Globalization and culture: the limitations and horizons of intercultural technical communication pedagogies

R. Peter Hunsinger

Iowa State University

Follow this and additional works at: https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/rtd

Part of the English Language and Literature Commons, and the Rhetoric and Composition Commons

Recommended Citation

https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/rtd/7937

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Iowa State University Capstones, Theses and Dissertations at Iowa State University Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Retrospective Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Iowa State University Digital Repository. For more information, please contact digirep@iastate.edu.
Globalization and culture: the limitations and horizons of intercultural technical communication pedagogies

by

R. Peter Hunsinger

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Major: Rhetoric, Composition, and Professional Communication

Program of Study Committee:
Helen Rothschild Ewald, Major Professor
David R. Russell
Mark W. Rectanus

Iowa State University
Ames, Iowa
2004
This is to certify that the master’s thesis of

R. Peter Hunsinger

has met the thesis requirements of Iowa State University

Major Professor

For the Major Program
Table of Contents

Acknowledgments iv

Chapter 1: The Limited Concept of Culture in Intercultural Technical Communication Pedagogies 1
   A Survey of Popular Technical Communication Textbooks 3
   The Limitations of the Intercultural Technical Communication Pedagogies 5
   Sanctioned Ignorance: Consequences of the Preoccupation with the Practical 7
   Toward a Humanistic Intercultural Technical Communication Pedagogy 9

Chapter 2: A Global Perspective on Culture for Intercultural Technical Communication Pedagogies 12
   Globalization and Culture 12
   Arjun Appadurai: Imagination and Cultural Practice in the Globalizing World 17
   Implications of a Global Perspective on Culture 20

Chapter 3: Understanding Consequences in Approaching Culture as a Display of Difference 23
   Culture as a Display of Difference 24
   Example of a Display of Difference: A Case Study in Saudi Business Culture 27
   Performative Consequences of the Limited Concept of Culture 29

Chapter 4: Opening a Space for a Humanistic Approach and a Critique 33
   Toward a Humanistic Intercultural Technical Communication Pedagogy 33
   Institutional Challenges to a Humanistic Pedagogy 40

Appendix: Textbooks Consulted in Chapter 1 Survey 44

Works Cited 45
Acknowledgements

I’d like to thank Helen Rothschild Ewald for helping me through what turned out to be more or less progressive and successive versions of the project over three semesters or so.

I’d also like to thank the members of my committee, David Russell and Mark Rectanus, for providing critical direction to the project and for terribly helpful advice throughout.

And David Evans, who contributed nothing to the project per se, deserves credit for mentioning me in the acknowledgements of his doctoral dissertation in physics last year. I similarly contributed nothing to his project, but, as far as I could manage, I didn’t hinder it.
Chapter 1: The Limited Concept of Culture in Intercultural Technical Communication Pedagogies

[The invention of tradition...can become slippery, as the search for certainties is regularly frustrated by the fluidities of transnational communication.... [C]ulture becomes less...a tacit realm of reproducible practices and dispositions and more an arena for conscious choice, justification, and representation.

Arjun Appadurai, Modernity at Large 44

In the research on intercultural technical communication, the concept of culture has proven to be infinitely complex, generating a large body of scholarship. Much of the research on intercultural communication that attempts to define culture describes it as “an established set of values and a way of thinking that is passed from generation to generation” (Bosley “Cross-Cultural” 53); other authors have similarly offered variations on this definition (see, for example, Thrush; Klein; or Warren). Some researchers have chosen to skirt the issue of culture altogether, instead focusing on intercultural communication, summarized as communication “in which the degree of difference between people is large and important enough to create dissimilar interpretations and expectations” about meaning making (qtd. in DeVoss, Jasken, and Hayden 70; see also Beamer). Additionally, case studies or similarly focused essays describe specific cultural practices to narrate accounts of communicative misunderstandings that stem from cultural differences (see, for example, Bosley Global Contexts; Dragga; Artemeva).

However, despite this “explosion of interest in international professional communication” and the proliferation of scholarship on the subject since the early 1990s (Lovitt 1), the concept of culture in intercultural communication research remains
problematic and incomplete. Much of the scholarship implicitly or explicitly articulates the urgent need for intercultural communication research by referring to “the geographical expansion of capitalism and democracy” (Dragga 365) or the “increase in international business” (Thrush 272). But the concept of culture in my experience with the scholarship has not been studied in light of such trends toward greater worldwide integration; that is, the effects of globalizing trends on culture itself have been ignored. Meanwhile, sociological research on globalization and culture indicates that globalization does, in fact, influence culture in significant ways. In the relentlessly dynamic flows of migration and communication in the globalizing world, culture becomes effectively immeasurable and indescribable, and to locate cultural stability within a world characterized by motion is, in fact, a challenge (Wallerstein 39). It thus seems an important endeavor now for intercultural technical communication to examine the influences of globalization on culture and the ways culture is discussed in the research.

The urgency of this project especially emerges in the technical writing classroom, where pedagogies and classroom materials reflect the prevalence of intercultural communication in the technical communication scholarship (see, for example, Weiss; Andrews; DeVoss, Jasken, and Hayden). An instructor, in fact, would be hard pressed to find a textbook from the past five years that did not mention intercultural communication in one way or another. However, these intercultural pedagogies, following intercultural scholarship, neglect the dynamic, unstable character of culture in the globalizing world. Such a limited perspective on culture in current intercultural pedagogies, I argue, fails to interrogate who describes culture as a stable construct and what interests such a stable construct serves. These questions are crucial, I will later show, for a critical intercultural communication pedagogy.
This thesis will focus on intercultural technical communication pedagogies and outline a move toward a critical intercultural pedagogy, which will not only present a complex way of describing culture in globalization, but also encourage students to question how and why culture is constructed. In this first chapter, however, let me explore the problem with the intercultural pedagogies in more detail.

A Survey of Popular Technical Communication Textbooks

It seems fair to expect that technical communication textbooks express the developments in intercultural communication scholarship, and clearly, textbooks published within the past ten years reflect the trend toward a more researched understanding of intercultural communication. In “Teaching Intracultural and Intercultural Communication: A Critique and Suggested Method,” Danielle DeVoss, Julia Jasken, and Dawn Hayden analyze textbooks published between 1994 and 2001. They find that recent textbooks often offer specific advice to students about intercultural communication situations and present a more ethno-relative view of culture and difference than their counterparts of 30 or 40 years ago.

A glance at the four out of the five most popular technical communication textbooks today, based on Amazon.com sales rankings, confirm the results of DeVoss, Jasken, and Hayden. While the general technical communication textbooks I reviewed did not devote a bulk of their space to intercultural communication, they did intersperse intercultural communication advice throughout the chapters. For example, Mike Markel’s Technical Communication, 6th ed. and Laura J. Gurak’s A Concise Guide to Technical Communication both feature crucial intercultural communication topics in their treatments of audience analysis, as well as in other places throughout the text. Paul Anderson’s Technical
Communication: A Reader Centered Approach, though it mentions little about the intercultural reader, notes the special impact that cross-cultural communication situations will have in “Defining Your Communication’s Objectives” or “Planning Your Persuasive Strategies.” Rebecca Burnett’s Technical Communication, while providing nothing in the regular chapters about intercultural communication, nevertheless offers a supplementary article that conveys practical advice for the technical communication student who might someday work abroad.

