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## Interfacing Cultural Rhetorics: A History and a Call

*This essay responds to recent exigencies that ask scholars to honor histories of cultural rhetorics, engage in responsible and responsive cultural rhetorics conversations, and generate productive openings for future inquiry and practice. First, the authors open by paying homage to scholarship and programs that have made cultural rhetorics a disciplinary home. Next, they consider the varied ways in which “culture” and “rhetoric” interface in cultural rhetorics scholarship. The authors provide case studies of how cultural rhetorics inquiry shapes their scholarship across areas of rhetoric, composition, and technical communication. Finally, they close by discussing the ethics of doing cultural rhetorics work.*

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This essay emerges amidst recent efforts to advance cultural rhetorics scholarship in rhetoric and composition.<sup>1</sup> Evidence of this includes a growing number of scholars identifying as cultural rhetoricians; cultural rhetorics departments and programs, requirements, and courses; and academic position descriptions that list cultural rhetorics as a desired area of expertise. Moreover, the biennial Cultural Rhetorics Conference hosted at Michigan State University in 2014 (inaugural) and 2016, as well as *Enculturation's* 2016 special issue on cultural rhetorics, have made space for supporting cultural rhetorics conversations.<sup>2</sup> We intend to contribute to these cultural rhetorical performances by deeply engaging with the terms of cultural rhetorics and more fully accounting for the rich history of cultural rhetorics inquiry as it has materialized across multiple places and spaces with intersecting and divergent agendas. Because we believe in the power of a “rhetorical oriented cultural studies [to describe and explain] past and present configurations of rhetorical practices as they affect each other and as they extend and manipulate the social practices, political structures, and material circumstances in which they are embedded in particular historical moments,” we work to historicize those configurations and consider their affordances within our own disciplinary and cultural contexts (Mailloux, *Reception Histories* 55). More pointedly, we follow Terese Guinsatao Monberg’s advice to “[recursively] move *within* [our] own borders or communities, [and] listen for the deeper textures present in the place(s) [we] call ‘home’” (22).

Rhetorical scholarship that sought to define cultural rhetorics surfaced around 1990, and rhetoric and composition curricula explicitly informed by, and engaging with, cultural rhetorics theories, methodologies, practices, and pedagogies developed soon after.<sup>3</sup> Early uses of the term “cultural rhetorics” include: (1) A 1987 essay by W. Ross Winterowd titled “Literacy, Linguistics, and Rhetoric,” in which he uses the term to talk about racialized (black/white) epistemologies; (2) Syracuse University’s 1996 proposal for a PhD in Composition and Cultural Rhetoric, which suggests an intentionally open interpretation of cultural rhetorics that “invites interpretation and argument about its meanings and the relationships it evokes” while maintaining a programmatic emphasis on studying rhetoric and composition from an Americanist perspective, and with a focus on situated practice, and cultural and historical specificity; (3) John Alberti’s 1997 “Teaching the Rhetoric of Race: A Rhetorical Approach to Multicultural Pedagogy” essay in which he argues for a “cultural rhetorics” pedagogy as a way of engaging issues of race, ethnicity, and racial oppression in educational contexts (203); (4) Raymie McKerrow’s 1998 “Corporeality and Cultural Rhetoric”; and (5) Steven Mailloux’s 1998 *Reception Histories: Rhetoric, Pragmatism, and American Cultural Politics*. While this scholarship grew out of the Culture Wars, the limits of cultural studies, a singular history of rhetoric, and literature (as traditionally and disciplinarily defined), additional scholarship has since considered cultural rhetorics as an explicitly named area of inquiry within rhetoric and composition studies. Such texts include Angela Haas’s 2008 dissertation, *A Rhetoric of Alliance: What American Indians Can Tell Us about Digital and Visual Rhetoric*; Barbara Monroe’s 2014 *Plateau Indian Ways With Words: The Rhetorical Tradition of the Tribes of the Inland Pacific Northwest*; Malea Powell, et al.’s 2014 “Our Story Begins Here: Constellating Cultural Rhetorics”; Jennifer Sano-Franchini’s 2015 “Cultural Rhetorics and the Digital Humanities: Toward Cultural Reflexivity in Digital Making”; and the 2016 *Enculturation* special issue on Cultural Rhetorics, edited by Phil Bratta and Malea Powell.<sup>4</sup> Further, we note that cultural rhetorics as it exists today, intentionally or not, builds upon a longer history of scholarship by minoritized scholars across rhetoric and composition and beyond. In other words, we observe how scholarship that may not explicitly use the term “cultural rhetorics” has contributed to our disciplinary thinking about how culture, rhetoric, and composition come together. Specifically, we think of research by scholars like Geneva Smitherman, Helen Fox, Victor Villanueva, Jacqueline Jones Royster, Shirley Wilson Logan, LuMing Mao, Julie Lindquist, Terese Guinsatao Monberg, Ralph Cintron, and others who have long engaged questions of rhetoric and culture.

