DIGITAL COMMENTARIES:

DVDS, DIGITAL RHETORICS, AND CRITICAL REFLECTION

By

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To the Faculty of Washington State University:

The members of the Committee appointed to examine the dissertation of KRISTINE ELIZABETH KELLEJIAN find it satisfactory and recommend that it be accepted.

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DIGITAL COMMENTARIES:

DVDS, DIGITAL RHETORICS, AND CRITICAL REFLECTION

Abstract

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This work examines the use of digital video commentaries in first-year college composition courses to engage students in effective forms of critical reflection. By exploring DVD commentaries and student digital video commentary projects, I make a case for the unique merits of incorporating digital video reflections in composition courses. In this project, I argue that teaching critical reflection through DVD commentaries and student digital video commentary projects provides students a generative method of reflection and practice in designing, producing, revising, and distributing their work. By applying Donna Qualley's concept of "reflexive inquiry," I analyze student digital video projects and consider both the possibilities and limits of this method of reflection. Finally, I make recommendations for future student digital video commentary projects.

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Dedication

To Loren, the love of my life; to my parents who never stopped believing in or loving me; and to my students, who are the reason for it all.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

> In less than thirty years digital technology has become an integral part of higher education. In that short time, computer technologies have literally electrified writing instruction, and it has been the job of composition studies to respond with new pedagogies, research, and scholarly communities.
>
> —Michelle Sidler, Richard Morris, and Elizabeth Overman Smith, *Computers in the Composition Classroom*

> In an attempt to bring composition studies into a more thoroughgoing discussion of the place of visual literacy in the writing classroom, I argue that throughout the history of writing instruction in this country the terms of debate typical in discussions of visual literacy and the teaching of writing have limited the kinds of assignments we might imagine for composition.
>
> —Diana George, "From Analysis to Design: Visual Communication in the Teaching of Writing."

Digital Commentaries and Composition: A Love Story

I know it is time to pack it in for the night when the family cat tries to sit on my keyboard. Not long ago, this feline would carefully select a stack of student

papers and insist on situating herself atop the one I was in the process of evaluating. Now, since my students usually submit their papers and projects online electronically, the best she can do is go after the keyboard. I check my email one last time, run some computer scans, and select "shut down." As I brush my teeth, the glow of the computer fades to black. I get in bed, turn on a DVD, and relax into sleep.

When I was a kid, growing up in San Mateo, California, I used to love going to the movies. There was a small movie theater downtown on B Street, and I remember taking the bus with my two brothers and sister and purchasing tickets for matinees in the rain. I also remember my older brother taking me with him on the bus to a fancier theater in San Carlos to see the original *Star Wars* in 1977. These experience were as formative for me as going to school or playing sports in the street in front of my house. In other words, at a young age I was hooked on the wonder of storytelling through the silver screen.

When I became a composition instructor in the 1990s, I began to think about the connections between film, narrative, and composition. Now, twenty years later, I am still considering these connections, but in the context of digital technology. With the emergence of digital technology, the ways in which films are designed, created, distributed, and received has dramatically shifted. Now, in addition to going to a movie theater, a film be downloaded to a personal computer or a handheld device and instantly viewed. Furthermore, instead of watching a documentary or special on the making of *Star Wars*, a common method of relaying information on the creation of a film occurs in a digital commentary that is either superimposed over the film

itself or accompanies the film in some way. For example, now even the popular new and revised science fiction television series *Battlestar Galactica* (2004) is accompanied by digital commentaries and podcasts accessible both online and on DVD. Yet, these often fascinating reflective pieces are largely ignored in research on composition and rhetoric.

In this project, I am going to discuss digital commentaries and several uses for such commentaries to enrich the composition and rhetoric pedagogy. By digital commentaries, I do mean those sometimes annoying but increasingly present "extras" included on many rentable DVDs from Blockbuster or Netflix. I have spent the last several years of my teaching and studies in composition and rhetoric exploring film, digital commentaries, multimodal rhetoric, and images, and will present the fruits of my labor in this dissertation. But to begin, I must relate the impetus for this project, which began rather innocuously with the viewing of a single digital commentary of a popular but rather insignificant film, *The Mummy* (1999). I originally bought the DVD because I fondly remembered going to the movie on a whim to escape a 110 degree summer day in Chico, California, where I was teaching five sections of English composition at a state university and community college. On that particular day, I recall being thrilled by the lighthearted adventure and fun of the film. Yet, it wasn't the excitement of the film that kept me interested during the viewing of the DVD, but the pleasure of experiencing the commentary playing "over" the film.

I was struck by the earnest, introspective, humorous, and intelligent manner in which the writer/director, Steven Sommers, and the editor, Bob Ducsay, explained

a range of information regarding the content of the theatrical release. I also loved the rawness and the immediacy of the commentary playing over the movie; it did not seem rehearsed or formulaic and the result was an apparently unedited and unpretentious forum for reflecting on a collaborative text. From that moment on, I began to consider the rhetorical dimensions of digital commentaries and embarked on a rather haphazard study of this digital form of marginalia and reflection for use in composition and rhetoric courses.

I viewed the commentaries of a wide variety of texts, from television shows *Battlestar Galactica* (2004) and *Alias* (2001), to films like *Citizen Kane (1941), A Brilliant Mind* (2001), *Rabbit-Proof Fence* (2002), and *The Whale Rider* (2002), to documentaries such as *Supersize Me* (2004), *Spellbound* (2002)*, An Inconvenient Truth* (2006), and *Jesus Camp* (2006). I went online and explored digital commentaries attached to the making of television shows, like *Battlestar Galactica* (2004) and *South of Nowhere* (2005), which employ such commentaries extensively on their websites. I also examined YouTube video clips that were evaluative or reflective in character, such as one of Derrida reflecting back on writing *Of Grammatology*. Derrida describes the experience as a unique moment in his writing life:

> I had the impression that an interpretative edge, a lever, appeared to me…. This was a lever for interpretation for reading the tradition—when I say tradition, this is the Western philosophical tradition. I have the impression that I had, I use the word "lever" but I could also call it a kind of machine, an apparatus for thought and technique that

> allowed me to formalize and economically decipher, not every text, but that which is dominant in our culture. ("Derrida on a 'Truly Exceptional Moment'")

Though this video clip is just old footage using a medium close-up shot of Derrida discussing his writing, it exemplifies a kind of reflection crucial to several theories of education or, to use John Dewey's words, represents "The kind of thinking that consists in turning a subject over in the mind, giving it serious and consecutive consideration"(*Democracy* 3).

The more I viewed and took notes on reflective commentaries and video clips, the more I recognized the potential of digital commentaries for use in composition courses, or at the very least, realized that digital commentaries might represent a generative moment in composition studies. Above and beyond allowing me the opportunity to watch more television and film than I had in the preceding ten years, these digital composites offered me a way to answer a pedagogical question I had been mulling over for some time, namely "How do I provide my students with a challenging but familiar framework for integrating argumentation, critical reflection, and multimodal rhetoric in my courses in ways consistent with current composition praxis?"

My desire to use digital commentaries came from a need to steer my students away from individualist expressions of knowledge and guide them more towards situating their writing in social, cultural, economic, and technological contexts. In other words, I wanted to make available some new points of entry for my students in their efforts to invent, present, synthesize, and reflect on and in writing using digital

commentaries. I was also hopeful that these new points of entry might fracture the narratives of progress so often included in written critical reflection and introduce a level of collaborative intratextuality and intertextuality into their final research projects not yet explored.

While it is imperative to be wary of employing commentaries into composition courses due to their commercial, corporate, and imperialistic purposes, and to be vigilant about issues access in contexts where digital divides are ever-present (Hawisher and Selfe, 2004; Monroe, 2004), it is also important to acknowledge that digital commentaries often change the ways in which multimodal texts are now designed, produced, distributed, and received. Digital commentaries appear on some of the most obscure and independent films, and there is a new expectation that DVDs being produced will have some sort of reflective pieces. These usually come in the form of commentaries superimposed on the “main text” or texts. As a composition instructor interested both in using digital technology and improving my students’ attempts at writing, critical analysis, and reflection, I view digital commentaries as significant resources for application in writing and rhetoric courses. In addition the appearance of digital commentaries represents an area of study that poses interesting theoretical, political, and economic questions related to composition and rhetoric.

Up to this point, I asked for student reflections in the form of "Memos to the instructor"(Sommers) to accompany every draft and often applied the portfolio method of evaluation in first-year writing courses, assigning the commonplace reflective cover letter at the end of the semester as an introduction to the portfolio.

These reflective pieces worked fairly well if students were prompted with a variety of specific questions and seriously took on the challenges of responding, but I often wondered if there might be a more fertile process by which students could respond to their own writing. I thought that my students could do better if I offered them a different way to think about their written texts, a way, perhaps, that might acknowledge the collaborative and risky aspects of meaning-making, incorporate their knowledge of digital technology (such as ipods and MP3s), and integrate their prominent interests in popular culture with the academic work with which they were obligated to engage. Thus, I began to examine digital commentaries as a viable area of exploration to match my objectives. In addition to incorporating film in my first-year writing courses, I began experimenting with digital commentaries as both overlay and additions to texts to allow my students to gain insight into the rhetoric of text production and reflection-related practices. I found that when I opened the door to such discussions, my students jumped right in and found ways to creatively incorporate digital commentaries and technology into their projects and discuss their work as more than writers, in other words, they often saw themselves as directors or as developing and experimenting authoritative creators and composers. These experiences in the classroom lead to my current project.

I must note here that I want the use of digital commentaries in composition courses to be more than another pedagogical activity in an already overflowing toolbox; indeed my intention in this dissertation is to use digital commentaries as a way to reveal and repair some of the problems with reflection often in practice in composition studies, or at least to argue for multiple methods of reflection in

composition courses that provide students with choices for making sense of their identities and narratives as writers.

Chapter Breakdown

In this first chapter I have provided an overview of my project, including my how it came about and my overarching argument, which calls for the incorporation of digital commentaries in first-year composition courses.

In the second chapter, I define my terms and discuss the most relevant scholarship related to Visual Rhetorics, New Media, and Composition. In particular, I discuss the basis for use of digital commentaries to represent concepts of student/writer invention, argumentation, and reflection that can be applied in a variety of ways in the composition classroom. I describe the most relevant theories on discourse, design, process, production, and distribution of collaborative multimodal texts. I also argue that digital commentaries are a significant resource for writing instructors to teach concepts of composition and rhetoric with the end goal of creating more conscious communicators. I also propose that students can benefit greatly from producing their own digital writing projects in a first-year writing course. Finally, I discuss the implications of the use of such technology in composition courses, classrooms, and programs.

In chapter three the focus is on concepts of reflection, reflexivity, portfolios, and assessment. I describe how my digital commentary project and digital commentaries in general can be used in composition/writing courses to reflect. In addition, I explain why and how digital reflections can be a significant part of the

composing paradigm. In particular, I argue that responsible and critically reflective digital commentaries accomplish the following objectives:

- Make available more embodied and immediate responses to writing and ideas
- Promote collaborative reflection
- Create a different relationship with readers/audience via layered hypertexts
- Promote less ritualistic opportunities for reflection
- Provide more authorial/rhetorical choices for persuasion

In the fifth and final chapter I discuss the implications of my work, and how I have since improved upon my original design.

The incorporation of multimodal rhetoric and image studies into composition studies is a complex and multi-layered endeavor that has not yet fully been embraced or explored. However, research in composition studies represents good-willed and situated points of entry for incorporating multimodal texts that will inevitably expand within the decade. In the upcoming chapters, I explore the ways in which the use of digital commentaries in composition courses will contribute to these discussions.