The attention that these recent textbooks devote to the cross-cultural communication situation is not limited to technical communication, but reflects a general trend that cuts across other types of professional communication as well. In business communication, four of the top five best-selling textbooks, as ranked on Amazon.com, reflect a focus on intercultural communication similar to that of the most popular technical communication textbooks listed above. The only significant difference lies in the amount of detail, as the business communication textbooks consistently devote a chapter to intercultural communication. For example, Kitty O. Locker’s Business and Administrative Communication offers students “Communicating Across Cultures,” in which she presents research and anecdotes about the common problems people have in cross-cultural communication situations, along with advice for overcoming cultural differences. Courtland Bovee, John Thill, and Barbara Schatzman’s Business Communication Today and John Thill and Courtland Bovee’s Excellence in Business Communication present similar information, though in more detail, in their respective chapters on intercultural communication. And while Mary Ellen Guffey’s Essentials of Business Communication does not provide an independent
chapter for intercultural communication, the text discusses the topic at some length under the subheading “Understanding How Culture Affects Communication.”

For both business and technical communication, textbooks specifically designed to teach intercultural communication competence are available as well, such as Ron Scollon and Suzanne Wang Scollon’s *Intercultural Communication*, Deborah Andrews’ *Technical Communication in the Global Community*, or Deborah Bosley’s *Global Contexts: Case Studies in International Technical Communication*. The content presented in these books, however, simply extends the basic intercultural communication material offered in the general business and technical communication textbooks. Moreover, the information presented tends to be similar across all of the textbooks surveyed. For example, culture is defined similarly in both technical and business communication textbooks, whether explicitly or implicitly, as a collection of beliefs and practices with indeterminate boundaries between one culture and the next, as culture is described in intercultural research articles. To account for cultural difference, students are commonly advised to avoid idiomatic language, recognize that fundamentally different ways of perceiving the world exist, assume cultural difference before assuming similarity, and, importantly, study particular cultures by interacting with individuals from different cultures (compare, for example, such information as it is presented in both Markel and Bovee, Thill, and Schatzman).

**The Limitations of the Intercultural Technical Communication Pedagogies**

My limited textbook survey finds what DeVoss, Jasken, and Hayden conclude from their deeper analysis: cultural differences are a recognized factor in communication, and discussions of culture have become more ethno-relative than ethnocentric. However, the
limited concept of culture in the textbooks reflects the limitations of the research; a clear gap separates the way textbooks discuss the globalized economy and the way they discuss and use the concept of culture in the global economy. For example, the essay that opens Deborah Bosley's collection of intercultural communication case studies points to "the rapid expansion of corporate interests worldwide" that makes the world a "global village" (1). Similar references abound in the general textbooks when significant space is devoted to intercultural communication (see, for example, Locker). But while intercultural communication materials thus recognize economic globalization, the concept of culture is not allowed a similarly global dimension. In other words, despite the rapid flows of migration and international travel, media and communication, which mark a globalizing world, textbooks understand culture as purely or primarily local and do not recognize the important influences that globalization exerts on culture. In short, though cultures constantly interact in the global economy, the influences of globalization on culture are not considered.

While intercultural scholarship seems to remove culture from the effects of globalization, intercultural technical communication research opens a space from which we might begin to explore globalization's influences on culture. For example, when Emily Thrush cites that "by the year 2000, 29% of the [domestic] workforce would be made up of people who had moved here from other countries" (272), she identifies a space where globalization might influence culture. These workers, though surrounded by American cultural practices, will preserve their home cultures and maintain connections with their homelands, problematizing the shape and consistency of what we consider to be American culture, as well as the composition of their home cultures.
By lingering on Thrush’s example for a moment, we see that culture is never simple to describe, whether conceptually or in terms of a particular culture. Recent sociological and anthropological research on globalization, which I will discuss in the following chapter, argues that culture in globalization should be recognized as a slippery, unstable process of identity and difference. Culture in globalization is characterized by a tension between homogenization or relativization on the one hand, and differentiation or reaction on the other, a tension between adapting local cultural contexts to the global cultural environment or adapting global trends to local cultural influences (Waters 126). Sometimes this globalizing dialectic results in an assimilation of a local culture to a worldwide mass culture, while sometimes it results in a local fundamentalism, revitalization, or isolation, sparked by the fear of cultural homogenization. Importantly, even cultures that seem to maintain a stance sharply differentiated from the rest of the world, such as Islamic fundamentalist movements, have become isolated in response to the relativizing effects of globalization. Sociological research indicates that a thorough examination of culture in a global framework, and by that token in intercultural technical communication, must account for globalization’s influence on culture beyond attending to the description of local cultural practices. In this thesis, I will suggest how intercultural pedagogies might account for the influence of globalization on culture in the classroom.

Sanctioned Ignorance: Consequences of the Preoccupation with the Practical

Understanding globalization’s effects on culture, then, becomes especially important when we consider the implications of the intercultural pedagogies’ reliance on the “local” description of culture. We should ask why intercultural technical communication pedagogies
rely on "local" culture and exclude the influences of globalization. This "why" is crucial to pursue because, as Carl Lovitt notes, intercultural pedagogies could discuss culture in any number of ways (3). How do researchers decide, for example, what cultural traits to focus on when any number of practices will affect communication in some way? In other words, how do researchers decide the "differences that matter" (Munshee and McKie 16). In chapter three, I will argue that practical constraints determine researchers' focus on "local" culture, the restrictions on classroom time and relevance that determine business-oriented writing pedagogies. Under such constraints, intercultural pedagogies are encouraged to focus only on the cross-cultural communication situation itself, shedding superfluous details that do not play directly into cross-cultural communication. Take, for example, the specific use of "context" in Bovee, Thill, and Schatzman's Business Communication Today, 4th ed. The "context" of the intercultural situation does not refer to global economic or political factors that might inform the scenario and place communication in a global framework; "context," instead, refers to body language, room arrangement, and other factors specific to the situation itself. Generally, the intercultural pedagogies thus draw out and isolate only the strands of cultural difference that might immediately influence communication.

Intercultural pedagogies are taught with a fairly limited scope on "practical" cultural differences because instructors expect the pedagogies to be effective in the business world. The current intercultural pedagogies are not abstract or purely academic exercises; they tend to be designed around the work of intercultural communication professionals with real-world experience and, indeed, many writing textbooks are marketed with this real-world, practical focus. My concern, however, is not simply to develop a more "effective" pedagogy. Instead, I want to argue that a narrow focus on the "practical" amounts to a "sanctioned ignorance" of
the globalizing world's intricacies, as well as of the university's and business' role in it. To develop a critical intercultural pedagogy that moves away from the purely practical or instrumental uses of culture, we must first recognize, as this chapter's epigraph suggests, that culture in the unceasingly dynamic, globalizing world must be thought of as a matter of choice and active construction rather than a passive accumulation of isolated cultural practices. Because ethnicity or geographical region no longer allow us to build a stable cultural identity, culture in the globalizing world becomes a space in which global citizens make conscious choices about identity, and in which people mobilize culture and group identity for particular interests.

The strong focus on the stable, limited scope of culture represents a similarly active and interested choice on the part of the researcher, textbook writer, or instructor to stabilize a cultural identity through description. As I will argue in chapter three, the limiting focus on the practical uses of culture free intercultural pedagogies—and students, importantly—from having to consider the ways in which the descriptions of culture themselves function to delimit and mobilize culture for particular interests. These interests might be, for example, the marketing or communication needs of international business. Thus, in the intercultural pedagogies, the article Rebecca Burnett includes in *Technical Communication* suggests that an international company might find it helpful to “assimilate a foreign culture into its product marketing campaign” (393) through a thorough understanding of individual cultures.
Toward a Humanistic Intercultural Technical Communication Pedagogy

To move away from the predominantly practical influences that limit the scope of culture to the "local," I will suggest a critical intercultural pedagogy in chapter four that will help students develop an understanding of globalization's influences on culture.