Additional critical scholarship implicitly, tacitly, or tangentially engages cultural rhetorics. It is worth noting that the term “cultural rhetorics” has been deployed in scholarship across disciplines since at least the 1960s, including in the works of Robert Oliver, Huber Ellingsworth, Roichi Okabe, and Akbar Muhammad Ahmed and Max Stanford. Others across disciplines like philosophy, literary studies, anthropology, ethnic studies, law, linguistics, second language studies (SLS/ESL), and communication studies have used “cultural rhetorics” to talk about the “communication styles of a particular culture”; the embedded discourses of cultural objects (like food); the persuasive force of pan-African cultural nationalism in the context of “black cultural rhetoric”; and to refer to the discursive properties of dominant culture (Bacon; Hymes; Jameson; McKerrow; Starosta). While these references to cultural rhetorics have mostly been in passing, we believe that understanding and acknowledging these past, extra-disciplinary uses in relation to current rhetoric, composition, literacy, and technical communication disciplinary contexts encourages a more open cultural rhetorics conversation as it enables cultural rhetorics scholars to understand and thus engage with and employ cultural rhetorics in increasingly nuanced and historicized ways.

This article seeks to extend cultural rhetorics conversations by building upon the aforementioned recent exigencies, honoring histories of cultural rhetorics work, and generating productive openings for future cultural rhetorics inquiry and practice. In doing so, we build on Mailloux's effort to create a robust and intentionally *political* definition of rhetoric that engages with reception history so as to "encourage a practical and theoretical preoccupation with making sense of the political dynamics of cultural conversations at specific historical moments" ("Re-Marking" 98). To achieve these goals, we organize the remainder of this essay in three sections. We begin with "Interfaces," a section that considers the multiple and varied ways in which "culture" and "rhetoric" interface in cultural rhetorics scholarship. We then move to "Trajectories," which demonstrates how cultural rhetorics inquiry and community practice has shaped our own scholarship across diverse areas of rhetoric and composition, computers and writing, and technical communication. Finally, we close with a call and possibilities for building upon important cultural rhetorics intra- and extra-disciplinary histories, theories, and practices toward deepening our understandings of how cultures and rhetorics interface.

### Interfaces

The study of cultural rhetorics is often formulated as an interrogation of both culture and rhetoric; thus, this inquiry understands constructions of culture and rhetoric as interdependent rather than stable categories. In this section, we point to the multiple, mutually-informing, and overlapping ways in which rhetoric and culture interface. We use the concept "interfaces" as a rhetorical strategy to move away from prescriptivist and singular definitions of "cultural rhetoric/s" and instead toward a discussion of the multiple and varied ways in which "culture" and "rhetoric" come together, overlap, and move apart. Moreover, we do so to both displace the notion that cultural rhetorics must be the exclusive realm of minoritized and racialized subjects, as well as to contribute to the sustainability of cultural rhetorics conversations in rhetoric, composition, technical communication, and related areas of research and practice. Articulating and situating how we use our terms of inquiry not only clears a path for emerging cultural rhetorics scholars but also participates in our commonplace disciplinary practice of interrogating concepts and our uptakes of them so that we do not take these terms nor our agendas for them for granted.

The concept of culture is taken up in a variety of ways in rhetoric and composition scholarship. It is used to analyze and explain who, what, when, where, why, and how we research, and thus operates from diverse definitions. Despite this diversity, we posit that rhetorical inquiry often treats culture as an object (or context), as a process (or assemblage), or some combination of the two. In relation to these interfaces, scholars often locate culture in terms of language, identity, custom, religion, or other forms of social organization and/or distribution. This section aims to trace some of the explicit interfacing between the concepts of culture and rhetoric.<sup>5</sup> However, it is important to note that critical to our understandings of cultural rhetorics are historiographical studies of rhetors doing cultural rhetorical work—from which complex relationships between rhetoric and culture emerge—rather than concrete and discrete concepts. Some notable implicit cultural rhetorics work appearing in print in the 1990s (around the same time as early work that explicitly marked itself as cultural rhetorics) include such foundational book projects as Shirley Wilson Logan's *We are Coming: The Persuasive Discourse of Nineteenth-Century Black Women*, and Jacqueline Jones Royster's *Southern Horrors and Other Writings: The Anti-Lynching Campaign of Ida B. Wells, 1890-1900* and *Traces of a Stream: Literacy and Social Change Among African American Women*.

Moving from implicit cultural rhetorics work toward more apparent articulations, James Berlin understood rhetorical study and cultural study as always already intertwined in *Rhetorics, Poetics,*

and *Cultures*, but a problematic (and false) belief in strict disciplinary boundaries, objectivity, and binaries between “art and life” impeded the potential and growth of early cultural rhetorics scholarship. Berlin located an alliance between rhetoric and cultural studies with the emerging interest “to recover the tools of rhetoric in discussing the material effects of language in the conduct of human affairs” in structuralist and poststructuralist theory at the time (xvii). Further, challenging the linearity of discursive formations altogether and extending anthropological formulations of culture as the lived experience of humans in response to historical conditions, Berlin engages cultural theorists and proponents of social-epistemic rhetoric who position culture as “signifying practices that represent experience in rhetoric, myth, and literature and the relatively independent responses of human agents to concrete economic, social, and political conditions” (xix). In doing so, Berlin’s work politicized the study of culture by highlighting the material conditions of signifying practices, which he argued is enabled by reconsidering the rhetoric/poetic divide. By suggesting that aesthetics (by way of literature) carried rhetorical weight, then, he also politicized the study of rhetoric.

