology.¹ Next she references Charles Paine's admonition in the pages of *College English* (1989):

Teachers need to recognize that methodology alone will not ensure radical visions of the world ... the teacher must recognize that he or she must influence (perhaps manipulate is the more accurate word) students' values through charisma or power—he or she must accept the role as manipulator. Therefore it is of course reasonable to try to inculcate into our students the conviction that the dominant order is repressive. (qtd. Hairston 180)

Here again, Berlin's concern for political awakening and transformation is readily evident. Paine, however, clearly calls on writing teachers to exploit their power over students in order to bring them into a leftist political stance. His discussion of "charisma" reveals his sense of the impressionable and, thus, vulnerable nature of freshman composition students—a vulnerability ripe for exploitation in the service of the radical teacher's agenda. Even more disturbing, though, is the recommendation that, when charisma fails, teachers should wield the power of their office (presumably as manifested in grading) to coerce students. Hairston presents this as one egregious example of the unethical treatment of students for the sake of political interests.

Hairston then points to Patricia Bizzell's 1990 "Beyond Anti-Foundationalism to Rhetorical Authority," wherein Bizzell advocates for a pedagogy that leads students "to engage in a rhetorical process that can collectively generate ... knowledge and beliefs to

¹ *Journal of Advanced Composition* vol. 10, no. 2, 1990.

displace the repressive ideologies an unjust social order would prescribe” (qtd. in Hairston 180). Yet again, the function and purpose of ideology which Berlin sets forth in *Rhetoric and Reality* and “Rhetoric and Ideology” are clearly at work. Despite her focus on writing processes in the early 1980s, Bizzell had, by 1990, clearly committed herself to the new political mission in composition classes. In fact, Bizzell made the turn at least a year earlier as evidenced in her 1989 “‘Cultural Criticism’: A Social Approach to Studying Writing.” In that article Bizzell attempts to frame her earlier work in the 1980s as an initial attempt to “practice cultural criticism” (225). While it is true that Bizzell made political nods in “Cognition, Convention, and Certainty” (1982), one would be hard put to find her discussing cultural criticism or ideology in the early 1980s. By 1989, however, Bizzell is focused on political change via cultural criticism. As she writes, “I think it is important for academics to become cultural critics ... because I hope that the activity of cultural criticism will foster social justice by making people aware of politically motivated ideological concealments” (“Cultural Criticism” 225). Here, yet again, we can see Berlin’s influence through Bizzell’s utilization of ideological considerations; the timing of Bizzell’s change is rather telling as well. Berlin’s push for placing ideology at the forefront of the field’s concerns was, after all, most intense in 1987 and 1988. Accordingly, Bizzell credits Berlin for his work in uncovering the role of ideology in education (228). By 1989, then, we see Bizzell marching in the direction Berlin had pointed. What we do *not* see in “Cultural Criticism” is Bizzell talking about sociolinguistics or the developmental psychology of Lev Vygotsky, which were central in “Cognition, Convention, and Certainty.” This is a worthwhile observation as it signals the abandonment of one set of philosophical roots in favor of another. That is, in taking the

political turn, Bizzell abandoned sociolinguistics and developmental psychology and turned, instead, to ideological inquiry. Thus, despite her attempts to frame her earlier work in the social turn as a bridge to her later work in the political turn, what we see appears more as a leap from one epistemic ground to another.

Not willing to rest on a few quotations to make her case, Hairston urges her readers to turn through the pages of then current issues of major journals in the field: *College English*, *Rhetoric Review*, *College Composition and Communication*, *JAC*, *Focuses*. To help her readers along in their search, she offers a list of prominent compositionists who were defining the field as a locus of political power (e.g., James Berlin, John Trimbur, Lester Faigley, Richard Ohmann, and Linda Bodkey). Finally, Hairston turns to the field's conferences: "At least forty percent of the essays in *The Right to Literacy*, the proceedings of a 1988 conference sponsored by the Modern Language Association in Columbus, Ohio, echo such sentiments, and a glance at the program for the 1991 CCCC convention would confirm how popular such ideas were among the speakers" (181). In short, Hairston supplies ample evidence that, by 1992, ideological study for the sake of sociopolitical transformation had spread firm, far-reaching roots throughout the field.

Given that Hairston was one of the architects of the process paradigm, it should be no surprise that she was alarmed by the rapid field-wide solidification of the political turn. She viewed it as "regressive" for two reasons. For one, "it doesn't take freshman English seriously in its own right but conceives of it as a tool, something to be used" (180). Secondly, it also represents "that old patronizing rationalization we've heard so many times before: students don't have anything to write about so we have to give them

topics. Topics used to be literary; now they're political" (180). Of course, the subtle irony in this observation is that the *reasons* they are political, and the methods of political inquiry in play, arose in literary studies and filtered into composition. So we should also see this as an assertion that the political turn is regressive because it serves goals set forth by literary studies, thus returning composition to the status of a priming field that prepares students for more advanced coursework in literary studies. Hairston, at least, makes the case for this in her article.

Thus Hairston touches upon two key issues that I raised in my previous chapter when discussing the Octalog and Berlin's "Rhetoric and Ideology" (as well as Karen Scriven's, Linda Flower's, and John Schilb's comments on that article). On the one hand, Hairston's concern over the influence of literary studies clearly recalls Bob Johnson's question during the proceedings of the Octalog. Hairston is simply more direct, opting for a clear claim and support rather than simply questioning. In the section of her article explaining "How We Got Here," Hairston poses the rhetorical question, "You see what happens when we allow writing programs to be run by English departments?" (183). It is worth noting that before posing this question, Hairston finished her list of supporting evidence for composition's political turn by pointing to Berlin's attacks on Flower and Hayes as written in "Rhetoric and Ideology" (183). I say it is worth noting because this *immediately* transitions into her discussion of the influence of literary studies, thus indicating that Bob Johnson was clearly not the only one who suspected the influence of literary studies in Berlin's work. Indeed, Hairston places the lion's share of the blame for composition's political turn on literary studies' embrace of leftist politics—especially Marxism. After stating, "I'm convinced that the push to change freshman composition

into a political platform for the teacher has come about primarily because the course is housed in English departments,” she turns to John Searle’s (a linguistics scholar) book review “A Storm Over the University” (1990). In his review, Searle claims, “The most congenial home left for Marxism, now that it has been largely discredited as a theory of economics and politics, is in departments of literary criticism. And [because] many professors of literature no longer care about literature in ways that seemed satisfactory to earlier generations . . . they teach it as a means of achieving left-wing political goals...” (183). Leaning on Searle’s claim, Hairston argues that the political turn in literary studies “trickled down to the lower floors of English departments...” (183).