What is generally needed, I believe, is to reconsider the theoretical basis of intercultural communication pedagogies. Intercultural technical communication research, with its insistence on defining culture as a relatively stable and local phenomenon, seems to have inherited a research agenda from Cold War era "area studies." During the Cold War in the United States, military funding to universities had encouraged sociologists and anthropologists to focus their cultural research on circumscribed regions that tended to delimit cultural descriptions within specific geographical boundaries. Over decades of focused research, cultural descriptions became inextricably linked to particular regions (Appadurai "Grassroots" 7). Moreover, when the Cold War ended and corporations began stepping up funding to universities, a corporate preoccupation with the practical and relevant in higher education became an organizing principle for pedagogies (Aronowitz 173).

To move beyond the Cold War and corporate influences in intercultural research, then, I propose a new foundation for intercultural communication pedagogies that would orient intercultural pedagogies around a more humanistic perspective. Carolyn Miller's "A Humanistic Rationale for Technical Writing," though 25 years old, guides the formulation of such a humanistic basis for intercultural pedagogies. This new humanistic rationale will include not only the rhetorical basis of technical communication, as Miller argues, but also its cultural implications in a global sense, putting into question "tacit commitments to bureaucratic hierarchies, corporate capitalism, and high technology" that underlie
intercultural technical communication pedagogies (616). I want to ask, in other words, not only whether a particular perspective on culture is practical or effective, but whether a perspective is ethical or humanistic in terms of the influences behind its representations of cultures.

In the following chapter, I will outline the theoretical basis of a more humanistic, critical perspective on culture in globalization, based largely in the sociological and anthropological cultural research of Arjun Appadurai. Appadurai’s insights will offer us a basis from which to examine the limitations—and horizons—of current intercultural technical communication pedagogies, aligning intercultural pedagogies with a more humanistic look at culture. In the third chapter, I will consider the implications and significance of the intercultural communication pedagogies and the localized focus on culture, or what I had called the “sanctioned ignorance” of the current perspective. This chapter will not make accusations of unwitting complicity with the exploitation of culture, but will consider the impacts of the active choice to define culture locally without considering its global dimensions. In the fourth and final chapter, I will suggest some measures that instructors can take toward a revised, humanistic intercultural pedagogy. Also in the last chapter, I will consider the space within the university for a critique of the intercultural pedagogies’ practical focus, as well as the space for a move toward Appadurai’s more humanistic focus. This section will problematize my proposed pedagogy in light of the practical and corporate-driven constraints on higher education that Aronowitz and others identify within the “promotional” or “corporate” university.
Chapter 2: A Global Perspective on Culture for Intercultural Technical Communication Pedagogies

A globalized culture is chaotic rather than orderly.

Malcolm Waters, Modernity at Large 125-6

In discussing intercultural technical communication in the previous chapter, I explored the problem driving this thesis: globalization, usually described in economic terms, often serves to justify studying intercultural communication in technical writing courses, yet the concept of culture is not considered in light of globalization. Culture, instead, is conveniently delimited and static, somehow outside the dynamic processes of globalization, though culture nevertheless remains a factor to account for in communication. In this chapter, I will suggest an alternative account of culture, based on the sociological work of Arjun Appadurai, that considers globalization's influences on culture.

Globalization and Culture

Before exploring the concept of culture with Appadurai, however, I believe it would be helpful to begin with a working definition of globalization, which will briefly describe the dynamic, globalizing world in which culture is constructed. Malcolm Waters, in a thorough overview of sociological theories of globalization through the mid-1990s, presents a helpful starting point for understanding globalization. He describes it as “a social process in which the constraints of geography on social and cultural arrangements recede and in which people become increasingly aware that they are receding” (3). Anthony Giddens similarly characterizes globalization as “an intensification of worldwide social relations which link
distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa” (64).

Waters, synthesizing various globalization theories, notes that what facilitates this intensifying global integration is “the progressive ‘culturalization’ of social life” (124), or the growing tendency for social exchanges to be mediated by symbols. In economic relationships, for example, exchanges that had traditionally been material-based have been superceded in financial markets by “monetary tokens,” or symbols, as the medium of exchange. Finance capital and the liquidity of stock markets have superceded production, in other words, as the basis of economic exchange. In more general terms, “material and power exchanges in the economic and political arenas are progressively becoming displaced by symbolic ones,” and symbolic exchanges in turn are more than adept at widespread dissemination (124). Media technologies, which play a central role in globalization’s influence on culture, hasten the tendency toward globalization in a world of symbolic exchanges, as media distributes symbols over wide areas. As we will see, the centrality of symbolic exchange will form a central component of Appadurai’s theory of globalization and culture.

So far I have considered only one aspect of globalization, the idea of global interconnectedness. However, existing intercultural pedagogies tend to fix on this worldwide integration as the central or determining factor of globalization. Since at least the early 1990s, in fact, intercultural research has consistently cited that various peoples and cultures are constantly interacting in the globalizing world (see for example Thrush 272). This feature of the research has been a mainstay through recent articles as well. For example, DeVoss, Jasken, and Hayden justify their 2002 study of intercultural communication textbooks by
noting that “[w]ith the increasing globalization of the marketplace, the United States is becoming more multicultural and active in international business than it has previously been” (69). Here, as in much of the intercultural research that mentions globalization, the only salient features of globalization are economic factors that create a global marketplace.

But while increasing economic interconnectedness is both an important and valid feature of globalization, the process of globalization has a fundamentally greater impact on culture than simply throwing different peoples into contact with one another in a global network. When the primary feature of globalization is described in terms of market relationships between cultures, as I believe it is in the intercultural pedagogies, the concept of culture that results is one in which globalization has no discernable influence. That is, globalization simply describes a network of independent cultures that are unaffected by globalization. But as Waters’ definition above makes clear, globalization also involves a “self-reflexivity,” as “people become increasingly aware” that the world is globalizing. Through self-reflexivity, globalization thus begins to influence culture when, in various ways, people caught up in the processes of globalization consciously take account of the world situation to experience their daily lives (63). Giddens notes the importance of mass media in this self-reflexivity, adding that extensive, world-wide social structures—economic, political, and cultural—would be unimaginable without the “pooling of knowledge” that various mass media provide (77). Moreover, advancements in mass media technologies exacerbate the homogenizing tendencies of globalization and form a grounding principle in Appadurai’s theory of culture in globalization.

The self-reflexive nature of globalization carries important implications for the study of culture in a globalizing world. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, sociologists
generally agree that culture in globalization experiences a tension between homogenization and differentiation (Waters 136), which is, for Appadurai, “the central problem of today’s global interactions” (Modernity 32). Self-reflexivity embodies this dialectical tension in culture when what appear to be “local” cultural contexts express a self-reflexive awareness of the global. Appadurai cites an example in which “Koreans in Philadelphia watch the 1988 Olympics in Seoul through Satellite feeds from Korea” (4). Local expressions of culture, in this case Korean ones, are inextricably caught up with a self-reflexive awareness of globalization. Perhaps an example more familiar to an American audience might be when central Iowa news sources report the fortunes of Iowa soldiers currently serving in Iraq. In this instance, Iowans are clearly aware of the global, through media, and recognize the connections between the local context of Iowa and the more global context of American foreign policy; the distinction between local and global thus becomes problematic.

To contextualize Appadurai’s place in the conversation, let me expand on the homogenizing and differentiating tension of globalization. An important question about the self-reflexive awareness of globalization that cultural researchers debate is the degree of cultural homogenization that globalization produces. Does homogenization imply, in other words, a beneficial cultural relativism as different cultures adjust to each other, or is homogenization more sinister than relativization? Those coming from a Marxist perspective, such as Fredric Jameson or Immanuel Wallerstein, tend to see homogenization as cultural hegemony rather than standardization. In “Notes on Globalization as a Philosophical Issue,” Jameson argues that the American domination of media production and distribution does not allow for significant or popular cultural differentiation, as media styles and themes become standardized around the world. Apart from what he identifies as regressive, reactionary
trends against homogenization, such as religious or nationalist fundamentalism, locally unique cultural forms generally cannot compete with American-owned marketing and distribution of global cultural forms. The local is ultimately overrun by a kind of mass-mediated cultural imperialism that homogenizes culture in an American image (67-8).

