Composition's Terms of Use:

The Pedagogical Implications of Learning Management Systems

A dissertation

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

BY

Mark Andrew Brenden

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Dr. Patrick Bruch, Co-Advisor

Dr. Thomas Reynolds, Co-Advisor

May 2023

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Pat Bruch and Tom Reynolds were not just my advisors on this project, but my collaborators, friends, and heroes. Tom seemed to always be in his office when I needed him to be there – whether to ease grad-school anxieties or to share notes about last night's Twins game -- and he guided my ship these past five years with grace and good humor. Pat steered me toward any good idea I've ever had about pedagogy without pushing me, and he always made me laugh while doing it. Without them, I'd still be wandering aimlessly in this this discipline. Any merit in this dissertation is theirs, and any bad idea is mine alone. To express the gratitude I feel toward them, words don't seem to be up for the job. I guess this is what the phrase "thank you" is for.

Michael Keller deserves thanks for similar reasons. Mike first introduced me to Rhetoric and Composition as a "teaching discipline" at South Dakota State University, and he has become one of my best friends. He gave me a baby-blue 1957 Smith Corona Silent-Super when I started this program, and I used that machine and the several I've bought since to work through ideas on this dissertation (often in correspondence with him). He is also a most trusted and generous reader of my work.

Many thanks are due to my fellow graduate students, who helped make this enterprise feel like a cooperation rather than a competition. I need to specifically mention Jackie James, Jessa Wood, Brandi Fuglsby, Ryan Wold, Eduardo Nevarez, Katlynne Davis, Evelyn Dsouza, D. Mollie Stambler, McKinley Green, and Niki Ciulla. My committee members Richard Graff and Kirsten Jamsen deserve thanks as well, for helping me avoid falling into bureaucratic traps. Molly Kessler, Lee-Ann Kastman-Breuch, Allie Cooperman, Shannon Klug, Michelle Lubbers, Bill Fricke, and Laura Luepke helped me miss some traps as well. Atilla Hallsby's seminar on rhetoric taught me everything I know about the subject, which will never be as much as he does.

My colleagues at Fort Lewis College, Ana Hale, Erik Juergensmeyer, Ayla Moore, Michelle Bonanno, and Jillian Wenburg helped me tremendously during my three years as a lecturer there. Particularly, they showed me the rewards of collaboration in building a writing program. On my last day in Durango, Ana gave me a piece of scrap-paper onto which she had transcribed "Now It Is Clear" by W.S. Merwin, which is now my favorite poem, and it speaks to what I am trying to communicate in this acknowledgements section.

I wrote the lion's share of this dissertation at Wilson Library on the U of M's West Bank, at Bush Library on the Hamline University campus, and at the Lindell Library on the Augsburg University campus. So thanks to libraries and all who keep that whole concept alive. If it ever dies, so do we. I often listened to the music of Yazmin Williams and John Fahey while writing, so I'm grateful to them as well. I am sure that when I hear their guitar-playing, I'll think of writing this dissertation, for better or for worse.

My family's influence is all over this dissertation as well. My father, Denny Brenden – a teacher of agriculture -- probably unknowingly taught me to not accept the B.S. My mother, Margy Brenden – a first-grade teacher -- taught me to never let the B.S. shrink my heart. My sister, Megan Madsen – a fourth-grade teacher – taught me to laugh about the world. Lyle Brenden, who though he dropped out of school in 8th grade to work the farm (or perhaps because he did), influenced my language more than anyone with his wry Norwegian wit. Flo Brenden nourished me as much with love as with lefse. Ralph Kranz showed me how to recognize decorum, and Helen Kranz taught me the necessity of writing through life. My nieces and nephews Hayden, Brenna, Landon, and Connor gave me perspective as well.

Finally, Katie McEachern not only supported me in this endeavor but makes any future endeavors worthwhile. From her, I get faith and hope and love. Good to eat a thousand years.

This dissertation is dedicated to my students at The University of Minnesota, Hamline University, Augsburg University, Fort Lewis College, Southwest Colorado Community College, and South Dakota State University -- with great appreciation for all they have taught me.

--

"And yet there is reason to suppose that the situation is not hopeless. Educators are not unaware of the effects of television on their students. Stimulated by the arrival of the computer, they discuss it a great deal -- which is to say, they have become "media conscious." It is true enough that much of their consciousness centres on the question: How can we use television (or the computer, or word processor) to control education? They have not yet got to the question: How can we use education to control television (or the computer, or word processor)?

- *Neil Postman,* Amusing Ourselves to Death, pp. 189

--

"You can't drive around with a tiger in your car
But you can be happy if you've a mind to"

- Roger Miller

--

Abstract

This dissertation is a critical study of the contemporary relationship between education and technology. It develops a philosophy on technology that both tries to make sense of the specific technologies our universities have chosen to embrace and imagines ways of making critical use of them. The intersection of this treatment of technology and education is Composition and Rhetoric, a pedagogical field. The application of this intersection, then, is a study of a particular, prominent technology of composition pedagogy, which is the Learning Management System. This pedagogical technology is explored in three main ways: narrative-based analysis of three case studies of student writing on the platform, rhetorical analysis of one LMS company's public discourse, and content analysis of one LMS's internal architecture. The dissertation finds that LMS companies rely on neoliberal rhetorical syllogisms which bypass public deliberation over enthymemes concerning the purposes of higher education, and thus join an assemblage of rhetorical projects that unite higher education with neoliberal interests. These enthymemes are the "terms of use" teachers and students accept. Finally, new terms of use are forwarded based on an updated method of critical literacy.

Table of Contents

List of Figures

INTRODUCTION: STUDYING THE NEOLIBERAL UNIVERSITY AND ITS TECHNOLOGIES

I frame this study of the contemporary university around a critical engagement with the technologies that sustain it, excavating the implicit terms of use that these technologies incur upon their users. In partnering with the private companies that supply Learning Management Systems (LMS), public universities may once again be embracing what Critical University Studies scholar Christopher Newfield called the "Great Mistake," prioritizing the growth-based, technocratic business models of today's private sector over human development for critically engaged citizenship. Newfield (2016) theorizes the Great Mistake as the tendency among college administrators and other public officials to understand the cause (privatization in theory and practice) that weakened higher education in the first place as the manifest solution for nearly all of its problems. According to Newfield:

> This conventional wisdom is wrong. In reality, public colleges and universities have been following this commercialization script since 1980 or so, responding to the same political and corporate demands that we hear today. Today's problems do not reflect a failure to introduce market thinking but the effects of its long-term presence … What I call the American Funding Model is indeed broken, but it has not been broken by too much public funding, public service, and public slack. It

> has been broken by too much private funding and service to private interests. (*The Great Mistake,* 3-4)

The byzantine nature of funding for higher education undoubtedly plays a major role in justifying the neoliberalization of the university, and Newfield explores that aspect of the problem thoroughly in *The Great Mistake* and in *Unmaking the Public University* (2011). However, this dissertation will not focus on funding so much as the university's increased "service to private interests." Specifically, I will study the university's more recent capitulations to neoliberal interests, and envision ways that teacher-scholars can adjust and resist in their pedagogy and scholarship.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic arrived in the US in the spring of 2020, higher education was forced to face a set of crisis-based exigences characterized by a damaged public health system, youth- and BIPOC-led demands for social justice, and the problem of inequitable accessibility to learning and technologies. Once again, the prevailing consensus among collegiate leadership on how to respond to these interrelated crises was to renew their commitment to the Great Mistake. Namely, corporatized Learning Management Systems such as Instructure's Canvas were not only nearly uniformly embraced by most universities, but their largely-unquestioned dominance gifted them a ubiquitous, ambient presence. Their presence on campuses preceded the pandemic, but since the pandemic they have deepened their grip on education's levers. They were and still are largely considered a neutral delivery site for equitable, accessible instruction, and as a result insufficient attention is paid to the ways in which they alter the meanings of equity and access to better fit privatized models for public education, both in the sense of

free market principles and isolated learning. Indeed, in many ways, the LMS turn could be Higher Education's *next* great mistake, and scholars of critical literacy, pedagogy, and rhetoric ought to train critical attention on the effects of its transformation.

Accordingly, the main research questions that guide this dissertation are:

1. What does the LMS turn mean for Higher Education broadly and Writing Studies in particular?
2. What are the LMS's implicit terms of use, and how do they transform the lived experiences of students and teachers? And,
3. How do these terms of use complicate and update the historical tensions between critical literacy and neoliberalism?

I will explore these questions by investigating and analyzing the following sites of study:

1. The aforementioned historical tensions between Critical Literacy and Neoliberalism in Writing Studies, from the Social Turn of the 1980s/90s, through the Multimodal Turn of the 2000s, into the competing LMS turn and social justice-informed intervention from Asao Inoue in his 2019 Chair Address at the Conference on College Composition and Communication (Chapters One and Six);
2. The methodology of teacher-scholar research in Writing Studies, particularly regarding its viability for studying LMS platforms -- at the same time building a methodology for my own study in this dissertation (Chapter Two);

3. How teachers and students actually use LMS to carry out the project of education -- ways that they resist and capitulate to its terms of use, i.e. its stealthy transformation of the processes and meanings of literacy work (Chapter Three).
4. The public-facing rhetoric of Canvas -- namely from its website, its parent company's LinkedIn page, and the educational studies that it has conducted or oversaw -- to understand how the company sees its role in education, and how it wants to be seen by students, teachers, and stockholders (Chapter Four).
5. The architecture of Canvas (the world's leading LMS) itself, including its browser aesthetics, its "Student" and Teacher" smartphone applications, and its pedagogical tools such as the Speedgrader™ -- to better understand how the platform itself wants to be used, and to critically engage its hidden curriculum and terms of use (Chapter Five).

In the process of this study, I hope to help writing teachers, students, and administrators reckon with these transformations by providing a critical hermeneutics for reading Learning Management Systems in their work. This hermeneutics centers on questions of *use*, which is a socially constructed and hegemonically driven concept that becomes naturalized through repetition. Typically, as Richard Ohmann noted, technologies and literacies -- as well as, I add, their use -- evolve "within particular social relations" and are thus "responsive to the needs of those with the power to direct that evolution" (790). Often the role of education is to expedite this evolution toward the needs of the ruling class through the teaching of dominant codes (Berlin, 1987) and the naturalization of certain forms of technological use (Ahmed, 2019; Postman, 1985). The first step of

redirecting technological use toward counter-hegemonic projects is to critically read the demands hegemony places upon technologies and their use, and the next step is to renegotiate use to emphasize critical processes. This dissertation, in a nutshell, will imagine ways of doing both.

Before going further, I would like to emphasize that this dissertation provides but one way of accessing the truth on this subject. More studies are needed that, for example,

1. Study the historical emergence of LMS into the educational realm;
2. Survey and interview students, teachers, administrators, and other campus workers about their perspectives on the presence of LMS in their educations;
3. Usability test LMS platforms in order to better comprehend their effect on user experience in education.

These methods would help to triangulate this dissertation's study of LMS platforms, but they are beyond its scope. In employing teacher narrative, pan-historiographic explorations of theories in composition and rhetoric, analysis of student writing, rhetorical analysis of public-facing materials, and content analysis of an LMS's digital architecture -- all informed by an updated, kairotic commitment to critical literacy -- I hope this dissertation can make unique contributions to our field's ongoing explorations of this challenging moment. That it will provide new directions for our field's conversations about neoliberalism and digital literacies, rather than terminate them.

Additionally, I want to acknowledge my positionality as a scholar. As an able-bodied white man, I recognize the many overt and invisible privileges that elevate my

position within inequitable systems such as higher education. I find it incumbent to not only acknowledge these privileges, but to employ them toward research and teaching projects that reallocate the privileges that have sustained me while shutting out so many others. An important step in this process is to critically engage basic assumptions of the status quo that are often reproduced in transformative moments in education, such as the one through which we are currently living and working. In studying student writing, transdisciplinary scholarship, and specifically the concepts of neoliberalism and critical literacy, I aim to amplify and build on the critical work that precedes and is happening concurrent to my own, and join in the project of trying to better understand contemporary transformations of higher education so that we can carry forth, rather than lose or abandon, insights about truly equitable and accessible education during the swirl of technological and social change.

Chapter Overviews

In Chapter One, I will establish the key terms of this dissertation: neoliberalism, critical literacy, and technologies' terms of use. I will survey the field of composition and rhetoric, and tell a story of how its genuflections to corporate interests and its critical viability have both led us to the LMS turn, and can provide us a way of better understanding how to proceed from it. Following Debra Hawhee and Christa J. Olson, I will employ a pan-historiographical method to study the field, "by turns zooming and hovering, simultaneously posing big-picture questions and fine-grained ones" (91), as well as a kairology, which Judy Z. Segal defines as "a study of historical moments as rhetorical opportunities" (23).

In Chapter Two, I will articulate my anti-technocratic research methodology, which employs insights from critical literacy scholarship to study the complex local contexts and practices in writing pedagogy during the digital transformation of higher education. Blakely and Hemphill (2021) write that technocratic research is that which seeks to "control outcomes by means of technology implemented via an elite of technical experts" (2). The goal of such research is to explain the world as it is, and accordingly, "[w]hat counts as a researchable question from a technocratic perspective also discourages exploratory research that is intended to discover indeterminate or unknown problems" (59). The goal of my methodology is not to explain but to understand and to transform (as in Freirean praxis), and it seeks to do so by rejecting Modernist, positivist, neoliberal, and technocratic notions of knowledge as fixed, finished and naturally progressing with the aid of emergent technologies, and rather to study lived experiences, to employ narrative writing, and to critically engage (rather than speed past) hegemonic enthymemes and social dynamics. This chapter will also assess the rhetoric of debates surrounding "lore" in composition studies, and advocate for revising conceptions of lore toward a new tradition of critical teaching narratives that amplify students' contributions to knowledge.

In Chapter Three, I will investigate how Canvas informs the lived experiences of students and teachers in education. I will study three case studies of student writing on Canvas during an asynchronous online semester during the COVID-19 pandemic. This chapter will enact the method I articulate in Chapter One, providing a concrete set of examples that demonstrate the lived experiences of students and teachers during a time

when a global pandemic hastily forced us to live inside the realities that neoliberalism has been systematically preparing for us to live in for decades. In examining student experiences through the lens of my own experiences (i.e. writing about them), I also aim to provide readers with detailed insights into the power as well as the limitations of this method -- to, as Ira Shor wrote in *When Students Have Power* (1996), "make my writing itself an experiment about the experiment" (xi). My writing in this chapter attempts to take a snapshot of our work during an extraordinary moment in history. Like any picture, the framing is not neutral or objective; and like any pedagogy, it is irreducibly, frustratingly, and necessarily related to the ever-complex processes of situated personal and social engagement with the politics of knowledge.

In Chapter Four, I will analyze Instructure Canvas's public-facing rhetoric in order to critically read how Canvas presents itself, and how it wants to be understood in the public imaginary. My artifacts for this chapter will be Instructure's (Canvas's parent company) 2021 Initial Public Offer, educational research conducted or sanctioned by Instructure that serves to justify its own business model, as well as Instructure's LinkedIn activity, website, and press releases.

In Chapter Five, I will analyze the architecture of Canvas itself in an effort to understand how it wants to be used. This analysis will build off of and compare to the previous chapter's analysis of how Canvas presents itself to the public -- bringing into focus the tensions between how it wants to be understood to how it wants to be used. In order to excavate these intentions, I will apply a combination of content analysis and critical heuristic evaluation to Canvas's smartphone apps, "Student" and "Teacher," and

its browser interfaces. Nielson and Molich (1990) define a heuristic evaluation as a "usability engineering method for finding the usability problems in a user interface design so that they can be attended to as part of an iterative design process" (150). My study draws from the general method of heuristic evaluation as it employs usability principles in analysis of an interface; however my study departs from the method in its purpose, as my interests are not in improving the design process for Instructure Canvas's smartphone app or browser interfaces, but rather to critically examine how the interfaces want students and teachers to use them, and to apply concepts from critical literacy to provide teachers and students ways of better understanding what the apps and browser interfaces want from them, how they present the work of education, and thus what they tell us about the meanings of literacy work today. In short, the purpose of my study is not to help Canvas improve its products, but rather to critically examine how they were designed (and, likely, usability-tested) to shape us and guide our thought and behavior.

In Chapter Six, I will zoom my focus back out to examine how the LMS turn and its terms of use complicate historical debates about clarity in and outside of writing studies. One response to this destabilized moment in history is to attempt to provide clarity and stability through language, framing entropy as a problem of clarity. Movements such as the "Plain English Revolution" provide one such response, which forwards a version of justice by extending access to terms of use, but does not do enough to examine the underlying assumptions and effects of that to which they extend access. Critical literacy supplies us with another response, and I argue that it faces a rhetorical challenge of how to make itself both potent and accessible in the age of neoliberal

technocracy, but historical antecedents can help us better understand ways to respond to the tensions between clarity and resistance. Specifically, I will employ brief critical historiographies to examine four historical movements that exemplify dynamics between critical literacy and the politics of clarity – from the American folk music tradition, the Frankfurt School of critical theory, conversations in feminist philosophy, and the late 80s/early 90s deliberations concerning composition and resistance in writing studies – and apply their insights to the challenges facing our field today presented by neoliberalism and LMS.

In the Conclusion, I will recap the hermeneutical principles, based on the preceding chapters in this dissertation, that teacher-scholars of writing can apply to LMS going forward. My argument is that critical literacy must be made vital in today's educational processes. For it to be vital, it must be updated to this present moment to better account for its continual oversights in regard to race, class, and gender, as well as to the mediums of writing and education. For it to sustain its potency as a contingent ideal of democratic education during the LMS turn, critical literacy must not only be done *through* LMS (as curricular content) but also *to* LMS (as a form of rhetorical engagement). Furthermore, in this chapter I will demonstrate a pedagogical strategy that invites students and teachers to apply to LMS an under-discussed hermeneutics for reading and using emergent technologies from a 1998 lecture by Neil Postman. I will also reflect on what kinds of inquiry still need to be done to supplement, complicate, and build on these hermeneutics. Finally, I envision ways that writing studies can reattune itself to democracy as a persuasive educational ideal in the public imaginary to combat the

prevailing hegemonic ideals of competition, efficiency, and privatization supplied by neoliberalism.

CHAPTER ONE: CRITICAL LITERACY, NEOLIBERALISM, AND THE LMS TURN IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Any new technology brings with it opportunities and limitations. Burdens and blessings, as Neil Postman put it in *Technopoly* (1992). “Nothing could be more obvious,” he writes of this dialectical reading, “especially to those of us who have given more than two minutes of thought to the matter” (5). A potent critic of emergent technologies, Postman was likely attempting to deflect accusations of technological determinism when he acknowledged the “blessings” of certain technologies he criticized, namely the television and the computer. “Technological determinist” is a pejorative term for adherents to a philosophy which puts technologies as “out of the blue” causes in cause-and-effect scenarios. In this way of thinking, critics fetishize technologies as arising out of thin air, completely changing our lives, and forcing us to adapt to them. However, I would argue that Postman’s work is anti-deterministic, as he kairotically positioned his critiques of technologies -- always reading their cultural and historical entrances into the world, and how they shape and are shaped by those factors. He understood technologies as ecological, rather than additive or subtractive. For example, post-WWII America was not “America plus television,” but rather a new country whose relationship to language and truth were completely changed (18). This might sound like Technological Determinism, but not to those who read Postman’s work in which he distinguishes between technologies and mediums. For Postman, a technology is a

"physical apparatus" and a medium is the "use to which a physical apparatus is put." When that use creates a "particular symbolic code," nestles into a "particular social setting," or becomes imbricated in "economic and political contexts," this is how a technology becomes a medium (*Amusing,* 98). Additionally, in *Technopoly*, Postman argues that we must pose the following question: "to whom will the technology give greater power and freedom? And whose power and freedom will be reduced by it?" (11).

For me as a rhetoric and composition scholar who teaches and studies writing in a moment completely dominated by "the digital," I'm particularly interested in Postman's use of the term "use," and in examining the missing agent in his passive construction of the "use to which a physical apparatus is put." The use is put *by whom*? Who, or what, decides how we use the tools that we use? How does this literacy get developed? And, once it is developed, whose job is it to teach it and to learn it, and to what ends? With a basis in kairology, the study of "historical moments as rhetorical opportunities," and genres as "typified social action" (Segal, 23; Miller, 1984), the field of rhetoric is in a unique position to answer these questions. On the composition side of the composition/rhetoric tent, the intellectual tradition of critical literacy also gives us a potentially clarifying lens with which to investigate these questions, centering power when reading the social dynamics that create and are created by emergent technologies, mediums, and modalities. And yet, despite its critical vitality, the field of composition and rhetoric has often found itself swept up by the very technologies it has set out to study, helping advance technologies themselves (and their parent companies), but often deepening social-group inequities in the process. As I will demonstrate in this chapter,

the field has made great contributions to understanding the uses of emergent technologies, but has been largely ineffectual in transforming the uses prescribed by the dominant discourse.

For centuries, education operated under what Postman calls the "knowledge economy" established by the printing press. Schooling was constituted by words on paper, and mostly concerned itself with the production of more words on paper (*Technopoly,* 10). Over the past three decades, the digital has established a new knowledge economy under which we live and work, and our work is dictated by the values inscribed into that knowledge economy by the larger economy under which it operates -- an economy that might best be described as neoliberalism. Put briefly (for I'll elaborate on this point shortly) neoliberalism is a philosophy that extends the logic of the market and the values of competition into all facets of public life. As Wendy Brown writes, neoliberalism is distinguished from capitalism by its "enlarged domain" -- its reach into all aspects of human affairs, so that social life, education, exercise, and so on are "more increasingly configured as strategic decisions and practices related to enhancing the self's future value" (35). Perhaps neoliberalism's strongest assault on the project of higher education is the assault it makes upon critical reflection, the cornerstone of education in a democracy. Neoliberalism reduces personal and social reflection to a measurable, collectible, marketable set of gestures -- more boxes to be checked. And so, it might still be true that, as Postman wrote in 1992, anyone who has given "two minutes of thought" to the matter can recognize both the blessings and the burdens of new technologies, but neoliberalism seeks to either repurpose these two minutes of reflection

toward self-interest and competition, or completely eliminate them from the adoption of its technologies, and impels us to accept them as the inevitable results of so-called progress.

Neoliberalism is the "economic and political context" through which our technologies become mediums. It is the hegemonic force, the dominant discourse that prescribes their use. Once these mediums are accepted into the ecology of education, they change the meaning and processes of education. Today's ecology is not "education plus LMS," but something new that requires teachers and students to acquiesce to new ways of understanding rhetoric and reality. In this dissertation, I posit that Learning Management Systems carry with them largely unspoken "terms of use" when we use them to mediate the process of education. Much in the manner that users of products agree to "terms of service" with providers, students and teachers must (mostly tacitly) assent to certain conditions for using a private service such as an LMS in order to carry out their work. Many of these concessions to routine surveillance and data collection are obvious in their hypernormalization -- to name just a few:

- Students will allow for their activity on the LMS to be logged, which, calling to mind Foucault's analysis of the panopticon prison, may or may not be monitored by their instructor, who may or may not use this data to measure a student's engagement with the course.
- Teachers will also allow for their activity on the page to be logged, which, similar to the above, may or may not be monitored by university administrators or Instructure employees.

- Students and teachers assent to their interactions with one another to be accessed by administrators or Instructure employees, including feedback on work, discussions with classmates, and messages between teachers and students.
- Students and teachers agree to allow their literacy work to be rendered as data to support learning analytics, including their writing and their behavior on the site.

Additionally, I argue that there are still deeper, hidden terms that students and teachers must accept when using a corporate LMS to carry out educational processes. These concessions involve often unspoken agreements with what Goodwin et al call the "ambient biopolitical rhetoric" of neoliberalism in the contemporary university (17).

Despite the efforts of pedagogical scholars to make sense of the implications of education's rapid adaptations to the digital, teachers and students have largely been powerless to even deliberate upon the terms that result from a university's contract with a private LMS company, such as Instructure's Canvas. In their 2013 Position Statement on Digital Literacy, the Conference on College Composition and Communication executive committee attempted to name guiding principles for remediating writing classrooms into digital spaces. They produced the following as their second principle for online writing instruction: "An online writing course should focus on writing and not on technology orientation or teaching students how to use learning and other technologies" (CCCC). The rationale for the principle elaborates that "Students should *use* the provided

technology to support their writing and not the other way around" (CCCC, my emphasis). The statement came fourteen years after Cynthia Selfe addressed CCCC in her 1999 chair's address about the "perils of not paying attention" to the effects digital technologies have on literacy practices. While the 2013 statement does not advocate for ignoring technologies, in drawing as it does a distinction between writing and the technologies through which writing takes place, the statement presents an intriguing picture of the meaning of contemporary literacy work. The committee clearly advises that writing instruction should not become an extension of the Information Technology department, and that the role of writing teachers is to teach writing, not to train students how to use digital technologies. However, this framing also assumes that the two objectives can be made discrete, as well as that students can *use* the technologies to support their writing without the technologies using them and their writing. In a sense, the statement acknowledges terms of use: without critical attention, the teaching of writing in online contexts uses students to support technologies. Indeed, to simply "focus on writing" through the LMS pushes the technology to the background, enables its ambient rhetoric, and presents it to students as, to borrow James Berlin's term, a "disinterested arbiter" (477). As an arbiter, LMS appears to be very interested: in collecting data, in enabling multi-layered surveillance, and (under-discussed but importantly) in interpellating students and teachers as neoliberal citizens who understand themselves and the world they inhabit through their interactions with neoliberal technologies. To teach students to write in the context of LMS -- even if we are able to dialogue about critical conceptions of writing, and especially if we do not ask students to

confront the ideologies embedded in this context -- also unavoidably teaches them how to *use* (and thus be used by) learning technologies and other technologies, as well as how to *use* literacy. It teaches them not to critically engage but to acquiesce to the terms of these uses. Put bluntly, in using Learning Management Systems, we *learn* to be *managed* by profit-driven *systems*. In a self-contained web of volunteered data and known surveillance, the machine feeds itself, and the food is our literacy.

In the rest of this chapter, I will provide an extensive definition of neoliberalism before surveying kairotic moments in the field of composition and rhetoric in an effort to tell the story of how its critical viability and catering to neoliberal interests have both led us to the LMS turn, and can provide us a route to critically proceed through it. Following Debra Hawhee and Christa J. Olson, I will employ a pan-historiography method to study the field, "by turns zooming and hovering, simultaneously posing big-picture questions and fine-grained ones" (91).

Identifying the Uses of Neoliberalism

Over the past two decades, scholars across the humanities have noted the transformation of societal institutions as a result of neoliberal thought: privatization of public resources, increased social division marked by competition, the construction of homo oeconomicus, and so forth (Brown, 2015; Ahmed, 2019; Harvey, 2005; Giroux, 2008). Within Writing Studies, austerity measures and corporatization have been analyzed and critiqued as deleterious effects of these Neoliberal ideologies (Welch and

Scott, 2016; Adler-Kassner, 2017). Tony Scott and Nancy Welch, in *Composition in the Age of Austerity* (2016), define neoliberalism as "[t]he belief that private interests and products associated with that interest will propel the public good" (9). In his 2017 essay in *The Guardian*, Stephen Metcalf follows the term back to the work of Austrian economist Friedrich Hayek, who proposed the economy as functioning like an autonomous "mind." For Metcalf, Neoliberalism is "a style of thought that reduces everything to economics" (par. 14). In other words, the economy is not just a piece of a larger society in neoliberal thought; instead, it is the whole of society—and "the attitude of the salesman [sic] has become enmeshed in all modes of self-expression" (par. 5).

Neoliberalism best functions when people are on their heels and unable to collectively deliberate, which is why austerity measures are a common method of neoliberalism, and why crises can serve its ends. Henry Giroux depicts Neoliberalism as a kind of "public pedagogy" that educates people to be self-interested and competitive (113), and Wendy Brown describes it as a "peculiar form of reason that configures all aspects of existence in economic terms" and has enjoyed a stealthy and largely unobstructed path into the mainstream (17). David Harvey reads the history of Neoliberalism as in part a tension between social justice and individual freedom. Rather than creating social justice through proper allocation of resources, neoliberalism chokes out resources to supposedly enable individual freedom, so that individual freedom and social justice are "uneasily fused" (40). Neoliberalism did not create the US left's difficulty in forging a connection between collective action and individual freedom, but,

according to Harvey, it was able to "easily exploit, if not foment" the tension between the two concepts (12). In this way, neoliberalism might sound indistinguishable from capitalism, but Brown maintains that neoliberalism is distinguished by its "enlarged domain," its reach into all sectors of life, so that social life, education, exercise, and so on are "more increasingly configured as strategic decisions and practices related to enhancing the self's future value" (35).

As a hegemonic rhetoric, neoliberalism constructs a shared reality that uneasily holds society together by forcing buy-in to the notion that the dog-eat-dog weltanschauung of the free market can sustain all aspects of life, that we help each other best by competing with each other, and the primal laws of competition are the actual method for achieving social justice. As it relates to literacy, neoliberalism presents reading and writing as functions of the marketplace that can "enhance the self's future value" (Brown 35). A neoliberal conception of literacy educates students and teachers alike to view reading and writing as reflections of the entrepreneurial spirit, an "expressivist rhetoric" (to use Berlin's term) that maps onto the buyer/seller dynamic. And so, literacy is not a practice that socializes individuals into a democratic exchange of ideas in the public sphere, but rather the market plays the "disinterested arbiter" that determines whether ideas are worthwhile. If the rhetor is successful, they "sold it well," and if the auditor is convinced, they "buy it."

Neoliberal forces pervade daily life in today's university. I use the phrase "neoliberal forces" because its effects are not simply marshaled by pernicious people.

Indeed, in working in the contemporary university and benefitting from certain neoliberal policies, I cannot critique neoliberalism from the outside, anymore than I can exist outside of history. While some actors in the university may more overtly carry water for neoliberal forces than others, it is not possible nor would it be particularly helpful to label individuals as "neoliberal" or "anti-neoliberal." Goodwin et al. rightly point out that the rhetoric of neoliberalism is rarely "authored" by individuals, but rather it is ubiquitous to the point of achieving ambience. Building from Thomas Rieckert's notion of ambient rhetoric (it "gives rise to discourse and then withdraws from that discourse"), they respond to a situation recounted by famous feminist scholar Judith Butler, in which she puzzles over the authorship/accountability of an interaction in a meeting where an administrator dubiously cited a colleague who dubiously said the humanities are failing. Butler felt she couldn't effectively respond to this claim, because of its deliberate opacity. Its ethos unable to be traced back to an origin, it permeated. For Goodwin et al, it became *ambient*, and "ambient biopower serves as neoliberalism's primary rhetorical form" (17). Its persuasion is its ubiquity and its persistence.

Under neoliberalism, composition does not so much function to select members of the governing class and equip them with attendant verbal skills, as Richard Ohmann described in his critique of the field in 1976, but rather to conceive of literacy as something that, when properly taught, can be wielded in the market as a tool, a way to get a leg up on the competition. Neoliberal literacies are then finite vouchers that we all compete for, rather than means of carrying out public deliberation about how to create a

more just society. Education is not a collective project from which all participants benefit, but another marketplace of limited resources in which and for which students (and teachers) compete. Therefore, neoliberalism doesn't just benefit from a depiction of writing classes as being about nothing but writing itself (removed from the inefficient politics of knowledge), but it demands that students and teachers alike see them as such, even while the neoliberal market-based paradigm creates the function that writing skills will serve.

Neoliberalism prescribes the terms of use for an LMS such as Canvas because its dominance and its ambience seep into the medium itself, and dictate users' experiences. The LMS can and does get used for purposes that could be considered anti-neoliberal: collaboration, sousveillance, and accessibility. However, collaboration is strained by the medium's affordances: a now-ubiquitous genre like the "forum post" takes place through an asynchronous time warp, and every semester multiple students report to me that this genre feels contrived and counterproductive. For every instance of sousveillance -- which makes the LMS a potentially power-giving, agential space -- is a teacher who measures students' engagement with the class by how many minutes they've logged on the LMS page. Students and teachers are left watching each others' metadata. And it must be acknowledged that many students and teachers have found in the LMS opportunities to make learning more accessible, as, to take one example, students are afforded the opportunity to engage content without the domineering presence of the teacher, at least in a physical sense. But it must also be acknowledged that the LMS itself has become a new

kind of teacher, pedagogical in itself, and so we don't just learn with or through it, but from it. Its primary lesson comes from neoliberalism: education is about completing a discrete set of objectives and vying for credentials.

At this point one might wonder if I'm suggesting that the route to reclaiming literacy from the dehumanizing forces that absorb it can only be found through destroying digital technologies and recommitting to, for example, a print tradition. But I do not want to argue that we should un-ring the bell. Even the digital revolution's most vocal skeptics have noted the "liberatory potentials" latent in the epistemological discombobulation of the past thirty years (Ohmann, 1985; Faigley, 1997; Banks 2005). The print tradition itself is far from unproblematic, constructing as it does a limited, deceptively linear version of the truth that amplifies the privileged voices that get to be anointed as "literate" and marginalizes those whose literacies conflict with "Standard English" (a coded-whiteness term if there ever was one). Literacy in and of itself has never been liberatory, and addressing these problematics is the challenge that critical literacy undertook to address during composition's Social Turn, but this effort has been repeatedly and routinely swept aside to the margins of public and scholarly discourse. One of the goals of this dissertation is to take a step back and attempt to understand what has happened to the project of critical literacy during the digital transformation of higher education. What useful ideas did the field forget or choose not to bring along? What ideas from the Social Turn were worth hanging onto, which were in need of revision, and how can the robust corpus it constructed help us understand the present set of challenges

brought on by neoliberalism, and the hyper-digitization, increased social division, and racial and economic injustices it has wrought?

Berlin's book *Rhetoric and Reality* (1987) convincingly argues that writing pedagogies kairotically arise out of social and cultural moments. For example, writing teachers helped reify an American literary canon by teaching "the classics" after WWI, and individualistic expressivism became pedagogically fashionable in response to the Cold War-era "Red Scare." More recently, Min-Zhan Lu and Catherine Prendergast, respectively, articulate the connections between the deficit-based teaching of english and the demands global capitalism places on english as a lingua franca. Today, the dominant ideology takes its form in neoliberalism, and its attendant material, social, intellectual, and affective repercussions. David Harvey writes that neoliberalism has become hegemonic as a "mode of discourse," in the sense that it has "pervasive effects on ways of thought to the point where it has become incorporated into the common-sense way many of us interpret, live in, and understand the world" (3). As the dominant mode of discourse since the Reagan/Thatcher 1980s, it has clearly reshaped the way we interpret (read) and (re)create (write) the world, which puts its infractions in the jurisdiction of literacy studies. The question is not if compositionists have responded, are responding, or will respond to neoliberalism, but how.

In order to disentangle ourselves from neoliberalism's web, we must understand how we've been entangled, and we must learn from the conflicted efforts to resist neoliberalism's takeover of literacy work. Through methods of diversion, distraction,

coercion, cooptation, and austerity, neoliberalism funnels literacies into its vortex, so that their development services the status quo rather than questioning or creating alternatives to it. As a result of this furtive takeover, neoliberalism limits what literacies can do (Brown, 2015). The perceived inability of the populace to acquire en masse the requisite knowledge to keep up with emergent, rapidly changing technologies is set up as a "digital literacy crisis." Knowledge is presented as skill-based, as the crisis arises from individuals' inability to properly *use* emergent technologies, rather than critically examine their material and social impacts. Language is presented as merely transactional, rather than deliberative or transformational (Stone and Austin, 2020). In the midst of a so-called "post-truth crisis," the truth is presented as that which survives and services the marketplace, and opportunities for meaningfully engaging the truth have been eroded by the privatization of public spheres and filtering interactions through the commercial internet's "algorithms of oppression," to invoke Sophia Umoja Noble's phrase. The purpose of education is presented as instrumentalist, concerned with producing a "useful class," and institutions of higher learning are drunk with assessment and "career-readiness," scrambling to produce, per Wendy Brown, not new knowledge-makers, but "human capital" (Ahmed, 2019; Brown, 2015; Shor, 1999).