A good deal of work in cultural rhetorics seeks to stabilize either culture or rhetoric for particular purposes. Rhetoric, for example, is often taken up as persuasion, while culture is understood as political, economic, and historical context. For at least twenty years, Mailloux has been theorizing cultural rhetorics, defining it in 1998 as “[t]he study of the political effectivity of trope, argument, and narrative in culture,” and describing cultural rhetorics as a transdisciplinary investigation into “the conditions, purposes, activities, and results of the disciplinary production of knowledge, especially within academic institutions such as the U.S. university” (*Reception* 154; 186). Given this institutional focus, Mailloux described cultural rhetorics in Foucauldian terms as involving the interplay between relations of power and systems of communication (*Reception* 199). What’s more, Mailloux situated rhetorical hermeneutics as a form of cultural rhetoric, and he would, in 2002, take up the objection to rhetorical hermeneutics based on the presumption that rhetorical hermeneutics is merely an analytical frame and not “a performance heuristic or productive art” (“Re-Marking” 99). Later in *Disciplinary Identities*, he identifies rhetorical hermeneutics as a comparative cultural rhetoric, which is “the use of rhetoric to practice theory by doing history” and would “encompass the productive and interpretive aspects of the rhetorical tradition, embracing classical and modern invention in spoken and written rhetorics and including modern and post-modern hermeneutics applied to oral, print, and digital media as well as various cultural technologies, whether aural, visual or kinetic” (42; 129). The context of Mailloux’s work is important as it develops out of a concern for disciplinary fragmentation in English studies and speech communication with rhetoricians scattered across increasingly divergent fields. Mailloux productively theorizes multidisciplinary alliances for scholars practicing rhetorical study rather than a fixed methodological solution.

For Margaret Marshall, texts are always already representative of cultural values, such as those related to education, and culture is understood as values and/or beliefs. In her 1995 book, *Contesting Cultural Rhetorics: Public Discourse and Education 1890-1900*, she uses discourse analysis to examine textual renderings of public education. For Marshall, this methodology moves beyond the figurative relationship between language and thought, offering the potential to describe cultural values, beliefs, and epistemologies, as well as the ways in which “the tensions of negotiating socially constructed meanings are made concrete in discourse” (3). Marshall is not alone in this understanding of the relationship between texts and culture. Anthropologist Clifford Geertz, for example, whose work is often taken up in cultural rhetorics inquiry, describes culture as semiotic: “[A] historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited

conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men [women, and trans people] communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life” (89). However, Marshall argues that rhetorical devices that organize texts and explicate the negotiation of social meaning are what illuminate the values that inform such expressions, thereby contributing to social-epistemic rhetorical lines of thought.

While Marshall is careful to highlight the various definitions of rhetoric and the importance of recognizing its plural nature, she posits that *rhetoric as purpose* rather than *rhetoric as persuasion* can better tell us about the values and beliefs encoded in a particular text. Similarly, Douglas Foley articulates the purposeful processes of culture: “An ethnic culture’s cultural practices and forms are, therefore, whatever the group invents from their present struggle *and* from their past. Such a process is ceaseless, is always reflective of deeper societal contradictions, and is always some unpredictable synthesis of the old and new” (166). In other words, culture-making is an ongoing process, contingent on *chronos*, *kairos*, and the political conditions of a group of people, and Marshall reminds us that this process is socially and rhetorically negotiated. Accordingly, then, culture is symbolic and fundamentally rhetorical, both in the way that it is constructed and in the way that it is deployed.

Negotiating meaning, while crucial for social-epistemic rhetoric, is also what Jen Bacon finds most productive in cultural rhetorics work. In her analysis of coming out narratives, she relies heavily on James Zappen’s definition of cultural rhetorics, which represents rhetoric as concerned with negotiation and listening, not persuasion. This listening, however, highlights an ontological kind of rhetoric that can “write new bodies into existence” (Bacon 257). In particular, Bacon believes that queer bodies challenge us to understand that meaning is always constructed collaboratively, requiring negotiation and the willingness to listen (257). Clearly, listening and negotiation as concepts and methods for inquiry have been key to recent cultural rhetorics work (Powell, “Listening”; Ratcliffe). The body is also foregrounded as a crucial component of cultural rhetorics work for these scholars, as listening is a mode of interpretative production that is based in the body. Listening becomes a method for enacting and illustrating how bodies hold meaning, make meaning, and are meaningful.