CHAPTER TWO

VISUAL RHETORICS, NEW MEDIA, AND COMPOSITION

> There was a time perhaps when we could make believe that making meaning with language was somehow fundamentally different, or could be treated in isolation from making meaning with visual resources or patterns of bodily and social interaction. But today our technologies are moving us from the age of writing to an age of multimedia authoring in which voice-annotated documents and images, and written text itself, are now merely components of larger meaning objects.
>
> —J.L. Lemke, "Metamedia Literacy: Transforming Meanings and Media"

Over the last three decades, personal computers, laptops, and mobile communication technologies have impacted higher education. At this writing, word processing still ranks high in the practical use of computers in educational settings (Clark 483); however, the digital landscapes of universities and community colleges have also rapidly shifted to adapt to new and available interfaces and technologies. For example, at Eastern Oregon University, a small rural college where I currently teach, the university president posts a weekly YouTube video update on issues of local and economic concern in lieu of written emails or letters. Other departments use podcasts of class sessions, Twitter announcements, digital textbooks, Facebook

pages, and e-learning platforms, like Blackboard, on a regular basis. Research corresponding to these applications and technologies emerge frequently in composition and rhetoric-related list-servs, publications, and conferences. Conventional topics include e-portfolios, web design, and other webbed and networked environments such as hypertext and wireless applications.

Even as scholarship exists on many web-based and other multimodal documents in composition studies, digital commentaries and DVDs are forms of new media that have not yet received much attention in terms of theory or application. My work will begin to fill these gaps. Before I describe my own data, an understanding of the ways in which digital technology influences the study of composition and rhetoric is required.

New Media Now

> The medium, or process, of our time—electric technology—is reshaping and restructuring patterns of social interdependence and every aspect of our personal life. It is forcing us to reconsider and re-evaluate practically every thought, every action, and every institution formerly taken for granted. Everything is changing: you, your family, your education, your neighborhood, your job, your government, your relation to others. And they're changing dramatically.
>
> —Marshall McLuhan, *The Medium is the Message*

There is nothing new under the sun but there are lots of old things we don't know.

—Ambrose Bierce, *The Devil's Dictionary*

Though perhaps a bit overstated, McLuhan's claim from 1967 regarding the changes “electric technology” would set into motion have largely come into being in the twenty-first century, including changes in education. According to the most recent U.S. Census reports, households with personal computers have increased rapidly in the last decade, “from 42 percent to 67 percent between 1998 and 2005" ("U.S. Census Press Release"), and 61.7 percent of U.S. households have internet service. In addition, in 2000, nine out of ten "school-age children (6-to-17 years old) had access to a computer" at home or at school (*Reported Internet Usage*). Considering that most institutions now utilize some sort digital technology to communicate on a daily basis, it should come as no surprise that community colleges and universities are investing in digital technology, software, and specialists who integrate technology into their courses and curriculum. However, though technology is becoming more of an assumed part of daily life for many, the intelligent and effective inclusion of such technology in courses and curriculum remain largely unrealized. Stuart Selber acknowledges, "Computers are indeed a fact of life in educational settings, yet few teachers today are prepared to organize learning environments that integrate technology meaningfully and appropriately"(1). Many composition and rhetoric scholars are attempting to addressing this problem in intelligent and relevant ways.

Our current cultural practices are significantly influenced by digital technology. It is appropriate for composition and rhetoric scholars to engage in research and practice that can bring about more pedagogical understanding of multimodal rhetoric. Thus, the overall purpose of my project is to reply to Selber's call for significant and conscious integration of digital technology through my study of reflective digital commentaries created by students in first-year composition.

Like many of my students, I have embraced different technologies that have become commonplace and find great applicability of digital technologies in particular. Over the last thirty years, new digital technologies—personal computers, cameras, cellular telephones, Blackberries, ipods, and other devices, software, and interfaces—have not only emerged, but are prevalent in the everyday lives of a majority of college students, business professionals, and others in the general workforce in the Unites States and abroad. Many of these technologies are challenging long-held assumptions about texts and artifacts, communication, and literacy in educational institutions at all levels nationally and globally, but especially at colleges and universities, and particularly in terms of writing instruction, rhetorical studies, and communication.

New Media, defined as "the translation of all existing media into numerical data accessible through computers" (Manovich 20), differs from other forms technology in that it "affects all stages of communication, including acquisition, manipulation, storage, and distribution" and all manner of data, including "texts, still images, moving images, sound, and spatial constructions" (Manovich 19). In terms of composition studies, Cheryl Ball defines new media as:

> Texts that juxtapose semiotic modes in new and aesthetically pleasing ways and, in doing so, break away from print traditions so that written text is not the primary rhetorical means. For instance, some of the semiotic modes in a new media text might include sound, graphics, video, animation, and/or written words. (405)

The ease and speed with which these stages and media can be accessed have propelled many in English studies to significantly alter the ways in which subjects such as composition and literacy are perceived and taught. In addition, these variations in everyday technologies have compelled broader questions about image, language, and literature, or, as Richard Lanham states in *The Electronic Word* of 1993, poses the question "What business are we really in?"(23) as composition instructors. Although Lanham's query is not uncommon even when separated from technological concerns, the rapid shifts in communication made manifest through digital and computer-related apparatus has required a reframing, and often revising, of educational enterprises, especially writing, reading, critical thinking, and academic support. Since notions of literacy have often been at the center of college education, the integration of technology has significantly impacted the ways in which we teach, communicate, and evaluate our students and ourselves on the college level. Moreover, as digital technology has permeated most aspects of education, as educators our response can be crucial in terms of both the use and interrogation of technology from several perspectives.

New Media

> Digital literacies, indeed all literacies, exist and develop within the context of complex and interrelated local and global ecologies. The ecology of literacy is seldom monocultural and never static; it is always the site of contestation between emerging, competing, changing, accumulating, and fading languages and literacies. People exert their own powerful agency in, around, and through digital literacies often in resistant and unanticipated ways.
>
> —Gail E. Hawisher and Cynthia Selfe, with Yi-Huey Guo and Lu Liu, "Globalization and Agency: Designing and Redesigning the Literacies of Cyberspace."

As editor of and contributor to *Writing New Media*, Anne Wysocki explores the definition of new media composition and tries to tackle the deficiency in resources for writing teachers (56). In this work, the authors use the concepts of Andrew Feenberg, and Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen to focus on the "embedded materiality" and biased character of all texts as a way to reflect back on the need to incorporate New Media.

Many scholars in composition and rhetoric calling for field-specific integration of digital technology claim that composition experts have taken up the task of reacting to the technological changes. Composition studies has changed in answer to digital technology, and the multimodal characteristics of composition and rhetoric are receiving more recognition. While multimodal rhetoric leads some to argue the emergence of a fundamental shift in the relationships between words and

images, and others decry it as simply a focus on “bells and whistles” or elite materialism, ultimately the advent of new media has made a significant accomplishment, which is the realization of preexisting tensions between word and image.

In Richard Lanham’s milestone work, *The Electronic Word: Democracy, Technology, and the Arts* (1993), the author discusses the move from primarily printed texts to the potential that networked electronic and digital technologies might have on accepted notions of “text” in English studies. Lanham argues that electronic technology significantly impacts the way meaning is communicated and “where” it is located in an academic context. Lanham recognizes that “in practice, the computer often turns out to be a rhetorical device as well as a logical one” (31). What some experience as a new and daunting technology that often involves the multimodal in communication and persuasion, Lanham views as a unique opportunity to redefine English studies. Lanham states:

> Electronic technology is full of promising avenues for language instruction; it will be lunacy if we do not construct a sophisticated comparative-literary pedagogy upon it. The bankruptcy of our long-fragile ideas of a humanities curriculum has been exposed by both changing demography and changing technology. And again electronic technology, through its central agency of digital conversion, suggests how we might begin to constructing precisely the rhetoric of the arts that we so much need. (23)

This redefinition dictates a change in the way texts function and are perceived in composition studies from a relatively fixed text to a more flexible artifact that embraces the notion of "play". Lanham asserts, "The textual surface has become permanently bi-stable" (5). Lanham asserts that the textual surface is now a malleable and self-conscious one. All kinds of production decisions have now become authorial ones" (5), including the idea of the final edits or "cut" of a text (7). At that time, Lanham perceived possibilities for a renewed rhetorical medium that could use the elements of meaning-making through collage, scale, juxtaposition, repetition easily performed via digital media (40-42).

Researchers have really just started the work of charting student writing in conjunction with digital media using a multimodal framework in terms of multimedia, most often focusing on k-12 environments. Some examples of these studies include a focus on computer games by James Paul Gee (2003) and Carey Jewitt (2003), PowerPoint presentations by Jabari Mahiri (2006), and digital video projects by British scholars David Buckingham and Issy Harvey (2001), and Bolter and Grusin(2000). I am certain, that as more time passes college level inquiry into these areas will follow.

Without doubt, New Media has changed classrooms, course content and texts, and communication between students and instructors and other academic sites of activity, but these changes are not without controversy nor problem free. Issues of access to new media and the disadvantages of not acquiring both access and facility with such technology are significant issues of concern. In composition courses instructors still ask students to create well organized and essays and arguments using

primarily written texts, however, many teachers and writing programs now invite students to submit hybrid electronic texts, electronic portfolios, or other digital multimodal projects.

Composing and technology are inevitably entwined. Dennis Baron reminds us that digital technology is only one of many technologies that we already take for granted, and that writing in and of itself is a technology. Baron states:

> When we write with cutting-edge tools, it is easy to forget that whether it consists of energized particles on a screen or ink embedded in paper or lines gouged into clay tablets, writing itself is always first and foremost a technology, a way of engineering materials in order to accomplish an end.(16)

More recently, however, with the emergence of computer and digital technologies, the connections between writing and technology are more explicit, and, more to the point, institutionally supported. In addition, other ways of making meaning through both the written and the visual have created pedagogical interest and scholarship. New reliance on digital and computer resources in university classrooms reveals enthusiasms and tension, acceptance and resistance, and a great deal of exploration of what it means to write, compose, teach, present, reflect, and learn. Keith Dorwick makes this point clear in *Rethinking The Academy*:

> The existence of the computer, a device which can increase the ability of its user to manipulate text, and the existence of networks which can link those devices and thus speed the transmission and modification of text through collaborative means, allow, if not force, the academy

> and those who work within its spheres to rethink how we teach, how we make scholarship and even what the role and purpose of the academy will be in the next millennium.

These changes in literacy practices are being acknowledged in the general public as well. In the August 2009 edition of the popular technology magazine *Wired*, Clive Thompson remarks on a conversation with composition and rhetoric scholar, Andrea Lunsford. Thompson reports, "For Lunsford, technology isn't killing our ability to write. It's reviving it—and pushing our literacy in bold new directions." But how are our English departments responding to these “new directions”? As Collin Brooke argues in *Lingua Fracta: Toward a Rhetoric of New Media,* a strong literary tradition in English studies may have contributed to the slow adaptation of digital technologies in college composition curriculum. Brooke insists:

> Another of our legacies inherited from English departments has left us underprepared for the shift from page to screen; technology is transdisciplinary, cutting across the full range of activities we engage in as professionals, rather than subdisciplinary. The longer we wait to realize this, the harder we will have to struggle for respect and relevance as experts in writing. (5)

Despite barriers to the incorporation of digital technology in composition and rhetoric, several prominent scholars continue to argue for its inclusion, and furthermore, for our suitability to the enterprise. Anne Wysocki insists that new media requires the attention of composition and rhetoric instructors due to our assumed knowledge of the processes involved in interpreting and composing texts in

educational contexts, “I want to argue that writing about new media needs to be informed by what writing teachers know, precisely because writing teachers focus specifically on texts and how situated people (learn how to) use them to make things happen (5).

While agreeing with these positions, we need to be attentive to confronting unreflective assumptions and dangers associated with incorporating new media into writing courses without conscious and informed designs. Jody Shipka asserts the need for an informed understanding of multimodal rhetorics before they are used in the composition classroom:

> Increasing the semiotic resources with which students work will not alone, *in and of itself*, lead to a greater awareness of the ways systems of delivery, reception, and circulation shape (and take shape from) the means and modes of production. Instead, I argue, composition courses present students with the opportunity to begin structuring the occasions for, as well as the reception and delivery of, the work they produce. (278-279)

Incorporating multimodal rhetoric takes practice, observation, analysis, and knowledge. Without much experience and structure, the incorporation of new media can lead to an environment in which designs aren’t “best practices, and fair grading is difficult”(Talty). Furthermore, while many universities welcome the notion that limits on space and time in educational contexts can now be overcome easily through the assimilation of digital technologies, this naive view on such technologies will likely serve to elevate dominant social classes and negatively affect student agency.

