I have always believed and taught my graduate students that history's purpose lay in what it can tell us about the present and the future. Not only must a writer's historical research be thorough, but knowledge of modern theory and practice must also be thorough in any attempt to put the two together. Hawhee's knowledge of the *Harbrace* is based almost entirely on the early editions. Hodges is history, but the *Harbrace Handbook* is very much alive. It never purported to “inform and shape” the discipline. On the other hand, it has always been “informed and shaped” by the discipline—the changes in practice and theory in the teaching of composition, the ongoing changes in the language, the advent of technology, and the important shifts in the nature of the student population.

Notes

1. Note the aversion and real anger to the recent change in the generic “he.” Also, instructors “hate” the use of “alot,” which though not accepted yet is undergoing the same change that “along” and “awhile” have already gone through.

2. For a major journal such as *College Composition and Communication*, there is a lag between the acceptance of an article and the time it appears in print. Production takes time. The publication of the thirteenth edition, however, was easily predicted by anyone even slightly familiar with the history of the *Harbrace Handbook*. A 1999 article on the *Harbrace College Handbook* that fails to consider an edition that appeared in 1997 with a copyright date of 1998 seems unforgiveably out of date.

3. Hawhee constantly speaks of “rules,” a term that the *Harbrace* has for the most part abandoned in favor of the more acceptable and correct term, “convention.”

Regarding History

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It seems my article hit a nerve or two, as evidenced by the intensity of replies it has elicited from Win Horner, Tom Broadbent, and John Bell. All three of the re-
spondents, it should be noted, have specific investments in the *Harbrace*
(Horner, a co-author, and Broadbent, a former editor) or handbooks in general
(in the case of Bell). But even more intriguing than any of the professional
investments and more compelling than Horner's and Broadbent's displeasures
with my article are the trajectories of all three responses, the general assum-
ptions that drive the specific interventions. At stake in these responses are issues
central to our discipline and therefore worth examining: the use of history—
specifically the relation between a history of institutional practices and con-
temporary practices, the effects of certain reading styles, and the objective of
composition classes.

"A usable past"

A major assumption of “Composition History and *The Harbrace College
Handbook*”—indeed, of both 50th anniversary issues—is that history has a use,
that past practices have in some way helped produce present practices. Given
the nature and purpose of the special issue, I took this claim to be axiomatic and
didn’t feel obligated to elaborate on it. Instead, the article mentions the kinds of
history I find most useful and therefore wrote: those that “critically examine
conditions that produce the institutional practices of composition instruction
in American universities” (504). Bound up with this historiographical approach
are assumptions about how power moves through institutions, practices, bod-
ies, and culture and the way in which micro-training practices—practices as
seemingly small as instructional tactics, textbook use, and paper-grading tech-
niques—facilitate the movement of power. For this approach to the past I am
indebted to Michel Foucault, who writes what he calls “effective histories,” his-
tories interested in emergence or in the disruption of continuous narratives.
Such histories are concerned with the delineation of cultural forces and their ef-
effects (Foucault 1977).²

But as the responses by Win Horner and Tom Broadbent make clear, his-
tory can be sliced in multiple ways; various functions and styles of history can
get mobilized for a variety of purposes. One compelling trait of Horner’s and
Broadbent’s approaches to history is the way both separate history from the
present. Horner’s response distinguishes the article’s historical work from the
“application of that material to modern editions of the *Harbrace Handbook*”
(653). She then goes on to critique the sources as badly outdated, when in fact,
my article’s use of early editions constitutes precisely the historical work she
claims to be valuable.³ It is this separation of past and present that brings
Horner to her final claim: "Hodges is history but the *Harbrace Handbook* is very
much alive. It never purported to 'inform and shape' the discipline" (654). Here, Horner continues the separation of history from the present by relegating John Hodges to the past, by discursively attempting to wrest the book from his hand. But more striking is Horner's related and necessary claim about the handbook's role in shaping the discipline, a claim that works at cross-purposes with her invocation of the handbook's tradition: "Because of its long and highly successful history the Harbrace Handbook has been the most imitated book in the discipline. It appeals to a wide population of students and instructors and continues to serve them exceedingly well" (653). While Horner asserts that the Harbrace "continues to serve" students and instructors, I would add that in doing so, the book continues to produce students and instructors in particular ways, to "inform and shape" the discipline and its attendant disciplinary practices. Salient in Horner's separation of history from the present is a tension between tradition and "progress." That is, Horner articulates precisely the assumption that my article seeks to interrogate and account for. In other words, my history seeks to answer the question: What is it about the Harbrace that has made it so successful for so long?

