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# INTRODUCTION

Bruce McComiskey

Once a year, every summer, I clean out my office at work, filing documents and memos that have been stacking up for months, reshelving books thrown lazily in haphazard piles, shredding and discarding old papers and exams. I do not relish this annual task, and by the time I get to my filing cabinet, I am always tired and bored enough to limit my work to the bare necessities. Every year, toward the end of this long and unpleasant day, I saw that red accordion folder in the back of my bottom filing-cabinet drawer, and every year I just left it there, completely unaware of its contents but convinced that if I had once placed it in that location, then that's where it must belong. So there it stayed for maybe thirty years.<sup>1</sup> But one recent summer, May or June 2013, was different. I decided to begin this distasteful annual task with my filing cabinet because space was becoming increasingly limited, and I needed to vet its contents more carefully than I had done in the past. And there was that red accordion folder, this time unavoidable. I pulled it from the drawer, unwound the latch, and lifted the flap, revealing some very old papers. As I slid the papers from their hiding place, I quickly realized what they were: this folder contained every essay I had written during my undergraduate degree at Illinois State University, including six handwritten essays from my fall 1982 section of English 101.

The identity of the person who wrote those compositions (as we called them) in 1982 was not even close to the identity of the person who was staring at them, somewhat bemused, a third of a century later. Back then, I was an eighteen-year-old physical-education major (it's a long story) enrolled in a slate of required general-education courses, but now I'm a teacher and a scholar whose specialized discipline is composition studies. Although I have never done any significant archival research, there I was, sitting in my office, staring at my own personal archive, and I had written its entire contents. To say the least, I became curious, having genuinely forgotten nearly all of this experience, so I started reflecting and reading.

**COMPOSITION, 1982**

Since printed histories of composition studies covering the 1960s through the 1980s were far more present to my conscious mind than the actual events of 1982, I began my personal archival journey with one main question: what was going in rhetoric and composition at that time? Thinking back to all the disciplinary histories I have read through the years, four things in particular came to mind about composition studies from the early 1970s through the early 1980s: the emergence of PhD programs in the field; the transition from modes to rhetorical genres; the shift from product-centered pedagogies to process pedagogies; and the turn from individualist to social epistemologies.

Histories of composition studies reveal that the 1970s and 1980s were deeply fertile decades for the field since a number of significant changes were taking hold. Janice M. Lauer explains that several forces converged throughout the 1970s to professionalize rhetoric and composition as a full-fledged academic discipline, including the establishment of sixteen PhD programs, each producing college teachers trained in classical and modern rhetorics (Lauer 2003, 14–15). In 1987, David W. Chapman and Gary Tate identified no fewer than fifty-three doctoral programs in rhetoric and composition (Chapman and Tate 1987). Robert J. Connors (1981) writes about the rise of the modes of discourse in the nineteenth century and their fall and abandonment during the 1960s, replaced by pedagogies rooted in linguistics and rhetoric. Lad Tobin (1994) locates the birth of the writing process movement in the 1960s and 1970s with the work of Donald Murray, Janet Emig, Peter Elbow, James Moffett, and Ken Macrorie, and in 1982 Maxine Hairston described a complete paradigm shift in composition studies from product-centered pedagogies to process-centered pedagogies (Hairston 1982). In *Rhetoric and Reality*, James A. Berlin explains that the categories of composition pedagogies he describes there were no longer “as descriptive” after 1975 since even individualist pedagogies had shifted their grounding principles in the direction of social epistemologies (Berlin 1987, 183–89). By the early 1980s, then, graduate programs in rhetoric and composition were producing a new class of English professors interested in researching and teaching writing, not literature; the modes of discourse had fallen into disrepute and were supplanted by rhetorical genres; product-centered pedagogies had been replaced by process-centered pedagogies that emphasized students’ own writing, not anthologies of model essays; and writing was increasingly being theorized and taught as a social act.

After reflecting on these transformations in composition studies during the late 1970s and early 1980s, I felt ready to approach the essays I

had written during my own first semester in college, fall 1982. I decided to read the essays chronologically, arranging them by the dates listed in each heading. My teacher, S. G. McNamara, had written her name in red near the heading of my first essay, indicating that this was a required element in headings for her class. McNamara was a PhD candidate at the University of Illinois specializing in eighteenth-century British literature, if I remember correctly. Though not trained in rhetoric and composition, McNamara was a great teacher. She was invested in her students' development as writers, and she was partly responsible for my initial interest in the craft of writing, though my commitment to the discipline of rhetoric and composition would come a little bit later.<sup>2</sup>

As I flipped through the pages of my first composition, I noticed right away that it was clearly a narration. Before I could finish reading this essay, I had to know—was I looking at a stack of EDNAs, as Sharon Crowley (1990) might call them? *EDNA* is Crowley's acronym for the modes: exposition, description, narration, and argument. I saw no descriptive essay, which was strange, though my narration included a lot of concrete details covering all five senses, so perhaps those two modes were combined. But certainly, following that initial narration (incorporating description), exposition and argument were well represented. The next four essays were expositions (definition, classification/analysis, comparison/contrast, and cause/effect), and the last essay was an argumentative/persuasive research paper with a long formal outline stapled to the front. One of McNamara's comments at the end of this research paper refers to my note cards, so I must have used that method as a way to record bibliographic information and quotations from sources.

The textbook we used, *The Writer's Rhetoric and Handbook* (McMahan and Day 1980), first edition, published in 1980, was written by Elizabeth McMahan, Illinois State University's (then) director of composition, and Susan Day, who was an instructor of English at ISU. I know the title and edition of the textbook because in my cause/effect essay I cited a line from Bob Dylan's "Subterranean Homesick Blues," which was printed in the text and thus listed in my works cited. McMahan and Day were both literature specialists, and many of the examples of style and structure in the textbook are excerpts from works of American poetry and fiction. Just curious, I typed Elizabeth McMahan's name into the catalog database of the library at my current institution, the University of Alabama at Birmingham. To my utter surprise, there is actually a copy of the first edition of *The Writer's Rhetoric and Handbook* on the shelves. This textbook begins in an almost enlightened way with a brief discussion of rhetoric, including sections on invention, audience, purpose, tone, and

formality; however, all of these sections put together occupy less than ten pages of the first chapter. Chapter 2, “Peerless Paragraphs,” moves straight into relentlessly formalist patterns of development, such as narrative, process, definition, classification and analysis, comparison and contrast, and cause and effect. Chapter 3, “Writing Effective Sentences,” emphasizes coordination and subordination, periodic and cumulative sentences, and concision. In Chapter 4, “Writing Strong Essays,” students find that what is good for a paragraph is also good for an essay since the sections in this chapter also break down into patterns of development, including narrative, process, definition, classification and analysis, comparison and contrast, cause and effect, and persuasion and argument (which, interestingly, are considered practically synonymous). Chapter 4, I presume, is where all the essay assignments came from.

Class periods, I remember, often included discussions of essays that demonstrated the modal structure we were writing at the time. I know there was an anthology required for the class, but I could not say what it was, and there is no evidence of its identity in any of my compositions. I assume, then, that these essays were not meant to generate ideas for our own writing but were simply meant to be structural models: that is, we were expected to strip the content and mimic the format. We also wrote a lot in class, which makes sense. Scholars who were developing writing-process pedagogies during the 1970s encouraged teachers to let students compose during class, providing opportunities for teachers to intervene directly in students’ writing processes. However, McNamara, perhaps unsure of how to handle the pedagogical downtime, usually graded our essays while we wrote, though she was happy to answer any questions we might have had. The day before our final essays were due, we brought rough drafts to class for peer-review sessions. I do not remember being prompted to say anything in particular about each draft, and I am certain we did not submit our drafts or our peer-review comments with our final compositions. Most likely, only a few students actually benefitted from this kind of undirected peer review, for which we were not held accountable in any way. McNamara’s teaching methods (determined in part, at least, by the common departmental syllabus McMahan had designed) were generally formalist, and there was nothing social about them. Class discussions served formalist ends and did not construct a community of writers. Students wrote “together” in class, but only as individuals sitting in the same room. Peer review generated comments like “good job” or “great introduction,” and after completing our reviews, the comments went into our folders never to be looked at again. We exchanged writing, of course, but this exchange had little

effect (social or otherwise) on the compositions we produced. The only collaborative tasks students completed in the class were exercises from the book, and our goal was merely to generate correct answers, not to negotiate complex ideas.

So my experience in English 101, fall 1982, can be summarized like this: the class was led by a graduate student in literature, who taught composition as a means to a different end (though I had the sense that McNamara liked what she was doing); the textbook emphasized modal structures and divided essays into paragraphs, paragraphs into sentences, and sentences into grammatical units, ending with a list of 1,500 commonly misspelled words; students were taught “the writing process,” but it was not emphasized in the curriculum, amounting to writing in class and peer-review workshops that were not valued or assessed; we were individual composition students, sitting together while writing in class but not creating a community of writers or engaging each other in the social play of ideas.