But from another perspective, popular media forms—music, film, television—can be a site of cultural differentiation as well, and a challenge to hegemony. Jameson mentions that popular music in Britain, for example, has served as a site of resistance for immigrants from the colonies against the white racist state (71). But even when we consider the importation of hegemonic cultural forms into a local region, such as American popular songs into the Philippines (Appadurai Modernity 29-30), there is still a strong element of cultural differentiation that resists homogenization. Arguments preoccupied with global homogenization often fail to account for the indigenizing action that culture experiences in local areas (32). This cultural differentiation in globalization forms the basis of Appadurai’s theory, that individual cultures may adopt homogenizing cultural forms, but then differentiate them or indigenize them in specific ways (17). Globalization thus involves the agents of homogenization, but these agents are often “repatriated as heterogeneous dialogues of national sovereignty” (42).

Note that the indigenization of global cultural forms into “local” cultural contexts is not the same as the limited and static culture that the intercultural pedagogies describe. Culture in the intercultural pedagogies is portrayed as being relatively unaffected by globalization; that is, culture is local without the self-reflexivity of globalization. Appadurai’s account of the indigenization of culture into local areas, on the contrary, represents a “local” culture in which the global emerges in the tension between global and
local forces. This "local" is self-reflexive. In the following section, I will elaborate on Appadurai’s theories of local cultural production and discuss the nature of globalization’s influences on culture.

**Arjun Appadurai: Imagination and Cultural Practice in the Globalizing World**

I focus specifically on Appadurai’s theories of globalization and culture in this section because Appadurai investigates how the local is constructed amidst what is effectively the chaos of globalization, rather than how the global threatens local cultural richness. His focus illustrates that even descriptions of culture limited to the “local,” such as those in the intercultural pedagogies, must have a fundamentally global influence at heart.

The essential feature of Appadurai’s theory of culture and globalization is imagination, which relates more closely to representation, the word “image,” or the Lacanian “imaginary” than to an idealist “life of the mind.” For Appadurai, imagination is a legitimate and central form of social practice. The centrality of imagination in everyday life, in fact, is what differentiates our globalizing era from earlier periods in history; Appadurai goes so far as to announce a “rupture” between contemporary times and others (*Modernity 2*). In Appadurai’s account, traditions and territories no longer confine the possibilities of social lives, and imagination is no longer residual or derivative (53). Two distinguishing features of contemporary life now place the imagination at the forefront of people’s lives: 1) advances in media technologies that rapidly disseminate images and symbols around the world, and 2) migratory patterns that rapidly circulate populations, problematizing regional or ethnic determinants of culture. The prevalence of media and migration throw globalizing symbolic exchanges into the forefront of life as media converts human experiences into symbols.
(Waters 150), which can then be exchanged between migrant and other populations over distances. Thus, Appadurai calls "the work of the imagination" a constitutive feature of modern life (Modernity 3), as the increasing intensity of media and migration create "a new order of instability in the production of modern subjectivities" (4). Importantly, moreover, the social practice of imagination is not merely escapism or thought without action, but rather a form of work, a field of "negotiation" between the local and the global that makes up the self-reflexive aspect of globalization. Imagination for Appadurai is now "central to all forms of agency, is itself a social fact, and is a key component of the new global order" (31).

Since the work of the imagination is a primary feature of life in the globalizing world, Appadurai argues that other accounts of globalization and culture, such as the classical Marxist model that understands culture to be the superstructure of the global capitalist base, need to be problematized. "The new global cultural economy," Appadurai argues, "has to be seen as a complex, overlapping, disjunctive order" (32) between the broad categories of culture, politics, and economics. This new cultural economy is characterized not by the dynamic interaction of relatively stable entities, such as nation-states or cultures, but rather by mobile world-wide processes and currents that move independently of one another and overlap and interact in a complex global system. Importantly, these flows intersect and problematize cultures and other constructed "stabilities."

Appadurai describes five global cultural flows: ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, finanscapes, and ideoscapes, which roughly correspond to movements of people, media, technologies, capital, and political ideologies, respectively. While these five "scapes" influence one another in various ways, they move disjunctively and rather unpredictably, because they are largely subject to their own constraints (35). Yet what
exacerbates the disjunctures between these non-isomorphic flows is the sheer speed and volume of the global cultural economy (37). The result is that cultural world must be characterized not as a neatly interlocking grid of stable influences, but as a system of disjunctive and heterogeneous motion.

The suffix “scape” that Appadurai attaches to these five terms demonstrates the irreducibly “fluid and irregular shapes” and deeply perspectival nature of these different global flows, as self-reflexive individuals experience them through the imagination. Individuals’ different points of view, that is, determine the various forms that the(scapes) take for different individuals in the globalizing world. Moreover, the ways in which individuals experience the interactions and forms of these various “scapes” in everyday life, Appadurai argues, determines the “imagined worlds” in which people experience the globalizing world (33). For example, we can imagine “media flows across boundaries that produce images of well-being that cannot be satisfied by national standards of living and consumer capabilities” (“Grassroots” 5), such as might happen when a North American television program about an upper-middle-class white family airs in parts of South America. Mediascapes, ethnoscapes, and finanscapes intersect in a unique way that determines the imagined worlds of the program’s South American viewers.

Moreover, individuals construct their cultures in and through these imagined worlds, which individuals construct from the complex interactions and disjunctures of dynamic global flows. It is crucial to note that the cultures that emerge from individuals’ imagined worlds are not, in fact, the sole product of region or nation, though people’s local material and economic situations obviously play into the construction of culture. Instead, the local
situation is merely one aspect of culture in globalization; the concept of culture represents individuals attempting to construct locality and stability out of the chaotic global dynamic.

I have said that current intercultural research, in contrast to Appadurai’s theory of culture above, tends to describe culture without considering the influences of globalization. I must note, however, that intercultural pedagogies do often move toward problematizing culture in the globalizing world. For example, various discussions of culture, such as that in Deborah Andrews’ *Technical Communication in the Global Community*, warn students that while “[s]imilar technical training, interests, organization roles in international companies, and consumer tastes are making professionals around the globe think a lot alike…strong cultural differences still remain” (11). Here Andrews appears to be describing something akin to the homogenization and differentiation that culture experiences in globalization. However, caveats such as Andrews’ only serve to make culture normative rather than problematic. That is, by allowing certain anomalies to be incorporated into a description of culture, or by admitting that a “Western” habit has found its way into a specifically Chinese situation, for example, the researcher reinforces a stable or essential cultural identity. The effect is that individuals who do not precisely “fit” the cultural description are nevertheless categorized in the culture, and unclassifiable anomalies, instead of problematizing descriptions of culture, only reinforce a central cultural identity. Clearly, the normative problematization of culture in intercultural research does *not* align with Appadurai’s theory of globalization and culture. Appadurai, by contrast, allows the challenges of describing stable culture in globalization to remain both dynamic and problematic.
Implications of a Global Perspective on Culture

To close this chapter, let me summarize the basic differences between Appadurai’s theory of culture and the intercultural pedagogies’ use of culture with an example. Sam Dragga in a 1999 TCQ article describes the Chinese system of Confucian ethics that influences Chinese interactions, offering a brief outline of Confucius’ central tenets, such as the values of righteousness, goodness, reverence, etc. Dragga also discusses the challenges to Confucian thought, from the ancient philosophy of Lao Tzu up to Maoist thought and some of the more Western influences of contemporary times. But while he is careful to explain the interactions of Chinese cultural traditions with Western ones, Dragga still restricts Chinese culture to an ancient, specifically Chinese philosophy. I should be clear that Dragga’s discussion of Chinese culture is not misleading, ethnocentric, inaccurate, or impractical for intercultural communication. My point, rather, is to show how Dragga neatly contains Chinese culture within Confucian ethics; influences on culture after 1800, including the communist revolution of 1949, are reserved for two paragraphs toward the end of the description (374). With Dragga’s focus on Confucius, the different scapes of globalization—the ideoscapes of liberalizing market politics, the ethnoscapes of emigration to the US, the finanscapes of China’s complex trade relationship with the US—play no significant role in the Chinese culture depicted in Dragga’s article.