This is why it is imperative that scholars and practitioners of composition and rhetoric remain open to the integration of technology but not blindly embrace it. For, as Hawisher and Selfe state:

> And what we learned convinced us that computers were becoming increasingly important in educational settings—not just simply because they are tools for writing, (they are not simply tools; they are, indeed, complex technological artifacts that embody and shape—and are shaped by the ideological assumptions of an entire culture), but rather because these machines serve as powerful cultural and catalytic forces in the lives of teachers and students. (Hawisher and Selfe 2)

The ideological and cultural impacts of digital technology should not be disregarded.

This an attempt to explore a new direction in composition and rhetoric, specifically focusing on the ways in which digital commentaries may help students bridge gaps between writing and critical reflection using an accessible, imaginative, critical, portable, and durable method. This process focuses on creating student digital commentaries of writing and relies on student interest and familiarity with digital audio-visual technology, such as digital cameras, or such cameras in cellular phones, computers, and PDAs. It also draws on student interest in digital audio-visual representations, for example, films and television show online and in DVD form, and on shorter video clips embedded in websites, such as those found in YouTube.

Critical Reflection and Digital Commentaries

> All of us construct our representations of what our experiences mean, and we fabricate, at least in part, how it will be played out. And we construct our own representations of the meanings of others. It is this construction of meaning that lies at the heart of education.
>
> —George Hillocks, Jr., *Teaching Writing as Reflective Practice*

> Recalled and reconstituted experience lacks immediacy, but it does have a certain durability in personal consciousness and in the minds of persons who listen and look; this experience has meaning by virtue of being reflected on, of being consciously held, and of having a public—or a potentially public-existence.
>
> —Yi-Fu Tuan, "The Significance of the Artifact"

As Hillocks reminds us, reflection is a significant aspect of education. As digital media or "New Media" is becoming ubiquitous in our students' lives and in education, questions about different methods of reflection come into play. What happens to reflection, for example, when students shift to creating electronic portfolios (e-portfolios)? Do the characteristics of reflection change when digital videos are created and distributed to an instructor or an institution or hyperlinked to student portfolios? Though other scholars, like Yancey, are focusing more on e-portfolios, I would like to cover the latter issue of reflection in the form of digital commentaries similar to those on DVDs, or video clips that can be viewed online. As

digital media provide numerous ways to design, manipulate, distribute data, analysis, sounds, and images, and to create multimodal texts, it provides a new avenue for reflection in composition courses at every level, though here I take introductory college writing courses as my focus in this project. Digital technology can influence different aspects of writing, but I am most interested in the ways in which digital technology, and digital commentaries in particular, affect concepts of reflection or reflexivity in writing courses, both in terms of discrete assignments and in terms of writing over the course of a quarter, semester, or year (or perhaps even over a college career). Questions I am interested in answering include the following: In what ways do digital commentary reflections differ from traditional forms of reflection currently used in first-year composition courses? What advantages, if any, do digital commentaries offer students and instructors in reflecting on writing? What are the disadvantages of using digital commentaries in writing courses, such as issues of unequal access, commoditization, time commitments, and software?

Asking a person to reflect on their work and experiences can be a tricky business. It leads to the murky depths of memory, familiar narratives, and fabrications. When college students are required to reflect on their writing, as is often the case in the United States since the 1960s, they are placed into a largely predetermined rhetorical situation. Indeed, reflection, as Kathleen Blake Yancey reminds us, is often mediated by what we, as composition and rhetoric instructors, encourage, nay, permit students to do when we ask them to reflect. Yancey posits that each genre of reflection "simultaneously invite certain constructions and (yet) provide the texts that we assess" performing "a double function—providing grist for

the twin mills of identity and assessment"(739). In this project, I am interested in examining these dual performances of identity and assessment created by reflection in digital commentaries, and will apply this theoretical concept to the student audio/video commentaries I collected for this project.

Critical Theory and New Media

In the process of writing dissertation, I also confront my own sense of foreboding when it comes to using computer-based technologies in composition studies. My interests in composition and rhetoric from the get-go, my *raison d'être,* is to teach literacy practices with the goal of democratization of education. As a proponent of social constructionism and critical pedagogy in all its glorious shifting forms, I want to simultaneously teach and subvert dominant paradigms in my courses, and while this aim in itself is not without problems, I can still sleep relatively well at night with this pedagogy. However, the use of digital technology at this point in time in the context of composition tends not only to work against my critical pedagogy, but appears predisposed to reinforce the practices of individualism, elitism, conformity, consumerism, and profit-driven corporate control I have challenged my entire professional life. Thus, herein I am not only arguing that digital commentaries can and should be integrated into writing courses, but I am also confronting my own objections and concerns. Perhaps this conundrum says more about the problems with my pedagogy and my subject position as an assimilated lower middle-class, third-generation Armenian American queer feminist than it does about problems with technology (and believe me, I spend time thinking about it), but

I think there is more going on here than that. The technology and its ties to corporate control are deeply troubling and require an explanation in this dissertation.

Computers and Composition

In retrospect, research on computers and digital technology as related to composition and rhetoric appears to have experienced theoretical and practical shifts over time. Gail Hawisher argues that the initial research on computers in composition emphasizes a model of “drill-and-skill” consistent with current-traditionalist practices (*Reimagining Computers*, 37-53). This concentration changed in the 1980s and early 1990s to reflect more process-oriented integration of digital media. During this time, perhaps partly as a gesture to justify the study of computers and digital technology in composition and rhetoric, the stance of much of the research tended to focus on dualistic divisions (pen versus computer, print versus screen, word versus image, verbal versus non-verbal, visual versus linguistic, etc.), and on issues of “digital literacy.” A social-constructivist approach is also noticeable in terms of viewing computer and digital technology through the lenses of critical theory and discourse communities. In the “post-process age” wherein multiple pedagogical theories and writing strategies are effectively valued and applied, the research mirrors all of these perspectives, highlighting new global realities and underscoring the important of design, production, distribution, and reception, as well as analysis.

Visual and Multimodal Rhetoric

> Meeting the challenge of the visual to the verbal need not become an occasion for English studies to further divide and subdivide itself in another defensive effort to respond to social and historical needs by creating new, relevant, but "lite" Englishes on the margins in order to preserve a nostalgic fiction of pure English at the center.
>
> —Craig Stroupe, "Visualizing English: Recognizing the Hybrid Literacy of Visual and Verbal Authorship on the Web"

Terms such as "visual rhetoric" and "multimodal rhetoric" have appeared in composition and rhetoric studies, and are often framed in terms of helping college students acquire "digital literacy." Since many composition instructors teaching at the moment are still transitioning from non-digital learning environments to digital ones, the shift to hybrid and visually demanding texts can be threatening, and it is only within the last decade or so that "new media" has made a significant impact in composition publications and conferences. Richard Lanham describes the shifts brought on by personal computers and digital technology as they affect notions of literacy in an early article on digital technology appearing in *Scientific American* (1995). Lanham argues that literacy now means more than to read and write. He claims that literacy:

> Has gradually extended its grasp in the digital age until it has come to mean the ability to understand information, however presented.

> Increasingly, information is being offered in a new way: instead of black letters printed on a white page, the new format blends words with recorded sounds and images into a rich and volatile mixture. The ingredients of this combination, which has come to be called multimedia, are not new, but the recipe is. (198)

In a field that professes to teach reading and writing practices, it is not surprising to find the issues of multimodal rhetoric and image studies framed as a form of literacy instruction with which we need to provide our students in this context of increasing technologies. The beginnings of such discussion about audio-visual literacy in the U.S. colleges can be perceived in scholarship of the 1960s with the selling of overhead projectors as "new chalkboards" (Seglum and Witte). At that time, discussions of incorporating visual aids in the classroom emerged. According to Braden and Hortin, visual literacy in educational contexts is defined as "the ability to understand and use images, including the ability to think, learn and express oneself in terms of images" (38). The popularity of computers has reinvigorated this rhetoric of literacy (Kleinman and Dwyer). More recently, Lemke discusses the social aspects of literacies in meaning-making. He states "Literacies are legion. Each one consists of a set of independent social practices that link people, media objects, and strategies for meaning making" (71). Lemke characterizes literacies as technologies that alter perception and cultures, and argues that literacies make possible social relationships and change. "Literacies" Lemke argues,

> …provide a key link between self and society: the means through which we act on, participate in, and become shaped by larger

> "ecosocial" systems and networks. Literacies are transformed in the dynamics of these larger self-organizing systems, and we-our own human perceptions, identities, and possibilities –are transformed along with them. (71)

Digital technology, constructed as a type of literacy, has a significant impact on what it means to read, write, speak—to communicate. However, when we conceptualize new media as a kind of literacy, there are several consequences.

In an interview with theorist Homi Bhabha by Gary A. Olson and Lynn Worsham, Bhabha echoes the significance of literacy practices. Bhabha asserts, "literacy is absolutely crucial for a kind of ability to be responsible for yourself, to make your own reading within a situation of political and cultural choice" (29). However, he also warns that "Racism is often the ideology of the most educated and literate people" (29). To challenge the racism within practices of literacy, Bhabha insists on a different perception of literacy that "is not merely about competence but about intervention, the possibility of interpretation as intervention, as interrogation, as relocation, as revision" (29). In linking literacy, culture, agency, and intervention, Bhabha situates theory as an extension of literacy that has the potential to be a disruptive force. He states, "Theory enables people, both in the academy and in the public domain, to break the continuity and the consensus of common sense—to break it and break into it" (4), and to "interrupt the dominant and dominating strategies of generalization within a cultural or communicative or interpretational community precisely where that community wants to stay in a very settled and

stentorian way" (12). Bhabha defines literacy and writing in a broad manner, embracing an inclusive definition of what many call rhetoric:

> By writings—if I might use that word—and inscription, I'm not talking about printed writing or writing as we usually understand it. I am talking about the possibility of making a determining mark on a surface. It may be a social surface; it may be a visual screen. I am talking about writing in the widest sense: a kind of ordering of things or ordering communication in one way in the context of a wider contingent structure. (9)

By examining DVD commentaries in a beginning composition course, one could elicit attention to the ways in which the rhetoric of DVDs and DVD extras, and the "ordering of things" such as race, class, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality can be explored in an accessible manner. However, since images influence audiences in a variety of ways, the significance of visual aspects related to computer and digital technology are undeniable. This focus on the visual brought about by electronic technology is reflected in the scholarship of composition and rhetoric.

In an article in *College Composition and Communication* published in 2002, Diana George urges composition instructors to consider both the design aspects of visual rhetoric and the analysis of such texts. George traces the history of "visual literacy" from the instructional "Dick and Jane" books of the 1940s, to the New London Group's manifestos of the 1990s, declaring that definitions of literacy need to transcend that of the printed text (17). Even though composition students are often asked to rhetorically analyze web pages and advertisements, George claims that the

focus on the visual needs to include student design and production: “On1y rarely does that call address students as producers as well as consumers or critics of the visual. More rarely does the call acknowledge the visual as much more than attendant to the verbal”(George 13-14). One goal of having my students create digital video commentaries hyperlinked to their final portfolios was to provide an appreciation of the contextual and visual elements of a rhetorical situation, and to allow creation as well as analysis.

I must note that the term rhetoric in visual rhetoric is not being contested here. Aristotle defines rhetoric as “an ability in each [particular] case, to see the available means of persuasion (*Rhet.* I.2, 1355b26f.p. 36), and defines rhetoricians as persons “able to see what is persuasive” (*Topics* VI.12, 149b25). More recently, Kenneth Burke defines rhetoric as being “rooted in an essential function of language itself, a function that is wholly realistic and continually born anew: the use of language as a symbolic means of inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols” (43). Even one of the most adventurous definitions of rhetoric, such as George Kennedy’s definition of rhetoric “as a form of mental and emotional energy”(4), can be applied to a variety of forms of persuasion, including those digitally rendered. The combined term of “visual rhetoric,” however, poses several problems.