As I reflected on all of these memories flooding my mind, I was struck most of all by the fact that my own experience in first-year composition did not coincide with any of the best-known histories of the discipline. Based purely on my understanding of the narratives of composition history, I would have dated the compositions in that red accordion folder to the 1950s or 1960s, but certainly not to the 1980s. So were the historical narratives I had studied so closely wrong about composition studies in the 1970s and early 1980s? Or was there something more interesting going on (more interesting than simple negation or evidence to the contrary)? Were the essays in my own personal archive clues to a more complicated history of composition than I had previously perceived? And if so, why had I been unable to perceive this complexity?

My understanding of composition history (acquired from long hours spent reading Berlin, Crowley, Connors, Fulkerson, and others) created in me what Kenneth Burke calls a “trained incapacity,” or “that state of affairs whereby one’s abilities can function as blindnesses” (Burke 1954, 7). Burke explains that when a certain structure of knowledge that served our purposes in the past limits our ability to understand evolving and emerging situations, then these structures of knowledge “become an incapacity” (10). According to Burke, people often continue to act (ineffectively) according to these incapacities because “the very authority of their earlier ways interferes with the adoption of new ones” and because it is “difficult for them to perceive the nature of the reorientation required” (23). My trained incapacity was the belief that real historical writing had to be the composition of abstract narratives that tell

coherent stories based on credible evidence, and my reliance on the legitimating function these stories served made any alternative difficult for me to perceive. However, as I encountered puzzling concrete experiences and contradictory evidence in my own personal archive, I was forced to reassess my assumptions regarding what history is, what historical narratives do, and how historical evidence should be marshaled in the service of an argument. I began to wonder, where are all the people in these histories of composition studies? I do not mean people like Ann E. Berthoff or Edward P. J. Corbett or Janet Emig or Fred Newton Scott or Sondra Perl. Their names are produced (or, more likely, reproduced) in every narrative. I mean people like S. G. McNamara, and me, her student at Illinois State University in 1982. Where were we? Has real teaching been abstracted out of our narratives of composition history? Have teachers and students been erased by the drive for temporal progression and narrative coherence? Has each individual classroom been obliterated by the abstraction *pedagogy*?

The established narratives of composition history served an important function during the 1980s and 1990s, transforming a little-respected course into a full-fledged academic discipline that rejected past formalisms in favor of complex social epistemologies. However, by the turn of the twenty-first century, the stale terminology of these older histories no longer represented the realities of the discipline, as specialization both fragmented rhetoric and composition into a variety of subdisciplines and also provided its specialists opportunities to develop complex knowledge not possible in the previous century.

### REVISIONARY HISTORIES IN COMPOSITION STUDIES

As I have indicated, the grand narratives of composition history published during the 1980s and 1990s served important social and academic functions without which composition studies may not have evolved into a full-fledged discipline. During the 1970s, our colleagues in English departments equated rhetoric and composition, the emerging discipline, with English 101, the class. But histories like Berlin's (1984, 1987), Faigley's (1992), and Miller's (1991) taught us and our colleagues that our academic foundations were grounded on critical inquiry into epistemology, ideology, and discourse, not the uncritical requirement of modes, five-paragraph themes, and grammar drills. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the actual practice of teaching college composition varied widely from institution to institution and from classroom to classroom, causing some of our colleagues in English departments to



view rhetoric and composition as an incoherent collection of menial tasks based on whatever textbook happened to have been written and required by the director of composition. But histories like Connors's (1997) and Crowley's (1990, 1998) and Richard Fulkerson's (1990) taught us and our colleagues that our classroom practices were becoming increasingly coherent due to the depth of their intellectual foundations and the rejection of their collective nemesis, "current-traditional" rhetoric. Throughout the 1970s, the writing-process movement established individualist epistemologies as the dominant force in the development of new composition pedagogies, resulting in the brief reign of expressivism and cognitivism, which caused many of our colleagues in English departments to wonder if we were unaware of the linguistic and social turns in the discourses of the human sciences. But histories like Berlin's (1987), Crowley's (1998), and Faigley's (1992) taught us and our colleagues the value for rhetoric of a social orientation toward language and epistemology, culminating in the mantra *rhetoric is (social) epistemic*. Yes, these narratives abstracted, erased, and obliterated, but they also constructed a discipline. I might not be writing this introduction today if they had not done the work of narrating composition into its present disciplinary status during the formative decades at the end of the twentieth century.

More recent histories of composition studies, however, have consciously revised these earlier histories, both extending and challenging the knowledge constructed through the grand narratives of disciplinary evolution composed during the 1980s and 1990s. These extensions and challenges have taken a number of different forms, yet in every case they are critical of grand historical abstractions, and they rely heavily on archival sources that reflect local knowledge, not abstract trends. Shortly before the turn of the twenty-first century, scholars in the field had already begun to recover marginalized voices from the archives of composition, historicize traditionally ignored subjects like assessment and technology, and limit the periods and locations within which historical forces are investigated. These efforts were not exactly microhistories of composition since microhistory implies the integration of several related methods and attitudes toward the past, but their importance in the development of a more complete sense of composition history has certainly heralded a need to move in that direction.

Dissatisfied with traditional histories of composition studies that base their evidence for historical progression on white male scholars teaching at elite or flagship institutions with predominately white male student bodies, a number of recent composition researchers have turned to

alternative sources of evidence for real-life accounts of writing and teaching in populations not often considered due to the processes of narrative abstraction. In *Traces of a Stream: Literacy and Social Change among African American Women*, for example, Jacqueline Jones Royster (2000) uses archival research and multidisciplinary sources to recover and articulate the literate acts of noted nineteenth-century African American women. As Royster explains, although she herself knows “quite well that African American women have actively and consistently participated over the years in public discourses and in literate arenas,” the unfortunate fact is that these women have been systematically denied “the lines of accreditation, the rights of agency, and the rights to an authority to make knowledge and to claim expertise” (3). Since the means of accreditation and rights to construct social knowledge are often the first criteria historians use in their selection of legitimate sources about past events, African American women’s literate acts have generally been ignored in histories of rhetoric and writing. In *Liberating Language: Sites of Rhetorical Education in Nineteenth-Century Black America*, Shirley Wilson Logan (2008) turns her critical focus toward literacy education and the ways in which writing and speaking were taught and learned by African Americans throughout the nineteenth century and especially after the Civil War in religious institutions, literary societies, and the black press. These institutions are not considered legitimate sites of rhetorical education by traditional historians, and thus the education that has taken place in these marginal locations is not included in standard histories of rhetoric and composition. Like Royster before her, Logan’s aim is to tell a story traditional historiography cannot tell.

Continuing this drive to reveal untold stories of rhetoric and writing, in her 2008 book *Refiguring Rhetorical Education: Women Teaching African American, Native American, and Chicano/a Students, 1865–1911*, Jessica Enoch (2008) explains that the traditional histories of rhetorical education and writing instruction focusing on the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century emphasize the cultural, theoretical, and pedagogical principles promoted by white men teaching in elite schools preparing white male students for leadership positions in dominant social institutions. However, this narrative is incomplete if we take these teachers as representations of “rhetorical history” and “writing instruction” at that time, as if there were neither women teaching nor nonwhite students learning. Enoch explores the pedagogical theories and practices of five women (Lydia Maria Child, Zitkala-Ša, Jovita Idar, Marta Peña, and Leonor Villegas de Magnón) who taught writing and rhetoric to traditionally disfranchised students, including African Americans, Native

Americans, and Mexican Americans, negotiating their traditional gender identities as purveyors of white male cultural values and subverting their traditional pedagogical tasks of preparing students for leadership roles in white male society. In her book *To Know Her Own History: Writing at the Woman's College, 1943–1963*, Kelly Ritter (2012) draws extensively from archival research to trace the intersections of rhetoric, composition, and creative writing at the Woman's College, which would later become the University of North Carolina, Greensboro. Through her archival research, the method most commonly used in the local-history movement, Ritter uncovered rich resources relating to women's rhetorical education, an aspect of composition's past neglected by the traditional histories written by Berlin, Connors, and Faigley, for example. Again, these early historians were not wrong in their descriptions of white male writing instruction during the middle decades of the twentieth century; they were wrong in their presumption that women did not play a significant role in the history of writing instruction at that time. In 2008, David Gold published *Rhetoric at the Margins: Revising the History of Writing Instruction in American Colleges, 1873–1947*. Gold's (2008) archival approach to recovering marginalized voices in the history of composition breathes new life into tired narratives. Gold pushes beyond the epistemological and ideological problematics that structured early historical narratives and uses archival research to closely examine rhetoric and composition at a private black college, a public women's university, and a rural normal college. While epistemological and ideological frameworks may describe the elite teachers and institutions that dominate traditional histories, they do not represent the more public and critical rhetorics and writing pedagogies developed in black colleges, normal colleges, and women's universities.

Several books, published mostly within the last decade, examine single themes that had been neglected in histories of composition. James Inman's (2004) *Computers and Writing*, for example, is a history of what he calls the "cyborg era," from 1960 through 2004, the year the book was published. Inman does not situate computers and writing within composition history, and he does not cite a single standard narrative. There is no reason he should. Computers and composition generally developed independent of the epistemological and ideological categories (and the debates surrounding them) that dominated the works of Berlin, Connors, Crowley, Fulkerson, and Faigley. Thus, Inman focuses instead on the technologies emerging after 1960 and the scholars exploring the intersections of these technologies with writing. In his book *Remixing Composition: A History of Multimodal Writing Pedagogy*, Jason Palmeri

(2012) calls direct attention to the fact that historians (such as Berlin, Crowley, Ede, Harris, and Miller) have generally ignored “the crucial role of multimodality and new media within the development of composition as a field” (6). Palmeri’s approach is different from Inman’s, though. Rather than writing a history of multimodal composition completely independent of composition history, Palmeri argues instead that composition history has always contended with multimodal technologies—it just hasn’t been self-critically aware that this is what it was doing. Norbert Elliot’s (2005) *On a Scale: A Social History of Writing Assessment in America* traces the history of writing assessment from the late nineteenth century through 2004, the year before the book was published, only occasionally invoking narratives of composition history. These accounts of neglected themes in the history of composition tend not to contradict traditional histories; instead, they either ignore traditional histories altogether, articulating an independent narrative of their own, or they supplement traditional histories with richer treatments of important subjects that the drive toward narrative abstraction had prevented.

One of the most straightforward means of limiting the scope of abstract narrative history is to limit the years of coverage, describing a few years in rich detail rather than a few decades in generalized abstraction. Several of the works already discussed limit the time of analysis to a shorter period than was common in earlier histories of the discipline: Enoch’s history covers forth-six years, Inman’s covers forty-four years, Palmeri’s covers twenty-two years, and Ritter’s covers only twenty years. But other recent histories limit time periods even further. In his 2011 book, *From Form to Meaning: Freshman Composition and the Long Sixties, 1957–1974*, David Fleming examines the University of Wisconsin-Madison’s first-year writing program during that seventeen-year period that was so formative in composition history. Fleming explains that very few of those formative principles made their way into the writing classrooms at UW-Madison. However, one memo that surfaced during a local-history project Fleming directed in a research-methods course at UW-Madison provided an account of a meeting in which the TAs who taught English 101 got into a disagreement (that may have ended in a verbal altercation) with the director of composition and the chair of English over the nature of the course and the methods for teaching it. As Fleming’s students delved deeper into the UW-Madison archives of composition, they discovered that some interesting things were going on, interesting things nowhere represented in the standard histories of composition studies. Fleming writes,

In the UW Freshman English program, the most important development during these years [1957–1974] was the rise of a short-lived but potent pedagogy, simultaneously critical and humanist, developed almost entirely by English graduate student teaching assistants working by and among themselves, and reflective of (but not reducible to) the new world created by the war in Vietnam, the civil rights movement, the struggle for ethnic studies programs, and the other political, cultural, and ideological transformations of the time. . . .

It was a pedagogy that promoted relevance as the key criterion for selecting and evaluating educational materials and tasks, that advocated a radical decentering of classroom authority away from the teacher, that used “emergent” curricula responsive to the day-by-day life of the course and the growing human beings involved in it, and that rejected conventional grading as the ultimate assessment of student work.

It was a pedagogy that was also profoundly unacceptable to the tenured faculty in the English department at the time, who were unwilling either to relinquish control over the freshman course or to take an active interest in it. (Fleming 2011, 24)

For Fleming, a standard story or representative history of composition cannot possibly account for the real richness of writing instruction at UW-Madison or any other institution, for that matter. When history writers narrativize periods beyond the scope of several years, they abstract the importance and meaning out of real-life events. In their 2007 book *1977: A Cultural Moment in Composition*, Brent Henze, Jack Selzer, and Wendy Sharer take temporal limitation to a new level, focusing on just one year in culture, English studies, and rhetoric and composition, particularly as they played out in the composition program at Penn State University. With their critical focus trained on a single year, it is no surprise that Henze, Selzer, and Sharer discovered more contradictions than consistencies, and their limited scope allows them to forego the drive to construct coherent abstractions leading to a consistent narrative. Henze, Selzer, and Sharer (2007) write, “Some of the stories we heard and the historical traces we uncovered were contradictory, and the interpretations of events in the department varied widely. . . . Rather than tidying these disparate, filtered, and embedded traces of the past into a unified story of progress that would make Penn State’s current program seem like the culmination of a steady, always admirable, and self-reflective path of progress, we have tried to retain the messy traces of these conflicts within our narrative and to highlight how very unpredictable and contingent writing program development can be” (viii). Such historical writing, which represents conflicts and contingencies, simply cannot appear in a work that covers eighty-five years of an entire discipline, as Berlin’s *Rhetoric and Reality* does. The limited temporal scope of

Henze, Selzer, and Sharer's *1977: A Cultural Moment in Composition* allows them to represent a certain richness and complexity that more abstract histories simply cannot represent.<sup>3</sup>

What all of these recent revisionary histories represent is a challenge to traditional history's criteria of selection for what gets told in historical narratives and what gets left on the floor of the archive: women, African Americans, Latina/o Americans, Native Americans, assessment, multimodal composition, computers and writing, critical pedagogies in the time of current-traditional dominance, and the conflicts of composition in 1977 at Penn State University. All of these revisionary histories seek to represent the unrepresented, to describe the neglected in our present historical knowledge. However, these revisionary histories are also individually incomplete. In their drive toward understanding local practices, some employ just one or two means to limit the scope of historical analysis, and others neglect the larger contexts that construct and constrain the discipline. In "Remapping Revisionist Historiography," Gold suggests that "future historiographic research will increasingly seek to locate pedagogical practices within their wider spheres of historical development, better understand the interplay between local and global patterns, and acknowledge the mixed up goals and hybrid forms that most often mark classroom practices" (Gold 2012, 22). One historiographical approach that leads firmly toward this future research, Gold explains, is microhistory, which does "not merely describe a local scene, but use[s] the local to illuminate larger historical questions" (26). The value of microhistory as an extension of existing revisionary histories of composition is that it brings together a full collection of related methodologies, all of which together reduce the scale of historical analysis and increase the complexity of our current historical knowledge.

### MICROHISTORY

Microhistory emerged during the 1970s among a small group of Italian Marxist historians who had grown increasingly dissatisfied with the state of academic history, including the hegemonic grand narratives of social history and the anecdotal descriptions of cultural history. According to Giovanni Levi, both abstract social history and decontextualized cultural history had simplified the historian's task unnecessarily, and microhistory emerged "from the necessity of reappropriating a full complexity of analysis, abandoning therefore schematic and general interpretations in order to identify the real origins of forms of behavior, choice, and solidarity" (Levi 2012, 123). Social history assumes that relatively

unified social forces determine individual actions, and cultural history assumes that individuals act according to their own free will; but micro-history assumes every act is conditioned by multiple forces at varying levels, some imposed socially (by institutions) and others emerging personally (from desires), all in a complex dialectic. The intention of these early microhistorians was to negotiate a methodological middle ground, emphasizing the concrete details characteristic of cultural history but also placing those concrete details back into the larger contexts of social history. These early Italian microhistorians emphasized contextualized lived experience over lifeless abstractions and isolated events, recovered marginalized tactics as responses to hegemonic strategies, and began their historical work with evidence in the archives, subsequently building their arguments out toward larger contexts.

Many of the most salient characteristics of social history were established during the nineteenth century when history was seeking legitimation as an academic discipline in Europe (and, later, in the United States), and these characteristics continue to legitimate the academic study and practice of history and historiography even today. According to Georg G. Iggers, “Central to the process of professionalization was the firm belief in the scientific status of history” (Iggers 1997, 2). Social history, as a scientific discipline, would produce objective knowledge about the past, which progresses through inherently diachronic processes driven by structures of causality. It is the social historian’s task, then, to write objective accounts of these “great historical forces” (Iggers 1997, 32), tracing each particular cause and its necessary effect until a coherent narrative emerges. Levi explains that “macro-interpretations strive for linearity, coherence, continuity, and certainty—even in a biography—and aim to convey an impression of completeness in the data presented, or at least of an authoritative, coherent, and all-inclusive authorial point of view” (Levi 2012, 129). The *telos* of social history is a general narrative of Western progress (toward modernization or rationalization), and each new historical work strives to cover more and more of that general narrative through processes of abstraction and quantification, using credible sources and actual events as examples that illustrate conceptual claims. Edward Muir calls this constant drive toward greater abstraction “the giantification of historical scale, which has crushed all individuals to insignificance under the weight of vast impersonal structures and forces” (Muir 1991, xxi). The evolution of powerful computers throughout the latter half of the twentieth century led practitioners of social history deeper into methods of quantification and statistical abstraction. Even some Marxist historians by the mid-twentieth century considered themselves positivist social



historians, arguing that historical studies was an objective science whose primary subject was the dialectical progression of broad economic forces, and abstract quantification served their interests very well.

Throughout the late 1960s and 1970s, an increasing number of historians began to challenge the settled practices of social history, arguing that abstract and coherent grand narratives did not represent the daily activities or special contexts of marginalized populations, which are inherently concrete and complex. Iggers (1997) argues that cultural history was primarily a response to the postmodern turn in historical studies (and in the social and human sciences generally) that refuted the possibility of objective knowledge and its legitimation through grand narratives. In *The Postmodern Condition*, Jean-François Lyotard defines postmodernism as “incredulity toward metanarratives” (Lyotard 1984, xxiv), resulting in a relativistic emphasis on little stories (*petit récits*) in paralogical competition. Based on this rejection of the legitimating functions of metanarratives, cultural historians relate only constricted stories outside of any larger temporal or social context. Further, Lyotard explains, related to this incredulity toward metanarratives is the postmodern loss of faith in the truth of representation and the objectivity of knowledge. If representation is always political and knowledge is always situated (if not subjective), then historical accounts become more like literary narratives than scientific treatises. Thus, in direct opposition to the modernist failings of social history, postmodern cultural historians wrote detailed descriptions of minute (thus often marginalized) historical objects and events without reference to larger historical contexts.

During the mid-1970s, four Italian Marxist historians, Carlo Ginzburg, Giovanni Levi, Edoardo Grendi, and Carlo Poni, began to develop what we now know as *microhistory*, believing that both positivist social history and relativist cultural history had reached points of theoretical and practical exhaustion. Social history’s constant drive toward abstraction and quantification had drained the very life out of history, seeking concrete examples only as support for conceptual claims about linear temporal progression, and its desire to tell coherent stories that transcend contradiction destined these narratives to recount only hegemonic (thus unified but only partial) perspectives on the past. Cultural history’s constant drive toward detailed thick description had turned its interests away from larger historical questions, suggesting that any attempt to contextualize their findings results in fiction, not science, and the drive to represent the internal complexity of cultures overstates their independence from sources of social power. Although microhistory emerged out of a dissatisfaction with the abstract narratives of social history and the



insular descriptions of cultural history, it is best to understand microhistory as a negotiation of social history and cultural history. According to István M. Szijártó, “Microhistory is able to apply the approaches of both social and cultural history: to grasp the meanings of the latter and provide the explanations of the former and, within the frames of a very circumscribed investigation, show the historical actors’ experiences, how they saw their lives and what meanings they attributed to the things that happened to them on one hand and on the other give explanations with references to historical structures, long-lived mentalities and global processes using retrospective analysis, all of which were absent from the actors’ own horizons of interpretation” (Magnússon and Szijártó 2013, 75). In other words, microhistory uses microscopic analysis and progressive contextualization to answer what Szijártó calls “great historical questions” (Magnússon and Szijártó 2013, 6, 53).<sup>4</sup>

Microhistory is neither solely abstract, like social history, nor solely concrete, like cultural history. Instead, microhistory’s dialectical negotiation of these two positions results in a methodology that is multiscopic, equally valuing and dialectically employing both abstract narrative and concrete description in the service of historical arguments. Iggers explains, “There is no reason why a history dealing with broad social transformations and one centering on individual existences cannot coexist and supplement each other. It should be the task of the historian to explore the connections between these two levels of experience” (Iggers 1997, 104). And Ginzburg and Poni explain, “Microhistorical analysis therefore has two fronts. On one side, by moving on a reduced scale, it permits in many cases a reconstitution of ‘real life’ unthinkable in other kinds of historiography. On the other side, it proposes to investigate the invisible structures within which that lived experience is articulated” (Ginzburg and Poni 1991, 4). But for Ginzburg, the simple copresence of multiple scopes of analysis is not sufficient. Instead, “The specific aim of this kind of historical research should be . . . the reconstruction of the *relationship* (about which we know so little) between individual lives and the contexts in which they unfold” (Ginzburg 1994, 301). The goal, in other words, is not multiscopic copresence but the dialectical and analytical integration of multiple layers of scope in any historical interpretation. This dialectical analysis is especially critical in historical studies of individuals since “any individual has a different set of relationships which determine his or her reactions to, and choices with regard to, the normative structure” (Levi 2001, 101). For this reason, contextualized biography is one of the standard genres in microhistorical scholarship.<sup>5</sup>

So the microhistorical method of changing the scale is a historiographic, methodological principle, but it is also predicated on the belief that social actors act on different levels as well, that these scales are actually embedded in phenomena, and that if we perceive only one scale, we perceive only a small portion of any total phenomenon. Risto Alapuro explains that “Microhistorians’ contextualization work implies that all historical actors take part in processes and belong in contexts whose levels vary from local to global” (Alapuro 2012, 140). The scale that is changed in microhistorical analysis, in other words, is not just a theoretical or methodological construct, it is also an aspect of real acts and their contexts. Szijártó explains that “social actors appear in different contexts, micro- and macro-, at the same time” (Magnússon and Szijártó 2013, 31). Thus, according to Bernard Lepetit, changing the scale in microhistory helps historians identify “those systems of context that form the framework of social action” (quoted in Magnússon and Szijártó 2013, 31). These levels are thus present in the experience of everyday life, with actors sometimes performing highly personal and individual acts and other times participating in highly overdetermined and institutionalized acts. To understand only personal acts through cultural history or only overdetermined acts through social history results in an incomplete understanding of historical action generally. Since microhistory moves dialectically among all levels of experience, its analyses are more complete.

Engaging in multiscopic analysis not only enables historians to describe more of the contexts that contain (construct or constrain) historical actions, but it also generates more complex historical knowledge. By alternating the scales of historical investigation, new insights emerge that are invisible to the authors of both social histories and cultural histories. In “On Microhistory,” Levi explains, “Phenomena previously considered to be sufficiently described and understood assume completely new meanings by altering the scale of observation. It is then possible to use these results to draw far wider generalizations although the initial observations were made within relatively narrow dimensions and as experiments rather than examples” (Levi 2001, 102). Microhistorians believe that by shifting back and forth among scopic levels (or levels of abstraction), or by beginning with microscopic analysis and spinning its effects out toward larger contexts, new knowledge is gained, deeper than any knowledge gained through analysis at one level (as in social history or cultural history alone). As Kathleen Blee points out, “Microhistorians accrue significant explanatory power by moving between attention to the particular and the wider context, between the small details of social

life and the large context, between the micro level and the macro levels of society, and between time periods” (Blee 2008, 41). When all levels of abstraction are combined into a single analysis, all levels of knowledge are revealed, creating a more complete historical picture than either social history or cultural history alone can paint.

The scale of analysis in social history and cultural history has not only methodological implications but political implications as well. The subjects of social history are powerful individuals (politicians, rulers) and hegemonic institutions (empires, monarchies) since these are the forces that push history along on its grand temporal path. The subjects of cultural history are marginalized people (peasants, criminals) and popular culture (family, entertainment, work) since these are the constituents of immediate experience. Microhistory seeks neither the “normal” (hegemonic strategies) alone nor the “exceptional” (marginalized tactics) alone; microhistory, instead, seeks the exceptional normal (or the normal exception). The exceptional normal is a particular case in history that is exceptional from the perspective of social history but may reveal a hidden normal from the perspective of cultural history. John Brewer explains that the exceptional normal is “an event or practice that, viewed in the context of modern ‘scientific’ enquiry, seems exotic, remarkable, or marginal, but that, when properly investigated, that is, placed or coded in its proper context, reveals its own logic and order” (Brewer 2010, 97–98). The point of microhistory is not to narrate the normal or describe the exceptional but to interpret their relationship, shedding light on the normal and lending more than anecdotal significance to the exceptional. According to Muir, “Since rebels, heretics, and criminals are the most likely candidates from the lower or nonliterate classes to leave sufficient traces to become the subjects of microhistories, their behavior is, by definition, exceptional” (Muir 1991, xiv). However, “certain kinds of transgressions against authority constitute normal behavior for those on the social periphery, . . . those illegal or socially proscribed actions that were normal for those who had no other means of redress. Some transgressors, therefore, might be exceptions to the norms defined by political or ecclesiastical authorities but would be perfectly representative of their own social milieu” (xiv). The case of the exceptional normal can be extended from historical individuals and their actions to historical documents as well. Muir writes, “If documents generated by the forces of authority systematically distort the social reality of the subaltern classes, then the exceptional document, especially one that records the exact words of a lower-class witness or defendant, could be much more revealing than a multitude of stereotypical

sources” (Muir 1991, xvi; see also Ginzburg and Poni 1991, 8). Seeking the exceptional normal, which reveals the intersections between social systems and cultural activities, is a central starting point in microhistorical methodology.

When the exceptional normal is a historical person, as it so often is, this person is understood by microhistorians to have contextualized agency, or a certain ability to act according to the exigencies of personal desires, though this ability is not comprehensive and some exigencies may be conditioned. Levi explains that in microhistory, “all social action is seen to be the result of an individual’s constant negotiation, manipulation, choices, and decisions in the face of a normative reality which, though pervasive, nevertheless offers many possibilities for personal interpretations and freedoms” (Levi 2001, 98–99). And Muir writes, microhistory seeks to understand “individuals making choices and developing strategies within the constraints of their own time and place” (Muir 1991, viii). In other words, in microhistory the acts of the exceptional normal reflect a dialectical interaction of individual free will (the sole focus of cultural history) and social conditioning (the sole focus of social history). Levi explains that microhistory is “the study of events or persons in context, that is to say, within the complex interplay of free choice and constraint where individuals and groups perform in the interstices of the contradictory pluralities of the normative systems that govern them” (Levi 2012, 126). The social formations that grand narratives unify through abstraction are actually messy and contradictory in local practice, leaving individuals to negotiate these contradictions based, at least in part, on personal motives. Further, Szijártó explains that microhistorians “point to the fact that structures—at a given moment those unalterable conditions that limit the historical actors’ freedom of action—are to a large extent the product of individual decisions that point to the responsibility of the actor” (Magnússon and Szijártó 2013, 69). Since social structures are formed through collections of individual decisions, and since individual decisions are actually responses to contradictions in social contexts, then a deep understanding of individuals’ actions and motives, especially of those who resist social structures, reveals complex dynamics that neither abstract social history nor descriptive cultural history can reveal.

By shifting the scope of analysis from abstract or concrete to multiscopic, and in seeking the exceptional normal with contextualized agency, microhistorians also must shift their attitude toward the sources they use as evidence in the service of historical arguments. In social history, good sources are objective and legitimate, relating actual events

as they happened. Any kind of subjectivity is grounds to disregard a source as biased. These sources are also arranged in serial progression, mirroring and thus supporting the temporal progression of the grand narrative. However, social history's source material "has primarily been concerned with the upper classes and their ideological, political, or economic actions" (Myrdal 2012, 156) since these are the actions (and their representative sources) that drive social history. In cultural history, good sources are salient, reflecting the unique perspective of an individual or an isolated culture and its inhabitants. Any kind of pretense toward objectivity is grounds to disregard a source as manipulative. However, cultural history's source material is uncommon, often discarded as irrelevant and a waste of archival space. In both of these cases, sources are chosen because they illustrate a priori assumptions about events under analysis: if they support grand-narrative abstractions, they are objective; if they support an isolated cultural zeitgeist, they are salient. For microhistorians, sources are not objective or biased, salient or manipulative; all sources are rhetorical, and source plurality is the goal. As Marjatta Rahikainen and Susanna Fellman explain, the microhistorical practice of "combin[ing] different kinds of source materials" is "more fruitful than repeated re-interpretations of the same contemporary texts" (Rahikainen and Fellman 2012, 22) and results in what Richard D. Brown calls a more "contextual, three-dimensional, analytic narrative" (Brown 2003, 18). Incorporating a plurality of sources not only gives a better total picture of the object or event in question, but since each source is part of a particular context (legal, familial, etc.), this plurality of sources also reveals "systems of contexts of the observed particular case" (Szijártó in Magnússon and Szijártó 2013, 44).<sup>6</sup> For microhistorians, sources are not either objective or biased since "no source is innocent" (Rahikainen and Fellman 2012, 26). Instead, all sources interpret events (for certain audiences and specific purposes), and the historian's task is to collect a variety of interpretations from which a full and complex understanding might emerge. The search for a plurality of sources often begins in the archives, following a trail of clues, and this investigative methodology requires a new orientation toward sources, an orientation Ginzburg (1989) calls the "evidential paradigm" and Matti Peltonen (2001) calls the "method of clues."

In "Clues: Roots of an Evidential Paradigm," one of the central methodological chapters from *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method*, Ginzburg describes the "silent emergence of an epistemological model" during the latter half of the nineteenth century, and he calls this epistemological model the "evidential paradigm" (Ginzburg 1989, 96). This

paradigm was shaped by the work of three intellectuals from the 1870s through the 1890s: Giovanni Morelli, an art historian; Arthur Conan Doyle, or, more specifically, his character Sherlock Holmes, a detective; and Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis. These three historical figures shifted the focus of analysis within their respective fields from obvious signs to trivial details, inaugurating “a method of interpretation based on discarded information, on marginal data, considered in some way significant” (101). Conceptual analysis yields abstract knowledge, but, Ginzburg explains, for Morelli, Holmes, and Freud, “infinitesimal traces permit the comprehension of a deeper, otherwise unattainable reality” (101). Ginzburg traces the roots of this new evidential paradigm all the way back to the earliest human hunters and gatherers as an acquired “attitude oriented towards the analysis of specific cases which could be reconstructed only through traces, symptoms, and clues” (104). This ancient “semiotic” paradigm, however, was “suppressed by the prestigious (and socially higher) model of knowledge developed by Plato” (105). More recently, and specifically in history (although it is true of other disciplines as well), this evidential paradigm has been suppressed by scientific positivism despite the fact that history is a “highly qualitative” discipline and “historical knowledge is indirect, presumptive, conjectural” (106). According to Ginzburg, the evidential paradigm was resuscitated during the late nineteenth century by Morelli, Doyle, and Freud, and it is currently being reinvigorated by the practitioners of microhistory.

Matti Peltonen (2001) describes the “method of clues” as a historical practice associated with the new evidential paradigm described by Ginzburg. Social historians frame their grand narratives using temporal generalizations and broad social categories often derived from prior narratives, and they seek evidence that supports their conclusions. According to Peltonen, however, microhistorians use the method of clues by “starting an investigation from something that does not quite fit, something odd that needs to be explained. This particular event or phenomenon is taken as a sign of a larger, but hidden or unknown, structure” (Peltonen 2001, 349). In other words, microhistorians do not apply generalizations to evidence; they apply the lessons of evidence, sought as clues to something hidden, in the construction of new generalizations. For Peltonen, the method of clues is specifically multiscope: “Take for instance the concept of the clue as a micro-macro relation. On the one hand a clue is something that does not quite fit in with its immediate surroundings, something that seems odd or out of place. It is in certain respects discontinuous with its environment. On the other hand

a clue leads thought to somewhere else, reveals connections, exposes some secret or crime. So there is continuity, too, which is equally important” (357). Rather than taking credible or salient sources at their word (as in social and cultural history), microhistorians interpret “insignificant and marginal, unconsciously or routinely performed actions *as clues*” (Peltonen 2012, 45; my emphasis).

Multiscopic analysis, the evidential paradigm, and the method of clues all assume a dialectical movement among grand narratives and little stories, among social elites and cultural subalterns. Thus, microhistorians recognize, as Richard Maddox points out, that “hegemonic processes are Janus-faced. One dimension of hegemony centers on the direct political and ideological struggles of specific groups, parties, classes, and alliances to win and maintain leadership and control over the general direction of social life. . . . However, far less attention has been given to the second dimension of hegemonic processes. This dimension consists of the more diffuse, indirect, and illusive cultural politics that permeate the conduct of everyday life and shape commonsense understandings of what is valuable, desirable, and practical in particular circumstances” (Maddox 2008, 18). Microhistory reclaims this second dimension of hegemonic processes by viewing everyday life and commonsense understandings through a microscopic lens and then placing these understandings back into the context of power and authority. According to Muir, “Understanding what behaviors and ideas were beyond the pale [of established social norms] might also help to describe better the characteristics of the dominant group that defined what was considered normal” (Muir 1991, xiv), and “our understanding of official institutions can be redefined through microhistorical studies of persons who were subject to their influence” (xvi). Microhistories thus “show in particular how the behavior of marginal persons can be used to clarify the nature of authority” (xv). Historians can only understand the evolution of hegemonic power if they understand how hegemony has evolved in direct response to resistance and to what microhistorians call the *exceptional normal*.

One final characteristic of microhistory is the self-conscious presentation in the narrative itself of methodological assumptions and difficulties in the evidence. Levi (2001) explains that one of the central characteristics of published microhistory is “incorporating into the main body of the narrative the procedures of research itself, the documentary limitations, techniques of persuasion and interpretive constructions. This method clearly breaks with the traditional assertive, authoritarian form of discourse adopted by historians who present reality as objective.



In microhistory, in contrast, the researcher's point of view becomes an intrinsic part of the account. The research process is explicitly described and the limitations of documentary evidence, the formulation of hypotheses and the lines of thought followed are no longer hidden away from the eyes of the uninitiated" (Levi 2001, 110; also see Levi 2012, 124–25). Methodological self-consciousness places microhistorians in dialogue with the historical sources they interpret, not in a position of power over them, and it places the audience of the historical text in dialogue with the past.

### *Microhistories of Composition*

The authors in this edited collection apply the theories and methods of microhistory to composition studies not as if microhistory has emerged out of a vacuum but as an extension and complication of existing revisionary histories, collecting their disparate methodologies into a more coherent and more powerful historical practice. The early histories of composition treated the discipline as if it were a unified body of knowledge and practices that evolved almost predictably in dialectical response to broad historical and social pressures, and social history is the genre of choice for describing such abstract progression toward teleological ends. However, composition, as both a body of knowledge and a collection of practices, has never been unified or predictable, and the historical and social pressures that motivate its evolution are always both local and global, both individual and social. Thus, among choices of historiographic methodologies, microhistory is ideally suited for the complexities of a discipline like composition, which emerged and developed in local sites yet also shows signs of more general social and historical influences.

Microhistory, as I have argued, explores the dialectical interaction of social (grand) history and cultural (local) history, enabling historians to examine uncommon sites, objects, and agents of historical significance overlooked by social history and restricted to local effects by cultural history. Uncommon sites might include a Canadian conference in 1979 and a school of expression in the late nineteenth century; uncommon objects might include archival materials, such as annual reports, broken and redirected URLs, federal-grant applications, and teaching materials; uncommon agents might include forgotten or misunderstood scholars. Microhistory's proclivity for the margins, the exceptions, the uncommon (but always viewed within larger contexts) makes it an ideal methodology for exploring composition's other histories, the histories not



included in grand narratives, such as composition's struggle with labor issues, its difficult relationship with literary studies, and its presence in a variety of educational institutions (community colleges, normal schools, HBCUs, women's universities, and, of course, huge land-grant universities, some of which have PhD programs in rhetoric and composition or one of its burgeoning areas of specialization). Microhistory, more than any other historiographic approach, can account for the dialectical interaction of local and general historical forces in the formation and development of composition studies in all of its myriad varieties and contexts, as each individual chapter in this edited collection illustrates in its own way.

I have not divided the chapters into distinct sections because all the authors apply methods from a common historiographical approach, microhistory. However, the book is structured to flow across crucial themes with a certain coherence. Chapters 1 (Mendenhall) and 2 (Phelps), for example, challenge common assumptions in disciplinary origin narratives, suggesting that the watershed years 1963 and 1979 have been misunderstood. Chapters 3 (Ritter) and 4 (Eyman and Ball) continue the theme of disciplinarity, yet they shift focus from watershed years to salient texts, challenging the hegemony of published (print) journal articles in our understanding of composition's past. The next two chapters, 5 (Bordelon) and 6 (Zebroski), broaden their emphasis from years and texts to certain salient categories that drive grand-narrative histories of composition, including expressionism and grammar instruction, illustrating that archival research and a limited scope of analysis reveal complexity masked by narrative abstraction. Chapters 7 (Stock), 8 (Lerner), and 9 (Gold) also emphasize archival research, yet they shift their purpose from the critique of grand narratives to the recovery of little-known figures in composition history, theorizing along the way the reasons for their marginalization. The final two chapters, 10 (Gogan) and 11 (Craig, Davis, Martorana, Mehler, Mitchell, Ricks, Zawilski, and Yancey), retain a biographical emphasis, but they shift their purpose from recovering marginalized figures to reinterpreting central individuals, reframing their work by placing them into institutional and historical contexts available only through archival research and oral history. The remaining pages of this introduction provide detailed summaries of each chapter.

In Chapter 1, "‘At a Hinge of History’: Rereading Disciplinary Origins in Composition," Annie S. Mendenhall explains that 1963 represents a watershed moment in composition history, partly because of certain publications from that year that legitimated composition as an

academic discipline. In *The Uses of the University*, Clark Kerr identifies 1963 as a “hinge of history” in university education, a bond between a historical frame and a door that opens to a new future. According to Mendenhall, two 1963 publications in composition studies—Richard Braddock, Richard Lloyd-Jones, and Lowell Schoer’s *Research in Written Composition (RWC)* and Albert R. Kitzhaber’s *Themes, Theories, and Therapy: The Teaching of Writing in College (TTT)*—also represent a hinge of history for the discipline, but the hinge Mendenhall describes is different from the hinge described in composition’s best-known histories. For scholars such as Berlin, Connors, and North, *RWC* and *TTT* represent the first conscious attempts to shift composition’s devotion to formalist or haphazard practice (current-traditional rhetoric, lore, etc.) toward a new interest in empirical research, thus initiating composition’s rise to disciplinary status. Mendenhall, however, uses methods of microhistory to demonstrate that the authors of these 1963 texts were not concerned with a forward-looking attempt at disciplinary formation but instead with a backward-looking attempt to secure research funding from federal and private granting agencies and connect, in the process, with existing American cultural values. They were responding, in other words, more to the federal government’s National Defense Education Act and NCTE’s response, the National Interest, than they were to any perceived exigency to transform composition into a discipline. In the process of narrative abstraction in search of disciplinary origins, the contexts (the textual environment and personal motives) of real historical actors are replaced with the contexts (progress, development, democratization, rationalization) of historical writing. Using the microhistorical concern for reduced scale of analysis, and drawing from articles written by Lloyd-Jones and Kitzhaber after 1963, Mendenhall recovers (recontextualizes) the textual ecologies and personal motives that surrounded the production of *RWC* and *TTT*, identifying these watershed texts as rather mundane responses to funding exigencies, including the federal privileging of science and technology during the Cold War and the Space Race.

In Chapter 2, “The 1979 Ottawa Conference and Its Inscriptions: Recovering a Canadian Moment in American Rhetoric and Composition,” Louise Wetherbee Phelps examines three conference proceedings volumes (*Reinventing the Rhetorical Tradition*, *Teaching/Writing/Learning*, and *Learning to Write: First Language/Second Language*) as inscriptions of the 1979 Ottawa Conference. This conference and its inscriptions represent a watershed moment in rhetoric and composition’s development as a discipline, yet their character as multidisciplinary and multinational has

been largely ignored in the historical grand narratives of composition studies, which tend to identify the field as a phenomenon unique to the United States. Phelps describes Ottawa 1979 as an “interaction ritual” in which knowledge is generated through sincere conversation, face-to-face engagement, dynamic interaction, social networking, emotional investment, diverse viewpoints, and creative conflict. Academic conferences are prototypical interaction rituals, and Ottawa 1979 was a critical context for generating knowledge about writing studies and forming rhetoric and composition into a discipline. In particular, the three volumes of conference proceedings edited by Aviva Freedman, Ian Pringle, and (for *Learning to Write*) Janice Yalden define rhetoric and composition as an intellectual discipline in its own right, with characteristic theories and practices, yet they also describe it as international in its reach. Freedman, Pringle, and Yalden, as Canadians (not from the United States), were “outliers” in the very discipline they helped to create, and the three conference proceedings they edited represent the exceptional normal: normal because they were familiar with the American phenomenon of rhetoric and composition; exceptional because they were not situated in the national context where rhetoric and composition was taking hold. Phelps draws from microhistorical methodologies to examine Ottawa 1979 and its inscriptions as a lost Canadian moment in North American rhetoric and composition.

In Chapter 3, “Journal Editors in the Archives: Reportage as Microhistory,” Kelly Ritter argues that historical work on unusual source materials such as journal editors’ annual reports can provide insights into the evolution of composition studies not available in published journals. Journal editors are often what microhistorians call “outliers,” not average citizens of the rhetoric and composition community, and emphasizing the limited scope (or “minor episodes,” as microhistorians call them) of the annual reports written by these outliers can both challenge and reinforce claims in established grand narratives of the field. Ritter draws from her own experience as the editor of *College English* to explore how the annual reports of past editors of both *College English* and *College Composition and Communication* (from 1954 to 1979) address issues that promoted and hindered the evolution of composition studies as a disciplinary formation. These reports comment directly and in highly personal ways on themes such as disciplinary identity in relation to literature and composition, revealing, for example, that insiders viewed the two journals not as competitors but as a cooperative team concerned with the equal development of English studies and composition studies. This insight counters narratives that assume *College English* favored

literature and was either disinterested in or resistant to scholarship in composition. The editors' annual reports also reveal a concern for the work of editors who meant well but also had to deal with more submissions from scholars in a developing discipline than they were equipped to handle. Ritter's close attention to a limited time period and a single, usually ignored source of evidence represents microhistory's desire to make historical knowledge more complex.

In Chapter 4, "History of a Broken Thing: The Multijournal Special Issue on Electronic Publication," Douglas Eyman and Cheryl E. Ball direct their microscopic attention toward a special issue on electronic publishing, copublished simultaneously in 2002 by five different online journals: *Kairos*, *Enculturation*, *Academic.Writing*, *The Writing Instructor*, and *CCC Online*. This multijournal special issue was designed to both theorize and exemplify the power of electronic publishing; however, its very status as online discourse caused certain problems that were, at the time, unforeseeable. Eyman and Ball point out, for example, that among these five online journals, only *Kairos* has published consistently since the special issue went live, and *CCC Online* (at least its 2002 iteration) is not only inactive now but was also never archived, making at least one article in the special issue extremely difficult to access. Only two of the twelve articles published in the special issue are still available at their original URLs. However, despite its status as "a broken thing," the multijournal special issue on electronic publishing tapped into some of the key themes in digital publishing that were pressing at the time and resonate even today, including hypertext/theory, archiving/history, issues/challenges, pedagogy, and tenure/review. Eyman and Ball's microhistorical examination of this ground-breaking special issue that became a broken thing leads not to despair but to lessons learned and new best practices. With attention to three forms of infrastructure (scholarly, social, and technical), existing online journals and future online publishing venues will avoid the problems that plagued the 2002 multijournal special issue by insuring their accessibility, usability, and sustainability.

In Chapter 5, "Tracing Clues: 'Bodily Pedagogies,' the 'Action of the Mind,' and Women's Rhetorical Education at the School of Expression," Suzanne Bordelon uses methods of microhistory to recover expression and elocution from their present historical disparagement. Using the method of clues, Bordelon seeks the unsettled over the established, the strange over the familiar, the unexplained over the known, and in the process discovers an approach to expression that integrates mind, body, and voice into a unified pedagogy with precedents in ancient

sophistic rhetorical education. Anna Baright Curry and Samuel Silas Curry, founders and directors of the School of Expression in Boston during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, are described as “normal exceptions” in Bordelon’s analysis, as exceptions to the dominant historical narratives that actually represent a different kind of norm among competing, though forgotten, voices in rhetorical history. Bordelon explains that the Currys emphasized not the mechanical movements and scripted vocalizations of what we now understand as expression and elocution, but instead they emphasized bodily movement and vocal representations as effects of emotion and intellect, necessitating their simultaneous and dialectical development. Thus, in addition to poetic recitation and oratorical performance, students at the Curry School of Expression learned gymnastics and pantomime, invoking similarities between this bodily pedagogy and the rhetorical education of the Sophists in ancient Greek gymnasia.

In Chapter 6, “Teaching Grammar to Improve Student Writing? Revisiting the Bateman-Zidonis Studies,” James T. Zebroski employs microhistory’s method of clues and conjectural (or evidential) paradigm to shift the scale of analysis from sweeping generalizations about grammar instruction to a specific examination of the Bateman-Zidonis projects conducted and described from 1959 to 1973. The earliest commentaries on Bateman and Zidonis’s work limit their influence to sentence combining, and later discussions categorize their work with others who argued that teaching grammar improves student writing. However, Bateman and Zidonis’s work is actually complex and defies simplistic categories (sentence combining, grammar instruction). These simplistic interpretations of Bateman and Zidonis resulted, Zebroski argues, first from an incomplete reliance on only one document in the Bateman-Zidonis corpus (their abridged 1966 NCTE report) and second from the narrative drive to abstract complex scholarship into coherent narratives of development (from grammar to style, for example). Zebroski reinterprets Bateman and Zidonis’s work by revisiting their published scholarship, most of which has been completely ignored by modern historians, and by working to complete, as much as possible, a Bateman-Zidonis archive, filled with unpublished (or recently archived) research reports, grant applications, in-house manuscripts, and conference presentations. Zebroski follows a series of clues throughout this archival material, letting the plurality of evidence tell a new story, one in which Bateman and Zidonis had no interest in sentence combining and little interest in structural grammar or its teaching. Zebroski finds evolving interests throughout the Bateman-Zidonis projects, with later, more mature

documents (circa 1970) advocating instruction in the new transformational linguistics (not structural grammar) as a means for students and teachers alike to inquire into the structures and functions of language. It was through this mutual inquiry into language that Bateman and Zidonis would find improvement in their students' writing, especially at the sentence level. Thus, by shifting the scale of analysis from a history of grammar in writing instruction toward a microscopic analysis of a plurality of sources in the emerging Bateman-Zidonis archive, Zebroski finds linguistic complexity and methodological inquiry, not structural grammar and drill-and-kill exercises.

In Chapter 7, "Who Was Warren Taylor? A Microhistorical Footnote to James A. Berlin's *Rhetoric and Reality*," David Stock argues that the early histories of rhetoric and composition served important legitimating functions but also acquired subsequent normative effects that limited the terms of historical analysis to outmoded concepts and limited subjects. In Particular, Stock argues that Berlin's *Rhetoric and Reality* was itself the product of a specific historical moment in which rhetoric and composition was being recovered as a discipline through its connection with social epistemologies and democratic politics. In this context, Berlin praises Warren Taylor's 1938 essay "Rhetoric in a Democracy" as an important early appeal to composition as a form of public (not private or formulaic) discourse. Berlin attributes some of Taylor's progressive political (thus rhetorical) views to his location, the University of Wisconsin-Madison, which was a bastion of liberal politics at the time. However, Stock points out, Warren Taylor never taught at the University of Wisconsin-Madison; Warner Taylor, whose 1929 *A National Survey of Conditions in Freshman English* is often cited in composition histories, did. This simple misattribution in Berlin's text led Stock to write a brief footnote about it in his dissertation, but a different focus forced him to leave it behind. Stock's chapter in this volume is the development of that footnote into a microhistorical recovery of Warren Taylor's evolving understanding of the roles of rhetoric, composition, literature, and humanism in a liberal education that emphasizes participation in democracy. Employing a microhistorical reduced scale of analysis, Stock focuses on Warren Taylor's complete life and work as they evolved and changed over time, viewing Taylor as an individual with historical agency. Through archival research at Oberlin College, where Warren Taylor taught for most of his career, Stock finds that Taylor valued rhetoric and composition as a pedagogical means to prepare students for participation in a democratic society; however, over the course of his career, Taylor's interest in rhetoric faded and his commitment to

literature and the humanities emerged. Toward the middle and end of his career, Warren Taylor had stopped teaching composition, instead devoting his time to developing and teaching two advanced seminars, *The Humanistic Tradition* and *The Twentieth Century*. These courses, which included religion, literature, and philosophy, among other themes, prepared students for the critical thinking and complex writing they would need to participate in democratic life. Stock's microhistorical recovery of Warren Taylor's evolving view of composition, rhetoric, literature, and humanism adds complexity to Berlin's account of rhetoric's intersections with liberal education during the early and middle decades of the twentieth century.

In Chapter 8, "Remembering Roger Garrison: Composition Studies and the Star-Making Machine," Neal Lerner argues that the name-tag game we often play at conferences (look at the face, look at the name tag, look back at the face) is symptomatic of a larger historical process of remembering and forgetting. During the early writing-process movement, especially in writing center and one-on-one conferencing scholarship, Garrison's work was often cited, and he was considered among the major players of the time, which also included Peter Elbow, Janet Emig, and Donald Murray. However, as composition constructed its historical genealogies throughout the 1980s and 1990s, only those scholars who had institutional credibility seem to have been remembered. Murray, Elbow, and Emig all taught at well-recognized institutions, while Garrison spent his career at little-known Westbrook College in Portland, Maine. After about 1984, when composition studies began to examine its disciplinary history with some vigor, Murray, Elbow, and Emig were frequently referenced by, for example, Berlin, Connors, Crowley, Maureen Daly Goggin, and North. But Garrison had been forgotten, never cited once by any of these historians, a victim of the star-making process and composition's historical drive toward disciplinary legitimation. However, Lerner's microhistorical analysis of Garrison's work on conferencing and the writing process reveals that he was a normal exception, an individual who was not remembered in grand historical narratives but who was otherwise representative of teachers whose classrooms were filled with students writing and rewriting, editing and discussing. Thus, Garrison's work and legacy are worth remembering because he represents the norm, the teachers who work in undergraduate classrooms consulting with students on their writing and making a difference.

In Chapter 9, "Elizabeth Ervin and the Challenge of Civic Engagement: A Composition Teacher's Struggle to Make Writing Matter," David Gold



analyzes the evolution of Elizabeth Ervin's published works related to public literacy and civic engagement. Grand narratives of rhetoric and composition tend to characterize certain influential scholars as if their ideas were conceptually static, having little space or time in the process of historical abstraction to consider personal and professional change over time. However, Gold's microhistorical reduction of scale enables him to consider the complex evolution of Ervin's thought over time regarding the role of civic engagement in her own writing classrooms. Covering the full extent of Ervin's publishing career, just a brief nineteen years (cut short by illness), Gold traces Ervin's development from her early enthusiasm for teaching civic engagement, through her own self-critical evaluation of those early successes and failures, and finally to her later attenuation of the promise of civic engagement in public-writing pedagogy. Gold's reduction of the scale of historical analysis also enables him to understand Ervin as a historical actor with agency, not the material effect of inexorable social forces. The evolution of Ervin's thinking and teaching over time, however short, illustrates that the force of her will, in both scholarship and teaching, derived not from surfing the tide but from making waves. Ervin's own historical agency emerged from self-critical examinations of her own practice and the resulting work her students produced. As a work of microhistory, Gold's analysis of Ervin's published career reveals nuances that would be lost in the process of grand-narrative abstraction.

In Chapter 10, "Going Public with Ken Macrorie," Brian Gogan reduces the scale of his inquiry to an individual whose complex scholarship and teaching has been simplified to an abstract category in the most influential grand narratives of the field. Ken Macrorie most often appears in these narratives as the poster child for expressivist rhetorics and pedagogies, but, Gogan points out, much of Macrorie's public rhetoric is ignored in the interest of coherence. Microhistorians seek historical sources known as *outliers*, sources that tend to get ignored by writers of grand narratives because they are messy, inconsistent, and difficult to reconcile with established stories. Since microhistorians seek outliers, their narratives are often centered less around the story of composition and more around the journey of discovery. Gogan writes about his encounter with one of Macrorie's early essays, "Spitting on the Campus Newspaper," and how this essay did not seem to fit in with, for example, Berlin's history of the expressivist movement and Macrorie's central role in it. Tracing evidence in the archives at Western Michigan University, where Macrorie taught throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Gogan finds evidence of a Macrorie who was dedicated not to radical individualism



but to going public, especially with his students. Throughout the archival documents studied by Gogan (annual reports, unpublished lectures, and letters to administrators) there is clear evidence that Macrorie encouraged his writing students to publish their essays in the student newspaper and in magazines and that he taught courses about public language. Macrorie's relationship to public and personal writing was, in other words, complex, not simple, and complexity is difficult to represent in grand narratives of composition.

In Chapter 11, "Against the Rhetoric and Composition Grain: A Micro-historical View," Jacob Craig, Matthew Davis, Christine Martorana, Josh Mehler, Kendra Mitchell, Anthony N. Ricks, Bret Zawilski, and Kathleen Blake Yancey argue that the experience of individuals in rhetoric and composition is often different from the ethos represented in their published work, and the best way to recover such experience is through oral history. These authors conducted an interview with Charles Bazerman, focusing on his entry into and development within the discipline of rhetoric and composition. They discovered that while there were clear historical pressures influencing his perceptions of the field in its infancy, Bazerman was also free to resist and reject certain normative functions that came along with emerging disciplinarity. For the authors of this chapter, Bazerman is a normal exception who operated within normative structures yet retained individual agency, ultimately influencing composition through his exceptional beliefs and practices. In particular, Bazerman resisted the individualism developing in certain communities in the 1960s, turning toward social theory for his grounding in writing instruction. When open admissions came to the CUNY system where he was teaching, Bazerman turned away from the pedagogical emphasis of Mina Shaughnessy, for example, and advocated research into writing *per se* and attention to writing at all academic levels. This interest in writing research led him eventually to rhetoric; however, while other influential scholars were looking to classical rhetoric, Bazerman saw greater potential in the works of more recent rhetoricians like Adam Smith and Joseph Priestly, pragmatists like John Dewey, and linguists like Lev Vygotsky. Bazerman's interest in rhetoric and in writing research at all academic levels led him inevitably toward an early commitment to writing across the curriculum (WAC), but Bazerman favored a model of WAC in which composition teachers were not experts disseminating knowledge of academic writing but co-researchers with students into the possibilities and constraints of disciplinary communication. Bazerman, according to the authors of this chapter, is a normal exception, a teacher and scholar who was aware of some of the normative aspects of

the emerging discipline of composition studies, accommodating some of these aspects and rejecting others, acting as an individual historical agent in social context.

Throughout the pages of this collection, the authors all engage in the dialectical processes of microhistory, integrating cultural history's interest in isolated acts, events, and people with social history's interest in broader contexts for social action. In so doing, we have tried to illuminate new aspects of composition's history that have been previously masked by the discipline's early drive toward abstract narrative histories, and we have also tried to illustrate a relatively new methodology on the scene of rhetorical historiography, opening it up to further use and development. Microhistory, we believe, has the potential to make composition history more complex, and we look forward to future microhistories of composition.<sup>7</sup>

#### Notes

1. Though my filing cabinets changed occasionally as I moved around, the placement of this folder always remained constant.
2. In the fall of 1983, I became a tutor in the university writing center, administered at the time by Janice Neuleib, who asked all of her tutors to read one short article or chapter about composition pedagogy for each of our weekly staff meetings. It was during this semester that I became hopelessly hooked on rhetoric and composition (the discipline, not just the craft of writing) and changed my major from physical education to English education.
3. There are, of course, other ways to limit the scope of historical analysis, thereby increasing the complexity of its results. In Patricia Lambert Stock's (2012) edited collection *Composition's Roots in English Education*, the contributing authors explore the little-known early development of composition in schools of education, not departments of English. In L'Eplattenier and Mastrangelo's (2004) edited collection *Historical Studies of Writing Program Administration: Individuals, Communities, and the Formation of a Discipline*, contributors examine the lives and careers of early WPAs whose work was ignored in histories of the discipline. In Donahue and Flesher Moon's (2007) edited collection *Local Histories: Reading the Archives of Composition*, the contributing authors explore archival methodologies as alternatives to traditional historiographic methods that result in incomplete understandings of composition's past. And in Massey and Gebhardt's (2011) edited collection *The Changing of Knowledge in Composition: Contemporary Perspectives*, contributors reexamine the historical and contemporary importance of Stephen North's (1987) *The Making of Knowledge in Composition*. These texts, like the others discussed in this section on revisionary histories in composition studies, reduce the scope of analysis by limiting the subject under study.
4. *Context* is a key term throughout most microhistory theory, yet its meaning and application are contested. For example, Magnússon and Szijártó (2013) articulate their own differences of opinion throughout *What Is Microhistory?* with Szijártó arguing that microhistory must consider larger historical contexts if it is to distinguish its method and purpose from cultural history and Magnússon arguing that microhisto-

- ry is most effective when it maintains exclusive attention to the microscopic level of analysis. Further, even among microhistorians who agree that microscopic analyses gain power when they are placed back into larger historical contexts, the nature of those contexts is also contested. Levi (2001, 2012) argues that microhistory should begin with microscopic analyses and then refer those analyses back to abstract historical narratives, supplementing them and making them more complex. But Ginzburg (1980) argues that contexts should not exist prior to analysis and should be constructed from available evidence, building a context for individual acts, for example, by tracing clues in the archives until a social context emerges. I see no reason to take sides in the debate between Levi and Ginzburg since both senses of context are useful, and the one a historian prefers ought to be determined by the object of analysis. However, I do disagree with Magnússon, siding instead with Szijártó's claim that the distinction and value of microhistory is in its dialectical analysis of the relationship between microscopic objects and their broader contexts.
5. Linda Gordon (2008) explains that "in a simple sense, biography is always microhistory, inasmuch as individuals are the 'micro' in relation to the 'macro' themes of social and political history" (145).
  6. Brown agrees, explaining that "because the microhistorian narrows the scope and shrinks the scale of his or her research, she or he can justify the time spent pursuing such stray facts so as to link data found in census records, vital records, town meeting and selectmen's records, tax records, probate records, land registries, court documents, diaries, letters, as well as printed sources—newspapers, pamphlets, book subscription lists, local histories, and individual biographies. Through these linkages, one comes to understand, however subjectively, the multiple contexts in which people made their decisions and acted out their lives. One recognizes that behavior rests on more than one or two planes selected from among the usual suspects—class, race, gender, economic interest, religious or ethnic identity" (Brown 2003, 18–19).
  7. I would like to thank Suzanne Bordelon, David Gold, Neal Lerner, Annie Mendenhall, Louise Wetherbee Phelps, David Stock, and James Zebroski for providing helpful advice on an earlier draft of this introduction. I am also grateful for a productive WebEx conversation with Phelps's students from her summer 2014 graduate seminar, *The Past Is the Future*—Laurie Stankavich, Sherie Mungo, Aubrey Mishou, Corwin Baden, Sara Brandt, Danielle Huff, Jennifer Hitchcock, Kelly Cutchin, Michelle Maples, and Nathaniel Cloyd—which included, among other things, a discussion of an early draft of this text.

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