A second crucial difference between the intercultural pedagogies and Appadurai’s theory of culture emerges in this example as well: Chinese culture is not shown to be constructed, but rather seems to be inherited from time immemorial. That is, the ways in which Chinese people identify and portray themselves as Chinese are not considered in Dragga’s article. Chinese-ness and its traditions are something that people have, rather than
what they do, and the ways in which people and groups mobilize cultural differences for one reason or another, for something like nationalistic pride, for example, are absent. One of the key features of Appadurai’s theory, however, which will become important in the following chapter, is that culture is actively constructed in people’s imagined worlds, in light of dynamic global flows.

To account for this element of construction in his theory of culture, Appadurai suggests that our very models of cultural shape should alter, since territorial or ethnic models of culture no longer account for culture among the “scapes” of the global cultural economy. He proposes that researchers should treat culture as possessing no Euclidean boundaries, structures, or shapes (Modernity 46), and that rather than studying static cultures, assuming these exist, researchers should study dynamic problems that stem from cultural conflict in general (46-7). In fact, for Appadurai, the active and conscious mobilization of group identities must be at the heart of any understanding of culture (13). In the following chapter, I will extend Appadurai’s theory about how people come to build their cultural stability amidst the shifting, globalizing world, and look at how and why culture may have been constructed as delimited and stable in the intercultural pedagogies. These issues, I believe, are crucial to raise in the sheer speed and movement of the globalizing world.
Chapter 3: Understanding Consequences in Approaching Culture as a Display of Difference

[T]here is nothing mere about the local.

Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large* 199

In the previous chapter I argued that finding spaces of cultural stability amidst the constant flows and disjunctive movements of globalization is the work of imagination and of active construction. As Appadurai says, in globalization “the apparent stabilities that we see are, under close examination, usually our devices for handling objects characterized by motion” ("Grassroots" 5). Culture is one of these apparent stabilities. While intercultural pedagogies have depicted culture as a tacit set of reproducible norms and conventions, organized around region or ethnicity, I argued that culture is more like what Appadurai calls “an arena for conscious choice, justification, and representation” (*Modernity* 44) in the globalizing world.

I also argued that the intercultural pedagogies produce a stable, “local” way of looking at culture that does not account for the influences of globalization. This limited picture of culture is constructed through descriptions of individual cultures, for example in Sam Dragga’s article described above, as well as in descriptions of a limited concept of culture. Despite the difficulty of maintaining a limited notion of culture amidst the motion of globalization, this stable and “local” view of culture persists. Since Appadurai has suggested that culture is constructed largely through active choice, it seems important to examine the influences that maintain current intercultural pedagogies’ preoccupation with a limited, static picture of culture. This examination will be the focus of this chapter.
In the first chapter, I had said that the intercultural pedagogies limit culture because they are designed to be “practical,” and the intercultural pedagogies find it convenient to focus on the “differences that matter” in understanding cross-cultural communication. However, the result of letting the practical remain unquestioned, as Debashish Munshee and David KcKie warn, is that the intercultural pedagogies’ limited view of culture “ignores the social processes behind the construction of cultural differences” (19). In other words, a focus on the practical amounts to a “sanctioned ignorance” of the forces that drive practicality. In this chapter, I will explore what might encourage the intercultural pedagogies to construct a limited view of culture, and to ignore the effects of globalization on culture.

**Culture as a Display of Difference**

This section will first examine the ways in which culture can be used—both controlled and mobilized—for certain interests and will then interrogate how the intercultural pedagogies might employ the limited picture of culture. Let me begin by considering how different agents use culture to manipulate difference in one way or another. It seems clear that, as Immanuel Wallerstein puts it, “the very construction of culture becomes...the key ideological battleground” between opposing interests in the globalizing system (39). Though some might object to the overtly political implications in the word “ideology,” we could agree that culture is often manipulated for political or economic objectives. In some instances, culture is controlled by nation-states that seek a unified “national” culture. Henry Giroux describes such a situation in his account of the “new cultural racism” that emerged during the Reagan/Bush era in the U.S. Giroux argues that the conservative Right portrayed cultural difference as a barrier to American unity and global prosperity, which in effect
sanctioned a racist discrimination against diverse cultural groups; attempts at pluralism or multiculturalism were (and often still are) characterized as "divisive." In the case of the new cultural racism, the Right’s prospect of a singular American culture controls difference by excluding it, and, importantly, marginalizes the demands of diverse cultural groups for equal rights (38). Cultural diversity is suppressed to suppress the demands of certain groups.

In a different vein than what Giroux describes, Appadurai discusses the ways in which culture is mobilized, rather than suppressed, for specific purposes. Nation-states, for example, often mobilize culture to achieve a semblance of multicultural unity within a state characterized by sometimes volatile heterogeneity. Culture in such instances is mobilized to control the outbreak of diverse demands for self-determination and to "pacify separatists," ultimately "exercising taxonomic control over difference" (Modernity 39). Though Appadurai is primarily referring to nationalists in so-called third world states, the multicultural control over difference appears in the U.S. as well, often in advertising. In an American context, Deepika Bahri speaks of a "boutique multiculturalism" that sanitizes difference for advertising or public relations campaigns (29), as in Benetton ads in the 1990s that depicted well-dressed young people taking pride in carefully defined racial and cultural diversity. We could also cite the example of census categories, which exercise multicultural control over cultural heterogeneity by racially taxonomizing difference, and sometimes forming the basis of redistribution or affirmative action programs.

The intercultural pedagogies, I argue, exercise such multicultural control over cultural difference, constraining the shape that the concept of culture can take. Gayatri Spivak in A Critique of Postcolonial Reason notes how multinational corporations, and institutions that
It is no secret that liberal multiculturalism is determined by the demands of transnational capitalism. It is an important public relations move in the apparent winning of consent from developing countries in...the financialization of the globe. Already in 1990, the National Governor’s Association Report queried: ‘How are we to sell our product in a global economy when we are yet to learn the language [read: “culture”] of the customer?’” (396-7).

DeVoss et al. seem to echo this sentiment tacitly when they urge the necessity of intercultural communication training, noting that “more than half of US businesspeople on long overseas assignments return home early because of their inability to adapt to other cultures” (70); in other words, intercultural pedagogies exists to train people in the language of the international consumer. Munshce and McKie go so far as to characterize intercultural communication as a kind of Orientalism, which helps “us” with the problem of “coping with and controlling” “them” (15).

The result of these “practical” constraints on intercultural communication is that mere displays of difference emerge from intercultural business discourses, giving catalogues of cultural traits or points of cultural difference that are digestible for technical communication students. And the consequence is that discussions that might question the ways culture is constructed or mobilized, or conversations that might interrogate other kinds of political or economic relationships between peoples, cannot be asked in the intercultural pedagogies. These gaps in the conversation represent the “sanctioned ignorance” that I had mentioned,
the restrictions that the "practical" or instrumental places on pedagogy. While it is doubtful that the intercultural pedagogies consciously reduce culture to make it an uncritical tool for international business, or advocate that the concept of culture should mobilize a taxonomic control over difference, the way the intercultural pedagogies are organized precludes a critical examination of the concept of culture, which I intend to illustrate momentarily.

In other words, it is not enough to elude the politics of cultural construction by invoking the instrumentally "practical," for the decision to be practical already represents a political or ideological choice for the intercultural pedagogies. The choice results in an evasion of deeper issues that might underlie cultural differences or intercultural relationships. A critical examination of these deeper issues, I argue, is precisely what is needed in this chaotic, globalizing world of ours.

Example of a Display of Difference: A Case Study in Saudi Business Culture

Let me illustrate the constraints and limitations that the practical places on the intercultural pedagogies with an example. Mike Markel's Technical Communication, 6th ed. includes a section on "Ethics and Multicultural Communication" that focuses on the moral dilemmas technical writers might confront when interacting with different cultures. The section warns that certain cultural practices might seem objectionable to the writer's moral code. To help the student negotiate such questionable cultural practices, Markel posits the "moral minimum," which holds that in intercultural situations it is acceptable to ignore what might be considered unethical, as long as the unethical practice is not reinforced.

The moral minimum is tested in a case study at the end of Markel's chapter. The female founder of a company is trying to secure a contract with a Saudi oil company that
would benefit her company. At an initial meeting, however, she finds that the Saudi businessmen are quite uncomfortable with her, and she later identifies what she considers a strong current of sexism in the Saudis. With her eye on the contract, however, she deemphasizes her name in her company’s records and asks a male representative in her company to downplay the fact that the company was founded by a woman. The technical writing student, then, must decide whether or not her actions are ethical for her cultural moral standards, or whether or not she transgresses the moral minimum.

Undoubtedly, this case study could spark a fascinating moral discussion about important issues that the intercultural communicator might face; and, again, I am not arguing that Markel’s case study is somehow inaccurate or unfaithful to Saudi practices, or that it is not useful to a future practitioner. But what might be passed over in an ethical discussion of this case study is the way the portrait of Saudi culture focuses on the differences that matter, the harsh sexism of Saudi culture that defines “them” against “us.” Students are not asked to consider where such practices might have come from or what global conditions might have produced them. Were students to examine the case study more closely, however, they might note that the particularly Saudi form of sexism is a product of globalization. The treatment of women under Islamic law is a reactionary, differentiating cultural practice, a feature of the radically conservative revolution brought on by Wahhabi clerics in response to the Westernizing oil boom of the 1970s (Rubin 41-3). In this case, ideoscapes (fundamentalist politics) have converged with finanscapes and ethnoscapes (oil money and Western culture) to shape Saudi cultural practices into the ones that end up in Markel’s case study.

Generally, the specific focus on the differences that matter, the packaging of Saudi culture into a case study that shows “their” difference from “us,” does not allow a critical
inquiry into deeper cultural differences, including the ways in which cultural practices get constructed and mobilized for certain purposes. In the Saudi case, the royal family and the Wahhabi clerics legitimate each other and actively shape Saudi culture for their respective purposes, in response the threatening Westernizing trends of globalization. Importantly, Markel’s case study also mobilizes Saudi culture to train mostly Western technical writing students to handle precarious cultural situations, and constructs the culture again for a new situation in the Western university. Given especially that Saudi culture here is meant to serve as an example of especially objectionable practices for the student to “handle” ethically, an interrogation of how culture forms in the globalizing world is crucial. Such a critical inquiry would make Saudi culture seem more human, rather than just an abstraction against which we define ourselves and our moral values.

**Performative Consequences of the Limited Concept of Culture**

I have argued that it is important to understand the concept of culture in light of globalization’s influences, because a critical look at the ways culture is constructed tends to be excluded from the intercultural pedagogies’ limited view of culture. But here I must ask why it is important for students to engage with what I call a more humanistic approach to intercultural communication (which I will discuss in detail in the following chapter). What, in other words, is the significant difference between the intercultural pedagogies’ limited view of culture and a deeper, more critical exploration of culture? The difference, I argue, emerges when we consider the *performative* character that cultural description can often have, in which the description of culture becomes blurred with its prescription. In this section, I will argue that the way culture is constructed and discussed in intercultural
pedagogies can exert real influence in the world, and that instructors should be mindful of that possible influence.

It is especially important to consider the performative implications in culture when we remember that creating stability in the dynamic, globalizing world is the work of choice and construction. In ethnography, for example, Appadurai notes that the researcher creates the “local” experience of culture based more on preconceived ideas than on observation; locality is a ground, not a figure, and locality is then produced as it is described (Modernity, 182). As this line of ethnographic research was often state-funded to inform American Cold War defense policy, the researcher’s focus on the local in some instances was specifically designed to influence policy and have concrete effects in the world. Similarly, the intercultural pedagogies are designed for international business practices, and would not be “practical” if they were not intended to influence and inform cross-cultural communication. Therefore, we must be concerned that the intercultural pedagogies may in fact produce for the student the limited, non-global view of culture that they describe.

To explore such a performative notion of culture a little further, let me turn here to the work of Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu argues that social action is possible because agents, who are part of the social world, have a (more or less) adequate knowledge of this world and because one can act on the social world by acting on their knowledge of this world. This action aims to produce and impose representations (mental, verbal, visual, or theatrical) of the social world which may be capable of acting on this world by acting on agents’ representation of it (Language and Symbolic Power 127).
This "knowledge" of the social world, I believe, can roughly approximate Appadurai's global "scapes" that individuals experience and act on to live in the world. Culture, in other words, is one such representation of the social world produced by the disjunctures and intersections of the global cultural economy, and especially by individuals' and groups' experiences of it. Importantly, then, as both Appadurai and Bourdieu would note, culture is a construct that depends more on active prescription and the imposition of this construct upon the world than it does on description of actually existing groups or cultures. Ultimately, what this means is that the representations that people produce from their individual and social experiences, far from being an idealist exercise, actually influence the social world, which itself depends on representation for its "reality."

Bourdieu, in another essay, cites a general case in which representation exerts its influence on the world and produces concrete effects for individuals. In "Neo-liberalism, the Utopia (Becoming a Reality) of Unlimited Exploitation," Bourdieu discusses how the "desocialized and dehistoricized" theories of neo-liberal economics have imposed their theoretical findings on the social world when backed by powerful political and economic institutions (95). Corporations, the state, and other individuals and groups feel different pressures to accept these economic theories as an adequate representation of the real social world, not because the theories are more descriptive of a social reality, but because they have powerful backing interests that prescribe a reality, through policy, sanctions, etc.

Bourdieu's example, though it does not precisely mirror the extensive power that the cultural representations of intercultural communicators will have, nevertheless shows us how representations, with supporting institutions, can impose a reality on the social world. In intercultural communication, cultural representations might go so far as to influence
international investment deals, if businesspeople are at times inclined to make choices based on cultural "difficulties." And, depending on the institutional (corporate, national, etc.) weight behind an intercultural communicator, representations of culture have the ability to impose themselves on the social world. The important details of people's live disappear as limited and mostly uncritical cultural representations dictate business policy and cultural (in)sensitivity. At the least, what the intercultural pedagogies encourage, with their limited, packaged depictions of culture, is categorization and simplification, often only one step removed from ethnocentrism or even tacit racism.

For this reason, I believe it is important to interrogate the construction of culture and to examine the representations of the social world upon which people act. While it seems impossible to avoid constructing and representing culture in some manner, the intercultural communication instructor and student should be critically prepared to question cultural constructions and representations. In the following chapter, I will propose some ways to revise the intercultural pedagogies to allow students to examine the very concept of culture, and the ways culture can be employed for certain interests. These will move toward a more humanistic pedagogy of intercultural communication.
Chapter 4: Opening a Space for a Humanistic Approach and a Critique

Being useful is not necessarily good, …but little in the discourse of technical writing allows for this conclusion or explores its consequences.

