Power and Legitimacy in Technical Communication

Volume I: The Historical and Contemporary Struggle for Professional Status

Edited by

Teresa Kynell-Hunt
Northern Michigan University

Gerald J. Savage
Illinois State University

Baywood's Technical Communications Series
Series Editor: CHARLES H. SIDES

Baywood Publishing Company, Inc.
AMITYVILLE, NEW YORK

CHAPTER 9

The Technical Communicator as Author? A Critical Postscript

Jennifer Daryl Slack

When we wrote "The Technical Communicator as Author" [1] we had in mind a very specific task: to see what might be learned about technical communication by overlaying arguments about the different approaches to meaning that were then widely discussed in the field of communication. We called these approaches transmission, translation, and articulation; and we argued for the recognition of technical communicators as authors, that is, as contributing to the articulation and rearticulation of meaning. As theory in communication and cultural studies has developed, articulation theory has been further explored (see, for example, [2, pp. 37-67; 3, pp. 145-173; 4]); but more important, alternative ways of understanding identity and agency are being developed that bring to light some of the limitations of our strategy in the "The Technical Communicator as Author."

I still believe that the fundamental insight of "The Technical Communicator as Author" is the assertion that technical communicators, *whether it is acknowledged or not,* contribute to the articulation of meaning and are thus implicated in relations of power and authority. We put it this way:

> Whether they desire it or not, technical communicators are seen as variously adding, deleting, changing, and selecting meaning. Again, whether they desire it or not, they are always implicated in relations of power. Their work is at least complicit in the production, reproduction, or subversion of power. This is necessarily the case, even when the acceptance of the transmission or translation view may

> occlude the nature of the work that they do. Technical communicators are authors, even when they comply with the rules of discourse that deny them that recognition [1, p. 31 in original].

By approaching the matter as a problem of the identity of the technical communicator (as either author or not), we inadvertently contributed to the belief that bestowing the label "author" to the technical communicator offers a sort of magical solution to the conundrum of their status. We deflected attention away from a deeper understanding of the technical communicator when we failed to fully address a more revealing question: Does it matter *necessarily* if the technical communicator is recognized as an author? Or, to put it another way: Does recognition of authorship offer assurances of autonomy, authority, and social responsibility? The answer is "of course not." To explore the reasons "why not," opens up a different, more generative, set of concepts to think with, a more helpful way to understand, *though not resolve*, the complex work and status of the technical communicator. Furthermore, the implications for the significance of the label "author" apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to the attribution of the technical communicator as "professional."

We contended that to send technical communicators out with the knowledge of their authorial role is "to send them out armed" [1, p. 33 in original]. I have come to doubt that the assertion of authorship in the workplace is either as possible or, even if successful, as effective as we seem to imply. Two levels of critique seem to be in order. The first addresses the forces operating against achieving the status of either "author" or "professional" in the workplace. The second addresses the limitations of identity categories such as author or professional in taking us very far down the road to understanding or reconfiguring the work of technical communicators in ways that emphasize socially responsible practice. This critical postscript explores these two levels of critique and points toward an alternative way of approaching the problem of the relationship between technical communicators, technical communication, and socially responsible practice.

AN UNFAIR BURDEN

Authorship and the status of professional are to some degree unfair burdens to insist on—given the real work demanded of technical communication in the workplace, where it is often nothing more than, as Cezar Ornatowski puts it, "the rhetorical instrument of organizational-bureaucratic rationality" [5, p. 101]. In reviewing the social position of the technical communicator, Gerald Savage, for example, concludes that "It is difficult, from a pragmatic standpoint, to hold technical communicators

morally responsible for the social consequences of their texts when they produce such texts from relatively powerless positions within organizational hierarchies" [6, p. 324].

True enough. But does it make sense to conclude from observations like those of Ornatowski and Savage that technical communicators are mere dupes of the systems that employ them and thus totally without complicity or perhaps even culpability in any and every work situation? Again, of course not. "I was only following orders" is a dubious defense, as unacceptable as the equally preposterous position that "I am in complete control." To conceive of the choice as a binary one is to insist on occupying one of two equally unacceptable conceptions of human agency: on the one hand, that an autonomous humanist subject is in complete control of their choices and actions; on the other hand, that the human is completely subjected and thus merely acts out the choices and actions that are imposed by the structures within which they find themselves. There are, of course, ways to traverse the gray areas of the middle ground, where one is understood to be variously caught up in bureaucratic assemblages with varying degrees of latitude to make socially responsible decisions. To understand the middle ground is precisely the reason we recommended (and I would still recommend) education in ethics and in organizational communication. It is far more reasonable to expect that something we might call socially responsible decision practice will take place somewhere in that middle ground.