The way my archival study led me to answer this question is obviously different from the way Horner and Broadbent would answer it. While my study places a good deal of emphasis on the Harbrace as a system of pedagogy with an inherent and abiding logical structure, Horner and Broadbent emphasize the changes in content—the revised conventions. In this regard, Horner's and Broadbent's responses certainly suggest opportunities for future research. My article simply could not deal with the potential effects of the revised editions. Nevertheless, the tension between "tradition" and emergent conventions, a tension that produces contradictory claims in Broadbent's and Horner's responses, is indeed a compelling one that deserves more scholarly attention.

Take, for example, the Preface of the thirteenth edition, which details significant revisions, the most notable of which reflect a "commitment to writing as a process" (vii). In other words, Harbrace editors have added process-oriented materials that focus on planning, drafting, and revising. Yet the end of the preface reassures the book's users that the current-traditional function still inheres:

Although it has been reorganized, Harbrace remains a handbook first and a rhetoric second. Within each division, most chapters are still located next to chapters that previously neighbored them. We have tried to change existing chapter titles and subtitles as little as possible. And while we have made the book eas-
iер to teach and easier to consult, we have not compromised its well-established integrity. (13th edition ix)

Apparent in this paragraph is a struggle between the old and the new—the demand to be on the “cutting edge” and a powerful nostalgia for the familiar, tried-and-true structure of the book. This paragraph promotes the very “selling points” Hodges elaborated in 1966, while at the same time attempting to accommodate emerging trends in writing pedagogy. The negotiation of this tension is something I’m sure Broadbent, Horner, and other Harbrace editors have grappled with along the way. Their responses to my article suggest that these chapters of Harbrace history need be written as well. How, for example, does the Harbrace cater to the habits of instruction and paper grading it produced with past editions? How do transformations in content within a relatively stable structure alter the habits and practices of students and teachers? What kinds of subjectivities emerge in relation to these changes?

The separation of history from the present is much more blatant in Broadbent’s response, which all but dismisses history as a useful category for analysis. Nearly all of Broadbent’s charges of “untruth” are aimed at my examination of past editions of the Harbrace with the major assumption that I’m using the evidence solely to critique current editions of the Harbrace. It seems that Broadbent takes the article’s early claim about “the relative fixity of The Harbrace’s structure” (505) to mean that what I examined in the earlier editions is “representative” of the latest, revised version of Harbrace. Nevertheless, my claims about the second edition are really about the second edition, so I’m not sure how his use of the tenth edition disproves my specific claims. In other words, if one buys Broadbent’s assumption that conditions of emergence are irrelevant, then one need not read the rest of his response, or my article for that matter.