Searle identifies two connected aspects of the political turn in literary studies that Hairston sees mirrored in composition. The first is goals (and the philosophy that drives them). What is perhaps most fascinating about Hairston’s argument, regardless of responses that would question her grasp of Continental philosophy, is her attempt to demonstrate just how thoroughly composition studies was mirroring the moves already made by literary studies. One excellent example is her quoting of Ronald Strickland’s 1990 “Confrontational Pedagogy and Traditional Literary Studies”:

Marxist critics have demonstrated that conventional literary studies have been more complicitous . . . than any other academic discipline in the reproduction of the dominant ideology Traditional English studies helps to maintain liberal humanism through its emphasis on authorial genius. . . . [Thus] there is a political imperative to resist the privileging of individualism in this practice, for, as Terry Eagleton has demonstrated, it

amounts to a form of coercion in the interests of conservative, elitist politics” (qtd. in Hairston 184).

Strickland was, at the time, a professor of Literature at Illinois State University. It is difficult to read this passage and not see that one could easily replace *literary studies* with *composition classes*, and *Terry Eagleton* with *James Berlin*, and thereby capture exactly the spirit of composition’s political turn. Moreover, the passage as a whole reveals, as Hairston intended, that Berlin, in *Rhetoric and Reality* and “Rhetoric and Ideology,” was rehearsing political arguments already deployed in literary studies.

Hairston also draws on Searle’s assertion that “many professors of literature no longer care about literature in ways that seemed satisfactory to earlier generations.” In this regard, she raises another issue I identified in my previous chapter when arguing that the political turn represented a fundamentally different view of writing instruction. In her opening paragraph of “Ideology, Diversity and Teaching Writing,” Hairston recalls her view of the purpose of writing instruction as she described it during her 1985 CCCC address: “I asserted that we teach writing for its own sake, as a primary intellectual activity that is at the heart of a college education. I insisted that writing courses must not be viewed as service courses. Writing courses, especially required freshman courses, should not be *for* anything or *about* anything other than writing itself” (179). In short, Hairston envisioned freshmen writing courses as being about writing *per se*. In this regard, she echoes Stephen North’s *The Making of Knowledge in Composition*. Her distinction between “writing courses” and “required freshmen courses” is also important to notice because it indicates that Hairston saw much potential in the ways that students can study writing and rhetoric. She alluded to this in her 1985 CCCC address by lauding

the creation of courses on the history of rhetoric as well as graduate programs in rhetoric and composition. What we see through Hairston, then, is a view of writing studies as capable of providing tiers of sophistication that are present in other disciplines—from introductory freshmen courses all the way to graduate level courses. Indeed, part of Hairston's point is that all of this had already been accomplished well before the political turn took hold, and that composition was abandoning the model that had, at long last, professionalized the field, earned it some measure of academic standing within the university, and brought it to the cusp of disciplinarity. What she saw happening in the late 1980s, however, was (returning to her term) regressive because the political turn did not value composition classes for writing instruction *per se*. The politicized view of writing instruction held that pedagogies that only focused on writing *per se* were repressive because they unquestioningly reproduce unjust social structures. Hairston's article, then, rails against the repurposing of writing classes away from writing processes and toward political transformation. Thus, she provides a stark example of the fundamentally differing visions for writing classes that I pointed to in the previous chapter when discussing the debates between Berlin, Scriven, and Flower. In "Diversity, Ideology, and Teaching Writing," Hairston exemplifies the same concern by juxtaposing the process model's (the earlier generation's) view of writing classes with the political turn's view. Here again, then, we can see the disagreement over objects of study that Elizabeth Wardle and Doug Downs refer to in *Composition, Rhetoric, and Disciplinarity* (116-117).

Hairston's argument regarding the influence of literary studies also calls to mind the "inferiority complex" Connors refers to in the Octalog (30). Responding to Bob Johnson's questioning of the role of literary studies in composition's political turn,

Connors pointed to composition's need for validation from other disciplines. Hairston echoes this sentiment when she sardonically states that "Rhetoric scholars who go along will also get new respect now that they have joined the ideological fray and formed alliances with literature faculty" (185). This is really, though, not a new position for Hairston. She had been arguing since 1985 that composition suffered from a psychological need for respect from faculty in literary studies. In her address "Breaking Our Bonds," she asserts that "we have complex psychological bonds to the people who so frequently are our adversaries in our efforts to make the writing programs in our departments as good as they should be and can be." Continuing to support Connors's claim that composition continually sought validation from other disciplines, Hairston laments, "I also see us stunted in our growth because we are not able to free ourselves from needing the approval of the literature people. We've left home in many ways, but we haven't cut the cord. We still crave love" (274). Surprisingly, after such an impassioned call for breaking our bonds, Hairston seems open to the idea of a *mutual* influence between the fields. However, her article clearly indicates that she saw only one direction of influence. Thus she complains that even while "We keep trying to find ways to join contemporary literary theory with composition theory ... I hear no one talking about using what we know about writing processes to help us teach literature." The reason for this one way relationship, she says, is that "they don't know writing theory and, as far as I know, are making no attempt to learn" (274). This ending complaint of Hairston's reveals, for her, the essence of imbalanced respect. Like Connors, she argues that composition's political turn was deeply rooted in the need for validation—for respect. According to Hairston, however, literary studies took little notice of what was going on in composition.