Literacy educators, beset with localized crises as a result of austerity, institutional concessions, and marginalization, are asked to either adapt to these conditions or perish (Welch & Scott, 2016; Skinnell, 2016; Brown, 2015; Bullock et al, 1991). Despite flickering calls for a critical, social conception of the field, the meaning and social

function of composition has largely been to "administer thought" (Ohmann, 1976), to inoculate students to "the codes of the ruling class" (Berlin, 1987), and to attune itself to fast-capital impulses (Lu, 2004; Prendergast, 2009; Horner, 2015). As I'll try to demonstrate in the following diachronic kairology, throughout the history of composition, critical understandings of the work of literacy come in and out of focus, but they have not represented the prominent meaning of the field, particularly when it comes to engaging the uses of educational mediums. And yet, composition and rhetoric has also shown great critical promise throughout its history: glimmers of light revealing a darkened path out of the woods.

The Field of Composition: A Brief Diachronic History

In just six decades, the field of composition has forged an impressive path within the academy, particularly in the United States. The requisite first-year writing course (FYW) has at once solidified its presence and subjugated it on the hierarchy of disciplinary knowledge (Skinnel, 2016; Palmeri, 2012; Miller, 1991; Berlin, 1987; etc). Despite the many problematic aspects of its history, its present, and likely its future (Fitts et al, 1995; Trimbur et al, 1991; Hurlbert et al 1990), the field has maintained critical viability through its commitment to (re)assessing itself. Indeed, as a field and as a praxis, composition deserves considerable credit for centering what I am calling the kairotic question in its scholarship: "What are we doing *now*?"

Stemming from its rich tradition in rhetorical studies, the field is persistent in posing this kairotic question. Answering it is another matter, but answers are often less

useful to an academic discipline than are good questions. The social turn of the 1980s and 1990s -- a movement led by scholars such as Geneva Smitherman, James Berlin, Susan Miller, J. Elspeth Stuckey, Ira Shor, Victor Villanueva, and many others -- saw the field asking lots of good questions, mostly posed while also confronting the politics of the field's knowledge, and by placing the teaching of writing *within* (rather than, it is important to emphasize though it might seem obvious) *outside* of social dynamics that create and were created by racial, gendered, and class-based inequities. At the turn of the 20th century, a time when the field solidified itself with more and more PhD programs devoted to the study of writing pedagogy, the field deployed "multimodality" as a framing concept by which to adapt to the rampant digitization of nearly all sectors of society, including the teaching of writing. And since the astonishingly momentous year of 2020 -- which introduced a global pandemic concomitant to exigent demands for a more fully realized version of democracy that truly values BIPOC rights, LGBTQ+ rights, women's rights, class equity, and accessibility -- the field once again recalibrated its work, this time around an ethic of empathy (Day et al, 2021). In a 2021 piece by Day et al, which appeared in *Pedagogy*, they ask their own version of the kairotic question, "What does a good teacher do now?" And their answer is that "[a] good teacher crafts communities of care" (390). The field's renewed commitment to an ethic of care is a decorous response to a pandemic which exacerbated mental-health issues and deepened already massive inequities in housing, health care, and other social goods.

On an affective and rational level, however, the field has not realized its potential as a potent, critical force for helping to fully realize the ever-unfinished project of

democracy. Perhaps Lester Faigley described this feeling of lacking -- that something is in the way or amiss -- best in his 1997 address to the Conference on College Composition and Communication, in the aftermath of the social movements of the 60s being swept up by the reshaping of society as a collection of self-interested individuals (i.e. neoliberalism). Faigley said, "it no longer seems that we are riding the wave of history, but instead are caught up in a rip tide carrying us away from where we want to go" (32). The rip tide that Faigley describes functions well as a metaphor for how neoliberalism operates in contemporary thought. This belief is hegemonic in the sense that it subsumes all other philosophies into its logic through a stealth (as Wendy Brown would say) public pedagogy (as Henry Giroux would say) that *educates* citizens to view themselves as competitors for finite resources across contexts -- and in education, knowledge is the finite resources for which neoliberal citizens feel they must compete. Each semester, writing teachers face the difficult task of working within this context while also developing pedagogies of resistance, and the LMS turn makes the task all the more difficult, when neoliberalism prescribes the terms of use for the mediums through which we carry out these pedagogies.

Neoliberalism is the rip tide that caught up Faigley and his social-turn contemporaries, taking them away from collective action against racial violence in language and toward apolitical and/or expressivist pedagogies (Hairston, 1992; Sirc, 2002). These movements -- exemplified in my mind by Maxine Hairston's "Diversity, Ideology and the Teaching of Writing" and Geoffrey Sirc's *English Composition as a Happening*, respectively -- serviced neoliberalism's dominance in our field by 1) leaving

that dominance unquestioned, and/or 2) dislodging composition out of a critical, kairotic context and placing it into either (to put it crudely) a skills-based training session for future memo-writers, or a carnivalesque bazaar for fun-loving future entrepreneurs.

More recently, critical scholars such as Asao Inoue have contributed vital critiques that have caused many in the field to take long, uncomfortable looks in the mirror. At the 2019 meeting of the CCCC, Inoue gave a monumental chair's address that challenged literacy scholars to recognize our complicities by directly confronting the narratives of innocence in which white scholars, critical or otherwise, often nestle ourselves:

> I'm not going to say that you--you White folks in this room--are the special ones. You thinking you're special is the problem. It always has been, because you, and White people just like you who came before you, have had most of the power, decided most of the things, built the steel cage of White language supremacy that we exist in today, both in and outside of the academy-and likely, many of you didn't know you did it. You just thought you were doing language work, doing teaching, doing good work, judging students and their languages in conscientious and kind ways, helping them, preparing them, giving them what was good for them. (Inoue, 356-57)

One of the many vital contributions of Inoue's address is the kairotic energy it gives to critical literacy, a project in need of continual recalibration to the realities of the moment. No pedagogy can be neutral, disinterested, or innocent, and Inoue's work, along with so many other critical scholars in the field today, help teachers learn how everyday

capitulations to dominant narratives of innocence maintain the violence of the status quo. Neoliberalism consigns questions of social justice to specialized committees or to corporatized Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion efforts, rather than calling us to recognize how quotidian pedagogical moments are charged with hegemonic and counter-hegemonic potential.

Because the digital carried with it so much counter-hegemonic promise to the hegemony of the print tradition, which privileged certain forms of intellect and marginalized others, much of the early conceptions of digital literacy fervently embraced the blessings of the digital, while often ignoring the complex inequities it sustained due to its neoliberal terms of use.

Composition's Efforts to Adapt to the Digital: Multimodality and Posthumanism

Over the past few decades — as a way, perhaps, of making sense of the epistemological discombobulation that stemmed from the digital age — compositionists have constructed an impressive body of scholarship around the concept of multimodality. The previous knowledge economy's monomaniacal focus on the modality of alphabetic text, scholars such as those in the New London Group theorized, is limiting and inconsistent with the multifaceted demands of contemporary languaging. Jody Shipka and Jason Palmeri, in their respective re-views of the field, pointed out that even when we think our writing is monomodal, it is not, as what we do with alphabetic text is also inherently multimodal. Though "multimodal" and "digital" are not synonymous, several scholars regarded digital technologies and saw resources to finally re-conceive of the old-

hat ways of doing and teaching composition. This body of scholarship has revitalized the field in many ways, and contributed much-needed dynamism to the discussion of how to best go about teaching writing in response to emergent cultural and technological moments. However, keeping James Berlin's maxim in mind, we might ask in what ways the sanctioned codes of the ruling class have also changed along with the digital age, and in what ways multimodality as a pedagogical concept not only offers alternatives to those codes, but pays service to their dominance.

It is safe to say, I think, that the New London Group, while sharing their ultimate goal of societal transformation through a more just, critical approach to pedagogy, also works from a more optimistic conception of the social function of education than James Berlin did. Take, for example, the first sentence of their influential essay "A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies: Designing Social Futures" (1996):

> If it were possible to define generally the mission of education, one could say that its fundamental purpose is to ensure that all students benefit from learning in ways that allow them to participate fully in public, community, and economic life (60).

As a foundational text in the formation of multimodality scholarship, the New London Group's assessment of literacy provided an optimistic -- if not in some ways quixotic -- set of assumptions about the social function of literacy from which much of multimodality scholarship followed.

A strong example of the kind of scholarship that followed the New London Group's call for multimodality scholarship is *Remixing Composition: A History of*

Multimodal Writing Pedagogy (2012). In it, Jason Palmeri uncovers a history of the field by pulling on threads of latent multimodality. In rejecting Berlin's categories of expressivist, cognitive, and social-epistemic rhetoric (Berlin favored the latter and critiqued the former two in *Rhetoric and Reality*), Palmeri effectively makes the case that composition is always already multimodal, and in doing so he rescues some dignity from scholars disparaged in Berlin's expressivist and cognitivist camps. For Palmeri, "cognitivists" like Ann Berthoff were prescient in acknowledging the multimodal mental activities that writers are asked to translate into alphabetic text. Instead of teaching students to disavow their multimodal "out-of-school" writing activities, Palmeri suggests following Berthoff's work to its conclusion, and encouraging students to "draw connections among the many diverse kinds of composing experiences they have had in the past and will have in the future" (41). Expressivists like Peter Elbow are also commended for enabling a bridge to be constructed between voice and writing, "help[ing] us understand that words are richly multimodal" (55) Even Ira Shor (Berlin's paragon of social-epistemic rhetoric) and Paolo Freire are presented as advocates for multimodal composing, due to the way that they value "spoken dialogue as an end in and of itself" (67). Though his criticism of Berlin's canonical history is bold, the pedagogies argued for in Palmeri's history, as is often the case in multimodal scholarship, are moderate, suggesting that literacy teachers "consider including one informal, multimodal composing activity as part of every major unit or sequence in the course" (44). More audacious is Palmeri's reading of Geneva Smitherman's *Talkin and Testifyin: The Language of Black America*, in which he seeks to articulate a connection between the

hegemony of standard english and that of print culture. Popular digital writing technologies such as Google Docs and Grammarly complicate Palmeri's conflation of print and standard-english hegemonies, as current-traditional "correctness" is not only valued but embedded in their software. Print culture's hegemony, like modernism's faith in rationality, is rapidly fragmenting in the 21st Century. Neoliberalism feeds on the division that comes with fragmentation, and, despite print culture's own set of problems, digital literacy's privileging of efficiency, disjunction, distraction, and consumption in many ways better serve the neoliberal project at this moment.

Geoffrey Sirc's reading of multimodality is similar to Palmeri's in its digital optimism, but his conception of multimodal pedagogy is in some ways more radical. Throughout his career, Sirc has convincingly argued that the typical expository essay that composition teaches students to write is reductive, trite, staid, and insipid -- perhaps most excitingly in *English Composition as a Happening* (2002). Part of the problem for Sirc lies in the motivations for teaching these discourses: writing professors should not be teaching students to write in order to convince and persuade, but rather to amaze and thrill ("Serial" 64). In an essay written in 2004, Sirc advocates for "serial composition" in the spirit of the chaotic, grazing literacy practices of online MP3 blogs. Invoking Nicholas Carr's metaphor for online vs. print-based reading (jet skiing vs. deep-sea diving), Sirc concludes that "serial composition of short, staccato bursts seems essential as a compositional strategy for our age" (70). In the MP3 blogosphere of the early 2000s, the reader listens to a track, accepts or rejects a writer's brief review, then "hops back on the jet ski" (70). What Sirc overlooks is that Carr presents his jet ski metaphor as a

lament decrying what he feels distracted online reading practices are doing to his brain. Like Sirc, many scholars from this era became advocates for a future writing pedagogy that anticipated a freedom from the present's essay-based hegemony, but in retrospect perhaps the scholarship did not swim against the current, but rather rode the rip tide of technological progress concomitant with neoliberal dominance. In her 2011 book entitled *Toward a Composition Made Whole*, Jody Shipka, as her title suggests, calls for a dynamic conception of multimodal literacy. Shipka reiterates that multimodality is not a synonym for "digital," and perhaps the most memorable moment in her book is a description of a student in her writing class who composed a research paper on a pair of dancing shoes. For Shipka, multimodality is embedded in the writing process, not just in its product, and what she hopes students take away from her courses is a "more nuanced awareness of the various choices they make or even fail to make throughout the process of producing a text and to carefully consider the effect those choices might have on others" (52, 83).

In a 2011 review essay in *CCC*, Sirc praises *Toward a Composition Made Whole* as an exemplary alternative to social/political treatments of literacy epitomized by Thomas Miller's recent history, *The Evolution of College English: Literacy Studies from the Puritans to the Postmoderns*. Writes Sirc, "Too many of us teach a textuality inflected more by adjudication than imagination … But not Jody Shipka" (513). Sirc is dazzled by Shipka's ability to both teach the "traditional goals of academic prose" and also "thrill students with the experience of exciting composition, interrogating all the forms and tools at their disposal" (515). Sirc's digital optimism reflects the multimodality camp's faith in

the digital's ability to free the writing classroom from politics. They succeeded in invigorating the discipline with fresh scholarship that gave the writing classroom exciting alternatives to staid genres such as the domesticated research paper, but they perhaps wrongly assumed that political critiques of society cannot be thrilling for students. What did that student write on the dancing shoes? In multimodal scholarship, form is what matters, not content. A major problem with the multimodality camp's disinterest in interrogating the politics of their apolitical pedagogy is that they present for students an autonomous view of literacy as apolitical expression and entertainment, which goes to serve neoliberalism's cooptation of literacies devoid of meaningful deliberation into the civic and social stakes of languaging.

Despite some of the missteps of multimodal scholarship from this time, the vitality of multimodality scholarship lies in his insistence on disrupting the perfunctory motions that neoliberalism compels teachers to go through with our students. One of multimodality's great contributions to the field is that, at its best, it provides for students and teachers of writing a way to, in the tradition of Russian formalist critic Victor Sklovsky, defamiliarize, or "make strange" the staid forms of composing that writing classes often uncritically ask students to perform (qtd. in Gee, 276). Sirc's career has been an effort in defamiliarizing composition to itself, and the field is better off as a result of these critical interventions. The New London Group, for their part, also recognized the need to defamiliarize perfunctory habits of literacy, in their vision for the role of pedagogy: "the teacher must help learners to denaturalize and *make strange again* what they have learned and mastered" (86, my emphasis).

In order to make multimodality a critically viable approach in a neoliberal age, scholars should emphasize its ability to defamiliarize cursory literacy routines, while also contending with its relationship to fast-capital impulses. Bruce Horner, for example, criticizes multimodality for often confusing the difference from a perceived "old" set of practices (in this case the multimedia/modal alternatives to alphabetical text) as a difference from hegemonic, dominant approaches to languaging. Instead, Horner argues, the scrambling toward these perceived differences often serves to accommodate fast capitalist ideologies: "every niche market must be identified (or created) and accessed through exploitation of difference qua difference as (a) good" (267). Moreover, Horner sees most multimodal scholarship as privileging form over content (indeed often divorcing the two and celebrating the former at the latter's expense), which, following Brian J. Street, portrays forms as autonomous, in the sense that modes are removed from their social and ideological contexts, and rendered neutral, able to be picked up and transferred across contexts without considerations of the "ideologies of modality these practices arise from and contribute to the sedimentation of" (271). Horner calls for an ecological approach to communication in scholarship and pedagogy that does not pretend to be new or different for the sake of being different, but to see available resources of communication as connected, not as having discrete "affordances" (270). In the essay's conclusion, Horner gestures toward "transmodality," a term that seeks "to invoke, encourage, and solicit … alternative experiences and the practices they are the outcome of, as well as to consider what practices produce the experience of monomodality despite its actual impossibility" (279). To resist dominant ideologies for language and modality,

Horner argues that scholars must "counter the isolation, commodification, and hierarchical ordering of languages and modalities" and "allow instead for pedagogies that problematize language and modality as the always-emerging outcomes of our material social practice" (280).

In "An Essay on the Work of Composition: Composing English against the Order of Fast Capitalism," Min-Zhan Lu argues that to be "responsible users of english" scholars must resist the "commodity approach" encouraged by fast capitalism, which assumes students take on english as a "ready-made, self-evident, discrete object" to then wield as a tool in the marketplace (25). Instead, we should recognize that all english users contribute to english as they are acquiring it, for complex purposes and with a complex set of resources (26). Taking into account that the way we teach english in composition has ripple effects in a globalized economy, if we conceive of composition as a matter of "design," then we might be able to appreciate redesigns of standard english (and, I might add, of apparently monomodal composition) as welcome contributions consistent with the emergent history of the language, and not "inconveniences" to be rooted out.

In "Embracing Wicked Problems: The Turn to Design," Richard Marback traces the relationship between composition and design as a "wicked problem." It's a wicked problem, he says, because it brings no solutions. It is "irreducible." Writes Marbarck, "[T]he wickedness of design thinking is the unavoidable fact that prior designs in multiple media manipulate and orchestrate the agency of the designer at the same time the designer manipulates and orchestrates them" (267). Marback summarizes Gunther Kress's idea that we as composers choose to employ the design (or modes) to best meet

the demands of what we are trying to do, as though they are tools in our toolbelt. Often, then, we acquiesce to the demands (or, one could say, the terms of use), rather than question or upend them.

Key Concepts in Literacy Studies and the Move Toward Critical Digital Literacy

As the previous pan-historiographic subsection has demonstrated, thus far into the third decade of the 21st Century, composition has built an impressive corpus of critical work while riding the rip tide, even at times redirecting it to support more just pedagogical projects. However, one of the consistent oversights of recent critical scholarship in composition is failure to recognize in digital literacy the classic adage from media scholar Marshall McLuhan, which is *the medium is the message*. Compositionists have repeatedly devised critical ways to make use of the digital, and largely overlooked what Marback and the 4Cs statement on digital literacies notices: the ways in which the digital makes use of its users.

Traditionally conceived, digital literacy seems to mean in the public imagination something along the lines of knowing how to use digital technologies the way that they were designed to be used. Knowing how to open or upload a file are examples of digital literacy on display. Conversely, critical digital literacy involves better understanding how technologies want to be used, and emphasizing their liberatory possibilities while imagining alternatives to their more harmful qualities. The adjective *critical* in critical digital literacies is earned by our capability and willingness to ask the kairotic question -- what are we doing *now*? -- while we carry out literacy work in spaces

that are designed, engineered, and sponsored by digital-technology corporations. The goal of critical digital literacy is not simply to use the digital to think and write critically, but to think and write critically about the digital. Its goal is to demystify the commodity fetish that the digital can make of learning objectives by rendering them surveillable, measurable, and decontextualized. In *Keeping Faith: Philosophy and Race in America,* Cornel West writes, "To demystify -- the primary mode of critical theory – is to lay bare the complex ways in which meaning is produced and mobilized for the maintenance of relations of domination" (89). Domination has a specific meaning in political theory, and particularly in West's book it relates to the process of how the ruling class subjugates black bodies. Moreover, Iris Marion Young in *Justice and the Politics of Difference* theorizes domination and oppression as the major impediments to justice. Dominance is thought of as the institutional constraint on self-determination, and oppression is the institutional constraint on self-development. Demystification in critical digital literacy, as I am framing it, involves domination in a different, but related, sense. The project of demystification in critical digital literacy is to "lay bare the complex ways in which meaning is produced and mobilized for the maintenance of relations" in the dominant discourse -- i.e. the hegemonic ways of languaging. It is thus insufficient to use the digital to lay bare the workings of the dominant discourse. We must also lay bare the ways the digital itself produces and mobilizes meaning for the maintenance of relations in the dominant discourse.

When I attach the word "critical" to a noun, I refer to a way of reading the noun that acknowledges and engages with power and the politics of knowledge. For example, critical pedagogy involves decentering the role of the teacher and positioning them as a participant in the project of knowledge creation, rather than bestower of knowledge to ignorant students (as in Freire's "banking model"). Critical literacy involves recognizing how reading and writing practices are tangled in webs of power and ideology, or as Giroux defines it, "deconstructing knowledge in order to understand more critically one's own experiences and relations to the wider society" (34). Critical literacy, therefore, not only seeks to call knowledge into question, but it has the overarching goal of connecting individuals to a larger collective project, which is an idea that neoliberalism aborted in cleaving society into a collection of self-interested individuals, encapsulated in Margaret Thatcher's infamous quote that there is "no such thing as society, only individual men and women and their families" (qtd. in Harvey, 23).

Literacy refers to the dialectical relationship between reading and writing. More than just the act of reading and writing, literacy also refers to knowledge, which means that it is imbricated in the historical and emergent social dynamics that create the terms for knowledge. Literacy is not a static skill, as it is often used colloquially to set up the facile dyad that one is either "literate" or "illiterate." Nor is it a singular state of mind that one can achieve, for one has many literacies that are ever-changing inside the whirl of history. In *The New Literacy*, John Willensky posits that literacy is "a social practice that takes certain materials and turns them to certain ends in a given setting, an activity that

takes up a place in a life, as working on something does" (6). As a "social practice," literacy both creates and responds to social and material relations, and, as Richard Ohmann points out, is a term that came to prominence fittingly parallel to monopoly capitalism at the end of the 19th Century (702). For Ohmann, literacy is "an activity of social groups and a necessary feature of some kinds of social organization" which "embeds social relations within it" (711). And as John Duffy puts it, literacy is "a technical contrivance for disseminating the version of reality preferred by a given institution, culture, group, or individual" (qtd in Harker 9). Uncritical mass literacy -- as depicted in, to take one example, standardized testing -- disseminates an apparently fixed and finished version of reality based on dominant narratives that society's inequalities exist outside of the domain of language. Despite the stratigraphy embedded in social groups' access to dominant discourses, at the level of language, students are invited to "[fit] quietly into the way things are" (Shor, "What Is Critical Literacy," 12).

It can therefore be argued that a dyadic, instrumentalist conception of literacy as an integrationist skill that one either gains or fails to gain is foundational to a white-supremacist, caste-based civilization. In *The Literacy Myth* (1979), Harvey Graff posits that the rise of literacy as an uncomplicated, apparently beneficent concept is congruous with the rhetorical successes of liberalism, modernity, and rationality. On a parallel track, Religious Studies scholar Charles Long (1980) argues that modernist conceptions of civilization impound us into a kind of epistemological prison, stemming from a need to explain human beings through a civilized/uncivilized dyad, which I would add laminates

onto the need for a literate/illiterate dyad. Both the victims and the champions of civilization, he writes, "come to know themselves and define their presence within the rhetoric of civilization" (118). Long writes that when scholars began problematizing the term "primitive" as a foil to civilization's utopia, new terms filled the void they left, among them "nonliterate." Illiteracy is set up as a crisis of civilization, while it also satisfies a binary need for the project of civilization. If people cannot read the codes of civilization the way they are meant to be read, they must be labeled as illiterate, in need of straightening out.

Writing from a social-science perspective, theorists such as Graff, Brian Street, J. Elspeth Stuckey, and Deborah Brandt took note of the "ideological" and economic functions of literacy. According to Street (1985), an autonomous model of literacy is thought of as transferable across contexts, and unsullied by ideology. In the autonomous model, literacy enjoys an independent, universal, and neutral effect on other social and cognitive practices. The ideological model, which builds off of Graff's work in *The Literacy Myth*, recognizes that reading and writing practices are always ideological and dependent on social institutions, often serving to perpetuate power structures. Taking Graff and Street's critiques a step further, J. Elspeth Stuckey (1999) noted that literacy often inflicts violence upon dominated social groups. For Brandt (2001), literacy is a resource that "is pursued for the opportunities and protections that it potentially grants its seekers" (5). Literacy is acquired through the work of sponsors, which Brandt defines as "any agent, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, model, as

well as recruit, regulate, suppress or withhold literacy -- and gain advantage by it in some way" (1998, p. 166). And so, she astutely points out, literacies are in pursuit of people just as people are in pursuit of literacies, and the sponsor and sponsored enter into a mostly unspoken, rarely broken contract.

While the above brief survey of literacy scholarship demonstrates that preference for the ideological model is fairly well accepted in contemporary literacy research -- indicating the rhetorical success of critical theorists in rewriting disciplinary consciousness -- it is less so in the public consciousness, and certainly not in the corporate consciousness that underwrites much digital and academic activity. Here, autonomous concepts such as standardized grammar instruction and literacy tests are still largely accepted as neutral or beneficent, and the perceived failure in adequately teaching these autonomous concepts is considered a sign of crisis in our schools. In the public charter, we may have moved past the simplistic definition of literacy supplied by UNESCO in the 1950s, which said "A person is literate who can, with understanding, both read and write a short simple statement on his [sic] everyday life" (qtd in Graff 3), but we have not shaken the tendency to stoke literacy crises in the service of inequitable "progress." Our understanding of literacy is still tied to the version of reality preferred by the dominant discourse, and so today literacy often means understanding how to competently think and behave according to the codes supplied by neoliberalism, epitomized by the continued calls for english teachers to commit to teaching uncritical, decontextualized versions of digital literacy as a way for citizens to learn how to work the

tech industry's latest offerings in the ways the tech industry wants them worked, rather than to critique them, understand their cultural implications, or work them in unintended ways.

Critical digital literacy, then, involves applying critical literacy in order to demystify digital spaces. Without critical literacy, the online writing classroom carried out through an LMS risks teaching students a Thatcherian lesson: That there is no class that works together to create knowledge, only individual students and their computers. Critical digital literacy is a possible corrective to what Stuckey called the violence of literacy -- a violence that did not recede during remediation into digital spaces -- because it offers us a hermeneutics for rejecting and demystifying the neutrality of digital mediums. Bringing terms of use to the fore shows that mediums actively shape reality rather than merely reflect it, and they transform learning ecologies rather than simply adding to them. However, in order for critical literacy to remain viable in our current climate, we must work through the many problematics attendant to its history.

Limitations and Possibilities of Critical Literacy

Critical literacy and critical pedagogy have been rightly critiqued for their contradictory tendency to "reproduce the very 'regime of truth' they would criticize" (Goleman, 5), as well as the way they historically distance themselves from a meaningful engagement with issues of race. As an example of the latter critique, Patrick Bruch and

Thomas Reynolds point out that James Berlin and Michael J. Vivion, in the introduction to their collection *Cultural Studies in the English Classroom*, lament that scholars of color "chose" not to submit to the collection. Bruch and Reynolds argue that Berlin and Vivion not only problematically frame the systemic issue as a matter of "choice," but also reveal a blind spot of critical literacy, which is that it tends to "disembody" literacy and "links it to whiteness":

> We see critical literacies as institutionalizing "whiteness," then, not in the sense of the skin color of those who may or may not use the literacies, but in the sense that the relationship each literacy imagines to exist among social groups and valued institutional practices -- namely, that valued institutional practices like literacy are themselves neutral with respect to social group relations of power — protects the facts and outcomes of white privilege by disguising them as individualized meritocratic achievements. (Bruch and Reynolds)

Whiteness, it follows, has historically not just been a blind spot of critical literacy, but a prime feature of the project. One possible reason this is the case is that critical literacy is a product of the "Ivory Tower," of the university which has never been able to equitably reconstitute its *use* in the larger society -- which has typically been, according to Sara Ahmed, to bolster white privilege and create a subsidiary "useful class." Catherine Fox, in her essay "The Race to Truth: Disarticulating Critical Thinking from Whiteliness" (2002) incidentally merges these two critiques of critical literacy, and intriguingly argues that "[t]here is nothing radical or transformative about supplanting a conservative,

hegemonic truth with a leftist, marginalized truth -- it is only more 'running in old cycles" (203).

The question, too, of access often comes up in critiques of critical literacies. A common counterpoint -- which Tom Fox (1999) says is "old as freshman composition and as young as yesterday" (27) -- posits that critical pedagogues effectively do little more than withhold access to dominant discourses from those who could most benefit from their development. This is the position that Stanley Fish advances and to which Vershawn Ashanti Young takes umbrage in his 2010 essay "Should Writers Use They Own English?" Young points out that Fish makes assumptions about Standard English as an equal playing field that does not get borne out in reality, and that many successful rich white people (including some presidents) do not demonstrate control of Standard English grammar (113). Many students, reproducing the dominant conception of literacy, also accept the premise that to be successful in a capitalist world, they will need to know how to write correctly in the dominant discourse. However, as Catherine Prendergast argues in *Buying Into English*, the notion of language as a neutral, static force in the market, especially as English works as the lingua franca of global capitalism, is a red herring. "Linguistic fixity is the promise the global economy makes but never fulfills" (22). It matters as much if not more *who* is speaking or writing than *how*. Tom Fox, in *Defending Access: A Critique of Standards in Higher Education* (1999), states that despite the apparently alluring rhetoric of social mobility, "[e]conomic and social power *precede* school success, not the other way around" (27).

These debates provide a reminder that the uses of literacy are the effect, not just the cause, of material and social conditions. In her book *Working Theory*, Judith Goleman revises Althusser's notion of "critical effectivity," which follows this Marxist dialectic to demonstrate that knowledge is perpetually being re-formed inside of history, and so one's subjectivity "must be understood over and over again in its effects" (18). Education is a curious (and to Althusser, ineffectual) place to carry out critical resistance, given its centrality in the Ideological State Apparatuses that reproduce dominant ideology, but in order to *use* education as a critical, transformative space, teachers and students must embrace, or at least not shy away from, contradictions like these. Goleman puts it this way:

> Two purposes for critical work in education are working with students to read the forms of their (and our) individuality and learning together the mechanisms of this reading. These purposes cannot be negated by the fact that education will also involve reproduction of contradictory social relations. (20)

In confronting the problems of critical literacy, we are left with the choice of updating or abandoning the project in the face of our current set of challenges. To abandon the project concedes literacy to the autonomous conception preferred by neoliberalism, as it detaches the work of literacy from collective social project, and places it in the realm of individualistic expression and competition. Updating the project means confronting its problems, and reframing critical literacies not just in opposition to autonomous literacies, but to neoliberal literacies. Literacy cannot exist outside of

ideology or history, but literacy scholars can recognize and study the ideologies with which literacies are imbricated, and help students confront the unequal subject positions that history continually asks them to occupy. Goleman's pedagogical solution is to ask students to "read the forms their schooling takes" in order to "work the theories that are working [them]" and create a "critical nonidentification with one's subject positions and discourses" (7-8). Students and teachers can make use of a writing class to not only read and study the rhetorical genres and gestures they are being asked to reproduce (such as the "research essay"), but also to critically read and study the current "form their schooling takes," e.g. the seemingly neutral medium of an LMS.

Making Critical Use: Forging Through the LMS Turn

At this point we return to the kairotic question: What are we doing now? What is the intellectual project of composition? Many stakeholders in, for example, the FYW class are content and even adamant that it is a service class that prepares students for their other classes or for the "real world." Many critical teacher-scholars reject this reduction of literacy work. As I have hitherto demonstrated, the question of the social function of literacy has long been a nagging one in composition studies. In their historical critiques of the field, Richard Ohmann and James Berlin both noted that, rather than providing a release from the machinery of monopoly capitalism, english composition is instead a function of that machinery. According to Ohmann, whose 1976 book *English in America*

warrants continual reconsideration in response to contemporary crises, english composition's role in the university was to "administer thought" to align with dominant interests. The required FYW course served two purposes: "select those who display the verbal signs of a governing class; and teach them some of the verbal skills necessary for governance" (134). It is important to note that Ohmann didn't see the course operating this way only for the students, but that it also attuned professors' interests with those of the "governing class" (170). Berlin arrived at a similar reading of composition and education more broadly, summarizing the problem pithily in a 1987 essay: "The ability to read, write, and speak in accordance with the code sanctioned by a culture's ruling class is the main work of education, and this is true whether we are discussing ancient Athens or modern Detroit" ("Revisionary History," 52).

It is with this hermeneutics of interpreting composition as a function of the machine that Ohmann analyzes the effects of computers in writing instruction in his 1985 article "Literacy, Technology, and Monopoly Capitalism." Some of Ohmann's conclusions about literacy and technology are worth examining through the emphasis afforded by a bulleted list:

- Literacy grows from the soil of a top-down discourse that had as its mission to "keep the lower order docile" and also to divide people into "measurable quantities" (701).
- Literacy is a term that came to prominence curiously parallel to monopoly capitalism at the end of the 19th Century (702).

- Literacy is "an activity of social groups and a necessary feature of some kinds of social organization" which "embeds social relations within it" (711).
- Technology is similar to literacy in that it evolves "within particular social relations, and is responsive to the needs of those with the power to direct that evolution" (705).

Reading these aphorisms from the perspective of a writing teacher today, I wonder from what soil do current calls for "digital literacy" and "21st century skills" take root? Which version of monopoly capital seeks to nourish their propagation? What are the social relations that they create and respond to?

Building off of Ohmann's ideas, Cynthia Selfe (1999) points out that, at the end of the 20th Century, many compositionists were resistant to address or even pay attention to computers in their research and in their teaching. As a result, she says, "computers are becoming rapidly invisible, which is how we like our technology to be" (413). We ignore them at our own peril, Selfe argues, as following Lester Faigley, she calls attention to the ways in which technologies function as cultural systems with a need to fulfill a literate/illiterate dyad. She articulates a connection between so-called autonomous constructions of literacy movements, which were sold as a path to upward mobility, but in fact served to further stratify society when those from dominant groups received more access to dominant forms of literacy and thus were deemed *literate* while those from disadvantaged communities were deemed *illiterate*. Today, the digital transformation of higher education could be generously read as one that welcomes more people into the advantages of literacy, but there is insufficient interrogation into the social function that

literacy holds in a capitalist system. In her essay, Selfe examines the rhetoric of Clinton-Gore initiatives such as Global Information Infrastructure, which kicked off a "national project to expand technological literacy" (426). The push for more technological literacy in schools reflected efforts to maintain and expand US dominance in the global market, but they also were sold, like other forms of literacy previously, as a path to success and upward mobility for all citizens. "The truth of this claim," she says, "has not been borne out and is not likely to be so" (419).

In a book chapter entitled "Oakland, the Word, and the Divide: How We Missed Our Moment" Adam J. Banks (2006) similarly problematizes the emancipatory or equalizing effects of literacy technologies. Banks argues that rhetoric and composition and the technology sector, like the legal system, has "branded African-Americans as utter outsiders" (828). He expresses frustrations in the result of social movements being manifested in fleeting victories such as the Civil Rights / Voting Rights Acts, (both of which having been recently depleted in new ways by voter suppression efforts), and that the debates in composition over Students Right to Their Own Language and African American Vernacular English forewent a "serious, thoughtful discussion about race and the problem of access to computers, the Internet and information technologies" (831). This point brings texture to Ohmann's 1985 prediction that, as a result of new calls for computer literacy, "Graduates of MIT will get the challenging jobs; community college grads will be technicians; those who do no more than acquire basic skills in computer literacy in high school will probably find their way to electronic workstations at McDonalds" (708). Similarly, in the post-COVID era, online education is often thought

of as a great equalizer yet again. However, one can see the severe risk of deeper stratification latent in this moment, further revealing other injustices such as those of housing and public health. Students with excellent setups in their parents' cool, private basements will do better, and those in a less propitious position to remake a portion of their home into a remote classroom will be at a disadvantage. In a moment in our field and the country more broadly in which deep-seated racial reckonings are finally at the forefront (brought into focus by Asao Inoue's momentous intervention at the 2019 4C's), we must not overlook once again those inequities that Banks points out.