For the sake of my somewhat limited intervention here, I enter the middle ground via a distinction that simplifies the problem in some ways and makes it more complex in other ways: the distinction between the *technical communicator*, as a contingent identity, and *technical communication*, as a contingent identity. These are, in a very real sense, two different identities. The identity, "technical communicator," is a subject position, occupied by a certain kind of *human subject*, who, among other activities, engages in the practice of technical communication. The identity, "technical communication," is a particular kind of *activity* that can be undertaken by different kinds of subjects. Despite their differences, both are *contingent* identities. That is, they have no necessary, essentially fixed nature. Their meanings can change, illustrating what in cultural studies we call the "sliding of the signifier," which asserts that the relationship between the signifier (a term for example) and the signified (what the term means) can change. Calling something a particular name does not guarantee that it signifies anything in particular. It must be made to mean.

What *is* a technical communicator? And what is technical communication? That depends. Their meanings are always fragmented and multiple, evolving and changing. Their identities, their signifiers, *appear* to

represent a coherent and unified referent, but in actuality, their identities are never unified or fixed. There are multiple meanings of the technical communicator and technical communication operating in job descriptions, job expectations, academic descriptions, everyday practice, and even in the sense of one's self. To be a technical communicator, to practice technical communication, is to be fragmented (like any other identity) living out fragmented, contested, identities. Further, the configuration of these multiple, fragmented identities evolve and change in both intended and unintended ways. Meanings change as the result of the efforts and work of academics, employers, and people who call themselves technical communicators. Meanings change as the nature of the conjuncture within which the work is undertaken changes. All these efforts and occurrences work together (and against each other) to make technical communicator and technical communication mean in particular configurations of meaning. No matter how much people may want to fix (hold in place, settle at last, resolve the fragments, unify the multiplicity) these identities are not likely to be ever fixed for long or more than locally, not given their tenacious identification with the politically potent task of transmitting, translating and articulating knowledge from one arena to another.

However, the desire to explore, shape (and even try to fix) the meanings of technical communicator and technical communication is no mere academic exercise. It matters what you call something. However—and this is an important corrective to "The Technical Communicator as Author"—it might not matter, it does not necessarily matter, and it might not matter very much. What matters is less what something "means" than what it is possible to do with and to that identity. That is the point I wish to demonstrate by problematizing claims for authorship and professionalism.

In "The Technical Communicator as Author" we implied that technical communicators could improve their status and ability to work in a socially responsible manner by insisting on their status as authors. Since we wrote the chapter, I have heard from many technical communicators who have done just that. The trouble is, they report, it didn't have much effect. Why not? The difficulty of asserting authorship (or professionalism) is, as I see it, less a problem for technical communicators who may wish to be authors, accept responsibility, and struggle for authority. Rather the difficulty is more with technical communication, the practice itself, the meanings of it that have developed in the workplace and, though perhaps to a lesser degree, in the academy, where it is powerfully articulated to transmission and translation. In a sense it does not necessarily matter in the workplace that technical communication *is* complicit in the articulation of meaning. If the fact is effectively denied in the structure and location of the practice of technical communication,

technical communicators are reduced to defining themselves and their practice in relation to that practice. When technical communicators struggle against that dominant tendency, they are most likely aligned with one of two positions: 1) redefining what is meant by technical communication, and 2) redefining the technical communicator.

The first path of resistance is to change what it means to practice technical communication, and there clearly are technical communicators trying to do this. However, to work to change what is meant by technical communication suggests running counter to the expectations of employers. Given those expectations, the calls for educating people about what technical communication "is" make sense, especially if you understand that explaining what it "is" is really striving to change it by convincing all relevant parties of what it "could be" or "ought to be." In addition, the power of the persistent—unenlightened—expectations of technical communication as transmission and translation underlies the reasons for Savage's suggestion to move technical communication to "alternative sites of practice" [6, p. 324], where technical communicators would work more like consultants than employees, "for clients, rather than employers" [7, p. 365]. Savage's hope is that by changing the site of the practice technical communicators will have more freedom to act authorially or professionally. However, changing the site would not necessarily change employee expectations or the work to be done. As long as, and to the extent that, the need for technical communication—*qua* transmission and translation—dominates, even consultants would be expected to produce the same sorts of products as in-house employees. The work still needs to be done, the manuals and documentation still need to be written, and few employers want anything other than skilled transmission or translation. Savage's suggestion—ironically—might find enthusiastic support from employers, for the work of technical communication can now be outsourced, thereby actually reducing the status of technical communicators to being something less than valuable employees worth providing with continued employment and benefits!