Visual rhetoric has been a “hot topic” in composition studies over the last fifteen years and represents one of the initial ways in which scholars made sense of computer technology. In *Visual Rhetoric in a Digital World* (2004), Carolyn Handa claims “Composition teachers are thinking about the visual, considering theories

historicizing the separation of words and images, and understanding the place of classical rhetoric, design studies, and cultural studies in our pedagogy"(2), which is reflected in online journals (*Kairos; Enculturation*), "hardcopy" journals (*College English*, *JAC*, and the *CCC*), and the national composition conventions (NCTE; CCCC). This visual rhetoric focus is also echoed in the majority of handbooks students are required to use in composition courses, such as Diane Hacker's *A Writer's Reference* and Lester Faigley's *The Penguin Handbook*, which integrate discussion of digital and visual rhetoric, and Donald McQuade and Christine McQuade's *Seeing and Writing*, now in their 4th edition, which combines notions of composing and perception, especially visual perception.

Kristie Fleckenstein criticizes the field of English studies for its privileging of linguistic issues over image, insisting, "The scales of meaning and teaching need to be balanced so that word no longer eclipses image. Language is not the sole, perhaps not even the primary, means by which we create meaning of our worlds" (4).

Craig Stroupe also argues that English studies must confront the visual as well as the verbal as a whole to create more instances of critical consciousness that mark our discipline. Instead of suggesting that the field give more attention to either the visual or the verbal, Stroupe views this moment of accessible verbal-visual meaning-making and rhetoric via digital technology as an opportunity to revise concepts of the subject of English. Stroupe argues for reshaping composition into a discipline that does not insist on writing as the chief means of gaining knowledge and understanding, and contends "the challenge of the visual to the verbal can become an occasion to recognize the discipline's long-standing ideology of

elaborationism" (609). Stroupe defines this "elaborationism", as "a set of cultural, pedagogical, and technical practices based on the idea that the formal composing or reading process can produce more critical forms of consciousness" (609). Stroupe insists that the visual and verbal are always in conversation and this "dialogue" needs to be recognized and accepted by the profession:

> The more hybrid approach of a visualized English would describe instead the potential for dialogically constitutive relations between words and images—in a larger sense, between the literacies of verbal and visual cultures—which can function as a singly intended, if double-voiced rhetoric. (609).

For Stroupe, this rhetoric can be readily accessed through cultural artifacts:

> When we acknowledge that elaboration is expressed outside its traditionally recognized forms and media, we discover continuities between traditionally defined English Studies and certain possibilities in the hybrid practices of popular and Web cultures. (631)

Like Stroupe, other scholars find the tensions between different reactions to the visual and computer-based technologies in English studies to be generative. For example, Mary Hocks and Michelle Kendrick suggest that the "new" division between language and image is ever-present and should be viewed as such:

> To attempt to characterize new media as a new battleground between word and image is to misunderstand radically the dynamic interplay that *already exists* and has *always existed* between visual and verbal

texts and to overlook insights concerning that interplay that new media theories and practices can foster. (1)

In other words, instead of seeing the strain between proponents of either words or images as irresolvable and fruitless, Hocks and Kendrick remind us that verbal and visual texts have always been present in “interpenetrating, dialogic relationships”(1) that ought to cultivate innovative and useful responses.

Yet, despite the inclusion of visual rhetoric in all of these works, few have been able to define visual rhetoric in a way that limits the topic to the visual in exclusion of all other aspects and senses in a way that reflects the persuasive power of images. Even in Charles A. Hill and Marguerite Helmers’ collection titled *Defining Visual Rhetorics,* the editors struggle to pin down the term and ultimately decide to allow their contributors to “discuss the definitional assumptions behind their own works, and to exemplify these assumptions by sharing their own rhetorical analyses of visual phenomena”(x). This doesn’t mean that visual rhetoric proponents do not embrace the non-discursive as well as the discursive, but right now the theorization of visual rhetoric is still too limited, which is why I prefer the language of “image studies” or “multimodal rhetoric” over visual rhetoric.

Image Studies

Even though images may be processed primarily using our visual senses, what our brains do with those images in terms of persuasion, interpretation, imagination, and application transcends the visual, though whether or not it transcends the discursive is debateable. In *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (1986),

W.J.T. Mitchell clearly views the differences between discursive and non-discursive as minimal. Mitchell remarks, "There is no essential difference between poetry and painting, no difference, that is, that is given for all time by the inherent natures of the media, the objects they represent, or the laws of the human mind" (49). Mitchell, instead, maintains the differences are a result of the "'language games' that we play" including the fetishsization of images and simultaneous distrust of such these images in different cultures and political contexts. Mitchell ultimately argues, not surprisingly, that the ways in which images are understood, studied, and valued relate to social, historical, and cultural practices (162), regardless of the technology involved.

Before Roland Barthes and Kenneth Burke began discussing the influence of signs and symbols, rhetoricians largely focused their analysis on the persuasive power of the verbal rather than the visual in public discourse (Lucaites and Hariman 37). Then, in the essay "The Rhetoric of the Image" (1977), Barthes argued that "all images," including words, are polysemous; they imply, underlying their signifiers, a 'floating chain' of signifieds, the reader able to choose some and ignore others"().

Barthes asserts a significant influence in the creation and study of multimodal rhetoric in terms of his notions of what constitutes a text and critical analysis. In his collected works in *Mythologies* and *Image-Music–Text* Barthes discusses methods of analyzing artifacts and events for the meanings and codes embedded within such displays through examining structures and their potential influences. Like Marx and Althusser, Barthes discusses the "naturalization" of cultural values and bourgeois

morality by exploring signs. Barthes describes his concept of myth in relation to message:

> Since myth is a type of speech, everything can be a myth provided it is conveyed by a discourse. Myth is not defined by the object of its message, but by the way in which it utters this message: there are formal limits to myth, there are no "substantial" ones. Everything, then, can be a myth? Yes, I believe this…. Every object in the world can pass from a closed, silent existence to an oral state, open to appropriation by society, for there is no law, whether natural or not, which forbids talking about such things. (109)

Likewise, rhetorician Kenneth Burke, in *A Rhetoric of Motives*, implies that arguments are not limited to the spoken word, but instead, involve symbols in a larger sense. Burke states "Persuasion cannot be confined to the strictly verbal; it is a mixture of symbolism and definite empirical operations" (161), including discursive and non-discursive elements. Philosopher Susanne Langer also wants a more comprehensive concept of the meaning of expression and discusses language and image in relation to art, taking on the "indescribable aspects" of rhetoric in her intriguing book, *Philosophy in a New Key: A Study of the Symbolism of Reason, Rite, and Art*, stating that the limits of "rational and logical language" need to be examined and, perhaps, blurred, insisting that "there is an unexplored possibility of genuine semantic beyond the limits of discursive language" (86). These ideas regarding the expanded territory of composition and analysis holds implications for instructors and students in terms of establishing different ways to recognize rhetoric

and meaning, and opens up a space from which multimodal artifacts can be appreciated.

Academic conversations on “image” in composition and rhetoric are clearly present in recent scholarship, largely focusing either on the connections between images and computers/digital technology or on revisiting images as related to printed texts and language in general. These often overlapping perspectives still tend to emphasize the discursive aspects of composing over non-discursive elements, and has thus far limited the rhetorical choices and strategies that may be available in for purposes of composing and analyzing artifacts, perhaps to the detriment of the disciplines of composition and rhetoric.

In addressing the issues of political economy and ideology in relation to the rhetoric of the image, the ideas about ideology of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels are instructive. In *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels discuss the connections between the material production, the “ruling classes,” and cerebral practices:

> The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas: i.e., the class which is the ruling *material* force of society is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, consequently also controls the means of mental production, so that the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are on the whole subject to it. (67)

The notion of ideology as a group of ideas established by the dominant class of society to be dispersed to all is important to image studies because it begins to explain how ideology is naturalized and legitimized via images, including language.

The focus on forces of production and distribution in the concept of political economy provides a way for students to understand connections between ideology and culture, and to comprehend the ways in which images, such as those in the media, permeate and function in everyday life. A grasp on political economy, however unfashionable, also allows critique of technologies (defined broadly here) used to promote ideologies in a capitalistic culture.

Antonio Gramsci's theories, from the *Prison Notebooks* are edifying in terms of image studies and multimodal rhetoric in that Gramsci built on Marx and Engels' notions by developing the concept of "ideological hegemony," which not only explains how the ruling classes especially in a capitalistic state, remain in power without having to constantly be waging war, but also describes how the subaltern might gain agency through an understanding of ideology. In trying to explain the failure of socialism and the rise of fascism, Gramsci claims that one must look beyond the economic base to see how power is legitimated by the willing consensus of those who are most exploited via the dissemination of bourgeois values, beliefs, and morality, which is brought about through institutions of education, religion, government bureaucracy and media. Gramsci claims that the model of ideology should not be perceived as entirely negative, but viewed as a more complex mechanism. Gramsci asserts:

> One must therefore distinguish between historically organic ideologies, those, that is, which are necessary to a given structure, and ideologies which are arbitrary, rationalistic, or "willed". To the extent that ideologies are historically necessary they have a validity which is

> "psychological"; they "organize" human masses, and create the terrain on which men move, acquire consciousness of their position, struggle, etc. To the extent that they are arbitrary they only create individual "movements", polemics and so on (though these are not completely useless, since they function like an error which by contrasting with truth, demonstrates it). (376-377)

For Gramsci, a persistent investigation of "ideological structure" is useful to gaining an understanding of how dominance is maintained and can be challenged. For students in beginning composition and rhetoric, such a study can also lead to an understanding of the power of composition and the importance of constructing meaning in regard to production, distributed, and reception. In *Selections from the Cultural Writing*s, Gramsci discusses the ideological character of media and cultural misinformation:

> The press is the most dynamic part of this ideological structure, but not the only one. Everything which influences or is able to influence public opinion directly or indirectly, belongs to it: libraries, schools, associations and clubs of various kinds, even architecture and the layout and names of streets…Such a study, done seriously, would be very important. Besides providing a living historical model of such a structure, it would accustom one to a more cautious and exact estimate of the forces acting in society. (389-390)

Similarly, through analyzing the manner in which modern technology made mass reproduction of images possible and mass media made dispersal more efficient and

widespread, Walter Benjamin, in *Illuminations*, considers the loss of "aura" of "high culture" as an opportunity for significant changes in society. With this change, Benjamin also envisions more critically conscious populous which promises new agency for more people:

> One might generalize by saying: the technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition. By making many reproductions it substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence. And in permitting the reproduction to meet the beholder or listener in his own particular situation, it reactivates the object reproduced. These two processes lead to a tremendous shattering of tradition which is the obverse of the contemporary crisis and renewal of mankind. (221)

Conversely, Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer argue against this potential for agency in their book, *The Dialect of Enlightenment*. Adorno and Horkheimer view the mass media and technologies of reproduction, and multimodal images as systematically making up a "uniform" project to ensure the "total power of capital"(94) in capitalist cultures. By creating a system in which the reproduction and dispersal of information is uniform and efficient, a "monopoly" on meaning-making and information distribution is also established. Adorno and Horkheimer stress, "The technical antithesis between few production centers and widely dispersed reception necessitates organization and planning by those in control" (95). Instead of the needs of the consumers being the central issue, the authors argue, "In reality, a cycle of manipulation and retroactive need is unifying the system ever more tightly. What is

not mentioned is that the basis on which technology is gaining power over society is the power of those whose economic position in society is the strongest. Technical rationality today is the rationality of domination" (95).

