TOWARD A MORE VISUALLY LITERATE WRITING CLASSROOM: AN ANALYSIS OF VISUAL

COMMUNICATION PEDAGOGY AND PRACTICES

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ABSTRACT

"Toward a More Visually Literate Writing Classroom: An Analysis of Visual Communication Pedagogy and Practices" examines the teaching of visual communication in undergraduate professional and technical communication courses. Through an analysis of scholarship, textbooks, I argue that a situated visual communication pedagogy that integrates both analysis and reflection throughout the visual production and design process can better allow students to understand the ways in which the visual participates within larger social and cultural contexts. This understanding helps students develop abilities to potentially transform visual discourses emphasizing that all visual documents and texts, including the ones they produce, participate in shaping the ways in which meaning is made. By integrating visual communication and design into civic engagement pedagogies in the professional and technical communication classroom, instructors and students can begin to interrogate the view that professional and technical communication is a neutral, objective practice concerned only with prescriptive adherence to forms, conventions, workplace efficiency, and corporate success. Thus, in addition to helping students develop as communicators and thinkers, integrating visual communication into service-learning and throughout the duration of a course allows students to explore the civic dimensions of professional and technical communication, situating them as engaged designers and active members of their communities.

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Most of all, I thank my friends and family who sacrificed so much to get me through this. Thank you for not giving up on me despite the many hurdles.

DEDICATION

For my son, Finn.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND FRAMING

In the April 2011 issue, *WIRED* Magazine featured a cover image of Limor "Ladyada" Fried, the first woman engineer to ever grace its covers. An MIT graduate in electrical engineering, inventor, and owner of Adafruit Industries, Fried is considered to be one of the leading pioneers of the Do-It-Yourself (DIY) revolution. WIRED depicted Fried as a modern-day Rosie the Riveter—body centered against a diffused red background, dressed in navy blue coveralls, her hair pulled back in a sensible pony tail, safety glasses atop her head, right arm flexed to show a band of muscle, her raised hand gripping a power tool that shoots pink currents of electricity. Cutting across Fried's body is the large caption "How to Make Stuff: 25 Awesome Projects." The issue's theme is endorsed by a pink and black round seal reading, "If You Can Think It, You Can Build It!" Directly under WIRED's logo is a caption that reads "The DIY Revolution Starts Now," alluding to the piece for which Fried was interviewed.

Following its publication, the cover image generated a slew of controversy. Cord Jefferson, senior editor of GOOD Magazine, opines that while WIRED was astute in featuring Fried for her brilliance and innovation, he accuses the magazine of photo- shopping Fried beyond recognition and "treating a smart, innovative scientist like she's shooting a Britney Spears album cover" (Jefferson n. p.). In response, Fried herself commented on Jefferson's piece stating that "the cover is stylized but that is what I really look like. I was not "plasticized" or "heavily photoshopped." If I take off my glasses, have my hair done, and wear make-up, it's what I look like" (Jefferson).

Similarly, a blog entry on *Feministing* celebrates Fried's cover feature but takes issue

with Fried's iconic "Rosie the Riveter" pose. Miriam, the blog entry's writer and at the time

editor of *Feministing*, claims that "the image feels flat" and that "posing [Fried] like Rosie feels

antiquated, and also draws attention only to the fact that she's a woman in a man's world—not

that she's an incredible engineer in her own right." She further laments, "When will we get

beyond Rosie the Riveter? When can women across fields just be acknowledged the way their

male counterparts are—for their accomplishments?" (Miriam). For Miriam, the Rosie icon

represents a tired, masculinized symbol that only draws attention to—rather than transcends—

the gender disparity in the field of engineering. To make her point especially clear, Miriam

includes a US Department of Labor graph displaying the number of employed female engineers

in comparison to employed male engineers. Not surprisingly, the graph does, indeed, provide

visual evidence confirming a large gender gap. Compelled to respond, Fried again commented

that "the 'pose' was partly my suggestion, it's a wonderful iconic symbol that I *really* like—

engineering isn't just a 'man's world'" (Miriam).

In the summer semester of 2015, I shared this cover image and the discussion that

ensued after its publication with students enrolled an undergraduate writing class as an

example of the ways in which professional workplace contexts—in this case, engineering—

always inform and are informed by broader cultural concerns. I specifically chose this image to

begin a course unit that asks students to analyze the professional communities they wish to

enter upon graduation not only because it speaks to workplace issues typically explored in

professional and technical communication courses, but also because it highlights the ways in

which "the visual is contested, debated and transformed as a constantly challenging place of social interaction and definition in terms of class, gender, sexual and radicalized identities" (Mirzoeff 6). That is, I also wanted to make salient to students that visual texts—including both the magazine cover image as well as the graph—are circulating cultural artifacts located within specific social, cultural, historical, political, and economic contexts. But what does this have to do with teaching technical/professional communication?

Numerous scholars have emphasized the increasing significance of visual communication to professional and technical communication curricula and practice. In this project, I refer to visual communication as the culturally-shaped practices of interpreting and designing visual elements and media for the purposes of communication. In 1986, Stephen Bernhardt claimed that "classroom practice which ignores the increasingly visual, localized qualities of information exchange can only become increasingly irrelevant," and in the nearly three decades since, scholarly research and pedagogies in the broad category of visual communication studies has flourished across multiple academic disciplines ("Seeing" 103). Situated within a landscape of ever-evolving communication technologies including multimedia software, web-based applications, social media, and mobile technologies, visual communication, as Kenneth T. Rainey further asserts, "the discrete skills involved in communication—writing, editing, designing, producing—are collapsing in on one another so that, in many cases, communicator, editor, designer, and producer are the same individual" (231). Moreover, Diane Hope states that visual artifacts are "the material products of technologies [and] their production, reproduction, circulation, and consumption constitute major economic and social activities for

individuals and collectivities" (4). Visual studies, thus, by way of document design, found a comfortable home in professional and technical communication. I discuss the ways in which professional and technical communication textbooks frame visual communication instruction in more detail in chapters three and four, but I did find that, indeed, numerous professional and technical communication textbooks now include entire chapters—in addition to entire textbooks—devoted to visual communication instruction, often focusing on teaching students how to produce visual texts and documents.

I found Fried's cover image on *WIRED* particularly striking and appropriate to share with students, too, because it evokes what Anne Frances Wysocki has articulated as both "pleasure and offense . . . [in] seeing beauty and feeling angry" (149). In "The Sticky Embrace of Beauty," Wysocki describes her appreciation for an advertisement's well-designed form as well as her critique of the gendered ideologies the advertisement's content perpetuates. Wysocki argues that common approaches "for teaching the visual aspects of texts are incomplete and, in fact, may work against helping students acquire critical and thoughtful agency with the visual" (149). Because visual communication instruction in professional and technical communication pedagogy tends to emphasize the formal design elements of visual texts, Wysocki warns that focusing exclusively on form can blind practitioners to ideologies and politics present in the content. In the case of the advertisement she analyzes, visual pedagogies should also attend to "[the] objectification—and the violence against women that can follow from it—as inseparable from the formal approaches" (168). What she argues against, thus, is the separation of form from content, advocating instead for "reciprocal communication" or an approach to teaching

visual communication "so that form does not override content, so that form is, in fact, understood as itself part of content" (149). As such, Wysocki charges that visual communication pedagogy should cultivate an awareness of the social consequences of visual design so that "students (and [teachers]) [can] be generously and unquestioningly reciprocal in [their] designings" (149).

I begin with this example because it highlights some of the ideas this dissertation will explore, questions I will highlight in detail later in this chapter, but largely this example helps foreground the ideas of how I struggled scaffolding visual communication within traditional and pragmatic curricular goals, while still helping students see the potential of visual communication and rhetoric as critical cultural practice.

Although I did not have formal training in professional and technical communication—in fact, I had never even taken coursework in professional and technical communication either at the undergraduate or graduate level— I taught my very first professional communication course: ENGL 326 – Writing in the Design Professions, a writing course primarily for students in design majors. As a graduate student enrolled in a rhetoric and composition program with research interests in visual rhetoric, I was excited to teach the course and thought it would be a fantastic opportunity to engage students in visual production, especially since scholars have called for composition instructors to teach students not only to be visual critics but also visual designers (George; Marback). Tempering my excitement, however, was also a sense of trepidation. While I felt quite confident that I could teach students how to analyze visuals, I was

less confident in my ability to teach them how to design and produce visual texts particularly within the context of technical writing situations.

Despite having several years of teaching experience in first-year composition courses (FYC), as well as a visual culture and language (VCL) course, I found myself struggling multiple times during that first semester of teaching professional writing. Although I had plenty of experience incorporating visual rhetoric in FYC and VCL courses where I often themed entire curricula around visual rhetoric and social issues—teaching and learning from students as we teased out the ways in which our lives are influenced and mediated by visual culture, analyzing visual artifacts, and then writing about them—I struggled to bring that same critical focus to the professional writing course, despite the course being for design majors and it being largely visually-oriented.

Part of my frustration was due to the resources for teaching visual communication and visual production in the professional and technical communication materials I encountered. As a novice to the field, I sought out resources for teaching visual design and consulted multiple textbooks in an attempt to ground myself within an unfamiliar teaching terrain. Whereas the broader discipline of rhetoric and composition tended to approach visual artifacts as social constructions to analyze, the visual communication instruction I encountered—at least from the graphic design tradition from which it tends to be taught in professional and technical communication—focused primarily on teaching students rules and principles of visual design so that they can then apply those rules and principles to their own documents. Critics such as Wysocki note, however, that this approach may not give sufficient attention to rhetorical,

cultural, and ideological influences, and that teaching such principles may have the potential of being interpreted as inviolable rules that should be followed without critical consideration. Thus, for me as a teacher, I was struck by this artificial binary—visual analysis versus visual production—in the teaching materials I encountered, even when most scholarship—in both rhetoric and composition and, as I soon learned, in professional and technical communication— agree that engagement with *both* analysis and production is imperative because one necessarily informs the other. In short, my initial foray into the available materials for teaching visual production left me unsatisfied; while I certainly wanted to teach students how to produce well-designed visual documents, I also wanted to teach them more than that. I wanted students to learn that visual texts have much broader consequences than what the visual design principles that were so often emphasized in the resources I found suggest (I do not want to suggest that I did not find these initial resources useful but rather, as Wysocki also points out, I found them limited and limiting). I wanted students, in Wysocki's words, to "see themselves capable of making change, of composing work that not only fits its circumstances but that also helps its audiences—and its makers—re-vision themselves and try out new and more thoughtful relations between each other" (173).

Equally frustrating, too, was my own uncertainty about *what* I was supposed to be teaching. Having gone from college straight to graduate school—first, to a master's program and then, immediately, to a doctoral program—I had little professional experience in workplace contexts outside of the university. In that first semester of teaching professional writing, I learned alongside the students enrolled in the course, the conventions and genres typical of

technical writing situations, attempting to figure out, as the students did, why notions of

"objectivity," "clarity," "efficiency," and "usability," were so seemingly integral to the field. Still,

I often asked myself: What am I teaching? By teaching students the standard genres and

conventions typical of professional and technical communication, was I unwittingly preparing

them *only* for the workplace (a concept that, for me, was just as abstract as I suspect it was for

the students)?

In the semesters and years since that first professional writing course, I learned that

what I experienced during that first semester of teaching was dissonance between what

Charlotte Thralls and Nancy Roundy Blyler identify as *social constructionist pedagogies* and

ideologic pedagogies in the teaching of professional and technical communication. Thralls and

Blyler write that social constructionist pedagogies "focus on acculturating students to the

communities they wish to enter" by positioning the classroom as "mirrors of professional

communities" (111-12). In this pedagogical view, "communities shape and even determine the

discourse of their members through communal norms," and thus, classroom instruction tends

to focus on teaching students common workplace documents, genres, and conventions in order

to prepare them for the discourses and norms of the workplace (111).

Ideologic pedagogy, on the other hand, asserts that "the fact that community norms

govern knowledge and notions of good writing within discourse groups is no reason to valorize

them in the classroom" (114). Drawing from critical pedagogy in order to "raise questions about

the political implications of community norms," this second pedagogical stance explores

"whose interests are protected and reproduced, as well as whose voices are silenced and

diminished in disciplinary, professional, and other social groups" (114). Thus, I found myself

facing another seemingly artificial binary—this time between teaching students pragmatic kinds

of things in order to prepare them for their careers versus my commitment to engaging

students with civic engagement writing and research that asks them to confront social issues

that exist in the world beyond the classroom.

This dissertation emerged from my (ongoing) attempt as a teacher- researcher in

rhetoric and composition to reconcile my own interests and investments in visual

communication and professional and technical communication pedagogy. The goal of this

project, thus, is to offer one potential response to a call forwarded by Susan Hilligoss and Sean

Williams for pedagogies which cultivate a view of "students as citizen designers [who] have the

ability to analyze, to respond critically, and to produce visuals in a variety of genres" (230).

Influenced by graphic design artists Steven Heller and Veronique Vienne, Hilligoss and Williams

argue that by employing critical pedagogies that foster "dialogue about what visuals leave out,

what they privilege, and how they do these things, we can begin building a sense of the citizen

designer who is able to recognize when alternatives are available and then argue both visually

and verbally about the importance of alternative representations" (241).

Especially because one of my arguments concerns the ways in which visual discourse, as

in all discourse, cannot be separated from the broader cultural contexts in which it participates,

it is here that I would like to pause for a moment to acknowledge that all terms, including the

term *citizen designer* to which I refer throughout this project, are fraught with multiple

implications. Although the focus of this project is neither on national citizenship nor

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immigration, I want to emphasize that in referencing the term *citizen designer*, I do not wish to

erase or exclude the presence of undocumented students who may be in our classrooms.

However, I also acknowledge that the term *citizen*, and thereby the concept of *citizenship*, has,

at various historical moments, worked to perpetuate inequality and exclusion, creating

oppositional binaries between citizen/non-citizen and insider/outsider, authorizing, in many

cases, who has access to the power to act, speak, write, or otherwise participate in the

citizenry.

Rhetoric and composition has mobilized the concept of citizenship and the subject of

the citizen in scholarly conversations (Berlin; Eberly; Ervin; Kates; Weisser) to forward

arguments about literacy instruction on behalf of basic writers (Horner and Lu; Shaughnessy), in

arguments for critical pedagogy (Giroux; Shor), and to advocate for classroom work that

extends into the public sphere (Cushman; Ackerman and Coogan; Grabill). Professional and

technical communication, has also invoked the terms *citizenship* and *citizen* to expand the

reach of the field beyond the confines of the workplace (Miller; Dubinsky; Savage; Scott).

Attached to the concepts of citizenship and citizen, as deployed in both rhetoric and

composition as well as in professional and technical communication, is a hope that education

can provide an avenue to increased participation in cultural, social, and material spaces that

exist outside the classroom in order to position and empower students as agents beyond the

academic institution. In recognizing this tradition of mobilizing the notion of citizenship in the

field, however, I am not suggesting that the concept should never be troubled or questioned;

we must always re-examine our assumptions for its deployment in light of ever-shifting

political, social, historical, and cultural circumstances, reflecting on the ways in which the institution of higher-education itself is complicit in what Amy J. Wan calls a "constellation of citizenship-credentialing mechanisms [which] activate literacy for different enactments of citizenship" (14).

For the purposes of the project, however, I am drawn to Hilligoss and William's positioning of students as citizen designers not only because it suggests active and invested engagement with visual communication as it participates in the broader culture, but also for its potentials to situate student learning in community contexts outside of the professional and technical communication classroom. Moreover, the term *design* also evokes the possibility of (re)making and (re)shaping meaning with the potential to effect change. In "A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies: Designing Social Futures," the New London Group writes that educators and students "are both inheritors of patterns and conventions of meaning and at the same time active designers of meaning. And, as designers of meaning, we are designers of social futures— workplace futures, public futures, and community futures" (65). They further argue that design "involves re-presentation and recontextualization. . . . Designing transforms knowledge in producing new constructions and representations of reality. Through their co-engagement in designing, people transform their relations with each other, and so transform themselves" (75-76). The notion of design, thus, also has the potential for reciprocity among designers, audiences, and the cultural conditions for which designs are made.

Although Hilligoss and Williams called for pedagogies that can cultivate citizen designers specifically within the auspices of composition instruction, I argue that their call is equally

relevant (and perhaps more so) to the teaching of professional and technical communication, where visual communication instruction too often focuses on form, and where preparing students to be successful in the workplace, narrowly defined, is commonly prized as the end goal. The four article chapters that comprise this dissertation, thus, also respond to calls for professional and technical communication researchers, instructors, and practitioners to attend to what J. Blake Scott, Bernadette Longo, and Katherine V. Wills call "hyperpragmatist" ideologies which value practices "that privilege utilitarian efficiency and effectiveness, including rhetorical effectiveness, at the expense of sustained reflection, critique, or ethical action" (9). According to the authors,

> hyperpragmatism can look past the regulatory power that conditions (and is reinforced by) technical communication, partly by pretending to be apolitical. Guided by a still lingering positivism, some of our field's research and pedagogy continues to treat technical communication as somehow separate from the political and ideological dimensions of culture. (12)

The danger in hyperpragmatist ideologies, Scott, Longo, and Wills continue, is that they can inform pedagogy, inadvertently emphasizing professional assimilation as the end goal of professional and technical communication instruction, often focusing on "conformity, expediency, and success, narrowly defined," thus forestalling student engagement with potentially transformative practices that are more civically-minded (13).

In recent years, professional and technical communication scholars have looked to cultural studies models of critique to better situate the ways in which professional and

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technical communication is enmeshed in "the broader web of conditions, relations, and power

dynamics of which [the field] is a part" (Scott, Longo, Wills 11). In a 2004 special issue of the

Journal of Business and Technical Communication, Carl Herndl emphasizes the notion of critical

practice in professional and technical communication research. Drawing solely from critical

theories that generally seek to critique social relations of domination, Herndl argues, while

important, does little more than "lead to the recognition of domination and its workings but

offer few opportunities for resistance and action" ("Introduction" 4). In order to avoid the

stalemate of critique, Herndl combines the term critical with the term practice, drawing on

postmodern theories of practice and its understanding of social relations as "ongoing but

contingent patterns rather than as static structures" ("Introduction" 5). Thus, Herndl ultimately

defines critical practice as "an attempt to move beyond either naïve or overly pessimistic

analyses and to generate really useful knowledge that opens possibilities for action, however

circumscribed or local" ("Introduction" 3).

The need to bridge the gap between critique and practice is an argument often

repeated by rhetoric and composition instructors who insist that incorporating visual literacy

into the composition classroom should also "address students as producers as well as

consumers or critics of the visual" (George 13). In the article "From Analysis to Design: Visual

Communication in the Teaching of Writing," Diana George historicizes the relationship between

the visual and writing studies and convincingly makes the case for further exploring the ways in

which visual communication can be utilized in the composition classroom beyond solely

analyzing visuals in order to produce written texts. Although I certainly agree with George (and

in recent years, many advocates of multimodal composition have responded to her call), I find

her following comment to be more telling of the visual's status in professional and technical

communication. In her justification of locating her argument strictly within the composition

classroom, George acknowledges that "a concern for visual literacy/visual communication has

been an ongoing one in the teaching of scientific, technical, or professional communication. . . .

[and] its emphasis on the functions or uses of visual information" (14).

Although professional and technical communication has been concerned with the visual

for quite some time, my contention with professional and technical communication's view of

visual communication pedagogy, as I will explore throughout this project, is that it tends to

focus too narrowly on function and use, often presented as prescriptive formula to be applied

without critical consideration. Thus, I also understand Hilligoss and Williams' call to "equip

citizen designers. . .with the literacy skills necessary to actively participate in shaping our social

context" (236) as a call for developing pedagogies of the visual as a "critical practice," to borrow

Herndl's term, and to begin a dialogue about the ways in which the visual can be situated as a

tool for social action beyond the professional and technical communication classroom.

It is with the hope of continuing the conversation about critical cultural approaches to

visual communication pedagogy in professional and technical communication that I offer an

outline of the remainder of this project. My main research questions are: How might writing

instructors develop pedagogies that better situate visual rhetoric and design as it is mired in

various contexts laden with cultural, social, political, and economic influences? And how can

instructors scaffold the teaching of visual communication and design in ways that may help

students see the potential of visual communication as social action? Central to this inquiry is my own grappling with how to teach visual communication as a critical cultural practice while simultaneously attending to the more traditionally pragmatic curricular goals of the writing classroom.

To fully answer my research questions, the following chapters will serve as interlocking, but individual papers. The overarching aim is to identify three significant points of tension in the teaching of professional and technical communication that are crucial to this dissertation. First, in the second chapter of this dissertation, I discuss the social and cultural "turns" in professional and technical communication. I also review not only surrounding scholarship but also pedagogical approaches to visual communication in order to make the case for why I believe professional and technical communication instructors should develop pedagogies of the visual as a critical, culturally-shaped practice. Within this discussion is the overarching concern about whether instruction should acculturate students to common conventions and genres germane to the field in order to mirror actual professional communities—social-constructionist pedagogy—or teach students, instead, to think critically about the political implications of such conventions and genres in an effort to resist or reconceptualize existing structures—ideologic pedagogy. Further embedded within this discussion are the ways in which professional and technical communication is positioned as a field that functions to "professionalize" practitioners, often for economic ends such as workplace efficiency and corporate success.

The second point of tension involves the seemingly contradictory role of visual communication in writing instruction such as the visual/verbal divide as well as the valuing of

visual production over visual analysis. I examine this in chapters 3 and 4 where I present the results of a textbook review of ten commonly adopted professional and technical communication textbooks in undergraduate courses. Textbooks are particularly apt sites of analysis for they not only shape how instructional content is framed and presented, but also normalize what information is worth knowing. Chapter 3 focuses exclusively on the ways in which the ten textbooks reviewed frame visual communication practices for students. Among my findings is that the trend to privilege visual production over visual analysis continues, as well as that there is a lingering divide between the verbal and visual. Because I argue that visual communication practices cannot be separated from the broader cultural contexts of which they are a part, in chapter 4 I situate my findings about visual communication within a broader discussion of how these textbooks frame issues of culture primarily through instruction about audience awareness.

Finally, in chapter 5, I pull these three tensions together and situate visual communication as *techne*, drawing from public and civic-engagement pedagogies that emphasize the significance of student learning within local community contexts. Although instruction has begun to acknowledge the ways in which cultural factors may affect professional and technical communication, instruction tends to teach students prescriptive rules that treat culture and cultural factors as static, predetermined elements. I will draw on professional and technical communication's ties to classical rhetoric and civic engagement in order to address the three points of tension outlined above. Specifically, I will argue that a

visual-rhetorical pedagogical framework that is grounded in the civic engagement objectives of

a rhetorical *paideia* may help students begin to view visual communication as a critical practice.

CHAPTER TWO: TEACHING THE VISUAL IN PROFESSIONAL AND TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION:

OUTLINING THE NEED FOR CRITICAL PRACTICE

W. J. T. Mitchell writes that no single academic discipline can lay claim to visual communication studies; rather, he argues that visual studies is an "indiscipline," signifying a "moment of breakage or rupture at the inner and outer boundaries of discipline" (541). Visual communication studies, thus, has large bodies of scholarship from fields as varied as rhetoric, communication, composition, art history, film and media studies, gender studies, cultural studies, anthropology, and others. In order to limit the scope of this project, however, I focus primarily on the ways in which visual communication studies have been approached from English studies through the fields of professional and technical communication, though I will also draw from interdisciplinary scholarship. Also, throughout this chapter, I consciously use the term "professional and technical communication" rather than "professional and technical writing" to emphasize the ways in which communication contexts make use of multiple modes. Additionally, defining what encompasses professional and technical communication remains at an impasse although common characteristics include: a relationship to technology (in terms of either subject matter or function); a relationship to work or the workplace; and a relationship to workers/users (see: Allen; Britton; Dobrin; Tebeaux and Killingsworth).

In order to understand what Scott, Longo, and Wills have dubbed "the legacy of hyperpragmatism" and the potentials of cultural critique as a possible corrective to professional and technical communication broadly, and visual communication approaches within the field specifically, a brief review of the history of professional and technical communication is

necessary. Although professional and technical communication shares a long history with

writing and rhetoric studies, professional and technical communication, as an academic area of

study, was born out of and fueled by demands from industry. Of course, I do not mean to

suggest that all scholars, researchers, teachers, and practitioners of professional and technical

communication are from the discipline of English and, more specifically, from rhetoric and

composition. In their 2004 article "Changing the Center of Gravity: Collaborative Writing

Program Administration in Large Universities," Richard Johnson-Sheehan and Charles Paine

write that despite the "cultural split" commonly aligning professional and technical

communication with the sciences and rhetoric and composition with the humanities, both kinds

of writing share an affinity with "rhetoric as a mother discipline" (200). Professional and

technical communication, as Robert Connors notes, has long been associated with (and

criticized for) teaching utilitarian forms and skills due, in part, to the exigence surrounding the

rise of the field as an academic course in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries:

namely, a perceived literacy crisis in engineering curricula and the need for writing instruction

for professional contexts (79). According to Teresa Kynell, first-year composition courses

proved insufficient for "the engineer's need for practical, real-world writing" and consequently,

the service-course (or what was then "English for Engineering") was created in order to provide

the space for curricula that focused on modes of discourse, clarity, and plain-style, along with

instruction in the genres of the report, instructions, and proposals (68-70). In *A History of*

Professional Writing Instruction in American Colleges, Katherine Adams also points out that

both first-year composition and technical writing were, at the time, informed primarily by the

current- traditional paradigm of mechanical correctness, clarity, exposition, and description (137).