In their chapter on technology in *On African American Rhetoric,* Banks and Keith Gilyard explore ways in which "White supremacy is fundamentally related to technological control" (71). From the ships that carried slaves across the Atlantic to the cotton gin's imbrication in slavery, technologies have been deployed to maintain privilege and dominance. Like MacLuhan and Ohmann, Gilyard and Banks seek to "disrupt posivitistic assumptions that technologies are value-free and neutral" (73). So although the internet may possess liberatory potentials, it arises out of and therefore goes to reinforce specific systems of oppression. To use the internet in a way that extricates its "liberatory possibilities" requires at very least an acknowledgement of this truth. And for digital literacies to truly provide teachers and students of writing modalities of liberation, we must confront these histories and recalibrate our continued relationships to them.

--

In the neoliberal era, critical strands of the field have struggled to legitimize their work because their telos is to pose questions in a world that demands easy answers. In

response to this problem, one way the field has attempted to legitimize itself is by embracing transfer theory. But Roseanne Caro (2020) shows how the theory is an expression of rather than a means of gaining freedom from neoliberalism. In transfer theory -- exemplified by "threshold concepts" in Adler-Kassner and Wardle's *Naming What We Know* -- students learn discrete skills that can transfer across contexts; desirably they will transfer cleanly into other classes and into their experiences in the "workplace." Students are the de-coders of "the course," whereas teachers encode it (to borrow Stuart Hall's terms) within specific departmental constraints, and the meaning of the course arises from that interaction. It is a site, often, of rhetorical conflict: teachers may want to encode the course as something that encourages students to deploy writing as a gesture of agency against the demands of the dominant discourses, or at least something more productive than 15 weeks of grammar lessons that prepare students for the real writing, which apparently takes place somewhere else. Moreover, many students are themselves persuaded by the public charter's conception of FYW as a service course that fixes their writing up for ambiguous "real world" situations like "the workplace" or "other classes," and therefore they might understandably wince when they hear that "practical" matters like grammar and correctness will not be emphasized in this course. As rhetors/instructors, being student-centered either could mean giving students the service course that they have been told they want, or it means conceiving of the course as an opportunity to, as Doug Downs writes, "expose alternative conceptions of writing that better account for students' lived experiences" (60).

The public charter's current-traditionalist understanding of FYW is an extension of students' prescribed identity as consumers. Especially for critical educationists who view students as active shapers of what happens in a classroom, it can be difficult to negotiate how and when to intervene when what students want reproduces the hegemonic conceptions of ideas such as learning and literacy. Moreover, FYW does not exist as a required course because administrators want every student to develop a critical disposition against the dominant discourse. On the contrary, FYW very much depends on the public charter's current-traditionalist justifications in order for it to exist. In this sense, as Ryan Skinnel (2016) argues, universities "concede composition" to English departments. Because composition lacks a cohesive disciplinary focus, institutions "concede" composition to departments/WPAs, and because they all conceive of or invent the class in ways that align with their understanding of the university. In other words, according to Skinnel, that lack of disciplinary focus is an asset to FYW, not an inadequacy. In order to work through the neoliberal LMS turn toward more emancipatory educational practices, the intellectual project of composition should be to make *critical use* of what we are conceded. Part of this project involves establishing use as a central concept in digital literacy. An unlikely but edifying pairing of two interdisciplinary studies of use (from Sara Ahmed and Neil Postman, respectively) can help clarify the meanings of use today.

In her 2019 book *What's the Use?*, Sara Ahmed thoroughly explores what she calls "the uses of use," which are manifold. One of her many observations is what she calls the "strange temporalities of use" (9). In other words, what is socially considered

"useful" changes over time, but so too does the way things get used. The image on Ahmed's cover depicts an old post-office box, no longer used for holding mail, but rather by birds to make their nests. Through "following around" use in the context of the university, Ahmed discovers that "what is named neoliberal could be understood with reference to a longer history of utilitarianism," which is to say that universities are required to be "useful," and to particular people for particular ends. Put another way, universities were often erected upon stolen land, and largely built to be used by the white elite to solidify the white elite's cultural and economic dominance, or to create a "useful class" that services this dominance. In a neoliberal paradigm, committees are convened to address issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion, but the terms of knowledge-production, the status of and access to accepted knowledge, and the reproductive function of the university largely goes unchallenged. Elsewhere in the book, Ahmed quotes Marx's description of historical-material usefulness: "The usefulness of a thing makes it a use-value. But this usefulness does not dangle in mid-air. It is conditioned by the physical properties of the commodity, and has no existence apart from the latter" (qtd in Ahmed, 25). In other words, use, like discourse and ideology, is an effect of material conditions, not their cause. As discussed in this prospectus's introduction, I argue that the meaning of literacy and technology is inextricably tied to its socially prescribed uses.

Working on a parallel track to Ahmed's recognition that use is prescribed by social dynamics, Postman argued in *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (1985) that technologies become mediums when they develop desired uses. The television, for

example, is a technology, composed of wires, metals, and plastic, and it delivers moving images. It also has uses: it could be used as a reading lamp, or as a bookshelf, or (most inconceivable to Postman) for education (97-98). According to Postman, clearly the television is meant to be used as entertainment -- it demands to be used to entertain, even when it attempts to educate -- and thus it cannot be used to carry on the "literate tradition" (98). Postman's facetious examples of a TV being employed as a reading lamp or a bookshelf reflect what Ahmed describes as "queer uses," which describe "when things are used for purposes other than the ones for which they were intended" (26). It is important to note that Ahmed does not explore the use of digital technologies in her book, and her conception of "queer use" is expansive: challenging traditionally white-male-dominated citation practices, heteronormativity, and the problematic function of the university. Queer use also provides for Ahmed a way of reframing diversity work; for example, the conflicted effort to use an institution like the university for distributive social justice projects, as opposed to nourishing the privileged, "open[ing] institutions to those for whom they were not intended" (212). Sometimes opening a container can be "deemed damaging, ruining the value of something," but some containers might need to be broken in order to create new knowledge (212). In other words, the kind of queer use that Ahmed theorizes involves risk. Postman overtly yearns for a return to what he sees as the epistemological values of a previous tradition (the print tradition), a predisposition Ahmed would perhaps reject.

Both perspectives are needed to critically reframe the relationship between digital technologies and literacies. Though they create an unlikely synthesis in many ways, taken together Ahmed and Postman's theories of use remind us to pay attention to which "economic and political contexts" that a thing like digital technology and a use like literacy are attached to, even when they appear to be "dangling in mid-air."

--

This chapter opened with a dialectical framing of technologies as blessings and burdens. Subsequently, I have tried to show some ways that the past few decades of composition and rhetoric scholarship have both facilitated the problematic situation of the LMS turn, and provided us with a critical apparatus with which to map our way through it. The benefits of this moment mostly lie in the field's opportunity to defamiliarize itself with hegemonic literacy practices, to demystify those practices, rescue them from routine fetishization, and to imagine new possibilities for counter-hegemonic literacy practices. Previously, the emergence of the digital provided the field with a similar opportunity to break free from the staid, inequitable practices of the print tradition The multimodal turn invigorated the field with exciting counter-hegemonic possibilities, but mostly made the mistake of embracing emergent technologies for their expressivist affordances while ignoring the dominant ideologies that were embedded into the mediums themselves -- their terms of use. Put broadly, the field became enamored with the blessings and inadequately accounted for the burdens.

As ever, debates about digital pedagogy and literacy are really at their heart debates about the purpose of education, about what we want education to accomplish. The LMS turn has produced a new rupture in our work, which presents new opportunities and new challenges. Is the purpose of education to learn the skills of the workforce, to work the codes of the ruling class the way the ruling class wants them worked, to "fit quietly into the way things are"? If so, I would argue that LMS productively takes the reins in higher education as a pedagogical force. If the purpose of education is to participate in meaningful social and personal transformation, to critically engage our roles in the world, and imagine alternatives for a more just social project, then I argue that LMS complicates education's mission.

And yet it seems that today LMS is being presented as the inevitable context for literacy work. However, to quote McLuhan, "there is no inevitability so long as there is a willingness to contemplate what is happening" (qtd in Postman and Weingartner, 20). The task before us as teacher-scholars is to work with students to contemplate what is happening, to uncover and engage the implicit and explicit ways our forms of schooling are teaching us, to "work the theories that are working us," as Goleman put it, and to more fully involves students in the struggle to deploy reflection as a way to critically engage the terms of use of educational technologies.

--

In the next chapter, I will survey another selection of historical conversations in the field of composition/rhetoric, this time regarding the rhetorical problem of

methodology, and articulate a vision for a critical methodology for pedagogical research in writing studies that brings mediums and their terms of use to the fore as a crucial aspect of contemporary learning ecologies.

.

CHAPTER TWO: DEVELOPING A CRITICAL METHODOLOGY FOR WRITING STUDIES RESEARCH IN THE NEOLIBERAL UNIVERSITY

As discussed in Chapter One, my research questions focus on how to better understand the terms of use that are implicit in the neoliberal university, particularly when students and teachers are asked to integrate an LMS into their literacy work. Much in the manner that users of products agree to "terms of service" with providers, students and teachers must (mostly tacitly) assent to certain neoliberal conditions for using a private service in order to carry out their work. Over the past two decades, research across the humanities has sufficiently named the myriad problems introduced by the neoliberal university, often at a theoretical level (Adler-Kassner, 2017; Welch and Scott, 2016; Ahmed, 2019; Brown, 2015; Giroux, 2008; Harvey, 2005). Moreover, much of the focus in contemporary scholarship on LMS in writing studies attempts to understand and implement (make use of) LMS is trained on the technologies themselves (Duin and Tham, 2020). In other words, researchers focus on what the LMS does, what types of activities it does and does not afford, how it can better influence student and teacher behavior, and ways it has and can one day service a broad instrumentalist mission of education. What studies of LMS and of neoliberalism often fail to adequately portray are the lived experiences of human beings -- students and teachers who use and are used by neoliberalism and its technologies. Thus, scholars have opportunities to create projects

that help readers better understand the ordinary effects of manufactured consent to the deeper terms of use for the technologies casually accepted into everyday life.

With its belief in embodied knowledge, a controversial yet vital, ubiquitous yet rarely acknowledged method of knowledge-creation called "lore" can provide scholars a way to access this critical, human-empowering knowledge. The scholarly debate about lore, narrative, and auto-ethnography as legitimate methods for knowledge-making are deep and complicated, and I do not feign to comprehensively capture the wide-ranging facets of those conversations in this chapter. Rather, I want to explore method as a rhetorical problem in Writing Studies by taking as complete a snapshot as possible of lore as a contested concept in the field. Then, I will demonstrate how lore can be bolstered by a commitment to critical literacy. Finally, I will articulate how I combined lore and critical literacy to study my own LMS classroom during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Lore as a Contested Method of Knowledge-Making in Composition Studies

The dubious relationship between lore and disciplinary knowledge has been a major issue in composition since Stephen North jump-started the disciplinary conversation around lore in 1987's consequential treatise *The Making of Knowledge in Composition* (*MKC*). North defines lore as "the accumulated body of traditions, practices and beliefs in terms of which Practitioners understand how writing is done, learned, and taught" (22). While North writes that the method does generate "clearly very rich and powerful bodies of knowledge" (27), it also has its shortcomings, namely a loose or complete lack of rigorous empiricism, which goes to reinforce the stereotype that

composition is a mere service discipline of lesser importance compared to other disciplines in the humanities. For North, lore is akin to gossip or hearsay, in the sense that seemingly any unremarkable study in teaching can fit under its category: a teacher says something "works" in the classroom, and that approach becomes a part of the discipline's lore, even if the approach does not "work" or gets remediated into traditional ways of teaching.

However, the framing of lore as gossip ignores the fact that other empirical methods are similarly informed by "lore" in the sense that they too are often spread without context and take on a fetishistic quality. The oft-repeated concept of "best practices" in pedagogy is typically supplemented by a cursory mention of "studies" that retroactively support the practice that is apparently best. Such an appetite exists for the lore of empiricism that morning commutes are soundtracked by FM radio hosts announcing new "studies" that indicate that morning coffee lengthens your life, or shortens it, depending on the driving hour. As Blakely and Hamphill note, in pedagogical lore, the phrase "research shows" is repeated ad nauseum from university hallways to international conferences (1). "Research shows" might sound more rigorous than a phrase like "experience indicates" due its assuredness and the ways in which it reflects "the larger, problematic modernist project of the Western Enlightenment" (1). A common fear regarding lore is that it will produce a scholarly impasse, in which scholars talk across one another based on the knowledge they've gleaned from their experience. However, who in the so-called "post truth" era has not encountered a scenario whether in online forums or academic conferences in which people joust between the dueling contentions

that "research shows X" and "research shows Y"? "Research shows" maps on to the project of Enlightenment because it presents pedagogy within the grand narrative of historical progress, and purports that education is something that can be perfected as a science, rather than accepting pedagogy as an art that is recursive, shambolic, and continually experienced within a particular set of changing historical, social, cultural, and institutional contexts.

The Modernist faith in Truth continues to pervade in pedagogical scholarship, and this faith is more compatible with positivist empiricism (objective studies of the world) than with auto-ethnography (subjective narratives of the self in the world). This compatibility is reflected in what gets taught in writing classes as well, and what qualifies as knowledge in student research. Many scholars have made various attempts to welcome undergraduate students into roles as knowledge creators in the field of writing studies, often by training them as burgeoning writing studies scholars, perhaps most notably in the influential Writing About Writing movement (Wardle and Downs). Responding directly to North's work in an essay collected in 2011's *The Changing of Knowledge in Composition*, Joyce Kinkead calls on the field to acknowledge "that students can and do join us as makers of knowledge" (137). Rather than acknowledge the many unrecognized ways students already make knowledge in composition, however, many proponents of undergraduate research instead call students into a Modernist, technocratic methodology. For Kinkead, writing students are "compositionists in training" who have great potential as makers of publishable academic articles (137). This commitment to empirical knowledge-making as counter to affective and intellectual experience is wide-ranging.

For example, Kinkead calls on writing studies scholars to "look to the STEM fields as models" in "helping the naive student become an expert," and (via Schwalm) criticizing the "lack of corporate culture" in writing studies departments (153-4). Moreover, Kinkead worries that "[d]escriptive narrative reports have been termed 'research," when they have in practice little practicality in their ability to generalize" (153). In this conception of undergraduate research, students are welcomed into a reductionist critique of their own experiential expertise, and are invited to discount their own experience as credible knowledge in favor of modernist empiricism.

Composition's anxiety surrounding the undergraduate production of lore and its commitment to Modernist conceptions of research is complicated by Fulkerson's findings that even the work published in the most rigorously empirical journals in the field (such as *Research in the Teaching of English*) have "collapsed into lore." In 2003, the journal's editors noted that "the vast majority of papers submitted during our editorship have employed qualitative methods" (qtd in Fulkerson, 60). Scanning the journal's past two issues, this claim has held true, as each issue contains at least one article that employs a teacher-scholar narrative method that fits under North's definition of lore. Readers of other flagship journals in the field, such as *College English, College Composition and Communication,* and *Pedagogy*, will find that lore continues to serve as a prominent method for the field. Thus, the continued Modernist critiques of student lore (Kinkead is far from alone in this enterprise), yet again attempt to correct students for their tendency to commit the same perceived infractions that professional scholars do -- reminiscent of Joseph Williams's work in "The Phenomenology of Error" (1981) which demonstrated

how professional writers regularly commit the "errors" for which students are corrected and penalized.

Helpfully, Fulkerson provides three ways of reading lore that brings light to the ways Modernist and Postmodernist scholars in Writing Studies tend to talk over each other in regard to its ontology:

1. Lore as a conclusion, i.e. lore is in itself knowledge -- an understanding that perhaps leads scholars such as Kinkead to say students' narratives are not generalizable, and leads North to write that seemingly anything that a teacher says has "worked" can count as lore (North 24);
2. Lore as possibility, i.e. lore creates hypotheses that could be included in the field's body of knowledge if it is used to supplement empirical methods; and,
3. Lore as a method, i.e. lore is one of many legitimate approaches to making knowledge in composition.

Fulkerson seems to lean toward the third understanding, but, while he says he enjoys the poetic nature of lore-based studies, he worries that "the field's future is endangered by its totalizing embrace of lore done well" (61). I do not share the concern about lore done well, though I do want to make the case that if lore is to be "done well," teacher-scholars must critically engage its many limitations.

Limitations of Lore: The Power of Stories

Later in this chapter I will argue that teacher narratives can serve as a potent corrective to technocratic, neoliberal methods in pedagogical scholarship. On its face, this

argument might appear to be traveling in well-tread ground. Many scholars have defended narrative writing as a legitimate method for knowledge making across disciplines (for example: Kessler, 2020; Molloy et al, 2018; Nickoson, 2012; Christianakis, 2008; Ray, 1992; Berthoff, 1987). What I would like to add to these treatments of lore is the specific ways that the method, when paired with a commitment to critical literacy, can work to combat the logic of neoliberal, technocratic rhetorical projects -- the kind which help direct us to the LMS turn in pedagogy. Before getting to that, I would like to elaborate on what I see as some of the major limitations of lore as a method.

First, just because personal narratives, as a method, can serve as an effective subversion to the big-data, quantitative methods of technocracy does not mean that they are inherently "correct" or "true." This reductive inclination was the source of North's major uneasiness with lore as "Practitioner knowledge": that it was easily cooptable because it was uncontestable. Perhaps because of North's critical assessment, much of the narrative-based Practitioner knowledge that followed took on a defensive, self-justifying tone. As Debra Journet points out, "narrative has sometimes been presented as an almost direct way to represent qualities of personal experience -- a kind of transparent window into individual subjectivity" (15). Narratives are not useful because they are narratives. Rather, they are useful when they are placed within a set of situated contexts and when they critically engage with the politics of knowledge under which they are operating. Much as empirical methods from the social sciences such as field observations, surveying, and interviewing (to name a few) are not neutral in the way they reflect the

truth, neither are narratives of personal or collective experience. Perhaps narratives, in some disciplinary circles, enjoy the reputation of granting access to the unvarnished truth in large part because they do not even feign objectivity. However, simply because they are subjective does not mean that they are true or rigorous or even worth reading.

Another major limitation of lore stems from its inability to transcend its circumstances in order to truly reflect on them. Scholars who employ narrative to critique neoliberalism, for example, are not able to do so outside of neoliberalism, or, in the manner of Billy Pilgrim, to dislodge themselves from culture, history, or language. Social-turn era theorists such as Lester Faigley, James Berlin, Alan France and Karen Fitts recognized this inability as the crisis of postmodernism: that the subject of literacy is scattered and incoherent, a "constituent of culture" whose agency is expressed when it word-shops for finite knowledges and identities. Fitts and France put the determinism most crudely in *Left Margins* (1995) when they write "culture coauthors each text, rendering chimerical the claim that individuals freely choose meanings to encode in writing" (xii). More recently, Debra Journet, in "Narrative Turns in Writing Studies Research" (2012) connects this determinism more directly to lore, arguing that narratives have become "at least in part, conventionalized ways of representing disciplinary knowledge" (13).

If it is to be critically viable, lore must contend with the crude determinism that constituted aspects of the social turn while also refraining from embracing the despair that might result in losing faith in writing as an expression of agency. It must also not become mere proselytizing. The same issues that Berlin took with the so-called

"Expressivist camp" of rhetorical scholarship could apply here, namely that relativism engulfs the social project of rhetoric and it becomes removed from the social dynamics that it informs and is informed by. This way, lore becomes not only ineffective in studying and dismantling neoliberalism, but rather it serves neoliberalism by accepting as the context for critical thought the "marketplace of ideas." As Stephen Metcalf writes, in the neoliberal marketplace of ideas, the dispassionate workings of the market takes the mantle as the objective, capital-T Truth, while "all other values have the status of mere opinions; everything else is relativist hot air" (par. 39).

The "transactional" theory of truth that Berlin posits can be helpful in rescuing lore from the neoliberal vortex of "relativist hot air." In transactional rhetorical theory, writes Berlin, "Truth is never simply 'out there' in the material world or the social realm, or simply 'in here' in a private and personal world. It emerges only as the three—the material, the social, and the personal—interact, and the agent of mediation is language (17). The teacher narratives that have been most successful, in my estimation, at working against hegemonic forces in order to critically engage the kairotic pedagogical situation recognize how the personal interacts with a clear social context, and -- crucially -- they do not ignore the material, technological situation that mediates these interactions (the terms of use).

A helpful example is Ira Shor's self-described "teacher lore" work in *When Students Have Power*, in which he engages his own positionality as well as those of his students, while also taking stock of their material situation in the classroom. For example, Shor notices the phenomenon of certain students flocking to the back rows of a classroom

-- which he calls “Siberian Syndrome” -- and recognizes it as a form of “student agency in the contact zone of mass education” (13). By asking students to question the typically unacknowledged decora of education, such as the quality and arrangement of chairs, he models for students techniques of critical literacy, demonstrating that “[students’] complex minds and creative desires conflict with architectures of control in curricula that present knowledge and society as finished and fine the way they are” (12). On the first day of class, Shor moved to the “Siberia” section to disrupt the perfunctory routines, to defamiliarize them, and to call them into question. This move presents the classroom to Shor and, perhaps by extension, his students, as a “laboratory for the counter-hegemonic reconstruction of the social self” (23). Shor’s quotidian example speaks volumes about how the method of lore when combined with critical literacy, at its most effective, does not just allow students to read how their thoughts and emotions are written to maintain power relations, but also to locate ways, quotidian and otherwise, that they can rewrite them in the service of a more just social project—even if they decide they don’t want their teacher sitting beside them in the back of the class (Shor was voted out of Siberia).

Lore as Corrective to Neoliberal Scholarship (and Scholarship on Neoliberalism)

Another way of envisioning a possible corrective to the limitations of lore is to commit to a participatory approach, which combines theory-informed teacher narratives with analysis of student writing. The teacher-scholar might draw from their own experiences as well as students’ many explicit and implicit contributions to knowledge-making in a writing class to document and theorize the meanings of the teaching/learning

of literacy at the moment, particularly in relation to neoliberalism and its learning technologies (e.g. LMS). For example, scholars such as Lee Nikoson and Ruth E. Ray have made their version of lore (which they refer to as teacher research) participatory by cluing their students into their study. This way, students are not "merely subjects," as Ray writes, but "co-researchers, sources of knowledge whose insights help focus and provide new directions for the study" (175-76). In her teacher research, Nikoson found that welcoming students "behind the curtain" helped to improve the collaborative, intellectual atmosphere of the class, as students would implore her to make note of something pedagogically significant, or remind her to write something down (107).

Lore can be also participatory in the sense that it involves students as already multifaceted creators of knowledge — not "compositionists in training," but knowledgeable participants in education whose experiences should be listened and paid attention to, especially as they constitute the population whom educational research will most acutely affect. While working with undergraduates to produce empirical scholarship and publishing in undergraduate research journals is exciting and important work, positioning it in dyadic opposition to narrative (in terms of legitimate knowledge-making methods) is reductive and hostile to some cultural epistemologies (for example, some indigenous epistemologies).

Perhaps because of its ubiquity in today's composition scholarship, one option that is available to scholars is to bypass any acknowledgement of using lore, and simply to do it. This option, which is taken up by many scholars, is perhaps an encouraging sign for lore's defenders, indicating that narrative-based experiential knowledge might have

itself become enthymematic as a legitimate method. However, as Smagorinsky (2008) argues, writing studies scholars should be overt and intentional about describing their methodology. Not doing so leaves the onus on the readers to make assumptions about what it is the scholar is doing and why, and it also rejects an opportunity to situate one's work within a critical context. Here is how Smagorinsky articulates the importance of methods as the "epicenter" of writing studies scholarship:

> I see the Method section as having an impact in at least two ways. First, for the writer it can serve as the point of origin for the ways in which the other sections of the manuscript find their thrust and organization. A research method requires a theoretical perspective, and so the content of the opening framework for an article is suggested at least in part by the tenets behind the investigative method. Explicitly stated research questions need to be answer-able through the methods employed in the research. Results need to be specifically linked to method so that it is clear to readers how results have been rendered from data and how the theoretical apparatus that motivates the study is realized in the way that the data are analyzed and then organized for presentation. (407-8)

As I wrote earlier in this chapter, the prevailing criticism of lore is that it does not produce generalizable knowledge, and that its lack of empirical rigor makes it susceptible to misuse (North, 1987; Kinkead, 2011; Fulkerson, 2011). These criticisms are in many ways valid; however, they ignore the fact that the same could be said about most any method.

Furthermore, many arguments for the neoliberalizaiton of the university employ apparently unimpeachable empirical methods to make their case. For example, a study conducted by administrators at Boise State University (discussed at further length in Chapter Five of this dissertation), used the empirical method of a survey in order to fabricate faculty and student buy-in to the university's business partnership with Instructure's Canvas ("Boise"). Other examples of decontextualized and yet apparently generalizable research being used to justify business mergers include Instructure's own "State of Student Success & Engagement in Higher Education," which is a "global study on the state of student success and engagement" that "gives institutions vital insights for thriving through today's challenges," and mimics (and perhaps intends to supplant) the National Survey on Student Engagement. Yet another example comes from a large midwestern public university, whose Information Technology department conducted an internal focus-group study of students' feelings about Canvas, concluding that students "stated a preference for having a Canvas site for their courses as compared to no Canvas site at all" and that students "do not want to lose these technologies moving forward" ("Fall 2021 …").

I select these studies for emphasis due to the ways in which they represent how empirical research can be coopted in order to serve neoliberal interests. Relating back to the Smagorinsky quote, a major problem of these studies is that they do not make clear the theoretical perspective that informs their methodology. In other words, explicitly stating a theoretical perspective is as crucial as explicitly stating a methodological perspective. And, to me, it follows that the major complaint leveled against lore (that is it

not generalizable), is less at issue than the fact that it is often performed without explicit engagement with its theoretical framework. Lore's importance is diluted when it is removed from a context. When it is adequately placed within a context, then it is generalizable to others who are familiar with or interested in a similar context.

And so, how do critical scholars effectively use lore to study pedagogy? One way that I have tried to answer this question is by pouring over some of the major texts that I consider to be paragons of pedagogical scholarship and examining their "methods statements." Intriguingly, the task was not simple, because, as Smagorinsky notes, many seminal works in the field do not dedicate space to defining their methodology. Many that do feature only cursory statements that pay passing homage to other seminal texts before speeding along their way. Take, for example, Shor's aforementioned book *When Students Have Power* (1996), in which Shor documents a semester teaching a class on the theme of "Utopia." Here is how Shor describes his method (I bold and italicize his fascinatingly casual mention of lore):

> In this story about a Dewey-Freire model of democratic power relations, I will try to make my writing itself an experiment about the experiment. That is, I want this personal report to cross genres. On the one hand, I will draw on creative nonfiction and literary narrative to produce "***teacher lore***," an emergent genre in composition studies (North 1987; Downing, Harkin, Sosnoski 1994). On the other hand, I will include extensive materials from the students and the curriculum by using the genres of ethnographic reporting and classroom inquiry. For this, I'll be doing some "thick description" of college classroom, and community experience,

> as urged by Clifford Geertz (1973), along with discourse analysis of the classroom "speech community" as recommended by Dell Hymes (1974), combined with teacher-research into methodology and learning as described by Dixie Goswamiand Peter Stillman (1987) as well as by C.H. Knoblauch and Lil Brannon (1993). Further, I will situate this "blurred genre" narrative and research (Geertz 1983) in a cultural studies approach to everyday life, drawing out issues of class, race, and gender through sociological, economic, and historical frameworks on one side and subjective experience on the other. (xii)

Given the way he casually references it, one wonders if Shor either did not read, misunderstood, or wanted to flippantly counter North's critical treatment of lore. While, as Edward M. White notes, North's critique of practitioner knowledge was not necessarily meant as the "slur" it became (24), nowhere in his 600-plus-page tome does he hail lore as "an emergent genre in composition studies." Despite this oversight, if it is an oversight, Shor's statement is persuasive because of the way in which it positions methodology within a theoretical context. The references to Geertz and Hymes might also be cursory, but nonetheless, Shor makes clear in this statement that his intentions are to study "everyday life." This could be done using surveys, field observations, semi-structured interviews, or another popular method in the social sciences, but Shor employs narrative-based "teacher lore" to construct his version of the truth. He goes on:

> The intersection of the social and the subjective in cultural studies helps me to understand the meaning of ordinary events, like parking lots, bad teeth, hamburgers, and classroom chairs, connecting the global with the local, the

> ideological with the personal (Hall 1980; Johnson 1987). By thus crossing genres, I want to avoid a traditional voice of academic discourse, which Peter Elbow (1991) argued denies its own subjectivity, which James Berlin (1988) claimed denies its own ideology, and which Lillian Bridwell-Bowles (1992) said denies the diversity of positions actually at work in the academy. Others have presented innovative narratives in voice that are cross-generic, cross-cultural, or "heteroglossic" (Bakhtin 1981), such as Gloria Anzaldua (1987) Pat Belanoff (1990), Keith Gilyard (1991), and Victor Villanueva (1993), so this book is not the first effort in that direction. Lastly, in terms of the "speech genre" (Bakhtin 1986) of my text, I will also be in dialogue with myself, hoping to be self-critical, interrogating my own position while also trying to represent fairly and to present extensively the positions of the students (through examples of their own productions and expressions)." (xii).

One gets the sense that Shor wrote this section either playfully and/or reluctantly, perhaps even at the behest of an editor, or in response to calls to explicitly state one's methodology like those from Smagorinsky. Shor's statement becomes a litany of big names and buzzwords, culminating in a somewhat cantankerous confession that his text's "speech genre" is in conversation with himself. The method is as generalizable as a love song -- it might not have been written about you, nor is it completely transferable to your circumstances, but you might feel it when you hear it.

The generalizability of personal narratives is also central to Tom Fox's brief statement of methodology in his book, *Defending Access* (1999), a book whose thick

descriptions of student writing and experience over the course of the semester greatly inspires my approach to method in Chapter Three. Fox writes, "The integration of politics and pedagogy has, in the past few years of composition studies, come close to being a meaningless mantra, but I seek to recover the meaning from abstraction by looking carefully at daily lives of writing teachers, administrators, and writing students" (14). Here, Fox articulates the value of studying everyday experience under today's neoliberal educational context, as doing so rescues criticism of neoliberalism "from abstraction."

As a method in our field, lore will continue to be viable so long as the scholar is willing and able to situate the method within a theoretical context. As Lankshear and Knoble put it in their *Handbook for Teacher Research: From Design to Implementation* (2004), "Teachers may learn much of the value for informing and guiding their current practice by investigating historical, anthropological, sociological or psychological studies and theoretical work conducted in other places or at other times" (7). When placed within a clear, critical context, lore unlocks access to the everyday lived experiences of teachers and students under neoliberalism as well as other empirical methods. One tempting response to the delegitimizing of lore in our field might be to continue doing it, but attempt to fold the method into another, more widely accepted empirical method, as Fishman and McCarthy do in conceiving of teacher research as participant-observation research, or as Lankshear and Knoble do in suggesting mixing in quantitative methods with teacher narratives. There is also power in proudly reclaiming the term, as Shor does in *When Students Have Power*, as a defiance to technocratic methods which exhort teachers to distrust themselves and their experiences, and, and to instead place their trust

in managerial systems whose chief concern is often (re)producing human capital than fostering human development, or conceiving of human development in terms of capital. As an anti-technocratic method for accessing the lived experiences of classroom participants, lore can continue to be a prominent, legitimate method of teacher research, a "systematic study," as Lee Nickoson describes it, which is to say "sustained inquiry intended for a public audience beyond that of the classroom studied" (106).

Critical Literacy as a Method

Thus far in this chapter I have argued that lore can be a viable, anti-neoliberal method for studying pedagogy when it is placed within a clear theoretical context. A key theoretical context for my study is supplied by critical literacy -- an intellectual tradition that seeks to make sense of the relationship between reading, writing, and social dynamics. Critical literacy makes three important contributions to the study of literacy:

1. As an epistemology -- a way of knowing -- centered around the ideological relationship between reading, writing, and power;
2. As a hermeneutics -- a way of reading -- that excavates often hidden power dynamics in reading and writing practices; and
3. As a methodology -- a way of exploring -- that allows scholars to study literacy in counter-hegemonic ways.

While it has been widely discussed as a hermeneutics and as an epistemology, critical literacy is often under-discussed as a methodology. As I wrote in Chapter One, critical literacy falls short of its emancipatory goals when it removes itself from a context and

attempts to assert itself a new capital-T Truth (Fox, 2002; Bruch and Reynolds, 2000). In other words, it often fails to heed its own insights that truth is socially constructed, kairotic, and doxastic. At its best, critical literacy can expose how all forms of discourse are constructed by language in the interplay of knowledge and power, and therefore can be revised through critical thought and collective action, what Freire called praxis. Thus, critical literacy is not just an epistemology or a hermeneutics, but an action -- a method that is *done* in the world.

Empirical methods in writing studies can be improved through a deeper consideration of critical literacy principles. A systematic study with generalizability as its primary goal often not only aligns itself with a Modernist conception of truth (for what is generalizability if not a grand narrative?), but it also reproduces a technocratic logic under which neoliberalism thrives. Blakely and Hamphill are worth quoting at length on this point:

> In this neoliberal landscape, educators rely heavily on the notion that standardized measures of student success permit comparisons across techniques and settings, including teachers, grade levels, schools, districts, regions, and nations. This has further contributed to a drive for standardized instruction, since it is assumed that when students have a uniform schooling experience, they can be more easily studied, sorted, and ranked. (Blakey and Hamphill 6)

Moreover, Weis and Fine contribute a vital, ethical belief that "critical researchers have an obligation not simply to dislodge the dominant discourse, but to help readers and audiences imagine where the spaces for resistance, agency, and possibilities lie" (xxi).

Thus, if the scholar is interested not just in studying neoliberalism but also working to dismantle it, they must consider how their methodology might be serving the interests of neoliberalism on a larger scale, by establishing students and their writing as raw material and data that can be easily "studied, sorted, and ranked" but also measured, generalized, and reproduced. Since critical literacy-informed lore seeks to employ thickly described narrative writing to portray localized, everyday lived experiences of students and teachers, it follows that the method is necessarily inductive in the sense that it attempts to subvert the logic of technocratic standardization that tends to view students as numbers rather than complex human beings. John Dewey (1916) gives an evergreen reminder: "There can be no discovery of a method without cases to be studied" (168).

Finally, connecting the ideas of critical literacy and lore as a method for subverting technocratic rule involves recognizing the power of stories. Critical literacy gives us the critical apparatus to read this statement dialectically: stories are powerful, but also power dictates the shape our stories take – as well as who gets to tell them and who gets to hear them. Particularly in a situation of routine surveillance, living and working within a financial and technological system that is so complex that it requires a technocracy in order to function, telling situated stories helps us better understand what daily life looks like for those without the power to shape, or oftentimes even comprehend, the byzantine systems that shape us and our literacy. Technocratic research will not dismantle the technocracy, nor will neoliberal methods dismantle neoliberalism.