Others have taken the hermeneutic function of rhetoric in the context of culture, considering how texts are negotiated and assembled in terms of narrative or story. Julie Lindquist explicates culture as a narrative construct, citing Jerome Bruner who says that “culture is both invented and managed by stories,” as well as Kathleen Stewart who sees culture as the “phenomenological realm in which symbolic tensions and structural contradictions may coalesce, through narrative,” or, “as nothing more, and nothing less, than what people say” (5). In *A Place to Stand: Politics and Persuasion in a Working-Class Bar*, Lindquist further treats the creation of culture as persuasion to get at the question of “how language works to create, manage, and situate culture” (4).<sup>6</sup> Lindquist goes on to suggest the mutual benefits of examining the analytics of rhetoric and culture together, showing how rhetoric is uniquely equipped to make sense of the contradictions between social structure and experience by foregrounding such contradictions in terms of interpretation (281). Lindquist explains this interface in terms of its methodological affordances: “If persuasion is regarded as a teleological process in which the ends are social as well as the means, and if these ends are highly contingent on identity configurations within social networks and on contingent material conditions, then it becomes clear that ethnographic research in particular scenes is a productive way to apprehend the dynamics of persuasion more generally” (4). That is, Lindquist highlights ethnography as an apt approach for studying the complex and ever-shifting social configurations and material realities that inform processes of rhetorical production and interpretation.

More recent work offering and advocating for cultural rhetorics frameworks have largely been headed by American Indian rhetorics scholars and, as such, have continued to foreground questions of power while prioritizing an indigenous perspective. For instance, Haas's 2008 dissertation, *A Rhetoric of Alliance: What American Indians Can Tell US about Digital and Visual Rhetoric*, defines cultural rhetorics as the study of "everyday rhetoric and writing practices of specific cultural groups . . . and the historical, social, cultural, and political contexts that shape those practices," and demonstrates that rhetoric is cultural and culture is rhetorical with case studies of cultural rhetorical contexts for and analyses of American Indian wampum and blogging practices (9). Likewise, Powell's 2012 CCCC Chair's address—delivered with the "help from all [her] relations"—models the rhetorical performance after indigenous storytelling practices and roots its importance in place and relationality (383). As Powell illustrates in her stories of St. Louis, Cahokia, modernity, and the discipline: "Stories take place. Stories practice place into space. Stories produce habitable spaces" (391). Further, Bratta and Powell's introduction to *Enculturation's* 2016 special issue on cultural rhetorics advocates a view of cultural rhetorics as embodied practice, and they provide "four points of practice" for cultural rhetorics work: decolonization, relations, constellation, and story. These aforementioned efforts—as well as other work in indigenous rhetorics—are significant as they actively shift the location from which we might theorize how culture and rhetoric interface, center indigenous perspectives, and practice situated studies of cultures.

### Trajectories

In the section that follows, we heed Powell's call to "tell different kinds of stories . . . in the service of a decolonized, multivocal knowledge world," and extend the partial historical backdrop provided earlier in this essay by providing several distinct trajectories emerging from each of our own varied scholarly and community engagements with cultural rhetorics ("Stories Take Place" 403). Our approaches to cultural rhetorics treat the term as: (1) a question to critically (re)consider rather than an answer; and (2) what Louise Wetherbee Phelps refers to as *précising definitions* of cultural rhetorics—a concept instrumental in the establishment of Syracuse's Composition and Cultural Rhetoric program (Writing Program Faculty).<sup>7</sup> As Phelps clarifies:

A *précising* definition tries to clarify, sharpen, and stabilize the meaning of a term for a particular purpose and context. Trying to constrain the possible interpretations of a scholarly term is justified when you're using it to formulate productive concepts, as long as you realize that a richly polysemous term will always escape our efforts to keep it under our thumbs. You can't erase its history or control its fate—even your own use of the term, and your definition of the concept, will inevitably evolve. Mostly, *précising* definitions are useful for a very specific situation, argument, text, or historical moment, not to establish a fixed meaning across all times and contexts. ("Response to Roundtable")

In this vein, our use of *précising* definitions is an attempt to offer frameworks for how we practice scholarship as individuals and as members of subdisciplinary communities and inspire future cultural rhetorics stories and trajectories.

### **Angela Haas**

I understand rhetoric as the negotiation of cultural information—and its historical, social, economic, material, and political influences—to engage participation and social action, broadly understood. Thus, rhetoric is always already cultural, although some rhetorics pretend not to be, while Othered rhetorical roots, traditions, and practices are oftentimes ignored, silenced, consumed, appropriated, or forgotten by those same rhetorics pretending not to be cultural. All work in our discipline does ideological work informed by cultural values; however, I do not consider all work in rhetoric studies to be cultural rhetorics scholarship. Rather it is the rhetorical work that marks those cultural values—that makes explicit the ways in which subjectivities, positionalities, and commitments to particular knowledge systems are interrelated and situated within networks of power and geopolitical landbases—that I consider to be cultural rhetorics scholarship.

