Make, O Muse…

Knowing I was speaking about disruption, I thought “what’s more disruptive than playing punk music for an academic talk?” So I played punk for you. I’ll play some more punk for you after the talk. It’s hard to be complacent when you listen to punk. If you want, stick that in your head as the soundtrack for today’s talk. Punk and disruption may also produce in your mind’s eye the image of friends working in a garage or the basement, and I encourage you to keep that image in your head, because whether they’re taking a new approach to rock and roll or inventing the Apple computer, the garage tinkerer and inventor is our muse today as we reflect on making disruptive and innovative action in our discipline and our organization.

CCC

I’ve been coming to the C’s for a long time, since I was a graduate student in the ’80s. For me (like many of you, I’m sure), the CCCC is
a natural academic home. And it’s easy to see why: a wide range of pedagogical approaches visible in the program, all our theories on display, varied interests (FYC, creative nonfiction, creative writing, linguistics, rhetorical theory, history, technical and professional writing), and a general concern about writing both in the classroom and in society. The convention has one of the friendliest and most helpful group of members in higher education. It’s a culture of fun (witness C’s the Day and its Sparkleponies), and a culture of sharing and learning, where most of us are like Chaucer’s Clerk in that “gladly would we [all] learn and gladly teach.”

1.02 We have an acceptance rate that’s stingy—but not too stingy—so that we can put a lot of people on the program. There are workshops on Wednesdays, and we serve as a magnet for other organizations such as TYCA, ATTW, and WPA-GO to meet at the same general time.

1.03 And during this same span of time that I’ve been coming to our convention (which is, unbelievably, almost thirty years), I have seen the C’s take steady and meaningful steps to become more than a guild of writing teachers and researchers, but also an organization committed to openness, access, inclusivity:

We have established travel and research scholarships that are designed to enable travel to and participation in the convention for both international and domestic scholars who may not have travel support from their institutions. These awards, along with reduced registration fees, have benefited a host of traditionally marginalized scholars, including contingent faculty, graduate students, retired members, Latin American scholars, tribal fellows, LGBTQ scholars, among others. And the one that started it all, the Scholars for the Dream in 1993, includes membership in NCTE/CCCC, travel assistance, and mentoring to help foster future leaders in our organization.
We have an inclusive leadership structure, where elected positions on the executive committee, nominating committee, and chair rotation are broadly representative of the diversity of our organization. And we continue to evolve in this respect. Did you know, for example, that we have in the last five years added elected positions on the EC for graduate students and contingent faculty?

We have created and supported research throughout our organization, rewarding scholars at all levels, from our undergraduate posters to graduate students, our book and article awards, and our wildly successful research initiative.

We have taken steps to ensure inclusivity without regard to rank, tenure, job title, or type of institution. We feature undergraduate research posters, a graduate student on the EC, a thriving cross-generational (XGEN) initiative, and SIGs for grad students and retired professors. The program includes papers and roundtables from graduate students, adjunct and contingent faculty, tenure-track faculty, non-academic or “alt-ac” practitioners—from private institutions, two-year, four-year, regional universities, and R1’s.

We have committed ourselves to access. In recent years, we have budgeted for signers, Internet for all, AV in all break-out rooms, and accessibility guides in local cities.

I wonder how quaint this will seem, not in the distant future, but even at publication?

Maybe it’ll be a cool feature in future conventions—you may request “silent” or “non-electronic” presentation rooms—the same way we used to have to request AV.
We celebrate and encourage an incredible diversity and acceptance of being. Not only do we believe in students’ right to their own language, but to their own identities. This goes for us, their teachers, as well. We’ve created gender-neutral bathrooms in a time when some try to politicize bathroom access, lactation rooms in a time when some are squeamish about women’s bodies, quiet rooms for neurodiversity, a creative disability/ability local group that gets timely information to you about diet, gender, and accessibility options. We see excellent representation of women, men, and the gender-nonconforming. It says a lot about the heart of this organization that you elected me, a transgender person, to a position of leadership. It says a lot about the CCCC, and believe me, it means a lot to me personally, and I know it means a lot to all lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer members of our profession.

1.04 But we’re not done. We still have work to do to make ourselves more inclusive and more representative.

1.05 You’ve told us many times (believe me, I know) that the C’s feels too much like an insiders’ club. In this respect, I’m happy to announce we’ve expanded our research awards to include more than seasoned researchers; we have also budgeted money and mentoring for awards to go to emerging researchers and emerging research topics.

1.06 And we recognize that it’s not enough for you to wait a few years until the big convention comes to your corner of our country, so we also just approved a more micro-level of conference engagement, taking the C’s on the road in the summers into up to four corners of the country.