Carolyn Miller, “What’s Practical?” 18

In the previous chapters, I argued that the intercultural pedagogies construct culture in a stable, limited way that removes culture from the homogenizing and differentiating dialectic of globalization. The pedagogies thus conveniently package culture in a sanitized and manageable form that constrains culture for instrumental interests and excludes conversations about the construction and mobilization of culture. I also argued that this excluded conversation is crucial in accounting for the performative influences that a limited view of culture might impose on the social world. In this chapter, I will begin to explore steps that technical writing instructors might take to move toward a more critical, humanistic intercultural pedagogy. This revised pedagogy, I argue, will help introduce critical questions about the construction and mobilization of culture. In the last section of the chapter, I will also explore some of the institutional and societal obstacles that challenge a humanistic intercultural pedagogy in the technical writing classroom and contemporary university.

Toward a Humanistic Intercultural Technical Communication Pedagogy

In this section, I will consider how technical writing instructors might discuss intercultural communication, and how they might mobilize culture, so to speak, without reinforcing the idea of a stable, limited, and easily circumscribed culture. Appadurai suggests
that the first step is to describe culture as an active, deterritorialized process rather than as a noun referring to a set of passively acquired or inherited traits (Modernity 12). As he says, culture should not be expected to exhibit "Euclidean boundaries," and intercultural pedagogies should not expect culture to have them either. However, refusing to reify stable, bounded culture is not to deny the existence of culture, or its importance in everyday life. That is, though culture seems impossible to pin down definitively, it still significantly influences communication, and instructors must account for the importance of culture in their communication pedagogies. Instructors and students, therefore, cannot help but mobilize culture in some way.

The problem with intercultural pedagogies then becomes how to mobilize culture without lapsing into the limitations that a "practical" focus represents. Instructors must resist the temptation merely to pay lip service to the instability of culture while still reifying stable, limited culture with catalogues of cultural differences. To resist this possibility, I argue that the intercultural pedagogies should mobilize culture around a humanistic basis, rather than a purely "practical" one. The general shift from the "sanctioned ignorance" of the practical to a more critical basis in humanistic values, I believe, will allow intercultural pedagogies to discuss the role of culture in communication while resisting the construction of a stable, limited concept of culture. That is, humanistic values will allow intercultural pedagogies to discuss culture without being preoccupied with the instrumentally practical application of that discussion to cross-cultural situations. Generally, humanism will provide a justification for exploring culture rather than merely abstracting and using it.

But a humanistic basis for intercultural communication does not need to be entirely impractical. Carolyn Miller, in "What's Practical About Technical Writing," suggests that
technical writing pedagogy can be "practical" or "useful" to students, while still managing to remain critical of the role of technical communication in industry. Technical writing pedagogy, Miller argues, should not take all its cues from industry and simply train students to fill corporate needs. Rather, pedagogies should allow students to critically examine industry's demands and actually inform industry practices. Her suggestion for technical writing, which I want to extend to intercultural technical communication as well, is to redefine "practical" around its "high" sense, concerned more with flexible social wisdom and socially responsible action than simply with instrumental ends. Redefining "practical" thus cleverly plays both sides of what she describes as the industry/academe divide, allowing technical writing pedagogy to be useful for industry, yet preserving academe's ability to inform industry's practices. For intercultural pedagogies specifically, the ability to critically interrogate the construction of culture while mobilizing culture in intercultural communication pedagogies represents a parallel compromise between industry and academe.

Though 15 years old, I believe Miller's high definition of "practical" should help guide the development of a critical intercultural pedagogy based on humanistic values. This humanistic intercultural pedagogy, I believe, must have at least two central features. The first would emphasize to students the ways individuals construct their cultures, and would avoid simply compiling a catalogue of cultural differences that influence communication (Munshee and McKie 18-9). As a starting point, we can turn to a 1993 article by Timothy Weiss, who provides five topics for an intercultural pedagogy designed to teach the constructedness of culture. Weiss first suggests that students problematize the convenient categorization of culture by questioning the "meaningfulness of defining and measuring something as varied and elusive as 'national character'" (212). Students should be encouraged to examine
whether such traditionally defining categories as "power distance," individualism," or "masculinity," for example, accurately capture the slippery phenomenon of culture.

Additionally, students should begin to question the relationship between culture and nation or region through considering the various problems with regionalism and nationalism in the world (213), such as in the former Yugoslavia or in the Kurdish areas in several Middle Eastern countries. Students might also benefit from considering the effects of mass migration on an American image of "national culture."

In Weiss' pedagogy, students then begin to examine the influences that converge to shape an individual's concept of his or her culture. Weiss suggests that students consider the various communities to which they belong, looking at "how these communities shape the individual's attitudes and actions" (214). Students then extend this exercise to members of other cultures, interacting with different people to understand the sheer complexity of the influences that shape the concept of culture throughout the world. Weiss' limitation, however, is his focus on local cultural contexts. When he discusses the construction of culture in his intercultural communication classroom, Weiss does not allow a sufficient discussion of the influences of globalization on culture. As a supplement to Weiss' pedagogy, I would suggest that students also consider the different global flows that Appadurai describes, reflecting on how the "scapes" influence culture. For example, students might consider outsourcing and how it influences American perceptions of company loyalty or the value of work, or the impact of immigration on "American culture" and the myth of the melting pot. Also, students would benefit from struggling to fit "minority" cultures or first or second generation immigrant cultures within traditional images of an American culture. In general, students should be encouraged to consider any globalizing influence that
challenges cultural stability, uniformity, or homogeneity, constantly problematizing these perceptions with counterexamples and critical examination.

An important component of this pedagogy would be for students to consider the "scapes" from other points of view as well, and how the processes of globalization influence people from different cultures differently. For example, students could learn how Chinese students perceive American investment in China and East Asia, how students from Europe's former colonies perceive American actions on the world scene, or how non-Western cultures experience the homogenizing and differentiating dialectic of globalization.

By reflecting on the various instabilities and global flows that influence the construction of culture in the globalizing world, students would begin to experience the difficulty of constructing stable or clearly delimited culture, as well as globalization's influence on culture. Ultimately, students would learn to recognize the importance of cultural difference in communication, yet avoid constructing overly simplified banks of cultural differences. However, I believe it is important not only to teach students that culture is constructed in a globalizing world, but also how and why it is constructed for certain interests. In the second feature of a humanistic intercultural pedagogy, then, students would be encouraged to investigate the very global flows and interests that seek to mobilize cultural differences. Stanley Aronowitz provides a useful framework for this aspect of the pedagogy. In *The Knowledge Factory*, he discusses an extensive humanistic pedagogy that moves away from the limited, instrumental curriculum of the contemporary university, and which asks students to read from important primary texts in history, philosophy, literature, and sociology. Although he calls for a radical shift away from the job training curriculum that pervades most universities, Aronowitz' pedagogy is not academic learning for its own sake.
Rather, he wants to educate students to interrogate their social environment, arguing that instrumental pedagogies “have failed to prepare students to face relatively new issues such as globalization, immigration, and cultural conflict” (127). Similar to Miller’s humanistic perspective, Aronowitz’ synthesizes the “practical” goals of education with more critical tools that let students negotiate their complex social world. “Ironically,” he summarizes, “the best preparation for the work of the future might be to cultivate knowledge of the broadest possible kind, to make learning a way of life that in the first place is pleasurable and then rigorously critical” (161).