With this said, my understanding of cultural rhetorics is informed by a unique set of educational experiences, both formal and informal. In brief, as a first-generation college student, I stayed in my hometown to attend Bowling Green State University for my undergraduate and MA studies. I was part of the first full PhD cohort of students admitted to the new Rhetoric and Writing graduate program at Michigan State University. As program assistant, I collaborated with faculty to write, revise, and design the graduate handbook, which included our cultural rhetorics concentration. Three years later, Qwo-Li Driskill and I were the first to graduate with this PhD concentration. My cultural rhetorics work is also informed by my graduate training in professional writing and over ten years of technical communication experience in the automotive industry in Northwest Ohio. Moreover, I have enjoyed a life-long experiential education granted by my large working-class, multiethnic extended family of maternal great grandparents, maternal and paternal grandparents, parents, and five aunts who worked in automotive factories in Northwest Ohio, in textile mills in North Carolina, as farm hands in the Carolina Piedmont, and in a tobacco factory at the fall line in Georgia—as well as by other relatives in those communities.

Certainly, there are other and more complex relational influences worth noting, but the purpose and scope of this essay is such that I must now scaffold toward fostering conversations between cultural rhetorics and technical communication. To be specific, I seek to decolonize technical communication using cultural rhetorics in ways that support social justice, or intentional rhetoric-in-action that works toward redressing social injustice. Toward these ends, some of the disciplinary projects I have participated in include: troubling the myths of objectivity and neutrality; examining technical communication's historical and contemporary relationships with/to racism, sexism, and nation-building; revising the hegemonic WWII engineering origin story as just one story among other (older) narratives about technical communication genres, practices, research, and teaching; and revealing how particular spaces and bodies have been colonized and re-colonized by the rhetoric (and management) of environmental risks, among others. Currently, I am interested in investigating how technical communication is complicit in, implicated by, and can transgress oppressive colonial and capitalistic influences on and effects of globalization, such as technocratic rhetorics of post-industrialism.

As Carolyn Rude reminds us, technical communicators have the potential to both “function as agents of knowledge making, action, and change” for some *and* function as agents of oppression—albeit often unwittingly—for Others (183). As public intellectuals, knowledge workers, and advocates for users, technical communicators have a responsibility to advocate for equity in local and global networks of scientific, technical, and professional communication. To do so, technical communicators must ascertain how these networks are constructed, by whom, toward what ends



—as well as the stakeholders, power dynamics, distributed agency (for example, distributed by whom/what; who/what benefits, is underserved, and disenfranchised within the network; in what ways)—and the direction(s) of the material and information flows within the network(s). I posit that cultural rhetorics frameworks can help us to do this work in technical communication research, pedagogy, and practice. With this in mind, I ask: How can cultural rhetorics help us to interrogate how our disciplinary identity, history, and future has been written and on whose backs? How else might we imagine using cultural rhetorics to do decolonial or other social justice work in technical communication studies related to user-centered research, risk communication, regulatory writing, legal literacies, organizational culture, information architecture, digital and visual rhetorics, medical rhetorics, scientific rhetorics, workplace writing, globalization and localization, community informatics, curricular programming, pedagogy, and more?

### ***Gabriela Ríos***

I orient myself to the study of cultural rhetorics as a way to interrogate the categories of culture and rhetoric, and what each brings to bear on the other when they are brought together for systematic study. Through this interrogation, I aim to better understand the material effects of public and private discursive and non-discursive practices made visible through this merging. Similarly, early scholarship in cultural rhetorics saw the alliance of rhetorical and cultural studies (particularly those concerned with poststructural critique) as “an effort to recover the tools of rhetoric in discussing the material effects of language in the conduct of human affairs” (Berlin xvii). More recent turns in the field (corporeal and ontological) have broadened the effort in a variety of ways: While earlier trends focused heavily on texts, textuality, and meaning, more recent trends expand (or, in some cases, shift) focus to include the body, affect, ontology, production, nonhumans and, perhaps, a more deliberate social justice aim.

One cultural rhetorics related interest for me is how, or if, a cultural rhetorics approach can allow for a more thorough interrogation of the material effects of academic cultural practices, including textual practices. For example, recent scholarship on the rise of new media and digital humanities has often deployed the trope of colonization to articulate a variety of frustrations stemming from the “invisibility” and marginalization of rhetoric and composition as a discipline in these trends to more internal frustrations over the imposition of writing as the one and only valued mode of composing. Of course, these frustrations are interconnected in that they ultimately boil down to disciplinary identity claims in relation to power struggles for autonomy (and, probably, funding) if not territory. These claims do matter. They raise a set of questions and goals that have the potential to materialize and make more readily present or visible some realities over others, particularly as the discipline moves toward more explicit social justice aims. For example, as someone who is a scholar of indigenous rhetoric, I consider the relationship between colonization and indigeneity (broadly) that the trope evokes. For scholars of indigenous rhetoric, the trope of colonization matters differently in this context than it might for other scholars, and it probably matters differently for students and faculty who are marked as indigenous or who identify as indigenous as well. How do these scholars and students affect the definitional and disciplinary claims inherent in these debates and vice versa? How does “real” colonization figure into its metaphorical use in these disputes? How do we articulate the complexity of writing within the discipline with respect to, for example, theories of writing in anthropology or education? Why, when, and how should it matter that we distinguish them?