Marshall McLuhan shares some of these concerns as demonstrated in *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. McLuhan explains the kind of power aspects of the media, such as television and the radio, possess, namely, the creation of an alienated, passive, and colonized populous (23-35).

Multimedia and Multimodal Rhetoric

In this dissertation, I apply the term multimodality as promoted by Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen in *Multimodal Discourse* (2001), and multimedia as discussed by Richard Mayer in several of his works on multimedia instruction in the areas of learning and psychology. According to Kress and van Leeuwen, multimodal theory proposes that modes are interactive forms that operate within a sign system understood by a social collective. The authors define and demonstrate multimodality from a semiotic viewpoint, claiming that multimodality is "the use of several semiotic modes in the design of a semiotic product or event, together in the particular way in which these modes are combined"(20). Modes, in this framework, refers to the "semiotic resources which allow the simultaneous realization of discourses and types of (inter)action"(21) and include language, writing, image, gesture, and sound. Kress and Van Leeuwen emphasize the notion of *practice* to stress the social aspects of multimodality, and advocate for a four part "strata" (9) of discourse, design, production, and distribution of multimodal texts that combine verbal and non-verbal

elements and requires invention, transmission, and reception in interpretive communities or discourse communities (110-124). Discourses are “socially situated forms of knowledge about (specific aspects) of reality”(20). In other words, discourse refers to the materials or elements of meaning-making(words, photos, sounds) and the ways in which they are situated within a cultural context on which its interpretation, acceptance, and stability depends. In a composition course, students become conscious of discourse communities and rhetorical strategies through analyzing a variety of multimodal texts guided by an instructor. Examples of multimodal texts are maps, charts, websites, and rooms.

Kress and van Leeuwen make a distinction between practices of “design” and “production” to emphasize the differences between conceptual aspects of multimodal projects and the actual production of multimodal texts so practitioners can understand the processes of planning, imagining, and designing as separate from production practices (5). For example, when we write, we use recursive processes to develop our ideas for specific purposes and audiences. Similarly, multimodal text production involves experimenting with different technique, strategies, and methods, and as such, students are asked to pay attention to how the components of projects work towards fulfilling rhetorical purposes. The split between design and production recommended by Kress and Van Leeuwen reflects the variety of choices available at different recursive points in multimodal text creation that can address the expectations of potential audiences.

To gain further understanding of multimodal rhetoric, it is important to connect it with multimedia studies in the discipline of psychology, since the use of

multimodal rhetoric involves theories of learning. Most of us teachers use principles of multimodal learning on a daily basis whether we realize it or not. When we allow written texts, photos, wipe board diagrams and instructions, and Power Point presentation to mingle in a classroom, we are enacting multimedia instruction. Mayer defines multimedia instruction as "a lesson containing words (e.g., printed words or spoken words) and pictures (e,g., illustrations, photos, animation, or video) that is intended to foster learning" (760). His work on multimedia learning is based on the concepts of dual-channel learning, limited capacity, and active processing (760). As Mayer notes "dual-channel" learning is "the idea that humans possess separate channels for processing visual and verbal material"(760); "limited capacity" relates to "the idea that each channel can process only a small amount of material at any one time"(760); and "active processing" is "the idea that deep learning depends on the learner's cognitive processing during learning (e.g., selecting, organizing, and integrating)"(760).

Multimedia instruction provides the use of several aspects of sensory memory, including that of auditory sensory memory, visual sensory memory, and working memory, wherein "the learner organizes some of the sounds and images some of the sounds into a verbal model and organizes some of the images into a pictorial model"(767). Al of these processes lead to long-term memory, in which "the learner can activate prior knowledge to be integrated with the verbal and pictorial models in working memory and can store the resulting knowledge in long-term memory"(767).

Mayer also discusses the efficacy of multimodal learning based on his "multimedia principle" which states that cognitively "people learn more deeply when they build connections between a verbal representation and a pictorial representation of the same material"(766). This principle is based on Mayer's own research and the research of others in the fields of psychology and education, who argue that:

> This cognitive process of integration is an important way to promote learner understanding. For example, in a words-only presentation, learners receive a printed text explaining how a pump works; in a words-and-pictures presentation, learners receive the same printed text along with an illustration depicting the pump when the handle is pushed down and pulled up. In 11 of 11 experiments, involving paper-based lessons on brakes, pumps, generators, and lightning and computer-based lessons on brakes, pumps, lightning, and arithmetic, learners who received corresponding graphics with words performed better on transfer tests than learners who received words alone. (766)

By using digital audio/video commentaries in concert with student writing, I am attempting to apply concepts of multimodal rhetoric and multimedia instruction and learning. Using digital audio/visual reflections allows students to practice Mayer's theory of "generative multimedia learning," which suggests that a learner can be viewed as a "knowledge constructor who actively selects and constructs pieces of verbal and visual knowledge" in unique ways (4), for the purposes of constructing a reflective repertoire of skills.

Criticism: The Digital Divide

> We live in a world in which there is more and more information,
> and less and less meaning.
>
> —Jean Baudrillard, *Simulcra and Simulation*

Lanham's enthusiasm for digital media and electronic technology as a medium for creating the "personalization of learning, a radical democratization of 'textbooks' that allows every student to walk an individual path" (10) has since been critiqued and tempered by academics such as Selfe who warns against viewing the computer as a technology that will "level the playing field" for all students. Selfe asserts:

> With its utopian underpinnings, this narrative [of computers as a progressive literary tool] expresses most directly American hopes for technology, rather than the realities characterizing technology's link to literacy in official instructional contexts. (27)

Selfe argues that technology is affected by the continuing presence of racism, poverty, and sexism (19). Significantly, Selfe reminds us that issues of access to digital technology are mediated by economic, social, and political factors, among others (Grabill, 2003).

In "The Politics of the Interface: Power and Its Exercise in Electronic Contact Zones" Cynthia Selfe and Richard Selfe contend that electronic interfaces are no more neutral than other textual surfaces (485). Selfe argues that deterministic assumptions of technologies inhibit our ability to carefully think about the ethical

integration of technology and its impact on literate practices, and our ability as teachers and scholars to work toward meaningful change. Additional critiques of such enthusiasm for the digital age come in the form of social traditional theories of language learning and social critiques which privilege word over image in educational settings, especially in as applied in composition courses. As part of this consumer and technological revolution, visual images are increasingly recognized as a larger framework in which printed texts and other cultural artifacts are embedded with harmful ideological and corporate-driven elements. In composition classes, most students are familiar with such multimodal texts and artifacts.

As Cynthia Selfe suggests above, computers haven't brought the promised revolutions in access or social change, and may actually work to oppose transformation:

> Computers have, in many cases, supported stasis rather than change, and, indeed, have served to actively resist change! For example, I do not think that computer technology has substantially changed the populations that we see in our classrooms, the ways in which class and race influence our teaching, or the ways in which our published scholarship continues to be accessible by only a very, very small number of elite scholars. (qtd. in Dorwick)

Selfe does not, however, preclude change via computers. Instead she makes the point that the existence and potential uses of computers do not represent significant social, political, economic, or educational changes by proxy, but require other influences to work in tandem with such technology. Selfe qualifies her remarks:

> I am not saying, of course that computers have not changed *other* aspects of our lives as professionals, but, rather, that technology is only an artifact of a culture and will not produce or encourage change *unless* there are other tangential forces and social formations in place that support such changes. (qtd. in Dorwick; emphasis in the original)

The incorporation of multimodal rhetoric and image studies into composition studies is a complex and multi-layered endeavor that has not yet fully been embraced or explored. However, the works we have in composition studies represent good-willed and situated points of entry for incorporating multimodal texts that will inevitably expand. It is my hope to contribute to the discussion on these issues vis-à-vis this project on digital commentaries as reflective practice in composition studies. Most importantly, I want to show how students make sense of their writing, rhetorical strategies, and literacy practices in embodied and digitally advanced ways in the classroom today.

This chapter promotes the extension of composition by briefly discussing visual rhetoric, image studies, new media, and the digital divide to provide a background for authoring of digital video commentaries as a suitable project for beginning college writers. Perhaps if we consider our students familiarity with digital video capabilities, such as YouTube to be both cultural objects of analysis and production as well as recreational, we can provide some teachable moments and provide new possibilities in the composition classroom. I am not arguing that written words can or should be replaced by digital video compositions, but rather that the authoring of digital video for the purposes of reflecting on writing can take

advantage of a popular, accessible, and flexible technology to improve instruction and reflection. Rather than dismissing digital videos out of hand I suggest that writing instructors consider incorporating digital videos into their classrooms and assignments.

Since we, as composition and rhetoric instructors, are assumed learned in the art of rhetorical analysis and communication processes, the integration of digital video commentaries need not significantly change existing priorities in composition courses, but instead support those processes in a complex writing context. This integration acknowledges the complicated communication situations in which our students are placed. By integrating digital video commentaries, not replacing writing in a course, instructors can build on genres and rhetorical situations with which students are already familiar and make connections between what they currently know and what they may need to know as college-level writers.

Effective use of digital video commentaries provides for a rhetorically rich form that depends on understanding the rhetorical situation and providing clear and compelling evidence of writing and technical skills. Since digital technology and video techniques are not just trendy and cool but make are easily accessible and allow for easy acquisition, editing and manipulation, and distribution, I argue it has pedagogical potential and import in composition classes. I am, however not advocating for a full range of uses here, but a specific application for writers in performing critical reflection.

CHAPTER THREE

CRITICAL REFLECTION

> A reflexive pedagogy emphasizes understanding. Understanding represents both the product and the process of the transaction between knower and known. I suppose occasionally we might experience understanding as a sudden flash of insight, the eureka moment. More frequently, however, I believe the realization that we understand emerges gradually and we only become aware of it when we make a reflexive turn.
>
> —Donna Qualley, *Turns of Thought: Teaching Composition as Reflexive Inquiry*

The goal of this project is to examine the use of digital commentaries in composition courses as an effective method of reflection and assessment in college composition courses. Since my research focuses on incorporating digital audio/video commentaries as part of an end-of-term writing portfolio, in this chapter I will discuss writing assessment, writing portfolios, and reflective writing in contemporary composition and rhetoric, and then apply it to my own project, but will begin with a discussion of the history of reflection as related to composition and rhetoric. According to Yancey:

> During the 1970s and into the 1980s, students in writing classes across the country were asked to take part in research focused on

> writing processes. The problem we wanted them to help us to address was simple if a little disconcerting: while we in composition studies were supposed to be teaching students how to write, we really didn't know how they *learned* to write. (2)

Thus, composition studies shifted to focus more on the student learner. Over the last forty years of contemporary composition instruction, researchers have attempted to define the field and establish legitimacy in a larger academic context. As in most disciplines, in so doing, we developed and circulated manifold theories and practices, and encountered conflicting ideas, changes in concepts, unresolved debates, all of which, I am sure, well represent the complex nature of language and epistemology. As Yancey explains in her quote above, it took our area of study some time to evolve from a traditional method of presenting students with models of professional or canonical writing and asking them to imitate such genres and ideal forms, instead of inviting them to engage in their own development as students and writers. In the shift to more processed-oriented pedagogy, some researchers began to pay more attention to student writers and less attention to the great works of "master writers." Initially, this research adhered to a quasi-scientific model of having students compose while describing their writing processes in a "lab-like" style (Emig), and proceeded to compare the writing processes of "advanced" student writers with beginning writers in order to bring writers to the same level (Flower and Hayes). As Yancey points out, these methods take for granted an "ideal text"(*Reflection* 3).

I remember enacting a form of this imitation model myself many years ago when I was hired for my first teaching job at a community college. I was still a new

graduate student in English and was just beginning to learn about composition theory. At the community college at that time, all teachers were required to use a common text, and since I was hired less than a week before the semester started, I based my courses on a colleague's syllabus. I taught all the traditional genres of narration, description, example, comparison and contrast, process analysis, division, classification, definition, and argument and persuasion. I had students read, among other pieces, E.B. White's "Once More to the Lake," Amy Tan's "Fish Cheeks," and William F. Buckley's "Why Do We Complain." While I actually loved reading these texts and found that the texts could be incorporated in different ways in my classes, requiring students to use these works as models and write in specific forms made me question if I was asking students to perform tasks that were not only restrictive and of little practical use, but also conceptually unreasonable. For example, White's "Once More to the Lake" not only reflects years of carefully crafted description, but also the developmental maturity to understand mortality from a nostalgic point of view that only a few of my older students could begin to grasp or appreciate.

More recent scholarship focuses not as much on the ideal forms and models, but on the dialogical processes of coming to know, experimenting, revising, using different rhetorical strategies, and contributing to what Joseph Harris calls an "ongoing conversation"(qtd. in Yancey, *Reflection* 3), not unlike the Burkean Parlor model, discussed decades earlier in Kenneth Burke's *The Philosophy of Literary Form* (1941), as explained in his words:

> Imagine that you enter a parlor. You come late. When you arrive, others have long preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated

> discussion, a discussion too heated for them to pause and tell you exactly what it is about. In fact, the discussion had already begun long before any of them got there, so that no one present is qualified to retrace for you all the steps that had gone before. (110-111)

I introduce this concept to my first year composition students. Like Trimbur and Graff, I follow the academic conversation model in my composition courses to discuss academic writing. Burke continues to describe the now familiar concept of epistemology in which humans can engage and to which they can add:

> You listen for a while, until you decide that you have caught the tenor of the argument; then you put in your oar. Someone answers; you answer him; another comes to your defense; another aligns himself against you, to either the embarrassment or gratification of your opponent, depending upon the quality of your ally's assistance. However, the discussion is interminable. The hour grows late, you must depart. And you do depart, with the discussion still vigorously in progress. (110-111)

This change in the conception of writing and associated instructional methods also transformed the concept of reflection as integrated into composition courses, which involved less focus on the outward appearances of writing practices and the lab-like coding of writer behavior and placed more emphasis on actual student participation and interpretation of writing processes and products in a less-prescribed and more open-ended context. This lead to recordings of students commenting on their own writing in specific contexts, readings, conversations, discourses, and research, and

also contributed to our current perceptions of reflection in writing courses, in which Yancey describes reflection serving “as a means of go[ing] beyond the text to include a sense of the ongoing conversations that texts enter into" (5), using the concept of the student as the authoritative informant. Instead of a cognitivist approach of observing students as part of a scientific model, Yancey insists on a more student-centered model, "To ask students to participate with us, not as objects of our study, but as agents of their own learning" (50).

This is really where my study comes into play. Not unlike the recordings which were produced in the early days of composition studies, I am looking at digital video/audio recordings to get at how students view the learning process and their place in it, and to learn better how to help my students negotiate reading, writing, and critical thinking. Although Yancey, one of the early scholars on reflection in composition, claims that reflection did not play a significant role in the early history of composition studies (4), in the year 2010, there are several common reflective practices used in writing classes, from daily reflection on ideas, readings, and writing to reflecting on collected writings over time. Some use reflection for generating inquiry, others use it for assessment, and still others use it for both reasons. For example, John Bean recommends daily reflection in the form of a daily tally of events, while many routinely use a portfolio system to assess writing in composition classes and colleges consisting of 1) collected works, 2) a cover letter, and 3) selection (Condon and Hamp-Lyons).

According to Yancey, reflection constitutes a significant component of learning and is comprised of "1. goal-setting, revisiting and refining, 2. text-revising

in the light of retrospection, 3. the articulation of what learning has taken place, as embodied in various texts as well as in the process used by the writer" (Yancey 7). Yancey places emphasis on students as a significant part of the reflection process. Reflection now comprises an important aspect of composition in terms of creating student portfolios, advancing teaching practices, researching and assessing writing programs, and changing educational systems. Unfortunately, asking students to be agents of their own learning can become an occasion to respond in non-analytical ways. It can also lead to a focus on the individual student to the exclusion of others in terms of writing processes, thinking, and research.

Reflection as practiced in composition has been criticized in the last few years for being too expressivistic, formulaic, and inconsequential. Kathryn Emmons critiques the current implementation of reflection in composition studies on the basis of its focus on the individual instead of a social context. In doing so, Emmons reveals a chasm between what we say we want in composition studies in terms of reflection, what we actually ask for, and, not coincidently actually receive from students. Emmons sates, "in contrast to our post-process goals…we currently value the display of personal growth and achievement in isolation from the discursive and social practices of larger communities" (44). By observing a consistent/undeniable "narrative of progress" as a common rhetorical move often found in student portfolio cover letters (44), Emmons argues that reflections are becoming formulaic accounts that function to make instructors feel good and often allow students to elide confronting the collaborative and context-specific work they produce over an

academic quarter, semester, or year (which, it must be noted, cannot really be blamed entirely on the students). Emmons asserts:

> Thus, our reflective assignments are quickly refigured as self-reflective assignments, as occasions to consider highly personal and individual achievements, rather than as occasions to struggle with the relationships—both technical and rhetorical—that constitute writing for a particular community. (44)

Emmons is not the only critic of the current reflective practices in composition studies. Donna Qualley is similarly convinced that what we are currently doing as reflection merely asks that students discuss their application of technical knowledge and skill, and does not go far enough in asking students to understand the implications of their own assumptions, viewpoints, and texts. While agreeing that reflection is paramount in learning, Qualley is more interested in the concept of reflexivity in a composition studies context. Qualley's model of reflexivity is based on not only focusing on one's own goal-setting and learning of the writing process, but also concentrates on the engagement of meditating on one's ideas and inquiry in relation to engaging the ideas of others. Qualley uses the term "reflexive inquiry," for this shift, explaining, "By reflexive, I mean the act of turning back to discover, examine, and critique one's claims and assumptions in response to an encounter with another idea, text, person, or culture"(3). Qualley's emphasis on the points of encounter with the ideas of others is an idea that is often forgotten in the reflective stage of composition courses, but is critical. Qualley makes this point clear in distinguishing between "reflection" and "reflexivity":

> Reflexivity is not the same thing as reflection, although they are often part of the same recursive and hermeneutical process. When we reflect, we fix our thoughts on a subject; we carefully consider it, meditate upon it. Self-reflection assumes that individuals can access the contents of their own mind independently of others. Reflexivity, on the other hand, does not originate in the self but always occurs in response to a person’s critical engagement with an "other." (11)

Qualley's definition of reflexivity is key to my own work and project on student digital commentaries because it takes in to account a broader understanding of reflection in which students may be able to transcend their student roles in favor of viewing themselves as writer and creators beyond the academic context and bring such knowledge to their other roles as writers. It also, more importantly, acknowledges that writing and thinking are improved with contact and engagement with others, including the “others” in our own thinking. In composition courses, as in many academic endeavors, interacting with the ideas of others is crucial in developing ideas, solving problems, conducting research, designing and carrying out projects, and promoting new or revised frameworks for understanding. As such, asking students to reflect on the ways in which the works of others confront their own developing or developed understanding of textual discourse, design, production, distribution and reception of texts is also vital, informative, and productive for writers and potential audiences and stakeholders.

Educational Reflection

> Many things happen to us in the way of pleasure and pain which we do not connect with any prior activity of our own. They are mere accidents so far as we are concerned. There is no before or after to such experience; no retrospect nor outlook, and consequently no meaning. We get nothing which may be carried over to foresee what is likely to happen next, and no gain in ability to adjust ourselves to what is coming—no added control.
>
> —John Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 1916

My discussion of reflection and knowledge will be limited to a group of concepts. People who study philosophy or rhetoric will know that thinking about reflection and learning began with Aristotle and his three-fold disciplinary classification system of theoretical, practical, and productive disciplines. John Dewey discusses similar concepts as routine action and reflective action and Donald Schon's ideas about "reflection-in-action" and "reflection-on-action" place reflection in a more current and concrete context.

As many composition scholars have noted, composition studies owes much to John Dewey and his perspectives on reflection. In *How We Think: A Restatement of the Relation of Reflective Thinking to the Education Process* (published in 1910, and republished in 1933), Dewey examines several facets of reflective processes, including distinctions between "routine action" and "reflective action." As Dewey defines it, reflection is a way of thinking that cannot be equated with simply

reconsidering a text, issue, or event, which he considers undisciplined and "routine action"(4). “Reflective activity” instead, is defined as “active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusion to which it tends”(9). To become a habitual way of thinking, Dewey argues that this type of reflection must be learned and practiced (34).

Following in the footsteps of Dewey, Donald Schön also contributes to the development of ideas on reflection, specifically in the context of educational practice. Schon’s work, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action* (1983) focuses on how different professionals construct their range of skills, including teachers as professionals. He explores the ways in which teachers reflect on their practice while engaged “in action,” which can assist teachers in creatively adjusting practices to fit new circumstances. The concepts of “reflection-in-action” and “reflection-on-action” are of importance to my digital commentary project.

“Reflection-in-action” involves examining our experiences as we perform routine actions, connecting these actions with feelings, theories, and histories to build new understandings while experiences unfold. Schon described this process:

> The practitioner allows himself to experience surprise, puzzlement, or confusion in a situation which he finds uncertain or unique. He reflects on the phenomenon before him, and on the prior understandings which have been implicit in his behavior. He carries out an experiment which serves to generate both a new understanding of the phenomenon and a change in the situation. (68)

"Reflection-on-Action," on the other hand, occurs after an experience. In order to reflect on action, one spends time considering and reconsidering how she/he acted, why, and what was occurring with others in the context or environment at the time. In so doing, a reflective thinker can develop questions and ideas regarding activities and practices, and should do so by recording these questions and ideas (such as in a digital commentary or in writing), and in conversation with supervisors and peers. In this way, a person can establish a "repertoire" or inventory of ideas to draw upon in future practice. Schon discusses the concept of repertoire:

> When a practitioner makes sense of a situation he perceives to be unique, he *sees* it *as* something already present in his repertoire. To see *this* site as *that* one is not to subsume the first under a familiar category or rule. It is, rather, to see the unfamiliar, unique situation as both similar to and different from the familiar one, without at first being able to say similar or different with respect to what. The familiar situation functions as a precedent, or a metaphor, or... an exemplar for the unfamiliar one. (138, italics in original)

The more we recognize and reiterate, the more concrete our self-knowledge becomes.

DVD commentaries themselves and concepts of reflexive inquiry in student video projects can foster reflective thinking, writing, and meaning-making in different fields of study through the use of video commentaries. This reflection is recursive and represents multidirectional collaboration with peers, experts, and instructors. Reflective writing is often difficult for first-year students to produce and

view as characteristic of writing and thinking in different disciplines. This reflective writing exercise is designed to help students use technology with which many students are intimately familiar and move them from observation to reflection. Through reflective thinking, participants become familiar with the idea and utility of being a "reflective practitioner" (Schön, 1983). It highlights student consciousness because it asks that students take the authority in examining their writing and ideas, and discuss what they know. This activity also addresses the development of student confidence, and competence. In addition, student reflection provides instructors with useful and significant feedback on course content and pedagogy.

Freire and Reflection

Burke was not the only theorist influencing the conceptions of composition, rhetoric, and literacy. Brazilian educator and activist Paulo Freire also significantly influenced the ways in which educational philosophies of language and writing, and especially reflect on texts, are taken into account. According to Kathleen Weiler, "Freire saw that the oppressive regimes encouraged habits of submission and docility which caused individuals to cease questioning their life circumstances and to accept the unacceptable"(14), and one of the ways he tries to undermine this submissiveness in order to liberate more people is through reflection. Freire's now famous "banking concept of education" is what he refers to as a model of unreflective thought in which a knowledgeable teacher makes a deposit of knowledge into docile and empty student vessels.

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1972) Freire explains the banking concept of education: “Knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those who they consider know nothing”(46). This consequence of this form of instruction is the lack of opportunity and practice for students/people to develop ideas and ask questions, and students and populous, therefore, remain passive. In order to break this oppressive paradigm, Freire advocates a model of education based on problem-posing and dialogue between student and teacher that is reflective, dynamic, and interactive. In this model, students gain political and social empowerment through literacy and consciousness by using student experience and knowledge as a basis for future study. This consciousness, or *conscientizacao* is developed via the integration of action and reflection and is referred to as praxis (85-86). Friere’s ideas are important to this digital video project because digital videos can offer students opportunities to actively use their own experiences to interrogate their worlds as citizens, producers, and critics. It encourages students to see themselves as more than passive learners.

Writing Assessment and Reflection

Kathleen Blake Yancey describes contemporary writing assessment in U.S. colleges as three overlapping waves of “objective tests (1950-1970),” “holistically scored essays (1970-1986)”, and “portfolio assessment and programmatic assessment (1986-present)” (Yancey, “Looking Back” 131). Portfolio assessment came into being out of a cultural push for better educational standards in the 1980s (Park 1) and due to a perceived need to assess more real language-in-use practices and writing

processes taught in college (Hamp-Lyons and Condon). While Peter Elbow and Pat Belanoff are widely credited with implementing writing portfolios as an improved form of exit exam (Yancey, "Looking Back" 138), other scholars have contributed to refining the writing portfolio over the years. Differences exist in how instructors conceive of and apply portfolio assignments, but in the main in the context of writing instruction and assessment, a portfolio is defined as "a collection of texts the writer has produced over a defined period of time" (Hamp-Lyons 262). These can consist of many things, including "selected but not necessarily polished or finished pieces" (Privette 60), but are usually comprised of a selection of student texts and a reflective essay or letter. Bill Condon and Liz Hamp-Lyons offer nine characteristics of effective writing portfolios, including collection of work representing more than a single performance, a range of work representing different genres that display different areas of expertise, delayed evaluation wherein students can go back and revise their work, selection which requires that students participate in the selection process of pieces that will appear in the portfolio, and reflection and self-assessment in which the learner is asked to self assesses and/or reflects on what he/she has learned (33-37). It is, of course, the reflection element in the portfolio on which I will focus.

Portfolios

Writing portfolios are often scored "holistically" (White 167) under specific conditions as described below by Edward White:

> Controlled essay readings, preceded by training sessions designed to inculcate the same set of scoring guidelines for the particular essay topic assigned; sample papers illustrating the various score points, public discussion of the ways in which sample papers illustrated those score points; and record keeping to see to it that readers generally agreed on scores and didn't dilly-dally during the time set for the reading. (White 166)

Although many believe in the legitimacy of this type of assessment, the different genres of writing that may be included in the portfolio, and the inconsistency of evaluating these different kinds of writing has, over time, made many researchers question the validity of holistic evaluation of portfolios. White argues against holistic evaluation of portfolios, stating "Regardless of how it is adapted, holistic scoring is fundamentally unsuited for evaluation of portfolios" (167) due both to validity issues and to the necessary and significant resources required to perform such assessment, for example, paying professional readers for the time it takes to examine each portfolio.

Instead, White recommends what he calls, "Phase 2 method of scoring" in which a student reflection plays a key role. In Phase 2 scoring, there are two main components required, one, "a set of goals set by faculty for the particular course, program or purpose for which the portfolio is being submitted" (169) and, two, "a reflective cover letter to readers composed by the student arguing that those goals have been met, using the portfolio contents as evidence"(169). The benefit of Phase 2 scoring to teacher-graded writing portfolios is that students are encouraged, nay,

required to take ownership and authority of their portfolio and construct an argument about their work via the reflection. Instructors read the reflective piece, and can selectively read the rest of the portfolio in a goal-oriented manner (171). Many portfolios required of students in writing classes now require the reflective piece and can consist of a "cover letter" or reflective essay serving as a way for students to articulate different aspects of their work, including how they have met the goals of the course, their strengths and weaknesses and writers, the effects of the ideas of others on their thinking and writing, and even their place as citizens and consumers in larger cultural contexts. In other words, though the content can vary, ultimately, these reflective pieces allow students to create and assess the meanings of their experiences while simultaneously providing instructors and institutions with another level of evaluation and feedback, and perhaps ideally, to create a dialogue between students, instructors, programs, and university-wide instruction.

Yancey's definition of reflection is 1) the process by which we know what we have accomplished and by which we articulate accomplishment, and 2) the products of those processes (*Reflection* 6). Yancey specifies the seven rhetorical moves typically made in "reflection-in-presentation" as including the following:

- Introducing the text by invoking a context of experience and/or a context of the class
- Speaking of past selves as a way of understanding the current self
- Using metaphor as a means of exploring relationships
- Assessing one's work or learning

- Invoking other contexts voluntarily as a means of understanding and explaining
- Looking towards gaps and making connections, as two means of synthesizing and revitalizing and reflecting
- Answering the question, what have I learned? With as much emphasis on the I as on the learned. (95)

In this scheme, there may still be problems with reflection and privilege, since students trained to conform to educational institutions have benefited from the cultural messages of the dominant culture and the implicit associated privileges (McIntosh, 1989). In addition, this makes the formulaic reflective responses almost impossible to get away from since it asks students to perform formulaic work. In many ways I reject Yancey's definition, and instead embrace Jody Shipka's manner of assessment, which is more in line with Qualley's reflexive turns and my own goals for my students and writers. Shipka declares:

> If we are committed to providing students with opportunities to forge new connections, to work in new ways, to produce new kinds of texts, and to become increasingly cognizant of the ways texts provide shape for and take shape from the contexts in which they are produced, circulated, valued, and responded to, I think it is crucial that we take care not to limit the texts, tools, and composing strategies students might employ and alter in compelling ways.

Shipka discusses assessment of multimodal reflective texts, and the assessment of multimodal texts in general, as being an extremely under-theorized area of study

(347). Like Shipka and others, I require that students "assume responsibility for describing and evaluating the purposes and potentials of their work"(347) by clearly explaining their work in an evaluative manner to others. I also adopt Shipka's stance that digital texts need not be assessed differently than other texts, but that we should focus on assessing the rhetorical effect of multimodality in every text. Shipka states: " 'multimodality' as it is used here requires that we attend to 'how multiple modes operate together in a single rhetorical act and how extended chains of modal transformations may be linked in a rhetorical trajectory' (Prior et al. 23)" (348). Shipka advocates for a four question text to accompany any reflective text that is submitted by students, referred to as the Statement of Goals and Choices (SOGC) as follows:

> 1. What, specifically, is this piece trying to accomplish—above and beyond satisfying the basic requirements outlined in the task description? In other words, what work does, or might, this piece do? For whom? In what contexts?
> 2. What specific rhetorical, material, methodological, and technological choices did you make in service of accomplishing the goal(s) articulated above? Catalog, as well, choices that you might not have consciously made, those that were made for you when you opted to work with certain genres, materials, and technologies.
> 3. Why did you end up pursuing this plan as opposed to the others you came up with? How did the various choices listed above allow you to

accomplish things that other sets or combinations of choices would not have?

4. Who and what played a role in accomplishing these goals? (354)

Again, these types of prompts force students to take responsibility for and explain their texts. It also embraces problems and dilemmas which are vital to learning. Even Dewey viewed perplexity and doubt, coupled with critical reflection, as the way in which individuals could make meaning and come to resolution. Incorporating the use of dilemmas as a tool for critical reflection requires that programs create a structure and process in which students can: 1) open their eyes to acknowledge dilemmas and stay in that state of discontinuity, rather than jumping to solutions; 2) describe dilemmas in ways that ensure that they see themselves at the center of the dilemma. Brookfield (1987) suggests that two activities are central to critical thinking: identifying and challenging assumptions and exploring and imagining alternatives. He suggests, however, that embracing critical reflection can be an "almost Herculean act of will…" because, "If we are comfortable with our existence, …we are imprisoned in our own histories and constrained by the inevitably narrow paradigms of thought and action we inhabit" (Brookfield 91). Even in reflecting on my own journey in developing an effective method of reflection, I have found that dilemmas can be productive and that I am trapped in my own history of needing to assess in specified ways. The manner in which I originally asked my students to reflect on their writing was a dilemma for myself and my students. In asking students to reproduce the rhetoric of assessment and course goals while simultaneously explaining how they understood themselves as writers caused

students to be formulaic and contradictory in their reflections. But by "identifying and challenging assumptions and exploring and imagining alternatives" as Brookfield suggests, I came to understand that there are different ways to reflect that actually require more critical thinking and allow for broader applicability, such as the SOGC. For me, the degree to which they address the SOGC is also important, and I use a rubric each of these questions in which I have four categories of lacking, struggling, achieving, and mastering, which I learned from Lisa Johnson-Shull. I am sure this assessment tool will require more attention as I continue to develop my multimedia projects in composition studies, but I think it works well for getting students to assess their own works in light of the course context and their individual projects, whatever they may be.

CHAPTER FOUR
DIGITAL COMMENTARY PROJECT

> If English is to remain relevant as the subject which provides access to participation in public forms of communication, as well as remaining capable of providing understandings of and the abilities to produce culturally valued texts, then an emphasis on language alone simply will no longer do. English will need to change.
>
> —Gunther Kress "English at the Crossroads"

As Dewey, Schon, Boud and Walker argue, experience and learning are enhanced by reflection. Reflective practices establish the necessary conditions to create a repertoire of understanding, skills, and knowledge within a particular context to apply to future experiences. As we all know, students bring much with them when they appear in our courses; they do not come to us *tabula rasa* but already have several ingrained notions of themselves as students, citizens, composers, and consumers who are subject to a cultural systems of hierarchy and power. These notions include understandings about reading, writing, culture, education and their perceived relationships with each. As composition instructors, we can consciously provide more positive and generative reflective experiences to beginning writers as they engage with college-level reading, writing, critical thinking, and performances of comprehension; yet, doing so comes with challenges, including practical limitations and the complexity of reexamining previous negative experiences.

I argue that reflection represents a useful method for students and writers to structure understanding, and several researchers and practitioners, like Yancey, prove that students and writers can develop reflective abilities under the right circumstances. However, in order for students to make reflective practices personally significant in a college composition environment, they need to be supported by instructors who develop reflective process and build reflective opportunities into a course curriculum. I am suggesting that digital video commentary projects are especially well-suited for the task, since it provides an effective means for students to examine the past, assess the present, project into the future.

The manipulability, accessibility, and durability make digital video useful in restructuring perceived acquisition of knowledge. In addition, utilizing audio/video commentaries allows students to describe and capture their experiences of college writing in a direct and embodied manner that they can use or look back on later if asked to discuss their writing in, let's say, a junior writing portfolio or a job interview. These videos also provide students with points of connection between prior knowledge, present knowledge, and forecast future knowledge acquisition on topics of writing, reading, researching, collaborating, rhetoric, and multimodal communication. I share the assumptions about reflection made by Yancey, that "reflection is both process and product"(19). Asking students to reflect on their works can facilitate opportunities for students to "triangulate their own truths, to understand and articulate the pluralism of truth"(19). An additional assumption I make is that "Students can theorize about their own writing in powerful ways"(19) when they see their works as rhetorical acts.

The focus of my inquiry is an alternative video/audio commentary project offered to students in lieu of writing a two-three page reflective cover letter designed to accompany their English 101 portfolios at the end of a sixteen-week semester. At the time I conducted this research, I was teaching at the main campus of Washington State University (WSU), in Pullman, Washington. Washington State University is a rurally-situated Carnegie Doctoral/Research "Extensive" and land-grant state university with approximately seventeen thousand students. Students who attend WSU generally reside in the Western region of the United States (Alaska, Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana, California), or are international students. Like most college students, WSU students are largely technically savvy and media aware. In order to take advantage of these interests and skills, I employed Jeff Rice's concept of "cool."