1.07 You’ve said that the processes and governance of the C’s is too opaque, too confusing, its work invisible and hard to find. In the past, we have written well-researched policy documents that got
filed on a website where they cannot be used. We have surveyed our members on key issues in our field or our conference, then lost steam after collecting that data. And to that end, we are taking steps to open up our processes, to make our work more available and usable for you, our members. Not just to our members, but to the outside world, disseminated in multiple modalities to multiple audiences. To that end, I’m also working with the EC to rewrite all our documents for multiple audiences. Who knows what the right format is: brochures, white papers, even public service announcements?

1.08 All I know is that when our hard work gets filed away in a warehouse, akin to the ark of the covenant at the end of *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, that’s not good. Outward engagement is critical—because others are making decisions about your curriculum, your classroom, your work, our shared field.

2 Paradoxical Days

2.01 For all of our history and our ongoing efforts at improvement, I’m proud to belong to the CCCC. We’ve done a lot of good, and we continue to do a lot of good.

2.02 But is it enough?

2.03 Of course not, for any number of reasons, both internal and external.

2.04 In some respects, these are great days. We’re living in a time of incredible literacy—more people are writing than ever before—
using phones and tablets, texting, Snapchatting, tweeting, blogging, tools that make it easier than ever to connect with readers. And more people are reading than ever before—newspaper digests, Reddit, multiple news sources, Facebook feeds, Tumblr, Instagram, Snapchat, and the list goes on. Just look around your campus or your public space or even this opening session—everyone is writing and reading.

2.05 You could call it a golden age of literacy, anchored in such communication practices. Whether that’s good literacy or bad, too populist or not, that’s a matter of discussion.

2.06 Employers routinely tell schools, recruiters, and the press that the skills that are important for making it in their business (and it doesn’t really matter what business they’re talking about) are critical thinking, problem solving, and communication. And, as it turns out, these are the very values we espouse and create in our students and our scholarship.

2.07 So, to sum up, you’ve got an era of unbelievable levels of communication, you’ve got a business and nonprofit sector dying for communicators and thinkers. You’d think that in such an age, the disciplines that know how to make messages, fine-tune them, research them, teach others how to engage in these spaces—us, in other words—you’d think that we would be in the middle of the action, the heart of the economy, the very center of society itself.

2.08 But as you know, that’s not the case, and in fact, the very opposite is true because while these may be great days from a certain perspective, these are also days of incredible challenges and paradoxes to that literacy I just mentioned, challenges to our discipline and to this very organization.

Again, how will this sound in the future?
While our field has matured and grown more sophisticated, at the same time, economics, politics, and culture seem to drive away our students and the value we have worked so diligently to create. Our discipline's core assets and activities are being eroded in any number of ways, and I’m sure you can think of many of them. I’d like to highlight three.

First, our bread and butter for decades has been first-year composition, the orientation to college writing, the gateway to critical thinking, preparation for college writing and college life, as well as entrance into the workforce and even to democracy and citizenship. But because of dual credit, concurrent enrollment, and advanced placement trends, which have been building for at least twenty years, our core activities are increasingly being removed from the college classroom and into the high school space. Current estimates are that fundamental courses like math, history, and writing are currently operating at perhaps half the level of twenty years ago, and it’s not hard to imagine a world where FYC no longer takes place in college, and thus, not in this convention.

It’s not like it’ll go away from our discipline, but the ones discussing it will be high school English teachers, and they will talk about it in our fall convention, the NCTE convention. And those of us in college who coordinate the best of those programs, advise high school districts on best principles, and partner with school districts may discuss these coordination efforts at CCCC, but the work of FYC will most certainly take place without most of us. And that’s too bad because writing isn’t a body of knowledge that you acquire in ten or fifteen weeks. It’s a habit of mind, a craft, a practice, and while students and families are rightly concerned with keeping college costs under control, I fear that what they’re buying is an overstated, underperforming product, a service that sells them short.
2.12 Second, the courses that we do teach for subsequent semesters in college students’ lives are also being cut out of our control, mostly by paranoid STEM advocates who are worried that their students are wasting their time in the Core curriculum. It’s not hard to see that effort happening right now, all around us. I recently heard a story about a university that cut the core requirements for STEM majors from 12 hours of communication, language, and literature to 6 hours. The initial request had been to cut to only 3 hours, but all parties compromised at 6 hours, so I guess that made it all better. The STEM guys got the two extra courses they desperately need to be competitive in math, science, engineering, and so on, not recognizing, of course, that employers continue to tell us (and them) that problem solving, critical thinking, and communication are key values they expect, and unfortunately no additional access to STEM courses is going to change that need.