Developing a Method: My Approach to Lore in Chapter Three

In employing teacher lore as a method, part of what I want to demonstrate is that teaching *is* research, and, inversely, research is pedagogical. Over the course of a semester, we do not "arrive" at answers, but we test hypotheses, triangulate our data with interviews (student conferences), coding (reading students' work), and crystallization (students' own contributions to the class). Framed this way, we can see each semester of a writing class as a collaborative research project, kairotically situated, in which students and teachers work together to answer questions such as:

1. What does learning mean in this historical and cultural context now?
2. What methods work to achieve learning?
3. How does writing function in this context?

Additionally, I want to combine the personal, the social, and the material (as Berlin advocates for in transactional rhetorical theory) by particularly emphasizing the ways in which LMS mediates interactions. In short, I want to bring the medium to the fore, and make it and its terms of use visible, and to animate ways that critical literacy informs my narrative writing. Technologies become "invisible" when they dissolve into hegemony. Critical literacy is an extension of critical theory, which, put broadly, is value-laden theory that questions received knowledge. Critical theory as conceived by the Frankfurt school does not "stand in awe" of positivism -- which "may ignore history but cannot escape it" (Giroux, 15) -- but instead views self-criticism and resistance to hegemony as indispensable features of critical thought. Critical theory "must acknowledge the value-laden interests it represents" and "methodological correctness

does not provide a guarantee of truth, nor does it raise the fundamental question of why a theory functions in a given way under specific historical conditions to serve some interests and not others" (Giroux, 17). Critical literacy applies critical theory specifically to the realm of knowledge and the practices of reading and writing. It recognizes that none of these is neutral, and none exists outside of ideology and history. It understands the purpose of reading and writing to question received knowledge and imagine new ways of creating knowledge that take seriously the lived experiences of those without the power to change the circumstances in which they are working.

All this in mind, in the Spring semester of 2021, I resolved to document the complicated educational situation in which students and I found ourselves during an online, asynchronous FYW class. Given that we were a year into remote teaching and learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, the initial shock of the experience was beginning to wear off and I sensed a collective malaise setting in -- the sharp pain had become a dull ache. The vaccines had not yet been made available, and public life was permeated by a routine sense of fear. My days were constituted by monotonous migrations between three small, connected rooms in my small apartment in south Minneapolis. Since the classes I taught were asynchronous, I spent most of my time with Canvas upkeep: fixing hyperlinks, writing announcements about how to navigate its labyrinthian interfaces, composing emails, and providing seemingly endless feedback to student work. Some days, I'd muster the unexceptional courage to take a walk, or brave the grocery store aisles donning an N95 mask.

The circumstances seemed ripe to document -- for posterity the extraordinary nature of the work, and for the moment the ordinariness of the day-to-day experience. My teacher lore was constructed by completing the following steps:

1. I kept a regular journal of the ordinary and extraordinary moments that made up the semester. Nearly every day (or whenever inspiration struck) I composed dated dispatches, musings, jokes, drawings, and reflections into a Google Doc that ended up stretching over 30 pages.
2. I proposed the study of student writing through IRB
3. I received written permission from each student in the class to quote from and analyze their work. I analyzed their writing and behavior via the LMS belatedly, and did not create any assignments in order to support my work in this dissertation.
4. I composed case studies of three students (anonymized by randomly chosen pseudonyms) and their writing, which I felt most accurately portrayed the experience of literacy work that semester -- specifically noting how their writing contended with, resisted, ignored, and complied with the message of structural interpellation written into the medium of Canvas.

To send out the Consent Sheet for Research (Appendix A), I made a Canvas announcement to the whole class with the following note:

> "As you know, I'm a student in addition to a teacher. As part of my dissertation work on the teaching of writing, I want to document what it was like to teach

> writing and make knowledge during these peculiar circumstances, this year during the pandemic. This would become a chapter of my dissertation and possibly an article for publication. What I often find conspicuously absent in these types of articles is the contributions of students, and the contributions you all make to the knowledge-making function of the university. So my idea would be to incorporate your voices, and your writing, into the project. So I would use the writing you turned into me, and anonymize it of course. But I wouldn't want to do this without your blessing. Is that feeling comfortable to you or not?"

Nearly every student replied promptly, and said some variation of "yes, no problem, go nuts." A few even said, "that would be awesome, I would love that." One student (whom I feature as "Bobby" in the case studies) said, "no problem at all. I suppose it is nice to be able to say, 'hey, I have all these first year students.'" I told him I don't want students to feel like lab rats and that I want to amplify the writing they were doing and give it the kind of scholarly attention it deserves. And he said, "of course, I totally get it." The one student who expressed hesitancy, said that she was hesitant because she said that no one has ever taken her writing seriously before, so she was hesitant to have it taken seriously. She said, "Can I think about it?" I said of course. She ultimately decided to sign the consent sheet as well.

When I proposed the project to the Institutional Review Board at my institution, an analyst concluded that the study did not qualify as "human research." The IRB analyst told me over the phone that I can say IRB reviewed the study and deemed it as exempt and "not human research" but cannot say it was IRB approved. I told her that was

understood, and that it is still important to me that I get the blessing of my human students, and so I would go forward with circulating a form for them to be able to opt-in or opt-out. The analyst said that is sound, so long as I do not tell the students this study was IRB approved, a temptation I was successful in resisting.

The next following summer (2021), I received a fellowship from my department to carry out this proposed research. I combed through my "teaching diary" and reread all the student work on Canvas, as well as my own writing, such as in feedback and in announcements. I toyed with the idea of organizing the essay around themes of use such as resistance, compliance, and indifference. Ultimately, following the thinking I detailed in this chapter regarding critical teacher lore, I decided to focus on individual students as case studies. I wanted to emphasize the ways in which humans strained to connect with one another to carry out the social project of education through the LMS. The result of my work during the summer fellowship became an essay that was accepted by *Pedagogy: Critical Approaches to Teaching Literature, Language, Composition, and Culture* for their special issue entitled "After the Pandemic: The State of English," and was published in April 2023. Chapter Three will be a slightly revised (and extended) version of that essay, and will dramatize the kind of critical teacher lore I have theorized in this chapter.

CHAPTER THREE: CASE STUDIES OF STUDENTS' WORK IN CANVAS

Of all the student writing I read in the past year, one the most memorable works is a blank document. I received the submission through Canvas in the spring of 2021, during another asynchronous online semester, when pandemic and other fatigues weighed heavily. Around the midterm, one student began to drift away from the work of the class. For our third project, a rhetorical analysis of an object that "sells" the idea of college to students, he produced an empty submission. His name was printed at the top of the page, my name too, the course name, and the date. Even a title that read "Writing Paper" at the top, but below that: nothing.

Was this a test? Had he uploaded the wrong document? Was there an error on my end? Should I try another browser?

I sent him an email, a cordial nudge, hoping to get answers to my questions. His reply withheld them, and instead produced further bewilderment.

"Dear Professor Brenden -- yeah, sorry about that. I don't know what happened. I'll get the assignment in right away."

Back and forth like that we went the rest of the semester, but no words filled that abyss. Still, I continue to turn the peculiar event of the submission over in my mind. What happened there? Was this move to upload a blank document … brilliant? Perhaps

the blank document was a gesture of meaningful resistance to the dehumanizing forms his schooling has taken on. Perhaps many routine, cursory attempts to go through the motions and half-heartedly guess what a teacher wants us to say might as well be blank word documents. Perhaps everybody should have submitted blank documents. Perhaps the simulacra of type transmitted through ones and zeros to be accessed through the flickering glows of multiple, private screens became so divorced from the real that finally this student had chosen to simply make literal the figurative emptiness of contemporary literacy work. Perhaps it's blank documents all the way down.

Or perhaps he was just busy with football practice and other obligations, and this was his last resort before the deadline. Perhaps he was confused by the prompt and didn't know what to say. Perhaps he didn't think I'd read it anyway. Perhaps he took a chance.

Whatever the case -- and the matter, sadly, went unresolved -- his responses to my emails seemed to align with the subject positions that neoliberalism and its educational technologies had sorted us into, as did my emails to him. "I'll get that to you right away," he said. "Very good, thank you," I said. I wanted to be his teacher. Or better yet his co-participant in the knowledge-making project of higher education. I didn't want to be his boss. And I wasn't. I was more like a middle manager. He didn't report to me, nor I to him. We both reported to Canvas. The machine demanded a submission from us – blank or otherwise -- and damned if we weren't gonna get it one.

--

The case of the blank document, to me, encapsulates many of the difficulties of using LMS to practice critical literacy. The phenomenon could be dismissed as a web 2.0 version of "the dog ate my homework." However, the blankness of it all speaks to something new, and seems to reflect the instrumentalist, box-checking picture of education that LMS creates for students and teachers today. And so, while the student may have been reaching for an excuse, in many ways he also appears to have been properly reading what his education has asked of him. While the assignment called for him to use literacy to read and critique the myriad forces that interpellate students, the LMS was busy interpellating him. The content of the course called for critical reflection, but the medium communicated something different.

As I wrote in Chapter One, critical literacy is a project that requires repeated recalibration. As an epistemology that purports to create and grant access to counter-hegemonic, non-hierarchical knowledge, critical literacy must continually reassess its viability in response to cooptation into dominant discourses and remediation into emergent technologies. Today, neoliberalism is the prevailing hegemonic force which has proved itself capable of adapting to and co-opting counter-hegemonic efforts. One way it does so is by inviting counter-hegemonic discourse to be carried out through privatized digital technologies capable of surveillance, data collection, and management. The connection between digital literacy and neoliberalism is not that the digital inherently serves commercial interests or the 1%, but rather because technologies and literacies, as Richard Ohmann wrote, "evolve within particular social relations," and are "responsive

to the needs of those with the power to direct that evolution" (705). One common example of this redirection of critical literacy is the contemporary practice from both leftist and rightist factions to employ Facebook and Twitter's platforms to theorize and organize political resistance, which then becomes data for advertisers to sell their resistance back to them. Another example that is central to my purposes in this essay is using a privatized LMS as a sponsored "contact zone" through which to conduct critical literacy in college writing classes, which allows multi-layered surveillance and for further habituation into dominant ways of participating in the world, literacy development for the benefit of the status quo.

Here I would like to emphasize again that perhaps neoliberalism's most dangerous assault on the project of higher education is the assault it makes upon critical reflection, reducing personal and social reflection to a measurable, collectible, marketable set of gestures -- more boxes to be checked. LMS does not invent or, necessarily, enforce this watered-down version of reflection, but it does facilitate it, and, I argue, it appears to be designed for it. In a context in which LMS mediates reflection, students suffer from an inability to connect with one another to meaningfully reflect on the modes and functions of their learning, but so do teacher-scholars -- another example of a practice that we ask students to perform, and lament when they do not adequately perform, but which we do not adequately perform ourselves. Accordingly, my study in this chapter will critically reflect on what learning meant through the course of an asynchronous semester during the COVID-19 pandemic, which became a crisis of the neoliberal university. The texts

under examination are those produced and submitted by students, anonymized and examined with written permission by the students themselves. In the interest of paying attention to the pedagogical function of learning technologies, I will also study contextual and paratextual elements created by LMS as a pedagogical force and an interested (but neutral-presenting) site of literacy. More specifically, I will attempt to document, analyze, and theorize real instances of students resisting and complying with the forms their schooling has taken on -- working under the faith that while university students may be novices in the content areas of their education, they are deeply experienced authorities in the mediums of education, authoritative readers of what their education wants from them. Before examining student texts, I will elaborate on what is mean by resistance, and how it relates to opposition and compliance.

Case Studies: Student Resistance

While for the reasons I described in the introduction of this chapter the blank submission did become the a most memorable piece of writing of the year for me (or at least the one I've agonized over the most), the writing itself was not meaningful. Indeed, the writing was absent. The piece's meaning, and its potential for resistance, lied only its gesture, and how its literal emptiness can serve as a subversive commentary on the figurative emptiness of other such gestures in the neoliberal university, the perfunctory motions students and teachers are repeatedly demanded to perform: *The top-right corner of my Canvas page is chastising me for not giving it a submission, so here's one.* However, gestures like these "do not speak for themselves," as Giroux wrote about

similar defiant behaviors, and "to call them resistance is to turn the concept into a term that has no analytical preciseness" (109). Not all oppositional behavior can constitute resistance, and confusing the two concepts could lead not only to meaninglessness, as Giroux describes, but to an insubstantial engagement with the critical reflection "necessary for education in a society that calls itself a democracy and may yet become so" (Shor). To categorize such oppositional behavior as resistance, according to Giroux, "means uncovering its emancipatory interests" (110). This excavation requires a dialectical analysis of the complex set of factors influencing the oppositional event. Dialectical thought in this case means simultaneously accepting that subjects are a) interpellated by cultural structures and b) agential beings capable of both resisting and perpetuating interpellation in complex ways. In this way, according to Held (1980), dialectical thought reveals "the insufficiencies and imperfections of 'finished' systems of thought … It reveals incompleteness where completeness is claimed" (qtd in Giroux, 18).

The dialectic to be engaged in this situation exists in the relationship between this student and neoliberal education, which both creates opportunities for resistance and limits the forms that resistance can take. Students and teachers do not uniformly either resist or comply with the neoliberal university, but instead toil in contradictory subject positions, forms, and literacies. The assignment asked him to engage in a critical analysis regarding the structures that interpellate him. For one reason or another he declined, which *was* a gesture of resistance to something, but its "emancipatory interests" were cloaked in blankness. Potentially meaningful resistance was reduced to punishable,

vacuous opposition by neoliberalism's assault on reflection. Instead, we got a blank word document.

The blank document might have been sent from what Ira Shor described as "Siberia" – the far-flung chairs in the back of the classroom where students go to disengage from the class. Shor did not read the Siberian disengagement as passive, but rather as a gesture of active resistance to their schooling, as a form of "student agency in the contact zone of mass education" (13). By asking students to question the typically unacknowledged decora of education, such as the quality and arrangement of chairs, he models for students techniques of critical literacy, demonstrating that "their complex minds and creative desires conflict with architectures of control in curricula that present knowledge and society as finished and fine the way they are" (12). On the first day of class, Shor moved to the "Siberia" section to disrupt the perfunctory routines, to defamiliarize them, and to call them into question. This move presents the classroom to Shor and, perhaps by extension, his students, as a "laboratory for the counter-hegemonic reconstruction of the social self" (23). Shor's quotidian example speaks volumes about how the method of critical literacy, at its most effective, does not just allow students to read how their thoughts and emotions are written to maintain power relations, but also to locate ways, quotidian and otherwise, that they can rewrite them in the service of a more alive, fulfilling, and just social project.

Due to the literal and figurative distance of online asynchronous education carried out through LMS, one might say that entire classes are set in Siberia, and the teacher

must also reside there. The "architectures of control" are manifested in the neutral-presenting medium of LMS, which students are eager to critique, but are rarely invited to do so. In Spring 2021, I resolved to document the complicated situation of knowledge-creation in which students and I found ourselves during an online FYW class. I kept a regular diary of the ordinary and extraordinary moments that make up a semester, and, with written permission from students themselves (Appendix A), zoomed in on complex ways students resisted and complied with the forms of schooling. All names in the ensuing case studies are pseudonyms for real students, and the work was analyzed belatedly, and not created for the purposes of this project. In each case I will introduce the students based on how they presented themselves to me and the class through their writing on Canvas, and then I will document and, remaining committed to the methodology of dialectical thought, analyze ways that their writing contended with the ways in which the medium of Canvas carried the message of structural interpellation.

Sven

Sven, a first-year student, is an apparently white man who stated in his writing throughout the semester that he identifies as gay. In our introductory Canvas discussion—which is a message board–like feature of the LMS that allows students to respond to a prompt and each other; they can even "like" each other's posts—Sven quickly established himself as a humorous writer with an astute and wry sense of education as a social process, an incisive class clown to the extent that one can exist through asynchronous course delivery. "I'm into hippy-dippy stuff like tarot and

astrology (I'm a pisces) and I think god is whatever you want it to be, so that's fun," Sven wrote when asked to introduce himself. His writing style shucked so-called formal expectations, and he clearly felt comfortable writing honestly and unapologetically about his experience in the world. This post introduced his writing to his distant classmates but also to his distant teacher, and so he shows a willingness to critique his education even to those he knows are tasked with measuring it when he writes about the skepticism he feels about taking another rhetoric class. "The one language/rhetoric class I took had an awful teacher," he wrote, "so it's gonna take some effort to get myself into a non-fiction rhetorical argument mindset." The introductions assignment also required students to reply to a classmate, in which Sven provided a critical reading of what could be called neoliberal co-optation of social justice movements: "The need for profit shapes the writing to be self-congratulating and promote a sense of self-exceptionalism (being more important than a cog), and that shapes the social movements to be focused on the people promoting it instead of the issues they're fighting." Time and again throughout the semester, Sven used writing to resist entities trying to convert him to their perspective, including most essays we read and the prompts I assigned him and his classmates. His style of resistance was much like his prose: detached, ironic, clever, and sometimes surface level. He broke just enough rules to have fun but still ultimately made tacit gestures of compliance by completing each assignment on time and showing an eagerness to receive good grades.

As I mentioned, for our third project, students were asked to rhetorically analyze a found object in which someone was "selling" college to them. Sven chose to wryly and astutely critique an email he received from an Air National Guard member offering to pay his tuition in exchange for his enlistment. Before I read his project using Canvas's SpeedGrader™ feature, however, I encountered a message from Sven using Canvas's Assignment Comments feature:

> I know this paper was supposed to cite one of the three readings we did in class, but I didn't find a way to add any of them that didn't feel inauthentically tacked on to my argument. Also, your "How will Project 3 get assessed?" doesn't mention use of the readings. I'm including this comment just so you know that it's an intentional choice that I think makes my paper better, and that it's not absent just because I forgot. Thanks :-)

As I told Sven in my end comments, his preamble demonstrates rhetorical awareness and makes use of Canvas to take agency in his writing. However, the agency in this case involved a choice to disengage from critical literacy. His paper was a rhetorical analysis that did not discuss rhetorical concepts, and in so doing it missed the opportunity to place his critique of what he calls "Multi-Level Military Schemes" in a critical, transactional context instead of an expressionistic one (Berlin 1987). Critically evaluating what demands are being placed on your writing, rejecting unjust demands, and taking on agency in your writing are valuable lessons of critical literacy that I always hope students can take away from the class and apply to their lives. In a way, Sven

accomplishes all three here, but his critical literacy is sponsored by the LMS and what modes of resistance it affords. Sven knows that, while his teacher is asking him to "make intentional choices" in his writing, the practical ends of his education require him to jump through hoops and keep his GPA as close to 4.0 as possible. With this comment appended to his essay, he has it both ways.

In the last week of the class, students wrote end-of-the-semester reflections. My assignment invited them to ponder what the class meant to them, what they learned, and what they might take with them as they live their lives. I also prompted them to consider incorporating answers to two questions into their reflection: "How has the online nature of the course informed your experience in the class? What roles did Canvas and Zoom play in educating us as a class this semester?" Sven focused his reflection on the tension he experiences between product and process in his writing, particularly as it relates to "getting assignments done" and "getting the grade." He said he felt he was able to learn about his own writing through the class but wished it could have been in person. A section from his conclusion—in which he follows this tension toward a recognition of the social nature of writing (and learning about writing)—is worth quoting at length:

> I think overall my biggest learning point is to engage earnestly with the process. I think too often I'll dissociate any actual important learnings or ideas from the assignment, and just do the assignment. I'm usually pretty confident that I'll do the assignment well, albeit last minute or superficially. I think that this class emphasized the process and discussion enough that it required me to care beyond

> just a "do the assignment get a grade" level that I usually operate at. I think this would've been even more true if we were able to have in person classes, because I think a lot of going beyond an assignment comes from a sense of obligation to other people and contribution to discussion.

Ultimately, Sven was able to learn valuable lessons from the class despite the limitations placed on it by LMS and the pandemic, because he was able to critically engage those limitations, and rethink his relationship to his education, his writing, and to "other people."

Ellen

Ellen, a second-year student, is an apparently black woman who mentioned in her writing that she immigrated to the United States from Ethiopia in high school. In her introductory discussion post, Ellen, like Sven, wrote humorously and openly as a way of piercing through the contrivances of an online discussion assignment on Canvas: "I'm from Ethiopia, Addis. I moved to the states my junior year of high school, and spent the following two years in a really shitty town 40 minutes south from Minneapolis." She also mentions that in addition to English she also speaks French and Amharic. Despite confessing that she is "nervous" about taking a writing class, due to writing insecurities, her prose jumps off the page and is alive with personality. In a passing sentence, Ellen expresses a relational epistemology that would become a central concern for her throughout our distanced learning: "My hobbies include getting on the green line to get from my apartment to campus, and encountering interesting characters on the train." A

note from Canvas below her post indicates that Ellen made several edits to her introduction after posting it. Her post did not receive any responses from her classmates.

Ellen was a regular fixture in my Zoom office hours, during which she liked to ask questions that transcended the work of the class into everyday observations, or "small talk," that people tend to use to connect with people as people. In one such Zoom meeting, after a discussion about possible approaches to the assignment she was working on, I suggested a more creative approach based on work she produced in a freewrite, in which she might incorporate narrative and hypothetical fiction to open up the bounds of the assignment and experiment in a way that might make the assignment more meaningful to her. She nodded her head through my monologue but said that she would rather just go the "traditional, thesis-drive" route. At the end of the session, as I'm wont to do, I asked, "What other questions do you have?" She said, "I don't have any more questions about the paper. I'd love to keep talking, but I don't have any questions about that."

Unthinkingly, I replied, "Well, if questions come up, don't hesitate to reach out." But she was reaching out. It seemed throughout the session that she was starved for the tangential, extra-curricular conversations that often occur in educational settings but are foreclosed and rendered businesslike through Zoom and LMS.

"Well—I do have a question," she interjected, "Were your walls red last time? For some reason I was thinking they were green." Her eyes lit up at my boring answer:

nope, red last time too. When I took a sip from my mug, she excitedly inquired, “What is that you’re drinking?”

“Oh, coffee.”

“Classic professor drink,” she replied.

“You don’t drink coffee?”

“I can’t, because I learned that if I went a day without it, I would get headaches.”

“Well, I might interpret that as a reason to *keep* drinking coffee, not to stop.”

We both laughed, then paused. To fill the silence, I asked her about her plans for revision. The light left her eyes. We closed our screens.

These quotidian conversations are not vacuous or superfluous to education. They might be understood as radical attempts to subvert the oftentimes dreary, alienating experience of education-through-the-screen; to brazenly shift subject positions; and to center our shared humanity. Ellen seemed to understand that we learn as much, if not more, from these seemingly mundane acts of “small talk” as from overtly “educational” activities like thesis-driven papers, revision, and so on. The LMS and Zoom filter such interactions, make them feel superfluous, and interpellate us into our subject positions within a management structure. Clearly, Ellen yearns for the affective meaning supplied by these interactions, and I do, too. Writing this now, I am wishing I would not have changed the subject, as it were.

Throughout the semester, Ellen struggled to meet the deadlines imposed by the LMS, which contradicted my own lenience that I expressed regarding due dates. Mostly she was in arrears, talking to me about one assignment when she still had three to complete before getting to it. In her final reflection, she revealed that this was her third attempt at passing the required FYW course. The first time, she was overwhelmed by credit load; the second, by the sudden shift online due to the COVID-19 outbreak in spring 2020. The prospect of passing it on the third try was looking dicey, but, ultimately, she was glad to have finished. Like Sven, she looked to take ownership of her process, even if her "relationship to writing isn't the best": "I don't like writing, but that doesn't really matter. As a college student, I still have papers waiting to be typed. The least I can do is try to incorporate my own thing to actually make it MY paper, and not something I think the person reading it is about to like. I wish I had taken this class my freshman year. It would have definitely been helpful." I winced a bit as I read her concession to the box checking nature of education; she recognized that writing plays an integral part in maintaining the system. More writing was lurking on the horizon like items on the to-do list of her Canvas calendar just "waiting to be typed." She concludes the class with a resolve to put more of herself and her desires into the perfunctory assignments she will be required to complete. In doing so, she might just be able to do some writing rather than mere typing.

Bobby

Bobby is an apparently white transgender man who arrived at the class with an already impressive toolbelt of critical thought. “Like a lot of Gen Z,” he wrote in his intro post, “I have postmodern and relativist views of literature and media.” His post went on to point out how capitalism coopts social movements such as Black Lives Matter and attempts to render them into commodities. “Capitalism preaches that the status quo is where the money is, but there is always incentive to appeal to all sides of issues. Playing all sides guarantees that you always win.” Clearly, Bobby did not need my class to introduce him to critical consciousness, but I did find it interesting that, beyond a passing mention of online learning not being “ideal,” he chose not to apply his critical lens to the ways these same capitalistic forces might be coopting his and his classmates’ educations in his introductory post, though he did go on to forge these connections in other writing situations.

For the rhetorical analysis project, Bobby chose to focus not just on how college is sold to prospective students, but rather ways that it continues to be sold to students once they are enrolled. Specifically, he critiqued what he saw as the performative empathy communicated in the university presidents emails about the pandemic and racial injustice. That essay’s introduction featured some of the more perspicacious analysis of the neoliberal university that I have read – from anyone – in some time, and, yes, is worth quoting at length:

> Throughout our lives, we have continually been marketed to by institutions of higher education. This commercialization is so aggressive, that consequently

> many students and families internalize the need for higher learning, and take post-secondary education for granted. However, once we enroll in college and agree to pay insidious dues, the peddling does not stop. It can be hard to recognize, but we are still encouraged to consume college-produced media, merchandise, and propaganda. This incentivizes us to stay enrolled, and also enriches the institution in both funding and clout.

Throughout the rest of his essay, Bobby analyzed five specific mass emails from the president in a measured, precise tone. His main argument was that while the president's emails are "effective" examples of Aristotelian rhetoric, their overarching function is to maintain the business interests of the university, and quell students concerns by directing them to a labyrinth of in-house resources in order to defuse dissent and perpetuate the interpellation he describes students being inundated by in his opening paragraph. The essay was an astoundingly bold act of critical reflection that, like Sven and Ellen, also reflected students' eagerness to use writing to take on agency against structural forces.

Elsewhere in the semester, Bobby added texture to his critical epistemology, and sometimes used writing to express interest in complying with the objective-driven picture of education of the status quo – mostly by reaching out via email to ask what Postman calls "technical questions," those clerical inquiries students have been "permitted to ask" throughout their experience in an education system which does not teach them to inquire meaningfully, to question questions, to interrogate the politics of knowledge, but rather to memorize, recite, and ask calibrating questions about the rules (31). "How do I cite this

essay" being the most common example. In his final reflection, he focused on how the concepts he learned about in this class might help him to leverage writing in order to accomplish his future goals:

> This class will certainly not be one that I toss out of my consciousness after the semester ends. The lessons from required readings will be important for me to know later on, especially since my majors require multiple writing intensive courses. Additionally, if I like what I'm studying enough, I might even pursue graduate school, which will require even better writing skills. I have developed a new framework for writing and developing arguments because of this class, and I am excited to expand upon my skills and understandings of rhetoric and writing that I have been exposed to here.

Conclusion

The cases of Sven, Ellen, and Bobby might not be generalizable, but they are, I would bet, recognizable to those who taught during the pandemic — and they demonstrate complex ways that students are resisting and complying with education under neoliberalism, sometimes simultaneously. The LMS sponsors students' resistance to their education and prescribes how and where it can happen. These cases are also a reminder that students have a lot to teach us about the meanings of education today, as well as going forward after the pandemic. Today, neoliberal forces in education invite us to distrust our own experiences with students and instead place our trust in byzantine

systems that seem to be more focused on managing learning than facilitating it. These forces attempt to make education about either the transmission of skills or perfunctory digital box-checking, both of which render learning into measurable and surveil-able data that justifies a business model instead of fostering human development. The challenge for critical literacy is to shock education awake, and to critically reflect on what we are doing and why, both in online and physical classrooms. If the LMS is here to stay, then meeting this challenge requires us to recalibrate the meaning of education, and that we ask students to pay critical attention not just to the content but also to the forms of their schooling.

The desire placed upon critiques of culture today is that they speed past negativity in order to supply solutions that will help to create a better world. When I give talks at conferences that critique educational technologies, for example, this is the first and sometime only question I get: “so what do you propose instead?” Throwing a heavy bowling ball at our laptops and phones, I think in my crankier moments. But that solution, while rather tempting, is perhaps justifiably interpreted as quixotic and reductionist. Importantly, it ignores the dialectical approach to critique for which I have advocated in this chapter. Fortunately, this conundrum of critique is far from new, and in fact it can be traced at least as far back as purported formation of critical theory in the Frankfurt School. Writing about a mid-century culture that they read as the natural fascistic ends of capitalism, writers of the Frankfurt School such as Horkheimer and

Adorno grappled with the conundrums of critique which inevitably extends from the culture under examination. In *Negative Dialectics* (1966), Adorno writes,

> Whoever pleads for the maintenance of this radically culpable and shabby culture becomes its accomplice, while the man [sic] who says no to culture is directly furthering the barbarism which our culture showed itself to be. (367)

Similarly, one cannot critique neoliberalism from outside of neoliberalism, or simply withdraw from its epistemology. As it is impossible for thinkers to imagine a new world outside of the context of the one in which they are situated, the best they can do is point out the negatives of their world so that they may be changed ("Horkheimer on Critical Theory"). However, the understandable haste we might feel to undo the cynicism and despair that neoliberalism wreaks must not impel us to simply replace one Truth with another (see Fox 2002 for an evergreen reminder of this need) or engage in reductive or technologically deterministic critique. Critical education is about attending to the dynamics that ruptures like the LMS turn create rather than speeding past them. My takeaway from using critical teacher narrative research while also teaching a class entirely through Canvas is that we cannot pretend the LMS does not alter the meanings and processes of education. Indeed, rather than simply doing critical education *through* an LMS, we must also do critical education *to* the LMS itself. If we are indeed at the point where simply rejecting LMS can only be thought of as romantic or quixotic, then we must work with and learn from students about ways that we can apply critical thought to these technologies, rather than assuming that it can simply be done through them. We

must all learn to critique and resist the lessons neoliberal technologies are teaching us (including what they're teaching us about critique and resistance).

In the next chapter, I will continue my critical investigation of LMS by examining everyday objects of neoliberal rhetoric by one giant educational technology company, Instructure Canvas.

CHAPTER FOUR: NEOLIBERAL RHETORIC AND ITS USE BY LMS COMPANIES

Today, a central question for higher education concerns who is in the position to manage it. Time and again, educators themselves are told that they cannot be trusted with the task. Boards of Regents are populated with business people and lawyers. Many presidents and chancellors of major universities promise to run their universities with the economic efficiency of corporations, citing as a goal "public-private partnerships." So normalized is the neoliberal management structure that teachers and students are invited to take for granted that classrooms themselves should be chaperoned by private companies. These chaperones take the form of Learning Management Systems -- which announce their managerial functions in their very name (learning *management* systems) -- an arrangement that once again invokes this dissertation's epigraph from Postman: that technologies control (or manage) education, rather than vice versa. This arrangement largely goes unquestioned on campuses as neoliberalism's ambient biopolitical rhetoric governs students and teachers' bodies, emotions, and logic. The LMS sends automated emails every afternoon: time to report your body to the computer.

The reasons that teachers and students are willing to take for granted this arrangement with neoliberalism are curious and compelling. On one hand, young people in America might seem to be more casually radical than ever. According to online polling by *Axios*/Momentum, "Just half of younger Americans now hold a positive view of capitalism — and socialism's appeal in the U.S. continues to grow" (Salmon, n.p.). At the same time, the discourse that apparently drives and sustains radical ideas largely takes

place on gigantic corporate platforms such as TikTok, Twitter, or Meta's Instagram. As a result, even radical discourse largely accepts the enthymeme that says that private corporations should sponsor, or chaperone, public discourse, and that neoliberal methods such as data collection and surveillance should be a fact of life, the price of admission. The terms of use.

Across social institutions, neoliberalism thrives on managerial structures that speed past public deliberation about its decisions to turn processes over to private interests (Brown, 2015; Scott and Welsh, 2016; Giroux, 2008). We can therefore name "neoliberal rhetoric" as verbal, bodily, and affective persuasion that invites auditors to accept corporatization, competition, data collection, and surveillance as the *terms of use* for public goods. In *Democracies to Come*, Rachel Riedner and Kevin Mahoney write that neoliberal rhetorics are emotionally and bodily persuasive, and that on contemporary campuses they "craft and direct our 'modes of life'" (39). It follows that neoliberal rhetoric sets up the context into which a platform like Canvas emerges in higher education, and, because the enthymemes of this logic go unstated, undiscussed, and un-deliberated upon, its presence in higher education seems neutral and inevitable. The crisis of higher education during the COVID-19 pandemic can therefore be read as a crisis of neoliberalism, in the sense that the assault on funding for public universities and its attendant austerity gave way to a seemingly inevitable embrace of private corporations to step in and save the day. Following Newfield (2016), we can read the LMS turn as the latest iteration of the "Great Mistake": clinging tighter to private interests, and accepting them as the savior rather than the killer of public institutions.

Public higher education followed the trends of the private sector in 2020. Internet-based tech companies, it's no secret, benefited financially and culturally as a result of the pandemic and the necessity that we continue to connect while keeping a physical distance from one another. The "Big Five" tech companies – Amazon, Facebook, Apple, Microsoft, and Google – earned a combined $1.2 trillion during the first year of the pandemic, up 25% from the previous year. They endured a tongue-lashing from Washington for their role in spreading misinformation about masks and vaccines, but their bottom line survived these reproaches, and remained in the stratosphere (Ovide, par. 2). While their reputations took a hit in some circles, most everyone became only further entrenched in their modes of participation. The equation seems to go as follows: The more divided we are physically and ideologically, the more we rely on big tech to bring us together, which only seems to drive us further apart.

In the realm of education, another tech company more stealthily cashed in on the social distancing imposed by the pandemic: Instructure, the parent company of Canvas, the world's most successful Learning Management System (LMS) for higher ed and K12. As the virus mostly kept students, teachers, and staff off campus and away from one another, Instructure's Canvas, Google's Docs, and Zoom stepped in and enabled the show to go on. In July of 2021, after more than a year of remote learning during which thousands of teachers were hastily trained as experts in online education (mostly technical training on how to navigate LMS interfaces), Instructure went public as a company. It offered shares at $20 a pop, valuing the company at nearly $3 billion

("Instructure"). Its IPO statement reasoned with potential investors that Instructure is the "LMS market share leader in all levels of education," boasted that it is "maniacally focused on [its] customers" and therefore will "continuously innovate to grow the footprint of [its] platform" (par. 2). The overarching, kairotic message rings clear, and it fits snugly into the above categorization of neoliberal rhetoric. Not only does the statement invite potential stockholders to accept privatization in higher education as inevitable and enthymematic, but it also indicates that the company intends to expand its already massive role in education. The statement seamlessly merges its educational philosophy with a growth-based business philosophy, as though the integration is mere common sense: "From the inception of a teacher's lesson through a student's mastery of a concept, Instructure personalizes, simplifies, organizes, and automates the entire learning lifecycle through the power of technology" (par. 2).

"The power of technology" is a telling phrase in this context, and it ought to command the attention of critical literacy and pedagogy scholars. As I discussed in Chapter One of this dissertation, Canvas and other LMS have benefitted from the perception that they simply store and deliver content in a neutral fashion, that they are "disinterested arbiters" between "a teacher's lesson" and "a student's mastery of a concept" (Berlin, 477). In this chapter, I will attempt to provide scholars with a hermeneutics for critically reading the power of technology in the context of neoliberal rhetoric, as I've defined it as a rhetoric which invites auditors to accept corporatization, competition, data collection, and surveillance as the terms of use for public goods.