All of Broadbent’s points, and many of Horner’s, while written as “corrections,” function instead as interesting supplements to the history of the book’s production—they tell another phase of the story not told by the Hodges archive (for obvious reasons). The archive, rather, enables a treatment of the conditions of emergence and production of the early Harbrace, which were the forces at work during the time when Hodges established the logic and structure of the book. My use of earlier editions enables a treatment of subject production along the way—the manner in which student subjects have gotten produced through the book’s major assumptions about writing, which are manifest most strongly in its tone and structure.
Styles of reading
The assumptions about history’s uses emerge, at least in Broadbent’s and Horner’s responses, in conjunction with a particular reading style. This style, endemic to scholarly work, reads for what is not in a piece rather than engaging what is. Interestingly enough, this style of reading is precisely the kind of approach encouraged by current-traditional rhetoric and the early editions of the Harbrace as examined in my article. As “Composition History...” suggests, a focus on grammatical correctness encouraged by the handbook system produces student writing as a lack-based phenomenon wherein the teacher finds and marks errors and the student consults the handbook for advice on how to correct these errors (see, in particular, the article section entitled “Bodies that Lack: The Construction of Student Subjectivity,” 516–22; see also Miller 84–120). This kind of reading style focuses on error—what the student has not done.

Similarly, Broadbent’s and Horner’s responses focus on what my article “lacks”: an attention to revision efforts after Hodges’ death. In effect, Broadbent and Horner seem to be upset because their roles in the production/alteration of the Harbrace go unaccounted for in my article. There are, of course, differences between the focus on grammatical errors and “historiographical errors,” but the style of reading is strikingly similar insofar as it places identities at stake and discourages what John Muckelbauer has called “productive reading”—an approach that reads the piece seriously and respectfully for what it is trying to do, where it is trying to go, rather than a reading that seeks to confirm what one already knows. What productive reading does not mean, however, is a “kinder, gentler,” more affirmative reading. John Bell’s response contains elements of productive reading. Bell seeks to complicate the article’s treatment of first-year composition by engaging its work—its underlying assumptions—and raising practical concerns in response. This set of responses therefore raises questions about the practice of academic criticism similar to those they raise about historiography: Does academic critique serve to “set the record straight” more than it offers a forum for productive engagement? What are the effects of a lack-based model of reading? How do notions of identity get negotiated through our reading practices?

The work of composition
At stake in Bell’s response are questions of what I’ll call the “work” of composition. The term “work” here cuts two ways. First, Bell’s response raises issues regarding the function of composition or what function training in composi-
tion is supposed to serve for students. As Bell indicates, the handbook’s role in first-year composition courses has altered over the years; as such, his response is a useful elaboration of my article’s too-brief point: “Current-traditional pedagogy is still current, though it has taken on the force of an under-current” (521–22). Early in its reign, the Harbrace likely did serve as the primary textbook in many composition classes, and as recently as 1989, my first year in college, it was the sole textbook in at least some classes. Still, the trend now, as Bell suggests, is for teachers to use a rhetoric textbook along with a handbook. This trend is marked by a savvy new marketing technique: the Harbrace can be shrink-wrapped to a reader or rhetoric of the teacher’s choice and made available to students as a package. Bell’s compelling account of his own relationship to handbooks, “While I favor my liberal reader/rhetoric, a book for my right hand, I have always wanted my English handbook in my left” (650), suggests that handbooks have moved from the center of the writing classroom to the margin, but they still sell for precisely the reason Bell elaborates: a primary task of the composition classroom is to school students in standards of grammatical correctness. This assumption, as many composition scholars have pointed out, has rendered composition a service industry for the rest of the university and the workplace (Berlin, Connors, Crowley, Miller).

Bell’s right-hand/left-hand metaphor also separates strategy, the domain of the rhetoric text, from mechanics, the domain of the handbook. For Bell, the handbook remains a necessary component of the work of composition, as it serves to maintain what Bell calls “standards.” Bell’s discussion of standards assumes that the category of “standards” is a commonly accepted and revered category of evaluation. Just a glance at Geneva Smitherman’s piece on language rights in the 50th anniversary issue of CCC (349–76) reveals that this is not the case. Tracking the long history of usage debates among linguists and compositionists, a struggle that is ongoing (374), Smitherman’s article suggests that “standards” are not as straightforward as Bell would have them.