Contemporaneous with what Connors describes as "the rise of technical writing" was an increasing disciplinary divide within English departments advanced by concerns about the perceived dwindling attention to humanistic study (by way of studying literature) versus the increasing need to attend to writing skills, thus forging a tension between humanism and utilitarianism (Connors 81-82; Kynell 10). Compounding this divide, Connors continues, was that "technical writing courses were seen by English departments as second-rate and was often staffed with younger faculty members or departmental fringe people . . . [with] no glory and no real chance for professional advancement" (83). Yoked to this view of professional and technical writing as vocational and utilitarian, Bernadette Longo notes in her historical work *Spurious Coin*, was adherence to a positivist view of science and objectivity, which enabled scientific and technical knowledge to become "the currency that keeps society's economy circulating" (22). This articulation, Longo continues, served two primary purposes: (1) it legitimated technical and scientific knowledge into useful economic output within a capitalist production system and (2) it served to perpetuate the notion of the technical communicator as a neutral scribe or transmitter of information (*Spurious* 16-17).

The turn to a social perspective of professional and technical communication occurred in tandem with a larger movement in rhetoric and composition to situate writing as a social practice (Berlin; Faigley). Professional and technical communication scholarship in the early 1980s, for example, sought to critique the long-held positivist notions of objectivity that

dominated the field in its early years. Carolyn Miller, in "A Humanistic Rationale for Technical Writing," critiques the "windowpane theory of language," or the view that language is a direct and accurate representation of reality, and warns against the dangers of characterizing "good" technical writing as clear, correct, neutral, and impartial. Miller argues that "our teaching of writing should present mechanical rules and skills against a broader understanding of why and how to adjust or violate the rules, of the social implications of the roles a writer casts for himself or herself and for the reader, and of the ethical repercussions of one's words" (617).

Following Miller's charge to reconsider positivist notions of professional and technical writing as a de-politicized practice, David Dobrin critiques the "logic of domination" that inculcates professional and technical communication documents with "a single, third-person voice [that] pretend[s] that this is the voice of everyman" (245). The idea that professional and technical writing can be detached from social, political, and ethical concerns, Dobrin argues, can potentially blind its practitioners to the ways in which power operates in discourse. In a similar vein, Dale Sullivan argues that the teaching of professional and technical writing is often influenced by a "technological consciousness" that avows objectivity and denies social responsibilities (375). Sullivan asserts that professional and technical communication ought to be viewed as praxis informed by phronesis because "all citizens, through workers, are responsible political agents. . . Expanding the scope of technical communication to include political discourse is to fight against the alienation produced by our economic and technological systems" (380-81). Robert Connors, Bernadette Longo, Teresa Kynell and other historians of technical writing note that the demand for technical communicators is inherently tied to

notions of capital and production. The technological boom of World War II, for example, created the need for documentation and manual writers. It was at this time, Bernadette Longo writes, that technical writing textbooks began to interpellate technical writing students "as individuals concerned with their own personal gain" (75). This emphasis on personal economic success is still present in contemporary professional and technical communication textbooks. I discuss this at length in Chapters three and four.

Likewise, Nancy Roundy Blyler and Charlotte Thralls, in their introduction to *Professional Communication: The Social Perspective*, describe the social turn in professional and technical communication as "a theory concerned with the local, the communal, and the social mediation of meaning, connecting a social perspective on writing research with social views of discourse prevalent in a range of current theoretical movements: poststructuralism, radical feminism, and the philosophy and sociology of science" (4). The social turn thus prompted an outpouring of scholarly research in professional and technical communication concerning collaboration (Bosley; Belanger and Greer; Burnett), ethics (Katz; Markel; Sullivan), gender and feminist approaches (Lay; Allen; Durack; Flynn; Tebeaux), multiculturalism and cross-cultural communication (Thrush; Beamer), technology (Sauer; Shirk; Selber), workplace studies and organizational culture (Odell and Goswami; Doheny-Farina), and risk communication (Herndl, Fennell, and Miller), just to name a few strands of inquiry.

While the social turn in professional and technical communication research proved to be a vast improvement from the current-traditional paradigm, some critics also noted that it was lacking in political commitment, thus occluding possibilities for change especially in relation

to professional and technical communication pedagogy. In "Teaching Discourse and Reproducing Culture," Carl Herndl summarizes his critique as such:

> Together, the idea of cultural (re)production and the theory of resistance present the major political challenge to the work of social or epistemic rhetoric in professional writing research. The problem with the largely descriptive focus of professional writing research from the perspective of radical pedagogy is that in teaching discourse we may merely be reproducing the social structures, ideologies, and subjectivities of the various communities we study. As we introduce our students to the various professional and organizational discourses we explore in our research, we may be reifying the social relations of which those discourses are a part. ("Teaching" 353)

As critical theorist Louis Althusser argues, educational institutions are among the most powerful "ideological state apparatuses" (ISAs), or the "distinct and specialized institutions" that perpetuate the ideologies of the ruling class or dominant culture (103). In effect, ISAs achieve this through "interpellating or hailing" individuals as subjects by telling them "this is who you are . . . this is your place in the world . . . and this is what you must do" (120). For Althusser, educational institutions are among those that reproduce ideology to maintain the status quo, and in his critique, one of education's primary functions is to teach students to be productive workers in a capitalist society.

For professional and technical communication—an academic field of study that, from its inception, was intertwined with industry and one that continues to maintain those ties by producing professional and technical communicators—the implications are complex and

perhaps troublesome. To return to one of the questions with which I have wrangled in my years of teaching professional communication: what, exactly, are we teaching? For Herndl, the goals of critical or radical pedagogy—which views social structures as constrained, not fixed, thereby allowing for what Paolo Freire calls conscientização, or the emergence of a critical consciousness that social and cultural structures and practices are recursive and in a constant state of negotiation—might point to new professional and technical communication "research [that] investigate[s] cultural and ideological work and the struggles that occur in professional discourse" (Freire 19; Herndl, "Teaching" 361).

While I hesitate to pinpoint Herndl's article as the catalyst for the cultural turn in professional and technical communication, in that same year (1993) more scholarly research that explicitly engaged cultural and ideological concerns emerged. Jennifer Daryl Slack, David James Miller, and Jeffery Doak's article "The Technical Communicator as Author: Meaning, Power, and Authority," for example, draws on Michel Foucault's discussion of the author to interrogate the communication practices of technical communicators, identifying three predominant views concerning the making of meaning through technical communication. In the first view, the technical communicator is merely a neutral conduit or transmitter of messages, a strictly positivist view where "the professional technical writer . . . is rendered essentially transparent in the process, ideally becoming the clear channel itself" (30). The second view sees the technical communicator as a translator, an approach that recognizes that meaning, and thus, power is negotiated but "limits our understanding of full authorial contribution and power of the mediator" (37). The final view is that of the technical communicator as a responsible

author which recognizes that communication is "an ongoing process of articulation" (37).

Informed by critical theorists Antonio Gramsci, Ernesto Laclau, and Stuart Hall, the authors

argue that cultural theories such as articulation, which assert that "any identity in the social

formation must be understood as the nonnecessary connection between the elements that

constitute it" and that "any identity is culturally agreed on or, more accurately, struggled over

in ongoing processes of disarticulation and rearticulation," may provide professional and

technical communication scholars, practitioners, and students with a means of understanding

the practices and structures in which they are complicit, thus potentially forging a means to

effect change (Slack, Miller, Doak 37, 39).

Just as Slack, Miller, and Doak insist that technical communication can never be neutral,

Ben F. Barton and Marthalee S. Barton argue that visual representations, too, are

"embodiments of cultural and disciplinary conventions" that can "sustain relations of

domination" (49, 50). Informed by semiotician Roland Barthes, Barton and Barton illustrate

how conventions can render visual representations as natural, using the map as their exemplar.

Denaturalizing the seeming naturalness of the map—or disarticulating the articulation of the

map as natural, to relate the example to articulation theory—requires examining what Barton

and Barton call the "rules of inclusion" and "rules of exclusion" (53). In so doing, "the

placement of visual elements becomes a way of imparting privilege" and, in the case of the

Mercator map, reproduces a homogenized Eurocentric view of the world that legitimizes some

while delegitimizing others (55-56). Particularly relevant to this project is Barton and Barton's

emphasis to move beyond simply critiquing mapping practices and to also explore alternative

representations of the map, calling for professional and technical communicators to be more attentive of the cultural and ideological implications of the documents they design.

In the years since the publication of the aforementioned articles, professional and technical communication research has continued to sustain scholarly inquiry into the cultural influences and effects of professional and technical communication practices. In 1998, Bernadette Longo explicitly argued for research grounded in cultural studies inquiry so that the field can better "illuminate how struggles for knowledge legitimation taking place within technical writing practices are influenced by institutional, political, economic, and/or social relationships, pressures, and tensions within cultural contexts that transcend any one affiliated group" ("An Approach" 61-62). In 2007, the first edited collection about cultural studies approaches to professional and technical communication, *Critical Power Tools: Technical Communication and Cultural Studies*, was published. The continuing interest in this kind of scholarly inquiry thus evinces the claim that professional and technical communication has, indeed, made the "cultural turn," which "draws on a number of theoretical and (inter)disciplinary traditions and engage[s] in a diverse array of political projects" (Scott and Longo 3).

Pedagogical practices infused with a cultural emphasis are also increasing in areas such as autoethnographic inquiry (Henry), critical approaches to technology (Salvo; Turnley) intercultural and cross-cultural communication (Hunsinger; Jeyaraj), disability studies (Palmeri), course design and curricula (Haas; Wills), program design (Franke, Reid, and DiRenzo), and service-learning and civic engagement (Scott; Dobrin and Weisser). In emphasizing the cultural

effects of professional and technical communication and integrating them into pedagogy, many of the works mentioned above offer potential responses to Gerald Savage's call for "teachers to integrate theory, pedagogy, and social action . . . [and] to remain engaged in the ongoing struggle to reconstitute technical communication as a socially responsible practice" (324). Thus, a primary focus of these pedagogies is to ask instructors to be aware and reflective of what we teach our students, to re-examine why particular content and practices have made it into our classrooms, as well as to interrogate what values are forwarded by our instruction, in the hopes of opening spaces to effect social change by teaching professional and technical communication students to be critical, attentive, and reflective practitioners. It is within this framework, thus, that I situate my project of developing pedagogies of the visual as a critical practice.

Pedagogical Approaches to Visual Communication

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, scholarly research and pedagogies about visual communication has thrived in multiple academic disciplines in the last half of the century, underscored by the notion that visuality frames our experiences as "a mode of cultural expression and human communication as fundamental and widespread as language" (Mitchell, "Interdisciplinarity" 543). Scholars affiliated with writing and rhetoric studies have especially advocated for pedagogies that attend to the multimodal— verbal, visual, and aural—literacy practices of the twenty-first century. Richard Lanham suggests, for example, that the multimodal literacy practices afforded by the changing technological landscape require "being skilled at deciphering complex images and sounds as well as the syntactical subtleties of words. Above all it means being at home in the shifting mixture of words, images, and sounds" (198).

The New London Group, too, argues for "a much broader view of literacy than portrayed by traditional language-based approaches" (60). Similarly, Cynthia Selfe insists on the inclusion of "visual literacy to our existing focus on alphabetic literacy . . . [in order] to extend the usefulness of composition studies in a changing world" (72). Undergirding such statements is the recognition that visual communication—and the various media in which they appear— are circulating discourses in public culture and, as such, are rhetorical productions with rhetorical force that have significant pedagogical import.

In the remainder of this chapter, I discuss common approaches to visual communication pedagogy in professional and technical communication as well as in rhetoric and composition. In so doing, I separate my discussion into what I view as the two dominant pedagogical approaches to visual communication: visual production in professional and technical communication and visual analysis in the broader area of rhetoric and composition. I realize, of course, that separating "analysis" from "production" might be viewed as a restrictive imposition of artificial binaries onto visual communication practices. However, I make these discrete distinctions in order to show how approaches to visual communication—particularly in rhetoric and composition and in professional and technical communication—tend to favor one over the other, even as most scholars and instructors from the two fields agree that pedagogical engagement with both analysis and production are imperative because one necessarily informs the other. Just as scholars in rhetoric and composition bemoan that the teaching of visual communication errs too much on the side of analysis and not enough on encouraging students to be "producers as well as consumers or critics of visual media" (George

13), I argue that the teaching of visual production in professional and technical communication ought to be better grounded in rhetorical and cultural analysis. In so doing, however, I view the unidirectional move—from either analysis to production or from production to analysis—as ultimately unproductive, advocating instead for a view of visual communication as recursive and always in the process of being designed, analyzed, and redesigned.

Approaches to Visual Production in Professional and Technical Communication

Perhaps more so than rhetoric and composition, professional and technical communication has always had a vested interest in visual communication. For example, before the late-1990s flurry of scholarly attention about visual communication in rhetoric and composition, *Technical Communication Quarterly* had already published special issues in hypertext (1995) and visual rhetoric (1996). Indeed, *TCQ's* predecessor, *The Technical Writing Teacher*, published two of the three earliest scholarly articles in Carolyn Handa's bibliography of visual rhetoric: Jennifer Titen's "Application of Rudolf Arnheim's Visual Thinking to the Teaching of Technical Writing" (1980) and Barton and Barton's "Towards a Rhetoric of Visuals for the Computer Era" (1985). Much of this interest is due to the ways in which the field holds document design as one of its central territories. Further, the significance of technical and scientific illustrations in professional and technical communication holds the visual as a crucial part of conveying information. Because one of the field's objectives is to educate its future practitioners in the genres used in various professional and technical workplace contexts, central to the field's pedagogical concerns is the teaching of producing documents. As previously mentioned, professional and technical communication's close ties to business and

industry often invite the critique that courses commonly taught in professional and technical writing curricula operate on a "skill and drill" basis with strong allegiances to form and structure.

As such, professional and technical communication's approach to the teaching of visual communication values production over analysis. In professional and technical communication, graphic design heavily influences the teaching of visual production. As a subset of design studies, graphic design is primarily concerned with the organization and presentation of textual or representational content such as the layout and arrangement of verbal and visual elements in any given document. The seeming straightforwardness and applicability of design's formal elements—such as line, shape, texture, value, color, space—provide students with structured guidelines in the invention, organization, and arrangement of visual information.

The guidelines and principles underscoring the use of design's formal elements are grounded in Gestalt theory, a movement of the early twentieth century influenced by cognitive psychology, which describes how viewers read and perceive visual elements. Gestalt theory explains that viewers read visual elements holistically rather than as a collection of individual elements, hence the common Gestalt mantra that "the sum of the whole is greater than its parts." According to the Gestalt theory of visual perception, when we view images, we first look to the figure-ground contrast to distinguish shapes from the background. Once we distinguish the shapes from the background in a given visual composition, we then rely on pragnanz (a German word meaning "conciseness" and is often used to describe how we organize the principles of Gestalt theory) to order what we see. That is, we group shapes based on their

similarity to each other, their proximity to each other, and their location based on a line of symmetry. Then, we try to connect the individual elements through continuation or complete missing elements through, what Scott McCloud would define as, closure, the "phenomenon of observing the parts but perceiving the whole" (63).

Current professional and technical communication textbooks often draw from Gestalt theory to teach visual production and among the most prominent advocates of this approach include Richard Johnson-Sheehan's *Technical Communication Today*, Mike Markel's *Technical Communication*, and Robin Williams' *The Non-Designers Design Book: Design and Typographic Principles for the Visual Novice.* In addition to Gestalt theory, another approach to organizing visual elements moves away from guidelines based strictly on visual perception and instead focuses on the notion of convention. According to Charles Kostelnick and David Roberts, design conventions are "the customary forms and configurations that members of an audience expect" in the layout and arrangement of visual information (33). The primary difference between the two approaches is that Gestalt theory explains why we perceive particular layouts in certain ways, whereas conventions explain why we expect to see particular layouts in certain ways. The use of both approaches together, thus, instructs students to produce documents according to how we see by replicating the expectations typical of certain genres. Ellen Lupton and J. Abbot Miller, however, critique both approaches because they reproduce modernist design theory which "focuses on perception at the expense of interpretation" and suggests "a universal faculty of vision common to all humans at all times, capable of overriding cultural and historical

barriers" (62). Still, approaching design through Gestalt theory or conventions continues to be

prevalent in professional and technical communication pedagogy.

In *Dynamics of Document Design*, Karen Schriver identifies three strands of visual design

pedagogy: the Craft Tradition, the Romantic Tradition, and the Rhetorical Tradition. The Craft

Tradition can best be considered as akin to what we now call current-traditional rhetoric

whereby instruction is based on identifying and modeling established principles of layout and

organization and then applying those principles to documents. As in current-traditional

rhetoric, the product is paramount to the process. The Romantic Tradition, in contrast,

subscribes to the belief that design is creative expression originating from innate intuition or

talent and is thus ultimately, unteachable. Finally, the Rhetorical Tradition approaches design

from the perspective of users whereby instruction begins with the needs of audiences and,

accordingly, design principles are constructed to meet those needs.

While graphic design approaches are useful in that they provide students with principles

and guidelines by which to produce visual documents, they also have their limitations. Visual

production in professional and technical communication is primarily taught from the Craft

Tradition (although more and more approaches are beginning to adopt the Rhetorical Tradition)

where students learn the rules and principles of visual design before applying those rules and

principles to their own documents. As critics note, however, this approach does not give

sufficient attention to rhetorical, cultural, and ideological influences, and that teaching such

principles as rules to be followed may unintentionally encourage uncritical use. This is made

especially salient by Wysocki's piece already mentioned in the introduction of this dissertation

where she critiques the ways in which the principles of design when taught as "form" can render the "content" (as well as the social, cultural, and ideological context of both form and content) as neutral, thus explaining her "pleasure" in seeing a well-designed advertisement in terms of form, and her "offense" in the gendered ideology of its content.

Of course, I do not mean to suggest that professional and technical communication scholars have not engaged in visual analysis in order to critique the seeming neutrality of visuals as they have done so clearly with the "windowpane theory of language." Barton and Barton, for example, have made clear that "technical and professional visuals are not only instruments of communication and even of knowledge, but also instruments of power" ("Modes" 83). Barton and Barton's influential study of maps have shown how "visual signification [can] serve to sustain relations of domination" especially in "natural" or "objective" visual media ("Ideology" 232). Lee E. Brasseur warns that visual representations that are inherently conceived as "sound" and "objective" are especially deserving of critical attention because of their "central tendency to disengage from experience, reality, and context" (*Visualizing* 151). Using the analytical lens of genre theory, Brasseur interrogates common visual genres in professional and technical communication such as graphs, illustrations, charts, diagrams, tables, and information visualization, and argues that inherent problems may exist within the genres themselves— problems resulting from the cultural, historical, and material consequences of their use (*Visualizing* 3). Daniel Ding also posits that emphasizing the aesthetic principle of the "good figure" is rooted in ideologies whereby notions of creating aesthetically appealing visuals are entangled with patriarchal undertones equating the appealing with the feminine. Ding thus

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advocates for an approach that is "more comprehensive and more situation-oriented . . . to tone down patriarchal ideas and prevent projecting new idols" (45). Certainly, many scholars have called for new approaches to visual design within professional and technical communication scholarship. What I wish to emphasize here, however, is that such calls and critiques have not yet radically impacted the teaching through textbooks of visual communication.

Approaches to Visual Analysis in Rhetoric and Composition

Whereas the aims of professional and technical communication's approaches to visual communication pedagogy are focused squarely on visual production, pedagogical approaches in rhetoric and composition are rooted primarily in visual analysis. Many times this is manifest in first-year writing classes when the rhetorical situation is being introduced. Or, is explored when students, specifically in design majors, are afforded technical or professional communication classes that specifically discuss the language in which visuals communicate, not merely the culture that surrounds visuals. It is important to note here, though it will be discussed in depth later, that the formal study of visuals as a language is strikingly lacking. Scholars like Wysocki, McCloud,Horn, Sousanis, Coen, are working to fill that gap, but largely, as I hope to show, there is room for improvement.

Paramount to the analytical approach to visuals in the rhetoric and writing classrooms is the recognition that visual artifacts are not neutral, objective, one-to- one representations of reality. Rather, scholars and teachers of visual analysis emphasize the ways in which visual artifacts are social constructions laden with the messages and ideologies of the communicative

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situations in which they exist. In the remainder of this section, I discuss two common pedagogical approaches to visual analysis in rhetoric and composition: semiology/semiotics and visual culture.

Semiology, the study of signs, is rooted in linguistics and was forwarded by the work of Ferdinand de Saussure. Saussure suggests that "signs" are comprised of a signifier (the written word or the sound of word in language) and a "signified" (the conceptual meaning of the signifier). Saussure further posits that sign-systems are self- contained and are governed by an underlying system of structures (Culler 28-29). Drawing from the theoretical framework of Saussure, Charles Peirce was the first to adapt and examine visual representations as sign-systems, categorizing them into three kinds of representational images: icons are direct representations of the things they stand for; indexes are only related to or associated with the things they stand for but are not actual representations; symbols need not resemble what they stand for at all and are generally used to represent abstract concepts and ideas. Because the teaching of visual analysis in rhetoric and composition is concerned with the ways in which visual artifacts work in various communicative situations, another component of teaching visual analysis focuses on the messages visual artifacts relay. Here, scholars and teachers of visual analysis have found the work of Roland Barthes particularly useful. In "Rhetoric of the Image," Barthes analyzes the verbal/visual interplay of signs in a pasta advertisement and distinguishes from denotational messages (the actual words used), connotational messages (what the words refer to), and the message of the visual image itself. These three elements, according to

Barthes, create a "linguistic message, a coded iconic message, and a non-coded iconic message" which are then perceived simultaneously in meaning-making (154).

Extending the work of Barthes, Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen approach semiotics from a more social standpoint positing that an understanding of "visual grammar" is integral to teasing out the associative meanings among signs. Kress and van Leeuwen argue that visual signs are not merely re-fashioned versions that originate from verbal signs. Rather, they emphasize that "the visual component of a text is an independently organized and structured message—connected with the verbal text, but in no way dependent on it: and similarly the other way around" (17). Thus, according to Kress and van Leeuwen, the visual should be conceived as its own discourse with its own grammar, logic, and rhetoric.

Although semiotics can provide students with meaningful vocabularies to discuss visual elements by which they can then analyze and deconstruct "visual grammar," to use Kress and van Leeuwen's term, common pedagogies of visual analysis also make use of visual culture approaches. Missing from a strictly semiotic approach is attention to how and why dominant cultural values are tied to gender, race, class, and so forth, and how visual representations communicate these values. In *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation*, visual culture scholar W. J. T. Mitchell forwards the notion of "critical iconology" that allow for analyses of culturally dominant ideologies as they are conveyed through visual representation (28). For Mitchell, ideology is "a historical cultural formation that masquerades as a universal, natural code" (31). Mitchell warns, however, that critical inquiries about visual discourse must also recognize how they are always already implicated in the visual materials it aims to address:

"It intervenes and is itself subjected to intervention by its object . . . [which] is why I've called this notion of iconology critical and dialectical" (30). Underscoring visual culture approaches, thus, are emphases on how particular beliefs, values, and ideologies shared by various cultural/discursive communities construct meaning from visual representations and how, in turn, they inform the ways in which visual representations are produced.

Visual communication scholars, especially in rhetoric, have advocated for visual culture approaches that attend to the rhetorical aspects of visual representation. In "The Psychology of Rhetorical Images," for example, Charles A. Hill suggests that visual culture frameworks can help rhetoric scholars analyze "the ways in which culturally shared values and assumptions are utilized in persuasive communication, and how these shared values and assumptions influence viewers' responses to mass produced images" (26). John Lucaites and Robert Hariman address how these shared values and assumptions are visually perpetuated in their study of iconic photographs in *No Caption Needed: Iconic Photographs, Public Culture, and Liberal Democracy*. Lucaites and Hariman take up the issue of "collective memory" by showing how visual representations have significant rhetorical import as circulating forces in public culture that help to construct—while are simultaneously constructed by—dominant values and ideologies.

In order to encourage students to adopt a critical stance toward visual representation, advocates of visual analysis have adopted various heuristics into their pedagogies. Robert Scholes, in *Protocols of Reading*, outlines five steps in which students can learn the basics of visual analysis by analyzing photographs: students should first note their emotional reaction to the image, consider its formal elements and publication history, note the process of creation,

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before finally reflecting on the initial emotional reaction (22-27). Similarly, Gillian Rose, in *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to the Interpretation of Visual Materials*, encourages students to consider the following four sites of producing meaning: production (the site of the image itself); technology (the format for reproduction); composition (the formal elements of the image); and social (the political, economic, institutional practices surrounding the observation and interpretation of the image) (16). Following an explicitly rhetorical approach, Cara Finnegan advocates for the deployment of one or more of the following approaches: In studying production, the critic examines not only the technical aspects of image-making but also the generic, institutional, and authorial factors that influence the creation of images.

> In studying composition, the critic attends to the visual features of the image itself, as well as any historical referents or commonplaces they activate. The study of reproduction invites the critic to examine the specific "textual events" in which images appear. The study of circulation asks the critic to study how the image moves in and through various contexts of public culture. Finally, the critic studying reception attempts to gauge audiences' responses to images. (252)

Many of the textbooks commonly used in the teaching of visual communication adopt one or more of these approaches to guide students in analyzing visual representations and the multiple communicative situations in which they appear. My point in reviewing pedagogical approaches to visual analysis is to show how such heuristics can complement pedagogies of visual production within professional and technical communication.

CHAPTER THREE: VISUAL COMMUNICATION IN UNDERGRADUATE PROFESSIONAL AND

TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION TEXTBOOKS

In her 1992 *College Composition and Communication* review of six professional and technical communication textbooks that were then in use, Carolyn Miller claims that one of the field's foremost concerns revolves around the seeming disjuncture between "composition research and textbook pedagogy," noting that the dissonance between research and pedagogy has "not been sanguine" (111). "The general charge," Miller continues, "is that research findings and theory are not 'trickling down' effectively into the textbooks, that publishers and markets remain conservative, committed to a tradition of teaching even as that tradition has been challenged by recent scholarship" (111).

Since Miller's initial charge, other scholars and researchers have similarly noted how textbook analyses can provide us with insight into what is being taught about writing and how it is being taught. Lester Faigley, for example, writes that textbooks "represent teachers' and program directors' decisions about how writing should be represented to students" (133). In his dissertation examining the ways in which composition handbooks have changed, Christopher Sean Harris, too, asserts the significance of textbooks as a means of "provid[ing] insight into how publishers think instructors should teach students or how colleges want instructors to teach students—merely how students *should* learn to write, what students should learn about writing" (iii). Textbooks, according to Bernadette Longo, are significant pedagogical resources that "contain knowledge that purports to be exhaustive, important, useful, standardized, idealized, for the public benefit, and encouraging of systematized social stability" (*Spurious Coin*

71). Speaking directly to professional and technical communication scholars, researchers, and teachers, Libby Miles also argues that "because textbooks often act as a vehicle for the dissemination of practice-based information, and their distribution is often nation-wide (if not continent- wide or world-wide), they are in a powerful position to send messages (both intentional and unintentional) about the nature of a globalized curriculum and a globalized workplace" (181). Miles' concerns are further underscored by the charges of J. Blake Scott, Bernadette Longo, and Katherine V. Wills who, in their edited collection *Critical Power Tools: Technical Communication and Cultural Studies*, urge teachers of professional and technical communication to be wary of "hyperpragmatist" pedagogies that forward "a hegemonic ideology and set of practices that privileges utilitarian efficiency and effectiveness, including rhetorical effectiveness, at the expense of sustained reflection, critique, and ethical action," citing textbooks as just one artifact that often reflects notions of such utilitarian, vocational concerns (9). The insights of these scholars, thus, locate textbooks as a particularly apt site of study for examining what we teach, how we teach it, and why. I recognize that textbooks often lag behind current scholarship due to lengthy publication processes. Additionally, I do not mean to suggest that all instructors use textbooks as sole pedagogical resources; many instructors often supplement textbook use with other readings and materials. Still, the widespread adoption of textbooks indicates that their contents are representative of what is taught in classrooms, or that they serve as exemplars for what *ought* to be taught.

In this chapter I examine a handful of current textbooks produced for undergraduate professional and technical communication courses focusing especially on the ways in which

visual communication is framed. Specifically, I ask: How are visual communication practices (both in terms of production and analysis) addressed in current professional and technical communication textbooks? What are the implications of these pedagogies? Driving my inquiry are the calls in the scholarship outlined in the previous chapter for more situated practices that make visible the ways in which professional and technical communication—and specifically, visual communication—is inextricable from "institutional, political, economic, and/or social relationships, pressures, and tensions within cultural contexts" (Longo, "An Approach" 61). My purpose in undertaking this project is to understand those points in which textbook pedagogy and current scholarship converge, diverge, and overlap in order to propose a framework that may more fully address both the calls in current scholarship and the pragmatic strategies offered by textbook authors.

First, I review previous work on textbooks in professional and technical communication before turning to a discussion of the ways in which textbooks may contribute to educational frames that "determine, at least in part, how classroom work is carried out" (Adler-Kassner 18). Next, I explain my methodology and acknowledge the limitations of this study. Finally, I present the results of the textbook review and discuss its implications.

Textbook Reviews in Professional and Technical Communication

Some professional and technical communication scholars working in issues of intercultural communication have undertaken textbook surveys to better understand the pedagogical efficacy of these classroom artifacts. For example, Danielle De Voss, Julia Jaskin, and Dawn Hayden surveyed 15 of the "best-selling" textbooks published between 1994 and

2001 in order to conduct a content analysis of key terms such as "culture, foreign language(s),

intercultural communication, international communication, [and] cross-cultural

communication" (72). To track the ways in which discussion of the above terms have changed,

the authors then compared their results with a survey of what they classify as 15 "randomly

selected" textbooks published between 1960 and 1975. Based on the data gathered from the

two surveys, the authors then propose teaching strategies that may better address intracultural

and intercultural issues in the classroom.

Jan Corbett also uses a textbook survey to question the ways in which textbooks present

issues of intercultural communication and notes three primary approaches: (1) "information

acquisition" whereby textbooks inform students about other cultures and then suggests

strategies for writing for different audiences; (2) "case-study" where textbooks present

students with simulated intercultural communication challenges before asking them to

problem-solve such issues through discussion; and (3) "praxis" where textbooks prompt

students to engage in intercultural experiences and then identify and analyze intercultural

communication practices (412). Using examples gleaned from textbooks, Corbett outlines the

potential benefits and challenges in the three pedagogical approaches. She does not explain her

methodology in selecting textbooks.

Other scholars have outlined methodological approaches to evaluating and selecting

textbooks for classroom use. In his 1981 survey of first-year composition textbooks, William

Dowie presents a rubric for analyzing textbooks and proposes the following categories as a

heuristic: range, emphasis, organization, pedagogy, evaluation procedures, language, and

recommendations (48). These categories, Dowie argues, can provide instructors with

"important categories that lead to [textbook] assessment, . . . [while] allow[ing] the reviewer-

teachers to make their own evaluations" (52). Similarly, Thomas Barker and Natalia Matveeva

propose an analytical model by which professional and technical communication instructors can

evaluate textbooks for an intercultural communication service course. Drawing from Emily A.

Thrush's three-pronged approach to intercultural communication (awareness, information,

practice) as a beginning heuristic by which to analyze specific textbook elements, Barker and

Matveeva also employ the Burkean Pentad (agent, agency, purpose, act, scene) in order to

situate the various contexts in which textbooks are used. The authors argue that this broader

analytical approach not only provides instructors with guidance in textbook selection but also

"situate[s] textbook usage in the contexts of the real demands of teaching" (Barker and

Matveeva 213).

     As these studies suggest, textbooks play a significant role in the teaching of professional

and technical communication. In many instances, textbooks are the primary resources through

which students are introduced to professional and technical communication. Further, textbooks

may also serve as the introduction to the field for instructors, particularly those who are

graduate students and adjunct instructors who may not have scholarly backgrounds or

sufficient pedagogical training in the courses to which they are assigned (Bleich 17-18). As such,

textbooks may, in part, contribute to educational frames that help shape and authorize a body

of knowledge.

Educational Frames

According to Erwin Goffman, frames help us understand how we "rely on expectations to make sense of everyday experiences" (7). Following Goffman's lead, Stephen D. Reese defines framing as the "organizing principles that are socially shared and persistent over time, that work symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world" (11). Because frames are ubiquitous and instantiated through multiple discourses, James K. Hertog and Douglas M. McLeod insist that frames have the power to "legitimize and delegitimize relationships . . . goals and ethics . . ." by reinforcing and activating dominant myths, metaphors, and narratives through their wide dissemination (143, 160). Frames, thus, use language and other symbol systems to organize, structure, and limit how human beings perceive their experiences. As such, framing is an inherently rhetorical process persuading individuals to act or believe in particular ways.

Some scholars have already applied framing theory and frame analysis to explore the ways in which education is framed. Explicitly linking framing theory to writing program administration, Linda Adler-Kassner explains that the narratives, or what she calls "stories," about writing and writing instruction are grounded in frames that "are always set within and reinforce particular boundaries" and commonly revolve around students' perceived literacy deficiencies (4). Although frames might seem natural, stable, and coherent, partly due to their ubiquity, Adler-Kassner also emphasizes that frames can be resisted and offers several strategies through which writing program administrators can shift the frames about writing instruction.

Educational frames not only shape conversations about disciplinary practices such as

writing program administration but can also inform classroom practices. In professional and

technical communication, David Reamer employs frame analysis to explore how the concept of

ethics and professionalism are articulated in professional and technical communication

pedagogy (54). As Reamer notes, educational frames can influence students' perception

regarding the value of what they learn about professional and technical communication in

classroom and its applicability to their future careers. Reamer further contends that

educational framing "happens every day in the classroom, regardless of any conscious intent by

instructors to influence students' behavior beyond the scope of the course" (41). Educational

framing in the classroom is thus constructed, in part, by the curricular and pedagogical

materials—such as textbooks, syllabi, course lectures, and assignments—with which students

engage.

Methodology

In order to conduct this study, I first reviewed textbook titles from three of the four

major publishers of textbooks in higher education: Pearson/Longman, Bedford St. Martin's, and

Thomson/Wadsworth (I chose to omit textbooks from W.W. Norton for reasons detailed later

in this chapter). Each of the publishers lists offerings by discipline—in this case "English"—

which is a consistent category among the three publishers. From this initial category, each

publisher uses various sub-classifications to delineate the fields of study within the broader

discipline of English. From these sub- categories—ranging from Composition, Developmental

English, and Literature, for example—I limited my inquiry to those classified as "Technical

Communication," "Business & Technical Writing," and "Professional and Technical Communication."

Even after focusing on the textbooks within the three sub-categories I identified, the initial dataset produced hundreds of textbooks, well above the number I could reasonably analyze within the scope of this chapter. Thus, I had to further narrow my sample size. Early in the study, I attempted to locate sales numbers to ensure that the textbooks with the highest sales numbers—and thus, likely the most commonly adopted—would be included in the study. (To be clear, I am not suggesting here that sales numbers and adoption records are indicative of the degree to which a textbook is actually *utilized* in the classroom). Publisher contacts, however, were reluctant to divulge this type of information; thus, I turned to titles recommended by publishers as well as those that were featured on the publisher's websites. In order to ensure that the study included only the most recent textbooks, I limited my samples to titles published or updated with a new edition within the last ten years, the earliest of which was published in 2008, thus ensuring the timeliness of this inquiry. To further narrow the dataset, I chose only to analyze textbooks that can be classified as "comprehensive" introductory texts for undergraduate courses in professional and technical communication and excluded those that are classified as "handbooks" and "reference guides." The only textbook offered in the sub-category of "Business & Technical Writing" by W.W. Norton is the reference guide, *Writing on the Job: A Norton Pocket Guide*. Thus, I did not include it in the survey. Additionally, the terms "Professional Communications" and "Professional Writing" seem to be used interchangeably with the term "Business Writing," suggesting a focus on workplace

communications. I have included textbooks with such a focus, although the majority of the

textbooks reviewed contain the more common term "Technical Communication" in the title.

Finally, I also chose to review two textbooks focusing specifically on visual design. Table 1

provides detailed information about each textbook reviewed, including title, author(s), number

of pages, publisher, publisher's classification, and date of publication:

Table 1: List and description of textbooks reviewed

Title	Author(s)	Number of Pages	Publisher	Publisher's Classification	Date of Publication
Document Design: A Guide for Technical Communicators	Miles A. Kimball and Ann R. Hawkins	390	Bedford St. Martin's	Technical Writing	2008
Technical Communication (10th Ed.)	Mike Markel	797	Bedford St. Martin's	Technical Writing	2012
Technical Communication: Process and Product (7th Ed.)	Sharon J. Gerson and Steven M. Gerson	663	Pearson/Longman	Technical Communication-Intro	2012
Strategies for Technical Communication in the Workplace (2nd Ed.)	Laura J. Gurak and John M. Lannon	498	Pearson/Longman	Technical Communication-Intro	2012
Technical Communication Today (4th Ed.)	Richard Johnson-Sheehan	646	Pearson/Longman	Technical Communication-Intro	2012
Designing Visual Language: Strategies for Professional Communicators (2n Ed.)	Charles Kostelnick and David D. Roberts	400	Pearson/Longman	Visual Communication	2011
Technical Communication: A Practical Approach (8th Ed.)	William Sanborn Pfeiffer and Kaye E. Adkins	705	Pearson/Longman	Technical Communication-Intro	2012
Workplace Communications: The Basics (5th Ed.)	George J. Searles	300	Pearson/Longman	Business Writing; Workplace Writing	2011
Technical Communication: A Reader- Centered Approach (7th Ed.)	Paul V. Anderson	752	Thomson/ Wadsworth	Technical Communication	2011
Successful Writing at Work (9th Ed.)	Philip C. Kolin	728	Thomson/ Wadsworth	Business Communication; Technical Communication	2010

Once I established my dataset of ten professional and technical communication textbooks, I then examined each of the ten textbooks for emerging categories of analysis. Following the methodology employed by Isabelle Thompson in her survey of professional and technical communication journal articles, I completed a qualitative content analysis of the textbooks which assesses words, phrases, and relationships among textual elements. I chose this methodology because it is a systematic method of analyzing texts according to defined parameters. Unlike a quantitative content analysis, however, a qualitative content analysis allows the researcher to test and revise categories as they emerge. The ultimate goal of a qualitative content analysis, as Thompson writes, is "to be flexible but at the same time systematic. The result of a qualitative content analysis is an inclusive representation of patterns found in a corpus" (162). Given the specific purpose of this review—to explore whether or not instruction in visual composition as espoused in professional and technical communication textbooks reflect trends in current scholarship—I focus my discussion and analysis primarily on the textbook chapters that address the issue outlined, with the exception of a brief discussion of the philosophical and pedagogical orientation grounding each textbook's approach. Thus, the categories that emerged for me are as follows: philosophy of text, philosophy toward visual communication, and practices of visual communication. In addition to these categories, I also considered the placement of chapters, the breadth of discussion, and the tone with which authors used to describe these pedagogies. In the remainder of this chapter, I present the results of the review according to the categories identified. I first review the eight comprehensive textbooks in professional/business communication and technical

communication before reviewing the two textbooks devoted solely to visual communication. In these sections, my primary purpose is to describe the patterns that have emerged across the textbooks. At the end of the chapter, I discuss the implications of the findings in depth.

Research Limitations

My investigation in this chapter is by no means an exhaustive or comprehensive review of instruction concerning visual communication in the professional and technical communication classroom writ large. Rather, I aim to establish a descriptive review to assess the dominant ways in which visual communication pedagogies are discussed and enacted. Although textbook surveys can only provide us with a partial picture, I contend that they lend significant insight into classroom pedagogies, for, when considered as an entire genre, textbooks function as an apparatus by which a collection of a given field's exemplary pedagogical ideas are compiled, organized, and framed by an editorial authority comprised not only of the (usually) well-established scholars who write the texts, but also the publishers whose market interests are served by the textbook's production and eventual adoption. (I realize that textbook authors work with an entire team of editors; thus, when I refer to an author's name, I do not mean to suggest that the textbook content is entirely emblematic of any single author's pedagogy. Likewise, I recognize that textbook authors' published scholarship may not necessarily correlate with the textbook contents). As such, textbooks play an important role in shaping a field of study, often serving as a standard paradigm not only for what instructors should teach but also for what students should learn. At the same time, however, I also acknowledge that while textbooks are designed to operate on a large scale—to

be used by numerous institutions and to help construct and disseminate pedagogical values

especially for new instructors and students—they are not always necessarily met with academic

scholarly acclaim, as Gary A. Olson and others note in the foreword to *(Re)visioning*

Composition Textbooks: Conflicts of Culture, Ideology, and Pedagogy (x). Thus, textbooks also

reflect the scholarly, pedagogical, and commercial demands "of the cultures that produce

them, the discipline of which they are an indispensable part, and the classrooms in which they

are to have their most tangible effects on teaching and learning" (Gale and Gale 4).

Comprehensive Professional and Technical Communication Textbooks

Philosophy of Text

Nearly all of the textbooks reviewed advocate for a process-based approach to

professional and technical communication. For example, in their Preface to *Technical*

Communication: Process and Product, Sharon J. Gerson and Steven M. Gerson argue that "the

writing process—prewriting, writing, and rewriting—has been the standard for teaching

students how to write effectively" and that "this textbook . . . build[s] upon this process with a

unique approach that applies the writing process to both oral and written communication" (vii).

William Sanford Pfeiffer and Kaye E. Adkins state that their text, *Technical Communication: A*

Practical Approach, "immerses [students] in the process of technical writing while teaching

practical formats for getting the job done" (ix).

Additionally, many of the textbooks emphasize the importance of rhetoric in shaping

professional and technical communication documents. Richard Johnson-Sheehan, in his preface

to *Technical Communication Today*, affirms that "the book is grounded in a solid core of

rhetorical principles that have been around for at least two and half millennia" (xxi). Laura J. Gurak and John M. Lannon, in their Preface to *Strategies for Technical Communication in the Workplace*, emphasize that "professionals in all fields are expected to adapt to a variety of communication situations" and that "a one-size-fit all approach . . . doesn't work. Effective communication must be tailored for different audiences and different purposes" (xxii, xxv). Invoking the rhetorical situation, Mike Markel, in *Technical Communication*, directly addresses students and explains that "the biggest difference between technical communication and the other kinds of writing you have done is that technical communication has a somewhat different audience and purpose" (5).

Following this pattern of introducing process-based writing and the significance of rhetorical principles, nearly all of the textbooks outline principles of professional and technical communication and the differences between academic writing and workplace writing, as well as broadly introduce concepts such as collaboration, ethics, and global issues in communication within the first several chapters before moving on to applying such principles and discussions to specific documents and genres. George J. Searles' *Workplace Communications*: *The Basics* is the sole exception to this organizational schema. Although Searles introduces his textbook by emphasizing the importance of rhetoric—particularly in regard to purpose, audience, and tone—and very briefly discusses ethics in chapter one, the subsequent chapters immediately delve into common workplace writing genres. Much of this is due, perhaps, to Searles' caveat in the Preface describing his textbook as "short on theory [and] long on practical applications" (xi).

Consistent across all the textbooks are exercises, discussion questions, and sample documents

at the end of each chapter designed to reinforce the concepts discussed in the previous pages.

Not surprisingly, all of the textbooks situate writing as a "problem-solving activity"

within the demands of the workplace. Paul V. Anderson, in *Technical Communication: A Reader-*

Centered Approach, tells his student audience that "When you write at work, you act. You exert

your power to achieve a specific result, to change things from the way they are now to the way

you want them to be" (10). Gerson and Gerson also assert that "technical communication is not

a frill or an occasional endeavor. It is a major component of the work environment" (7).

Employing a rhetorical framework that emphasizes the economic value of effective professional

and technical communication, Philip C. Kolin writes that the goal of workplace writing is

learning to "meet the needs of their employers, co-workers, customers, clients, and vendors

worldwide by getting to the bottom line" (xvi).

According to Hertog and McLeod, frames depend on "code words" and symbols that

forward "excess meanings" and subsequently "activate related ideas, social histories, beliefs,

experiences, and feelings" (140-41). In the introductory chapters of many of the textbooks, the

authors take great care to include recent studies, facts, and statistics providing evidence for

why effective professional and technical communication skills are desirable for employers, thus

deploying an economic framework to explain to students the merits of taking such courses. For

example, Pfeiffer and Adkins assert that "jobs, promotions, raises, and professional prestige

result from [the] ability to present both written and visual information effectively" (2). Johnson-

Sheehan describes technical communication courses as "golden opportunities" that help

students "land jobs [they] want" and contribute to their success (16). As these examples

illustrate, the economic value prescribed to professional and technical communication activates

a master frame that emphasizes notions of efficiency, profit, and professional success. Within

this framework, effective professional and technical communication can be interpreted as a

means to an end: For the fledgling practitioner, the merit of taking such courses is to acquire

valued, marketable skills in order to be rewarded with professional achievement.

Tempering such statements in the introductory chapters, however, is the

acknowledgement that professional and technical communication often also depends on

variables such as "the political, social, legal, and ethical contexts in which they are prepared"

(Anderson 10). Johnson-Sheehan warns that in many corporations "fewer checks and balances

exist, meaning that all employees need to be able to sort out the ethical, legal, and political

aspects of a decision for themselves" (15). Gurak and Lannon take care to note that "technical

communication in the workplace is more than a mere exercise in 'information transfer'; it is

also a social transaction involving individuals, teams, companies, and organizations that are

national and international in scope" (xxv). In the opening chapters of the textbooks, then, the

authors attempt to strike a balance between acculturating students to the utility of learning

workplace writing conventions, while acknowledging that such conventions are fraught with

multiple dimensions that the professional and technical communicator must navigate.

Philosophy Toward Visual Communication

Although all of the textbooks reviewed devote at least one chapter solely to visual

communication practices, I was surprised that only four of the textbooks foreground visual

communication as integral to the field, and still only two of those four explicitly acknowledge

visual communication as significant to the pedagogical orientation of the textbook. In his

Preface to *Technical Communication Today*, Johnson-Sheehan emphatically states that

computer technology has revolutionized not only how we compose, but also how we read and

interpret texts, and calls attention to the centrality of visual communication in instantiating

such changes. Further, Johnson-Sheehan recognizes that "the visual-spatial turn is an important

intellectual shift in our culture" and likewise, his book "reflects an ongoing evolution in

technical communication from literal-linear texts toward visual-spatial documents and

presentations" (xxii). Although he doesn't define what he sees as the distinction between

"literal-linear" texts and "visual- spatial texts," Johnson-Sheehan is quick to state that visual-

spatial communication involves more than simply "adding headings and charts to documents or

using PowerPoints to enhance oral presentations" (xxiii), suggesting that the textbook will

involve visual instruction beyond the basics of document design. In chapter one where he lists

the six qualities of technical communication, Johnson-Sheehan further underscores that

technical communication *is* visual and that by adding a visual component, practitioners "can

help readers quickly locate the information they need" (13). Mike Markel, in his "Introduction

for Writers," also alludes to the visual in his pedagogical approach and explains that *Technical

Communication* "highlight[s] the importance of the writing process in technical communication

and give[s] equal weight to the development of text and graphics" (xiii). Like Johnson-Sheehan,

Markel also maintains that "words and images—both static graphics and moving images" are

central characteristics of technical communication (8). Images, according to Markel, aid the

writer in: "mak[ing] the document more interesting and appealing," "communicat[ing] and reinforc[ing] difficult concepts," "communicat[ing] instructions," "communicat[ing] large amounts of quantifiable data," and "communicat[ing] with nonnative speakers" (8-9). Whereas Johnson-Sheehan and Markel foreground visual communication as vital to the textbook's pedagogical orientation, Anderson's *Technical Communication: A Reader-Centered Approach* and Kolin's *Successful Writing at Work* only mention visual communication when listing technical communication's characteristics. In Anderson's list, for example, he notes that technical communication "employs graphics and visual design to increase effectiveness" and tells his student audience that they need "expertise in creating graphics and in arranging . . . graphics" in order to make documents "visually appealing, easy to understand, and easy to navigate" (7). Kolin also identifies visuals as a characteristic of job-related writing and states that "visuals are indispensable partners of words in conveying information to your readers [. . . in order to] clarify and condense information" (21). These four textbooks certainly underscore the significance of the visual in professional and technical communication, as they all maintain that the inclusion of visuals is a core characteristic of professional and technical documents. Nonetheless, the textbooks also employ a functionality frame—that a visual component simplifies the contents of the more complex written text—as the primary charge for why professional and technical communicators ought to consider the visual.

Practices of Visual Communication

　　All of the textbooks reviewed dedicate at least one chapter of the text to visual communication. Occurring much later in the textbooks, the chapter(s) on visual communication

are often couched in discussions of document design and tend to adhere to the following

organizational pattern: a brief discussion reminding the reader why visual communication is

significant to professional and technical communication, a primer explaining design principles

and/or an overview of common visual genres in the field (only two of the textbooks surveyed

include both with the remaining six textbooks favoring the latter), and a set of guidelines

explaining how students should create and use visual genres (primarily tables, graphs, and

charts). Like all other textbook chapters, the chapters covering visual communication practices

culminate in exercises and discussion prompts.

Of all the textbooks analyzed, Johnson-Sheehan's *Technical Communication Today*

provides the most extensive coverage of visual communication practices with Markel's

Technical Communication a close second, which is unsurprising given that these two textbooks

were those that foregrounded visual communication as integral to the textbook's pedagogical

orientation. Due to the breadth of information in these two textbooks, I discuss them both first

before turning to the other six textbooks. Both *Technical Communication Today* and *Technical*

Communication devote two entire chapters to visual communication practices, with Johnson-

Sheehan briefly touching on visual communication again—in two separate chapters on

preparing and delivering client presentations and website design—later in the textbook. Table 2

summarizes and compares the two textbook's organizational layout of instructional content

about visual communication practices. I have indicated in the table where the discussion of

visual communication practices occur in the larger organizational scheme of each textbook, the

chapter titles containing the discussion, as well as the major and minor subheadings used to

delineate section foci within chapters.

Table 2: Summary and comparison of textbook chapters addressing visual communication practices in Technical Communication Today and Technical Communication.

Technical Communication Today – Richard Johnson-Sheehan	*Technical Communication* – Mike Markel

PART 4: DRAFTING, DESIGNING, AND REVISING
Chapter 18: Designing Documents and Interfaces
Five Principles of Design:
Design Principle 1: Balance
  ▪ *Weighting a Page or Screen*
  ▪ *Using Grids to Balance a Page Layout*
  ▪ *Using Other Balance Techniques*
Design Principle 2: Alignment
Design Principle 3: Grouping
  ▪ *Using Headings*
  ▪ *Using Borders and Rules*
Design Principle 4: Consistency
  ▪ *Choosing Typefaces*
  ▪ *Labeling Graphics*
  ▪ *Creating Sequential and Nonsequential Lists*
  ▪ *Inserting Headers and Footers*
Design Principle 5: Contrast
  ▪ *Adding Shading and Background Color*
  ▪ *Highlighting Text*
  ▪ *Using Font Size and Line Length* Cross-Cultural Design Using the Principles of Design
  ▪ *Analyze Your Readers and the Document's Context of Use*
  ▪ *Use Thumbnails to Sketch Out the Design*
  ▪ *Design the Document*
  ▪ *Revise and Edit the Design* A Primer on Binding and Paper ▪ *Binding*
  ▪ *Selecting the Paper* Chapter Review
  ▪ Exercises and Projects Case Study
Chapter 19: Creating and Using Graphics
Guidelines for Using Graphics
  ▪ *Guideline One: A Graphic Should Tell a Simple Story*
  ▪ *Guideline Two: A Graphic Should Reinforce the Written Text, Not Replace It*
  ▪ *Guideline Three: A Graphic Should Be Ethical*
  ▪ *Guideline Four: A Graphic Should Be Labeled and Placed Properly*
Displaying Data with Graphs, Tables, and Charts
  ▪ *Line Graphs*
  ▪ *Bar Charts*
  ▪ *Tables*
  ▪ *Pie Charts*
  ▪ *Flowcharts*
  ▪ *Gantt Charts*
Using Pictures, Drawings, and Screen Shots
  ▪ *Photographs*
  ▪ *Inserting Photographs and Other Images*
  ▪ *Illustrations*
  ▪ *Screen Shots* Using Cross Cultural Symbols Using Video and Audio *& Video*
  ▪ *Audio, Podcasting, and Music* Chapter Review Exercises and Projects Case Study
	PART 3: DEVELOPING AND TESTING THE VERBAL AND VISUAL INFORMATION
	Chapter 11: Designing Documents and Web Sites
	Goals of Document and Web Design Understanding Design Principles
	  ▪ *Proximity*
	  ▪ *Alignment*
	  ▪ *Repetition*
	  ▪ *Contrast*
	Planning the Design of Documents and Web Sites
	  ▪ *Analyze Your Audience and Purpose*
	  ▪ *Determine Your Resources*
	Designing Documents
	  ▪ *Size*
	  ▪ *Paper*
	  ▪ *Bindings*
	  ▪ *Accessing Aids*
	Designing Pages
	  ▪ *Page Layout*
	  ▪ *Columns*
	  ▪ *Typography*
	  ▪ *Titles and Headings*
	  ▪ *Other Design Features*
	Analyzing Some Page Designs Designing Web Sites
	  ▪ *Create Informative Headers and Footers*
	  ▪ *Help Readers Navigate the Site*
	  ▪ *Include Extra Features Your Readers Might Need*
	  ▪ *Help Readers Connect with Others*
	  ▪ *Design for Readers with Disabilities*
	  ▪ *Design for Multicultural Audiences*
	Designing Web Pages
	  ▪ *Aim for Simplicity*
	  ▪ *Make the Text Easy to Read and Understand*
	  ▪ *Create Clear, Informative Links*
	Analyzing Some Web Page Designs
	Chapter 12: Creating Graphics
	The Functions of Graphics The Characteristics of an Effective Graphic Understanding the Process of Creating Graphics
	  ▪ *Planning Graphics*
	  ▪ *Producing Graphics*
	  ▪ *Revising Graphics*
	  ▪ *Citing Graphics*
	Using Color Effectively Choosing the Appropriate Kind of Graphic
	  ▪ *Illustrating Numerical Information*
	  ▪ *Illustrating Logical Relationships*
	  ▪ *Illustrating Process Descriptions and Instructions*
	  ▪ *Illustrating Visual and Spatial Characteristics*
	Creating Effective Graphics for Multicultural Readers	

As the table illustrates, both textbooks take a similar approach to instruction in visual communication practices with both reasserting the significance of visual communication in professional and technical communication documents. Johnson- Sheehan asserts, for example, that "readers don't just *prefer* well-designed documents— they *expect* the design to highlight important ideas and concepts" (482), while Markel writes that "the effectiveness of a document or Web site largely depends on how well it is designed because readers *see* the document or site before they actually *read* it" (261). From the onset of the chapters, both textbooks explicitly approach visual communication as a practice steeped in production, signaled by statements such as, "You can master some basic principles that will help you make better decisions about how your document should look" (Johnson-Sheehan 482), and "To design effective documents and Web sites, you need to understand a few basic principles" (Markel 262). The chapters on visual communication, thus, are predicated on the assumption that students will learn, first and foremost, how to produce effective visual documents. Coupled with the emphasis regarding the significance of visual communication is the framing that students can learn design in straightforward fashion with relative ease.

Following the chapter introductions, both Johnson-Sheehan and Markel turn to Gestalt theory to ground their discussions of visual production. Here, Johnson-Sheehan offers much more detail than Markel, spending several pages discussing each principle with annotated examples from a variety of genres. (I discuss Gestalt theory in chapter 1). The inclusion of such examples serve as models by which students can identify established design principles prior to applying those principles to their own documents. Further emphasizing the focus on

production, Markel's textbook provides practical how-to instruction called "Tech Tips" detailing step-by-step instructions on adding and creating various design elements by using basic software such as Microsoft Office.

Despite the overt focus on visual production, both texts also ask students to engage in some visual analysis during the end-of-chapter exercises. For example, both Johnson-Sheehan's textbook and Markel's textbook provide exercises in which students are asked to analyze the governing design principles of an existing document and then write a critique explaining why the document does or does not adhere to the design principles. Interspersed throughout the chapter in Markel's *Technical Communication* are sample documents where students are asked to evaluate the use of each of the design principles according to criteria of effectiveness established in previous pages. Notably, Johnson-Sheehan also includes exercises asking students to redesign an existing document, thus bridging instruction in analysis and production. The placement of the analysis exercises at the end of the chapters, however, still suggests that visual production has significantly more import than visual analysis. (I discuss my critique of how the textbooks surveyed frame and present visual analysis instruction in more detail later in this chapter.)

The second chapter addressing visual communication practices in *Technical Communication Today* and *Technical Communication* both provide students with instruction in creating and using graphics for data display. As in the preceding chapter outlining the principles of visual design, the introductory pages of both textbooks explain the significance of incorporating visual graphics in professional and technical communication documents. Johnson-

Sheehan states, for example, that students "should look for places where graphics could be used to support the text. Graphics are especially helpful in places where you want to reinforce important ideas or help your readers understand complex concepts or trends" (523). Markel outlines the benefits of using graphics and applauds their advantages in "clarify[ing], emphasiz[ing], summariz[ing], and organiz[ing] information" and claims that they do so more effectively than words alone (307). Despite such assertions, however, both authors note that graphics should only be used to reinforce written text and never to replace it, thus maintaining the privilege of written/verbal modes over visual ones.

Following these guidelines, both textbooks then introduce students to visual genres commonly used for data display such as graphs, tables, charts, pictures, illustrations, photographs, and screen captures. Johnson-Sheehan, notably, also includes a discussion of audiovisual considerations when using multimedia and web-based documents. Both textbooks briefly acknowledge the role of ethics in designing visual genres, cautioning students never to distort, misrepresent, or otherwise obscure the data they represent. As in the previous chapters, the primary focus of both textbooks is instruction in the production of data display. Interspersed throughout the chapters on data display are extensive step-by-step guides showing students how to create and insert a range of graphics for their own documents. The end-of-chapter exercises in both textbooks reinforce the chapter foci on production. In each of the textbooks, only one out of multiple exercises require analysis with both exercises asking students to analyze a chart or graph for its effectiveness according to the guidelines established earlier in the chapter (Johnson-Sheehan 547; Markel 344).

Although the other six textbooks do not cover visual communication practices in as much depth as Johnson-Sheehan's and Markel's texts, their approach to instruction in visual communication is similar. In tandem with the entire textbook's "reader-centered" approach (xvii), Anderson places the potential audience of each document at the forefront of instruction regarding visual communication and tells students "to imagine readers' moment-by-moment reading process when planning and creating graphics as it is when planning and drafting written prose" (327). Reinforcing the parallel between written prose and visual communication, Searles, in *Workplace Communications*, compares effective visual communication to good writing in that both should be "simple, clear, and easy to understand" (61). Searles further states that while "every visual should be able to stand alone, its true purpose is to clarify the text it accompanies" (61).

Unlike Johnson-Sheehan and Markel, none of the six other textbooks incorporate an overview of design principles to ground their discussions of visual communication and common visual genres; rather, they provide a list of common heuristics that students can use to guide their productions. The table 3 illustrates, summarizes, and compares the general guidelines used in order to instruct students in producing their own visuals and graphs.

Table 3: Summary of heuristics used to guide visual production.

Technical Communication: A Reader Centered Approach – Paul V. Anderson	*Technical Communication: Process and Product* – Sharon J. Gerson and Steven M. Gerson
PART V: DRAFTING VISUAL ELEMENTS **Chapter 12: Creating Reader-Centered Graphics** A Reader-Centered Approach to Creating Graphics ■ Guideline 1 – Look for places where graphics can increase your communication's usefulness and persuasiveness. ■ Guideline 2 – Select the type of graphic that will be most effective at achieving your objectives. ■ Guideline 3 – Make each graphic easy to understand and use. ■ Guideline 4 – Use color to support your message. ■ Guideline 5 – Use graphics software and existing graphics effectively. ■ Guideline 6 – Integrate your graphics with text. ■ Guideline 7 – Get permission and cite the sources for your graphics. ■ Guideline 8 – Adapt your graphics when writing to readers in other cultures. ■ Guideline 9 – Avoid graphics that mislead.	**Chapter 10: Using Visual Aids in Technical Communication** Criteria for Effective Graphics ■ Integrated with the text (i.e., the graphic complements the text; the text explains the graphic). ■ Appropriately located (preferably immediately following the text referring to the graphic and not a page or pages later). ■ Enhance the material explained in the text (without being redundant). ■ Communicate important information that could not be conveyed easily in a paragraph or longer text. ■ Do not contain details that detract from rather than enhance the information. ■ Sized effectively (large enough to be readable but not so large as to overwhelm the page). ■ Correctly labeled (with numbers, titles, legends, and headings). ■ Follow the style of other figures or tables in the text (same font size, font style, color, size of the graphic, and so on).
Strategies for Technical Communication in the Workplace – Laura J. Gurak and John M. Lannon	*Successful Writing at Work* – Philip C. Kolin
PART 2: BLUEPRINTS **Chapter 8: Using Audience-Centered Visuals** Special Considerations When Using Visuals ■ Selecting appropriate visuals. ■ Placing, Cross-Referencing, and Presenting Visuals ■ Using Color in Visuals ■ Using Visuals Ethically	*PART V: PREPARING DOCUMENTS AND VISUALS* *Chapter 10: Designing Clear Visuals* *Choosing Effective Visuals* ■ *Include visuals only when they are relevant for your purpose and audience.* ■ *Use visuals in conjunction with—not as a substitute for — your written work.* ■ *Experiment with several visuals.* ■ *Always use easy-to-read and relevant visuals* ■ *Be prepared to revise and edit your visuals.* ■ *Consider how your visuals will look on the page.*
Technical Communication: A Practical Approach – William Sanborn Pfeiffer and Kaye E. Adkins	*Workplace Communications: The Basics* – George J. Searles
PART 5: ALTERNATIVES TO PRINT TEXT **Chapter 13: Graphics** General Guidelines for Graphics ■ Graphics Guideline 1: Determine the purpose of the graphic. ■ Graphics Guideline 2: Evaluate the accuracy and validity of the data. ■ Graphics Guideline 3: Refer to all graphics in the text. ■ Graphics Guideline 4: Think about where to put graphics. ■ Graphics Guideline 5: Position graphics vertically when possible. ■ Graphics Guideline 6: Avoid clutter. ■ Graphics Guideline 7: Provide titles, notes, keys, and source data.	**Chapter 4: Effective Visuals – Tables, Graphs, Chart, and Illustrations** Principles of Effective Visuals ■ Number and title every visual in your document sequentially, with outside sources clearly identified. ■ Any information you provide in a visual you must first discuss in the text. ■ Present all visuals in an appealing manner. ■ Clearly label all elements of the visual. ■ When visuals accompany instructions, the point of view in the visuals must be the same as that of the reader performing the illustrated procedure. ■ A visual should never omit, distort, or otherwise manipulate information to deceive or mislead the reader. ■ Avoid spelling mistakes, poor grammar, inconsistent formatting, or other blunders in the labels, key, title, or other text accompanying a visual.

As the table illustrates, these textbooks take a somewhat different approach than Johnson-Sheehan and Markel in that the guidelines above are seemingly more prescriptive, often focusing on design choices within the document itself such as placement, color, and accuracy. Without the larger theoretical framework providing the rationale as to why some visual design choices might be more appropriate than others, the guidelines as presented by the six textbooks in the table have the potential of being interpreted as inviolable rules that should be followed without critical consideration. Such pedagogies may inadvertently emphasize form over content, thus potentially blinding practitioners to ideologies and politics present in the content. For example, one of Searle's "fundamental rules" states that students should "present visuals in an appealing manner. Each visual should be surrounded by ample white space, not crowded by the text, or squeezed in between other visuals" (61). However, there is no explanation in Searle's chapter grounding *why* the use of white space might be more accessible and more appealing for readers. Following the discussion of general guidelines in producing graphics and visuals, the textbooks then move into discussions identifying common types of visuals: graphs, charts, tables, photographs, and illustrations. Gerson and Gerson's *Technical Communication: Process and Product* and Pfeiffer and Adkins' *Technical Communication: A Practical Approach* provide additional guidelines for creating effective visuals that are specific to each type of graphic.

In terms of providing instruction regarding the ethical uses of visuals, all of the textbooks acknowledge the importance of using visuals accurately and ethically although Kolin's *Successful Writing At Work* provides the most in-depth coverage, devoting nearly eleven pages

solely to ethics of visual representation. Kolin provides guidelines to using visuals ethically that

are specific to each type of graphic, noting the ways in which potential problems inherent in the

genres themselves may lead to unintentional misuse. Interspersed throughout this discussion

are sample documents illustrating both unethical visuals as well as their revised versions. Citing

Edward Tufte's *The Visual Display of Quantitative Information*, Pfeiffer and Adkins' *Technical*

Communication: A Practical Approach also devotes a section to detailing the misuse of graphics

by providing examples of distorted or confusing graphics, or those cluttered by *chartjunk*, a

term coined by Tufte to indicate extraneous or decorative design elements. Unlike Kolin,

however, Pfeiffer and Adkins do not offer students revised sample documents or strategies to

avoid making such mistakes (outside of their earlier discussion detailing guidelines specific to

each visual genre).

Like the first two textbooks by Johnson-Sheehan and Markel, the remaining six

textbooks focus their instruction on visual production. Anderson's *Technical Communication: A*

Reader-Centered Approach, by far, contains the most comprehensive and specific how-to

instruction. At the end of his chapter, Anderson provides twenty-one pages of extensive step-

by-step instruction in the "Writer's Reference Guide: Creating Eleven Types of Reader-Centered

Graphics," which walks students through the specifics of creating each type of graphic

discussed in the chapter. Finally, in the end-of-chapter exercises, two of the textbooks solely

ask students to produce visual documents (Gurak and Lannon; Searles), with the majority of the

textbooks including at least two exercises focusing on analysis (Anderson; Gerson and Gerson;

Kolin). Pfeiffer and Adkins' text is the exception, devoting half of its exercises to analysis and

the other half to production.

Visual Communication Textbooks

Philosophy of Text and Philosophy Toward Visual Communication

Whereas only two of the eight textbooks reviewed are explicitly concerned with the

significance of visual communication in the textbook's pedagogical orientation, visual

communication is *the* only central instructional concern in both Miles A. Kimball and Ann R.

Hawkins' *Document Design: A Guide for Technical Communicators* and Charles Kostelnick and

David D. Roberts' *Designing Visual Language: Strategies for Professional Communicators*.

Beginning with the Preface and reinforced throughout the chapters, both textbooks take great

care to emphasize the import of visual communication, asserting that "students must learn to

communicate visually just as well as they learn to write" (Kimball and Hawkins v). Directly

addressing the text's readers, Kostelnick and Roberts state that their "goal is to help you adapt

visual language to specific audiences, purposes, and contexts in much the same way you do

when write" (xxii).

Importantly, the audience for these two textbooks is markedly different from the eight

textbooks previously reviewed. While the eight textbooks discussed earlier in this chapter are

written primarily for introductory undergraduate courses in professional and technical

communication, *Document Design* and *Designing Visual Language* are written for a more

targeted audience. Kostelnick and Roberts, in the Preface, specifically identify three types of

readers for whom the textbook is intended: (1) students who are taking advanced courses in

professional communication; (2) professional communicators; and (3) professional

communication teachers who want a compatible text for courses with a significant design

component (Kostelnick and Roberts xxi). Kimball and Hawkins, likewise, identify an audience

who might wish to "go on to work as document designers, web designers, interaction designers,

information designers, or even user experience designers . . . [and] even students who plan

careers in business, medicine, industry, or government" as their primary readers (v). Not only

do these two visual communication textbooks differentiate their target audience, they also

note, from the onset, that the approach and layout of the textbooks differ from more general

and comprehensive textbooks like those discussed earlier in this chapter. Whereas nearly all of

the textbooks I discussed earlier include extensive step-by-step instructions for teaching

students to create common professional and technical documents, Kostelnick and Roberts

divulge that they specifically "chose not to write a how-to book with formulas, templates, and

lockstep rules—prescriptions that might succeed in some situations but likely misfire in others"

(xxi). Rather, the authors are more concerned with providing students and professional

communicators with "a sturdier, more reliable, and more comprehensive framework for

thinking about and practicing design" (xxi). Implied in their approach is that practitioners ought

to be able to articulate design choices beyond simply reproducing established templates and

principles. Kimball and Hawkins, too, argue for "a balanced approach—theoretically informed

practice—that introduces a working vocabulary to help students become reflective

practitioners, able not only to create effective and usable designs, but also to explain why and

how they made their design choices" (v). Thus, these two texts promise a more theoretically-informed approach, anchored in both practices of visual analysis and visual production.

Grounding the stance of both textbooks is an emphasis on rhetorical awareness, focusing on the ways in which visual design choices are shaped by both the designer and the audience. Kostelnick and Roberts, for example, assert that in order "to be effective, visual design must satisfy the needs of an audience—and that simple fact drives this entire book" (xx). Similarly, Kimball and Miles explain that their aim is to "introduce students to the basic principles and theories of design, combining practical advice about the design process with a foundation in visual rhetoric and usability" (v). Rhetoric, thus, is central to these textbooks and both devote a considerable amount of space providing foundational frameworks in visual rhetoric, visual perception, and other visual theories prior to discussions of specific visual genres. Table 4 summarizes and compares the two textbook's organizational layout of instructional content. I have indicated in the table the major sections, chapter titles, as well as the major subheadings used to delineate section foci within chapters.

Table 4: Summary and comparison of the table of contents in Document Design: A Guide for Technical Communicators and Designing Visual Language

Document Design: *A Guide for Technical Communicators*– Miles A. Kimball and Ann R. Hawkins	*Designing Visual Language: Strategies for Professional Communicators* – Charles Kostelnick and David D. Roberts
UNIT ONE – PRINCIPLES	**PART ONE – INTEGRATED COMMUNICATION**
Chapter 1: What is Document Design?	**Chapter 1: Rhetorical Background**
Document Design as Information Design The Document in Document Design	Introduction to Visual Rhetoric
	Visual/Verbal Cognates
From Document to Design	Process Example – Mapleton Center
Document Design as a Relationship Levels of Design	Conventions – What Readers Expect
Design, Rhetoric, and Emotion Visual Design	**Chapter 2: Perception and Design**
Chapter 2: Principles of Design	Introduction to Perception Issues
Design Objects and Their Characteristics Six Principles of Design	Gestalt Principles of Design
	Empirical Research as a Design Tool
Using Design Principles	**Chapter 3: Visual Analysis**
Chapter 3: Theories of Design	Introduction to Visual Analysis
Visual Perception Visual Culture Visual Rhetoric From	A Taxonomy for Visual Vocabulary
Theory to Practice	Analyzing Visual Vocabulary Rhetorically
UNIT TWO – PROCESSES	**PART TWO – TEXT DESIGN**
Chapter 4: The Whole Document	**Chapter 4: Linear Components**
Three Perspectives on the Whole Document	Introduction to Linear Components
Making Decision about Media	Process Example – Linear Components Vocabulary of Linear
Making Decision about Format	Components
Chapter 5: Pages	Applying the Cognate Strategies Interdependence of the
Three Perspectives on Pages	Cognate Strategies
Viewing Pages	**Chapter 5: Text Fields**
Creating Meaning with Page Design Using Grids for Page	Introduction to Text Fields
Design	Process Example – Text Fields
Chapter 6: Type	Vocabulary of Text Fields
Three Perspectives on Type	Applying the Cognate Strategies
Looking at Type	Interdependence of Cognate Strategies
Designing Documents with Type	**Chapter 6: Nonlinear Components**
Using Typographical Styles	Introduction to Nonlinear Components
Digital Type	Vocabulary of Nonlinear Components
Type on Screen	Applying the Cognate Strategies
Chapter 7: Graphics	Interdependence of the Cognate Strategies
Three Perspectives on Graphics	**PART THREE – EXTRA-LEVEL DESIGN**
Graphics and Principles of Design	**Chapter 7: Data Displays**
Graphics and Ethics	Introduction to Data Displays
Why Use Graphics?	Process Example – Data Displays
Information Graphics Promotion Graphics Creating and	Vocabulary of Data Displays
Modifying Graphics	Applying the Cognate Strategies
Incorporating Graphics into Documents	Interdependence of the Cognate Strategies
Chapter 8: Color	**Chapter 8: Pictures**
Three Perspectives on Color	Introduction to Pictures
Creating Color on Screens and Paper Designing with Color	Process Example – Pictures
Working with Color on Computers	Vocabulary of Pictures
Chapter 9: Lists, Tables, and Forms	Applying the Cognate Strategies
Three Perspectives of Lists, Tables, and Forms Lists	Interdependence of the Cognate Strategies
Tables	
Forms	

Table 4: Summary and comparison of the table of contents in Document Design: A Guide for Technical Communicators and Designing Visual Language (continued)

Document Design: A Guide for Technical Communicators– Miles A. Kimball and Ann R. Hawkins	Designing Visual Language: Strategies for Professional Communicators – Charles Kostelnick and David D. Roberts
UNIT THREE – PRACTICES	**PART FOUR – DOCUMENT DESIGN**
Chapter 10: Projects	**Chapter 9: Supra-Level Elements: Designing for Usability**[SEP]
Project Management[SEP]	Process Example – Supra-Level Elements Vocabulary of Supra-
Working with Design Teams[SEP]	Level Elements Applying the Cognate Strategies
Models of Project Management	Interdependence of the Cognate Strategies
Planned Iterations: A Mixed Approach	
Chapter 11: Production	
Printing Technologies[SEP]	
Paper[SEP]	
Ink[SEP]	
From Design to Document Preparing Design for the Press	
Responding to Proofs	

Practices of Visual Communication

As Table 4 illustrates, both textbooks begin with three introductory chapters outlining visual theories and foundations that are reinforced through the remainder of the chapters. The instructional content within the latter half of both textbooks reveals few significant differences—both texts instruct students in germane visual practices common in the field, namely, creating a variety of visual documents and employing various design elements. The instructional paradigms forwarded by the two textbooks, however, differ significantly.

Given the title of the textbook, *Designing Visual Language*, Kostelnick and Roberts consistently employ metaphors correlating the acquisition of visual design skills with language acquisition. Throughout the text, for example, Kostelnick and Roberts regularly refer to what they call "Visual/Verbal Cognates," which propose an equivalent relationship linking visual and verbal rhetorical concepts such as arrangement, emphasis, clarity, conciseness, tone, and ethos. Although these terms are most often used in writing instruction, here the authors take great care to explain how these concepts can be conceived and understood visually. Arrangement,

for example, "means order, the organization of visual elements so that readers can see their structure" (14), emphasis is "prominence or intensity of expression" (16), and conciseness "refers to the visual bulk and intricacy of the design" (18). Drawing from research in visual perception and Gestalt theories of design, Kostelnick and Roberts extend their concept of "Verbal/Visual Cognates" as strategies throughout the textbook. Underpinning the use of these strategies, the authors write, is the notion of convention which they define as "the customary forms and configurations that members of an audience expect" (32). Kostelnick and Roberts emphasize that effective design consists of understanding what conventions comprise visual discourse communities and knowing when to adapt or stray from such visual conventions depending on the rhetorical situation.

Kostelnick and Roberts maintain that "analyzing design goes hand in hand with doing design" (78), and that in order to address the complexity of visual communication, "a systematic scheme for describing visual language" is necessary and helps the designer to account for both local and global design decisions (79). As such, the authors propose a Visual Language Matrix to describe "levels of design," which they categorize as intra-, inter-, extra-, and supra-. According to the authors, "the intra- and inter-levels pertain primarily to text design; . . . the extra-level pertains primarily to nontextual elements such as data displays and pictures; [. . . and] the supra-level refers to the large-scale design of the whole communication" (81). These levels can further be categorized into three coding modes: textual, spatial, and graphic. Students, thus, are guided to consider documents from both a macro perspective (extra and supra), as well as a micro perspective (intra and inter). This taxonomy is carried

through in the remainder of the textbook and characterizes instruction in specific visual forms.

As Table 4 illustrates, the authors consistently return to the cognate strategies and explain how

the visual/verbal cognates are translated within the context of the relevant design element,

reinforcing the parallel relationship between writing and visual design. Each chapter concludes

with exercises and assignments in both analysis and production, incorporating illustrations and

sample documents that illustrate key concepts. In the analysis exercises, students are asked to

evaluate rhetorically either sample images of their own selection or sample documents that

appear in the textbook. Production-based exercises include asking students to create

documents that exemplify the particular concepts discussed within a chapter, often situating

assignments as a case-study with specific contextual constraints.

Whereas visual language is the primary trope for Kostelnick and Roberts, Kimball and

Hawkins employ the broader term visual design and, as such, *Document Design* does not focus

on the relationship between visual/verbal modes to the same extent as the previous text.

Rather, Kimball and Hawkins rely on three visual theories of design to ground their instruction.

Within the first pages of Chapter One, the authors define what they mean by *document design*

and link the term with the broader category of *information design*. Document design, according

to the authors, "focuses information design principles and practices on the crafting of

documents" while taking into consideration factors such as "the problems and situations of

information users and information providers," focusing especially on usability (3). After giving a

brief historical explanation of documents, emphasizing that "documents are not bound by any

particular medium" (5), Kimball and Hawkins then situate the practice of document design as a

relationship akin to the rhetorical situation with three primary stakeholders: designers, clients, and users (10). Following the introductory chapter on document design, the authors make the distinction between "design objects" and "principles of design" as two universal concepts hat are applicable to all documents. Design objects, the authors write, "include any mark or group of marks that can be seen and manipulated on a page" (21), such as shape, orientation, texture, color, value, size, and position (22). Although the authors admit the lack of consensus in defining design principles, the six basics they view as those that "govern most visual relationships between design objects" are similarity, contrast, proximity, alignment, order, and enclosure (27). Chapter Three, titled "Theories of Design," is, by far, the pedagogical strength of the textbook. Kimball and Hawkins extensively outline three theoretical approaches to visual design, emphasizing where the theories converge, diverge, and overlap, while simultaneously underscoring the potentials and constraints of each of the approaches. Visual perception theories, the authors write, "concentrate on using psychology and biology to explain how all beings experience the world through vision"; visual culture theories, on the other hand, "explain visual design by recognizing how societies and groups establish what visual perceptions *mean*"; finally, visual rhetoric "borrow[s] from both perception and culture to create visual designs that meet specific needs for specific people" (39). Within these broad theoretical frameworks, the authors also discuss more specific approaches such as those grounded in neurophysiology, Gestalt theory, constructivism, semiotics, and user-centered design. Notably, *Document Design* is the only textbook in this survey that explicitly addresses

the ways in which visual communication is linked to power, citing research in cultural studies

that seek to uncover and unravel hegemonic articulations.

These three theoretical frameworks provide the lenses through which Kimball and

Haskins approach instruction in the chapters comprising the bulk of the text. Similar to

Kostelnick and Robert's "levels of design" (although Kimball and Haskins do not use this term or

the specific taxonomy), Kimball and Haskins move from larger macro-level concerns (such as

the whole document and the page) to smaller micro-level issues (such as type, color, and

graphics). At the beginning of each chapter, students are prompted to consider the specific

concept (for example, page design) from each of the three theoretical approaches (visual

perception, visual culture, visual rhetoric), before they are introduced to specific techniques for

using the concept in design projects. The last two chapters in the textbook provide students

with guidelines in project management, user- research, user-testing, as well as more pragmatic

advice about the final stages of the production process. As in the previous textbook, each

chapter concludes with exercises concerning both visual analysis and visual production,

although Kimball and Hawkins also place much emphasis on conducting field-research and

interviewing both clients and users of various documents.

Conclusions/Review Results

The results of this textbook review suggest a number of conclusions about pedagogical

practices concerning visual communication within professional and technical communication.

First, as I posited in the previous chapter of this dissertation, professional and technical

communication textbooks situate visual communication primarily as a practice of production,

and teaching students how to produce visual texts is the paramount concern. While the textbooks do include some discussion of analytical strategies, as a whole, the analytical exercises espoused often operate solely within the level of the document to be analyzed itself, neglecting to take into account the larger cultural forces at work within any given document's production, reception, and circulation. Second, a visual/verbal divide continues to characterize the teaching of visual communication. Instruction in written or traditionally alphabetic literacies continues to be privileged, thus inadvertently suggesting that the visual is supplementary or less important. Finally, instruction in the textbooks still very much relies on tropes of effectiveness and utility, often employing rhetorical frames that promote economic tenets of success. I discuss each of these points in more detail in the following sections.

Visual Practices: Production vs. Analysis

In chapter 1 of this dissertation, I outlined three theoretically-informed pedagogical approaches to visual communication—graphic design theory, semiotics, and visual culture—assigning production practices in professional and technical communication to graphic design theory, and analytical practices in rhetoric and composition to semiotics and visual culture. The results of this review reveal two additional approaches to instruction: rhetorical (usually instruction in the rhetorical situation and/or the rhetorical appeals) and genre-based (instruction in the conventions, categories, or patterns of particular document types). All of the textbooks reviewed teach visual production from the standpoint of graphic design theory (although not all of the textbooks explicitly name their approach as such), with many of them linking the principles of design directly to rhetorical and genre-based concerns. This model

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suggests that in order to produce effective documents, students should follow and apply the

established design principles to their own texts, and adapt those texts to the expectations of a

particular rhetorical situation or the standard conventions of a specific community. While there

is much to be admired in this model—for example, the straightforwardness and applicability of

design principles seem simple enough to apply to any rhetorical situation, particularly for the

novice student—it also leaves prevailing conventions intact and may inadvertently promote the

notion that the standard forms of document design are neutral and static. Further, this

approach leaves little room to re-imagine alternative designs.

 A possible corrective to this issue concerning production is a stronger focus on visual

analysis that prompts students to explore not only the effects of particular design choices

within a document, but also its larger implications. As a whole, however, the analytical

exercises presented by the textbooks only ask students to consider the immediate rhetorical

situations and conventions of a particular document and not its broader trajectories within

organizations and the larger socio-cultural milieu in which such organizations are a part. For

example, many of the analytical exercises ask students to examine a sample document,

describe the use of a particular design element, and evaluate its effectiveness. Other analytical

exercises prompt students to evaluate documents based on its appropriateness to its given

rhetorical situation. Such exercises, however, focus primarily on recognizing established forms

and conventions and may lead to what Carl Herndl posits as the "produc[tion of] students who

cannot perceive the cultural consequences of a dominant discourse or the alternate

understandings it excludes" (350). Out of all of the textbooks surveyed, only two—those

dealing solely with visual communication—foreground visual analysis as a necessary corollary

to visual production, and only one provides an extensive overview of the visual analytical

methods commonly employed in rhetoric and composition (visual culture, visual rhetoric). Of all

the analytical exercises presented, Kimball and Miles are the only ones who encourage students

to analyze documents beyond their immediate rhetorical situations by conducting field-work.

The Verbal/Visual Divide

The results of this review suggest that instruction in visual communication is often

framed within the context of writing instruction. As I discussed earlier in this chapter, textbooks

often equate effective visual design with effective writing, employing language that suggests

the two are analogous processes, while simultaneously privileging written forms over visual

modes. Kolin's introduction to the chapter on "Designing Clear Visuals," for example, tells

students that "visuals work in conjunction with your writing to inform, illustrate, and persuade"

(437), and Kostelnick and Roberts maintain that their goal is to "help you [students] adapt

visual language to specific audiences, purposes, and contexts in much the same way you do

when you write" (xxii). Such tendencies, as Claire Lauer and Christopher A. Sanchez aptly

demonstrate in their 2011 article "Visuospatial Thinking in the Professional Writing Classroom"

fails "to recognize the power that visuals have to communicate meaning differently from

words, but more important, it privileges verbal thinking" (186).

At the same time, however, all of the textbooks reviewed directly acknowledge the

multimodal nature of today's composing practices (particularly Johnson-Sheehan and Markel),

as well as the persuasive nature of visual forms of communication. It would be difficult to argue

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that the textbooks do not consider the visual important or significant to the field. Nonetheless, the language used to describe visual modes often explicitly suggests that visuals are merely supplementary materials designed to simplify the more complex written content. Consider, for example, statements such as "visuals make data easier for readers to interpret and remember" (Gurak and Lannon 121), and visuals "are attention grabbers and can be used to engage readers' interest" (Pfeiffer and Adkins 483). Such statements are fairly common across the textbooks surveyed and inadvertently suggest that visuals are a "dumbed-down" form of communication.

Finally, rather than make use of holistic methods that explores both text and image at once, the pedagogies employed in the textbooks (with the exception of the two textbooks on visual communication) separate written instruction from visual instruction, despite the parallels often made between the two modes. That is, textbooks are often organizationally structured whereby students learn and master principles of written communication first, prior to learning and mastering visual communication, as indicated by the separate chapters on visual and graphic design that regularly appear much later in the text. Despite a textbook's explicit acknowledgement of the equality of written and visual modes of communication, this equality is undermined when a textbook's pedagogy suggests the opposite.

At the same time, however, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of the textbook genre in and of itself in making such observations. That is, within the traditionally print-dominant genre of the textbook, it is difficult to *not* position the verbal as primary. Thus, positioning visuals as equally important—and not as supplementary— within the context of a

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genre that is governed by printed text remains problematic in ways that may not be the case in different instructional formats. As such, this issue calls into question whether or not textbooks are the best medium for teaching visual communication. Finally, although the textbooks reviewed underscore the significance of the visual and provide students with detailed instruction particularly in the production of visual texts, the following questions remain: For whom do students design visual documents? Who makes up the "audience," "reader," or "user" that the textbooks insist students should consider when designing visual texts? While the obvious answer might involve the workplace audiences with whom students are most likely to encounter in their future professions—such as clients, supervisors, and colleagues—workplace and organizational cultures, as Bernadette Longo notes, cannot be divorced from "an organization's participation in larger cultural contexts" ("An Approach" 55). In the next chapter, I situate my findings about visual communication within a broader discussion of how the textbooks examined frame issues of culture.

CHAPTER FOUR: CULTURE IN UNDERGRADUATE PROFESSIONAL AND TECHNICAL

COMMUNICATION TEXTBOOKS

In "Composition Meets Visual Communication," Susan Hilligoss and Sean Williams assert that a critical visual communication pedagogy must consider "the 'contact zones' of visual representations from many cultures and subcultures," insisting that teachers should explore the following questions in their classrooms: "What can we teach students about the 'contact zones' where races and genders and different socioeconomic backgrounds meet? How do students attempt—or not attempt—to create visuals that expressly move across the contact zone? How can visual design teach students audience analysis and awareness?" (245).

In the previous chapter, I discussed the ways in which visual communication is pedagogically framed in ten commonly adopted undergraduate professional and technical communication textbooks. Contrary to the seemingly straightforward fashion in which visual communication tends to be framed in the textbooks examined, practices of visual communication are inextricable from the larger culture of which they are a part. As visual studies scholar Nicholas Mirzoeff notes, "the visual is contested, debated and transformed as a constantly challenging place of social interaction and definition in terms of class, gender, sexual and racialized identities. It is a resolutely interdisciplinary subject" (6). Critically interrogating the visual, however, is generally considered beyond the purview of professional and technical communication pedagogy due to the emphasis on formal elements that ground visual production. As Carlos Salinas aptly points out:

We seldom talk about the design of images—namely, the strategic composition of visual

representations that have cultural significance because other disciplinary arts, like

graphic design, do that kind of work. Furthermore, on those rare occasions when we do

mean the design of images, we traditionally limit ourselves to so-called objective figures,

such as data displays that function only as illustrative support for verbal text. Moreover,

we seldom consider the use value, or cultural consequences, that the images we

produce have. (168)

Because the kinds of visual texts students may produce in an undergraduate professional and

technical communication course are always already part of various cultural constructs, I

contend that an understanding of the ways in which the textbooks examined frame culture and

the cultural factors that inform notions of audience is integral to developing pedagogies that

situate visual design as a critical practice. In so doing, I should make clear that I am less

interested in the obvious or immediate audiences for whom the textbooks insist that students

should consider, namely, their potential clients, supervisors, and colleagues. As Gerald Savage

writes,

if the typical context of technical writing is understood to be bounded by the corporate

workplace, the responsibilities of the writer are similarly constrained. But if, as a great

deal of current theoretical work argues, the context of technical writing includes the

entire community within which it interacts, then the technical writer is responsible to

that larger community as well. (314)

Situating professional and technical communication solely within workplace contexts and only for workplace audiences, as Carl Herndl notes, "describes the production of meaning [within that discourse] but not the social, political, and economic sources of power which authorize this production or the cultural work such discourse performs" (351). Thus, I am much more concerned with the ways in which the textbooks reviewed frame cultural factors that inform notions of audience in order to explore the "contact zones" within which visuals are enmeshed.

Bernadette Longo argues that professional and technical communication practices—including visual communication and design—are "situated within institutional relationships of knowledge and power . . . [and] institutions where technical writing is practiced need to be reconstructed as cultural agents" that work to explore issues such as "multiculturalism, gender, [and] ethics" among other cultural issues ("An Approach" 54, 62). Although scholarship in professional and technical communication has been concerned with the cultural effects of professional and technical communication practices for quite some time, resulting in research that attends to gender and feminist theory (Lay; Flynn; Boseley; Durack; Allen; Tebeaux; Koerber; Brasseur; David), race and ethnicity (Pimentel and Williams; Haas; Evia and Patriarca), cross-cultural approaches and multiculturalism (Barnum and Huilin; Thrush; St.Germaine-Madison; Thatcher), postcolonialism (Jeyaraj), disability studies (Palmeri), and risk communication in cultural and community contexts (Bowdon; Sauer; Scott), driving my inquiry in this chapter is the extent to which such scholarship has influenced pedagogy, particularly visual communication pedagogy, as codified in current textbooks.

Because professional and technical communication textbooks not only provide students with instruction about producing common workplace and technical documents but also provide guidance about considering the audiences for whom the documents are produced, such an approach, as Scott, Longo, and Wills suggest, should not only "seek to explain technical communication . . . [but also] evaluate the ethics of its functions and effects, asking questions such as 'Whose values does technical communication privilege?' 'Who is included and who is excluded by these practices and how?' 'Who benefits and who loses?' and 'How are these practices beneficial and/or harmful?'" (14). Such questions are particularly important for students to explore as part of a critical visual communication pedagogy that not only instructs them in how to produce visuals but also teaches them to be reflective practitioners who are consciously attuned to the larger implications of visual design. As James Dubinsky notes, by incorporating cultural theories and "build[ing] them into our pedagogies, we can teach our students to become competent communicators who recognize cultural and gender differences, use their knowledge to effect successful communication, and work toward transformations" ("Introduction" 397).

Defining Culture

As I have discussed in earlier chapters, the field of professional and technical communication has made "the cultural turn," seeking to explore the cultural influences and effects of professional and technical communication practice. As I have illustrated, many have also called for pedagogical practices that emphasize the cultural contexts within which professional and technical communication takes place in order to teach students to be

attentive, critical, and reflective practitioners. But what does culture mean? Defining a term as ubiquitous and multifaceted as *culture* is no simple task; scholarly uses of the term vary to certain degrees and, moreover, the term itself is ideologically charged. While a thorough examination of *culture* is beyond the scope of this project, I offer a brief review of how scholars have defined *culture* in order to ground my discussions of the ways in which the textbook reviewed frame and deploy the term. Cultural studies theorist Raymond Williams writes that the concept of culture has come to mean "a whole way of life . . . as mode of interpreting all our common experience, and, in this new interpretation, changing it" (xvii). Additionally, Stuart Hall writes that culture encompasses "both the meaning and values which arise amongst distinctive social groups and classes . . . through which they 'handle' and respond to the conditions of existence; and as the lived traditions and practices through which those 'understandings' are expressed and in which they are embodied" (39). Culture, thus, typically describes the patterns of behavior, assumptions, artifacts, and practices that people use to organize social groups and make sense of their world.

According to Williams, the term emerged as a response to the societal changes caused by industrialization and soon acquired multiple functions. First, it allowed for "the practical separation of certain moral and intellectual activities for the driven impetus of a new kind of society," distinguishing artistic and intellectual pursuits from economics and politics (xviii). Moreover, it also allowed for the structuring and differentiating of the social world by providing a concept and a term with which social groups could be distinguished from another (11). The power of culture as an explanatory or conceptualizing device is its broad applicability to a

85

number of factors related to social diversity, consolidating various identities into a core concept. For example, culture is often used to name the identifying characteristics of any given society including factors pertaining to nation, class, race, ethnicity, gender, ability, religion, geographic location, and so forth. As critics note, however, its broad applicability can also drain the term and concept of specificity. Arjun Appadurai, for example, takes issue with the term *culture* as a noun, arguing that it suggests that culture is "some kind of object, thing, or substance [rather than] a dimension that attends to situated and embodied difference" (12). Instead, Appadurai advocates for the adjective *cultural* in order to account for "the idea of situated difference . . . [and the] contextual, heuristic, and comparative dimension" of individual cultures (13).

In the remainder of this chapter, I discuss how the textbooks reviewed address cultural factors that inform notions of audience, pointing to the ways in which discussions of culture are framed primarily through the lens of cross-cultural communication and gender. (The textbooks reviewed most commonly discussed cultural factors that inform notions of audience in relation to cross-cultural communication (which generally includes discussions of race, ethnicity, and nationality) followed by issues of gender. As such, my discussion focuses on these cultural factors.) Included in my discussion are the ways in which the textbooks situate communicating with diverse audiences broadly because instruction focusing specifically on addressing audiences when communicating visually is limited. Following the organizational structure I used in chapter 3, I first describe the patterns that have emerged across the textbooks before discussing the implications in-depth at the end of the chapter.

Comprehensive Professional and Technical Communication Textbooks

Culture and Cross-Cultural Communication

Recent scholarship in professional and technical communication have called for scholars, instructors, and practitioners to better attend to issues of race, ethnicity, and multiculturalism (Johnson, Pimentel, and Pimentel; Pimentel and Williams; St. Germaine-Madison) within the field, often citing increasingly globalized professional contexts as the impetus for why such issues ought to be incorporated in professional and technical communication pedagogy. As a result, nearly all of the textbooks reviewed include instruction in communicating with audiences from diverse cultures.

Directly addressing students, Kolin writes that in order "to be a successful employee in this highly competitive global market, you have to communicate clearly and diplomatically with a host of readers from different cultural backgrounds" (6). The preface of Johnson-Sheehan's *Technical Communication Today*, likewise, states that the textbook is organized in a manner that focuses on "international and cross-cultural issues . . . because issues of globalization are no longer separate from technical communication" (xxiii), while Gerson and Gerson emphasize the importance of learning to communicate with cross-cultural audiences because project teams and collaborations will often "consist of people who are different ages, genders, cultures, and races" (12). In fact, variations of the terms *culture*, *diversity*, and *globalization* were included in the index of nearly all of the textbooks, although the terms *multicultural communication* and *cross-cultural communication* were the most commonly used. (Interestingly, the terms *race* and *ethnicity* did not appear in any of the textbook indexes.

Further, explicit references to race and/or ethnicity were minimal across all of the textbooks. I discuss this issue at length at the end of this chapter.) The sole exception is Searles' *Workplace Communications,* which did not address communicating with audiences from diverse cultures at all.

Kolin's *Successful Writing at Work* includes a discussion of cross-cultural communication twice in the text, first in Chapter Five, "Writing Letters: Some Basics for Audiences Worldwide," and again in Chapter Ten, "Designing Clear Visuals." In his discussion of writing business letters for international audiences, Kolin lists eleven guidelines for students to follow in order to "significantly reduce the chances of [international audiences] misunderstanding you" (173). Such guidelines include using plain language, avoiding ambiguity, avoiding idiomatic expressions and jargon, avoiding metaphors that are specific to United States popular culture, avoiding abbreviations and acronyms, considering units of measure, avoiding culture-bound descriptions of place and space, using appropriate salutations, keeping sentences simple, and being cautious about style and tone (173-78). Following these guidelines, Kolin presents an additional six "precautions" about respecting a reader's nationality and ethnic/racial heritage, cautioning students to be mindful "of how cultures differ in terms of traditions, customs, and preferences" (181). Among these precautions include avoiding phrases such as "third-world country," "emerging nation," and "underdeveloped/underprivileged area," avoiding stereotypes, and being mindful of the cultural significance of colors and symbols (181-82). At the end of the chapter, Kolin includes a number of exercises asking students to rewrite business correspondence for international readers. Consistent with the textbook's introduction and

overarching philosophy, Kolin continues to employ a frame that emphasizes the professional

value of effective international communication with advice such as needing to be respectful of

international colleagues in order to be "a successful employee" and "for the common good of

[one's] company" (6, 8).

In Chapter Ten, "Designing Clear Visuals," within a section titled "Using Appropriate

Visuals for International Audiences," Kolin emphasizes that visuals may not translate for cross-

cultural audiences in the same ways that they would to primarily western audiences. Kolin also

provides more contextualized guidelines that locate the use of visuals at various intersections

of culture. In his "Guidelines for Using Visuals for International Audiences," for example, Kolin

instructs students to follow these principles:

- Do not use any images that ethnically or racially stereotype your readers.

- Be respectful of religious symbols and images.

- Avoid using culturally insensitive or objectionable photographs.

- Avoid any icons or clip art that international readers would misunderstand.

- Be cautious about importing images/photos with hand gestures in your work,
  especially in manuals or other instructional materials.

- Don't offend international readers by using colors that are culturally inappropriate.

- Be careful using directional signs and shapes. Avoid confusing an international
  audience with punctuation and other writing symbols used in the United States.
  (Kolin 480-82)

Each guideline is then followed by a brief paragraph providing students with real-life examples and scenarios, situating each guideline within a specific context.

Although Markel's *Technical Communication* provides specific guidelines similar to Kolin when writing for international and cross-cultural audiences, he grounds his instruction within a broader discussion of communication across cultures, emphasizing the need to understand what he calls "cultural variables." Markel identifies two sets of cultural concerns, asking students to consider what he calls "on the surface" cultural variables and "beneath the surface" cultural variables. Citing international communication scholar Nancy L. Hoft, Markel identifies seven categories of cultural variables that lie on the surface, including political, economic, social, religious, educational, technological, and linguistic considerations (95). Students, Markel writes, ought to be aware about "these basic differences" for they can affect "how readers will interpret [one's] documents" (95).

Following this discussion, Markel tackles more complex concepts by introducing six "beneath the surface" cultural variables that "are less obvious than those discussed in the previous section" (96). These variables include: a focus on individuals or groups, distance between business life and private life, distance between ranks, nature of truth, the need to spell out details, and attitudes toward uncertainty (96-98). In this section, Markel emphasizes the spectrum of cultural attitudes, cautioning students to be mindful of the ways in which power (although he doesn't explicitly use this term) operates across cultural contexts. For example, Markel acknowledges that "some cultures, especially in the West, value individuals more than groups" while "other cultures value groups more than individuals" (96). Such cultural

attitudes, Markel continues, influence how business and personal matters are conducted, including the ways in which cultures conceive of the "relationship between supervisors and their subordinates," the ways in which cultures conceive of and interpret "truth as a universal concept" or as "a more complex and relative concept," and how such factors contribute to the ways in which documents are constructed and interpreted (97). Particularly notable about Markel's approach is his acknowledgement of culture as a "fluid, not static" concept that cannot fully be addressed by any single set of guidelines; as such, students should always be mindful and reflective of the ways in which they address cross-cultural and international audiences (99). Following his discussion, Markel prompts students to analyze cultural variables by examining two sample business letters.

While many of the textbooks provide general guidelines and examples for addressing cross-cultural audiences, nearly all of them manage to avoid naming and specifying any one cultural group. Johnson-Sheehan's textbook, however, takes a markedly different approach. Chapter Two of Johnson-Sheehan's Technical *Communication Today*, titled "Readers and Contexts of Use," includes a detailed section on international and cross-cultural communication with sub-sections about differences in content, differences in organization, differences in style, and differences in design. In each of these sections, Johnson-Sheehan provides examples from various cultural groups. For example, in order to explain that different cultures have different expectations about the content of professional and technical communication, Johnson-Sheehan writes:

- In China, the content of your documents and presentations should be fact based, and you should focus on long-term benefits for your readers and you, not about short-term gains. In business, the Chinese tend to trust relationships above all, so they look for facts in documents and they do not like overt attempts to persuade.

- In Mexico, South America, and many African countries, family and personal backgrounds are of great importance. It is common for family-related issues to be mentioned in public relations, advertising, and documentation.

- In the Middle East, Arabs often put a premium on negotiation and bargaining, especially when it comes to the price of a service of a product. As a result, it is crucial that all details in the documents are spelled out exactly before the two sides try to work out a deal.

- In Asian countries, the reputation of the writer or company is essential for establishing the credibility of information. Interpersonal relationships and prior experiences can sometimes even trump empirical evidence in Asia.

- Also in Asia, contextual cues can be more important than content. In other words, *how* someone says something may be more important than *what* he or she is saying. For example, when Japanese people speak or write in their own language, they rarely use the word no.

- In India, business is often conducted in English because the nation has over a dozen major languages and hundreds of minor languages. So, don't be surprised when your

Indian partners are very fluent in English and expect you to show a high level of

fluency, especially if you are a native English speaker. (32-33)

Johnson-Sheehan continues to provide similar advice in regard to differences in organization,

differences in style, and differences in design before emphasizing that above all, when

communicating with international and cross-cultural audiences, students should listen carefully,

be polite, and research the target culture (36). At the end of the chapter, Johnson-Sheehan

prompts students to find two texts from any given country or culture to analyze according to

differences in content, organization, style, and design.

As I discussed in chapter 3, Markel's and Johnson-Sheehan's textbooks incorporate the

most instruction on visual communication and, in both textbook chapters establishing the

principles of design, the authors also briefly discuss designing documents for cross-cultural

(Johnson-Sheehan's term) and multicultural (Markel's term) audiences, both of which provide

students with considerations and guidelines when designing documents for readers from other

cultures. Johnson-Sheehan, for example, distinguishes from *culturally deep* documents and

culturally shallow documents whereby documents that are deep "use the language, symbols,

and conventions of the target culture to reflect readers' design preferences and expectations"

and documents that are shallow "usually follow Western design conventions, but [are]

adjust[ed] to reflect some of the design preferences of the cultures in which they will be used"

(508). Johnson-Sheehan further advises students that many documents "will need to be

culturally shallow so that they can work across a variety of cultures" (508). He then delineates

other considerations such as use of color, images of people, use of symbols, and reading paths

to supplement his discussion of cross-cultural design. Markel's discussion of multicultural

design is couched in a larger discussion of web design and the instruction he provides reflect

concerns specific to the medium. Included in his discussion are concerns outlining design issues

for readers with disabilities, and the author urges students to consider users who may have

vision, hearing, and/or mobility impairments. Likewise, Markel includes a brief list of bullets

which serve as guidelines when designing for multicultural audiences: "Use common words and

short sentences and paragraphs; avoid idioms, both verbal and visual, that might be confusing;

consider creating a version of your site in [another] language [if readers speak a language other

than English]" (296).

In *Technical Communication: A Practical Approach*, Pfeiffer and Adkins emphasize the

significance of international and intercultural communication in the global workplace, while

also acknowledging the complexities of understanding cultures.

> In studying other cultures, we must avoid extremes of focusing exclusively on either the
>
> differences or similarities among cultures. On the one hand, emphasizing differences
>
> can lead to inaccurate stereotypes; large generalization about people can be
>
> misinformed and thus can impede, rather than help, communication. On the other
>
> hand, emphasizing similarities can tend to mask important differences by assuming we
>
> are all alike—one big global family. The truth is somewhere in between. (8)

Drawing on Edward Hall's communication model, Pfeiffer and Adkins follow with a discussion of

high-context cultures, which they define as "fairly homogeneous, with the culture providing a

high degree of context for communication," and *low-context cultures*, or cultures that "consist

of diverse religions, ethnic backgrounds, and educational levels; as a result, communication must be explicit" (9). Pfeiffer and Adkins write that the concept of low-context and high-context cultures only "offers a general way of thinking about how to relate to clients and colleagues in other cultures and countries" (9); as such, they also provide students with a list of guiding questions to consider when communicating with international audiences, ranging from views about work and workplace practices, dominant religious and philosophical beliefs, attitudes toward gender, the value placed on professional and personal relationships, and communication preferences (10-11). Finally, the authors offer the following guidelines when writing for multicultural audiences: simplify grammar and style rules, use simple verb tenses and verb constructions, limit vocabulary to words with clear meanings, use language and terminology consistently, define technical terms, avoid slang terms and idioms, and include visuals (13). (See chapter 2 for my critique of the framework that equates visuals with notions of ease and efficiency.)

Gerson and Gerson's *Technical Communication: Process and Product* includes a discussion of multiculturalism in Chapter 4, "Communicating Effectively to Your Audience in a Multicultural World." The authors begin by explaining that "the world's citizenry does not share the same perspectives, beliefs, values, political systems, social orders, languages, or habits" and successful technical communication must take into account "language differences, non-verbal communication differences, and cultural differences" (105). Like nearly all of the texts reviewed, Gerson and Gerson then provide guidelines for students in order to "achieve effective multicultural technical communication," including advice on defining acronyms and

abbreviations, distinguishing between nouns and verbs, attending to cultural biases and expectations, avoiding humor and puns, avoiding figurative language, considering units of measurement, and representing people (107-110). While Gerson and Gerson's guidelines are similar to those found in the other textbooks, particularly in regard to sentence- construction and language-use, the authors also include a brief paragraph on using stylized graphics to represent people, making explicit the connection between considering multicultural issues and visual communication. Gerson and Gerson caution students that,

> a photograph or realistic drawing of people will probably offend someone and create cultural conflict. You want to avoid depicting race, skin color, hairstyles, and even gender. To solve this problem, avoid shades of skin color, choosing instead pure white or black to represent generic skin. Use simple, abstract, even stick figures to represent people. Stylize hands so that they are neither male or female—and show a right hand rather than a left hand (a left hand is perceived as "unclean" in some countries). Recognizing the importance of the global marketplace is smart business and a wise move on the part of the technical communicator. (110)

Following this suggestion is an example of a poorly written email message for a multilingual audience and *not* an example of how one should represent people for multicultural and international audiences. While it can be assumed that the authors' suggestion to strip representations of people of identifying factors such as race and gender through the use of stick figures refers to established protocols by organizations such as the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) for using graphical symbols—such as those used in public

information symbols (e.g., traffic signs, safety information, etc.)—the suggestion is not

contextualized and thus, students may inadvertently interpret it as an inviolable rule to be

followed in all situations that require communication with multicultural and international

audiences. At risk, too, is the implication that visual representations *can* and *should* be

neutralized, reinforcing the notion that technical communicators only need to be concerned

with the visual when it comes to objective data displays that rely on graphical symbols.

As the results of this review indicate, the textbooks tend to frame instruction regarding

communicating with cross-cultural and international audiences as a process steeped in what

Jan Corbett calls "an information acquisition" model whereby students will learn to

communicate effectively with cultural groups "if they identify the ways these cultures differ

from their own, for example, in language, concepts of time, employment practices, and

corporate values" (412). In addition to the information acquisition model, the textbooks

examined also consistently employ heuristics and guidelines, working under the assumption

that, when followed, students will be able to communicate effectively across a wide range of

cultures.

Culture and Gender

In addition to instruction concerning communicating with cross-cultural and

international audiences, nearly all of the textbooks reviewed also addressed culture in relation

to issues of gender (the sole exception, again, is Searles' *Workplace Communications: The*

Basics), although only four out of the eight textbooks included the term *gender* in the index

(Anderson; Gurak and Lannon; Johnson-Sheehan; Markel). More interesting, perhaps, is that

the textbooks reviewed addressed gender not only as a factor to consider when communicating with diverse audiences, but also as something to consider during collaboration.

The first mention of gender in Anderson's text is in Chapter Eight, titled "Developing an Effective Style." Here, Anderson provides guidelines for developing a professional tone of voice, as well as for constructing reader-centered sentences, focusing on issues such as clarity, active voice, prioritizing information, sentence length and structure, and word choice. In the section detailing word choice, Anderson instructs students to use inclusive language and to "avoid sexist language because it supports negative stereotypes. Usually, these stereotypes are about women, but they can also adversely affect men in certain professions, such as nursing" (276). Included in this brief discussion is a chart listing "do's and don'ts":

> Use nouns and pronouns that are gender-neutral rather than ones containing the word *man*; use plural pronouns or *he or she* instead of sex- linked pronouns when referring to people in general; refer to individual men and women in a parallel manner; revise salutations that imply the reader of a letter is a man; when writing about people with disabilities, refer to the person first, then the disability. (276-77)

Following this initial discussion of inclusive language use, the next mention of gender in Anderson's text occurs in Chapter Sixteen, "Creating Communications with a Team." This chapter foregrounds the fact that professional and technical documents are often produced collaboratively and provides students with guidelines and models to facilitate effective collaborative practices. Citing Mary Lay's "Interpersonal Conflict in Collaborative Writing: What Can We Learn from Gender Studies?" Anderson explains that "the gender of team members can

also influence the ways they interact," cautioning students to be aware that men tend to "present their ideas and opinions as assertions of fact" while women tend to "offer ideas tentatively" (455). Although Anderson is careful to acknowledge that such observations are generalized, he nonetheless emphasizes the need to be sensitive to such collaboration styles. While he suggests that students should "adapt [their] own modes and support people with different modes so that all can contribute to the maximum of their potential," he does not offer specific strategies for overcoming collaborative challenges in relation to the power dynamics of gender. Further, Anderson does not explain what he means by "adapting one's modes" in order to "support people with different modes," thus potentially making his advice unclear for students. None of the exercises at the end of the chapter specifically address gender, although one exercise prompts students to describe prior difficulties in a team setting.

Markel's *Technical Communication* also addresses gender, first in Chapter Four, "Writing Collaboratively," and again in Chapter Ten, "Writing Effective Sentences." In his discussion of gender and collaboration, Markel opens with the following caveat: "In discussing gender, we are generalizing. The differences in behavior between two men or between two women are likely to be greater than the difference between men and women in general" (77). Here, Markel contextualizes the issue slightly more than Anderson, explaining that gender norms in terms of communication and team work can generally be "traced to every culture's traditional family structure" whereby "men have learned to value separateness, competition, debate, and even conflict" and "women appear to value consensus and relationships" (77). Referencing feminist work in professional and technical communication, Markel suggests that "all professionals

[should] strive to achieve an androgynous mix of the skills and aptitudes commonly associated with both women and men" (77). Like Anderson, Markel does not offer specific strategies as to how androgyny can be achieved. Markel briefly touches on gender again in a section on using inoffensive language. Markel defines sexist language as that which "suggests that some kinds of work are appropriate for women and some kinds for men," noting that "in almost all cases of sexist language, women are assigned to duties and jobs that are less prestigious and lower paid than those to which men are assigned" (251). Markel offers the same guidelines in avoiding sexist language as Anderson, with the addition of alternating the use of *he* and *she*. Citing language scholar Joseph Williams, Markel suggests "alternating *he* and *she* from one paragraph or section to the next" as a potential strategy for avoiding gendered language use (251). At the end of the chapter, Markel includes one exercise (out of twenty-six) in which students are to revise three sample sentences to eliminate sexist language.

Considerably briefer than Anderson's and Markel's discussions, Gurak and Lannon also discuss gender at two points in their textbook. The first mention of gender appears in the second chapter, titled "Teamwork and Global Issues in Technical Communication." In their discussion of collaboration and managing group conflicts, Gurak and Lannon note that gender differences can be a contributing factor to collaborative challenges: "Research on the ways women and men communicate in meetings indicates a definite gender gap: Women tend to be more hesitant to speak up, and when they do, they are often seen as overbearing. In contrast, men tend to speak up and sometimes dominate discussions, and when they do, they are typically considered strong and leadership oriented" (24-25). The authors reiterate that "men

and women must be treated equally as team members," though again, they offer no specific

suggestions as to how this can be achieved (25). In Chapter Seven, "Writing with a Readable

Style," Gurak and Lannon instruct that "language that is offensive or makes unwarranted

assumptions will alienate readers" (115). Thus, they offer the following five strategies for

eliminating sexist language: "Use gender neutral expressions; don't mention gender if it is not

relevant; avoid sexist pronouns; drop condescending diminutive endings; use 'Ms.'" (115).

Although Johnson-Sheehan very briefly acknowledges gender issues twice in the

textbook, unlike Anderson, Gurak and Lannon, and Markel, he does so within discussions of

cross-cultural communication and writing letters, memos, and emails. In Chapter Two, titled

"Readers and Contexts of Use," Johnson-Sheehan establishes the importance of profiling

readers and their contexts of use when creating documents. In the same section on

international and cross-cultural communication where he emphasizes the ways in which

content, organization, style, and design are influenced by international and cultural factors, he

notes that women in Western parts of the world "are more direct than women in other parts of

the world" and that this "directness often works to their advantage in other countries because

they are viewed as confident and forward-thinking" (35). However, he cautions that "as writers

and speakers, women should not be too surprised when people of other cultures resist their

directness" (35). This is the only mention of gender in the entire chapter on cross-cultural

communication. Likewise, Johnson- Sheehan does not include in the textbook a lengthy

discussion of sexist language; however, in the chapter detailing common workplace

communication genres such as letters, memos, and emails, he writes that "it is no longer

appropriate to use gender- biased terms like 'Dear Sirs' or 'Dear Gentlemen," for "[students] will offend at least half the receivers of [the] letters with these kinds of gendered titles" (120). Not surprisingly, given the minimal nature of coverage in this textbook, none of the chapter exercises prompt students to consider issues of gender.

Although similarly brief, Pfeiffer and Adkins emphasize the importance of understanding cultures in the global workplace and provide students with a set of questions to ask themselves to prepare for communicating with people from other cultures. Among questions prompting students to consider the ways in which people from other cultures might approach notions of work, time, beliefs, personal relationships, collaboration, communication preferences, body language, and writing conventions, the authors also prompt students to consider how people might approach gender by asking, "What are their views of equality of men and women in the workplace, and how do these views affect their actions?" (11). Pfeiffer and Adkins assert that while "asking these questions does not mean we bow to attitudes that conflict with our own ethical values, as in the equal treatment of women in the workplace," nevertheless, it is imperative for practitioners to "comprehend cultures with which we are dealing before we operate within them" (11). In the last chapter of the textbook, Chapter Seventeen "Style in Technical Writing," Pfeiffer and Adkins include a list of techniques to avoid sexist language similar to those provided by Anderson and Markel. At the end of the chapter, they provide ten sample sentences for students to revise.

Both Gerson and Gerson's *Technical Communication: Process and Product* and Kolin's *Successful Writing at Work* address gender only sparingly in one chapter of their respective

texts. In Chapter Four, titled "Communicating Effectively to Your Audience in a Multicultural World," Gerson and Gerson begin their instruction by emphasizing the importance of audience awareness before delving into issues of biased language framed through the issue of diversity. In order to clarify what they mean by diversity, the authors quote Susan Grimes and Orlando Richards' definition: "Diversity includes gender, race/ethnicity, religion, age, sexual orientation, class, physical and mental characteristics, language, family issues, [and] departmental diversity" (qtd. in Gerson and Gerson 102). Following this definition, the authors then outline a few reasons why diversity is desirable in the workplace, maintaining reasons such as its protection by law, the golden rule (i.e., it is the right thing to do), its benefits to businesses, and the ways in which it keeps companies competitive (102-103). Gerson and Gerson then provide strategies for avoiding sexist language because "sexism creates problems through omission, unequal treatment, stereotyping, as well as through word choice" (113). The authors then provide indicators of sexist language

- **Ignoring Women or Treating them as Secondary.** When your writing ignores women or refers to them as secondary, you are expressing sexist sentiments. Modifiers that describe women in physical terms not applied to men treat women unequally.

- **Stereotyping.** If your writing implies that only men do one kind of job and only women do another kind of job, you are stereotyping.

- **Pronouns.** Pronouns such as *he*, *him*, or *his* are masculine. Sometimes you read disclaimers by manufacturers stating that although these masculine pronouns are used, they are not intended to be sexist. They're only used for convenience. This is

an unacceptable statement. When *he*, *him*, and *his* are used, a masculine image is

created, whether or not such companies want to admit it.

- **Gender-Tagged Nouns.** Use nouns that are nonsexist. To achieve this, avoid nouns

    that exclude women and denote that only men are involved. (Gerson and Gerson

    113-14).

I quote the authors at length here because I want to point out that their tone is markedly

different from the ways in which other authors have outlined guidelines for avoiding sexist

language; further, their approach in discussing audience awareness issues in relation to gender

is significantly more detailed and developed than the discussion concerning addressing

multicultural audiences. Rather than merely suggesting why students ought to use inclusive or

nonsexist language, Gerson and Gerson take a much more direct and emphatic approach. At

the end of the chapter, the authors provide students with five sentences for revision in order to

avoid sexist language.

Finally, Kolin briefly addresses gender in his second chapter titled "The Writing Process

at Work," where he instructs students about researching, planning, drafting, revising, and

editing. In a section detailing strategies for editing sentences, Kolin forwards the notion of

editing as a practice extending beyond mere clarity and readability, characterizing it, instead, as

a "professional style—how you see and characterize the world of work and the individuals in it,

not to mention how you want your readers to see you" (65). Kolin's text is the only one

reviewed where an explicit connection is made between the practice of avoiding biased

language and the ethos of the professional and technical communicator. Kolin explains how the

use of sexist language presents a distorted view of society that "discriminates in favor of one

sex at the expense of another, usually women [. . .] by depriving them of their equal rights"

(65). Interestingly, the next rationale Kolin provides draws on the economic frame outlined

earlier, whereby the "bottom-line" for businesses take precedence over other concerns.

Another reason why students shouldn't use sexist language, Kolin writes, is because "it may

cost your company business" (65). As consistent with nearly all of the textbooks, Kolin then

provides a brief list of guidelines to follow concerning the use of neutral words, masculine

pronouns, sexist salutations, and descriptors regarding physical appearance (66-68). Like many

of the other textbooks, Kolin provides an end-of-chapter exercise of fourteen sentences for

students to revise. As with the instruction concerning multicultural audiences, the textbooks

consistently employ heuristics and guidelines that students should follow in order to avoid

reproducing sexist discourse. However, unlike discussions of designing visuals for multicultural

audiences, the textbooks reviewed only rarely mentioned the ways in which gender

considerations may affect visual design.

Visual Communication Textbooks

The two textbooks focused exclusively on visual communication only discuss cultural

issues sparingly, and unlike the other eight textbooks reviewed, they do not include a section

devoted solely to audience considerations. Instead, both *Designing Visual Language* and

Document Design subsume designing for cross-cultural and international audiences under

larger discussions of visual conventions, or the culturally constructed agreements about "what

images can mean, how they can be presented, and how they interact" (Kimball and Hawkins

55). Introduced in the third chapter concerned with theories of design, Kimball and Hawkins place their discussion of intercultural visual communication within explanations of visual culture, emphasizing that conventions "are determined by individual cultures" and that "a document designed for one culture's conventions of visual language might not work for another culture" (56). In order to "solve this problem of intercultural communication," Kimball and Hawkins introduce the concepts of *globalization* and *localization*, whereby globalization attempts to create documents that will succeed for most people in most cultures and localization attempts to create culturally-specific documents for multiple cultures (56). Both approaches, the authors continue, have their own set of challenges:

> Globalized documents, however, can never hope to speak successfully to people of all cultures, and this approach often produces oversimplified, unsuccessful documents. . . . Ideally, localization helps designers create culturally sensitive documents. But localization inevitably costs more than globalization, making some organizations reluctant to invest in this practice. Localization projects also sometimes depend on superficial cultural stereotypes, such as "Asians don't like to do business with strangers." Although such a stereotype may have some general truth, a deep familiarity with the target culture and even individual members of that culture is necessary for localization to succeed. (56-57)

Despite foregrounding and identifying these challenges for students, Kimball and Hawkins do not provide sample documents of how students should go about designing for multicultural and international audiences. The next explicit reference to issues of multiculturalism occurs in a

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later chapter on using color, cautioning students that "cultural background also deeply influences how we apply meaning to color. For example, in Western cultures white is often associated with purity or innocence. In other cultures, this association can be remarkably different" (253). Although Kimball and Hawkins prompt students to consider various design concepts—such as type, graphics, and color—from three theoretical perspectives (visual perception, visual culture, and visual rhetoric), addressing multicultural and international audiences do not figure prominently in the discussions and are often subsumed under general guidelines that simply restate that students should be aware of the various cultural contexts in which documents are constructed and interpreted.

Kostelnick and Roberts' *Designing Visual Language* includes even less attention to designing for multicultural and international audiences. Similar to *Document Design*, Kostelnick and Roberts begin by introducing the notion of visual conventions, explaining that conventions are both "learned and acquired, depend[ing] entirely on the audience's familiarity with them to communicate the intended meaning. Depending on the convention, the audience may be large or small, with its members adhering to the convention within a discipline, an organization, or an entire culture" (35). Unlike Kimball and Hawkins, Kostelnick and Roberts do not devote a section entirely about intercultural or international visual communication; rather, they briefly allude to it in discussions of design elements. For example, when considering typography, Kostelnick and Roberts suggest that designers should "follow the typographical conventions that have developed within the country or the culture in which the documents will be used" (123); when discussing color, they remind students that "the meanings readers associate with

colors such as yellow, red, and green vary in different parts of the world, so designers need to use them cautiously" (365). Interestingly, while neither *Document Design* nor *Designing Visual Language* discusses the cultural factors that contribute to visual design at any great length, both texts do provide references to visual rhetoric and visual culture scholarship for students to consult.

Neither *Designing Visual Language* nor *Document Design* address gender at any great length, and unlike the other eight textbooks surveyed, they do not devote a section specifically to collaboration practices or inclusive language. Kimball and Haskins, however, briefly allude to issues of gender in their discussion of visual culture, noting that visual culture approaches take note of "visual cues about class, society, gender, and money" (53). I found this absence particularly striking because an extensive amount of scholarship and research methods have been published on feminist approaches to visual culture from an array of disciplines. Additionally, both textbooks include bibliographies and references for further reading, often pointing to prominent visual communication scholarship in composition, rhetoric, communication, philosophy, and design. Neither of the textbooks referenced visual communication scholarship through the lens of gender.

Conclusions/Analysis Results

Based on the results of this review, instruction in the standard conventions and forms (written, visual, and verbal) typical of organizations and businesses take precedence over instruction about the ways in which cultural factors impact workplace environments and practices. Although nearly all of the textbooks discuss issues in global, intercultural,

multicultural, and cross-cultural communication, generally cautioning students to be sensitive

to such issues, as a whole, they remain committed to what Gerald Savage describes as

"teaching skills, procedures, rules, and forms, as if these things have no history, as if they exist

objectively, neutrally, somehow separate from the contexts they appear" (316). Thus, as Lee

Brasseur notes, this pedagogical framing does not allow students to recognize "the idea that

while traditional discourse models in technical and professional writing may contribute to

successful communication within an organization, they may also promote enculturation to a

kind of communication which diminishes peoples' voices, disinherits them from power and,

thereby, limits the capacity to effect change" (115). In the following sections, I discuss the

implications of the findings in respect to the primary cultural factors addressed and discussed in

the textbooks reviewed. Then, I explain why these implications are important to developing a

pedagogy of visual communication as a critical cultural practice, outlining an approach that may

address the limitations of textbook instruction.

As the results of this review suggest, the textbooks deploy variations of the term *culture*

to characterize nearly all discussions of social diversity—in language, nationality, race, ethnicity,

or gender—and is often couched under a broad pluralistic framework of *multiculturalism*. In so

doing, the textbooks are able to acknowledge issues related to communicating in a diverse

society by subsuming all discussions under the blanket term of multiculturalism, while avoiding

the more explicit political implications of the terms race and ethnicity. In their 2012

introduction to the *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*'s special issue on race,

ethnicity, and technical communication, Miriam Williams and Octavio Pimentel acknowledge

that "even though (or quite possibly because) race as a concept and thereby racism still exist, many people, if not color-blind, avoid topics of race, ethnicity, and culture in their daily conversations. Thus, it is not surprising to find this same reticence to discuss such topics in technical communication research and pedagogy" (272). Moreover, critical pedagogue Peter McLaren argues that "multiculturalism has too often been invoked in order to divert attention from the imperial legacy of racism and social injustice" (195). While it can certainly be argued that the primary purpose of the textbooks reviewed is to provide a general awareness and introduction to professional and technical communication situations that involve diverse audiences most commonly encountered in the workplace, Bernadette Longo notes that partitioning instruction about communicating in the workplace from broader socio- cultural discussions has consequences: "A view of culture that is limited within the walls of one organization does not allow researchers to questions assumptions about technical writing practices because those practices are not placed in relationship to influences outside the organization under study" ("An Approach" 55).

As I discussed earlier in this chapter, the textbooks tend to frame instruction about communicating with cross-cultural and international audiences through an information-acquisition model guided by heuristics and guidelines that aim to identify important dimensions of culture and provide general descriptions students and their future employers might find helpful. As with the guidelines and heuristics employed in discussions of visual communication I discussed in chapter 2, providing seemingly prescriptive guidelines for communicating with

diverse audiences has limitations. R. Peter Hunsinger, for example, notes that heuristic approaches to culture

> treat members of a group as instances of a profile, an essentializing practice that displaces cultural identity from the concrete individual into a typical instance of the individuals who share a culture. The heuristic approach is also prone to misrepresent cultural identity to emphasize the differences that matter and flattens culture to the reduced dimension of a heuristic. (33)

In addition to emphasizing cultural difference, Jan Corbett notes that "the comparative nature of the information-acquisition model sometimes leads to moral judgments about other cultures" (413). Here, I would like to return to one of Johnson-Sheehan's example about cultural differences in content:

> In the Middle East, Arabs often put a premium on negotiation and bargaining, especially when it comes to the price of a service of a product. As a result, it is crucial that all details in the documents are spelled out exactly before the two sides try to work out a deal.

For students—whom the textbooks typically assume to be Western and with native English language proficiency—the implication in such a statement is to be wary when communicating with an audience from a different culture; that is, if students do not adequately "spell out" the details, they risk being taken advantage of, a sentiment further reinforced by language that frames multicultural and intercultural communication as "problems" requiring students to learn appropriate "precautions" (Kimball and Hawkins 56; Kolin 181). (In "Globalizing Professional

Writing Curricula: Positioning Students and Re-Positioning Textbooks," Libby Miles discusses

how professional and technical communication textbooks assume that "non-native English

speakers are generally the writer's audience, not the writer" thus overlooking the needs of ESL

students enrolled in professional and technical communication courses (185)).

Although the textbooks analyzed provide students with some guidelines about designing

culturally appropriate visuals, sustained attention to issues of visual representation is lacking,

which may inadvertently communicate to students that professional and technical

communicators only work with "factual data displays (like charts, tables, and graphs) . . . [and

that] visual design and visual rhetoric mean formulaically adhering to a universal set of

principles for coordinating images with verbal text" (Salinas 167). The risk in framing visual

communication in such a way, as Sam Dragga and Dan Voss point out, is the omission of what

they call a "humanistic ethic" (266). Dragga and Voss contend that the field's tendencies to

focus on functional and efficient design is insufficient and that recognition of "the equal

obligation of the visual component to support and to promote a humanized and humanizing

understanding" is necessary in order to ethically situate visual communication as constitutive of

broader social and cultural conditions (266).

Still, these textbooks have made great strides since Emily Thrush's 1993 critique that

"most textbooks on technical communication include little or no discussion of intercultural

communication" (272); however, I agree with Hunsinger and Corbett in their assertions that

textbook instruction can only go so far. Relying solely on the information-acquisition model, the

heuristic approach, or the case-study approach, which tend to emphasize "the differences that

matter," as Hunsinger notes, "traces [those differences] back to an effectively autonomous, supposedly traditional culture, [and] does not provide the opportunity for critical inquiry into the cultural differences it describes, leaving students with a static cultural representation" (46). While some of the textbooks take great care to emphasize that culture and cultural affiliations are fluid (Markel), the framing that students ought to consider communicating with diverse audiences according to the guidelines presented may also inadvertently suggest that cultures are comprised of homogenous groups, ultimately rendering the concept with little mobility and dynamism. Critical anthropologist Arjun Appadurai notes, for example, that traditional notions of culture have been destabilized by two features of globalization such as global communication technologies and increased migration, thus blurring the boundaries of "insider," "outsider," "indigenous," and "foreign" cultural influences (4). The textbooks reviewed seldom take this into account, nor do they address the concept of what Homi Bhaba calls "cultural hybridity."

Moreover, the seeming stability of the guidelines and heuristics provided may inadvertently position culture and cultural factors as pre-discursive or as something fixed that exists *before* communication, rather than as something that is negotiated and co-constructed *during* communication.

Although the textbooks have begun to include the work of feminist scholars in professional and technical communication, particularly those of Mary Lay and Jo Allen in regard to collaboration and language use, such guidelines are often presented in a manner that suggests students should not engage in gendered discourse for fear of offending readers or

tarnishing the reputation of one's organization or professional image. That is, such guidelines are presented as hard-fast rules that ought to be followed along with the many other "Do's and Don'ts" the textbooks espouse concerning professional communication in general, reducing gender bias into individual lapses in style, rather than as practices that enable and inscribe unequal power relations through modes of communication with actual material consequences. It is also important to note that the textbooks reviewed seem to conflate conceptualizations of *gender* with *sex*. (*Sex* generally refers to biological differences in the body while *gender* refers to the socially constructed roles and expectations to which sexed bodies assume. Feminist theory, however, has complicated the sex vs. gender binary. For example, Judith Butler writes that "the presumption of a binary gender system implicitly retains the belief in a mimetic relation of gender to sex whereby gender mirrors sex or is otherwise restricted by it. When the constructed status of gender is theorized as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice" (6). See also, Anne Fausto-Sterling's critique of the sex/gender, nature/nurture, real/constructed dualisms regarding the construction of gender and sexuality.) Consider, for example, the following excerpt from Markel's discussion of gender and collaboration:

> Effective collaboration involves two related challenges: maintaining the team as a productive, friendly working unit and accomplishing the task. Scholars of gender and collaboration see these two challenges as representing the feminine and the masculine perspective. This discussion should begin with a qualifier: in discussing gender, we are generalizing. The differences in behavior between two men or two women are likely to

be greater than the differences between men and women in general. The differences in how the sexes communicate and work in teams have been traced to every culture's traditional family structure. (77)

I quote Markel at length to bring attention to the ways in which notions of "the feminine" and "the masculine" are attributed to the categories of "men" and "women," while the terms *gender* and *sex* are used interchangeably—features that are consistent in nearly all of the textbooks that address gender. Although many scholars would agree that gender is a fluid and unfixed category, the textbooks reviewed frame it as relatively stable, requiring that students merely learn prescriptive rules and guidelines in order to successfully navigate gender issues in professional contexts. One risk in framing gender reductively to professional and technical communication students, according to organizational culture researcher Elizabeth K. Kelan, is that "gender becomes stabilized and re-established in work context[s]" (176). For students on the cusp of becoming professionals, such prescriptive rules and guidelines may be insufficient in helping them to negotiate the challenges—including those entailing issues of gender—found within any given organizational culture. Further, the binary approach—women/men, feminine/masculine—employed by the professional and technical communication textbooks reviewed exclude consideration of transgender bodies and identities which, as Toby Beauchamp and Benjamin D'Harlingue note in their recent piece on women's studies textbooks, "stabilizes the normativity of hegemonic sex and gender embodiments" (26). This further reinforces what Brasseur calls the "objectivist and rationalist paradigm [. . . that promotes] a

masculinist model of human experience which assigns goodness to certain 'valued' male traits such as rational thinking and objectivity" that has so strongly pervaded the discipline (114).

Additionally, the textbooks surveyed still very much maintain conservative definitions of "the workplace," indicating most typically organizations, businesses, and other institutions. Arguably, such notions of "the workplace" are accurate and appropriate for one of the field's goals is to school new practitioners into the standard forms and conventions typical of such communities. Recent feminist scholarship in professional and technical communication, however, note that defining professional writing as "geographically situated in the workplace fails to recognize the household as either a 'workplace' or setting of consequence," which "results in an interpretation of 'technical writing' that works to exclude the significant contributions of women" (Durack 105, 107). Although the textbooks take great care to include examples of both women and men in numerous positions, the conservative definition that professional and technical communication only takes place at school and at work, traditionally defined, obscures the many valuable professional and technical experiences and practices (and other "atypical" professional and technical communications documents) that take place outside of this setting.

Implications for Visual Communication Pedagogy

Thus far, I have pointed out some limitations concerning the ways in which the textbooks reviewed frame culture via instruction about communicating with diverse audiences. But what does this mean for visual communication pedagogy? In chapter 2, I discussed the ways in which visual communication instruction in professional and technical communication

pedagogy privileges visual production over visual analysis, inadvertently separating visual communication practices from the broader socio-cultural contexts in which it participates. Additionally, as I noted in earlier portions of this chapter, even when visual communication is placed into discussions that acknowledge the range of cultural factors that can affect communication, textbook instruction situates culture and cultural factors as relatively fixed, thus reinforcing the notion that the visual is merely a neutral transmitter of predetermined conventions and values. While this approach may prove useful in teaching students the formal elements of visual design, it also implicitly suggests that the visual texts students produce in professional and technical communication courses have little bearing on the ways in which culture is constructed and negotiated—that what they produce can only respond to the prevailing discourse (by adhering to its prescriptive guidelines and rules) but does not ultimately contribute to shaping it, thus positioning students with little autonomy in their practice. Coupled with this view is the framing that emphasizes the functional elements of visuals to support the more "important" verbal text, relegating the role of the visual as merely supplementary.

Compounding this limited view of visuals is the overarching framework that emphasizes the value of effective professional and technical communication in terms of economic success which, according to Ryan Moeller and Ken McAllister, "creates the illusion that students' only agency lies within the context and confines of a workplace or in the role of a professional" (167). Such tenets and emphases on "practicality," "efficiency," and "expediency," underscores the critique forwarded by Scott, Longo, and Wills: "The main goal of hyperpragmatist pedagogy

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is to ensure the technical writer's (and technical writing student's) professional assimilation and success is measured by vocational rather than more broadly civic terms" (9). Nearly all of the textbooks reviewed use a rhetorical framing strategy of economic success to underpin why learning to communicate in professional and technical environments is beneficial for students. Among the common rationales used by the textbooks include promotions and salary increases, prestige, and professional success. As Bernadette Longo notes in her cultural history of technical writing in the United States, technical writing textbooks construct students "primarily as individuals concerned with their own personal gain" because of articulated cultural values linking relationships among "knowledge to management and money" (*Spurious* 74).

> This relationship is measured by career success in an organization, i.e., the salary an entry-level employee (recent college graduate) can earn by being promoted within an organization because of his or her technical communication skills. The linking of knowledge to money through a management technology works to ensure that technical writing students conform to behaviors and attitudes resulting in efficiency and productivity within organizations that have evolved from the application of time-management and assembly line models of production. (*Spurious* 74-75)

While it can be argued that this economic frame is a necessary evil to ensure that students continue to take professional and technical communication courses, emphasizing the "bottom-line" in terms of what is beneficial from the perspectives of the practitioner and the workplace forestalls the potential for students to recognize that professional and technical communication

practices can work toward ends other than profit and for contexts outside of the corporate workplace.

Especially salient in this review of textbook instruction is the continuing push- and-pull between what Charlotte Thralls and Nancy Roundy Blyler identify as "social constructionist pedagogies" and "ideologic pedagogies" in the teaching of professional and technical communication. Social constructionist pedagogy, according to Thralls and Blyler, "focuses on acculturating students to the communities they wish to enter" by positioning the classroom as "mirrors of professional communities" (111-12). This pedagogical stance is especially apparent in the textbooks reviewed particularly in their focus on teaching students common workplace documents, genres, and conventions. Ideologic pedagogy, on the other hand, draws from critical pedagogy to question existing structures and hierarchies, focusing instead on "raising questions about the political implications of community norms" such as "How do conventions of discourse come to be codified as normal within academic and professional communities? How does this privileging impact individuals and the larger social good? Whose interests are protected and reproduced? . . . And whose voices and interests are silenced and diminished?" (114). Indeed, much of the scholarship in professional and technical communication advocates for this second view, although as the results of this textbook review suggests, the latter approach is often swept aside in favor of the former.

In "Redefining the Responsibilities of Teachers and the Social Position of the Technical Communicator," Gerald Savage critiques the gap between scholarship and pedagogy, asserting that

theori[zing] a social view of technical communication while teaching a primarily

instrumental approach emphasizing skills, tools, and prescriptive rules is not only

theoretically inconsistent and perhaps intellectually dishonest, it amounts to an

abdication of our own moral responsibility to make students aware of the social effects

of their professional practices. (324)

In order to address this gap, in the next chapter I begin to develop a pedagogy of visual

communication as a critical practice that seeks to disrupt the notion of the visual as only

functional and as divorced from broader cultural concerns. In so doing, I advocate for a view of

visual communication as social action, drawing from public and civic- engagement pedagogies

that emphasize the significance of student learning within local community contexts. Such a

shift, I suggest, can better prepare professional and technical communication students to think

critically about the norms and conventions of professional cultures as they are situated within

broader socio-cultural factors, to know when to conform to such conventions and norms, and

to know when to re-imagine them by employing responsible visual practices.

CHAPTER FIVE: BEYOND FUNCTIONALITY AND EFFICENCY: RHETORIC, DESIGN, AND CIVIC

ENGAGEMENT

In early November 2012, the social networking site Upworthy released a video featuring

Debbie Sterling Lewis—engineer, inventor, and CEO of GoldieBlox—a construction toy

specifically designed for and marketed to young girls. Frustrated by the dearth of women in the

field of engineering, Lewis designed the toy with the hopes of encouraging girls to develop their

spatial skills and pique their interests in activities such as engineering and construction,

particularly because such toys are traditionally reserved for and marketed to young boys.

According to Lewis, GoldieBlox differs from other construction toys in that it goes beyond

superficial appeals such as changing the packaging of the toy to suit the seemingly appropriate

gender (e.g., pink for girls and bold primary colors for boys). Both a series of books and a

building set, the premise of GoldieBlox asks users to follow a narrative featuring Goldie, a

female inventor, and her friends as they undertake various adventures by problem-solving and

learning to build simple machines. By designing a children's toy that draws on written, visual,

and spatial literacies and by combining fun with learning, Lewis hopes that her design concept

can combat common gender stereotypes and therefore might, in turn, open doors to other

possibilities and future interests for young girls. Specifically, Lewis' project seeks to increase

gender parity in the field of engineering and she views the gendered culture within which

children are socialized—including something as seemingly inconsequential as the toys they play

with—as directly related to that project.

I begin this chapter with this example for several reasons. First, Lewis' project aptly illustrates the ways in which design practices are always already mired in culture and politics. Second, the GoldieBlox project demonstrates the ways in which established design conventions can be re-conceptualized and rearticulated into new practices with the potential to be transformative in ways that move toward positive social change. Finally, I found Lewis' endeavor to be particularly relevant in helping to answer some of the questions I have raised throughout this dissertation: How might instructors develop pedagogies that better situate visual communication and design, as it's mired in various contexts laden with cultural, social, political, and economic influences? What can instructors learn from design projects such as the GoldieBlox project to cultivate pedagogies that help students see beyond conventional design practices? And how can instructors scaffold the teaching of visual communication and design in ways that can help students "participate in the actions of [their] communit[ies]" by understanding the potential of visual communication as social action? (Miller, "Genre" 165)

In *Vision, Rhetoric, and Social Action in the Composition Classroom*, Kristie Fleckenstein writes that an overarching concern of rhetoric and composition is to make salient "the literacy practices by which people make meaning of and participate in the world [as such practices are] intricately woven with concerns for justice, equity, and peace" (2). Integral to an agenda in social action, Fleckenstein continues, are pedagogies of hope whereby instructors believe in the possibilities of positive change and provide models for engaged citizenship. In order to do provide such models, Fleckenstein explicitly links rhetorical habits and visual habits, and she convincingly argues that "a culture's and an individual's options for social action lie within the

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visual-rhetorical connection, a connection formed by the various ways in which images *and* words relate" (30). Thus, through the trope of a symbiotic knot, Fleckenstein insists that instructors should attend to its three intertwining threads—rhetorical habits, visual habits, and place—in order to create the potential for social action because "*what* we teach and *how* we teach implicate the kind of citizens our students may become" (149). Similarly, information design scholar Robin Kinross notes that attention to rhetoric may help bridge design theory and practice, positing that rhetoric can "guide action and production" because he views rhetoric as "an art of making public statements, an art of reasoning, of public discourse" (213). To return to my opening example, sharing design projects such as the GoldieBlox project with students may help illustrate the ways in which rhetorical habits and visual habits are intertwined and located in spaces that extend beyond the professional and technical writing classroom and into various publics, foregrounding the ways in which design practices can help shape social action.

Scholars, instructors, and practitioners from graphic design fields have similarly noted the pedagogical imperative to rearticulate visual practices as potential tools for social change. In "Can Design Be Socially Responsible?," Michael Rock insists that "there is an implicit *power* involved in graphic design that is derived from an involvement in image production, and all power carries with it responsibility [although] we have not sufficiently addressed [it]" (191). The responsible designer, Rock continues, "should be conscious of the cultural effect of all [design] products" (192) and locates the practice of doing design responsibly as functions of "the content, the form, the audience, the client, and the designer" (191). Responsible design, thus, requires reflective practice and must take into account factors beyond the design object itself.

Likewise, in "Good Citizenship: Design as Political Force," Katherine McCoy argues that graphic design should be viewed not as a neutral objective practice that serves only commercial and economic ends; rather, McCoy advocates for the "compassionate designer [who can] strategize an ethical practice and be an informed, involved citizen" (6). More importantly, McCoy argues that the social, political, and cultural implications of design should be made salient for students beginning with the first introductory course. Foregrounding these issues for students, McCoy continues, can potentially interrupt the view that design is a passive practice whereby designers "unquestioningly accept client-dictated copy" at the expense of other concerns (7). Thus, despite the seemingly prescriptive approaches espoused in the textbooks pedagogies I discussed in chapters 3 and 4 of this project, current scholarship from multiple disciplines have called for a need to situate design as contingent, located, and potentially transformative.

Given the ties among professional and technical communication, rhetoric, composition, and graphic design, in this chapter I draw on both the calls of Fleckenstein and McCoy to bring voice to the practices of reframing the teaching of visual communication in professional and technical communication courses. In the previous chapters, I identified three significant points of tension in the teaching of professional and technical communication that are crucial to this project. I will address them again here, for clarity. First is the concern about whether instruction should acculturate students to common conventions and genres relevant to the field in order to mirror actual professional communities (social-constructionist pedagogy), or teach students, instead, to think critically about the political implications of such conventions and genres in an effort to resist or reconceptualize existing structures (ideologic pedagogy) (Thralls and Blyler

110-27). Embedded within this discussion are the ways in which professional and technical

communication is positioned as a field that functions to "professionalize" practitioners, often

for economic ends such as workplace efficiency and corporate success. The second point of

tension involves the seemingly contradictory role of visual communication in writing instruction

such as the visual/verbal divide as well as the valuing of visual production over visual analysis.

Finally, although instruction has begun to acknowledge the ways in which cultural factors may

affect professional and technical communication, instruction tends to teach students

prescriptive rules that treat culture and cultural factors as static, predetermined elements. In

this chapter, I draw on professional and technical communication's ties to classical rhetoric and

civic engagement in order to address the three points of tension outlined above. Specifically, I

argue that a visual-rhetorical pedagogical framework that is grounded in the civic engagement

objectives of a rhetorical *paideia* may help students begin to view visual communication as a

critical practice.

First, I historicize the *paideutic* tradition and demonstrate how its objectives can

potentially reorient professional and technical communication toward ends that are more

civically-minded rather than solely profit- or corporate-driven. In so doing, I agree with Stephen

Bernhardt that a foundation in rhetorical study within professional and technical

communication "encourages the convergence of individual skills with an excellence in character

that finds expression in civic virtue" (604). Second, I explore the rhetorical concept of *techne* as

a means by which students can engage in professional and technical communication practices

that can help them develop the necessary visual acuity and design skills that are both functional

and transformative. Finally, I argue that by positioning visual communication as *techne* and as integral to civic engagement pedagogies, instructors can better scaffold the teaching of visual communication and design as they are located within various publics, thus foregrounding for students the ways in which design practices occur outside of the classroom and make more salient the potentials of visual communication as social action.

The Classical *Paideia*

What we know as western classical rhetorical theory originates from the ancient Greek educational system and is generally referred to as a *paideia*, a term often loosely translated to mean "education." A *paideia*, however, is not simply education in the broad sense of the word but a very specific kind of education: instruction in the ideals, values, and practices of Greek culture. Classicist Werner Jaeger examines the relationship among education, culture, and values within the historical context of ancient Greece. According to Jaeger, the Greeks envisioned a *paideia* as "the process of educating man into his true form, the real and genuine human nature" (xxiii), which is concerned with "the shaping of moral character" (ix), and integrally "connected with the highest *arête* possible to man" (286). I realize that the Greek *paideia* as it was originally conceived is gendered, racialized, and classed. Indeed, many scholars have argued that such a paradigm only served to equate notions of virtue with power that was only available for educated, property-holding, white men. I invoke the term here to emphasize the ways in which *paideia* was used to cultivate students with rhetorical awareness in order to participate in broader social and civic concerns.

Further, Jaeger writes that the *paideia* as it was conceived connotes an education concerned with the social for "education is not a practice which concerns the individual alone: it is essentially a function of the community" (xiii). In *Rhetoric Reclaimed: Aristotle and the Liberal Arts Tradition*, Janet Atwill explains that a *paideia* is "not a strictly disciplinary model of knowledge; it is closely associated with imitation and the inculcation of habits and values" in order to prepare citizens to participate in the polis (128).

The Greek *paideia*, thus, was an education that sought to cultivate *arête*, or virtue. Jaeger explains that prior to the Greek adoption of democracy, education was primarily an aristocratic tradition "based on the inheritance of *arête* through noble blood" (287). The creation of city-states, however, resulted in the notion of membership within a political community and forged "a deliberate system of education to the mind" (287) that aimed to serve the polis by teaching citizens to cultivate *arête* through various intellectual pursuits. Thus, the *paideia* provided the educational framework through which *arête* could be taught. Among the formal training students received in order to cultivate a sense of virtuous citizenship was instruction in formal speaking and argumentation—in other words, what we call "rhetoric." The cornerstone of the ancient rhetorical *paideia* is a curriculum steeped in the *progymnasmata*, an extensive set of exercises designed to gradually introduce students to the elements of rhetoric in preparation for students to create their own orations. The curriculum was comprised of fourteen exercises and consisted of instruction in various compositional forms for students to model whereby students learn the elements of rhetoric and argumentation by imitating the established conventions and applying them to their own compositions. More importantly, in

addition to instruction in formal elements, ethical themes were also embedded in the exercises in order to shape moral character with the goal of preparing students to responsibly engage in civic matters related to the good of the polis.

In addition to instilling students with rhetorical habits that prepare them to participate in the larger civic arena, Kristie Fleckenstein argues that the Greek *paideia* also involved various visual habits that helped to shape the ways in which citizens *saw* the world and thus informed *how* they participated in it. Crucial to the notion of engaged citizenship, Fleckenstein explains, were the ways in which the "participatory, collective character [of Greek society] was enacted through an array of rhetorical options that were visually inflected," producing a very "particular way of speaking *and* a particular way of seeing to produce a particular way of acting" (32). Citing the rhetorical strategy of *ekphrasis*, the technique of vivid and dramatic verbal description, Fleckenstein explains that rhetors were able to appeal to their audience by bringing forth the "'mind's eye' [which is] a vision (and experience) of reality that validated [their] persuasive point and invited [their] listeners to participate in the lawfulness of that reality" (32). Engaged citizenship, thus, not only entailed the ability to learn rhetorical practices such as oratory but also depended on a particular way of looking—a vision, so to speak—of how one might enact such participation.

Although many aspects of the rhetorical *paideia* are not suitable to the demands and constraints of rhetorical instruction today—for example, the standard semester schedule simply does not allow for the time or the opportunity to implement the *paideia* as it was originally conceived—scholars continue to explore the applicability of the classical tradition to

contemporary pedagogy. For example, David Fleming suggests that rhetorical education ought to be envisioned within a *paideutic* tradition: "Rhetoric in the *paideutic* tradition is a knowledge attained only by a combination of extensive practice, wide learning, native ability, formal art, and love of virtue" (173). Walter Jost, too, insists that rhetorical instruction should be positioned as an art with the end goals of not "master[ing] fixed values, subject matters, texts, or theories" (21), but a "cultivation of abilities in dealing with subject matters" (15). To be clear, my purpose in invoking the *paideia* in relationship to this project concern the underlying goals of the *paideutic* tradition—especially those linked to *arête* as they are informed by both rhetorical habits and visual habits. As David Fleming writes, the *paideutic* tradition can help students "to become a certain kind of person, one who has internalized the art of rhetoric" (180). I suggest that this emphasis can also provide a useful foundation for teaching about visual communication and design for ends that align with participatory citizenship.

Indeed, scholars have already explored the *paideutic* tradition and its applicability to instruction in writing and rhetoric. James Murphy, for example, notes that rhetorical instruction has much less to do with teaching students rhetoric and more with teaching students "to be rhetorical" (68). Joseph Petraglia and Deepika Bahir suggest that instructors ought to help "cultivate rhetorical intelligence" in the classroom (3), while Wayne Booth insists that we should guide students in developing a "rhetorical stance" which consists of the "proper balance among the three elements that are at work in any given communicative effort: the available arguments about the subject itself, the interests and peculiarities of the audience, and the voice, the implied character, of the speaker" (141). Grounding the emphasis on cultivating

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rhetorical awareness is the broader concern of preparing students for active civic engagement, and I contend here that reinvigorating this emphasis can help to disrupt some of the views espoused in contemporary textbook instruction that the primary value in learning professional and technical communication practices is to acquire marketable skills in order to achieve "jobs, promotions, raises, and professional prestige" (Pfeiffer and Adkins 2), and for ends that only serve the bottom- line "needs of their employers, co-workers, customers, clients, and vendors" (Kolin xvi). For an extended discussion of how the benefits of learning professional and technical communication are framed through textbook instruction, see chapters 3 and 4.

Certainly, I am not the first to advocate for a view of professional and technical communication as civic engagement nor am I the first to explore the potentials of classical rhetoric in shaping the how this view might be achieved. Scholars have long ascribed a civic component to our pedagogy and practice, noting that professional and technical communication is "a practical rhetoric" that involves "arguing in a prudent way toward the good of the community" (Miller, "What's Practical" 23), as well as one that calls on a pedagogical tradition steeped in "civic humanism" whereby students learn to be citizens who "can say the right thing at the right time to solve a public problem because they know how to put the shared beliefs and values of the community into practice" (T. Miller 57). For Miller and Miller, the Greek concept of *praxis* is crucial to the work of professional and technical communicators, writing that they must employ "prudential judgment, the ability (and willingness) to take socially responsible action, including symbolic action" (Miller, "What's Practical" 23) in order to "develop a broader social perspective on practical writing, a

perspective that includes not just the social context of the company or profession but the larger

public context as well" (T. Miller 57). In order to enact the practices of social responsibility

advocated by Miller and Miller, Dale Sullivan adds that *phronesis*, or practical wisdom, enables

practitioners to "to deliberate about the good rather than the expedient and, as such, to act in

the political sphere rather than the sphere of work" (378).

In response to these calls, the pedagogical practice of service-learning in professional

and technical communications courses has gained significant traction in an attempt to meld

practical concerns about writing with attention to the broader rhetorical aspects of civic

engagement. James Dubinsky suggests that service-learning pedagogies better prepare

students to write for real audiences than pedagogies that only mimic or replicate the workplace

through simulated situations. Service-learning, Dubinsky insists, not only prepares students to

"learn the skills they need in the workplace" but also provides "a path toward virtue and can

create ideal orators and citizens who put their knowledge and skills to work for the common

good" ("Service-Learning" 62). Although J. Blake Scott similarly lauds the benefits of service-

learning models in professional and technical communications courses, he notes that the

transformative potential of correlating workplace skills, rhetorical awareness, and civic action

with service-learning is often tenuous and can be "co-opted by a hyperpragmatism that moves

past ethical deliberation about the larger cultural conditions, circulation, and effects of

[professional and] technical communication" ("Extending" 244). Without sufficient critical

attention and reflection, Scott continues, even service-learning pedagogies can succumb to "the

disciplinary emphasis on uncritical accommodation . . . and can work to maintain a pedagogy

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that facilitates *praxis* but not *phronesis*" ("Extending" 244). Still, civic engagement pedagogies

continue to proliferate in the field in an attempt to balance the pragmatic goals of professional

and technical communication with critical rhetorical engagement for the benefit of larger

publics. Drawing on urban-planning and community design theories, Andrew Mara, for

example, champions the use of charettes to "help teachers and students successfully perform

critical citizenship within professional practice" (220), while Amy Kimme Hea situates service-

learning projects within critical stakeholder theory in order to encourage students to reflect on

their client-consultant partnerships.

In this vein, much has been written about professional and technical communication as

a whole, though less explored are the ways in which visual communication practices within the

field contribute to civic engagement pedagogies. Following Michelle Eble and Lynée Lewis

Gaillet's reconfiguring of the term "community intellectual" and pedagogies that not only

prepare students for "their chosen professions but also to send them to community

organizations and businesses equipped to question community constructions and engage in

rhetorical practices" (353), I similarly advocate for a pedagogical view that positions students as

citizen designers who not only have the know-how to employ visual communication practices

but can do so through a critical lens that takes into account the broader cultural contexts in

which visual artifacts circulate. Teaching students to think of themselves as citizen designers, I

argue, can more fully take into account the role of visual habits as they inform rhetorical habits,

and positions visual communication as integral to and part of the larger movement to employ

civic engagement pedagogies toward more egalitarian social ends. Before turning to how visual

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communication pedagogies can be reinvigorated by the classical educational objectives I have

outlined thus far, however, I first turn to a discussion of the complex role of visual

communication within writing studies which may explain, in part, why its potentials as integral

to civic engagement have not yet been fully realized.

The Complex Role of Visual Communication

In addition to the overarching tensions between social constructionist pedagogies and

ideologic pedagogies I described in the previous chapters and in the beginning of this chapter,

another point of tension concerns the role of the visual in professional and technical

communication. Indeed, visual communication within the field has a long and sometimes

contradictory history. Although professional and technical communication was among the first

within the broader discipline of rhetoric and composition to explore visual communication as a

viable area for research and practice, pedagogical applications about the role of visual

communication have been primarily concerned about its functionality in aiding written

information. Consider, for example, the following statements gleaned from the textbook review

I conducted in the previous chapters: Visuals help to "make the document more interesting and

appealing to readers, communicate and reinforce difficult concepts, communicate instructions,

communicate large amounts of quantifiable data, and communicate with nonnative speakers"

(Markel 8-9); "Visuals make data easier for readers to interpret and remember" (Gurak and

Lannon 121); Visuals "are attention grabbers and can be used to engage readers' interest"

(Pfeiffer and Adkins 483); "Visuals are indispensable partners of words in conveying information

to your readers in order to clarify and condense information" (Kolin 21).

Especially interesting in such statements are the ways in which the process of communicating visually along with how visuals, as a thing in and of themselves, are described as having particular characteristics due to qualities that are seemingly inherent in visual modes. On the one hand, visual communication is a practical application that asks the writer/designer to harness the "ease" of visual modes in order to accommodate audiences; on the other hand, the visual as a thing articulated through various genres serves as evidence of "ease" materialized. Thus, the process of visual communication and visuals in and of themselves are doubly articulated as both a functional process (the doing of visual communication) *and* product (the resulting visual artifact).

This pedagogical framing of visuals and visual communication as functional process and product is reminiscent of Jennifer Daryl Slack and J. Macgregor Wise's discussion concerning cultural assumptions about technology. In *Culture + Technology*, Slack and Wise note that historical discussions of technology have been "treated as an application, capability, manner of doing, and specialized aspect, but not as a thing," whereas current popular discourse refers to technology "almost always as things (tractors, pacemakers, computers and so on)" (95). Underscoring such assumptions, Slack and Wise continue, is the articulation of technology as both processes and products "that are useful; that is, as having . . . some 'practical application'" (95).

This functional, or what Andrew Feenberg calls instrumental, perspective has affordances and limitations. First, it allows for the positioning of visuals and visual communication practices as transparent or neutral, and not as cultural artifacts imbued with

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histories and values that help shape the ways in which people interpret and respond to the visual cultures in which they are steeped. Wise and Slack's critique about "the formulation of technology as things that are useful deflects vision toward the tool-like use of these things, and away from the work or role of these things beyond matters of usefulness" (97), bears great relevance to this project and the ways in which visual communication is framed and taught. Wise and Slack's critique is reminiscent of Martin Heidegger's discussions of things, equipments, and works of art in his 1936 essay "The Origin of the Work of Art." According to Heidegger, equipment and works of art share similarities in that both are "produced by the human hand" and that both result from the process of "bringing forth" into unconcealment (59-60). However, Heidegger makes an important distinction in the "bringing forth" of art—which he calls "creating"—and the "bringing forth" of equipment—which he calls "making" (59-60). For Heidegger, when writing is brought forth as equipment, language disappears into usefulness (48). Such discussions about functionality and use—in regard to technology, writing, or as I argue, visual communication—is fundamentally rooted in issues of value. As both Heidegger and Slack and Wise suggest, when functionalism and use is emphasized, something valuable is lost. According to Carlos Salinas, the emphasis on functionalism in regard to visual communication within professional and technical communication pedagogy often results in the following problematic assumptions:

> Images objectively correspond to reality and illustrate factual claims made by verbal
>
> text; the types of images we work with are largely limited to factual data displays (like
>
> charts, tables, and graphs); all readers cognitively perceive images the same way; and

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visual design and visual rhetoric mean formulaically adhering to a universal set of

principles for coordinating images with verbal text. (167)

Although not all professional and technical communicators hold this functional view (and in

fact, quite a bit of scholarship within the field challenges it), pedagogical instruction often lauds

the functional role of visual communication as the primary reason for why students ought to

learn it. Coupling this emphasis on function within the broader framework that professional and

technical communications courses can help students achieve vocational success, I suspect, has

contributed to the reasons why visual communication practices have not yet been thoroughly

explored as integral to civic engagement pedagogies.

To complicate matters further, much of the discussion concerning civic engagement

pedagogies concern how *writing* and *speaking* can help to effect positive social change, a

symptom of the often contradictory role of visual communication in the broader area of writing

instruction in general. Craig Stroupe notes that writing studies has been centrally concerned

with the "dominant literacy of verbal culture" which often subsumes other literacies into the

traditional paradigm of written and spoken rhetoric (14). Similarly, Charles A. Hill argues that

the neglect of the educational system to teach students visual literacies to the same extent as

written literacy inadvertently positions students as passive spectators "rather than as critics or

analysts of visual messages" (108). Hill further notes that visual forms of communication have

historically been neglected in the writing classroom and posits that much of this neglect is due

to the fear that "visual and other modes of communication will overtake, replace, or diminish

the importance of the print medium" (108-09). Carolyn Handa, however, astutely points out

that "rhetoric's association with the written word is arbitrary, a by-product of print culture rather than the epistemological limits of rhetoric itself" (2). Rhetoric, thus, encompasses all media and rhetorical instruction need not be confined solely to written and spoken modes of communication.

Despite the ubiquity and increasing presence of visual communication in multiple areas of rhetoric and composition including professional and technical communication, however, Salinas aptly point out that "when we talk about the composing process or writing technical documents, we usually have a verbal text in mind—if not consciously, then nevertheless as a paradigm. When we talk about visual design at all, we usually mean the formulaic coordination of visuals to verbal text" (168). That is, the teaching of visual communication—particularly in regard to visual production—is filtered through the lens of language-derivative metaphors in order to describe visual modes. Consider, for example, Gunther Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen's concept of "visual grammar" for understanding representational images, as well as Charles Kostelnick and David Roberts' notion of "verbal/visual cognates" which proposes an equivalent relationship between the two modes. Although the use of such metaphors to describe visual communication can be useful in providing an interpretive context between a familiar mode and one that is less so, interpreting one sign system through the lens of another invariably leaves gaps in understanding and makes it difficult to conceptualize how visual modes work independently from verbal modes. Kress and Van Leeuwen, for example, note that their concept of visual grammar cannot completely account for the ways in which visuals make meaning (32), while Diana George asserts that "there is little reason to argue that the visual and

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verbal are the same, are read or composed in the same way, or have the same status in the tradition of communication instruction" (14). J. L. Lemke calls attention to the intertextuality of communication, arguing that "every time we make meaning by reading a text or interpreting a graph or a picture we do so by connecting the symbols at hand to other texts and other images read, heard, seen, or imagined on other occasions" (73). That is, although the tendency to treat visual and verbal elements as separate within writing studies is common—with instruction in visual modes as secondary to instruction in verbal modes—we do not necessarily interpret verbal and visual elements separately. Rather, multiple modes often work together to create meaning as a whole.

In *Design Writing Research*, Ellen Lupton and J. Abbott Miller explain that modernist design theories and pedagogies have contributed to both the functional view of visual communication and the use of language-derivative metaphors (such as "visual literacy" and "visual language") to describe the work that visuals do. They advocate, instead, for a transformative view of design that "can critically engage the mechanics of representation, exposing and revising its ideological biases; design can also remake the grammar of communication by discovering structures and patterns within the material media of visual and verbal writing" (23). Crucial to their approach is the critical reading of visuals as inseparable from social, cultural, and political contexts and thus emphasize that "words, images, objects, and customs, insofar as they enter in the process of communication, do not occupy separate classes, but participate in the culturally and historically determined meaning that characterizes verbal language" (65). As such, Lupton and Miller employ the term "design/writing" in order to

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situate visual communication as an act that functions both "constructively, as a tool for generating design ideas" and "analytically as an evaluation method" (169). Such a view takes into account both the know-how to produce visual texts as well as the critical lens to analyze the ways in which such texts circulate. In order to connect visual communication as integral to civic engagement pedagogies that seek to effect social change, the role of visual forms—not only in relation to written text—but as a communicative mode in its own right that is also laden with cultural effects must be foregrounded when teaching students to produce visual documents. Further, visual production pedagogies must also be coupled with visual analysis pedagogies in order to foster reflective practice. That is, visual communication must be reoriented to mean much more than just having the necessary skills to produce visual documents. Such a pedagogy, Salinas argues, also means teaching students "the ability to question, challenge, and revise as a central part of reading and using images *as well as* the ability to design them smartly and ethically in the first place" (171). This two-part pedagogy, thus, situates visual communication squarely within the art of rhetoric.

Visual Communication as *Techne*

In addition to the classical rhetorical concepts of *praxis* and *phronesis*, discussions of professional and technical communication practices particularly in regard to the basic skills, technologies, and forms taught in professional and technical communications courses have invoked the term *techne*, or the art of production. In Aristotle's discussion of the five virtues of thought in *Ethics*, he explicitly distinguishes *praxis*, the ability to take social action, from *techne*, which he defines as a technical skill with the end goal of producing something (6.4). For

Aristotle, *praxis* can only be achieved through *phronesis*, or the practical wisdom necessary

which allows one to deliberate for the good rather than the expedient (6.5). These divisions are

further underscored by scholars such as Barbara Warnick who notes that *techne* is simply "a

habit of producing" whereas *phronesis* is concerned with the ends to which such products are

put (304-05), and Carolyn Miller who notes that *techne* is merely "reason appropriate to

production" and cannot provide "a locus for questioning, for criticism, for distinguishing good

practice from bad" ("What's Practical" 22-23). In *Techne, From Neoclassicism to

Postmodernism*, Kelly Pender notes at least five different definitions for *techne*: (1) as a "how-

to" guide; (2) as a rational ability to effect a useful result; (3) as a means of inventing new social

possibilities; (4) as a means of producing resources; and (5) as a non-instrumental mode of

bringing-forth (16).

As these examples illustrate, *techne* has been positioned as primarily functional with an

emphasis on the skills or techniques required to produce something, and as discrete from both

praxis and *phronesis*. Such definitions, James Dubinsky states, do not sufficiently address

"*techne*'s social, ethical, and rational richness and are not accounting for the bridge that *techne*

builds between the practical and the theoretical. More importantly, they overlook *techne*'s

connection to civic duty" ("Service-Learning" 131). Here, I argue that if we are to teach our

students to think of themselves as engaged designers—that is, as active participants who not

only have the necessary skills to produce visual forms but can also take into account the ways in

which their designs are circulated and interpreted as part of the composing/designing

process—a broader understanding of *techne* must be cultivated in the pedagogical materials

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about visual communication. Further, I advocate for a view of *techne* that does not position it as separate from or in opposition to *praxis* and *phronesis*. Rather, I suggest that by reframing visual communication as more than merely functional and as part of broader cultural, social, and civic concerns, we can better teach students to see how the *techne* of visual communication is always already embedded in ethical (and rhetorical) decisions with the potential to effect social action.

Other scholars have similarly argued for a more expansive view of *techne*. Carlos Salinas argues for a broader definition of *techne* defining it as "an art involving both a skillful know-how (making) *and* savvy know-how (contriving)" (172). Such savvy, Salinas continues, involves both "the ability to read and critique culture as well as consider an artifact's possible cultural consequences as part of the production process" (172). Ryan Moeller and Ken McAllister similarly call for a broader view by positioning "*techne* as an epistemology" rather than as "a mere foil for praxis" (185, 189). In their critique of the *techne*/*praxis* binary, Moeller and McAllister argue that limiting *techne* to instrumentalism forestalls the potential for transformative social critique and does not allow for "students to think expansively about themselves as technical communicators in a society rather than as employees who have a job to do" (188). For Moeller and McAllister, foregrounding *techne* in the classroom allows students to approach their craft in ways that emphasize invention, creativity, and transformation, which may potentially subvert the field's tendencies to emphasize prescriptive adherence to forms and conventions, workplace efficiency, and corporate success.

In *Rhetoric Reclaimed: Aristotle and the Liberal Arts Tradition*, Janet Atwill offers a discussion of *techne* that goes beyond the Aristotelian notions of skill and technique as discrete concepts from prudence and social action. By drawing on Isocrates and Protagoras, Atwill situates rhetoric as *techne* and reorients the concept toward "knowledge as production, not product, and as intervention and articulation rather than representation" (2). Atwill offers several characteristics of *techne*:

1) A *techne* is never a static normative body of knowledge. It may be described as a dynamis (or power), transferable guides and strategies, a cunningly conceived plan— even a trick or trap. This knowledge is stable enough to be taught and transferred but flexible enough to be adapted to particular situations and purposes.

2) A *techne* resists identification with a normative subject. The subjects identified with *techne* are often in a state of flux or transformation. . . . *Techne* is never "private" knowledge, a mysterious faculty, or the product of unique genius.

3) *Techne* marks a domain of intervention and invention. A *techne* is never knowledge as representation. *Techne* appears when one is outnumbered by foes or overpowered by force. It not only enables the transgression of boundaries but also attempts to rectify transgressions. (48)

I quote Atwill at length because I find her definition of *techne* particularly useful to this project. Atwill's claims are especially compelling because she explains that *techne* is never concerned with determinate results, but instead is always focused on the contingent, and is always involved in an exchange. Atwill's characterization of *techne* is also expansive enough to

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accommodate both social-constructionist pedagogies that seek to acculturate students to common workplace conventions and genres while also allowing for ideologic pedagogies that teach students to questions those same structures. Although Thralls and Blyler remain skeptical that "ideologic theorists' focus on resistance to communal norms can be joined with constructionists' focus on acculturation" (124), I understand Atwill's positioning of *techne* as both/and—not either/or. Because *techne* is a dynamic concept, foregrounding visual communication as *techne* in the professional and technical communication classroom can allow students to learn the conventions of visual design, but also gives them room to play with and revise those conventions when the situation might demand it. That is, while we can align *techne* as a form of productive knowledge, *techne* is always more than just production itself. Even in its *most productive* forms, *techne* is never something as simple as the process of learning particular software in order to design a brochure, or even the knowledge of how to design it. Rather, *techne* involves a step beyond mere knowledge about useful processes and skills for producing useful things; *techne* also requires both forethought and reflection because it emerges in specific material conditions and contexts.

Here, I return to Salinas' concept of "savvy." Salinas argues that designers "need not reject functionalism out of hand, but rather need to add an understanding of *techne* back into it" (174). I understand the concept of "savvy" as a form of critical, cultural, and rhetorical awareness that goes beyond the knowledge and skills to produce something. Thus, helping students to cultivate "savvy" is foundational for teaching students to think of themselves as citizen designers who not only have the know-how and skills to produce visual forms, but can

also consider the cultural consequences of visual communication as an integral component to production. As I have argued, however, there are few pedagogical materials that offer strategies for how students can cultivate this critical stance in regard to visual communication in professional and technical communications courses. Still, there are a wealth of analytical frameworks from visual communication studies in rhetoric and composition as well those from other disciplines that can be integrated into the visual production process in professional and technical communications courses to help students cultivate "savvy." Framing visual communication as *techne* can allow for the integration of those analytical pedagogies in order to complement the various sets of heuristics used in professional and technical communication for visual production. In so doing, visual production becomes less about mastering prescriptive rules and uncritically applying them to one's design. Most importantly, Atwill's refiguring of *techne* as both "intervention and invention" positions visual communication as having the potential to intervene in existing structures and conventions that may work to perpetuate oppressive and unequal power relations. That is, framing visual design pedagogies in this manner may not only help students to understand that visual communication practices do more than merely add audience interest or communicate difficult concepts, but that visual communication can also be used to re-imagine and redesign existing practices and artifacts that can work to effect positive social change.

Crucial to this pedagogical framework are the ways in which visual communication as civic engagement and as *techne* must be made salient and supported *throughout* the duration of a professional and technical communications course.

Conclusion

By integrating analysis and reflection throughout the design process, students can better understand not only the significance of visual communication in professional and technical communication documents but also the ways in which the visual participates within larger social and cultural contexts. This understanding helps students develop abilities to potentially transform visual discourses and to be attentive to the social and cultural consequences of their designs, making salient that all visual documents and texts, including the ones they produce, participate in shaping the ways in which meaning is made. These approaches, I believe, can help to fill some of the gaps in the textbook instruction I discussed in chapters 3 and 4. In her work theorizing approaches to public pedagogy in rhetoric and composition, Ashley J. Holmes argues that integrating public pedagogies "in the teaching of writing is rhetorical, transformative, and located" (214). Civic engagement pedagogies such as service-learning not only have the potential to direct students to think expansively about their writing, but also to teach them about visual communication and other modes of meaning-making. By integrating visual communication and design into service-learning and other civic engagement pedagogies in the undergraduate professional and technical communication classroom, instructors and students can begin to interrogate the view that professional and technical communication is a neutral, objective practice concerned only with prescriptive adherence to forms, conventions, workplace efficiency, and corporate success. Thus, in addition to helping students develop as communicators and thinkers, integrating visual communication into service-learning and throughout the duration of a course allows students to explore the

civic dimensions of professional and technical communication, situating them as engaged

designers and active members of their communities.

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