Further, I construct this definition in part from Riedner and Mahoney's understanding of neoliberal rhetorics: that they "shape bodies, identities, and emotions … [as] a rhetoric, as a theory, as an ideology, as a means of understanding collectives, and their relationship to each other, neoliberalism produces bodies, emotions, and identities. Neoliberal rhetorics *do* things" (39, emphasis in original). I will attempt to help us understand what neoliberal rhetorics do by examining a small selection of representative, seemingly unremarkable examples: Instructure's in-house research and their digital presence on the professional networking platform LinkedIn and on their own website. As in my previous chapter, this analysis is not meant to be exhaustive or even generalizable. Rather, it is meant to stabilize a discombobulating rhetoric and complicate its ethos by capturing a snapshot of how it operates in specific digital spaces. Before arriving at this analysis, I will return to my pan-historiographic method from Chapter One in order to excavate historical moments of tension between doxastic and epistemic conceptions of rhetoric that set the stage for the neoliberal rhetoric that justifies and naturalizes the presence of the LMS in higher education.

Doxa and Episteme: Critical Rhetoric and Neoliberalism

Neoliberal rhetoric could be studied from a host of critical angles. One edifying possibility is to place it in the context of historical debates in rhetoric, dating back to antiquity, concerning *doxa* (opinion) and *episteme* (knowledge). As postmodern critical theory complicated Grand Narratives and universal conceptions of truth, a Modernist rhetorical faith in episteme was set up as a crisis while faith was placed in doxa as a

means for creating truth (McKerrow, 1989). In *The Postmodern Condition*, for example, Lyotard warned of the inability of knowledge and truth to remain static across technological changes (4). In a capitalist system, knowledge always "will be produced in order to be sold" (Lyotard 4). In his critique of the Postmodern condition, Lyotard provides a possible blueprint for a critical reading of neoliberalism, a philosophy which coopted Postmodernism's propping up of doxa in order to create technologies that destabilize literacies and reconceive of truth merely as the doxa that survives the operations of the market, where all other doxa are subjugated as "mere opinion" (Metcalf, 2017). But the tension between doxa and episteme has deeper roots that are worth exploring for our purposes.

Episteme and Doxa in Antiquity

In the *Gorgias*, Plato (via Socrates) resolutely favors episteme over doxa, and criticizes the Sophists, Ancient Greece's for-profit teachers of rhetoric, for taking advantage of doxa in vulnerable listeners without concern for whether or not what they are arguing is true. From this logic stems Plato's major critique of rhetoric — that it is akin to flattery, or to providing children with candy in order to persuade them, rather than giving them a healthy meal of truth. Socrates (rather persuasively) corners Gorgias into accepting that "knowing" and "believing" are distinct, and that episteme gives us the former while doxa gives us the latter:

> Soc.: Which persuasion, then, does rhetoric produce in law courts and other mobs, about just and unjust things? The one from which believing comes into being without knowing, or the one from which knowing comes?

Gor.: It's clear, I suppose, Socrates, that it's the one from which believing comes.

Soc.: Rhetoric, then, as seems likely, is a craftsman of belief-inspiring but not didactic persuasion about the just and the unjust.

Gor.: Yes. (454e - 455e)

Plato/Socrates is very persuasive in this framing, and from the framing it might seem logical that rhetoric is an unjust practice, and that the Sophistic teachers of rhetoric do not teach a concern for virtue or justice, but rather manipulate beliefs and opinions, persuading for persuasion's sake.

However, a figure like Isocrates would object to Plato/Socrates's framing (as he makes clear in his own rebuke of the Sophists), and say that appeals to doxa are more honest than appeals to episteme, as they do not feign the existence of universal truth, but appeal to available truths set up by the doxa present in the relationship between the rhetor and the audience. Isocrates wrote "Against the Sophists" as a promotional text to advertise for his own school, which is a rhetorical situation that is important to understand, as it reveals an exigence which informs his rebuke of the Sophists: he had a literal investment in making their approach to the instruction of youth appear inferior compared to his. Isocrates upbraids handbook writers of the time, who propose to have rhetorical rules with universal appeal, and yet seem to "distrust" the students/citizens whom they have helped to create (and have been paid by) (63). Moreover, Isocrates makes an implicit jab at Plato for his irrational belief in universal truth. Isocrates's disagreement with Plato has to do with his privileging of *episteme* over *doxa*. For Isocrates, doxai are more worthy of pursuit and trust than episteme, for they are not

duped by the lure of the universal, and those who follow doxai rather than a "claim to" episteme "live more harmoniously and are more successful" (63). The handbook writers, on the other hand, seem to Isocrates "to have no concern for the truth" and instead try to accumulate as many students as possible by the "smallness of their fees" (63).

Clearly, then, this is not to say that Isocrates has no concern for the truth, and that he thinks that rhetors should simply proselytize from their gut, or tell untruths knowingly. Indeed, the pursuit of truth seems to be at the heart of much of Isocrates' writing, and that is certainly the case in "Against the Sophists." What he distrusts in Plato is the belief in an elitist, universal truth existing in the cosmos, which only recondite philosopher kings have access to. Isocrates, like Aristotle, is more optimistic about the people, or at any rate in the viability of an orator following their own doxa rather than attempting to access a spurious claim to episteme.

For Aristotle, dialectical and rhetorical enthymemes (sets of principles that do not require explanations) stem from *endoxa*, which are "commonly held opinions" (Kennedy, 34). For example, take this famous syllogism:

Major Premise: All men are mortal.

Minor Premise: Socrates is a man.

Conclusion: Socrates is mortal.

Each of these premises seems logical based not just on a combination of inductive and deductive reasoning, but on a shared belief system that helps people accept that the progression is logical. All men are mortal because we agree with the empirical process that has led us to that conclusion. Socrates is a man — and not, say, a god or a statue —

because of a shared set of convictions that we all tacitly accept. Enthymemes are a key concept in critically reading neoliberal rhetoric, as neoliberalism is the (en)doxa that supplies the enthymemes that undergird public institutions' embrace of private solutions. Administrators speed from major premise through the minor premise all the way to the conclusion that, say, a program must move fully online without public deliberation over the enthymemes that sustain such an syllogism.

In his setup to Book 1, Chapter 1 of Aristotle's *On Rhetoric*, George Kennedy writes that "an ability to aim at commonly held opinions is a characteristic of one who also has a similar ability in regard to the truth" (34). Therefore, as Haskins points out, Aristotle does not believe in a universal (epistemic) or a subjective (doxastic) truth, but is "optimistic" concerning the ability of *endoxa* to bring the truth to bear in a given time. One can access the truth through reason, and through examining the data provided through endoxa.

For Aristotle, endoxa is the foundation off of which rhetoric and dialectic can function. In an essay called "Reinventing Doxa" (2017), Adam Ellwanger, via Amossy, lays out two contemporary interpretations of doxa: ideological and communicative. Doxa as ideology means what gets accepted as public opinion is decided by powerful, dominant groups (i.e. hegemony), and doxa as communication means that shared beliefs are what allow a democracy to function. Ellwanger argues that the two poles are not as opposed as we might suppose. Neither is true; or, at least, neither camp believes doxa provides access to the truth. The ideological camp believes doxa works to obscure the truth, whereas the communicative camp doesn't need doxa to be true, so long as it allows

groups to communicate with one another. An extended quotation from Ellwanger is necessary to further tease out this relationship:

> Further, both models agree with Aristotle that doxa is almost always silent and unstated. As ideology, doxa remains unstated because it is precisely the subject's unconscious acceptance of doxa that transforms him (sic) into an alienated object of oppression. In the communicative model, doxa rarely is explicit because it operates not as the subject of our conversation, but below it--doxa as shared belief serves as a precursor to communication. (par. 14)

In the communicative model, doxa becomes dangerously close to a kind of collective (un)consciousness, a bequest upon humanity from above, which allows us to dialogue with one another, but an ideological understanding of doxa recognizes that shared beliefs are always situated in culture, and by social constructions such as race, gender, and class. The communicative model of doxa is tantamount to the autonomous model of literacy, in that it is thought of as neutral, transferable across contexts, and unsullied by ideology. As it relates to the truth, Ellwanger rightly points out both camps distinguish doxa from truth. Intriguingly, Aristotle believed in a "cyclical view of history," that truth is transferable, knowable, but interrupted and erased periodically by cataclysmic events. Because of this epistemological optimism, doxa counts for him as "data" (6). Therefore, read in own our contemporary cultural context, Aristotle's theories get treated according to our own endoxa, which Aristotle, in the *Topics*, defines as "the things believed by everyone or by most people or by the wise (and among the wise by all or by most or by those most known and commonly recognized" (100b20). Haskins hints that "heterodoxy"

might be the "oxodoxy of the future." The idea that there is a universal, shared endoxa from which we can build is likely a myth, and rather we have myriad, often competing, endoxa often talking over and around one another, a rhetorical chaos from which neoliberalism's apparently stabilizing, hegemonic rhetoric benefits. Before we return to that idea, I want to survey another relevant debate in the 20th century, in which rhetoricians sought to make sense of the ways in which kairotic contexts inform a rhetor's ability to communicate truth.

Situation and Agency in Rhetoric

McKerrow (1989) argues that critical rhetoric, as opposed to Modernist or Platonic rhetoric, "constitutes doxastic rather than epistemic knowledge" (qtd. In Voorhees 197). An illustrative example of the Modern/Postmodern tension in rhetoric is Forbes I. Hill's neo-aristotelian analysis of Nixon's speech on Vietnam. Hill's is a Modernist approach that assumes analysis can be done systematically and objectively, and that a piece of rhetoric is successful insofar as it successfully takes advantage of "the available means of persuasion." Kathryn Kohrs Campbell deconstructed Hill's objectivity, and criticized him for foolishly attempting to be "morally neutral" in assessing a speech that was anything but. Mark J. Porrovecchio and Celeste Michelle Condit, write that, after Kohrs Campbell and other Postmodernists re-envisioned objective theory and analysis, "Modernist approaches to criticism and theory that presupposed the application of neutral and objective criteria to speeches (or other communication events) as a means of judging them would no longer suffice as a means of theorizing the rhetorical" (9). This tension coursed through the so-called "Situation

Debates" in rhetoric, and continues to inform many disagreements over truth, from which neoliberalism provides a perceived stability.

In "The Rhetorical Situation," Lloyd Bitzer posited that situation dictates rhetoric in the same way that a question dictates an answer (163). A rhetorical situation consists of three constituent parts: (1) an *exigence*, which is "an imperfection marked by urgency," which can be improved by discourse; (2) a rhetorical *audience*, which is distinguished from other audiences in that it is capable of being "persuaded by discourse"; (3) a set of *constraints*, which are the limitations placed on a rhetor by the situation. As Bitzer writes, we would ideally have no need for rhetoric, as "exigences would not arise." We need rhetoric, however, because the world is imperfect and requires change from "human agents" to "a mediating audience." For Bitzer, rhetoric is a science—in that it involves pragmatically solving problems presented by a flawed world (165). However, despite Bitzer's dubbing rhetors as "agents," he clearly argues that rhetoric is beholden to the truths presented by a situation, which forecloses agency, or the possibility of creating truths.

Famously, Richard E. Vatz argues for the exact opposite in his critical response to Bitzer: situations do not dictate the rhetor, but instead rhetors dictate situations. According to Vatz, Bitzer suffers from what he (via Richard Weaver) calls "melioristic bias," which is to say that he sees the goal of rhetoric to positively improve those situations under which they are called to operate. Vatz asks "what [is] the obvious 'positive modification' of the military-industrial complex?" (157). Bitzer assumes that situations are static, inevitable, and that they dictate "appropriate responses," while Vatz

feels the exact opposite, supposing that "meaning is not discovered in situations, but *created* by rhetors" (168).

While they disagree over the source, both Bitzer and Vatz reflect a Modernist faith in a coherent subject -- for Vatz, agential, and for Bitzer, subordinate to exigence. Jenny Edbauer further complicates this tension with her concept of "rhetorical ecologies," in which she resists the notion that rhetorical situations are a collection of discrete elements, but rather a ecology of "co-ordinating process, moving across the same social field and within shared structures of feeling" (183, 191). Similarly helpful is Carolyn Miller's work on rhetorical genres. Notably, Miller breaks from Bitzer in her thinking on exigence, as she finds his definition too material and objective, a pre-existing circumstance tantamount to a kind of "danger" (156). Rather than a mere defect that exists *out there* in the world and must be addressed accordingly by a rhetor, exigences are socially constructed and "must be located in the social world, neither in a private perception nor in a material circumstance" (157). What matters to Miller about rhetorical situations is their recurrence, and that they inform genres socially, not objectively or subjectively -- or, one could say, doxastically rather than epistemically.

A major part of neoliberal rhetoric's success relies on Vatz's notion of endless individual agency, which finds resonance in the entrepreneur's ability to forge new roads within the marketplace. Another part of its success relies on Bitzer's deterministic reading of the situation's eminence, the rhetorics of inevitability. The result is a rhetorical incoherence -- inevitability and entrepreneurial agency -- that perplexes rhetors, isolates them, and produces despair. Bitzer doesn't allow for enough agency beyond "the"

situation, whereas Vatz doesn't allow for rhetoric to result from collectivizing, but rather something that stems from the individual's agency (similar to Berlin's "expressivist rhetoric," from which neoliberalism's construction of the privatized self also benefits). Miller's recurrent rhetorical genres and Edbauer's rhetorical ecologies, which respond to socially constructed exigences, align with Berlin's social-epistemic philosophy of truth, and are more helpful roadmaps to driving us out of (rather than deeper into) neoliberalism's rhetorical vortex, but their placement of exigencies with doxai make theories vulnerable to cooptation. Neoliberalism constructs new rhetorical situations that Gerald Voorhees argues rely on new doxa and enthymemes effected by outsized economization.

Put broadly, it is out of these Modern/Postmodern tensions that the neoliberal university attempts to understand itself. The University has always played a role in curating and stratifying what gets counted as knowledge and who gets to have it, and today they have largely adopted neoliberalism's telos in situating knowledge within the realm of job training. However, as Riedner and Mahoney argue, universities are not just educational institutions, but rather "complex social institutions" that reinforce neoliberal hegemony while also providing space for counter-hegemonies to flourish. In *Undoing the Demos*, Wendy Brown writes,

> Once about developing intelligent, thoughtful elites and reproducing culture, and more recently, enacting a principle of equal opportunity and cultivating a broadly educated citizenry, higher education now produces human capital (24).

Under the neoliberal paradigm, questions of access that rightly problematize the Platonic conception of education in Brown's first clause might get answered, but questions about the purposes (telos) of college and the conditions for knowledge-production under which they operate are unasked. The reason for this silence can be understood as a result of neoliberalism's success is furtively reshaping doxai and setting up the marketization of all sectors of public and private life as enthymematic.

When he separated episteme and doxa in the *Gorgias*, Plato also rooted out affect in favor of rationality. For Riedner and Mahoney, Plato's project to displace affect is taken up again by neoliberal hegemony, and to create a counter-hegemony through rhetorical action requires "reworking emotional master narratives" and "map[ping] the affective work of neoliberal hegemony" (85). By privatizing public spaces for deliberation (for example, using the LMS to do education), neoliberalism thrives under a false consciousness that invites people to *feel* despair while also *thinking* there is no way to connect with coalitions to change conditions through collective action. This combination produces a social despair in the endoxa, often unrecognized or overlooked due to rationality's eminence over affect.

Critical Analysis of Canvas's Rhetoric

Thus far in this chapter and in this dissertation more broadly I have built upon scholarship in the humanities that designates neoliberalism as having a furtive, biopolitical, ambient effect (Goodwin et al, 2017; Brown, 2015; Riedner and Mahoney, 2008). To illustrate what neoliberal rhetoric does, I have chosen to analyze ordinary

digital objects rather than, say, presidential speeches or TV advertisements. Any way of seeing is also a way of not seeing, and so any methodology is always partial. What scholars can hope to do is take as accurate and thorough a snapshot of a problem as they can, while being forthright about the scope and limits of their project. In Chapters Two and Three, I argued that a methodology that seeks to expose the hegemonic work of everyday moments subverts the logic of neoliberalism, which tends to view students as numbers rather than complex human beings. Similarly, in analyzing everyday objects of neoliberal rhetoric, we can temporarily stabilize its discombobulation, and through analysis rescue critique from abstraction.

Figure One: Screenshot from Jan. 2023

A few years ago, when I decided to make a critical study of LMS, I began following Instructure Canvas's LinkedIn page to get a sense of how they were presenting themselves to their professional networks, most of whom were likely adherents to the

enthymemes that accept universities as sites for public and private partnerships. One thing that stood out to me in their posts was that, in addition to banal memes and calls for teachers to share their "favorite Canvas LMS shortcut." that the company was advertising its own educational research (see Figure One).

Here, Canvas employs case-study educational research to persuade their network that Canvas can foster a collaborative working environment, and that faculty must "buy in" to the platform. Assuming a friendly audience of LinkedIn followers will accept the warrant that finding "new technology tools to be disruptive" is misguided, they present research conducted at Boise State University. The research, presented as neutral, disinterested, or objective, seeks to demonstrate how faculty can be persuaded to buy in. Critical rhetorical analysis can help us identify the enthymeme of what this neoliberal logic invites audiences to take for granted.

Major Premise: Digital transformations have created new demands for higher education.

Minor Premise: Skeptical faculty are slow to accept this transformation.

Conclusion: Faculty must buy into Canvas to adapt to the new demands for higher education.

Neoliberal rhetoric, as Wendy Brown argues, pervades stealthily, and creates, as Goodwin et al argue, an "ambient rhetoric" [it "gives rise to discourse and then withdraws from that discourse" (17)]. Critical rhetorical analysis, as I am using the term, involves piercing through the ambience and excavating enthymemes -- syllogisms which a rhetoric determines do not require explanation. The major premise here is that

"increased use of technology in higher education has contributed to the digital transformation in colleges and institutions worldwide." The premise relies on the enthymeme that this digital transformation is either beneficent, inevitable, or both. In any case, whether the digital transformation is real or desirable is closed for deliberation.

Once we accept that deliberation is closed, we are then vulnerable to accept the enthymeme of the minor premise, which is that resistant faculty must either be persuaded to accept the major premise, or they should get out of the way. There is not room for resistance or deliberation among experts of education about what kinds of transformations should occur, because the markets have spoken. And just in case they haven't been clearly heard, unnamed researchers at Boise State University have deployed educational research -- as to whom they surveyed and for what purpose is apparently inconsequential -- to justify the divide-and-conquer business model of one private LMS corporation, which has a stake in whether or not faculty, students, and shareholders "buy in" to a digital transformation in colleges and institutions worldwide.

Further following the breadcrumb trail of this LinkedIn Post takes you to a video advertisement for the study that promises to help you "learn how Boise State University enabled its faculty with an easy-to-use and intuitive LMS." The video contains anecdotes from faculty, Deans, and Instructional Technologist, each one fawning more freely than the next about Canvas's ease of use. It is so easy to use, they say, that you hardly even notice it. One interview subject, a Director of Technological Solutions, posits that Canvas's ease of use "arguably enables things like student-instructor interaction and student-centered teaching approaches" ("Boise," 2:20 in the video). Accepting neoliberal

logic, one might be able to follow how ease of use enables these things, as teachers can ostensibly focus less on technological tedium and more on their students. Studying the terms of use can reveal how the meaning of "things like student-instructor interaction and student-centered teaching approaches" are transformed so that these processes serve the interests of the status quo. Filtering terms like "student-centered" and "student-instructor interaction" through the LMS deprioritizes the reflective, critical, agency of learners in favor of corporate-oriented definitions of time, tasks, and participation. Ease of use seems preferable to clunky technologies, especially if efficiency and streamlining is the goal of education. The easier the technologies are to use, however, the more they (and the terms of their use) fade to the background, and achieve ambience.

Since the pandemic, their presence in education has become so ambient that, *The Nation* reported, many teachers have felt "an unspoken pressure to adopt" Learning Management Systems into their pedagogy. One teacher at Rutgers told *The Nation*, "I was mildly concerned that not using the LMS would get me into some kind of vague 'trouble' with administrators" (Paris, et al). Due to its furtiveness, its ambience, neoliberalism manufactures consent without the burdensome deliberation of democracy participation. The teacher at Rutgers' use of the word "vague" is telling in this regard.

Earlier in this chapter, I explored pan-historical tensions in rhetoric concerning doxa and episteme. I argued that neoliberalism has benefitted from the chaos resulting from this tension, and has rearranged social dynamics to set up an ecology of myriad, competing doxa that are subordinate only to the marketplace. The research conducted by private LMS companies does not attempt to survey the doxa as data in order to better

understand reality and ways to compassionately transform it. Rather, it exploits the doxa to direct it into its vortex.

For example, in addition to partnering with specific colleges in order to conduct research that supports their business model, Instructure also partners with Hanover Research -- a firm that helps businesses, schools, and health-care industries conduct research to "make informed decisions, identify and seize opportunities, and heighten their effectiveness" (Hanover) -- to conduct their massive annual State of Student Engagement in Higher Education survey, which I also looked at in Chapter Two. The study surveyed thousands of students across 23 countries in order to reveal six key trends, each of which coincidentally support the work Instructure is doing in transforming higher education. For their similar study on K12, Instructure even paid for a press release to go out on the *AP Wire*, which mimics the form and content of a news article, with the headline "Instructure Releases Annual State of Teaching and Learning in K-12 Research that Explores New Normal in Education in U.S. Schools" and the subheadline "One study highlight reveals that many parents might not understand how far behind students are academically" (Instructure, 2022). The headline shrewdly seizes on a major post-pandemic exigence, which is parental concern about student engagement, and then the report subtly includes findings that both draw on neoliberal rhetoric and discover a need for the company's own products to remedy the problem. Here are their key takeaways from their survey results:

1. High-quality teaching is the key ingredient to high-quality learning.
2. Student engagement is (still) the No. 1 measure of success.
3. Changes need to be made in the way we approach assessment.

4. Both hybrid and digital teaching and learning are here to stay.
5. Strides are being made in achieving educational equity, but there's still work to do.
6. Technology is no longer a "nice-to-have." (Instructure, 2022)

To a critical reader, the trickery involved in wedging numbers 4 and 6 into this list might be obvious to detect. However, critical readers are clearly not Instructure's intended audience for this rhetorical project. As the Boise State study makes clear, their locomotive is pressing forward, and critical dissenters will either have to "buy in" or bow out. Number four displays the neoliberal rhetorical strategy in a nutshell: present future conditions as inevitable, forego public deliberation, and put in place a for-profit solution. Once auditors accept the rhetoric of inevitability in this syllogism, they are invited to bundle that acceptance with the enthymeme that says that digital teaching and learning should look and function the way Canvas has designed it to look and function. They elaborate in the article: "With the return to in-person learning, the continued use of technology in the classroom supports innovative pedagogical strategies that prepare students for 21st-century skills" (Instructure, 2022). That these 21st-century skills are market-serving digital literacies and not critical literacies need not be stated.

As a public pedagogy, Riedner and Mahoney argue that neoliberalism remains hidden but "teaches what a neoliberal identity and emotion feels like" (46). Instructure can tell students and teachers that they care about "achieving educational equity," so long as students and teachers allow them to transform educational processes to fit into private business models, impoverishing knowledge in the process, and to draw capital from their

users (i.e. the terms of use). As Sara Ahmed writes, “affect does not reside positively in the sign or commodity, but is produced as an effect of circulation” (45). Neoliberal rhetoric circulates and recirculates into ambience, and thus its hyper-normalization “seeks to make coercion appear as a process of consent” (Riedner and Mahoney, 47).

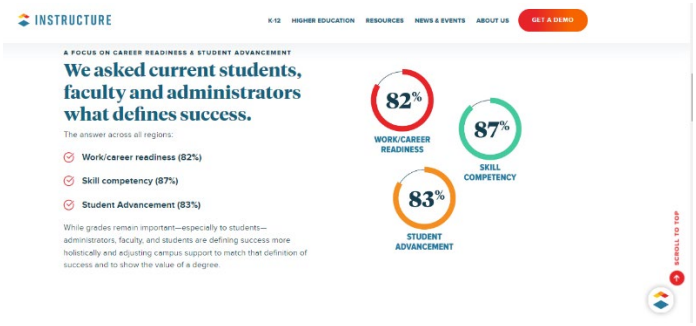


Figure Two: Screenshot of Canvas’s presentation of 2022 State of Student Success and Engagement in Higher Education Results

In Figure Two, we see how Instructure presents its vision of higher education through its major takeaways from its State of Engagement in Higher Education survey. In these results, students reproduce the hegemonic, job-training telos of neoliberalism. Once again, we speed past the enthymemes that sustain this syllogism. In the rhetorical situation of the LMS turn, “[t]he exigence is not just something that we respond to. Rather it’s already there” (Riedner and Mahoney, 44).

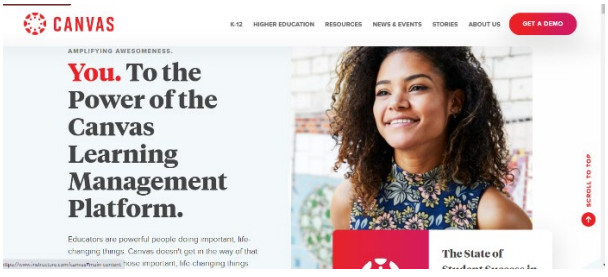


Figure Three: Screenshot from Canvas’s website.

The screenshot of Figure Three provides another limited but telling glimpse into how the company views its role in education, in this case limiting the student subject to a math function: You to the power of Canvas LMS. Once students are interpellated as neoliberal citizens, the neoliberal management of their education is mere common sense. Coercion appears as consent. In neoliberal rhetoric, drawing once again on Riedner and Mahoney's exploration, "multiple identities, ethnicities, and political positions may be allowed to represent themselves -- but their right to do so is contingent about a willingness to support and buy into the basic logic of neoliberalism and its sanctioned identities" (47).

The Rutgers instructor from the *Nation* article (quoted a few pages back) felt as though they would get into a "vague" kind of trouble if they were not using Canvas to carry out their teaching and learning. This structure of feeling mirrors a situation that Goodwin, Miller and Chaput summarize in their article "Accountable to Whom? The Rhetorical Circulation of Neoliberal Discourse and Its Ambient Effects on Higher Education" (2017). The authors demonstrate how ambient biopolitical rhetoric functions in the neoliberal university by describing a situation that was recounted by Judith Butler, in which she puzzles over the authorship/accountability of an interaction in a university meeting, where an administrator dubiously cited a colleague who dubiously said the humanities are failing. Butler felt she couldn't effectively respond to this claim, because of its opacity. Its ethos unable to be traced back to an origin, it

permeated. For Goodwin et al, it became *ambient*, and "ambient biopower serves as neoliberalism's primary rhetorical form" (17).

For-profit educational research and corporate rhetoric such as what is under examination in this chapter might seem inconsequential, but it helps to create the context of the vagueness noted by the Rutgers professor. The corporate-sponsored State of Student Success and Engagement in Higher Education equips administrations, who may have the goal to streamline classes and exploit overworked, underpaid adjuncts to expand sections, now have apparently rigorous research from which they can draw to justify their decisions. The customers have spoken: 85% want job training through Canvas classrooms. The endoxa has spoken. If you aren't on board, you're offboarded. Everybody is replaceable, because the LMS runs the class. Neoliberal rhetorics *do* things. They transform the power dynamics in education: "Teaching and learning to the power of Canvas LMS."

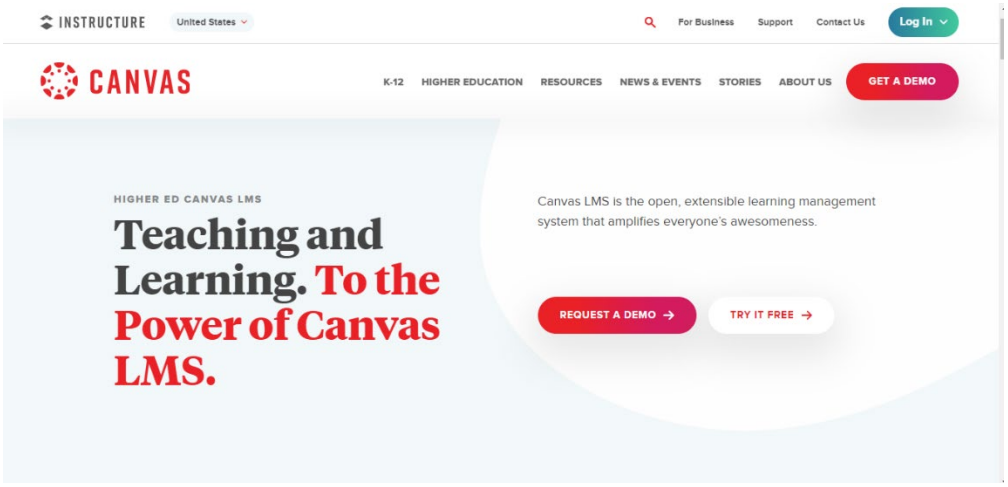


Figure Four: Screenshot from Instructure Website

This chapter began with the question, “Who is in the position to manage education?” Traditional pedagogy says that teachers are the answer. Critical pedagogy posits that students can take part in managing their own education. Neoliberal pedagogy tells us that neither are equal to the task. I then surveyed rhetorical history to demonstrate how neoliberal rhetoric can be understood in light of historical debates about doxa and episteme. Finally, I analyzed seemingly mundane texts produced by Instructure’s Canvas in order to demonstrate how neoliberal rhetoric manufacturers consent to its terms of use in order to transform higher education into a version that serves, rather than critiques or provides alternatives to, the status quo.

In the next chapter, I will turn my analysis to the internal architecture of the Canvas classroom, specifically looking at its smartphone app and its SpeedGrader™ feature. I will carry out this analysis by establishing the phrase “terms of usability,” showing ways in which engineers and technical writers are employed to make neoliberalism more usable, without questioning underlying assumptions, which are the terms of use.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE SPEEDGRADER™, THE HIDDEN CURRICULUM, AND THE TERMS OF USABILITY

Each year, a tech blog called *Semrush* uses a Traffic Analytics tool to reveal the top 100 most visited websites in the United States. For the year 2022, the top five were Google, YouTube, Facebook, Pornhub, and Reddit. Coming in at number 47 was Instructure Canvas. Instructure received more traffic in 2022 than did Netflix, Zillow, Pinterest, and MSN.com. The blog updates the list monthly, and as of April 2023, since they first published it in January, Instructure has only climbed the chart, moving up seven spaces to claim its spot at 40 (Semrush).

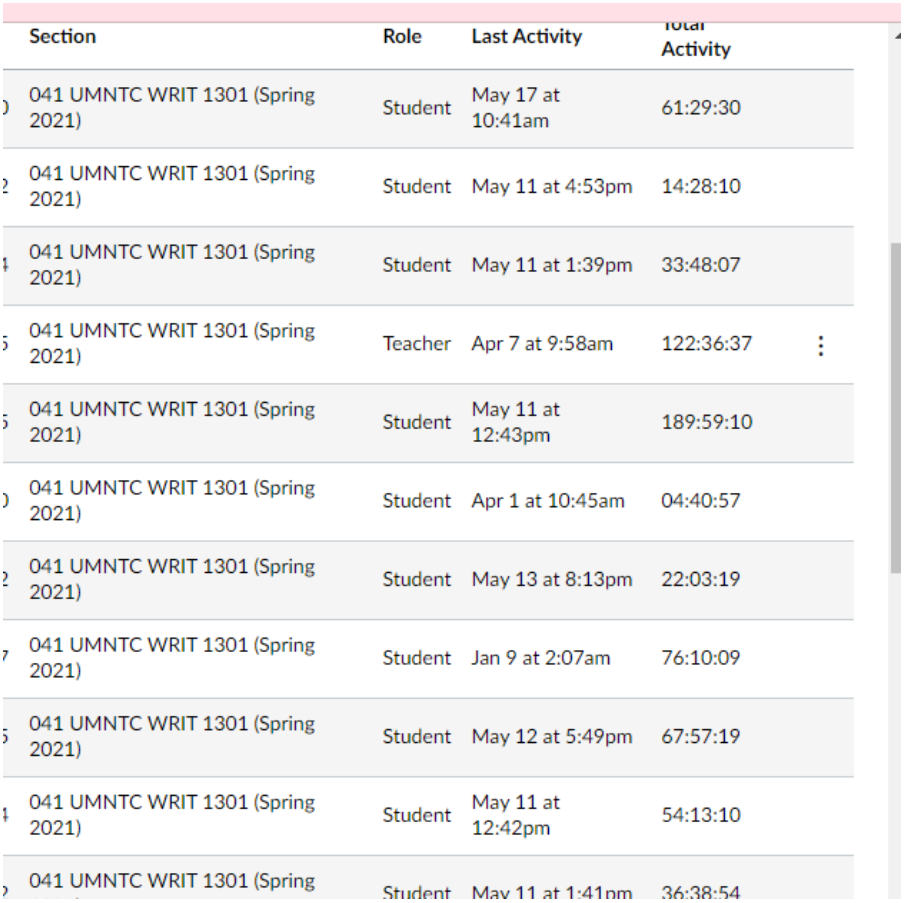
Under the neoliberal paradigm, this news is a clear victory for education. That framing looks like this: In a tough marketplace within a tight attention economy, education partners with a large tech company, breaks through, and is able to compete with the behemoths of business. More people spend time on Canvas than they do browsing potential homes on the immensely popular real-estate website Zillow. More tabs are devoted to keeping up with to-do lists on Canvas than to maintaining Pinterest boards. More teachers are working the Speedgrader™ function than binging Netflix on their computers. These victories might indicate that education is alive and well in the digital age. However, a critical literacy-informed philosophy of education would view its role not to compete with these giants of the attention economy, but to attempt to stand apart from them and their goals, and to articulate a critique upon them. Viewed through a critical-literacy lens, the news that people are spending so much time on an LMS

platform might be more concerning than exciting. Reidner and Mahoney are once again helpful in helping us think through this tension:

> People learn to communicate in [a neoliberal] environment in a way that is consistent with the circulation of capital in a particular context. In so doing, we are not only learning patterns of "how to communicate in a capitalist mode," we are also reproducing the circulation and patterns of circulation of capital itself, that is immaterial labor. Neoliberal rhetorics are intended to preserve, stabilize, and extend this system of circulation, with the particular purpose of creating and maintaining workers and consumers as appendages of capital. (Reidner and Mahone, 40).

In Chapter Four, I explored neoliberal rhetoric as verbal, bodily, and affective persuasion that invites auditors to accept corporatization, competition, data collection, and surveillance as the *terms of use* for public goods. In Chapter One, I argued that Learning Management Systems, perhaps above all, teach us how to be managed by digital systems, which prepare students for workplace managers like Workday and Slack. One student even told me that one of their high school teachers had projected onto a The startlingly high placement of Instructure on 2023's Traffic Report is but another reminder that the neoliberal university creates human capital "consistent with the circulation of capital in a particular context" (40). If the neoliberal university is to produce students as "appendages of capital" (40,) it must create a rhetorical ecology that impels students to understand themselves as bound by the inevitable realities of the ecology itself and what it values -- namely speed, competition, efficiency, data collection, and attention. As an anecdotal

illustration of the latter two values: since instruction has returned, at least in part, to the physical campus after the COVID-19 shutdowns, many students have told me that their engagement in a class has been measured by the amount of time they have logged on a Canvas page. screen an entire class's data to show who has and has not been engaged with the class (see Figure Five as an example). Another student told me that a TA reached out to them with concern because they hadn't spent enough time on the Canvas page in relation to their peers, even though their in-person attendance was consistent and work had been submitted on time.