The second path of resistance is to call the work something else; this practice takes both intentional and unintentional forms. For example, I know someone who was once a technical communicator who has redefined her work as "public policy" in a conscious act of reinventing her status, power, and authority. This "solution" is certainly a problematic one for maintaining the identity and education of technical communicators. If and when some other practice is defined as doing the "socially responsible" work of public policy, authorship, etc., why ask technical communicators to do more than transmit and translate superbly? And why train them to do more than they are expected to do? As a solution, this strategy might work against the very institutions (the academy for

example) and organizations (professional organizations for example) that are trying to make something more—not less—of technical communication.

But an even more revealing aspect of the strategy to call technical communicators something else (in this case, something very limited and specific) is the less intentional practice of variously linking or de-linking technical communicators and technical communication. Technical communicators practice technical communication, but much of what we understand to be the practice of technical communication goes on under the aegis of other labels: grant writing, job hunting, everyday memo writing, brochure designing, etc. This has the rather odd effect of coding the significant site of technical communication as the places where there are subjects called technical communicators and delegitimizing the practice of technical communication undertaken at any other site. This, it seems to me, is because the identity "technical communicator" is being institutionally limited to refer to those individuals whose work is defined by a particular kind of work relationship: a (for the most part) corporate relationship that demands the practice of technical communication as nothing more than transmission and translation. Consequently, a whole range of technical communication practices that a much wider range of people engage in, a range of practices that involve transmitting, translating and articulating knowledge as it flows from one arena to another, is delinked (or disarticulated) from the identity of technical communicators and thus from the shape of the education, expectations, and, overall, the identity of technical communicators. This has serious implications for the evolving meanings and practice of technical communicator and technical communication.

For example, the widespread distinction made in the field of technical communication between "ivory tower" academics and "real world" technical communicators is often used to delegitimize arguments made by academics. But the daily work life of an academic demands the ongoing production of an enormous burden of technical communication! My life as an academic is as much the real world of technical communication as is that of any (other) corporate employee. If I, for example, am not a technical communicator, then what I teach about the transmission, translation, and articulation of meaning from one arena to another need not be part of the practice and training of technical communicators. Indeed, such crucial matters as the role and power of discourse on technology, the workings of organizations, the structure of bureaucracy, the process of hegemony, the development of interpersonal and group communication skills, etc., can be (are in fact) relegated to play side-bar roles in the practice and education of technical communicators. The current environment is, to put it quite directly, decidedly unsupportive of

nurturing the development of technical communication as a practice that fully explores the question of socially responsible flows of communication. By designing the education of technical communicators in the restricted image and likeness of the corporate model of transmission and translation, possibilities for exploring the much larger process of articulating knowledge from one arena to another are closed down.

This is indeed a conundrum. While I greatly respect the work of technical communication and engage in it regularly, I would not choose to *be* a technical communicator; it is too confining an identity. And while I honor the work of technical communicators as contributing significantly to the articulation of meaning, whether acknowledged or not by their employers, I do not envy their status or position. And truly, I do not think that the "arms" that we offered them by explaining the fact of their complicity are sufficient to guide them through the difficult kinds of ethical challenges they might well face on the job. The identity of technical communication is simply too powerfully tied to corporate interest in (nothing but) transmission and translation. Efforts at resisting will be shaped and thwarted in the thousands of big and little ways that organizations have at their disposal. To understand the mechanisms that work to "discipline" technical communicators, I would now add to the list of "things technical communicators need to study" an understanding of the process of hegemony, by which I mean the articulation of interests such that something that looks like, but might not feel like, consent is forged (for an excellent introduction to the concept of hegemony see Hall, [8]). The process of hegemony suggests that successes are likely to be local and particular. In saying this I do not intend to be discouraging, only more realistic than I believe we were in so enthusiastically urging technical communicators to take up arms. But, I do not wish to convey an entirely pessimistic approach either. There is, I believe, a more generative approach to thinking about the practice of technical communication. I introduce this approach by working through the second level of critique: the inadequacy of identity categories, such as author or professional, as the focus of inquiry in the first place.

REARTICULATING IDENTITY

Identity matters: both more than and less than we might expect. The call to assume authorship, to be a professional, or even just to be a technical communicator holds out promise that expertise will be acknowledged and respected, that a degree of autonomy is extended, and that socially responsible practice can be a part of the work environment. But there are no guarantees.

That identity can be a rallying cry, an organizing tool, a powerful site for political organization is indisputable. In fact, it may be impossible to assert a politics without claim to identity categories [9]. To claim authorship, to develop professional organizations, to insist on the status of consultant can serve to direct the education of technical communicators and it can serve to shape the sense of possibility for technical communicators in the workplace. To insist on being recognized as an author and a professional is a way of creating a self, a strategy, a story, and a community that can work to gain recognition for the claims of expertise, relative autonomy, and responsibility.

The trouble is that an identity does not in and of itself guarantee the realization of these possibilities, because identity is ultimately fictional, it is never fixed, and it is never entirely in one's control. All the technical communicators on the planet could agree that they are authors, but they might still be treated as transmitters or translators, and they might not be performing in a socially responsible way vis-à-vis users. Worse yet, all the employers on the planet might agree that technical communicators are authors but still treat them like transmitters or translators. Those employers might simply have rearticulated the meaning of author to something that suits their interests rather than those of the technical communicator. In this case, to continue to resist their reduction to an unacceptable identity, technical communicators would be forced to argue about what authorship "really" means or claim to be something else yet again. But worst of all, everyone involved—employers, users, and technical communicators—might all agree that technical communicators are authors, and still the practice of socially responsible communication could be sidetracked. Further, because the meaning of author (or professional, or technical communicator) will vary from person to person, from group to group, and from time to time, the terrain of the discussion can (does) generate enormous confusion: people working at cross purposes, using the same words to mean different things, or using different words to mean the same things. Given the vicissitudes of identity, its slippery nature, it makes sense to shift away from prioritizing it. After all, it doesn't really matter if all you do is *call* someone an author or develop professional organizations and identifications. What matters is what those identities get you, what they allow you to do, what effects they have.

Drawing on the work of Gilles Deleuze in his work on Spinoza, what matters is not what a body *is* (for example, a technical communicator, an author, or a professional), but what a body can do and what can be done to a body, what Deleuze calls the "capacity for affecting and being affected" [10, p. 123]. To make sense of this formulation, one must understand first the meaning of "body" and second the meaning and significance of "relations of affect."

A body in this formulation may involve an organized mass of particles, as in the physical body of a "person, subject, thing, or substance" but it is much more significantly, "a mode of individuation" that consists "entirely of relations of movement and rest between molecules or particles" and "capacities to affect and be affected." Deleuze and Guattari term this sense of body "haecceity" [11, p. 261]. Because a body consists of relations and capacities to affect and be affected, it is inextricably connected with other bodies, other haecceities, other relations and affective capacities. Bodies are thus complex relations among heterogeneous elements, relations and capacities. They are assemblages in a constant process of *becoming* in these relations and capacities, not fixed identities.

Relations of affect are thus integral to the becoming of bodies. Bodies, as assemblages, "enter into composition with other affects, with the affects of another body, either to destroy that body or to be destroyed by it, either to exchange actions and passions with it or to join with it in composing a more powerful body" [11, p. 257]. As such, bodies mark particular capacities: they can have certain kinds of affects on other bodies and can be affected by them in certain ways; they can participate in (facilitate) the movement of certain kinds of flows and block certain kinds of flows. In so doing they enter into certain kinds of composition with other bodies.

To map the relations among bodies and their affective capacities we might develop a cartography of affect that would ask the following kinds of questions: What is put into motion? What is not? What can be done? What can't be done? What is facilitated? What is blocked? What affects can be generated? What affects are felt? In the encounters among bodies, what new bodies are composed or threatened?

We know nothing about the identities of bodies outside knowing these flows and affects. Identity matters here, but only as one element in the flows and blockages that constitute the movement of the assemblage. In mapping the flows, a cartography of affect might consider how particular identities are a result of, serve to make possible, and limit those capacities and affects. Thus identity—including the politics of identity—is part of the map, but only one (variably sized) part.

A CARTOGRAPHY OF AFFECT IN THE TECHCOM ASSEMBLAGE

To turn these insights to understanding technical communication and the technical communicator necessitates first recognizing that the body in question is not technical communication or the technical communicator as subject, an identity *per se* (as in a person in that position or in the nature of an established practice), but a *technical communication assemblage*, a "mode of individuation" made up of complex heterogeneous elements

characterized by various speeds and slownesses and by particular capacities to affect and be affected. I will call this the *techcom assemblage* to incorporate both the technical communicator and technical communication but likewise to differentiate the assemblage from both. Techcom marks the way that flows and affects are organized and distributed rather than designates an essential force behind those affects. The task is then to map those flows and affects, to construct a cartography of techcom.

How would we undertake this cartographic project? To understand the affective relations that constitute techcom, I suggest beginning with stories and ethnographies of what happens on the job. But the intent, I must again emphasize, is not to determine what a technical communicator *really* is, does, or ought to be or what technical communication *really* is, does, or ought to be. Rather, the intent is to map the flows and affects that matter and that account for what happens, what doesn't happen, what might happen, as well as for the composition of particular identities. Accounts such as Dorothy Winsor's "Owning Corporate Texts" [12] and Gerald Savage and Dale Sullivan's collected stories in *Writing A Professional Life* [13] provide excellent stories with which to begin. In spite of the fact that accounts such as these have goals that differ from what a cartography of affect is after, they reveal—in their telling—the flows and affects that matter. What matters is often what is assumed and unspoken, what is, in a sense, obvious. To illustrate, in the remainder of this chapter I begin to map a particular part of the network of affective relations that opens up new ways to understand techcom.

When I listen to or read accounts of technical communicators on the job I am struck by the significance of the interpenetration of two sets of affective relations in the techcom assemblage. Both sets of relations position techcom as integrally, and again significantly, responsible for engaging in what I call here " negotiating the affective terrain." The first set of affective relations involves the composition of a body positioned to facilitate the flow of information or communication between "expert" and "user." But the flow is imbalanced; and techcom is composed to negotiate the imbalance. The second set of affective relations involves the composition of a body positioned to function in a particular work environment. Here too, the flow of affect is imbalanced; and techcom must negotiate the imbalance. Working—negotiating—in the intersection of these imbalanced flows accounts for many of the limitations of techcom as well as some of its potentialities.

The first set of affective relations involves the composition of a body positioned to facilitate the flow of information or communication between "expert" and "user." Techcom marks a difference between expert and user as opposing poles in a communication process and posits a mediator

between them. At the most superficial level, techcom facilitates the flow of communication between expert and user. However, the flow is blocked by a variety of imbalances in affective capacities and flows. For the most part the flow is from expert to user; the direction of affect is largely unidirectional. Expert directs techcom to direct user. However, for techcom to successfully mediate, the position demands that the user (perhaps only indirectly) direct techcom to direct expert. To move the flow in this latter direction, techcom has to negotiate "upstream," against the flow as it were. In accounts of technical communicators on the job, this takes the form of tension between being directed by experts to communicate particular things in particular ways to users at the same time that technical communicators "stand in" for users and want to argue for what and how things ought to be communicated to users (see, for example, [14]). That "what and how" is often taken to be the purview of experts. Isn't that, after all, what expert means? And doesn't techcom itself posit the distinction between expert and non-expert?

This imbalance in the flow—an imbalance that favors the flow from expert to user and not visa versa—positions tech com as *having to negotiate* on behalf of the position of user (indeed, it composes a body of techcom/user in an inferior position) as well as on behalf of techcom. Again, stories told by technical communicators on the job are replete with accounts of negotiating on behalf of users to communicate what will be useful to them as well as negotiating their own status as "expert," "professional," "author," or "owner" of text (see, for example, Winsor [12]). This command to negotiate in the flow of information and communication is largely what composes techcom; just as techcom composes expert and user as the imbalanced ends of a largely one way process.

The second set of affective relations involves the composition of a body positioned to function in a particular work environment. Techcom is, at least in its predominant corporate form, an "adjunct" to the work of expert. Consequently techcom takes the form of (human) bodies hired by experts, companies, or employers. Again the flow of affect is imbalanced. Technical communicators on the job are *hired* rather than doing the *hiring* (except where a company of technical communicators hires an employee). What makes that significant is that the expert, company, or employer can hire and fire; the technical communicator does not hire but can be fired. The imbalance composes techcom as necessarily *negotiating* the legitimacy of its position. To put this bluntly, technical communicators on the job have to please the experts, company, or employer if they expect to keep their jobs. They are constantly put in the position of having to "prove themselves" and their worth. This command to negotiate is apparent in the accounts of technical communicators on the job. They have constantly to justify their expertise (sometimes in terms of asserting authorship),

characterized by various speeds and slownesses and by particular capacities to affect and be affected. I will call this the *techcom assemblage* to incorporate both the technical communicator and technical communication but likewise to differentiate the assemblage from both. Techcom marks the way that flows and affects are organized and distributed rather than designates an essential force behind those affects. The task is then to map those flows and affects, to construct a cartography of techcom.

How would we undertake this cartographic project? To understand the affective relations that constitute techcom, I suggest beginning with stories and ethnographies of what happens on the job. But the intent, I must again emphasize, is not to determine what a technical communicator *really* is, does, or ought to be or what technical communication *really* is, does, or ought to be. Rather, the intent is to map the flows and affects that matter and that account for what happens, what doesn't happen, what might happen, as well as for the composition of particular identities. Accounts such as Dorothy Winsor's "Owning Corporate Texts" [12] and Gerald Savage and Dale Sullivan's collected stories in *Writing A Professional Life* [13] provide excellent stories with which to begin. In spite of the fact that accounts such as these have goals that differ from what a cartography of affect is after, they reveal—in their telling—the flows and affects that matter. What matters is often what is assumed and unspoken, what is, in a sense, obvious. To illustrate, in the remainder of this chapter I begin to map a particular part of the network of affective relations that opens up new ways to understand techcom.

When I listen to or read accounts of technical communicators on the job I am struck by the significance of the interpenetration of two sets of affective relations in the techcom assemblage. Both sets of relations position techcom as integrally, and again significantly, responsible for engaging in what I call here " negotiating the affective terrain." The first set of affective relations involves the composition of a body positioned to facilitate the flow of information or communication between "expert" and "user." But the flow is imbalanced; and techcom is composed to negotiate the imbalance. The second set of affective relations involves the composition of a body positioned to function in a particular work environment. Here too, the flow of affect is imbalanced; and techcom must negotiate the imbalance. Working—negotiating—in the intersection of these imbalanced flows accounts for many of the limitations of techcom as well as some of its potentialities.

The first set of affective relations involves the composition of a body positioned to facilitate the flow of information or communication between "expert" and "user." Techcom marks a difference between expert and user as opposing poles in a communication process and posits a mediator

between them. At the most superficial level, techcom facilitates the flow of communication between expert and user. However, the flow is blocked by a variety of imbalances in affective capacities and flows. For the most part the flow is from expert to user; the direction of affect is largely unidirectional. Expert directs techcom to direct user. However, for techcom to successfully mediate, the position demands that the user (perhaps only indirectly) direct techcom to direct expert. To move the flow in this latter direction, techcom has to negotiate "upstream," against the flow as it were. In accounts of technical communicators on the job, this takes the form of tension between being directed by experts to communicate particular things in particular ways to users at the same time that technical communicators "stand in" for users and want to argue for what and how things ought to be communicated to users (see, for example, [14]). That "what and how" is often taken to be the purview of experts. Isn't that, after all, what expert means? And doesn't techcom itself posit the distinction between expert and non-expert?

This imbalance in the flow—an imbalance that favors the flow from expert to user and not visa versa—positions tech com as *having to negotiate* on behalf of the position of user (indeed, it composes a body of techcom/user in an inferior position) as well as on behalf of techcom. Again, stories told by technical communicators on the job are replete with accounts of negotiating on behalf of users to communicate what will be useful to them as well as negotiating their own status as "expert," "professional," "author," or "owner" of text (see, for example, Winsor [12]). This command to negotiate in the flow of information and communication is largely what composes techcom; just as techcom composes expert and user as the imbalanced ends of a largely one way process.

The second set of affective relations involves the composition of a body positioned to function in a particular work environment. Techcom is, at least in its predominant corporate form, an "adjunct" to the work of expert. Consequently techcom takes the form of (human) bodies hired by experts, companies, or employers. Again the flow of affect is imbalanced. Technical communicators on the job are *hired* rather than doing the *hiring* (except where a company of technical communicators hires an employee). What makes that significant is that the expert, company, or employer can hire and fire; the technical communicator does not hire but can be fired. The imbalance composes techcom as necessarily *negotiating* the legitimacy of its position. To put this bluntly, technical communicators on the job have to please the experts, company, or employer if they expect to keep their jobs. They are constantly put in the position of having to "prove themselves" and their worth. This command to negotiate is apparent in the accounts of technical communicators on the job. They have constantly to justify their expertise (sometimes in terms of asserting authorship),

meet unreasonable deadlines, adjust their work in response to changes made by experts, facilitate communication among conflicting factions, defend their expertise, capitulate or quit when challenged (see, for example, Jong [15]).

When these two regimes of affect come together, as they do so potently in the dominant, corporate assemblage of techcom, the composition of *techcom as negotiation* is rendered more salient. Techcom facilitates flows from expert to user, but must negotiate against that flow to perform its function of adequately representing the user. At the same time that techcom negotiates in and against that flow, it likewise must negotiate the imbalance in the affective relationship between employer and employee. A technical communicator on the job might, for example, draw conclusions that differ from that of expert, company, or employer, but the hierarchical structure within which the technical communicator works tends to block the flows of those alternative conclusions to the users—if, that is, the technical communicator hopes to keep their job, and unless the technical communicator can successfully negotiate an alternative.

The requirement to negotiate is made more difficult by the "lack" of expert knowledge that accompanies the identity technical communicator. If technical communicators were experts, they would be experts who were good communicators (not technical communicators) and would, presumably, hold different positions in the company hierarchy. Thus identified as not-expert and educated in techcom, technical communicators are composed in the unique position of having to negotiate in multiple ways "upstream," against the flow in order to succeed.

Sometimes it is clear that technical communicators on the job prioritize negotiating the hierarchy successfully over negotiating on behalf of the user. (If you lose your job, it is difficult to contribute in any way to the flow of communication between expert and user!) In these cases, being successful, in the sense of keeping one's job, works to block the flows from techcom/user that might give shape to the communication intended for the user. Very often the stories reveal that the expert, company, employer, or, as is sometimes the case, the legal department, enter into composition with the body of techcom such that the flow that could be facilitated by techcom is severely constricted, blocked in a sense (see, for example, Winsor [12]). Again, it is the responsibility of techcom to negotiate; it is the right of expert, company, employer, or legal department to agree or disagree, to hire and fire. This last point is revealing because the technical communicator could be fired whether the status was that of in-house employee or of contractual consultant. This fact suggests that the designation of "consultant" or "professional" and the training and ethos that accompanies that status would not necessarily

be accompanied by any significant difference in the affective capacity of techcom. Similarly, a technical communicator can resign from a position, but this blocks techcom's capacity to negotiate altogether and thus dramatically alters the flow from expert to user (especially if no other technical communicator fills that position).

Sometimes in these complex negotiations, particular technical communicators are successful is asserting authorship, making deadlines, facilitating communication, commanding respect, and so on. Interestingly techcom's composition as techcom-as-negotiation, the position that accounts for so many blockages, is the same composition that accounts for its ability to facilitate positive flows as well. That techcom is positioned *to negotiate* includes the possibility of success. Sometimes the stories of technical communicators speak of the composition of bodies that enhance a constructive, socially responsible flow of communication between expert and user (see, for example, Hile [16]). As I have suggested, these flows, are in a sense working "upstream," against the flow. But the fact that there are successes points to the very real possibilities (lines of flight in the terms of Deleuze and Guattari [11]) that can be generated from within even the most blocked flows.

The lesson that is revealed for technical communicators by these lines of flight is, to my thinking, that technical communicators need, apart from the more obvious technical skills (basic writing and speaking skills for example) a finely tuned sense of what it means to negotiate the affective terrain within which their discipline is composed. This certainly entails skill at interpersonal and group communication as well as conflict negotiation. But far more important, it entails an understanding of, and sensitivity to, the complex ways in which these interpenetrating regimes of affect position the challenges and possibilities within which they work.

This brief foray into the cartography of the affective terrain of techcom is just one way to read its flows, blockages and potentialities. I mean it to be generative: both as a flow that can be mapped further and as an example of how other flows might be mapped. As I suggested at the beginning of this critical postscript, by focusing on the affective capacities of techcom—such as the demand and capacity to negotiate—we may be able to develop a more helpful way to understand, *though not resolve*, the complex work and status of the technical communicator. I do not hold out promise that a focus on affective capacities will in any way settle the status of a technical communicator, but it can point to ways technical communicators can be better educated. Further, it can point to places in the practice of technical communication where the potential for lines of flight can contribute to supporting socially responsible flows of communication. I take *that* to be an exciting and generative possibility.

By focusing on flows and affects rather than identities, we can avoid at least some of the frustrations, dead ends, and talking at cross purposes that accompany arguments over essentialized identities in the ways that we understand technical communication and the technical communicator: What is technical communication? What is an author? Is a technical communicator an author? What is a professional? Is a technical communicator a professional? A cartography of flows and affects could keep us focused on mapping the practice rather than defending slippery identity categories whose affects so dramatically work toward contraction to a corporate model of the technical communicator. Developing a cartography of affective capacities and thresholds might lead us to see ways that on the one hand, affects are distributed such that some bodies are made to be invested with more power than others, and we might indeed want to question our complicity in those practices. We might take as a goal mapping flows and affects more expansively and more equitably, facilitating a more inclusive sense of the bodies that engage in technical communication and a more generous sense of the relative power of these bodies. We might take as a goal of technical communication engaging in the distribution of flows and affects in order to honor and elevate the actions and passions of all the bodies thus composed. Ultimately, by focusing on what the body can do and what can be done to the body, we can redirect our focus toward the potentialities of what techcom can become.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank Patty Sotirin and Gordon Coonfield for their ongoing willingness to discuss these matters and challenge my understanding. Their input has improved my argument.

REFERENCES

1. J. D. Slack, D. J. Miller, and J. Doak, The Technical Communicator as Author: Meaning, Power, Authority, *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*, 7:1, pp. 12-36, 1993. (Reprinted in this volume, Chapter 8)
2. L. Grossberg, *We Gotta Get Outa This Place: Popular Conservatism and Postmodern Culture*, Routledge, New York, 1992.
3. B. Latour, *Pandora's Hope: Essays on the Reality of Science Studies*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1999.
4. J. D. Slack, The Theory and Method of Articulation in Cultural Studies, in *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, D. Morley and K.-H. Chen (eds.), Routledge, London, pp. 112-127, 1996.

5. C. M. Ornatowski, Between Efficiency and Politics: Rhetoric and Ethics in Technical Writing, *Technical Communication Quarterly*, 1:1, pp. 91-103, 1992.
6. G. J. Savage, Redefining the Responsibilities of Teachers and the Social Position of the Technical Communicator, *Technical Communication Quarterly*, 5:3, pp. 309-327, 1996.
7. G. J. Savage, The Process and Prospects for Professionalizing Technical Communication, *Journal of Technical Writing and Communication*, 29:4, pp. 355-381, 1999.
8. S. Hall, Gramsci's Relevance for the Study of Race and Ethnicity, in *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialoges in Cultural Studies*, D. Morley and K.-H. Chen (eds.), Routledge, New York, pp. 411-440, 1996.
9. S. Hall, Minimal Selves, in *The Real Me: Postmodernism and the Question of Identity, IPA Documents*, vol. 6, L. Appignanaesi (ed.), ICA, London, 1987.
10. G. Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, R. Hurley (trans.), City Lights Books, San Francisco, 1988.
11. G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, B. Massumi (trans.), University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1987.
12. D. A. Winsor, Owning Corporate Texts, *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*, 7:2, pp. 179-195, 1993.
13. G. J. Savage and D. L. Sullivan, *Writing a Professional Life: Stories of Technical Communicators On and Off the Job*, Allyn & Bacon, Needham Heights, Massachusetts, 2001.
14. S. S. Staley, Daze at the Round Table, in *Writing a Professional Life: Stories of Technical Communicators On and Off the Job*, G. J. Savage and D. L. Sullivan (eds.), Allyn & Bacon, Needham Heights, Massachusetts, pp. 102-105, 2001.
15. S. Jong, Samurai Review, in *Writing a Professional Life: Stories of Technical Communicators On and Off the Job*, G. J. Savage and D. L. Sullivan (eds.), Allyn & Bacon, Needham Heights, Massachusetts, pp. 114-126, 2001.
16. J. S. Hile, I've Been Working on the Railroad: Re-Vision at BNP Railway, in *Writing a Professional Life: Stories of Technical Communicators On and Off the Job*, G. J. Savage and D. L. Sullivan (eds.), Allyn & Bacon, Needham Heights, Massachusetts, pp. 93-101, 2001.