These disputes and questions regarding the trope of colonization in recent scholarship raise a series of interdependent questions for cultural rhetorics as a field of study: Can a cultural rhetorics framework attend to these questions more readily than a rhetoric and composition approach can? To what extent can (or has, or should) cultural rhetorics scholarship contribute to a larger disciplinary identity? In other words, if social justice aims are increasingly concerned with transformation over representation, what does or can a cultural rhetorics framework transform from a disciplinary perspective? Finally, if, as many cultural rhetorics scholars have argued, all rhetoric is cultural and if all culture is rhetorical, why is there still a need to distinguish cultural rhetorics within rhetoric and composition? These are genuine questions that I have wrestled with as someone who has come into the discipline through cultural rhetorics.

### ***Donnie Johnson Sackey***

For me cultural rhetorics has been a historical approach embedded within cultural epistemologies and ontologies as emerging via relationships between various agents (people, artifacts, and institutions). Like Raúl Sanchez's push toward metonymy in *The Function of Theory in Composition Studies*, my definition argues for an understanding of rhetoric as relational wherein texts are not only shaped by people, institutions, and other texts, but also exert the same influence on people, institutions, and other texts. Since my scholarship concentrates on the rhetoric of environmental culture, my definitional turn toward relationality raises a deep engagement with environment through investigating how rhetoric simultaneously constitutes and is constituted by place. Attending to the production of space in addition to time allows us to better understand at a finer level of granularity the extent to which power relations constitute and are constituted by conduct in place. Here I am interested in a type of historiographic practice that guides researchers to adopt what Christine Oravec and Michael Salvador refer to as a diachronic over a synchronic reading and writing of rhetorical histories in an attempt to shift the disciplinary landscape through constant "recovering, re-ordering, re-situating, re-visioning, and re-creating the lives, experiences, contributions, and achievements of various non-normative subjects . . . that might enable paradigmatic shifts" (Oravec and Salvador 174; Royster, "Disciplinary Landscaping" 161). The historical foundations of cultural rhetorics as emerging from the "culture wars" at Syracuse University positions rhetorical research as responsive to/immersive within cultural politics. I like to think of cultural rhetorics not as a static, totalizing, orienting position within the discipline. Instead, I've had to conceive it as a verb or a recursive way of inhabiting and engaging space.

In researching spatialized historical accounts of environmental rhetorical practices, cultural rhetorics makes me conscious of the conditions under which my acts of scholarly making create ways of perceiving. Too often disciplinary forces require that we reveal our interested positions (how we come/relate to projects) and the histories of our tools (how and why they were created) only under certain circumstances. There has to be some form of reflexivity that comes with engaging in all types of research if we acknowledge that discourses run through humans and nonhumans alike. In *Aircraft Stories: Decentering the Object in Technoscience*, John Law asks that we make considerations as to what affect the "personal" has within our work. Specifically, he writes: "If we are constituted as knowing subjects, interpellated, in ways that we do not tell, then what are we doing? What are we telling? What are we making of our objects of study? Or, perhaps better, what are they making of us?" (64). Therefore, we need to attend to the ways in which our tools remove aspects of our bodies when documenting complexity because such removal affects how we see. We should also be willing to tell the ways our bodies are made (and perform making) in relation to our objects/subjects of study.

### **Casie Cobos**

I want to briefly weave together my interests in cultural rhetorics with my research (and personal) interests at the intersections of ethnicity and mental disability—and how they are constructed on top of and against each other—by using pieces of a current project to work through my ideas.

“What does a woman inherit that tells her how to go?,” asks Sandra Cisneros in the introductory poem of *My Wicked Wicked Ways* and again later as part of her memoir *A House of My Own* (3; 102). “What does a woman inherit that tells her how to go?” she asks, wondering what happens when she leaves the life her father set before her.

Cultural rhetorics (in its various facets) can challenge me to continually ground my work in Chicana rhetorics and rhetorics of disability in multiple histories, practices, and materialities. It reminds me to look at the things that I inherit both from academia in Greco-Roman-American traditions and from family with our Chicana practices. Cultural rhetorics can remind me of how to go about my work.

I am interested in the way cultural rhetorics asks me to be purposeful. And in so doing, I want to understand how culture, rhetoric, and cultural rhetorics are understood differently across various conversations. I’m interested in how these terms get employed, by whom these get deployed, whether or not it matters that they get used, what the pitfalls of their being used as an overarching expectation might be, and what their limits might be. Laying groundwork, then, to create possible understandings of cultural rhetorics is worthwhile for creating a conversation that allows cultural rhetorics to reach past culture as being used only for identity marking and/or race or ethnicity and to reach across multiple understandings of rhetoric by being intentional with its definition. Rather than maneuvering *around* questions—that include why using the term cultural rhetorics matters when context should always matter to rhetoric; how cultural studies and cultural rhetorics are not the same thing; and should Cultural Rhetorics be defined singularly—having these discussions can also challenge us to more purposefully interact with our own positionalities and our own research.

For instance, not understanding how rhetorics of disability have been situated in Greco-Roman-Euro-American histories while also understanding that conversations about (dis)ability among scholars and activists vary, while also resituating the historical and contemporary understanding of (dis)ability into Chicana and indigenous understandings may mean that my work should be situated in various logics, constructions, and epistemologies.

“What does a woman inherit that tells her how to go?” It’s a question I have asked myself in my own life, a question I’ve heard the women in my family ask, a question my *familia*-from-scratch asks, and a question echoed as I’ve read countless Latinx writings. It is a question that speaks to the very logic, context, and construction of rhetorics of mental illness. It is a question that calls for a shift from a rhetoric of disability most often situated within a Greco-Roman-Euro-American lineage to a decolonial intersectional logic that contextualizes disability in specific spatial, racial, ethnic, and indigenous epistemologies. It is a question that not only shifts histories and definitions of rhetoric but also the historical and cultural views of mental disability and illness.

### **Jennifer Sano-Franchini**

My own engagement with cultural rhetorics currently centers on the relationship between affect, embodiment, and institutions. I approach this space by re-working Porter, Sullivan, Blythe, Grabill, and Miles’s notion of institutional critique using my own concept of institutional rhetorics, an

approach for interrogating the enigmatic and intimate spaces between institutions and the bodies that inhabit them. If institutional critique was conceived as “a pragmatic effort to use rhetorical means to improve institutional systems,” I argue that institutional rhetorics is an effort to consider how institutions and bodies interplay in ways that affect human beings, interrogating the relationship between individual agents and the broader institutions, cultures, and societies in and with which they co-exist, that make particular acts of agency both necessary and possible (625).

Thus, institutional rhetorics takes a complex view of how institutional structures, policies, governance, processes, stakeholders, histories, politics, cultures, practices, and objects rhetorically interact to shape human experiences, including human agency, labor politics, power, and oppression. If institutional critique was intended to focus “on the institutional space/structure as its principle focus of interest,” I suggest that an institutional rhetorics approach can and perhaps should look beyond institutions to center the space where institutional structures and human beings meet—through a rhetorical, spatial, temporal, cultural, political, historical, and embodied methodology (Porter et al. 625). While institutional rhetorics embraces the necessity of “local actions that can lead to more global—disciplinary, economic, or otherwise political changes,” it also considers valuable theoretical approaches to re-conceptualizing local and global relationships, power, and control such that actions toward change can be grounded in complex theory (620). Most recently, I have been working on a project that investigates this space via the dimensions of emotional and affective labor enacted by participants seeking employment on the academic job search.

In the service of making room for cultural rhetorics that are flexible and open enough to engage questions about the rhetoricity of global flows, situated practice, identity, race, gender, sexuality, class, embodiment, performance, making, affect, political economies, and so on, I suggest that there is value in exploring and historicizing the relationship across terms like cultural rhetorics, intercultural rhetoric and communication, and cross-cultural rhetoric. Doing so, I believe, will provide a better sense of the varied ways in which scholars have examined—and do examine—the role of cultural politics in processes of discursive and textual production and performance. I’m interested in learning what is specific to each of these approaches, and how scholars who explicitly situate their work in these areas set that work apart around a conceptual sub-field within their disciplines. That said, I suggest that we further interrogate the following questions: What does an understanding of cultural rhetorics that is more broadly institutionally, historically, and disciplinarily situated afford? How has cultural rhetorics functioned as a disciplinary intervention and political strategy that shifts boundaries and orientations toward research? How might cultural rhetorics function as a writing strategy that enables particular kinds of actions and precludes others? How has cultural rhetorics been de- and re-politicized?

### **Conclusion**

Efforts to historicize and contextualize cultural rhetorics as an area of inquiry within rhetoric and composition studies have grounded cultural rhetorics using a number of different scholarly texts and traditions. For example, Monroe roots her discussion of cultural rhetorics in Robert Kaplan’s 1960s work on contrastive rhetoric, identifying him as “the first to formalize the idea that rhetorics are culturally marked” (20). Contrastingly, Powell et al. root their conception of cultural rhetorics in the scholarly practices of Qwo-Li Driskill, Malea Powell, and Terese Guinsatao Monberg, as well as other “important scholars in the discipline.” Such intellectual genealogies are significant not only because they inform the frames of engagement in cultural rhetorics scholarship, but also because they shape the possibilities for what we think cultural rhetorics can and should do. On this note, we

offer an additional opening for building a history that might theorize cultural rhetorics in increasingly diverse, multivocal, and expansive terms. That is, we model and argue for more intradisciplinary historical and theoretical scholarship considers how the terms of cultural rhetorics are taken up across various areas of rhetoric and composition—and related—inquiry, including but not limited to: comparative rhetoric, intercultural rhetoric, African American rhetorics, American Indian rhetorics, indigenous rhetorics, Asian American rhetorics, Chicana rhetorics, disability rhetorics, feminist rhetorics, working-class rhetorics, community literacies, technical communication, public rhetorics, translanguaging, and so on.

Alongside this expansive view, we have offered our own and imagined potential trajectories for doing cultural rhetorics research as a way of demonstrating a wide range of possibilities for drawing on cultural rhetorics frameworks to do research in rhetoric and composition. In response to a conference roundtable on cultural rhetorics where we first shared the aforementioned trajectories, Phelps shared:

I see Angela and Donnie as working toward *précising* definitions that afford their personal scholarly goals, while Gabi, Casie, and Jennifer are asking meta-questions like: What actions or insights would be afforded by different definitions of cultural rhetoric—historical, current, or possible? How does adopting a particular definition shape one’s scholarly identity? What difference does it make to the larger discipline? . . . Casie and Jennifer seem to be explicitly arguing for a broader interpretation of the potential subject matter of a scholar practicing cultural rhetoric as a method, but implicitly the very range of objects of study among all the speakers argues that case. (Response to Roundtable)

In sum, we have attempted to further open the cultural rhetorics conversation, highlighting the broad scope of cultural rhetorics work in the past alongside a handful of the far-reaching possibilities for building upon this history and deepening our understandings of how cultures and rhetorics interface.

Further, we call for future work on the stakes and scope of cultural rhetorics as a term and as an analytic, including its history and convergence in relation to other areas of rhetoric and composition, writing, technical communication, and community literacy studies. Likewise, we encourage more work that (re)historicizes and (re)inscribes bodies of people and knowledges overlooked by the hegemonic rhetorical tradition (see for example, Jay Dolmage’s “Breathe,” “Metis”), work that makes apparent how cultural rhetorics is embodied and employed theoretically and methodologically. Moreover, we ask for more explicit research on the roles and uses of cultural rhetorics outside of scholarly contexts. Matters of civic engagement and public advocacy are important to rhetorical study and inquiry, and cultural rhetorics can offer insightful and relevant approaches for interrogating how larger histories and organizational and systemic structures impact everyday practices and the interventions imagined and employed therein. It is our hope that our expanded yet provisional interfaces, *précising* definitions, and personal and projected trajectories have helped to craft a space to inspire such work.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup>We are grateful for the helpful feedback from our *RR* peer reviewers Steven Mailloux and Christina Cedillo, and the support of Louise Wetherbee Phelps and Elise Verzosa Hurley. Our manuscript is stronger thanks to your suggestions.

<sup>2</sup>To date, several programs offer optional or required cultural rhetorics courses, including Illinois State University, Northeastern State University, University of Central Florida, and Wayne State University. Rhetoric and composition departments and programs that include “culture” in their titles include: Louisiana State’s Writing and Culture Department; Michigan State University’s Department of Writing, Rhetoric, & American Cultures; Michigan Technological University’s Rhetoric, Theory and Culture Graduate Program; North Dakota State University’s PhD in Rhetoric, Writing and Culture; and Syracuse University’s Composition and Cultural Rhetoric Doctoral Program.

<sup>3</sup>Steven Mailloux’s biography accompanying his 1990 chapter, “The Turns of Reader-Response Criticism,” references an upper-division course at Syracuse University titled “American Cultural Rhetoric.” Also, that year, Mailloux published an article titled “The Rhetorical Use and Abuse of Fiction: Eating Books in Late Nineteenth-Century America,” which examines the “cultural rhetoric of reading fiction” by explaining how literary tropes would shape how audiences read fiction.

<sup>4</sup>While we work with/in rhetoric and composition studies (and related areas of inquiry in literacy and technical communication studies), we also note that rhetoric and communication studies scholars also take up cultural rhetorics (see, for example Marouf Arif Hasian and Megan McFarlane’s 2013 *Cultural Rhetorics of American Exceptionalism and the Bin Laden Raid*).

<sup>5</sup>Some of the more explicit articulations of culture and its dimensions and applications to rhetoric and composition are taken up in ethnographic cultural rhetorics work like Ralph Cintron’s *Angel’s Town* and Julie Lindquist’s *A Place to Stand*.

<sup>6</sup>Malea Powell’s “Stories Take Place,” drawing from American Indian rhetorical traditions, is another recent example that highlights the cultural and rhetorical function of story.

<sup>7</sup>Louise Wetherbee Phelps and her colleagues in the Writing Program spearheaded Syracuse University’s proposal for a PhD program in Composition and Cultural Rhetorics, which was implemented in 1997, and which expanded on Mailloux’s articulation of “cultural rhetoric” (Davies; Writing Program Faculty; Mailloux, *Reception*).

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