The service industry ideology underlying Bell’s response is tightly bound to the second kind of “work” important for composition studies—the material and intellectual labor conditions of composition teachers. Bell’s claim that the need for standards is heightened by the increasing reliance on adjunct faculty completes the recursive loop: a service industry ideology helps produce the very “teaching situation”—the increased use of adjunct faculty and the concomitant “flux” in the profession—that Bell uses to valorize the stability offered by handbooks. Perhaps such working conditions should be interrogated and acted on rather than offered as a justification for handbook use.
So . . .

In raising objections to “Composition History and *The Harbrace College Handbook*,” Horner, Broadbent, and Bell all put forth a cluster of hardened assumptions about the work of history, academic criticism, and composition studies. These assumptions—that there is necessarily a right way to do history, to critique each other, to teach our students—are deeply ingrained in our values, beliefs, and practices, so habituated as to be naturalized and rendered unquestionable. It is incumbent upon composition workers to cultivate an analytic stance, to develop the capacity to diagnose such habits and their effects in order to be able to alter them.

Notes

1. Also quoted in Jennifer Terry’s “Theorizing Deviant Historiography.”

2. For an excellent discussion of the usefulness of Foucault’s “effective history,” see Terry, pages 55–58.

3. Here I’d like to briefly describe my own article’s conditions of emergence and publication, which may address many of Horner’s and Broadbent’s charges about sources. As Horner notes in her response (footnote 2), there is generally a lag in time to publication. With the special 50th anniversary edition of *CCC*, however, lag time was increased, for the articles went through a proposal phase as well. Probably because of the attendant constraints of a special issue, the deadline for final drafts preceded the issue’s publication by several months. The thirteenth edition of the *Harbrace* was therefore not available to me either at the time of composition (1995) or during my revision phase (summer/early fall 1997). I will, however, consider the thirteenth edition in this response with apologies to Mr. Broadbent that I cannot consult the “more rhetorical” fourteenth edition, which is scheduled for publication in summer 2000.

4. While I don’t have the space here to produce a close analysis of the later editions and the effects of interweaving process-oriented material with current-traditional material, I recommend Sharon Crowley’s chapter (“Around 1971”) in her book *Composition in the University* on this very topic. She suggests that process pedagogy and current-traditional rhetoric don’t work at cross-purposes at all; in fact, they work together. As Crowley writes, “the two pedagogies are not antithetical but complementary” (191). Indeed, process pedagogy facilitates a continued reliance on handbooks. Such an argument, supported by Bell’s response, undermines Horner’s and Broadbent’s suggestions that the *Harbrace* revisions are all that transformative.

5. This theoretical claim about scholarly writing comes out of conversations with John Muckelbauer, who has formulated a “lack theory” of academic prose. This the-
ory, described here, is elaborated in his article, "On Reading Differently: Through Foucault's Resistance," which is forthcoming in the September 2000 College English.

6. Of course such a focus happens in degrees, and as John Bell's response indicates, this "grammar cop" function of composition instructor seems non-negotiable to most. I will interrogate this problematic in my response's last section.

7. For example, my article begs for scrutiny of its mobilization of Foucault as a kind of ideological critic, which he is not.

8. In 1996 I attempted to assess the handbook's role in composition courses by interviewing instructors at CCCC, and the results, while varied, indicated that many instructors, contrary to Bell's claim, still use the handbook as a central text in their first-year courses. The data, however schematic and anecdotal, are still suggestive. The common sentiment, as Bell suggests, however, seems to be that most "enlightened" instructors use a reader or rhetoric, with the handbook as a supplementary text, if at all. The question calls for more thorough empirico-historical research about text use, historical and contemporary. For an early example of such work, see Wozniak.

9. Of course such interrogation is ongoing; Sharon Crowley, Susan Miller, Robert Connors, and Jim Berlin all write compellingly about labor issues in composition studies. For a fascinating study of labor division in English departments, see also Evan Watkins' Work Time.

Works Cited