Section	Role	Last Activity	Total Activity
041 UMNTC WRIT 1301 (Spring 2021)	Student	May 17 at 10:41am	61:29:30
041 UMNTC WRIT 1301 (Spring 2021)	Student	May 11 at 4:53pm	14:28:10
041 UMNTC WRIT 1301 (Spring 2021)	Student	May 11 at 1:39pm	33:48:07
041 UMNTC WRIT 1301 (Spring 2021)	Teacher	Apr 7 at 9:58am	122:36:37
041 UMNTC WRIT 1301 (Spring 2021)	Student	May 11 at 12:43pm	189:59:10
041 UMNTC WRIT 1301 (Spring 2021)	Student	Apr 1 at 10:45am	04:40:57
041 UMNTC WRIT 1301 (Spring 2021)	Student	May 13 at 8:13pm	22:03:19
041 UMNTC WRIT 1301 (Spring 2021)	Student	Jan 9 at 2:07am	76:10:09
041 UMNTC WRIT 1301 (Spring 2021)	Student	May 12 at 5:49pm	67:57:19
041 UMNTC WRIT 1301 (Spring 2021)	Student	May 11 at 12:42pm	54:13:10
041 UMNTC WRIT 1301 (Spring	Student	May 11 at 1:41pm	36:38:54

Figure Five: Example of surveillance data from the teacher's perspective (cropped to redact students' names).

And yet, a dialectic reading of the rhetorical situation shows that students are not simply passive receptacles of the neoliberal university's rhetorics of attention and speed. Note in Figure Five the student who logged over 189 hours on the course Canvas page, even more than their teacher (me). Many students have also shared with me that, because they know their engagement is being measured by this type of data, that they keep a Canvas tab open on their screen nearly at all times. Here we see the feedback loop between the neoliberal university and the students it hopes to create revealed. Instructure Canvas creates an educational environment that all but mandates that students and teachers keep a Canvas tab open, impelled by the neoliberal rhetorical project examined in Chapter 4. As a result, Instructure is the 40th highest-trafficked website in the United States, which then goes on to justify to potential investors its growth-based business model in the contemporary economy, reliant on how many eyeballs a company can access. Many administrators, teachers, and students laud Canvas for its usability. I do not contest that point, or that its usability is an improvement upon some of its competitors in the LMS space, such as Moodle, Blackboard, and Desire2Learn. However, it is important to note that Canvas also creates a version of an educational platform that it is able to manage. The terms of usability, then, are the neoliberal baggage that come with its ease of use. In this chapter I explore these terms of usability through the lens of hidden curriculum theories of education.

The hidden curriculum -- i.e. the pedagogical terms of use -- of the LMS turn consists of a public pedagogy that teaches students how to passively contribute to a

corporate business model. Accordingly, in this chapter's pan-historiography, I will examine hidden-curriculum theories of education and relate them to the terms of use that I have been exploring thus far in the dissertation. Then, I will examine the hidden curriculum/terms of use for two specific features of Canvas's internal architecture that establish its terms of usability: the Speedgrader™ and the "Student" and "Teacher" apps.

The Hidden Curriculum as Educational Theory

The concept of the hidden curriculum can be traced at least as far back as the work of John Dewey in *Democracy and Education*, in which Dewey pointed out the subtle lessons behind the processes of schooling. Put broadly, the hidden curriculum refers to what students (as well as, I would add, teachers) learn through the forms and processes of learning rather than merely the content. As an example of a hidden-curriculum approach to pedagogical scholarship, Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner argue the major lessons from education often come from the medium rather than the content of the course:

> What students do in the classroom is what they learn (as Dewey would say) and what they learn to do is the classroom's message (as McLuhan would say). Now what is it that students *do* in the classroom? Well, mostly they sit and listen to the teacher. Mostly, they are required to believe in authorities, or at least pretend to such belief when they take tests. (30)

What Postman and Weingartner observe about the classroom's method being its content, or its medium being its message, still resonates in the LMS turn, but the contexts have shifted. Students might still learn to listen to the teacher, but also (and perhaps primarily) they learn to listen to the LMS, a commissary for the interests of neoliberalism. An incidental but illustrative example is when teachers announce that due dates are flexible to the experiences of students, but the LMS garishly flags their late submissions. Teachers themselves (and certainly myself included) also accept and (less commonly) reject edicts from the LMS as a manager.

The hidden curriculum, then, is closely related to the concept of terms of use, whose values I have argued in this dissertation are supplied by neoliberalism. We can extend this reading further to include a complex ecology of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic pedagogies that make up a campus. On today's college campuses, students, skateboarders, public transportation operators, custodians, and food workers also teach us about what it means to participate in our world, as does the campus itself: trees, architecture, billboards, crosswalks, and, more recently, various props designed to serve as the backdrop for selfies and ussies. As Reidner and Mahoney point out,

> [The neoliberal public pedagogy] occurs not just in the classroom but in a complex network of social spaces where bodies, emotions, and identities are corralled by capitalism. Further, consent here relies upon the continual and repeated performance of specific affective relationships and identities. (49).

Accordingly, a critical reading of the hidden curriculum must extend beyond merely what students do in the classroom, but how aspects of an entire campus ecology work together to function in a way similar to Jenny Edbauer's concept of rhetorical ecologies: not discrete elements but "co-ordinating processes, moving across the same social field and within shared structures of feeling" (191). Once again, the classroom, the campus itself, the dormitories, Google Docs, email, Canvas LMS, Grammarly, and now Chat GPT. These are not discrete or additive or subtractive educational elements, but elements of an ecology that create a shared structure of feeling. As (invoking Postman), I pointed out in Chapter One, the university is not now Education plus Canvas, or Education plus Chat GPT, but something transformed.

In *Theory and Resistance in Education* (2001), Giroux argues that, because its theorists forgo a dialectical approach, the hidden curriculum "needs to be resituated in a more critical discourse" (42). Amid the LMS turn, it must again be resituated, this time to attune itself to neoliberalism's terms of use. In his thorough analysis of the hidden curriculum debates, Giroux creates three categories of hidden curriculum theory: Traditional, Liberal, and Radical. The Traditional camp recognizes the relationship between schooling and capital, and accepts it as is. If there is, as Bowles and Gintis (1976) point out, a "correspondence principle" that sees schooling processes mirroring those of the workplace, then in the Traditional model, the role of teachers is to access the hidden curriculum in order to better prepare students for the demands of "the workplace" (qtd. in Giroux, 57). The Liberal camp critiques the correspondence that the Traditional camp accepts, but, according to Giroux, does not extend that critique to larger structures

of capital. For example, Giroux places Richard Merleman in this camp, who he says "ends up blaming teachers for [the hidden curriculum's] existence and influence" rather than recognizing how teachers and students both reproduce and resist the hidden curriculum in complex ways (57). The Radical camp extends a critique of the hidden curriculum to social structures, engaging with issues of class-based, racial, and gendered domination, but further reduces students and teachers to "passive role bearers and products of wider social processes" (58). As a consequence, Radical readers of the hidden curriculum "help to provide a blue-print for cynicism and despair, one that serves to reproduce the very mode of domination they claim to be resisting" (59).

The despair that Giroux worries that undialectical critiques of the hidden curriculum might produce is all the more present in the neoliberal university. Because of its biopolitical rhetorical ubiquity (as detailed in Chapter Four) the neoliberal university makes the hidden curriculum more deeply hidden -- *stealthy*, as Wendy Brown points out -- and more pervasive -- *ambient*, as Goodwin et al point out. The despair of the neoliberal university derives, in part, from speeding past public deliberations in instituting, to take just one example, curricular decisions, and the perceived lack of agency that results from speeding past them. The roots of this despair are complex, and are felt differently across differently privileged stakeholders. A female student of color, for instance, might feel a certain kind of despair in engaging in another class discussion in which she once again feels obliged to represent the diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives of the university, and that despair might be different from a non-binary student whose "they/them" pronouns that are displayed next to their name seem to isolate them

from their classmates in one class while making them feel seen and supported in another. These despairs might again be distinct from the white male student who withdraws to an asynchronous course schedule he cannot keep up with because the years of pandemic shut-downs hindered his social skills, which is again distinct from the despair a Korean-born woman feels when her majority-white class does not respond to her posts in the Canvas discussion. Moreover, a tenured professor who grumbles about having to convert a class she has taught for decades to a new modality on Canvas feels a different despair from the adjunct instructor who has taken on an underpaid, customer-service like role grading assignments for an asynchronous Canvas course he did not take part in creating. Though the despair is unequal, it is ambient, and it contributes to the false consciousness on which something like the neoliberal university's LMS turn, and its rhetorics of inevitability, thrives.

As I discussed in Chapter Two, despair also results from the casual normalization of surveillance and data collection in education. Take, for example, the recent obsession in the neoliberal university surrounding Learning Analytics, which LMS such as Canvas not only help facilitate, but make a common feature of all courses across the university. According to the 1st International Conference on Learning Analytics,

> Learning analytics is the measurement, collection, analysis, and reporting of data about learners and their contexts, for the purposes of understanding and optimizing learning and the environments in which it occurs. (qtd. in Siemen et al, N.P.)

This movement -- which could be the subject of a whole separate dissertation -- upends much of the momentum of critical literacy and critical pedagogy over the past three decades, and funnels it into neoliberalism's vortex. In this paradigm, learning is less about standing apart from the dominant discourse in order to critique it, so much as it is about behavioral manipulation by and for the dominant discourse. It addresses the aforementioned despair in students by rendering it into data -- for example pointing out when a student is at risk of disengaging from a class based on their behavior on a Canvas page.

Accordingly, Learning Analytics is one of the major goals of the LMS turn's hidden curriculum. The hidden curriculum is to inoculate students to these methods, and to render the methods ambient. And so, in 2023 we can add another camp to Giroux's theories of the hidden curriculum, which we might call the Neoliberal camp. The neoliberal camp is a close cousin of the Traditional camp, in that both accept the relationship between the hidden curriculum and the dominant discourse. However, the Neoliberal camp distinguishes itself by its ambience, and how it bypasses not just structural critiques, but any deliberation at all about the social function of education. In other words, it doesn't engage in a theory about the hidden curriculum. It wants to keep it hidden, and its rhetorical project is to keep it as hidden as possible. A technology like the LMS, while not necessarily designed for this purpose, does create an ideal scenario for the neoliberal hidden curriculum to thrive. This is especially true after the COVID-19 shutdown, during which time millions of students and teachers were hastily trained on

how to use these platforms. Moreover, because of Canvas's much-lauded usability, the medium itself gets pushed to the background.

It is important to add here that questions about the purpose of education are also at the heart of the social function of the hidden curriculum. For example, in *Schooling and the Struggle for Public Life* (1988), Giroux looks at the historical and contemporary (to the 1980s of his writing) contexts for education as a site of struggle for public life. Progressivist educators at the beginning of the 20th Century (another one of his camps whom he calls the "social reconstructionists") viewed the work of education as "part of an ongoing struggle to develop forms of knowledge and social practices that not only made students critical thinkers but also empowered them to address social problems in order to transform existing political and economic inequalities" (9). It was a struggle over education as a means of preparing students for active citizenship, and so educators served as "critical intellectuals" who constructed the public school as a place "committed to moral and political considerations designed to benefit often victimized and subordinated groups in American society" (10). After WWII and into the Cold War, the social reconstructionists' work was largely ignored by the public it helped create/serve, and public life was drained of its critical role in democracy, as suburban flight and television caused people to retreat into their private lives, allowing their celluloid educations to give way to what Giroux labeled, "a new form of illiteracy, one that decried substantive information and debate for the glitter of the spectacle" (12).

And so in the 1980s the Reagan era gave rise to a kind of education that produced an individually minded citizenry who was wary of social groups and their ability to

change their circumstances. Giroux cites a survey-based study by John Wagner that indicated that the majority of high schoolers at the time believed that both a "global catastrophe" was likely to occur in their lifetimes and that people have no ability to bring about change in a democracy through collective action. Giroux's read on Wagner's study is instructive for our purposes and worthy of extended quote:

> The point is that none of these students had studied an interpretation of history in which trade union struggles, civil rights struggles, or feminist struggles had any impact on changing the course of human history. Moreover, all these students seemed incapable of challenging a version of American life and history that suggests a conflict-free and ideal cultural narrative, one which in actuality smothers over the social contradictions born of racist, class-specific and gender-oriented forms of discrimination (16)

Giroux's indictment of uncritical education is strong. He understands its effects as fascistic, and that it creates a citizenry rooted in cynicism and despair. When collective struggle for change is presented as futile (its successes erased from history), who can blame students who see their ideal self in the image of the neoliberal citizen, privately competing for a piece of the pie, and who see the reproductive function of education as inevitable and even necessary?

The connection that the Neoliberal camp's hidden curriculum makes is between the everyday educational practices and neoliberalism's larger economic goals. I have said in this dissertation that the terms of use of the LMS can be succinctly summarized as follows: In using Learning Management Systems, we learn to be managed by systems.

David Harvey articulates the deep ties that the successes of neoliberalism has to its shaping of new technologies:

> [Neoliberalism] holds that the social good will be maximized by maximizing the reach and frequency of market transactions, and it seeks to bring all human action into the domain of the market. This requires technologies of information creation and capacities to accumulate, store, transfer, analyse, and use massive databases to guide decisions in the global marketplace. Hence neoliberalism's intense interest in and pursuit of information technologies (leading some to proclaim the emergence of a new kind of 'information society')" (David Harvey, 3-4)

The point that I am making here is not that LMS companies alone reshape the work of education, or that teachers or administrators are wrong to use them. Indeed, I use them. Rather, the purpose of this dissertation is to help educators see the connection between the everyday practice of using these technologies and the larger neoliberal interests those practices might go to serve. Critique is an important, though not a final, step in transforming seemingly inevitable circumstances, from which the despair Giroux describes emanates.

The Neoliberal camp thrives on rhetorics of inevitability, and this is in part why LMS companies provide it one of its most crucial tools. Think, once again, of the anecdote from Chapter Four about Judith Butler, who struggled to respond to the dubious claim that "the humanities are failing." Or, similarly, the professors at Rutgers, who reported to *The Nation* that they felts they'd get into some vague form of trouble with administration if they did not use Canvas to teach their classes. The reader of this chapter

might pause and think of how many times they have heard phrases such as "[X technology] is the future" or "[X technology] is here to stay, so you'd better get used to it." These rhetorics of inevitability often fool educators into joining the planned-obsolescence treadmill rather than stepping off of it and critiquing it. I return to this dissertation's first epigraph from Postman: that education is good at being controlled by technologies rather than vice versa. A crucial step in flipping that dynamic is to engage in a critique of the hidden curriculum of the LMS Turn, which is what I will practice in the next section of this chapter.

Canvas's Hidden Curriculum

Thus far in the dissertation, I have studied Canvas as a pedagogical platform (one that *teaches*) in two ways: (1) I have studied my own class, looking at student writing and behavior on Canvas during an asynchronous semester during the COVID-19 pandemic; and (2) I have analyzed the public-facing rhetoric of Canvas on its website, its social-media presence, and the presentation of its internal research. This section is an attempt to provide another angle to this research, by studying how Canvas looks, and how it appears to want to be used.

Methods

In the previous sections of this chapter, as with previous chapters, I employed the method of pan-historiography to establish an understanding of the hidden curriculum theories of education and applied that understanding to our current circumstances, the hidden curriculum/terms of use of Canvas LMS. In this section, I will apply the method of content analysis to key aspects of Canvas's architecture in order to better understand

how its hidden curriculum functions, and what it seeks to teach us. Content analysis is similar in many ways to the rhetorical analysis I performed in the previous paragraph, in that it seeks to excavate both surface-level and hidden meanings of a piece of content, which makes it a fitting method for unearthing a hidden curriculum. Johnny Saldaña describes content analysis as "the systematic examination of text and visuals (e.g., newspapers, magazines, speech transcripts), media (e.g., films, television episodes, Internet sites), and/or material culture (e.g., artifacts, commercial products) to analyze their prominent manifest and latent meanings" (10). The latent meanings of Canvas's pedagogy are its hidden curriculum/terms of use, which is what my content analysis seeks to expose

Additionally, because my goal is to expose the terms of use, I will also incorporate a critical version of what Nielson and Molich call a "heuristic evaluation" as a "usability engineering method for finding the usability problems in a user interface design so that they can be attended to as part of an iterative design process" (n.p.) My study of Canvas draws from the general method of heuristic evaluation as it employs usability principles in analysis of an interface; however I depart from the method in my purpose, as my interests are not in improving the design process for Instructure Canvas's smartphone app, as I am not an Instructure employee, but rather my goal is to critically examine how the interface wants to be used by students and teachers, and apply concepts from critical literacy to provide teachers and students ways of better understanding what the apps, tools, and browser interfaces want from them, how they present the work of education, and thus what they tell us about the meanings of literacy work today.

In sum, I will employ a hybrid of content analysis, heuristic evaluation, and critical literacy in order to identify the terms of usability for Canvas.

Basic Architecture of Canvas

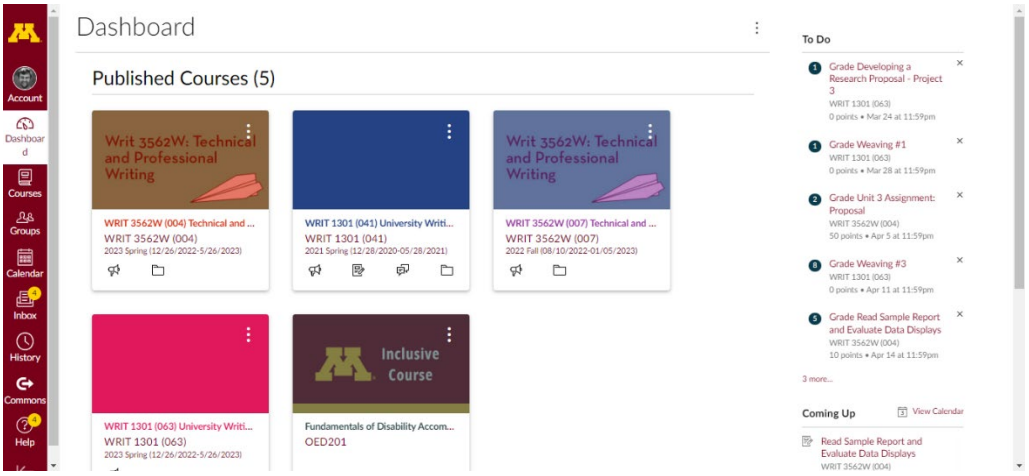


Figure Six: A screenshot of my Canvas homepage on an internet browser.

As a multimodal space, what does Canvas build? How does it compose itself? What are its aesthetics? What does it allow users to do? Upon looking at its dashboard (Figure Six), immediately one might notice how it achieves its ethos by draping the corners of the space with specific university colors and logos. This ethos appeal might unconsciously assure users that this is a space sanctioned by the university (which, of course, it is), while also diverting the user from the notion that it is the product of a giant, profit-driven corporation. The icons on the side of the screen recall a digital workspace, not dissimilar to Slack or Workday. The dashboard presents portals to individual courses, all of which are absorbed by the ever-emergent to-do list feature that engulfs the right side of the screen. One feature of Canvas's pedagogy is its emphasis on organization.

Clearly, the LMS has a lot to offer as an organizational tool. While it may help students and teachers organize their work, it also reshapes their work into something that it is capable of organizing, and of managing. The ever-flowing To-Do list, notably, positions students and teachers as responsive to the machine's automated calculations.

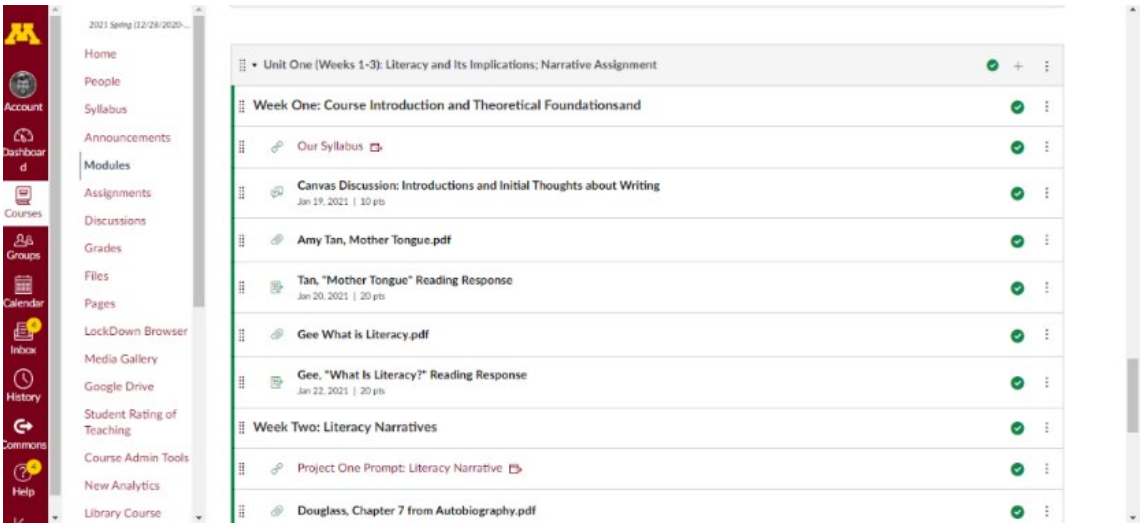


Figure Seven: Modules

The modules feature (Figure Seven), a commonly used tool advocated by teachers and administrators, builds a brutalist digital aesthetic around an incrementalist, linear organizational structure. The architecture seems to tell students: *Once you complete Week One, you move to Week Two, and by the time you complete Week Fifteen, you'll have gained the requisite knowledge of this class.* This message recalls a course schedule on a syllabus page, come to life with a goal to subsume the class itself. Aesthetically, the page is drab. It calls to mind tedium. Clerical work. But beyond that, it codes students and teachers into thinking in bite-sized, linear units, and to passively accept knowledge as is

rather than actively shaping it. Education -- importantly, even critical education -- becomes a series of linear tasks to be completed; this architecture teaches us through the hidden curriculum a Fordist lesson that we are assembly-line thinkers. When designers attempt to color this drab space with brighter features, the effort still exists within the task-based pedagogical framework of its hidden curriculum, as in the "Confetti feature" that celebrates the punctual completion of a task with a confetti effect that discharges onto the student's screen (Figure Eight).

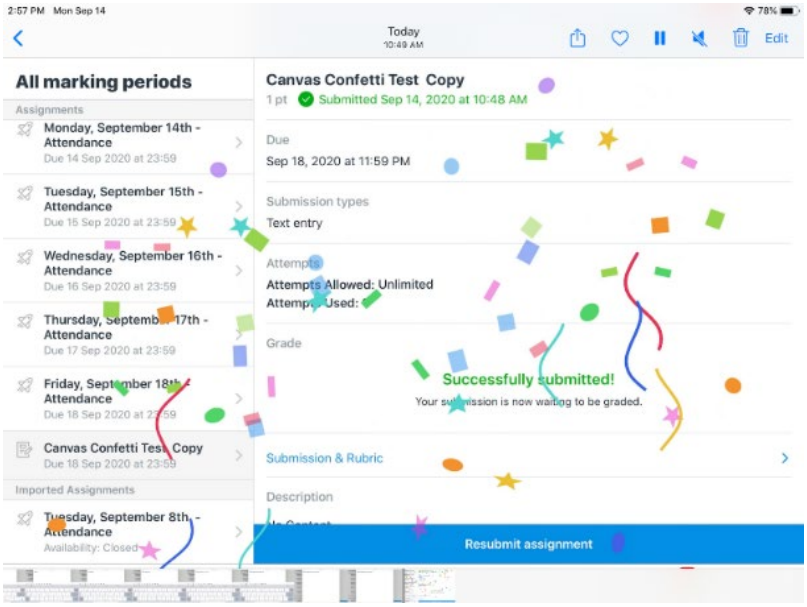


Figure Eight: Confetti Feature (Link: https://community.canvaslms.com/t5/Canvas-Ideas/Add-Confetti-for-On-Time-Submissions-on-Student-App/idi-p/314083)

Below (Figures Ten, Eleven, and Twelve), you can see images of the two Canvas smartphone apps: "Student" and "Teacher." These apps take on the insignia of other apps in the attention economy, such as the red numbers peeking above the "To-Do" feature. I know many students access the class this way, because they've told me they do. In an asynchronous situation, my weekly announcements ping their phones alongside

fantasy football updates, Instagram notifications, and missives from their bank. This way, as we also saw with *SemRush*'s Traffic Report, education joins the attention economy, rather than critiques it. Using this app, even if we are trying to critique it, we still join it, and thus tacitly endorse its way of recreating the world.

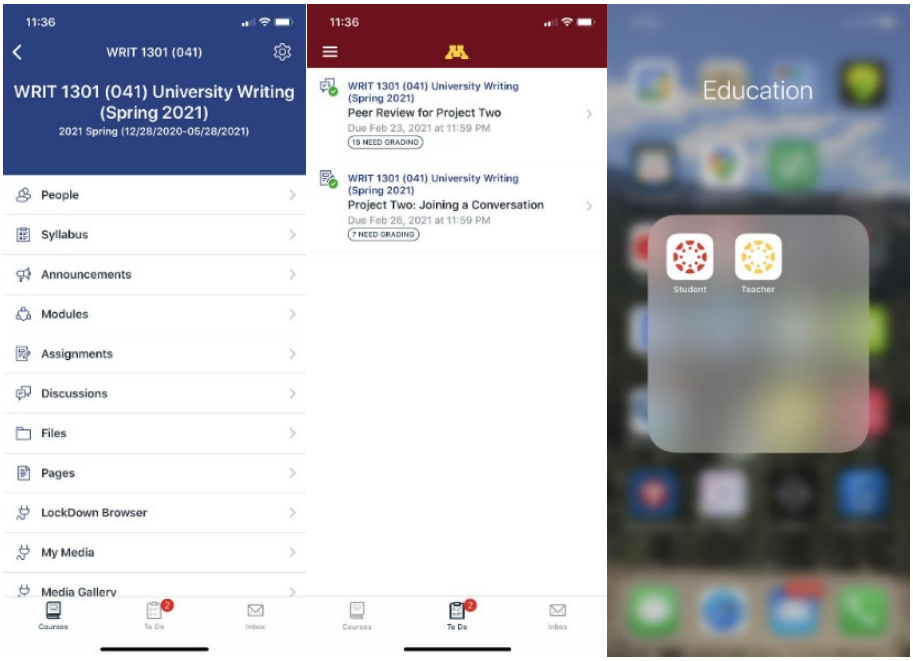


Figure Nine. Views from the Apps.

Returning again to hidden-curriculum theory, Postman and Weingartner, in *Teaching as a Subversive Activity,* posit that "what students do in the classroom is what they learn … and what they learn to do is the classroom's message" (30). In other words, in this Deweyan way of thinking about education, students learn as much if not more from the classroom environment itself than from what teachers "teach" them. What does this environment teach us? To take our orders from the machine. To be managed by

the system. “Your to-do list is empty. Well done. Time to recharge” -- for when the to-do list fills up again (Figure Ten).

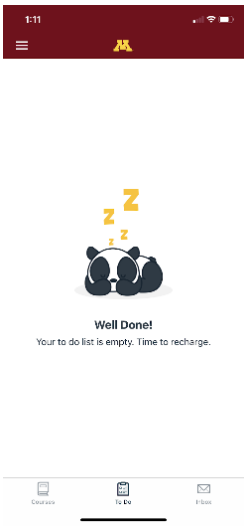


Figure Ten: The sleeping panda bear.

One of the most used features of Canvas for teachers is its trademarked SpeedGrader™ feature. The connections between this feature and the ethic of efficiency in the neoliberal university are overt enough that they do not warrant further elaboration. On that point, I’ll just offer that in some cases, the curriculum of the LMS’s pedagogy is not so hidden, or it is hidden in plain sight. Much as the terminology of Learning Management Systems announces their purposes in a stunning candid way (they *manage* learning), the SpeedGrader™ feature is like a geyser that erupts from the under the surface, revealing in almost comic candor the underlying pedagogical philosophy that is often hidden in plain view. The manager, after all, does what it says it does: it manages, and it keeps an efficient office. These are the terms of usability readily discernible: It will save you time on grading, not necessarily to free up leisure, but rather to allow the

employee to complete more tasks. To do more grading. In accessing the usability of the SpeedGrader™ function, teachers tacitly accept its ethic of efficiency.

The SpeedGrader™ feature also transforms and limits what writing teachers are able to do with writing feedback. In Figure Fifteen, you can see the tools of the feature: teachers can select text, make free annotations, highlight a selection of text, and strikethrough it. When I began teaching as a lecturer in a small public liberal arts college in the Mountain West, entire meetings were dedicated to teaching teachers how to work Canvas's interfaces. One semester, the first ten minutes of weekly faculty meetings were dedicated to share outs involving how teachers have incorporated Canvas into their pedagogy. Week in and week out, I watched as teachers strained to demonstrate the usefulness of these tools: drawing arrows, "handwriting" margin comments with the digital mouse, and holding their frustration in their teeth. What's more usable is the "assignment comment" feature on the right side, which privileges autopsy report-like end comments. And what stands out more than anything to the teacher is the Days Late icon quantifying the students' negligence on the top-right hand side.

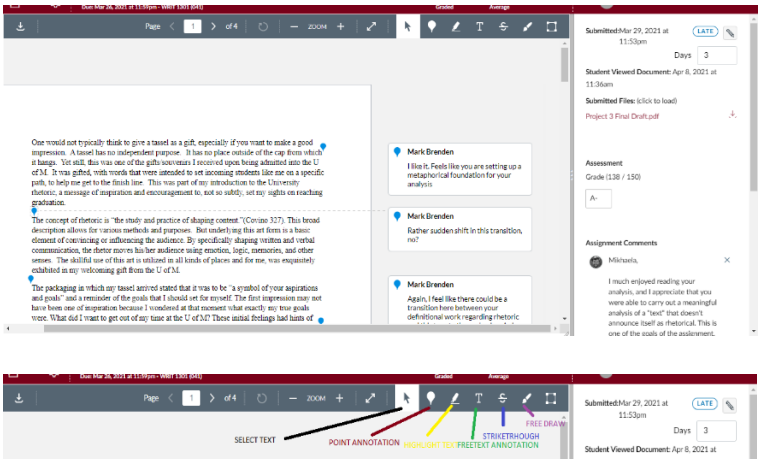


Figure Eleven: The SpeedGrader™ feature.

Providing effective feedback that students actually read and that actually helps them improve their writing is a challenge at least as old as the field of composition (Straub, 1999). In many ways, the SpeedGrader™ does improve upon the efficiency of providing feedback to writing, but it also limits the process in its focus on efficiency. One under-discussed, formerly ubiquitous practice that LMS eradicates is the practice of the teacher handing back papers to students. Nobody is writing elegies for the death of this mundane practice. It was tedious and often made students and teachers both feel vulnerable. But it also required a human interaction: what teacher of a certain vintage cannot recall the nerve-wracking feeling of passing back a disappointing grade to a student, or the elation of passing an under-confident student an A paper. Here is but another quotidian practice of education that Canvas subsumes and renders immediate and business-like. With the Canvas "Student" app, bad and good news pings to students' phones while they are riding the bus, watching TV, or caring for a loved one. *Bzzzz. Assignment Graded for Project Four: Researched Inquiry. Clear here to view grade. C+.*

Another under-discussed element of the SpeedGrader™ turn is how it arrives concurrent to a critical post-George Floyd movement in the field of composition surrounding anti-racist grading practices. Spearheaded by Asao Inoue, the anti-racist turn in writing assessment proposes a shift away from traditional assessment practices that prioritize standard English and "objective" criteria. Building on the Students' Right to Their Own Language movement and scholars such as Geneva Smitherman, Inoue advocates for assessment practices that value linguistic diversity and recognize the systemic racism embedded in traditional assessment methods. Inoue's pedagogical

suggestion, which has become a vogue approach across writing and English programs since 2020, is to use labor-based grading contracts. These are pre-made agreements between student and teacher to assess the student's writing according to how much work they say they put into it. According to Inoue, this approach better realizes social-justice goals in assessment, as it does not attune students' writing to a white-supremacist standard, and it recognizes that assessment is a social process that involves multiple perspectives and experiences (Inoue, 2019). While this practice became a pedagogical trend, it also created a context for a productive, critical conversation in the field surrounding assessment and social justice. Ellen C. Carillo, for example, wrote a response book to Inoue*, The Hidden Inequities in Labor-Based Contract Grading* (2021), in which she points out that labor is not a neutral concept either, and that the practice might unintentionally privilege students from dominant social groups who, for example, have the time to put in the labor on which their writing will be assessed.

The discussion about labor contracts and antiracist assessment is dynamic and ongoing. Each year, more dissertations, articles, and books emerge within the subfield. However, concurrent to this critical momentum is the normalization of Canvas and the SpeedGrader™, which not only does not include labor-based contract grading as part of its usability, but it also emphasizes grades as the prominent meaning of the class. Furthermore, Canvas's grading tools promote a competitive and individualistic approach to learning, where students are compared against each other based on their grades. The toggle that shows students a grade-comparison graph for each of their assignments is more difficult to locate and turn off than the "unsubscribe" button on streaming

subscriptions. One must navigate to “Settings,” then scroll all the way down to the bottom of the page where to find a tiny and inconspicuous link to "more options," click on it, go to a new page, and then select the option to hide grade distribution graphs from students before clicking on “Update Course Details.” For all its usability, turning off this feature that stokes deficit-based competition in students is not so straightforward.

While compositionists debate the politics of grading, Canvas interpellates teachers as SpeedGraders -- and speeds them past the speed bumps of public deliberation to the destination marked by the next module.

Conclusion

Taken together, these features under analysis encapsulate a limited but important window into understanding the hidden curriculum/terms of use of Canvas’s LMS platform. To fully comprehend the hidden curriculum and terms of use of Canvas's LMS platform, it is crucial to examine the features that are under analysis. While these features offer a limited but important window into understanding the platform's workings, further research should be done in composition studies to more fully assess Canvas's usability for both students and teachers. Moreover, a critical literacy approach is necessary to evaluate the broader socio-technical context of educational technologies, including the impact they have on learning outcomes. Because Canvas’s main role in education is as a manager, it emphasizes organization and efficiency in learning. Learning is a an embodied, social, political, and situationally contingent, and (perhaps above all) inefficient process -- ever-emergent and never static and finished. It is fragmented, swirling, un-composed. As a manager, Canvas is an order-bringing force. And so, in the next chapter, I will study the

history of the apparently dyadic concepts of composition -- as in something that composes or brings order -- and resistance. Furthermore, I will investigate the ways in which the LMS turn complicates these historical tensions and, indeed, funnels them into the vortex of neoliberalism.

CHAPTER SIX: THE TERMS OF CLARITY AND RESISTANCE

Thus far in this dissertation, I have studied composition as a dynamic discipline that has maintained a complicated relationship with the Dominant Discourse, and it both embraces and resists (sometimes simultaneously) efforts to align its telos with what Newfield called in terms of the broader public university's partnering with private ethos "The Great Mistake." One version of the discipline of composition can be understood through the framing of two discrete perspectives on the politics of clarity, efficiency, and compliance on one hand, and ambiguity, complexity, and resistance on the other. The former camp conceives of the relationship between literacy and justice as a matter of extending access to culturally and economically valuable resources such as Dominant Discourses, technological literacy, and complex technical knowledge. From this perspective of literacy derives technical communication as a major sub-discipline of Writing Studies, in which teacher-scholars study how complex information can be explained to an audience in clear terms. Specifically, the study and advocacy for "Plain English" found renewed interest at the turn of the 21st Century, and remarkably materialized in the "Plain Writing Act of 2010," signed into law by President Obama, whose long title is "An act to enhance citizen access to Government information and services by establishing that Government documents issued to the public must be written clearly." In the other camp is a perspective informed by postmodern critical literacy scholarship from the late 20th century, which held that rhetorics of clarity and composure

mistakenly presume universality in language and its ability to communicate an objective Truth; rather critical literacy understands language as an inherently political medium that constructs social versions of the "truth." In Writing Studies, tensions between these two ways of seeing literacy continue to play out in response to ever-emergent digital technologies and trends in culture and in higher education.