In a humanistic intercultural communication pedagogy developed along these critical lines, students would venture outside intercultural communication proper to investigate the global flows that influence culture in the globalizing world. Munshee and McKie, in an intercultural pedagogy designed to interrogate Western biases in intercultural communication materials, provide a good model of a critical pedagogy. The authors have students read primary texts from novelists, critical and cultural theorists, and postcolonial scholars who question the world in its various inequalities, imbalances, and asymmetrical economic and political relationships (20) to provide students with a picture of what the intercultural pedagogies tend to exclude. For a humanistic intercultural pedagogy that examines the interests and forces that mobilize culture, students might read, for example, selections from Edward Said’s *Orientalism*, to learn how Western scholars have studied their Others to better administer the European colonies. Here students could be encouraged to draw interesting parallels between imperialistic Orientalist scholarship and intercultural communication research and pedagogies. Also, both Aronowitz and Munshee and McKie recommend that
students read Albert Memmi’s *The Colonizer and the Colonized* to better understand the
globalizing colonial influences on the postcolonial world.

In addition to these suggestions, I recommend Frantz Fanon’s “On National Culture,”
from *The Wretched of the Earth*, which discusses colonialism in north Africa and presents a
vivid account of culture as it is mobilized in anti-colonial nationalist movements. This
selection would provide an opportunity to discuss how national culture was actually
produced while it was being “rediscovered” in nationalizing populations. Also, Appadurai’s
influential essay, “Disjunction and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy,” would give
students a framework for understanding the influences of globalization on the construction
and mobilization of culture. Instructors can add other texts along these lines, depending on
the needs of the course and the institution. To supplement or replace some texts, moreover,
film would work well to explain the global influences that help construct culture. For
example, Werner Volkmer’s *The Bomb Under the World* illustrates in sharp relief the effects
of globalization on a small Indian village that had thought itself removed from the dynamic
tensions of the globalizing world. Ethnoscapes, finanscapes, and technoscapes intersect as a
specifically Western standard of living imposes itself on the village.

Film might often work more effectively to engage students in this aspect of the
pedagogy because, admittedly, students may have difficulty reading primary texts, which
tend to be dense for undergraduates accustomed to textbooks. Aronowitz testifies that
students will have to work to make meaning, sometimes by reading paragraph by paragraph
in class, or with extra help to those students who need it (192). However, texts that
interrogate the body of knowledge in the technical communication textbooks from a critical
point of view allow students to experience the controversies over intercultural knowledge
making, rather than merely the dominant products of the debate from the textbooks' point of view (188). By being exposed to intellectual debate, students may then see possibilities for developing their own perspectives on intercultural relationships, based on contentious dialogue between the textbooks and the supplementary humanistic texts. Such a critical skill becomes central as students graduate into the infinitely complex, globalizing world, where they will face the unpredictable challenges that a globalizing world provides.

In short, what I want for a humanistic intercultural pedagogy is a way for technical communication students to learn to interact with other cultures in humanistic terms rather than purely instrumental ones. A humanistic intercultural pedagogy should shift the purpose of intercultural training from packaging and use of the concept of culture to critically understanding intercultural relationships. Ideally, a humanistic intercultural pedagogy also marries the “practical” and the humanistic, giving the humanistic a grounding while giving the instrumental a critical, substantive basis.

**Institutional Challenges to a Humanistic Pedagogy**

In this chapter, I have suggested ways in which the intercultural pedagogies might be revised to consider the influences of globalization on the construction and mobilization of culture, basing the intercultural pedagogies in critical humanistic values. But in this section, I must consider difficulties that might hinder instructors who implement a more humanistic intercultural pedagogy in their classrooms. Such obstacles represent a pressing concern because today’s academic environment, Aronowitz observes, tends to shortchange instrumentally “useless” but culturally significant knowledge, such as that produced in the humanities (173). As Andrew Wernick explains, “universities have been induced through
public underfunding to privatize their costs and adopt a more businesslike and entrepreneurial approach” over the last 20 years (158). The result, argues Masao Miyoshi, is that the university, “at times capable of independent criticism of corporate and state policies” before the Reagan-Bush era, now finds itself “increasingly less concerned with maintaining such a neutral position” (263). What challenges the instrumental corporate dominance of education, in other words, tends to face tremendous difficulty. In this closing section, I will ask how such challenges to a critical education might confront a humanistic intercultural pedagogy in the technical communication classroom.

It is no surprise to anyone teaching in academe today that a critical pedagogy, which students must often struggle to grasp, is difficult to convey in the classroom. The problems facing higher education in the third millennium stem from the corporate atmosphere that stifles critical learning, as well as from student apathy toward anything that is not immediately instrumental. As Aronowitz notes, little “evidence of real learning [is] taking place at most postsecondary institutions, if by that we mean the process by which a student is motivated to participate in, even challenge, established intellectual authority” (143).

The focus of education is instead on skills training, which seems to have become the accepted raison d’etre for the university in American popular consciousness (Aronowitz 139). Thus in his 2004 State of the Union Address, George W. Bush was able to argue unflinchingly that American universities and community colleges could “ensure that older students and adults can gain the skills they need to find work now,” in other words, to combat outsourcing. “Many of the fastest-growing occupations require strong math and science preparation,” Bush observed, “and training beyond the high school level.” This trend in the university toward “training” can be extended to the general university student
population as well. Aronowitz argues that "the academic system as a whole is caught in a market logic that demands students to be job-ready upon graduation" (158). This vocational focus seems to pervade every level of the university, from general freshman courses to more specialized courses in the various disciplines. What amplifies the problem is that many students, both returning students and "traditional" ones, must work while in school, and almost every student attends the university in anticipation of work. Students thus have little time or incentive to consider education as anything more than a venue for acquiring credentials (Aronowitz 159-60), or academic "tokens" that Wernick calls students' "promotional capital" (168).

With the university experience thus reduced to training and certification, critical or culturally relevant skills that will not directly land the student a secure, well-paying job become less capable of holding student interest. Economic interest, in other words, often dictates student responsiveness to pedagogy or course materials. Students instead spend much of their time "trying to decipher the professor's moral and intellectual code in order to give her what she wants to read or hear" (142), Aronowitz claims. Wernick agrees, noting that being a "good student" is "a matter of constructed appearance, albeit one which is haunted...by the anxiety of being revealed as a fraud" (167). Moreover, students may grow impatient with courses and materials for which they see no instrumental application. Miyoshi argues that students tend to resist university courses that do not guarantee job placement upon graduation, or ones that divert attention from basic job skills for one reason or another (266).

It seems likely, therefore, that some students may confront a critical, humanistic intercultural pedagogy with apathy or even resistance, questioning the "relevance" of such a
pedagogy to the "real world," or barely jumping through the classroom hoops that the
instructor puts before the student. What does fostering a deeper, more critical understanding
of the ways cultural differences are constructed, after all, have to do with understanding the
ways cultural differences "hinder" or "confuse" intercultural communication? Unfortunately,
students may be slow to recognize the latent "practical" value, in Miller's high sense of the
word, of a humanistic approach to intercultural technical communication. And students might
refuse to understand or accept the importance of a flexible, humanistic education in the
constant flux of the globalizing world, or at least accept humanism enough to read difficult
primary texts in the technical communication classroom.

However, Aronowitz claims that in his experience propagating a critical, humanistic
curriculum to university students, a committed instructor clearly explaining the value of a
critical pedagogy can teach students to recognize the importance of critical learning. The
instructor may need to try different ways to connect to students and "light a fire in their
bellies," but no student is beyond the reach of a good instructor (193). Any student, in other
words, should be able to find some relevant connection to the irreducibly heterogeneous,
disjunctive, and moving influences that shape culture in the globalizing world.
Appendix: Textbooks Consulted in Chapter 1 Survey

**Technical Communication**


**Business Communication**


**Intercultural Business or Technical Communication**


Works Cited