2.13 Third, and this is not anything particularly unique to our field, as other disciplines experience this syndrome as well, but the professionals who teach in our courses are increasingly part-time or less-than-part-time, contingent faculty. Estimates are that perhaps only 17 percent of writing classes are taught by tenure-track faculty, and many of the rest are taught by instructors who receive no benefits, low pay, last-minute schedules, and no role in shared governance or decision making within their schools. Our discipline depends on an underpaid, overworked, and unappreciated group of experts, our institutions employing a massive class of part-time specialists, when full-time commitment is required. And just like the erosion of FYC and advanced writing courses in our field, it’s also possible to imagine a future where this group of people simply says, “No more—I’d rather go work 9 to 5 somewhere than be treated like this.”

2.14 So not only does our field face this complex paradox, where we have evolved sophisticated research methods, teaching methods, and approaches to communication that dwarf our field as we...
understood it at CCCC’s founding in 1949, but where our core activities are being undercut by forces well outside of our control.

2.15 Our students are being taken away from us. On the bottom end, upon entry to university, from dual credit, and on the top end from reduced requirements for writing and communication around the country, all (arguably) to support more fundamentals for STEM education and to save families money. And our workforce is being eroded through all-too-recognizable shifts in economics and labor practices in higher education.

3 External Focus

3.01 Most of our most pressing problems, then, are external to this convention and to our classrooms, and these externalities are pressing on our discipline and our conference hard. For this reason, it’s imperative that we (the C’s) turn our attention outward—beyond our convention and beyond our classrooms.

3.02 Of course, we will certainly continue the inward work to make our organization and our discipline inclusive, smart, research-oriented, teacher-oriented, all of the values we hold dear. But holding those values at the exclusion of outward-facing engagement is a dangerous proposition.

3.03 All the internal improving and moves to open up leadership opportunities within the C’s will not change the structural and paradoxical situation in which we find ourselves, caught between offering something of great value and relevance to society while also losing what little power we have had before. Conservative tinkering inside the C’s mechanisms is insufficient given the
magnitude of external challenges. There's nothing wrong with conserving. We are the conservators and stewards of a tradition—of letters, rhetoric, deliberation, style, critical thinking, and those rigorous habits of mind we celebrate and teach. But even as we conserve, we shouldn't be conservative in promulgating those values.

3.04 This organization itself can no longer be just a convention where we give papers. We are more than that, with a shared history, shared values, shared visions, where we’re all related in a mission of literacy, persuasion, and inclusion. Former NCTE Executive Director Kent Williamson was fond of saying that you join the C’s not for what you get (journals, badges, a trip to a convention, a vita item), but for what you get to do, and that shift from things to actions is what really defines the new turn in our organization. We believe that we can do more and become better versions of ourselves working together than we can on our own.

3.05 So that’s my argument, that because of these social, economic, and cultural times, it’s not sufficient to simply be good internally, to teach well, to make our conference better, and to celebrate each other’s hard work and scholarship.

3.06 What is required of us is that we disrupt, or reinvent, our comfortable notions about what we do and explore radical new ideas about what we should do, what we can do.

3.07 The current milieu demands outward engagement, and I argue that we engage by making disruption, making solutions, making change.
And as we look to engage externally, we should do so in two modalities, one through advocacy, and the other through making and innovating. Both paradigms (Advocacy and Making) engage populations outside of the C’s: the public, the government, the market in different ways.

4 Advocacy

4.01 The first modality is Advocacy, and since it happens to be the theme of this year’s conference, I won’t spend more than a minute on this because we’re immersed in the concept for the next three days. Advocacy means looking at the landscape, identifying the influencers and decision makers in the realm of culture, economics, and politics, and using our skills of persuasion, communication, and research to compel them to give us support, money, laws, and cultural capital. Those we engage with our advocacy are many, not just the government: our deans, presidents, state legislators, donors, and congresspeople, the general public, parents, the press, the government, and charitable foundations. We don’t just advocate to, we advocate on behalf of others, as well.

4.02 You each have a highly refined set of skills and experiences—acquired through grad school, years of teaching, lots of writing and revising, and life experiences. Advocacy calls on us to be more than teachers or researchers, but to be engaged public intellectuals who use those skills for good in society and for our discipline, working well beyond our official job descriptions.

4.03 In NCTE and the CCCC, we seek to create advocacy power through the synergy of building our capacity, collective and individual, toward broader goals around literacy and education via NCTE structure and grassroots boots on the ground. Capacity building harnesses all those skills as researchers, teachers, speakers, and public intellectuals, and adds media training, and so on, eventually
transforming the group from a collegial trade guild of sorts into something with great agency.

4.04 These next three days are going to activate those abilities in you, even if you’re not sure you have those abilities.