As I have argued thus far, the rise of LMS presents a new rupture in composition wherein scholars both knowingly and unknowingly endorse an interpretation of literacy and its function in the world that often fits inside of one of the two above-described camps. A central question underlying this moment is whether literacy work should help students fit into the way things are or to transform the way things are. We might recognize in the latter description a commitment to Freirean transformative praxis, involving critical thought which interrogates paradigms of knowledge concomitant to action in and upon the world (Lankshear and McLaren, 41). In the former camp, we might instead recognize what has been labeled "functional literacy," a philosophy which understands literacy as a way of making "currently dysfunctional people functional" by developing ways of knowing, thinking, speaking, writing, and being valued by the Dominant Discourse (Lankshear and McLaren 22). Here I will again argue that the terms of use of LMS can become a powerful commissary for the interests of the Dominant Discourse. And without critical attention, Learning Management Systems *manage* learning, and prepare us to be managed by apparently fixed and finished systems.

These insights into literacy, supplied in part by Social Turn-era scholarship, are offered into this moment in the early 2020s when the field of Writing Studies is spinning away from the Social Turn toward the insights of New Materialism, Posthumanism, and Multimodality (Overstreet, 2021; Alexander, 2020; Cooper, 2019; Boyle, 2016; Micciche, 2014). These intellectual commitments are valuable, and they can be strengthened by a dialectic recognition, rather than rejection, of the Social Turn's insights into power dynamics involved in literacy, and the potential for critical literacy to engage those dynamics in ever-emergent situations. I'll argue later in this chapter that an updated version of critical literacy is more vital today than ever. It can provide us with a method by which to understand, resist, and transform neoliberal cooptation of literacies during the LMS turn. Up to now, scholarship that has paid attention to LMS as a pedagogical force in Writing Studies has largely ignored LMS as a medium that shapes the message of education. Instead, much of the scholarship has focused on the affordances of LMS as a pedagogical mode, or studied the ways in which instructors make use of LMS to teach in ways that are different from their in-person instruction, or teamed with Information Technology departments or private companies to make LMS more usable (Duin and Tham, 2020). Proponents of LMS often employ rhetorics of accessibility to endorse its increased role in education, arguing that LMS can extend access to education in ways that in-person learning cannot. Accessibility is the correct project for this moment, but aligning this project with a company like Instructure's business model also reshapes the meanings of accessibility. For example, usability/accessibility on Canvas could seem to mean allowing a student to disengage from their peers, and carry out the writing course in

correspondence with their LMS -- which tells them there's just two more papers (items on the to-do list) left to go. The question of what version of education universities are extending access to by embracing these ideologies largely goes unasked. The tension that I see building here is between clarity (usability) and the messiness of education as a social, democratic project.

And so what I want to propose in this chapter is that LMS presents another medium through which to carry out the historical tension between critical and functional literacy, but that it cannot be used for critical purposes without first attending to the ideologies embedded in the medium itself. Though they require pursuing a digression in order to take us out of the forest, there is no shortage of antecedents to this disciplinary debate, both in the history of composition pedagogy and in social and cultural movements, which I will explore and glean insights from. Specifically, I will explore four examples that exemplify tensions between critical literacy and the politics of clarity – from the American folk music tradition, the Frankfurt School of critical theory, feminist philosophy, and the late 80s/early 90s debates concerning composition and resistance in Writing Studies – and apply their insights to the challenges facing our field today presented by Neoliberalism and Learning Management.

Antecedents and Corollaries

A compelling story about the history of literacy in the United States can be told by studying the tensions between efforts in critical, counter-hegemonic understandings of truth and power, and cultural imperatives for clarity and accessibility. Writing about

cultural studies debates happening in the academy in the early 1990s, Henry Giroux summarized the complaint against linguistic complexity as being based in the assumption that abstruse academics "perform the double mistake of removing themselves from the public debate about social and political issues while simultaneously violating an alleged universal referent for linguistic clarity" (273). Michael Apple, a critical educational theorist and major proponent of the need for critical theory to be presented in accessible language, warned that in order not to isolate itself into recondite towers, "the left has to be very careful not to mystify" (4). Similarly, Martha Nussbaum criticized Judith Butler for writing prose that is "willfully obscure" and thus elitist and counter to the "democratic, egalitarian spirit of feminism" (Stone 613). On the other hand, many writers have defended obscurity as a necessary feature of academic prose, because "complex thought requires complex, difficult forms of expression" (Stone 614). It follows from this argument not only that difficult ideas require difficult writing, but to "dumb them down" may remove them from the intellectual realm and steer into the technical realm valued by instrumentalist systems of thought. Complexity, in other words, can be an expression of resistance to these systems of thought.

The tensions that I'm describing between composure and resistance are related, but in some ways distinct from, the fulcrum set up by Brian Street in the 1970s between "autonomous" and "ideological" literacy. Street's autonomous model of literacy, epitomized by literacy tests, is thought of as transferable across contexts, and unsullied by ideology. In the autonomous model, literacy enjoys an independent, universal, and neutral effect on other social and cognitive practices. The ideological model, which

builds off of Harvey Graff's work in *The Literacy Myth* (1979) recognizes that reading and writing practices are always ideological and dependent upon social dynamics, often serving to perpetuate and maintain power structures. And so the tension between composure and resistance is related to Street's dyad, but distinguished by its focus on broad intelligibility, which, as Giroux points out and Apple's call for demystification demonstrates, is often a shared value between conversative (or autonomous) and transformative (ideological) conceptions of literacy. Those advocating for an ideological model share with the autonomous literacy advocates an interest in lucidity in an effort to illuminate, and not baffle or alienate, the public imaginary. In this advocacy, they often overlook the ways they embed the autonomous model into their ideological conception.

The compulsion among the left to de-jargon its public outreach is understandable given their interest in using literacy as a tool with which to transform society, and many assume that transformative language must also be clear language. However, core concepts in critical literacy contend that language is not something that can simply "get out of the way" of content, or be used to simply transmit knowledge. Language as a medium does not reflect the Truth, but rather shapes particular versions of the truth. Technologies like LMS are similar; they do not merely deliver content, but shape it as well through their terms of use. And in this sense critical literacy, in embracing the politics of clarity, continually fails to heed its own insights into the way that language functions in the world. This does not mean that abstruseness is the path to transformative literacy, but nor does a universal conception of "clarity" guarantee shared understanding between rhetors and auditors. Rather, critical literacy means attending to the dynamics

between clarity/composure and complexity/resistance inside of given rhetorical situations. To demonstrate this dialectical approach, I will next survey four case studies in literacy history that exemplify or lend perspective to these dynamics: 1) the American folk music tradition of the 20th Century, 2) the Frankfurt School of critical theory, and 3) conversations in feminist philosophy, and 4) key debates in composition in the late 20th Century.

The Folk Music Tradition

There are perhaps no better paragons for exclusionary, high-culture uses of literacy than Modernist poets Ezra Pound and TS Eliot. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, while still a significant literary event in mass culture (Eliot was on the cover of *Time Magazine* in 1950 for an article about the poem) wove a tapestry of Latin phrases and literary allusions that was widely read as a deliberate attempt to alienate an uneducated readership, strongly implying that understanding a great work of art requires advanced knowledge in, among other subjects, great works of art. Pound's *Cantos* was even more erudite. Despite his initial ambitions to write a poetic people's history to tell "the tale of the tribe," the epic poem became so long and obscure that in 1919 Pound himself confessed: "I suspect my 'Cantos' are getting too too too abstruse and obscure for human consumption" (qtd. in Keller, 169). At one point in his life, Pound's commitment to high culture and suspicion of the hoi polloi were so extreme that he became enamored by Benito Mussolini's fascist cultural programs in Italy, broadcasting hundreds of radio programs that disseminated not only grossly anti-semitic rhetoric, but also literary

elitism. Reportedly, Pound once even solicited Mussolini to submit to his literary journal, *The Transatlantic Review* (Keller, 170).

Given their position as leading proponents of elitism in Western letters, it is no wonder that in the 1960s, Bob Dylan, who was weaned on the populism of the folk music tradition, alluded to these two in his own allusory tapestry about entropy, the 1964 song "Desolation Row." In a verse that appears late in the 11-minute epic, Dylan imagines the Modernist poets as duelers in a tower:

> *Praise be to Nero's Neptune, the Titanic sails at dawn*
> *Everybody's shouting: "Which side are you on?"*
> *And Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot are fighting in the captain's tower*
> *While calypso singers laugh at them and fishermen hold flowers ("Desolation Row")*

Dylan invokes Pound and Eliot in the context of an absurdist, imagist tableau in which people are chanting anti-war slogans (notably the lyrics from a leftist folk song), and the Modernist Authors joust above it all in "the captain's tower" (seemingly a symbol of the vaulted realm of high culture). Importantly, it is the calypso singers who "laugh at them," folk/blues-adjacent Afro-Caribbean musicians who find the Modernist poets' elitist jockeying absurd and silly. The verse might be read as Dylan's indictment of culture, both "high" and "low," for their inability to see the larger picture. In typical Dylanesque irony, each of these characters fails to appreciate that they are aboard the Titanic (a tragedy of Modernity), destined to sink, and so – what matters which side someone is on, or who is in the captain's tower, or who is chuckling below?

One who would be among those chanting "which side are you on?" is Pete Seeger -- one of Dylan's mentors in the folk scene -- who thought of folk music as a deliberately political, leftist genre whose purpose was to transform the material conditions of the working class through song. Over time, his interpretation of the project changed. In his early days as a folk artist, he conceived of his work as part of a collectivist exercise in "anonymous participation" to use songs to both disseminate socialist ideologies and "bring culture to the common people" (13). Later, during the 1950s (during which time he was jailed for subversive activity by the House Un-American Activities Commission), he stopped singing exclusively leftist songs, and switched his conception of folk music from a more pedagogical, overtly political project meant to activate the working class through song, to an effort to follow (rather than transform) the actual cultural interests of the working class. His shift in philosophy was not a result of being "scared straight" by HUAC, but rather it reflected a changing interpretation of the artist's relationship with the working class. From Elijah Wood's *Dylan Goes Electric*:

> He had hoped to support a singing labor movement, but found that "most union leaders could not see any connection between music and pork chops" and ruefully noted that by the late 1940s, "Which Side Are You on?" was known in Greenwich Village but not in a single miner's union local." … [H]e concluded that the most effective way to connect his music to his politics was by singing songs *by* the working class rather than writing songs *for* it. (27)

Seeger seemed to have concluded that the kinds of changes he wanted to help make in society were best made by joining the dominant discourse rather than rejecting it. This

involved singing commercial hits such as “Goodnight Irene” and simple, accessible love songs such as “Kisses Sweeter than Wine” rather than overtly Marxist political songs that challenged listeners’ beliefs, such as “Which Side Are You On?”. Another way of reading Seager’s change of heart is that he became beleaguered by the difficulty of bringing about meaningful change, as well as by the working class’s reluctance to participate in its own emancipation. If the ship is going down, why not sing songs to lift the passengers’ spirits rather than rile them up?

Dylan’s approach to politics was more individualistic than Seeger’s, and also more fatalistic. After rising to stardom through politically engaged original material like “Blowin’ in the Wind” and “The Times They Are A-Changin’” (as well as seering indictments of structural racism like “The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll” and “Only a Pawn in Their Game,” though neither was released as a single), Dylan rather quickly disengaged. A song like “My Back Pages” endorses dropping out of the struggle, and seems to see leftist political groups being just as worthy of protest as those on the right (“a self-ordained professor’s tongue / too serious to fool / spouted out that liberty / is just equality in schools”). Famously, he drunkenly dismissed leftist elites when the Emergency Civil Liberties Union awarded him the Thomas Paine Award in 1963. His famous performance at the 1965 Newport Folk Festival, in which he “went electric” over boos and jeers from a folk-loving crowd, is widely read today as a moment in which a 60s rebel freaked out the squares by rejecting conformity and doing things his way. Elijah Wald gives an intriguing alternative reading of that story in *Dylan Goes Electric!:*

> In most tellings, Dylan represents youth and the future, and the people who booed were stuck in the dying past. But there is another version, in which the audience represents youth and hope, and Dylan was shutting himself off behind a wall of electric noise, locking himself in a citadel of wealth and power, abandoning idealism and hope and selling out to the star machine. (3)

Wald's reframing of this tale demonstrates to me the power of dominant narrative and shows that Dylan's form of individualistic rebellion was less threatening to the Dominant Discourse than Seeger's vision of collective struggle for emancipation through anonymous participation. Dylan as an "Author-function" (to borrow a concept from Foucault) was more compatible with capitalism's entrepreneurial spirit than Seeger's Authorless world, despite Dylan's challenging, often opaque lyrics.

Critical literacy theorists in Writing Studies are faced with similar conundrums to Seeger. They ask, is the best way to transform society through critical pedagogy to teach students ways of resisting interpellation from the Dominant Discourse, or is it to help them to "master" the Dominant Discourse by teaching them how to write in a clearer and concise manner? Teachers are tasked with answering similar questions about how to respond to the LMS turn. Is a more usable Canvas page more accessible, and -- if so -- what is going to be more easily used for? If students, for example, want a usable Canvas page so that they can streamline their path to the end of the digital maze, how should a teacher who cares about critical education respond? Is there a third space that teachers and students can access beyond this fulcrum of clarity and complexity? The oftentimes facile juxtaposition between complexity and clarity might be composition's way of

jousting in the captain's tower. Moving *beyond* complexity and clarity means taking a page out of Dylan's lyric book and pointing out the overlooked: what good are our insights into literacy and pedagogy if we discuss them aboard the Titanic? In other words, what if it is not our ideas but the medium through which we share them that leads to our destruction?

The Frankfurt School

Similar to Seeger, the Frankfurt School -- most notably Horkheimer, Adorno, and Marcuse -- struggled with the Modern paradox of rejecting culture while also participating in it. Embracing this contradiction was central to their dialectic for reading and writing about culture. The critical thinker, as Adorno wrote, "must both participate in culture and not participate" (*Prisms,* p. 33). Adorno elaborates on the paradox in *Negative Dialectics*:

> Whoever pleads for the maintenance of this radically culpable and shabby culture becomes its accomplice, while the man who says no to culture is directly furthering the barbarism which our culture showed itself to be. (367)

In addition to the Frankfurt School's critique of reason, culture, and aesthetics, this sentence they understand the critic must serve (to simultaneously participate and not participate) is also evident in the medium of their work — that they used writing to communicate their radical ideas, that they published in academic journals, and that they wrote with the complexity that they did. Similar to the dilemma that Seeger faced in regard to folk music's relationship with the working class, the Frankfurt School had to reckon with another contradiction: that their complex Marxist theory dazzled the Ivory

Tower and made them famous on campuses, but those for whom it was meant to be emancipatory did not read it, and might not be prepared to understand it if they did read it. While their reading on the politics of knowledge could not have been more distinct from Pound and Eliot's, they might have also been fitting inclusions in Dylan's captain's tower aboard the Titanic.

Horkheimer is known to be more "solid" and accessible than Adorno, who is widely regarded as a genius whose writing is nearly impenetrable (Magee). In "The End of Reason," Horkheimer describes (in what might be considered "accessible" prose) the ways in which authoritarian reason creeps its way stealthily into the hearts and minds of "mass culture," to the point that the masses defend reason that they cannot comprehend, by virtue of having accepted this instrumentalist and anti-intellectual form of reason. The individual foregoes their ability to distinguish between dominant reason and their own, and thus reason "has degenerated because it was the ideological projection of a false universality which now shows the autonomy of the subject to have been an illusion" (36). Horkheimer might have extended this "ideological project of a false universality" to writing itself, and the role universalized, autonomous uses of language play in propagating dominant forms of reason in the masses. In the realm of composition studies, Fitts and France (indirectly) make this extension on Horkheimer's behalf, writing that "culture coauthors each text, rendering chimerical the claim that individuals freely choose meanings to encode in writing" (xii). In conceding this, however, Fitts and France (representing a postmodernist approach to thinking about literacy) abandon Horkheimer's

hope that the individual reclaim reason from dehumanizing forces. In so doing, they limit the possibilities of literacy just the same as instrumentalism limits its possibilities.

Marcuse's prose might be viewed as somewhere in between the relative accessibility of Horkheimer and the supposed unintelligibility of Adorno. Intriguingly, in 1977 Marcuse appeared on Bryan Magee's BBC series *Conversations with Philosophers*, a program that sought to "make philosophy accessible to the layman." In the interview, Magee takes Marcuse and the viewers on a deceivingly lucid tour of the Frankfurt School's philosophy, from its critique of Marxism to its embrace of Freudian psychoanalysis. At the end of the program, Magee asks Marcuse to atone for the Frankfurt School's inaccessible prose, an exchange which is worth reading at length:

> --
>
> **Magee:** *Something that might sound like a trivial criticism but is not trivial is that so many of the writings of the Frankfurt School are in fact very difficult to read. Worse than that, they're turgid. Sometimes unintelligible. I exempt -- and I do it sincerely -- your writings from this —*
>
> **Marcuse**: *They're bad enough.*
>
> **Magee**: *But Adorno for example … I find Adorno literally unreadable. Now that seems to me to constitute an enormous barrier between the ideas you are trying to disseminate and the public you are trying to disseminate them to. And that* is *a serious criticism. If anything it's made greater by the fact that other alternative philosophies are often expounded by writers who are very good writers …*

Marcuse: *To some extent I agree with you. I confess there are many things in Adorno I don't understand. I want at least to say one word about his justification. It was that ordinary language, ordinary prose … has been so much permeated by the establishment. It expresses so much the controls and the manipulation of the individual by the power structure that already in the language you use, you have to indicate the rupture with conformity. Therefore the attempt to convey already the rupture in the syntax, in the grammar, in the vocabulary, whatever it may be. Now whether or not that is acceptable, I don't know. The only thing I would say is there is an equally great danger in a premature popularization of the terribly complex problems we face today.*

--

Magee articulates a dominant understanding of literacy that permeates the public imaginary, which is that it should be used to "disseminate" knowledge to the masses. Marcuse makes some concessions toward this understanding, but also refuses the invitation to place language outside of ideology, and instead theorizes a connection between grammar and syntax and the techniques of control and "the manipulation of the individual by the power structure." For Marcuse, Adorno's abstruseness was a necessary expression of a "rupture with conformity." Obscurity in this sense might not represent a botched opportunity to share ideas with a reader, but rather a means of meaningfully resisting the status quo, and the botch comes from Magee and other's refusal to engage with a subversively difficult text. And so for Adorno, opaqueness is not only necessary because critical theory involves complexity, but because he recognizes the medium of

language as inherently political, and "clarity" is a tool used to fit even critical thought into the logic of the ruling class. Abstruse prose, in this sense, is necessary for meaningful resistance to the status quo. The usability of critical literacy is a serious consideration, but sending it through usability tests to better fit into a private company's product does not leave it unchanged. Rather, as with the hidden curriculum (explored in Chapter Five), a technology such as Canvas transforms critical literacy into something that it can manage.

Feminist Philosophy

As discussed earlier in this chapter, a debate about the virtues of clarity in feminist philosophy was ignited in the late 90s when Martha Nussbaum criticized Judith Butler's work for its opacity, which she contended betrayed the emanicipatory democratic spirit of feminist thought. Nussbaum even excerpted a particularly abstruse summary of Althusserian theory from Butler and rewrote it in more accessible prose (Stone, p. 616). A 2015 special issue on emancipation in the journal *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy* intriguingly took up the debate on clarity vs opaqueness, and provided valuable insights for critially engaging the tension through a relational, embodied epistemology. Intriguingly, the essays collected in the special issue exemplify critical literacy studies but are cordoned off into a seemingly separate conversation by the disciplinarity of academic discourse, and thus their valuable insights are likely unseen by a discipline that could benefit from them, as though they are happening in another room.

Alison Stone, in one of the essays published in the special issue called "The Politics of Clarity," provides a thorough survey of these tensions, and ultimately, with

reservations, concludes that clarity aligns with the feminist project of empowering "individuals … to criticize and resist oppressive power relations" (615). Clarity is necessary in this project, because if theory is too abstruse, then it risks "[reinforcing] society's broader power relations by becoming exclusive to the initiated" (615). Clarity, as defined by Stone, means transparency: the medium of words fades away in clear prose, whereas opaque prose brings the medium to the fore and distracts from the message. Opacity, then, is akin to a crackling telephone obscuring communication between people, and striving for clarity, Stone says, provides more hope that human beings can communicate across differences.

Responding to Stone, Aida Hurtado and Cynthia M Paccaerquia advance a view that a relational, feminist approach to writing can value both clarity and opaqueness through an analysis of the work of Chicana authors Gloria Anzaldúa and Chela Sandoval. In the former's challenging content through an apparently straight-forward poetic voice, they recognize the "clarity of ambiguity," which subverts various forms of oppression and exemplifies "differential thinking as critical engagement" (623). Through her expression of complex intersection feminist theory in accessible prose, Sandoval similarly demonstrates the possibilities of what Hurtado and Paccarquia refer to as "the politics of opaqueness in clarity" (623). These possibilities are expanded beyond the binary of opaqueness in clarity when purpose is centered, and when one recognizes that not all clarities and opaqueness are "created equal" (625). Hurtado and Paccarquia help us move beyond this binary by situating language in embodied purpose:

> … the *virtue* of clarity in a robust relational epistemology requires technologies of *opaqueness* -- language, style, performances, rituals -- for the sake of purpose. Self-reflexivity, recognition of our situated conditions, and the knowledge entailed in our particular ethico-political responses serve us in holding ourselves accountable for choosing to become literate in certain forms and deployments of opaqueness. (625)

It is important to emphasize that the Special Issue in which these philosophers debated the politics of clarity and opaqueness focused on emancipation. The publication of these essays then recognizes in this tension a struggle for emancipatory literacy. Their insights help us see that clarity and opaqueness do not speak for themselves, but are bound up in situational struggles for power among unequally privileged social groups. Clarity alone or opaqueness alone will not lead to emancipation, but only when joined by a critical engagement with the paradigms of knowledge under which they operate are their emancipatory potentials truly animated.

Composition and Resistance

Building off of these antecedents and corollaries, the heuristic that I want to propose for the field of Writing Studies in this chapter is not one that attempts to find new answers, or appoint new Truths, but rather to open up the uses of literacy *beyond* the either/or-ness of clarity and resistance. Moving beyond these tensions means working through them, and (re)discovering the expansive possibilities of literacy beyond the instrumentalism of meaning and its opposition. Critical literacy has been justifiably critiqued for its hypocritical tendency to supplant one truth with another, ignoring its own

insights into the way truth functions in society. Notably, Catherine Fox (2002), in her essay "The Race to Truth: Disarticulating Critical Thinking from Whiteliness" articulates a strong critique of this tendency in critical literacy and pedagogy: "There is nothing radical or transformative about supplanting a conservative, hegemonic truth with a leftist, marginalized truth -- it is only more 'running in old cycles" (203).

However, not all critical theorists within and preceding the discipline of Writing Studies commit this transgression. Foucault, to take one example, was perpetually suspicious in his writings of efforts to supply new answers inside of political critiques. Rather, he seemed to want to argue that critique itself is the answer, and therefore it must be performed perpetually under and onto paradigms that are unjust. Lester Faigley provides an illuminating reading of Foucault and the postmodern compositionists who took up his philosophies in *Fragments of Rationality* (1992):

> Few of the postmodern theorists are of much help in formulating what should be the appropriate politics for a particular writing classroom. Foucault's response is to turn away from formal theorizing that might grow out of critique. The incisive analysis of prisons in *Discipline and Punish,* for example, does not lead to proposals for prison reform. Foucault distrusted any global political theory of resistance *because he believed it would inevitably reproduce what it set out to eliminate.* (44, emphasis added).

Baudrillard, in Faigley's reading, takes the critique of politics further, as he considers "political efforts as fruitless continuations of Modernism that seek to find some direction and order in a directionless and disorderly world" (44). As applied to literacy work,

Foucault's critique and Baudrillard's outright dismissal of politics would indicate that resistance to, say, composure and management, reifies composure itself and management iself, and ensures their discursive dominance.

But a similar reification could be read as happening as a result of deconstruction. As postmodern and post-structural theories coursed through the American academy and into the public, they were met with suspicion and backlash, and they provided fodder for the public and the news media's increasing weariness with the perceived "indoctrinating" tendencies of higher education. *Newsweek*'s 1975 polemic against writing instruction, "Why Johnny Can't Write," sounded the alarm regarding a literacy crisis in America, stemming from english teachers' inadequate work in preparing young people to write according to dominant conceptions of clarity. The *Newsweek* journalist cited as evidence of literacy teachers' dereliction, the NCTE's 1974 statement on Students' Right to Their Own Language, which sought to emphasize and celebrate language difference in the academy, rather than reproduce a ruling-class standard of clarity that stratifies and excludes. In the early 90s, *Newsweek* found a new context to call for english teachers to teach either great literature or grammatical correctness in a cultural anxiety concerning so-called political correctness, a phenomenon many saw as stemming from Marxism and deconstruction.

The impenetrability of theoretical writing has repeatedly been chastised and lampooned in the public sphere, leading to the caricature of the aloof english professor, out of touch and incapable of practicing what they perplexingly preach. For example, the Marxian studies of rhetoric by James Berlin have been criticized for their political

influence on the writing classroom (Hairston, 1987), as well as for their supposed tendency to demonize current-traditional and expressivist figures in the history of composition (Palmeri, 2010) — but Berlin's work is also criticized for its turgidity. Notably, the *New York Times* published an editorial entitled "Johnny's Teacher Can't Write Either," singling out Berlin and Ira Shor's jargon-heavy, supposedly inscrutable prose, even going as far as suggesting that Berlin himself is in need of a remedial writing course. The piece's author, fellow writing teacher Rachel Erlanger, highlights a string of sentences from Berlin's "Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class" as an exemplar of shoddy and unclear prose:

> More recently the discussion of the relation between ideology and rhetoric has taken a new turn. Ideology is here foregrounded and problematized in a way that situates rhetoric within ideology rather than ideology within rhetoric (qtd. In Erlanger, 1991).

For Erlanger, the complexity of these sentences should make it obvious to readers that they constitute an example of bad or ineffective writing. That writing classes should be about teaching a universal standard of clarity is enthymematic in this critique, for surely Berlin need not take a remedial class in understanding the connections between ideology and rhetoric (the critical recognition of which might lead a student to improve as a writer more than grammar exercises). This enthymeme persists in the article's lambasting of Shor's cultural-studies approach to the english classroom, particularly his use of the english classroom to study the economic and political implications of the fast-food hamburger. Shor describes his pedagogical philosophy in jargon-laden prose to which

Erlanger also objects. “How can people who write like this teach others to write clearly and concisely,” Erlanger writes in the piece’s conclusion, “Is it asking too much to expect teachers of writing to heed the rules of rhetoric?”

But in the late 80s and early 90s, teachers of writing were engaging in serious resistance to or reconsideration of the “rules of rhetoric,” which many scholars argued failed to contribute to a more just society. Inspired by the work of Freire, hooks, and Ira Shor, three major collections emerged from the in-house political tumult from this era to take stock in ways to respond: *The Politics of Writing Instruction* (Bullock et al, 1991), *Composition and Resistance* (Hurlbert and Blitz, 1991), and *Left Margins* (Fitts and France, 1995). Bullock et al’s collection sought to name the injustices out of which writing instruction arises, including those of exploited labor, racism, and sexism. Hurlbert and Blitz gathered a who’s who of the field’s critical scholars to try to make sense of the political moment and imagine theoretical approaches to resisting that which they are conditioned to not resist. Fitts and France focused their collection on the conflicted experiences of bringing critical theories raised in the previous two collections into the classroom as praxis. Taken as a whole, the three collections invite us to take for granted that literacy and pedagogy are political acts, and thus have reverberating consequences outside the classroom.

In an essay collected in *Politics of Writing Instruction,* Victor Villanueva Jr. employs Gramscian theories to draw a line in the sand that is instructive for my exploration in this chapter, which is that literacies are either hegemonic or critical. Hegemonic literacies are exemplified by E.D. Hirsch’s popular 1987 book *Cultural*

*Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know (*1987), which sought to reestablish a Modernist cultural order in the face of Postmodern critiques of grand narratives. The book became a best-seller, owing in no small part to the successful rhetorical gesture of its title, which set up a universalized exigence of crisis. As Faigley points out in *Fragments*, the literacy crisis that the corporate media constructs and Hirsch responds to is "symptomatic of an uneven reaction to postmodernity" (78). For Villanueva, Hirsch's book also clearly articulated a hegemony against which a counterhegemony could be mobilized. To "appreciate" counterhegemony, he writes, we must "know" the hegemony (251). However, the counterhegemony called critical literacy, which Villanueva problematizes with his concept of "American Freiristas," is rendered ineffectual in a university system that arises from capitalist interests. In other words, hegemonic literacies are far easier to "sell" in the marketplace of ideas than are critical literacies, especially considering the brief, 15-week timeframe within which most FYW classes are set (251). Importantly, hegemonic literacy are also less complex, and time-consuming to work through. They are more efficient. And so writing that serves the dominant discourse, rather than calls it into question, is mostly what gets taught.

Composition & Resistance, edited by Hurlbert and Blitz, attempted to shake things up by subverting the medium of the book, as the editors mix into the essays (indeed sometimes interrupting them) transcribed dialogue from several prominent scholars from that time, such as James Berlin, Marion Yee, J Elspeth Stuckey, and others. This move was part of a concerted effort by the editors to "resist composure," or to stop making sense in the same old ways, which they felt led to the same old problems in

composition and in the society writ large (similar to the connections Marcuse and Adorno see between techniques of control and standard grammar) Additionally, the dialogues could be read as a way of advancing the point that critical literacy shouldn't look like uncritical literacy. In other words, it should involve struggle, disagreement, tension, compromise, and so on -- rather than the banking-model approach to literacy that can arise from the situation in which a credentialed Author pours knowledge into an ignorant reader. Hurlbert and Blitz elaborate on this point in their introduction.

> If we can do anything as writing teachers and as writers, it should be to stop teaching students to underwrite the university, to stop demanding written material which can be easily *gathered* and *assessed*. We can teach writing as an event in which knowledge and form is preserved or resisted and changed. We can teach writing as the material out of which we not only (re)create ourselves and others, our understanding of culture, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, but also as the material with which we can resist these narratives when they do *not* accurately reflect our real lives (7).

These insights are more crucial in the neoliberal, LMS-dominated context of today than ever, in which not only are we continuing to demand literacy that can be "easily gathered and assessed," but we are teaching literacy through a medium designed for the express purpose of gathering and assessing literacy as data. In deploying our expertise to fix its usability, we might be doing little more than maintenance work on the Titanic.

Conclusion: Reading The Medium and Its Messages

In the journey through tensions of clarity and complexity, Writing Studies scholars should not bypass the medium itself as an object of critical inquiry. Postman gives a helpful heuristic for a critical understanding of mediums in *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (1985), where he argues that technologies are mediums which have uses prescribed by Dominant Discourses. Postman's analysis here resonates with critical literacy studies as it rejects the notion that a medium can enjoy a neutral effect on meaning, and thus it follows that our literacy work is not fully critical if it does not engage the paradigms of knowledge that transform technologies into mediums, and which embed ideologies into how they will be used by the public (i.e. its terms of use).

Recent strands of scholarship in composition have critically engaged the materiality of writing, and noted how all writing is inherently multimodal. These movements in the disciplinary conversation build off of, and almost uniformly reject, the social movement of composition of the 80s and 90s, which centered insights from critical literacy and critical pedagogy to explore writing as a product and shaper of social dynamics. The recent New Material turn in composition revolves around the central insight that humans are but one of an assemblage of agents who do writing, rightly contending that the Social Turn oversimplified that matter by assuming that humans do writing "in and on the world" (Alexander 10). Marilyn M. Cooper, in her book *The Animal Who Writes: A Posthumanist Composition* recognizes in an embrace of the New Material turn a need to also reject some major assumptions from the Social Turn:

> Writing is no longer conceived of as an epistemic or even socioepistemic practice of understanding the world but rather as a behavior of intra-acting in the world in which writers participate in their own and the world's emergence. (11)

Laura R. Micciche offers a similar perspective on the Social Turn, and adds that its central insights are not necessarily incongruent with those of New Materialism, but that "the latter pivots away from the individual-community binary and toward writing as a curatorial, distributed act" (494). The New Material focus on distributed agency makes sense in a hyper-mediated world, but I would like to build on Micciche's reading and add that some insights from the Social Turn are not only compatible with those gained from the New Material turn, but that they can help us maintain a critical eye on the power dynamics embedded into the technological tapestry we intra-act *with.* And so, while, it is fair to critique the Social Turn for its misplaced faith in human agency as a driving factor in literacy, we should also account for France and Fitts' (surely exemplars of the social turn) notion that "culture coauthors each text, rendering chimerical the claim that individuals freely choose meanings to encode in writing" or Berlin's (one of the most cited and, lately, critiqued figure of the Social Turn) idea of the transactionality of meaning-making in literacy. The knowledge created during Social Turn is helpful in our current moment because it gives us a hermeneutics for how to be attentive to what cultural forces, including non-human actants such as technologies, are doing to humans, how they are imbricated in power dynamics, and to expose ways in which they might serve as commissaries for agents of the ruling class.

The New Material turn recognizes in digital literacy a tension between either working with or against emergent digital technologies. Micciche offers the useful term "withness" in writing, which is, as summarized by Alexander, "an expanded notion of collaboration or partnership that revisions writing as a 'practice of coexistence' -- not just between people (a la the "social turn") but a practice that asks that we "imagine merging of various forms of matter -- objects, pets, sounds, tools, books, bodies, spaces, feelings, and so on -- in an activity not solely dependent on one's control but made possible by elements that codetermine writing's possibility" (11). Moreover, in a recent *College English* essay, Matthew Overstreet concludes his exploration of networked reading this way: "the underlying idea … is to work *with*, rather than *against*, the reading environment that now exists" (376, my emphasis). But we should continue to ask, what are the possibilities of literacy when a student, for example, collaborates with the nonhuman agent of Grammarly, as a "writing aid" that embeds a current-traditional understanding of writing into its software, and draws capital out of the student's conversion to the codes of the Dominant Discourse? Or when a writing class collaborates with an LMS such as Canvas, which embeds the banking model into its hidden pedagogy, and facilitates robotic standardization across sections? To me, the New Material turn helps us better recognize the material entanglements of our writing situations today, and the Social Turn can help us better attend to the political dimensions of these intra-actions.

Critical strands of scholarship in composition today make exciting and important contributions to our understanding of the dynamic tapestry of agency that exists in literacy practices today. Often, however, they overlook Dylan's question: Are we on the

Titanic? In other words, they often ignore the medium through which knowledge is created, which in the case of profit-driven digital learning platforms like Canvas can coopt critical literacy work and funnel it into neoliberalism's paradigms of knowledge. We joust in towers, snicker from below, and shout "which side are you on?" but the paradigms themselves go unexamined. The use of LMS in writing instruction today has become ambient to the point that students and teachers come to expect its presence, and its absence feels like a transgression. As discussed in Chapter Four, many teachers have reported that, even when it isn't overtly spoken by administrators, the use of LMS feels compulsory (Paris et al).