While this may be overstated to some degree, if we consider Donald Gray's 1986 assertion that "ideas in composition studies are not very rewarding," then it would seem that Hairston's assertion had some legitimate grounding (150).

While Hairston places most of the blame for composition's political turn on departmental proximity to literary studies and composition teachers' psychological need for respect from their departmental counterparts, she also attributes some of the political takeover of freshman writing courses to a misguided attempt to deal with rapidly increasing diversity in student populations. That is, she recognizes that the changing demographics of college freshmen represent the changing demographics of the country. Her concern, however, is that terms such as "multiculturalism" and "cultural diversity" had been coopted and turned into "'god terms' that can be twisted to mean anything an ideologue wants them to mean" (186). Hairston sees this concern for the changing student body as connected to the larger political stage and the dominance of right-wing conservative forces (187). Pointing out that liberal arts tend to be dominated by liberals, Hairston claims that the ready acceptance of the leftist takeover in the humanities provided some means of resistance and change—in short, that humanities teachers in general had become so fed up with social conditions that they could no longer resist exploiting their positions to effect change (187).

Yet Hairston was also deeply disturbed by the contempt writing teachers began to show toward the values and beliefs of their students once they felt free to judge based on ideology rather than writing. As an example of this, she returns to Ronald Strickland's "Confrontational Pedagogy and Traditional Literary Studies" and quotes his admission that his pedagogy "conflicts with the expectations of some students [and] these students

make it difficult for me to pursue my political/intellectual agenda” (qtd. in Hairston, “Diversity” 181). Religion is seen as particularly problematic for the ideological agenda because such views “collaborate with the ideology of individualism” (qtd. in Hairston 182). Referring to Dale Bauer when discussing religion and student values as obstacles for the emerging political movement in composition pedagogy, Hairston notes his tying of these to “an expressivist model, one which reinforces ... the dominant patriarchal culture” (qtd. in Hairston 182).

Bauer’s distaste for expressivism, however, allows Hairston to segue from instructor resentment of students to intra-faculty resentment arising within the discourse of the political turn. As an example she points to Lester Faigley attacking, from an Althusserian position, a textbook for its section on writing an application letter: “In the terms of [the Marxist philosopher] Althusser, [the applicant who writes such a letter] has voluntarily assented his subjectivity within the dominant ideology and thus has reaffirmed relations of power” (qtd. in Hairston 182). Of course, Althusser’s Marxism was a *fundamental* tenet of Berlin’s *Rhetoric and Reality*, so we should mark Faigley’s use of him to chastise not only a textbook, but also implicitly any colleagues who implement such an assignment. Indeed, between Bauer’s attack on expressivism and Faigley’s attack on any pedagogy that does not fit into a Marxist agenda, it is difficult not to detect some degree of influence from Berlin, who also attacked expressivism and advocated, more boldly than anyone before him, for a neo-Marxist agenda in writing instruction.

Interestingly, at one point Hairston actually attempts to turn the tables on the Marxist approach, stating in “Diversity, Ideology and Teaching Writing” that “one could

argue with more force that the instructor who fails to help students master the standard dialect conspires against the working class” (184). Thus, even Hairston cannot resist arguing for the political power of her favored approach in writing instruction. In this regard, then, she plays the same sort of political game Flower did in her response to Berlin’s “Rhetoric and Ideology,” wherein Flower argues that the cognitive/social model can fulfill the goals of a politically interested writing class. Hairston, however, ups the ante by implying that the overtly Marxist writing class is self-defeating.

Hairston, then, provides not only abundant evidence of the expansion of the political turn in composition, but also suggests reasons that echo many of my own—*e.g.*, the influx of Continental philosophy aided by departmental proximity with literary studies and the influence of James Berlin. Hairston’s concern with ideology and the quotes she uses as examples of its regressive influence in composition all point to tenets and goals initially forwarded in Berlin’s *Rhetoric and Reality* and “Rhetoric and Ideology” (the latter of which Hairston specifically cites in her essay). However, although her resistance was clearly passionate, it would not stem the surging tide of the political turn. Indeed, quite a number of scholars immediately challenged to her attempts to do so.

Backlash – The Field Responds

With so many responses (again, half a dozen) being published in the next issue of *College English*, all compiled into one article, we must recognize the limited space for counterargument afforded each respondent. Still, we can glean a few important elements that emerged. The most obvious is the common defense of politicizing composition studies and classrooms. The importance of ideology in this common goal is also made evident. John Trimbur hails such politicization as the restoration of “first-year

composition as rhetorical education for citizenship” (248). Trimbur attributes Hairston’s resistance to a fear of difference (249) and also to conservative attacks on academic freedom as represented through the National Association of Scholars (NAS hereafter). Although Trimbur references the NAS specifically in regard to its orchestration of the cancellation of a freshman writing class at the University of Texas at Austin, the dichotomy of liberal vs. conservative is set up early through his response and thus frames the rest of not only his response, but the others as well. Moreover, ideology, as an underlying determinant of difference in culture is a central concern in Trimbur’s response.

Robert Wood picks up on this as well when he counters Hairston’s article by arguing, as Berlin did in *Rhetoric and Reality* and “Rhetoric and Ideology,” that there is no such thing as ideologically neutral teaching (249). William H. Thelin also stresses the importance of instructors “discussing the ideological foundations and the conflicts within their own fields...” as the means by which classrooms should be “overtly” politicized in pursuit of equality (252). As with Woods, Thelin argues that Hairston’s pedagogy, whether she is willing to admit or not, is already political: “Depoliticized? Hardly. As most classrooms are, hers is merely one where the politics are kept covert . . .” (252). It is striking, when reading these defenses of politicizing the composition classroom, just how clearly they rely on the ideological argument and profess the same sociopolitical goals that were championed by Berlin six years earlier.

We might also note how some of these responses ironically end up supporting Hairston’s arguments even as they attempt to refute them. Perhaps the most interesting example of this is when Ron Strickland challenges her argument regarding the trickling down of critical literary theory into composition. Strickland argues this is a false analogy

since “the concept of ‘canon’ doesn’t apply in composition studies in the same way that it does in literary studies, and composition scholars have long been concerned with extending social power through literacy in ways that are frequently at odds with literary studies’ traditional emphasis on the preservation of elite culture” (250). Moreover, Strickland asserts that Hairston does not have a firm grasp of Continental philosophy: “Hairston’s criticisms of radicalism and theory are ill-informed and undeveloped. She confuses deconstruction, for instance, with vulgar Marxism” (250-251). Putting aside Strickland’s intriguing comment on the difference between a canon in literary studies and a canon in composition, I will turn instead to his attempt to counter Hairston’s argument by contending that she does not fully understand the Continental philosophies she refers to. Ironically, Strickland is stressing the importance of properly understanding the foundational ideas behind the political turn already taken by literary studies which were now influencing composition. A specific example of this can be seen in Strickland’s critique of Hairston’s notion of multiculturalism. When critiquing Hairston’s means of addressing multiculturalism in her classrooms, whether in discussions or writing assignments, Strickland accuses Hairston of treating such issues only superficially:

Yet, in Hairston’s account, the communal interest of the topics is never specified or demonstrated—it is always subsumed or overwhelmed by the taken-for-granted, self-evident value of the personal experience of the writer. The rich variety of life experiences among these writers somehow gets reduced to the stereotypes of other cultures which circulate in the dominant American culture. (251)

Strickland's critique of Hairston's pedagogy is strikingly reminiscent of Stanley Fish's idea of "boutique multiculturalism" which is characterized by "its *superficial* or cosmetic relationships to the objects of its affection" (378; emphasis added). When discussing the idea of boutique multiculturalism, Fish points to tendencies to emphasize visible diversity and obfuscate racial hierarchy. In fact, *vis-à-vis* composition, literary studies was and is one of the most immediate sources of extensive theory on multiculturalism, and it is difficult not to see Strickland's critique of Hairston, in this regard, as a rehearsal of arguments made by Fish and others in literary studies. So despite arguing that Hairston inappropriately charges composition studies with appropriating literary theory, Strickland appears to rely quite heavily on literary studies to critique Hairston's ideas about diversity. Interestingly, Strickland offers no sources at all for his theoretical views on multiculturalism.

William Rouster also appears to shore up Hairston's argument regarding literary studies while trying to counter her claim that composition teachers are not qualified to engage many of the political issues they focus their pedagogy on. After recalling Hairston's claim that "compositionists should avoid teaching cultural criticism because this is an area in which they have 'no scholarly base from which to operate,'" Rouster counter's by conceding that "they [composition teachers] immerse themselves in currently fashionable critical theories ..." (qtd. in Trimbur, *et al* 253). Indeed, Rouster extends this to actual training in graduate programs, pointing out that many composition teachers "do receive an education in literary criticism which does teach us how to examine literary texts using the heuristic of a literary theory" (253). So while trying to

counter Hairston's point about qualifications, Rouster adds credence to her argument regarding the influence of literary studies.

Another aspect we may glean from these responses is their common condescension in treating Hairston's arguments as out-of-date and out-of-step. Thelin's response, for example, declares "we've moved, I think, beyond the naïve political belief that classrooms can be depoliticized" (252). Thelin's declaration conveys two clear messages. First, his use of the past tense *moved* firmly posits that he feels the political turn had been made by 1993. Secondly, Thelin's response carries in it a tone of impatient condescension. On the one hand, his declaration that "we've moved" appears to imply that this debate is, essentially, already decided and indeed he prefaces this assertion about the status of composition by charging that Hairston adds "nothing worthwhile" (252). His labeling of Hairston's arguments as naïve entails the unfortunate *ad hominem* implication that *she* is naïve. This tendency to condescend and attack Hairston personally trends through the other responses as well.

For example, if we look at Toni Mester's "response" we see it is not really an engagement of Hairston's argument at all. Instead, it is simply a mocking caricature of Hairston and her position in the form of a parodic revision of Gilbert and Sullivan's "They'll None of 'Em Be Missed" (from *The Mikado*).

As someday it may happen that a victim must be found,
 I've got a little list, I've got a little list
 Of professional offenders who might well be underground
 And who never would be missed, they never would be missed.

There's Marxist intellectuals who pen monographs,
 All feminists with leftist views that irritate the haves.
 All anti-racist graduates with ideology,
 All writers who when writing show a sense of history,
 And all the English teachers who on literature insist,
 They'd none of them be missed, they'd none of them be missed!

Chorus:

She's got us on the list, she's got us on the list
 And none of us be missed, no, none of us be missed!
 The literary critic, and the others of his taste
 And the deconstructionist, I've got her on the list!
 And the people who preach politics to puff in students' face,
 They never would be missed, they never would be missed.
 Then the idiot who praises in enthusiastic tone
 All rhetoric but mine or discipline but our own,
 And the grunts of the academy who papers must correct,
 And the basic skills providers who have nothing to protect,
 And that singular anomaly, the part-time activist
 I don't think they'll be missed, I'm sure they'll not be missed!

Chorus:

She's got us on the list, she's got us on the list
 And she don't think we'll be missed, she's sure we won't be missed!

It is difficult to read this and not see Mester as ridiculing Hairston. Certainly, Mester did not feel that Hairston or her argument warranted serious or professional treatment.

Even Trimbur could not resist the urge to condescend as he writes, “So she argues, if that’s the word ...” (248). All of these attempts to dismiss Hairston’s challenge to the politicization of composition, to question her motives, and to frame her as a politically debilitating relic are, to me, subtly reminiscent of Berlin’s response to Schilb’s comment on “Rhetoric and Ideology,” wherein Berlin uses a long list to rhetorically denounce further study that might impede the political turn.

Hairston’s reply to the responses is, not surprisingly, a reaffirmation of her position. Her only caveat is an apology to C. H. Knoblauch for misrepresenting a quotation from him, though she contends that she did not feel she misrepresented his views. However, bowing to her acknowledgement, as she bowed to his complaint, I omitted her references to Knoblauch in reviewing her work and the responses it provoked. Still, I would like to call attention to one important theme in Hairston’s reply: division. As I pointed out in my analysis of the responses, the debate over the political turn began to take on a condescending, bitter tone. As Hairston puts it, “The tone is also far more emotional. That’s unfortunate—some good professional friendships have dissolved in the heat of the argument” (255). Clearly, the political was becoming personal, and the responses to Hairston’s “Diversity, Ideology, and Teaching Writing,” unfortunately, provide egregious examples of that. Hairston also decides, on the eve of what she said was likely her last major publication, that the two sides had become so divided that open debate no longer appeared tenable. Hairston argues, as I am arguing, that the differences between the two sides are too fundamental:

I see little point in trying to rebut the criticisms of those who disagree with me so sharply ... We differ so radically about basic premises—about teaching, about our society, about the purpose of education—that we have little foundation on which to base a useful discussion ... (255).

Hairston here expresses one argument that I have been making regarding the political turn. That is, it represented a vision of writing classes so radically different from the process model that no reconciliation was possible. Indeed, the mission of the political turn *necessitated* the utter dismissal of any philosophical vestiges of the process movement (be they cognitivist or expressivist) in a way that the social turn of the early 1980s never did.

Hairston's article did not just draw serious attention and ire toward herself, however. Richard Gebhardt, then editor of *College Composition and Communication*, also faced backlash simply for publishing Hairston's challenge to the political turn. In the editor's note for the following issue, tellingly titled "Theme Issues and Fallout," Gebhardt reports, "Most critiqued the article, and some also criticized me for publishing it and (as one person said) 'publicizing McCarthyist views'" (295). This is a most unfortunate tactic as it represents an attempt to censor dissenting views from the pages of composition's professional journals. Gebhardt also tells us that "Maxine Hairston's 'Diversity, Ideology, and Teaching Writing' provoked more counterstatement submissions than any *CCC* article since the start of 1987" (295). The reference to 1987 is interesting because that is the year that Berlin published *Rhetoric and Reality*. Given the fact that these were *counterstatements*, the surprisingly negative tone, and the attempts to

discourage the publication of such positions, we can clearly see the sort of muddy tide Hairston was swimming against.

However, a later issue of *CCC* would present signs that Hairston was not *utterly* alone in her opinions. Although the counterstatements vastly outnumbered supporting statements, in 1993 Ralph F. Voss and Laurence Behrens published “Responses to Richard Gerbhardt, ‘Theme Issues and Fallout’ and Reply,” also in the pages of the *CCC*. Voss and Behrens were concerned about the treatment that Hairston and Gebhardt had received after the publication of “Diversity, Ideology, and Teaching Writing.” Voss’s response is aimed squarely at the bitter tone Hairston lamented in her reply. In particular, he takes issues with the “viciousness” that had emerged as well as the labeling of Hairston and Gebhardt as “McCarthyite” (256). As Gebhardt had previously, Voss points to the failure of many complainers to acknowledge the fact that Gebhardt had included numerous articles opposing Hairston’s argument. Blaming the zeal of the political left, Voss laments the loss of civility in the field:

In this debate, I suppose the level of zeal that at least partially blinds accounts for the sort of viciousness that has too often emerged, such as the notion of Hairston—and Gebhardt, by extension, since he published her ideas—as “McCarthyite”; and accounts for the failure of many readers to see that included in the same issue are other articles that clearly came from viewpoints other than Hairston's. I guess I'm just old enough to miss the civility that marked even the sharpest disagreements in the earlier days of the *CCCC* and *CCC*. The price of a maturing field seems to include a loss of respect for differing views. (257)

Voss also takes issue with Knoblauch's suspicions that Hairston had nefarious political motives for incorrectly citing him and sides with Hairston's contention that she had, nonetheless, fairly represented his position. Indeed, Voss attempts to turn the tables on Knoblauch's accusation:

C. H. Knoblauch is apparently right that Hairston misrepresented a quotation from him, and he is right to point this out. But his insistence on finding "darker motives" beyond human error illustrates what I mean by the polarizing price of lost civility we are paying now. Hairston may have misrepresented his quotation, but unless I am badly misreading Knoblauch's work, she did not misrepresent his views. Thus one might as readily see "darker motives" in Knoblauch's rather indignant tone in bringing Hairston's error to the attention of *CCC* readers. (257)

As with Hairston, then, Voss marks the increasing bitterness and polarization in the field as a byproduct of the political turn. In doing so, both he and Hairston help to remind us of the prophetic insights of Jan Swearingen and Linda Flower, both of whom had predicted increased polarization and conflict as inevitable under the political turn (Swearingen at the Octalog in 1988, and Flower in her response to "Rhetoric and Ideology" in 1989).

Behrens expresses similar frustrations over the dismissive or suspicious nature with which those supporting the politicization of the field treated opposing arguments. Thus, he essentially echoes Hairston and Voss. Ultimately, his article asserts that the politically motivated left in composition was no longer interested in academic diversity. "Significantly," he writes, "some of the new ideologues, while professing to embrace diversity, draw the line at diversity of professional opinion" (257). Here again, we can

see the growing sense that the field was beginning to censor dissent from the political mission. The reasons for such polarization, condescension, and dismissiveness should, of course, be rather clear. If the political turn in composition was dead-set on transforming the social order, then there was simply no room for any dissent that might hinder that movement.

Wherefore the Social?

Beyond the obviously bitter tone of the conflict that I have emphasized in this chapter, there is one other facet of the discourse of the political turn that is worth noting. Nowhere in these publications do we see any discussion of the philosophical roots of the early social turn. Not one of the respondents to Hairston even mentions sociolinguistics, Lev Vygotsky, or collaborative learning. Even Bizzell leaves such roots behind. Instead, the focus is squarely on the new political mission of liberation through cultural criticism—a criticism founded on ideological inquiry. Moreover, there are unmistakable attempts to censor viewpoints which do not support the new political mission of the field. This aversion to open inquiry is also contrary to the approach advocated by socially interested compositionists such as Bizzell in the early 1980s. To get a stronger sense of just how far out of fashion the concerns of the social turn of the early 1980s had fallen, one might preform a brief search of the pages of *College English* from 1987 to 1993, using the terms *ideology* and *sociolinguistics*. What one will find is 108 results for ideology, and 5 for sociolinguistics.

In addition to these themes of conflict and the adoption of new philosophical roots, we also see a new relationship with literary studies emerging in composition's

discourse of the political turn. While Strickland was somewhat resistant to Hairston's assertion that literary studies motivated composition's political turn, Rouster openly credited literary studies as preparing composition teachers to enact cultural criticism. Indeed, even in Strickland's case we might reasonably suspect that his motivation was less about distancing literary studies and more about discrediting Hairston. We can probably look to Susan Miller's 1991 *Textual Carnivals* as one inspiration for compositionists reconciling their relationship with literary studies. In that text, which won numerous awards in the field, Miller—speaking specifically of the relationship between composition and literary studies—advocates opening rather than closing the borders among established fields with the goal of mutually acknowledging knowledge as a *shared process* (187). Indeed, the reception of Miller's *Textual Carnivals* suggests that by 1991 the field had formalized its political turn.² Miller's call to recognize mutuality between composition and literary studies was extended by James Berlin in his 1996 *Rhetorics, Poetics, and Cultures*—a far cry from his position at the Octalog. Reviewers such as John Clifford applauded Berlin's "joining of cultural studies and literary theory" (283). So it would appear that completing composition's political turn entailed recognizing the importance of literary studies' political turn.

This chapter, then, has shown how ideas which Berlin set forth in *Rhetoric and Reality* and "Rhetoric and Ideology" played a strong role in providing a framework that allowed the field to crystalize the political interests that Lazere identified as having been persistent in composition since at least the 1960s. Despite these earlier interests, the

² *Textual Carnivals* was awarded The Conference on College Composition and Communication's Outstanding Book Award (1991), The Modern Language Association's Mina P. Shaughnessy Prize (1991), and The Teachers of Advanced Composition's W. Ross Winterowd Award (1991).

process paradigm arose as the dominant theory in composition—until, that is, the field awoke to composition’s political role and potential. Thus, I have been arguing that it was not the social turn of the early 1980s that hastened the end of the process paradigm; it was the political turn that began to take hold in 1987.

In exploring how Berlin’s ideas spread rapidly throughout the field, I have, as in the previous chapter, highlighted distinctions between the social turn and the political turn. Most especially I have pointed to the increased conflict predicted by Swearingen and Flower as having arisen from the mission of the political turn and, at the same time, as having been unnecessary under the social turn. In addition, I have argued that we can find distinguishing roots for the two turns—sociolinguistics, developmental psychology, and collaborative work for the social turn, and Continental philosophy (especially neo-Marxism) for the political turn. In discussing the conflict elicited by the political turn, I have highlighted the intense incivility of the discourse: the tendency to dismiss and even ridicule opponents of the political turn, and attempts to censor dissent from the pages of the field’s journals. In short, this chapter has presented the political turn as exceptionally combative and disruptive. As in the previous chapter, I am pointing to this conflict as a distinguishing feature of the political turn—that is, such conflict was not a part of the early social turn, nor was it necessary within the multidisciplinary nature of early social turn. Given this rather ugly period in the history of composition’s political turn, it is perhaps no wonder that the field has opted to characterize that time under the auspices of the social turn.

CHAPTER VII: CONCLUSION—THE PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE OF THE POLITICAL TURN

It is understandable that the field would desire to rename the post-process movement in a way that conveys what that movement was *for*, rather than continuing to rely on a phrase that merely suggests what it was *against*. Thus, by renaming those years as the “social turn,” compositionists are attempting to provide a reasonable account of how and why the field abandoned the process model. That is, *social turn* is meant as a historiographical term that indicates how the field refigured itself after the process paradigm. It is precisely this concern for refiguring ourselves that allows us to understand why the field would, in recent scholarship, look back and reimagine the social turn. After all, if we pay attention to the 2014 special issue of *College English* (*Reimagining the Social Turn*), then we cannot miss the fact that the field is again (or, as I am suggesting, *still*) trying to figure itself. Why else would Kathleen Blake Yancey ask, in a volume dedicated to composition’s disciplinarity, “now that we qualify as a discipline, what *kind* of a discipline would we like to be?” (31). Why else would Steve Parks and others, in that 2014 special issue, question the compatibility of disciplinarity and political action? And why else would we see scholars such as Parks and Donald Lazere, in that same special issue, drawing distinctions between the social and the political? As several scholars cited in this dissertation have asserted, charting the past in composition is always connected to understanding the present and charting the future.

Yet, I have argued *social turn* is an inadequate appellation for describing composition from the early 1980s and into the 1990s. Indeed, as a historiographical term,

I have contended that *social turn* actually obfuscates two separate movements by eliding them into a singular progression. Moreover, I have tried to make the case that not only does the phrase rather ironically misrepresent the actual social interests of composition in the early 1980s, it also masks the *essentially* political turn that began in 1987. Moreover, I have attempted to show how this masking diminishes the role of important figures, important epistemic distinctions, and important disciplinary conflicts.

As I have tried to show throughout my dissertation, in 1987 James Berlin became a central figure in composition studies, serving as the spearhead for crystalizing the political turn. By presenting an Althusserian reading of composition history in *Rhetoric and Reality*, Berlin, I have argued, positioned ideology at the forefront of the field's discourse—in both theoretical and practical contexts. In support of this contention I have pointed to the panel “The Politics of Historiography” at the CCCC the year after *Rhetoric and Reality*'s publication, the publication of “Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class” in *College English* the next year, the field's responses to both works, and, finally, to the conflict resulting from Berlin's political push. In reviewing the “The Politics of Historiography” as well as pertinent articles in *College English*, I have attempted to show that *ideology* quickly achieved the sort of disciplinary currency in the late 1980s and early 1990s that *paradigm* held in the late 1970s. Finally, I have argued that it was primarily through *Rhetoric and Reality* that Berlin provided a framework for crystalizing the political interests that, as Donald Lazere noted in “Reimagining the Social Turn” (2015), had been bubbling up in composition studies throughout the previous decades. Despite some quibbling between neo-Marxists and traditional Marxists, and despite concerns over Berlin's oversimplified, politically derived taxonomy of rhetorics, ideology emerged as

the preeminent avenue of cultural inquiry, which, in turn, afforded a strategy for political transformation. Even though Stephen North's *The Making of Knowledge in Composition* (1987; *MKC* hereafter) provided ample evidence that there was a plethora of epistemic methods available to the field as the process paradigm was crumbling, his work was virtually dismissed because he neglected the political dimension of writing instruction. Berlin's politicized view of the field, on the other hand, was widely embraced and rapidly spread throughout the field's discourse—effecting considerations of research, theory, and pedagogy. Thus, one of the primary goals of my project has been to demonstrate the importance of Berlin in composition's political turn. This important role of Berlin has, I have suggested, been largely diminished in recent accounts of composition's so-called social turn. In short, I have tried to show that we cannot fully account for composition history in the late 1980s and early 1990s, particularly the field's galvanizing around political concerns, without reckoning with the influence of James Berlin.

I have also strived to delineate two distinct movements that are, in recent composition studies, elided. That is, while I agree that there was a social turn in the early 1980s, I have argued that it was distinct from the political turn. In making this case, I have drawn clear philosophical and theoretical distinctions between the two turns. In doing so, I have relied most heavily on contrasting the work of Patricia Bizzell and Kenneth Bruffee in the early 1980s against the work of James Berlin in the late 1980s. In particular I paid close attention to Bizzell's reliance on sociolinguistics and Lev Vygotsky's developmental psychology in her attempts to supplement, rather than replace, cognitive psychology in studying writing processes. As I have pointed out, Bizzell's work in the early 1980s was post-process only insofar as she was attempting to move the field

beyond relying *solely* on cognitive psychology. Unlike Berlin's work in the late 1980s, however, Bizzell was not trying to displace cognitive psychology. She is quite clear about this in "Cognition, Convention, and Certainty" when she writes "Answers to what we need to know about writing will have to come from *both the inner-directed and the outer-directed* theoretical schools if we wish to have a complete picture of the composing process" (81; emphasis added). Thus, I have argued that Bizzell's work, despite the implications of including it within the scope of the social turn, did not actually hasten the end of the process model; it did not even call for it.

Instead, I have pointed to the work of Berlin as calling unequivocally for the abandonment of cognitivism and expressivism on political grounds and argued that the political grounding of Berlin's approach represents a clear distinction between the field's social interests in the early 1980s and its political interests by 1987. That is, while Bizzell was relying on sociolinguistics and Vygotsky's theories of developmental psychology in the early 1980s, Berlin, in the late 1980s, was relying on Continental philosophy and Western Marxism, which had already transformed American literary studies. Thus, we can see that when Bizzell does make the political turn in the late 1980s, she abandons sociolinguistics and instead emphasizes ideology and cultural studies, as I have noted by referencing her 1989 "Cultural Criticism." None of this is to say that Bizzell did not have political interests in the early 1980s. However, as Lazere notes in "Reimagining the Social Turn," Bizzell simply does not discuss, in any overt or direct fashion, socioeconomic disparities in the early 1980s (577). Nor, during that time, does Bizzell offer any attention to cultural studies or ideology. This is, quite simply, because such a framework had not yet been formulated in composition studies. That did not happen until *Rhetoric and*

Reality was published in 1987. It should be no surprise, then, that by 1989 Bizzell began focusing on ideology and crediting Berlin in that work. By then, Berlin had provided a method of inquiry for focusing the field on political interests and, moreover, he had effectively problematized a focus on writing instruction for writing instruction's sake.

This problematizing of writing instruction for writing instruction's sake leads to the final facet of the political turn discussed in my dissertation: disruptive conflict. Here, too, I have tried to draw a distinction between the social and political turns while also accentuating the importance of Berlin's model for politicizing the field. That is, I have argued that the conflict necessitated by Berlin's political agenda for writing instruction was not necessary under the social interests of the early 1980s. As we have seen, in 1982 Bizzell argued for mutuality between inner-directed theory (*e.g.* cognitive process) and outer-directed theory (*e.g.* sociolinguistics). However, because Berlin's agenda was one of economic and political transformation of the US, an agenda largely adopted by the field in the late 1980s, there was no room for writing instruction that could be seen as supporting existing political structures. Moreover, this meant that *any* approach to writing instruction had to acknowledge that it was inherently political and, thus, inherently supportive of particular political arrangements. As Berlin and many others in the field argued, no way of teaching could still be seen as innocent. Thus, any attempt to devalue the political dimension of writing instruction was maligned as consciously or unconsciously supporting injustice. As we might expect, and as I have tried to show, this led to bitter conflict—conflict that goes largely unaccounted for in recent scholarship's adoption of *social turn* to designate the entirety of the post-process movement. Indeed, a

significant element of my argument has been that if one does not reckon with Berlin's influence, then one cannot ultimately account for the conflict elicited by the political turn.

In reporting the conflict of the political turn, I have tried to connect its origins and escalations directly to the publication of *Rhetoric and Reality* and "Rhetoric and Ideology." While the reviews of *Rhetoric and Reality* were, on the whole, positive, we witnessed initial gripes from traditional Marxists (such as Sharon Crowley) and concerns over Berlin's simplified taxonomy of rhetorics—that is, some felt his taxonomy was inadequate in accounting for the complexity of composition studies in the early post-process years. Yet, as I noted, despite concerns over Berlin's simplifying taxonomy of the field's various approaches, no one was returning to North's *MKC* as an example of composition's richness. Instead, there was a tendency to confront Berlin on his terms. Thus, as I have tried to demonstrate that, once "Rhetoric and Ideology" was published, there was a marked increase in conflict as cognitivism and expressivism (two branches of the process model) fell under more direct attack by those embracing the political turn. As in North's *MKC*, we saw appeals for mutuality. This time, those appeals came from Karen Scriven, Linda Flower, and John Schilb. Those appeals were met with stiff resistance from Berlin, and in the case of Schilb's response, and Berlin's counter-response, we saw an emerging tone of bitterness and impatience. In short, the publication of "Rhetoric and Ideology" elicited more direct conflict in the field's discourse. However, in those exchanges the conflict was focused on research methods and practice.

Yet, as the field entered the 1990s, some compositionists, under the banner of the political turn, began attacking the motives and character of those who did not conform to the political mission. In arguing this, I paid close attention to Maxine Hairston's

“Diversity, Ideology, and Teaching Writing” and the responses to her article. As we saw, Hairston was maligned as being afraid of difference, as being uninformed, as being naïve, and as being out-of-date. However, it was not just Hairston who suffered attacks on her character and motives. Richard Gebhardt, then editor of *College English*, was attacked as “McCarthyite” simply for publishing Hairston’s dissent (Gebhardt 295). Of course, this labeling of Gebhardt was an extension, as Ralph F. Voss noted, of Hairston being labeled the same. What I have tried to show, then, is how the discourse of the political turn eventually evolved into bitter censures against those who stood against the new agenda as well as active lobbying for censorship of dissenting opinions.

This rather regrettable trend of attacking the character of colleagues, and calling for the censoring of their opinions from professional journals, suggests one avenue of continued research into the social and political turns. Specifically, if we accept the difference between the two turns, the next natural step would appear to be an investigation of the reasons the field opted for *social turn* in renaming the post-process years. Of course, historiographical terminology is rhetorical in nature. What, then, were the rhetorical reasons for choosing *social turn* instead of *political turn*. One might speculate that there were political reasons underlying such a choice. After all, a recent Pew Research poll found that between 2015 and 2018, “the share of Americans saying they had a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in higher education dropped from 57% to 48%, and the falloff was greater among Republicans.” Moreover, according to the poll, the reason faith in higher education dropped, for 79% of republicans at least, lies in “professors bringing their political and social views into the classroom” (Parker). We might also look to the 2007 report “Freedom in the Classroom” published by the AAUP.

The report was a response to “recent legislative efforts” to “regulate classroom instruction, advocating the adoption of statutes that would prohibit teachers from challenging deeply held student beliefs or that would require professors to maintain ‘diversity’ or ‘balance’ in their teaching” (54). The report also refers to “many legislative hearings and investigations nationwide” into higher education’s enforcing of a particular political viewpoint in the student body (60). Given such social and legislative distrust and intrusions, and the threats faculty surely perceived to their academic freedom, one can very reasonably speculate that *social turn* helps politically interested composition faculty avoid having to explain to their WPAs, legislatures, and society in general why they are focusing composition pedagogy on sociopolitical transformation. Of course, these are initial speculations with scant supporting research because my project was aimed at establishing the political turn rather than presupposing its existence and exploring reasons for obfuscating it.

Another avenue of continuing research would question one aspect of my presentation of the two turns—the social and the political. That is, so far I have discussed the two turns chronologically, speaking as if the political turn displaced not only the process model, but also the social turn. Indeed, in my introduction I explained how I treat these turns (the social and the political) in the sense of historical demarcations. Thus, I pointed to fundamentally different roots for each movement, at least between 1982 and 1987. However, when considering recent scholarship such as Steve Parks’s “Sinners Welcome” (2014), which argues that we are turning toward the social and away from the political, one could reasonably question whether the social turn ended or, rather, continues to compete. That is, I see my treatment of these two turns as larger, historically

demarcating turns as open to potentially enlightening critique. For example, Parks argues that Linda Flowers 2008 *Community Literacy and the Rhetoric of Public Engagement* is still rooted in the social while balking at actual political transformation. Research into this current distinction could prove useful in understanding how these two movements may have continued to operate in parallel and/or in competition with each other.

Certainly I have made the claim that insofar as the social was not political enough in the early 1980s it was, to some degree, an obstacle to the agenda of the political turn. Parks makes the same argument in “Sinners Welcome.”

One final avenue of continued research emerges from my necessarily brief discussions of the relationship between literary studies and composition. While I have shown that this relationship had some clear influence in composition’s political turn, it seems that this area is deserving of considerably more attention if we want to gain a more thorough understanding of composition history within and beyond the political turn. There can be little doubt that composition has, since its inception, found itself in an intimate political and academic relationship with literary studies. The two fields have, historically, shared so much in their studies of writing. Beyond the academic intimacy, there is of course a power relationship that has caused much historical tension between the fields. In retrospect, it is a little surprising that no-one has, as yet, embarked on a more thorough study of the history of the relationship between the two fields and the consequences for both areas of study.

These three avenues, then, represent the next steps of study that spring from an investigation of composition’s political turn in the late 1980s. I have, I hope, provided firm grounding for the existence of a political as well as a social turn and, in doing so,

brought back to light some of the most important figures, ideas, and conflicts that shaped composition in the post-process era. In addition, I hope that my dissertation has contributed to recent discussions over the difference between the social and political in composition studies as well as how those discussions bear upon the disciplinarity problem. Finally, given the current state of the disciplinarity problem, and given the possibility that the social and political turns may well continue to compete, I hope that I have opened up avenues of exploring not only the past and present states of the political turn, but also how it might continue to influence the field of composition.

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