4.05 And I endorse those efforts.

4.06 And this sort of activity is an important part of that outward turn you’re seeing, beginning to evolve in the past few conventions and in the leadership at the C’s and also NCTE.

4.07 It’s a good strategy, one we should pursue within this convention and beyond.

4.08 But it should not be the only outward-facing stance—because when you’re doing the asking (asking others for permission, asking others for money, asking others for legislative rules to change your state and your discipline’s state, asking for smaller class sizes), when you do that, the power rests in the askee’s hands, not in the asker’s.

5 Making

5.01 The second mode of engagement that’s outward looking, and the one I’d like to spend the rest of my talk highlighting, is making—not just making in class, which we all know how to do. But innovating, making products and services, developing apps, reinventing publishing, any number of value-added activities.
5.02 Taking this step doesn’t require any additional skills—what’s
called for is a different mindset, not a skillset. You already have the
skills—I think that you already have persuasive and building and
making and innovation—that you need to do this additional work.
So nothing I’m going to suggest requires a lot of extra training
or specialization. What I’m suggesting are ways we can take our
current skills, and leverage those skills, together, looking outward.

5.03 How would such a reframing change the way we might see
ourselves, as well as how the outside world might see us? Perhaps
as designers, architects, engineers, User Experience specialists,
technologists—and if you read the convention program carefully,
you’ll notice all of these identities are already at the C’s this very
week.

5.04 When I talk about
making, I’m
flipping the power
and flipping the
epistemology, and
saying that when
you make, you
dictate what will
happen. You create
new things that hopefully challenge the status quo (which is also
the goal of advocacy), and while some, if not most, efforts end in
failure, some will be quite disruptive.

5.05 For us, this means pushing the
bounds of disciplinary norms,
unleashing our creativity without
being constrained by norms of
propriety and what’s been done
before. In other words, creativity
that changes the frame, dictates
the terms.

Kyle’s question is
spot-on. It’s up
to us to create a
discipline that values
experimentation,
making, trying, and
failing—for all
members, not just
tenure-track.
5.06 And when you hear one of your colleagues say the words “my startup company,” or “my new app,” you might be tempted to think, “Oh, that’s a bit unusual for someone at the C’s to talk like this.”

5.07 I’ll argue that that kind of statement at the bar, or in a session, should be seen as desirable and normal—as normal as someone who mentions “my new book,” or “my research” or “my advocacy.”

5.08 I think that’s my overall and final part of this argument, that this kind of identification with making and advocating needs to become central to our identity. Our field’s DNA is in making—you may hear “maker movement” and think of 3D printing, but think further back to desktop publishing and networked pedagogy and what those things did for writing.

5.09 And don’t let the word entrepreneurship overwhelm you. It just means trying something, failing, and trying again. Don’t sweat it. And if you think about that, it’s precisely what we teach our students in writing—it’s natural for us—we try, we fail, we revise, we try again, we fail in a different way, we get feedback, we revise, and so on. Failure is how we learn to write; failure is how we learn to impact society. Failure and experience, hallmarks of Dewey and the maker movement, are inherent in our practices.

5.10 I remember taking a class with Jim Berlin in Austin, and even though I had studied writing theory and had worked in the composition classroom and the writing lab, for some reason I didn’t think those things applied to me as I struggled with my own seminar paper, and it was just killing me. I was flailing. We were helping him on Rhetoric and Reality, doing primary research, and my decades were 1900–1920, and I focused on English Journal during that period. I’ll never forget, he said your research, your seminar papers, even my book—they’re all drafts. They’re never finished. That was powerful permission and powerful medicine to me, and illustrative of this idea of tinkering, making, never being finished.
5.11 Above, I write about “capacity building” as our organization’s project of harnessing and augmenting your inherent skills to turbo charge our advocacy efforts. In the same way, I would argue that you also have untapped entrepreneurial energy within you, within your writing program, within your school and town. For the skills that make you effective teachers, rhetors, researchers, are the same skills business leaders and professional prognosticators say are critical for the emerging world and markets of ideas.

5.12 I believe you can create value for yourselves and society in ways that are different from the current configuration of semester, book, tenure, students, and committees.

5.13 And in doing so, I think you can strengthen your position, your job, and our discipline. I don’t know if we can fix the three thorny questions I started with, but the dual processes of advocacy and innovation are a start.

6 Examples

6.01 Before we look at some examples of makers and innovators, I would like to share a story about my own origins as a rhetorician-maker.

6.02 Back in the ’80s, at the University of Texas, fellow graduate students Paul Taylor, Fred Kemp, Wayne Butler, and I founded a lab that’s still in existence today as the DWRL (Digital Writing & Research Lab), and began to write software. And we were encouraged to make by our rhetoric faculty, no strangers to disruption themselves: Maxine Hairston, Lester Faigley, Jim Kinneavy, Jerry Bump, John Slatin, and Hugh Burns.

6.03 Through their help (and a bit of turning a blind eye), we encoded innovation into our practices, and those practices were writing/rhetoric based. We coded, knocked out walls, strung cable, invented network pedagogy, updated William Wresch, Lisa Gerard, Helen Schwarz, Carolyn Handa, and Hugh Burns’s foundational
works in computer writing and digital rhetorics decades before
the MLA was shocked, shocked, I tell you, to discover that
language arts might use digital technologies. My company,
Daedalus, formed out of that innovative soup, a company that
helped our digital rhetorical practices get off the ground in
the ’80s and ’90s.

6.04 In fact, I think of all my teachers a lot these days, and not just those
from whom I took classes. But those mentors and CCCC leaders
who also encouraged me to be disruptive, including Cindy Selfe
and Gail Hawisher, Cheryl Glenn, and those recent EC and Chair
elected members with whom I’ve served.

6.05 As teachers—as well as colleagues and learners—we need to push
our students, we need to push each other, to take such risks and
make things.

6.06 There are many examples of this type of creativity
in our field, and I’d like to highlight a few of them,
constraining my examples to members of our own
organization, in case you are skeptical about my
claims. Some were participants in last year’s Ignite
sessions in Tampa, where I asked our members to
show off their most audacious, most entrepreneurial projects.
And they didn’t disappoint.

6.07 These examples illustrate several different kinds of innovation,
but they all have this in common—a disregard for complacency,
a love of creativity, and a recognition of our field’s problem-
solving nature. If they are unhappy with their out-of-the box
course management system, they don’t say, “I’d like to do X, but
software/system Y doesn’t
let me do it,” because that
is the enfeebled stance of
 technological determinism,
my friend, giving the power
about what you know over to
someone else, a technocrat,
not a teacher. Making says the opposite—you know better because you’re the expert, the one who’s spent years researching language, teaching students, scheduling classes, inventing and reinventing online education.

6.08 Let’s look at examples from four categories of innovation: Publishing, Coding, Higher Education, and Manufacturing, shall we?

6.1 Publishing

6.1.1 Concerned with the slow pace of peer review, the high cost and markup of for-profit presses, the lack of fast bibliographic resources and archives, and the dwindling number of university presses, we have members right here in the room who have sought to reframe and reinvent avenues for our research and scholarship.

6.1.2 The EServer is a digital humanities venture, founded in 1990 and based at Iowa State U, where writers, editors, and scholars publish over 35,000 works free of charge. Includes a comprehensive Rhet-Comp section. Run by Geoff Sauer. eserver.org

6.1.3 Kairos, founded by Mick Doherty and other graduate students in 1996, all digital, still cutting edge. A refereed open-access online journal exploring the intersections of rhetoric, technology, and pedagogy. Probably reviewing this very talk. kairos.tech norhetoric.net

6.1.4 WAC Clearinghouse, a hybrid digital/print project founded in 1998 by Mike Palmquist and shepherded over the years by a who’s who of writing researchers. Part press, part virtual warehouse, part bibliography, part document archive, with a mission to support
scholarly exchange about communication across the disciplines.  
wac.colostate.edu

6.1.5 **Parlor Press**, David Blakesley. Independent publisher and 
distributor of scholarly and trade books. Founded in 2002 to 
address the need for an alternative scholarly, academic press 
attentive to emergent ideas and forms while maintaining the 
highest possible standards of quality, credibility, and integrity. 
Unencumbered by the bureaucratic machinery of older publishing 
entities. parlorpress.com

The leading bibliographic database in composition studies, 
providing listings of work published in composition and rhetoric 
since 1939. comppile.org

6.1.7 **Computers and Composition Digital Press** was founded in 2007 
by Gail E. Hawisher and Cynthia L. Selfe. Committed to publishing 
innovative, multimodal digital projects—especially those digital 
projects that cannot be printed on paper—but that have the same 
intellectual heft as a book. ccdigitalpress.org

**6.2 Software and Coding**

6.2.1 *The New Yorker* asked in 2015 if English teachers could learn to 
code.

6.2.2 Yes, you can learn, and you ought to code. Maybe like Hugh 
Burns or myself or Fred Kemp, using C++ or Pascal, creating a 
full network pedagogy on a local area network back in the ’80s, or 
maybe like Karl Stolley or Caitlan Spronk these days, using Ruby on 
Rails.

6.2.3 The language doesn’t matter because coding is a means to an 
end, whether you’re making apps, geo- 
located information displays, or relational 
databases, or implementing some form of digital rhetorics.  // see 6.2.5 and 6.2.7
6.2.4 Yes, I have two thoughts about coding.

6.2.5 First, you need to know how to code.

6.2.6 Ex supreme court justice Sandra Day O’Connor is writing apps in her retirement, so I know you can do it. Her app company, iCivics, offers nineteen apps in total on topics ranging from international affairs to the US judicial branch. And the one that everyone ought to be using, including this year’s presidential hopefuls, is called “Win the White House.” icivics.org

6.2.7 The starting question is whether you can learn to code. Of course you can. But the better question is, can you recognize the code you already write? Because if you don’t see what you do as coding, you’re missing out. You’re already coding the most complicated language there is, natural language that runs with a wetware compiler called human cognition.

Argumentation Schematic

// Writing IS Coding

// Argumentation IS Coding
Toulmin schematic we like to use so much in composition

// Writing arguments is Coding

Typical algorithm flowchart

Linguistic diagramming
program ItsAGirl;
const Name : string = 'Anna Elizabeth Taylor';
var Born : boolean;
Time : datetime;
Weight, 
Length : real;
begin (* ItsAGirl *)
  if Time = 3:00 a.m.
  then StartContractions;
  while Contractions >= 6 minutes do 
     begin
        writeln ('Are you having a baby now?');
        ScurryAboutHouse;
        PutSheetsInCrib;
     end;
  if ContractionsComeMuchCloser 
  then 
    begin
      CallDoctor;
      DoctorSays ('Have her come by the office at 
                   9:00 a.m.');
      DoctorSays ('We’ll see if she’s really in 
                   labor.');
      WifeScoffs;
      LoadCar;
      writeln ('How does this infant car seat 
                   work?');
    end;
  if (Contractions = 3.5 minutes) and (Time = 
      9:00 a.m.)
  then begin
      ForgetAboutDoctor;
      GoDirectlyToHospital;
      SignHundredsOfDocuments;
   end;
  while NurseAssists do 
  begin 
    EncourageWife;
    SupplyIceChips;
    WipeSweatyBrow;
  end;
  while WifeScreaming and not Born do 
  begin 
    writeln ('PUSH!');
    for count := 1 to 10 do 
      writeln (count);
    writeln ('Take a breath and PUSH!');
    if Time = 11:56 a.m. 
      then Born := true;
  end;
GaspInAmazement;
Weight := 6 lbs. 13 oz.
Length := 20.5 in.
repeat 
  BeAParent;
  until TheEndOfTime;
end. (* ItsAGirl *)
6.2.8 Think about it: Good writing runs—is compiled—on wetware resting in our brains.
   • Natural Language is the markup language
   • Rhetoric is the compiler
   • Cognition is the computer

6.2.9 We compose these symbols into something that works, that does something.

6.2.10 I’m not speaking metaphorically when I say I see my job as teaching our students to code rhetoric and language. // Rhetoric is Coding // Rhetoric is Code // Structure is Code

6.2.11 And if you don’t want to code for apps or application development or database development, code for XML, XSLT, CSS, HTML5, TEI, SGML.

6.2.12 Here are some great coding projects in our field:

6.2.13 My Reviewers at USF, Joe Moxley. Since 2009, a suite of tools, including online document markup, peer review, and assessment, and e-textbooks. myreviewers.com

6.2.14 ELI Review (or Eli) supports evidence-based teaching practices and facilitates rich peer learning environments, particularly feedback and revision cycles. Invented at Michigan State University by Jeff Grabill, Bill Hart-Davidson, and Mike McLeod. elireview.com

6.2.15 WriteLab. Founded and spearheaded by former Chair of the C’s Donald McQuade. WriteLab combines machine learning and natural language processing with proven pedagogical principles to identify patterns in language and provide suggestions specific to your prose. writelab.com
6.2.16 The Game of Writing. Roger Graves’s gamification of the writing classroom, including course management, feedback, and revision. gwrit.ualberta.ca

6.3 Higher Education

6.3.1 In all the excitement of digital humanities these days, it’s easy to picture digital humanities and digital rhetorics as primarily digitized archives of humanities materials, and those are exciting developments, to be sure. But I think the more transformative nature of digital studies involves the invention and use of new research methods, as well as the archival use not of primary materials, but of research materials.

6.3.2 Big Data studies undertaken by the likes of Joe Moxley, Susan Lang, and others to find meaningful patterns in writing assessment projects. toolsforwriters.com/2014-big-data-writing-studies

6.3.3 Rhetoric.IO, a project to share datasets from one researcher to others, programmed by Karl Stolley. rhetoric.io

6.3.4 Michigan State’s Lab, WIDE, run by Liza Potts, and all its digital rhetoric research methods developing concepts like Rhetorical Velocity and Rhetorical Modeling. wide.cal.msu.edu

6.3.5 Les Perelman’s brilliant BABEL generator that disproves the effectiveness of machine scoring of essays. babel-generator.herokuapp.com

6.3.6 You don’t have to code to invent things. Witness groundbreaking tools and techniques associated with reinventing how we see our profession and how we make our way in this profession.

6.3.7 Two new ways of seeing our field, visually, relationally, geo-located:
6.3.8 **RhetMap.** Since 2012, Jim Ridolfo’s geo-located maps of both PhD programs and job listings in writing studies. A visual collection of listserv postings and an alternative to MLA’s Job Information List. rhetmap.org

6.3.9 **Writing Studies Tree.** 2012. Founded by a team of students and faculty at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York (CUNY): Ben Miller, Amanda Licastro, Sondra Perl, Jill Belli, among others. Visualization of the complex web of places and people in our field—a great example of visualization techniques working with relational data. writingstudiestree.org

6.3.10 And new ways of seeing the world of higher education, through reinventing education to inventing alternative pathways of practice:

6.3.11 **Southern New Hampshire University,** transformed since 2003 by our colleague Paul J. LeBlanc, himself a righteous follower of the idea of disruption. snhu.edu/about-us/leadership-and-history

6.3.12 Paula Chambers’s **Versatile PhD,** the very heart of Alt-Ac, is the oldest, largest online community dedicated to non-academic and nonfaculty careers for PhDs in humanities, social science, and STEM. versatilephd.com

6.3.13 **Defend and Publish,** Beth Hewett. Seasoned academic writing professionals who can help with all aspects of writing and researching a dissertation. defendandpublish.com

6.4 **Manufacturing**

6.4.1 Sometimes, in following a thread of research in communication and social practices, we follow a thread well outside of rhetoric, code, and education and into a completely different realm. I’ll highlight two such efforts that began in writing programs with members of our discipline.
6.4.2 Shift Labs

6.4.2.1 My friend Beth Kolko and her students at UW were studying the usability of medical devices and wondered why certain devices seemed to be so expensive, cost-prohibitive for developing countries. Starting with a rhetorical question, they turned to one particular device that is quite expensive—the device that meters out medicine in an IV tube. Rather than say, oh, that’s why it’s expensive, they asked if there might be a better way of doing this—why couldn’t you just put a little shadow-light sensor on the surface of the IV and program some software that would measure the drops passing by? If it could be done reliably and validly, it shouldn’t cost too much. And Shift Labs was born and funded, the maker of the low-cost FDA-approved medical device the Drip Assist, which focuses on the developing world. Instead of spending thousands of dollars for IV pumps, medical practitioners in the developing world can deliver accurate medicine to their patients for mere hundreds of dollars.

6.4.3 EyeGuide

6.4.3.1 At Texas Tech University’s Usability Research Lab several years ago, we developed a research question about knowing whether the user saw something on the screen or not, and we identified eye tracking as the right method to answer that question—but the eye trackers on the market were well outside of our budget.

6.4.3.2 But innovative grad students and faculty Nathan Jahnke and Brian Still asked, I wonder if we could do the same thing? All we need is to put a camera close to the user’s eye, and then write some software that would find and identify the pupil as it moved around.

Figure 6.1: Frame capture of bee swarm of readers’ eye
6.4.3.3 And thus EyeGuide was born, and it enabled researchers to follow an eye around the screen. You’ve all seen heatmaps of patterns of interest on ads or other images, and that was our initial market. But check this out:

6.4.3.4 Just look at that. It’s beautiful—each dot is a reader’s eye as it engages the text. Some are slow, some fast, but all of them play across the text in their own reading. This is my area of research, and we’re observing, visualizing a biological audience in ways audience theory rarely ventures.

6.4.3.5 Viewing the same data, but in aggregate, we can see where these eyes have painted the text with their attention—a heatmap.

6.4.3.6 Professors pushing their graduate students to innovate, and those grad students pushing their teachers to innovate, created this device in a writing program.

6.4.3.7 And now we’re turning that knowledge of the movement of the eye to help parents and coaches recognize concussions in ten seconds and manage athletes’ return to play safely and inexpensively.

6.4.3.8 We, like all of these examples, have followed the thread of innovation wherever it has led us.

7 Makers, Innovators, Disruptors: Anomalies?

7.1 You may be saying to yourself, most of these examples don’t have anything to do with writing or composition—but let me remind you every company, every patent, every invention I’ve highlighted
was made by a member of our profession, colleagues of ours who have sat, and who still sit, right here in this room.

7.2 What I argued earlier, and what I’ll argue here at the close, is that these inventions, these patents, these companies should not be seen as anomalies, pet projects undertaken by writing teachers gone bad. My argument, rather, is that these inventions have come into being precisely <i>because</i> of the skills and beliefs that are foundational to our field: curiosity, a willingness to fail and revise, constructivism and social constructivism, and a commitment to make things out of nothingness.

7.3 These instances of entrepreneurship or inventive disruption are more than just blips in our disciplinary history. No, they are the kind of activity that’s always been at the fringes of our field, one we ought to make more central in our organization and our discipline. Indeed, I think that they can show us a way forward, a disruptive and innovative way forward, especially in an era of scarce resources and paradoxes.

7.4 We need to do something more, in between all our other duties—persuade and inform those outside our convention and our discipline, create value, innovate.

7.5 You don’t have to start a company or write an app if you don’t want to. No, disrupting is a stance, a mindset.

7.6 But at least do this for me, for us:

7.7 Find other disruptors, other makers, other innovators right here at this convention. Right in this auditorium. Share your disruptive ideas in this convention’s action workshops, in the bar, in caucus and SIG meetings, in the Q&A after session papers, in the hallways.
7.8 Find these disruptors and find a way to sit in, to collaborate, to jam with them. Follow the innovative thread wherever it leads: a new genre, a new theory, a new economics, a new app, a new method.

7.9 It doesn’t matter where or how you do it, but it does matter you make the effort.

8 Outro

8.01 For my own part, I’m doing my best to disrupt the C’s, innovate its products, debug its code, reinvent its processes, so that we can make it more useful and responsive not only for you, our members and future members, but also for audiences beyond those conventional spaces.

8.02 For your part, here’s my charge for this CCCC and beyond. Go forth and innovate. Disrupt. Make. Reframe.

8.03 To circle back around to how I started this talk, consider the words of my friend (and punk philosopher) Geoff Sirc:

   Punk is not a helping discipline; it doesn’t want to reform, but rather re-form.

8.04 Yes, Re-Form, Re-Make. Re-Make through your innovation and your disruption.

8.05 Take the initiative–Don’t wait for someone to give you permission. You’ll be waiting a long time.

8.06 Conserve what’s worth conserving and jettison the rest in the name of creative destruction.

8.07 Go learn to code and write an app.

8.08 Invent or reinvent something.
8.09 Make movies, interviews, podcasts.

8.10 Make connections with your colleagues in STEM fields.

8.11 Make new rhetorics, new publications, new pedagogies, new research methods.

8.12 Make new companies, new products, new services.

8.13 Continue to make new writers.

8.14 In short, for our organization and our discipline
   • Make
   • A
   • Difference

9 Remedial Note

9.01 This printed version of the Chair’s Address is the fifth version I’ve produced.

9.02 First was the text of the talk, dictated to my smart phone and written in fits and spurts from summer 2015 through April 2016.

9.03 Second was the performance of the talk, which involved the use of Magic Music Visuals software to create real-time visualizations on the screens in Houston based on light and sound from the audience, my microphone, and my own webcam. Programming these visualizations took several months. magicmusicvisuals.com

9.04 Third was the blog version of the talk, complete with public domain images and links. joycelockecarter.com/CCCC/mdi/
9.05 Fourth was a video remediation of the talk, as the official video missed all those visualizations and also ended abruptly with five minutes to go. I took official footage, shot new footage in the Texas Tech Media Lab (thanks to Michael Faris), re-performed the whole speech so we could capture the music visualizations members saw at the convention, and remixed everything. joycelocke
carter.com/CCCC/address/

9.06 And this print version is the fifth. My experiment in Houston involved disrupting the conventions of the keynote address: playing music before and after, using the screens not as slideshows, but as enhanced realities of the theme, and spending considerable time showcasing screenshots of member innovation. Some of what members found memorable was just luck, such as the very capable signers dancing as they signed the punk music and lyrics I played (I couldn’t see them and had no idea they were signing the lyrics), or the curiosity over the Twitter-feed about how I was controlling the strange visualizations that happened on the screens (I wasn’t – my VJ, Michael Faris, made all the decisions on what to play).

9.07 Keeping with this general approach, I decided that the print equivalent needed to aim not for re-creating the Houston keynote, but rather to disrupt the conventions of the scholarly article. Thus the QR tags, a stylesheet typical to technical manuals, and the wide margins with notes, programming code comments, and commentary. It’s not meant to be a gimmick, but rather to be a playful effort at a terribly difficult genre. It’s not <em>&lt;em&gt;</em> the excellent, multilayered novel by JJ Abrams and Doug Dorst, but it’s maybe partway there, hopefully more layered and more interactive than just the text of a speech.
10 References


Linguistic Chart: Creative Commons: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mapa_Conceitual_Aprendizagem_Significativa.png