Neoliberal technologies embed a version of clarity into their software that limits critical engagement with the politics of knowledge. Grammarly, Google Docs, and Microsoft Word underline a phrase and alert us to "check for clarity and conciseness." Canvas composes literacy work into something that can be readily gathered, measured, and assessed. What does it mean to collaborate with these agential, pedagogical technologies? Might opaqueness, in these situations, set the context for a meaningful form of resistance? In other situations, clarity facilitates resistance. But, as Hurtado and Paccaerquia remind us, not all clarities are created equal. Clarity, as expressed through corporate educational technologies, follows a functional approach to literacy: it asks us to use writing to straighten out our thinking so that we can better fit into the way things are. This ideology is written into the software. It limits literacy's potential, and makes the work of critical literacy appear frivolous.

But critical literacy is not frivolous. It is vital to an education that seeks to more fully realize the potentials of a democratic society . But simply doing critical literacy *through* LMS is insufficient in keeping this vital epistemology alive. Instead, teacher-scholars and students need to also do critical literacy *to* LMS. We should work with students to interrogate the emergent paradigms and mediums of knowledge in order to fulfill the human capacity for critical reflection plus action -- what Freire called praxis. A prominent mission for a kairotic version of critical literacy can be to help us see which direction the neoliberal paradigms and mediums are steering us, and to wrest hold of the wheel -- if not on the larger gears of power, then at least in our writing classes -- and to turn away from the iceberg.

CONCLUSION: PEDAGOGIES TO COME

The main goals of this dissertation have been to excavate the terms of use of educational technologies, and to place the LMS turn of composition within the historical and ongoing tensions between critical literacy and neoliberalism. In using "the terms of use" in the title of this dissertation, I wanted to access and keep active multiple meanings of the phrase. When coming up with the title, I was inspired by Larry McMurtry's 1975 novel *Terms of Endearment,* in which McMurtry summoned a common titular phrase that invokes pet names for those you love, while also calling attention to that phrase's other meaning, which is the sometimes-tragic conditions of loving someone -- namely, that it hurts to lose them. "Terms of use" is a similarly ubiquitous phrase that refers to the conditions we must accept when using a product – that river of legalese that most people skip over to thoughtlessly check the box that says, "I accept." I have argued that, in the case of LMS, the conditions that we are required to accept are supplied by neoliberalism: surveillance, competition, efficiency, and automated management. To conclude the dissertation, I want to also underscore the second meaning of "terms." Critical literacy and neoliberalism are the terms that should inform our future use of LMS. Rather than seeing LMS as a disinterested, neutral delivery system that gets out of the way of education and is removed from these tensions, we should see the LMS as an interested, pedagogical medium that often gets in the way, teaches its own lessons through its hidden curriculum, and redirects us away from where we want to go.

As a pedagogical practice, critical literacy can help students and teachers contextualize the work they do in their classes -- even the seemingly mundane or perfunctory tasks -- within an ongoing struggle to shape our understanding of and participation in the world. Moreover, approaching these tasks via critical literacy can center continually marginalized voices by inviting privileged students to engage the narratives of innocence that shape inequitable education, including the perceived neutrality of educational technologies like LMS. Learning Management Systems are destabilizing forces in education, which might seem like stabilizing forces, as they present learning as a linear set of modules, but they unsettle education by taking it out of an embodied context and placing it into a kind of digital maze for students and teachers to navigate, often seemingly removed from what is happening around them, and from each other. This decontextualization can perpetuate the perceived neutrality of neoliberal education, as it validates the perception that education is a series of tasks to be completed, unrelated to systemic inequities that inform those tasks and their management. Since the pandemic, I have noticed that more and more teaching meetings I attend feature discussions centered on how to do something better on Canvas (the LMS used at nearly every institution for which I have taught), or about new tools on Canvas that we are encouraged to enact in curricula. And -- especially in asynchronous online courses, but also in hybrid and in person courses -- more and more work by students and teachers focuses on attending to a class's LMS: making sure its hyperlinks, modules, and to-do lists are in order, demonstrating how to navigate its labyrinthian interfaces, or interacting with each other using the LMS. These focuses distract education from its vital

capacity to facilitate critical praxis. And so to more fully enact critical education, I want to propose that writing classes focus not just on how to better use the LMS, or to make it more usable, but to train critical attention on how it uses us. I propose that teachers work with students to critically engage with these systems which announce their purpose in a stunningly candid way: they *manage* learning.

Throughout the different stages of the pandemic, students have expressed complex and dynamic reactions to remote learning and the attendant prominence of LMS in their education. For example, a recent article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* featured interviews with several students who reported their desire that hybrid learning become permanent, as they feel it makes education more accessible and flexible to a variety of student needs (Lu, 2022). At my own institution, an internal focus-group study of students' feelings about Canvas, conducted by the Information Technology department, concluded that students "stated a preference for having a Canvas site for their courses as compared to no Canvas site at all" and that students "do not want to lose these technologies moving forward" ("Fall 2021 …"). Complicating these depictions, students in my own classes have repeatedly noted their frustration with the ways Canvas intrudes upon their lives. How its to-do lists feel ever-present, how they feel surveilled, and how their engagement with a course has been measured by the amount of time they've logged on a Canvas page (which, as I discussed in Chapter Five, compels some students to always leave a Canvas tab open). My study in this dissertation indicates that the LMS does extend access to a certain version of education, and in exchange we give it more access to students' lives -- as well as to their writing, which becomes data, the raw

material through which private LMS companies justify their business model. In supporting this business model, we support the private-public partnerships, which Newfield dubbed "The Great Mistake."

As students are not a homogenous group, and as education is an embodied, social, political, and situationally contingent process -- ever-emergent and not static and finished -- I see a need to facilitate opportunities for students to critically reflect on the changing mediums of their education through writing. This approach relies on the belief that students are capable and eager to critically reflect on the narratives they receive about their own education – how they are presented to them, what they expect of them, and how they can be transformed.

The Bounds of Theory and Practice

Another condition of the field of composition comes from the inherent connection between theory and practice, particularly as it relates to pedagogical practice such as classroom activities. To me, this connection has always represented both the best and the worst aspects of the discipline. In a negative sense, the required focus on pedagogical practice can remove critical theory from the state of perpetual critique that figures like Foucault and those from the Frankfurt School envisioned, and it can compel good theory toward reductive classroom techniques -- as though the complex problems we face today can be solved through a single activity, or even in the course of a 15-week semester. In a neoliberal age, Riedner and Mahoney rightfully ask if we can get to a place where we can talk about critical pedagogy without reducing it to "teaching techniques" (11), and I sometimes wonder if we can get to that place as well, especially when at professional

conferences, for example, an audience tends to desire readymade solutions to clean up complex and messy critiques.

On the other hand, the classroom (in its many forms) can also serve as a saving grace for critical theory. By providing a recurring outlet, the classroom can rescue scholars, teachers, and students from the despair that might result from engaging in critical theory, reckoning with society's problems, and confronting the too-slow mechanisms of making meaningful change. For those of us in the teaching profession, the show goes on in the writing classroom. It meets in room 119 in So-And-So Hall on Tuesday and Thursday mornings, as well as remotely over Zoom and LMS. There, students make breakthroughs, and they struggle. They write strong paragraphs, and not-so-strong paragraphs. They make up excuses to leave class early, and they form lasting bonds with each other. They work together, hold one another accountable, and gain new perspectives on the world. Teachers get frustrated with students and with the very nature of their typically very frustrating work. They complain to each other in the hallways. They lose sleep. They walk into class with a lesson plan, and the screen projector is kaput, so they adjust on the fly. And at times they leave class after an engrossing discussion on a Tuesday morning, or after reading a student stick the landing on their final project, and their feet do not touch the ground. They go forth into the world, sometimes, feeling truly good.

Too often, dominant narratives in education exhort teachers to distrust ourselves, each other, and we what we know to be joyful and effective pedagogy, and to instead place our trust in byzantine, contradictory systems that merge curricula with business

plans, public institutions with private interests, reflection with box-checking, demands for social justice with profit-driven rhetoric, and inequity with inevitability -- all while presenting themselves as neutral or disinterested. And so while I recognize that the complex problems that we face today cannot be solved or adequately addressed in a single activity or assignment, or even in the course of a fifteen-week semester, I want to follow the spirit of teacher-scholar research for which I advocate in Chapter Two and bring the conclusion of this dissertation into the classroom, as it were. I will share a short pedagogical activity that I have developed based on my research in this dissertation. It will not on its own cast neoliberalism from campuses, or assuage the complex concerns I have raised in the previous chapters. However, it does welcome students into a critical disposition toward (to invoke Judith Goleman's work) the theories that are working them, and it calls the mediums of their education to the fore instead of allowing them to fade like elevator music to the background. It brings students toward a place where they can critique what is happening, and imagine alternatives.

A Pedagogical Activity

The activity centers around Neil Postman's "Seven Questions for New Technologies," from an under-discussed lecture he made on the campus of College of DuPage in 1997. The teacher projects these questions onto the screen (or writes them on the board), and then breaks students into small groups. In these groups, students will discuss the seven questions, and apply them to an educational technology that features in their lives. Today students will likely choose either Zoom, their LMS, or Chat GPT, but

who knows which emergent technologies will be in need of critique tomorrow? Postman's seven questions are as follows:

1. What is the problem to which this technology is the solution?
2. Whose problem is it?
3. Which people and what institutions might be most seriously harmed by a technological solution?
4. What new problems might be created because we have solved this problem?
5. What sort of people and institutions might acquire special economic and political power because of this technological change?
6. What changes in language are being enforced by new technologies, and what is being gained and lost by such changes?
7. What alternative (and unintended) uses might be made of this technology?

This activity can be scaffolded by prior reading of Keith Gilyard and Adam J. Banks's chapter on technology from *On African American Rhetoric* (2018), as well as excerpts from Sofiya Noble's *Algorithms of Oppression* (2018) and Postman's *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (1985). After students discuss the above questions in small groups, they complete a short writing assignment reflecting on central insights gleaned from the exercise. The hermeneutics supplied by Postman's questions can help us all to temporarily stabilize a destabilized world by exposing contradictions and power dynamics latent in our interactions with emergent technologies. The hermeneutics also helps students reject the reductive impulse to either accept technologies as they are or disregard them, and rather to mobilize their ideas toward a deeper understanding of how

we can exert critical thought to transform the paradigms under which technologies are created and naturalized.

In a subsequent class, once students have produced their short reflections, they share their work with the class, and a large-group discussion commences around the strengths and limitations of both the educational medium under examination, and of the method of examination itself. As a class, new directions of research based on Postman's questions and the class's insights are brainstormed, and catalogued on the board by the teacher. Then, students return to their small groups, and from this catalogue of new directions, they compose a research question that they then pursue collaboratively.

Limitations of This Study and Recommendations for Future Research

Throughout this dissertation, I have attempted to underscore my positionality as a researcher. Rather than adopt an omniscient or detached disposition toward my subject, I wanted to portray how I am studying my subject from the ground floor. Put another way, I have not studied the neoliberal university from the outside; I have studied it from the inside. In the teacher-scholar tradition, I studied teaching while I was teaching, and I taught while I was studying teaching. My research and teaching, in other words, were innately tied to one another. In Chapter Two, I extolled the many benefits of this approach, but the approach also has many limitations that are important to acknowledge. Like any method, mine has taken a snapshot of one possible version of the truth, and, as Kenneth Burke wrote, any way of seeing is simultaneously a way of not seeing (70). Here

I will list what I see as some of the main limitations of my study, as well as recommendations for future research:

1. *My positionality itself*. I am an able-bodied, white man in his early 30s, who teaches and studies at a large, predominantly white public institution. This positionality greatly limits my vantage on the complex processes of education. Critical study of LMS will benefit from more teacher-scholar research that amplifies voices and experiences from marginalized social groups and that is contextualized in different institutions. For example, in Erica M. Stone and Sarah E. Austin's study of online education at an open-enrollment, two-year public institution from the perspective of an adjunct instructor and a course designer, "Writing as Commodity: How Neoliberalism Renders the Postsecondary Online Writing Classroom Transactional and Ways Faculty Can Regain Agency" (2020), the authors provide another perspective on how neoliberal design can limit agency in online classrooms. More work in this vein is needed.
2. *Generalizability.* Classroom case-studies, autoethnography, rhetorical analysis, and content analysis are the methods that constitute this study. These methods are not readily generalizable, as they provide localized data that is specific to the context and the samples under study, and so they cannot be easily extrapolated to other settings or populations. However, these research methods do provide valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities of this moment by uncovering complex

dynamics, and by highlighting the embodied experiences of participants in higher education. While the findings may not be generalizable, they can inform future research and contribute to a deeper understanding of the relationship between higher education and digital technologies. For example, future researchers might conduct surveys and interviews with students, teachers, and administrators about their perspectives on LMSwhile placing this inquiry in the context of the tensions between critical literacy and neoliberalism that this dissertation has emphasized.

3. *Sample Size.* In Chapter Three, I tried to be clear that the case studies under examination were not exhaustive. I did not select the cases based on merit -- as in the practice of choosing the best responses in student evaluations to portray your teaching -- but rather because I found them to be representative of what the class was experiencing while using Canvas as our classroom. Similarly, in Chapters Four and Five, I selected objects that represented the rhetorical and pedagogical constellation of neoliberalism that I noticed, felt, and lived in as a teacher-scholar. Further research can build on and productively complicate my concept of "terms of usability" by crystallizing it with usability tests of Canvas conducted by students and teachers.

Coda: Pedagogies to Come

The kairotic question around which I framed my exploration of our discipline -- what are we doing now? -- will be crucial to ask as our work becomes further entrenched

in automated management. Neoliberalism attunes our interactions with educational technologies around hegemonic ideals of efficiency, competition, and privatization. These are the terms of use. But, as I've written in this conclusion, terms have more than one meaning: they point to our limits and to our possibilities to create new terms, a new glossary of critical literacy that contends with the challenges of the emergent moment. Structure and agency. Hegemonic designs which constrain and direct, but cannot eradicate, our agency as teachers, students, writers, and citizens. This tension is what writing instruction has been all about, and will be all about. And so while the LMS turn provides many challenges to our field, it also provides many opportunities for critical engagement, which we must harness. Does it overstate the matter to say that the future of democratic education depends on it?

Works Cited

Adorno, Theodor W. *Negative Dialectics.* Seabury Press, 1973.

Ahmed, Sara. *What's the Use?: On the Uses of Use*. Duke University Press, 2019.

--. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. 2nd ed.., Edinburgh University Press, 2014.

Alexander, Jonathan. "Materiality, Queerness, and a Theory of Desire for Writing Studies." *College English,* vol. 83, no. 1, 2020, pp. 7–41.

Althusser, Louis. "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses." Trans. Ben Brewster. *Critical Theory since 1965.* Ed. Hazard Adams and Leroy Searle. Tallahassee: UP of Florida and Florida State UP, 239-50.

Arato, Andrew and Eike Gebhardt, editors. *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader.* Blackwell, 1978.

Aristotle, and George A. Kennedy. *On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991. Print.

Banks, Adam J. "Oakland, the Word, and the Divide: How We All Missed the Moment." *Cross-Talk in Comp Theory:* A Reader. Edited by Victor Villanueva and Kristin L Arola. NCTE, 2011, pp. 699-716.

Berlin, James A. *Rhetoric and Reality.* Southern Illinois University Press, 1987.

-----. "Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class." *College English,* vol. 50, no. 5, 1988, pp. 477–494.

-----. "Revisionary History: The Dialectical Method." *PRE/TEXT* 8.1-2 (1987): 47-61.

-----. "Composition and Cultural Studies." *Composition & Resistance.* Edited by Hurblert and Blitz, Boynton/Cook, 1991, pp. 47-55.

Berthoff, Ann. "The Teacher as Researcher." *Reclaiming the classroom: Teacher research as an agency for change*, edited by D. Goswami & P. Stillman, Boynton/Cook, 1987.

Bitzer, Lloyd. "The Rhetorical Situation." *Contemporary Rhetorical Theory: A Reader (Second Edition)*, Edited by Porrovecchio and Condit. The Guilford Press, 2016, pp. 159-166.

Blakely, Erin and David Hemphill. *Opening Third Spaces for Research in Education: Challenging the Limits of Technocratic Methods*. Myers Education Press, 2021.

"Boise State University | Instructure Canvas." Instructure, 2023, https://www.instructure.com/canvas/resources/case-studies/boise-state-university.

Boyle, Casey. “Writing and Rhetoric and/as Posthuman Practice.” *College English,* vol. 78, no. 6, 2016, pp. 532–554.

Brandt, Deborah. *Literacy in American Lives*. Cambridge University Press, 2001.

-----. “Sponsors of Literacy.” *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 49, no. 2, 1998, pp. 165–185.

Brown, Wendy. *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution.* Zone Books, 2015.

Bruch, Patrick, and Thomas Reynolds. “Critical Literacy and Basic Writing Textbooks: Teaching toward a More Just Literacy.” *Basic Writing e-Journal*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2000.

Bullock, et al. *The Politics of Writing Instruction : Postsecondary.* Boynton/Cook, 1991.

Burke, Kenneth. *Permanence and Change : an Anatomy of Purpose*. 3rd ed., with a new afterword.., University of California Press, 1984.

Carillo, Ellen C. *The Hidden Inequities in Labor-Based Contract Grading*. Utah State University Press, 2021.

Cooper, Marilyn M. *The Animal Who Writes: A Posthumanist Composition*. University of Pittsburgh Press, 2019.

Dewey, John. *Democracy and Education : an Introduction to the Philosophy of Education.*The Free Press, 1966.

Donehower, Kim., Eileen E. Schell, and Charlotte Hogg. *Rural Literacies.* Studies in Writing & Rhetoric. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2007.

Duin, Ann Hill, and Jason Tham. “The Current State of Analytics: Implications for Learning Management System (LMS) Use in Writing Pedagogy.” *Computers and Composition*, vol. 55, 2020, p. 102544, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compcom.2020.102544.

Edbauer, Jenny. “Unframing Models of Public Distribution: From Rhetorical Situation to Rhetorical Ecologies.” *Contemporary Rhetorical Theory: A Reader (Second Edition)*, Edited by Porrovecchio and Condit. The Guilford Press, 2016, pp. 182-194.

Ellwanger, Adam. “Reinventing Doxa: Public Opinion Polling as Deliberative Discourse.” *Argumentation and Advocacy*, vol. 53, no. 3, 2017, pp. 181–198.

“Fall 2021 Student Focus Group Insights.” University of Minnesota Information Technology, Fall 2021, https://it.umn.edu/services-technologies/resources/fall-2021-student-focus-group-insights

Faigley, Lester. *Fragments of Rationality: Postmodernity and the Subject of Composition*. University of Pittsburgh Press, 1992.

----. “Literacy after the Revolution.” *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 48, no. 1, 1997, pp. 30–43.

Fishman, Stephen M., and Lucille Parkinson McCarthy. *Unplayed Tapes : a Personal History of Collaborative Teacher Research.* National Council of Teachers of English ; Teachers College Press, 2000.

Fitts, Karen, and Alan W. France. *Left Margins: Cultural Studies and Composition Pedagogy*. State University of New York Press, 1995.

Fox, Catherine. “The Race to Truth: Disarticulating Critical Thinking from Whiteliness.” *Pedagogy: Critical Approaches to Teaching Literature, Language, Composition, and Culture*, vol. 2, no. 2, 2002, pp. 197–212.

Frazer, Nancy. “From Progressive Neoliberalism to Trump--And Beyond.” *American Affairs*, volume 1, no. 4, 2017, pp. 46-64.

Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New rev. 20th-Anniversary ed., Continuum, 1993.

Fulkerson, Richard. “The Epistemic Paradoxes of ‘Lore’: From *The Making of Knowledge in Composition* to the Present (Almost).” *The Changing of Knowledge in Composition: Contemporary Perspectives*, edited by Massey et al. Utah State University Press, 2011, 47-62.

Gilyard, Keith, and Adam J. Banks. *On African-American Rhetoric.* Routledge, 2018.

Giroux, Henry. *Against the Terror of Neoliberalism: Cultural Politics and the Promise of Democracy.* Routledge, 2008.

--. *Schooling and the Struggle for Public Life: Democracy's Promise and Education's Challenge.* University of Minnesota Press 1988.

--. "Language, Difference, and Curriculum Theory: Beyond the Politics of Clarity." *Theory into Practice*, vol. 31, no. 3, Taylor & Francis Group, 1992, pp. 219–27, https://doi.org/10.1080/00405849209543546.

Goodwin, Phillip, Katrina Miller, and Catherine Chaput. "Accountable to Whom? The Rhetorical Circulation of Neoliberal Discourse and Its Ambient Effects on Higher Education." *Rhetoric In Neoliberalism*, Edited by Kim Hong Nguyen, Palgrave/Macmillan, 2017, pp. 15-38.

Goleman, Judith. *Working Theory: Critical Composition Studies for Students and Teachers.* Bergin & Garvey, 1995.

Graff, Harvey J. *The Literacy Myth : Literacy and Social Structure in the Nineteenth-century City.* Studies in Social Discontinuity. New York: Academic Press, 1979.

Hanover Research. "Hanover Research - Strategic Market Research, Consumer Insights, & Analytics." *Hanover Research*, 2021, https://tinyurl.com/2s37su5r

Hairston, Maxine. "Diversity, Ideology, and Teaching Writing." College Composition and Communication, vol. 43, no. 2, National Council of Teachers of English, 1992, pp. 179–93, https://doi.org/10.2307/357563.

Harvey, David. 2005. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism.* Oxford University Press.

Haskins, Ekaterina V. "Endoxa, Epistemological Optimism, and Aristotle's Rhetorical Project." *Philosophy & Rhetoric*, vol. 37, no. 1, 2004, pp. 1–20.

Harris, Joseph. *A Teaching Subject Composition Since 1966.* New ed.., Utah State University Press, 2012.

Hawhee, Debra and Christa J. Olson. "Pan-Historiography: The Challenges of Writing Across Time and Space." *Theorizing Histories of Rhetoric*. Edited by Michelle Ballif. Southern Illinois University Press. 2013.

Horner, Bruce. "(In Lieu of) an Afterword." *Bridging the Multimodal Gap: from Theory to Practice.* Edited by Santosh Khadka and and J. C. Lee. Utah State University Press, 2019.

-----. "Rewriting Composition: Moving beyond a Discourse of Need." *College English*, vol. 77, no. 5, 2015, pp. 450–479.

Hurlbert, Mark and Michael Blitz. *Composition & Resistance.* Boynton/Cook, 1991.

Hurtado, Aída, and Cynthia M. Paccacerqua. “Not All Clarities Are Created Equal: The Politics of "Opaqueness".” *Hypatia*, vol. 30, no. 3, Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2015, pp. 620–27, https://doi.org/10.1111/hypa.12164.

Inoue, Asao. “CCCC Chair's Address: How Do We Language So People Stop Killing Each Other, Or What Do We Do About White Language Supremacy.” *Conference on College Composition and Communication*. Pittsburgh, 2019.

-----. “Classroom Writing Assessment as an Antiracist Practice.” *Pedagogy : Critical Approaches to Teaching Literature, Language, Culture, and Composition*, vol. 19, no. 3, 2019, pp. 373–404, https://doi.org/10.1215/15314200-7615366.

"Instructure Releases Annual State of Teaching and Learning in K-12 Research that Explores New Normal in Education in U.S. Schools." Associated Press, 27 June 2022, https://tinyurl.com/75ww793m

Keller, Michael. “*A Poem Containing History: Textual Studies in The Cantos* (review).” *Modernism/modernity* (Baltimore, Md.), vol. 4, no. 3, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997, pp. 169–70, https://doi.org/10.1353/mod.1997.0046

Kessler, Molly Margaret. “The Ostomy Multiple: Toward a Theory of Rhetorical Enactments.” *Rhetoric of Health & Medicine*, vol. 3, no. 3, 2020, pp. 293–319, https://doi.org/10.5744/rhm.2020.1016.

Kinkead, Joyce. “Undergraduate Research as Makers of Knowledge in Composition in the Writing Studies Major.” *The Changing of Knowledge in Composition: Contemporary Perspectives*, edited by Massey et al. Utah State University Press, 2011, 137-160.

Lankshear, Colin, and Peter McLaren. *Critical Literacy: Politics, Praxis, and the Postmodern*. State University of New York Press, 1993.

Lankshear, Colin, and Michele Knobel. *Handbook for Teacher Research: From Design to Implementation*. Maidenhead: Open University, 2004.

Long, Charles H. "Primitive/Civilized: The Locus of a Problem." *History of Religions* 20, no. 1/2 (1980): 43-61.

Lu, Adrienne. “Some Colleges Are Ending Hybrid Learning. Students Are Pushing Back.” *The Chronicle of Higher Education.* 11 April 2022.

Lu, Min-Zhan. “An Essay on the Work of Composition: Composing English against the Order of Fast Capitalism.” *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 56, no. 1, 2004, pp. 16–50.

Lyotard, Jean-François. *The Postmodern Condition : a Report on Knowledge*. University of Minnesota Press, 1984.

Marback, Richard. "Embracing Wicked Problems: The Turn to Design in Composition Studies." *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 61, no. 2, 2009, pp. W397–W419.

Massey, Lance, et al. *The Changing of Knowledge in Composition: Contemporary Perspectives.* Utah State University Press, 2011.

Marcuse, Herbert. "Some Social Implications of Modern Technology." *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*. Edited by Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt. Blackwell, 1978, pp. 138-162.

McKerrow, Raymie E. "Critical Rhetoric: Theory and Praxis." *Communication Monographs*, vol. 56, no. 2, 1989, pp. 91–111, https://doi.org/10.1080/03637758909390253.

Metcalf, Stephen. "Neoliberalism: the idea the swallowed the world." The Guardian. August, 2017. Retrieved from www.theguardian.com.

Miller, Carolyn R. "Genre as Social Action." *The Quarterly Journal of Speech,* vol. 70, no. 2, 1984, pp. 151–67, https://doi.org/10.1080/00335638409383686.

Miller, Susan. "The Feminization of Composition." *The Politics of Writing Instruction: Postsecondary*, edited by Bullock et al, Boynton/Cook, 1991, pp. 39-54.

Mirhady, D., & Too, Y. (2000). *Isocrates I* (1st ed., Oratory of classical Greece ; v. 4). Austin: University of Texas Press.

Molloy, Cathryn, et al. "A Dialogue on Possibilities for Embodied Methodologies in the Rhetoric of Health & Medicine." *Rhetoric of Health & Medicine*, vol. 1, no. 3-4, 2018, pp. 349–71, https://doi.org/10.5744/rhm.2018.1017.

Moss, Beverly J. *A Community Text Arises: A Literate Text and a Literacy Tradition in African-American Churches.* Language & Social Processes. Cresskill, N.J.: Hampton Press, 2003.

New London Group, The. "A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies: Designing Social Futures." *Harvard Educational Review*, vol. 66, no. 1, 1996, p. 60.

Newfield, Christopher. *The Great Mistake : How We Wrecked Public Universities and How We Can Fix Them.* Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016.

Nguyen, Kim Hong. *Rhetoric in Neoliberalism*. Palgrave/Macmillan, 2017.

Nichols, James H. “Introduction.” *Gorgias*, trans. by James H. Nichols. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998. Print.

Nickoson, Lee and Mary P. Sheridan. *Writing Studies Research in Practice : Methods and Methodologies.* Southern Illinois University Press, 2012.

Nielsen, Jakob, and Robert Molich. "Heuristic Evaluation of User Interfaces." *Proceedings of the SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems* - CHI '90, Association for Computing Machinery, 1990, pp. 249-256, doi: 10.1145/97243.97281.

Noble, Safiya Umoja. *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism*. New York University Press, 2018.

North, Stephen M. *The Making of Knowledge in Composition: Portrait of an Emerging Field*. Boynton/Cook Publishers, 1987.

Ohmann, Richard. *English in America: a Radical View of the Profession*, with a New Introduction. 1st Wesleyan University Press ed., Wesleyan University Press; University Press of New England, 1996.

----. “Literacy, Technology, and Monopoly Capital.” *Cross-Talk in Comp Theory: A Reader*. Edited by Victor Villanueva and Kristin L Arola. NCTE, 2011, pp. 699-716.

Oppenheimer, Todd. *The Flickering Mind: Saving Education from the False Promise of Technology*. Random House, 2003.

Palmeri, Jason. *Remixing Composition: A History of Multimodal Writing Pedagogy*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2012.

Paris, Britt, et al. “Platforms like Canvas Play Fast and Loose with Students' Data.” *The Nation*, 22 Apr. 2021, https://www.thenation.com/article/society/canvas-surveillance/.

Pernot, Laurent. *Rhetoric in Antiquity*. Catholic University of America Press, 2005.

Plato. *Gorgias*, trans. by James H. Nichols. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998. Print.

Porrovecchio, Mark J. and Celeste Michelle Condit. *Contemporary Rhetorical Theory: A Reader (Second Edition)*. The Guilford Press, 2016.

Postman, Neil. *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business.* Methuen, 1985.

----. *Conscientious Objections: Stirring Up Trouble About Language, Technology, and Education*. Vintage, 1988.

----. *Technopoly: the Surrender of Culture to Technology.* Knopf, 1992.

----. "The Surrender of Culture to Technology." College of Dupage Arts Center, 11 Mar. 1997. Glen Ellyn, Ill. Lecture.

Prendergast, Catherine. *Buying into English: Language and Investment in the New Capitalist World.* University of Pittsburgh Press, 2008.

Riedner, Rachel, and Kevin. Mahoney. *Democracies to Come : Rhetorical Action, Neoliberalism, and Communities of Resistance.* Lexington Books, 2008.

Ray, Ruth E. "Composition from the Teacher Research Point of View. *Methods and Methodology in Composition Research.* Ed. Gesa E. Kirsch and Patricia A. Sullivan. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1992, pp. 172-89.

Saldaña, Johnny. *Fundamentals of Qualitative Research.* Oxford University Press, 2011.

Salmon, Felix. "America's Continued Move Toward Socialism." *Axios,* 25 June 2021, https://www.axios.com/2021/06/25/americas-continued-move-toward-socialism.

Scott, Tony, and Nancy Welch. *Composition in the Age of Austerity.* Logan: Utah State University Press, 2016.

Segal, Judy Z. *Health and the Rhetoric of Medicine.* Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 2005. Print.

Selfe, Cynthia L. "Technology and Literacy: A Story about the Perils of Not Paying Attention." *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 50, no. 3, 1999, pp. 411–436.

Semrush. "The Most Visited Websites in 2021." Semrush Blog, Semrush, 30 March 2021, https://www.semrush.com/blog/most-visited-websites/.

Shipka, Jody. *Toward a Composition Made Whole*. University of Pittsburgh Press, 2011.

Siemens, George, Maarten de Laat, Maarten, Shane Dawson, and Caroline Haythornthwaites. "Learning Analytics: The Emergence of a Discipline" *The American Behavioral Scientist*, vol. 57, no. 10, 2013, pp. 1380–400, https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764213498851.

Sirc, Geoffrey. *English Composition As A Happening.* Utah State University Press, 2002.

----. "Resisting Entropy." *College Composition and Communication*. Vol. 63, no. 3, 2012, pp. 507–519.

----. "Serial Composition." *Rhetorics and Technologies: New Directions in Writing and Communication*, edited by Stuart A. Selber, University of South Carolina Press, 2010, pp. 56-73.

Shor, Ira. *When Students Have Power: Negotiating Authority in a Critical Pedagogy*. The University of Chicago Press, 1996.

----. "What is Critical Literacy?" *Journal of Pedagogy, Pluralism, and Practice*, vol. 1, no. 4, 1999.

---- and Paolo Freire. *A Pedagogy for Liberation: Dialogues on Transforming Education*. Bergin & Garvey, 1987.

Skinnell, Ryan. *Conceding Composition: a Crooked History of Composition's Institutional Fortunes.* Utah State University Press, 2016.

Stone, Alison. "The Politics of Clarity." *Hypatia*, vol. 30, no. 3, Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2015, pp. 613–19, https://doi.org/10.1111/hypa.12143.

Stone, Erica M. and Sarah E. Austin. "Writing as Commodity: How Neoliberalism Renders the Postsecondary Online Writing Classroom Transactional and Ways Faculty Can Regain Agency." *Basic Writing e-Journal*, vol. 16, no. 1, 2020.

Straub, Richard. *A Sourcebook for Responding to Student Writing.* Hampton Press, 1999.

Street, Brian V. *Literacy in Theory and Practice*. Cambridge Studies in Oral and Literate Culture; 9. Cambridge [Cambridgeshire] ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985.

Stuckey, J. Elspeth. *The Violence of Literacy.* Boynton/Cook Publishers, 1991.

Vatz, Richard E. "The Myth of the Rhetorical Situation." *Contemporary Rhetorical Theory: A Reader (Second Edition)*, Edited by Porrovecchio and Condit. The Guilford Press, 2016, pp. 166-170.

Villanueva Jr., Victor. "Considerations for American Freiristas." *The Politics of Writing Instruction: Postsecondary*, edited by Bullock et al, Boynton/Cook, 1991, pp. 247-262.

Voorhees, Gerald. "Computational Culture and the New Platonism in Neoliberal Rhetoric." *Rhetorical In Neoliberalism*, Edited by Kim Hong Nguyen, Palgrave/Macmillan, 2017, pp. 189-207.

Wald, Elijah. *Dylan Goes Electric! : Newport, Seeger, Dylan, and the Night That Split the Sixties.* First ed., Dey St., an Imprint of William Morrow, 2015.

Weis, Lois, and Michelle Fine. *Working Method: Research and Social Justice*. Routledge, 2004.

Welch, Nancy & Scott, Tony. *Composition in the Age of Austerity.* Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2016.

White, Edward M. "The Significance of North's *The Making of Knowledge in Composition* for Graduate Education." *The Changing of Knowledge in Composition: Contemporary Perspectives*, edited by Massey et al. Utah State University Press, 2011, 17-27.

Williams, Joseph M. "The Phenomenology of Error." *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 32, no. 2, 1981, pp. 152–68, https://doi.org/10.2307/356689.

Young, Vershawn Ashanti. "Should Writers Use They Own English?" *Iowa Journal of Cultural Studies*, vol. 12, no. 1, 2010, pp. 110-118.

APPENDIX A

INFORMATION SHEET FOR RESEARCH

"Making Knowledge Through Online Learning During a Global Pandemic"

You are invited to be in a research project that studies the challenges and rewards of conducting teaching and learning using digital learning management platforms during the pandemic. You were selected as a possible participant because you were a member of WRIT 1301 taught by Mark Brenden in the Spring of 2021, and were an active participant in the class. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by: Mark Brenden (advised by Dr. Patrick Bruch and Dr. Thomas Reynolds)

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

• Agree to allow the writing you produced and submitted to our Canvas classroom to be made available for quotation, summary, and analysis by Mark Brenden. o Please note that all writing quoted, summarized, and analyzed will be anonymized to protect your identity, and that I am only retroactively studying the work we produced in this class, and did not preemptively design the curriculum of this class to favor this study in any way.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only researchers will have access to the records. All reference to identity will be anonymized.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University of Minnesota or your standing in this class. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher(s) conducting this study is (are): Mark Brenden

You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact them at brend053@umn.edu

Please mark one of these two boxes with an X, checkmark, or initials

__ I consent to being a participant in this study as described in this document.

__ I *do not* consent to being a participant in this study as described in this document.

Your name:

Date signed: