



**Clay Spinuzzi**

Professor

Department of Rhetoric and Writing

University of Texas at Austin

Austin, Texas, USA

[clay.spinuzzi@utexas.edu](mailto:clay.spinuzzi@utexas.edu)

I was introduced to CHAT in the mid-1990s as a Ph.D. student, focusing on the question of how to support users as their work was being transformed by newly available digital computers and software. Across my career, I've focused on these questions: *How do people communicate, coordinate, and collaborate at work? And can I provide insights that can help them do these things more effectively so that they can reach their collective and individual objectives?* These questions are still vital: Since the mid-1990s, we have undergone major changes in how we worked: in information technologies, organizational structures, societal expectations, and even in how we commonly define and conceptualize “work” and “workplaces.”

As I've investigated these questions, I've repeatedly drawn on CHAT and theorized it for writing studies. As a sociocognitive framework, CHAT has supplied vital conceptual tools I needed for understanding how people work and learn at individual and collective levels. I've applied CHAT to my studies of various kinds of work: software development, traffic engineering, telecommunications, search engine marketing, freelancing, coworking, online labor platforms, and early-stage technology entrepreneurship. In each case, CHAT has provided important insights. But every framework has its limits, so I've also used other frameworks — including actor-network theory, dialogism and genre, orders of worth, and I-Space — and attempted to create theoretical and methodological bridges with CHAT.

My research has largely been conducted as qualitative case studies. In these case studies, I observe people at work, interview them about their work, and collect artifacts that they produced

and used during that work, triangulating these data sources to build a larger picture of how they communicate, coordinate, and collaborate, as well as points at which their work breaks down. I've described this research approach in my book *Topsight 2.0* (2018).

In my most recent book (2025, in press), I have stepped back to consider how CHAT has developed from its roots in Vygotsky to the present. Drawing on actor-network theory, I examine how different versions of CHAT have treated key categories such as empirical focus, mastery, and mediators. Along these lines, I've also considered how unit-of-analysis issues are complicated by long-term changes in work organization.

In the near future, I intend to continue examining entrepreneurship, specifically, thinking through how specialized mediators (such as the Business Model Canvas) and practices (such as developing and testing Minimal Viable Products) help new entrepreneurs to develop entrepreneurial concepts.

### **Selected sources**

Spinuzzi, C. (2025, in press). *Triangles and Tribulations: Translations, Betrayals, and the Making of Cultural-Historical Activity Theory*. Boston: MIT Press.

Spinuzzi, C. (2018). *Topsight 2.0: A Guide to Studying, Diagnosing, and Fixing Information Flow in Organizations*. Austin: Urso Press.

Spinuzzi, C. (2015). *All Edge: Inside the New Workplace Networks*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Spinuzzi, C. (2008) *Network: Theorizing Knowledge Work in Telecommunications*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Spinuzzi, C. (2003). *Tracing Genres through Organizations: A Sociocultural Approach to Information Design*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.