In *The Rhetoric of Cool*, Jeff Rice focuses on the notion of "cool" in composition and rhetoric by discussing the ways in which popular culture, technology, and new media disrupt and blur disciplinary boundaries. Rice argues that cool is not just "throwaway term best left to popular culture"(5), but a way to use a distinctive rhetorical approach to new media technology that allows students to engage in best practices of academic reading, writing, and critical analysis. Though Rice, following in the footsteps of Marshall McLuhan, would likely consider film as a "hot" technology due to its "low-participatory characteristics"(13), I contend that digital commentaries themselves can be considered "cool" in character because they have a high-participatory nature. In applying Rice's concepts to digital commentaries, I explore the potential for addressing several issues of composing,

including student reflection by incorporating and modeling critical reflection present in television and film commentaries throughout my English 101 course.

Why DVDs?

Available since 1997, DVD technology is popular in the United States and other electronic-heavy countries. According to Harris Interactive Research, in 2008, 85% of U.S. households own a stand-alone DVD player and 81% of households own a computer with an embedded DVD player. Some large corporate retailers and video distributers such as Blockbuster and Circuit City (before their collapse) began selling and renting movies only in DVD format, and have phased out VHS movies (Ramsey). Rebecca May, of *Electronic Media* states, “DVD player ownership among people who own television sets increased from 3 percent in 1999 shortly after their introduction, to 16 percent in 2001. It took VCRs about five years to reach similar growth.”

The popularity of DVDs over VHS videotapes can be attributed to the high quality of picture, sound, and image, relative low-cost (with DVDs selling at around $20, and players priced under $100), durability over time and play, flexibility in viewing choice (with options of letterbox or full screen; a variety of sound system, language, and subtitle selections). John Tollet and David Rohr claim that DVDs "had the fastest adoption rate of any consumer format in history. Forget about records, eight-track tapes, cassettes, VHS, or CDs. While each of these earlier formats found favor with the public, none was embraced as quickly as the DVD”(2). According to IRMA (the International Recording Media Association) "More than 31 million DVD

players have been sold, and consumers can now choose from over 125 DVD player models that are marketed under 50 brand names"(qtd. in Tollet and Rohr 2).

Commentaries on DVDs function as an overlay to the film. When the commentary function is enabled, the commentary audio track plays "on top of" the visual of the film, which sound and audio track are played at a lower volume. Although commentaries also differ from DVD to DVD, participants in these commentaries most often consist of directors, producers, writers, actors, musicians, and members of the film crew, individually or in combination. For example, in the recent movie, *Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl* (2003), one of the best selling DVDs of 2004 ("Top Ten DVD Sales"), the DVD includes four different commentaries. One features director, Gore Verbinski and actor, Johnny Depp. Actors Keira Knightly and Jack Davenport are included on another. A third involves the film's four writers, and the remaining commentary is made by producer, Jerry Bruckheimer (*Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl*). Like commentaries, "featurette" extras also vary but often include "making of" documentaries or cover aspects of filmmaking such as set, wardrobe, casting, and props, historical footage, as well as publicity content.

DVD commentaries and featurettes not only offer movie buffs insights into filmmaking and celebrity, they also present viewers/readers/students/teachers with another way to "read" issues of power, race, class, and gender, as well as to more readily understand processes and the products of composition that are presented in these video tracks.

Interactivity of DVD technology and other new media is an issue of debate. Lev Manovich, in *The Language of New Media*, is careful to critique claims about new media, arguing against “the myth of interactivity” (55-61), asserting that “I avoid using the word *interactive* in this book without qualifying it…I find the concept too broad to be truly useful” (55). Manovich explains that all texts are interactive:

> When we use the concept of “interactive media” exclusively in relation to computer-based media, there is the danger that we will interpret “interaction” literally, equating it with physical interaction between a user and media object (pressing a button, choosing a link, moving the body) at the expense of psychological interaction. The psychological processes of filling-in, hypothesis formation, recall, and identification, which are required for us to comprehend any text or image are mistakenly identified with an objectively existing structure of interactive links. (57)

Tollet and Rohr consider interactivity in relation to DVD technology as definitive and as one of the most significant features of DVDs, which allow consumers to control the ways they view a video presentation or other content. Instead of the linear, start to finish nature of VHS tape, DVD provides the means to quickly jump to any part of the content they want to view(4). While Tollet and Rohr overemphasize some of the ease of use of DVDs in terms of the amount of control a user actually has based on the interface and options, their point about the “jumping around” capability can be an asset in the classroom.

In terms of design and authoring, DVD production allows for design features to play a role in the creation of meaning that can lead to discussions of audience and purpose, in addition to other aspects. Authoring DVDs can be complicated and necessitates access to specific materialities as well as instruction, as Tollet and Rohr observe, "While we may celebrate the creative design possibilities of DVD, we can't overlook the fact that DVD creation can be a very difficult undertaking…that you won't learn overnight" (7). These authors explain, a "DVD disc may contain the handiwork of several different disciplines, including video editing, still and motion graphic design, 3D modeling, audio editing, and more"(7). While this may be a challenge economically and physically for teachers and students, it can also reap rewards. In terms of the commentary assignment I am suggesting in this project, the DVD film segment is short and the commentary, will likewise, be brief. However, while using this equipment, students can gain a better understanding not just of technology and software, but of the processes that go into composition of a text or texts, and possibly the collaborative possibilities of composing.

DVD commentaries can be used to make students aware of meaning-making choices and can function as a type of reflection. Because commentaries tend to be reflective in character, they can serve to highlight several aspects of communicative and rhetorical strategies. To give just one example, in my classes I have used the director commentaries from the popular television series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (*BtVS*) which ran from 1999-2002. I use this series for several reasons; it is hip and features college-aged characters, much like the ones first-year composition are often peopled with, and it is funny and rhetorically rich. Joss Whedon, the director and

creator is wonderfully reflective about his work. Many other DVD commentaries work as well. In particular, I use an episode from the fourth season titled "Hush" in which the characters "lose their voices" for the greater part of the episode. I play a ten minute segment of the show. As the clip is playing, I have students take notes on the commentary in relation to the action on which it is superimposed, keeping in mind the ways in which the writer/director/creator discusses the "text" he produced and how and why he produced it.

Whedon explains each scene, and discusses the aspects he would revise or change if he could, finding fault, for example, in a costume the lead character is wearing, and discussing the limitations of the genre of television. Whedon states, "That's the problem with television; you can't control everything." In commenting on the first scene, Whedon discusses the allusions he makes in terms of classic archetypes symbolized on the show. In addition, Whedon explains the different challenges of creation and how he overcomes these challenges. He also describes issues of language, audience, context, collaboration, and risk-taking. Whedon states:

> What was fun about it [the show] was the absolute surety that I would completely fail…so I came into it with real terror in my heart, which is a wonderful, wonderful feeling to have on a television show because it means that you are actually doing something new.

I think statements like this can allow students to see challenges in composition as positive, "normal," and in some ways indicates that risk and uncertainty is a normal aspect of communication. This is just one example of the ways in which students might benefit from DVD commentaries or digital commentaries.

Other advantages to asking students to create their own digital commentaries on their writing projects are that they become aware of written forms of planning, designing, and storyboarding before they shoot their footage or record their responses, making choices about organizing and manipulating their text, much like in writing. They are asked to edit/cut and paste their recordings using computer software such as Studio, imovie, or Moviemaker. Since most students have more and access to films, video, and music than access to other experiences, creating digital commentaries can work on the knowledge base that many bring with them into the classroom.

In brief, by conducting this research, I also wanted to assist students in performing reflection that would, in the words of Peggy O'Neill "help students become more effectives writers while avoiding the pitfalls and preventing it from becoming formulaic, ritualistic, and predictable" (O'Neill). However, I also started to consider the broader implications for incorporating digital DVD commentaries and digital video production in college-level writing courses, including experiencing subtle changes the technology provided in framing rhetorical, compositional, and literacy practices for beginning college writers, as well as providing students with opportunities to take the technology and use it for their own purposes to reinforce their cultural backgrounds or to encounter other cultures, including negotiating academic contexts. I wanted to see if these embodied commentaries might shift the way they used the "available means of persuasion." Thus, in my own courses, I made certain to incorporate a multimodal and reflective focus from the beginning using a variety of texts highlighting clashes from different cultural perspectives.

In addition to film clips and commentaries, my course materials included excerpts from Ralph Cintron's *Angel's Town: Chero Ways, Gang Life, and the Rhetorics of the Everyday*, in which Cintron poses the question of how one "creates respect under conditions of little or no respect?"(Cintron 112); academic articles on city murals, graffiti, and wartime photojournalism; music analysis from several different cultural perspectives; and the book, *It's the Media Stupid*, by Robert McChesney and John Nichols. These texts offered us a multimodal environment in which to learn college-level reading strategies, summary and response, critical and rhetorical analysis, conventions and citation, and academic argumentation.

The Project

I first collected data from my own courses described above. However, I soon came to realize that by limiting the study to my courses, I would lack a sufficient number of participants needed to create a respectable pool of commentaries. Thus, for this project, I gathered data from four sections of English 101: Introduction to College Writing, a writing requirement for all students. Two sections of the course were taught by me, and the other two by a great colleague and friend, Gwen Sullivan. Specifically, in all four classes, with three weeks left in the term, and armed with IRB approval, I asked for volunteers willing to create digital video reflections commenting on the work they completed over a sixteen week semester. In order to attract volunteer subjects, I stipulated that these digital commentaries would take the place of writing a portfolio reflection or cover letter. In response, thirty students eagerly gave heir informed consent and volunteered for this project (to this

day I am uncertain if their enthusiasm was due to writing fatigue or interest in the project). It is important to note that students performed a great deal of writing in all sections participating in my project, and that my goal for this project is clearly not to eliminate writing from a college composition course, but to complicate and enrich writing and persuasion via multimodal texts.

At the beginning of data collection, I gave each subject instructions for the digital commentary that were consistent with written reflections, specifying for example, that students had to be substantive and specific in discussing their writing assignments. I gave students the option of making individual commentaries or making group or pair commentaries. I encouraged the volunteer subjects to be as creative as they wanted to be with the understanding that they would be graded on making claims and supporting those claims with referential evidence.

In terms of technology, I offered the use of my lovely Sony Vaio laptop, which has an embedded camera and basic movie making software(name here). I also recommended that students take advantage of our WSU Academic Media Support services (AMS). Free to students, the AMS offers extensive media equipment, tools, software, and support, and their facilities include two cutting-edge editing bays. I anticipated receiving many technology-related questions and complaints of problems from students engaged in the project. I was concerned about this aspect of the process since my own technological expertise was quite limited at the time to specific programs and practices. However, surprisingly few students even asked me for support (four of thirty). Most used their own laptops with embedded cameras or digital video cameras to film themselves or have others film them while they went

through their writing or read their scripts. They used both Macs and PCs. They recorded using different formats and files: Audio Video Interleave (AVI-Microsoft), Windows Media Audio (WMA-Microsoft), and Quicktime (MOV-Apple). Several edited their commentaries using titles and transitions, and a few incorporated music, images, and effects. Some students interviewed each other, but most discussed their own work.

One of the most important aspect of digital commentaries, to my mind, is the force of embodied reflection it offers in both the making and in the final product. In reviewing my digital commentary projects in freshman composition, I realized that several non-discursive aspects of the artifacts, namely gestures, facial expressions, glances between participants, emotional responses, and other performances related to embodiment, were only partly addressed in the popular existing structure of "visual rhetoric." In fact, these non-discursive signals are not much discussed in composition or rhetoric in most contemporary texts, but may be crucial to interpreting and teaching multimodal rhetoric.

I must discuss an obvious ironic situation regarding my project. In an ideal case, I would include hyperlinks to my student commentaries as I discuss each herein. However, since this is not yet possible due to privacy issues, technical issues, and the tradition of print-based dissertations, my written descriptions will have to suffice. I do believe, though, that in the near future, more multimodal dissertations will be accepted and valued as interactive artifacts, and will be able to be presented in a form more reflective of their original intent.

I reviewed thirty DVD commentaries, but the data I will focus on includes a representative sample of five commentaries of freshman students reflecting on their writing portfolios in seven to thirteen minute time-frames. These five digital videos represent three forms of commentaries. The first is the "solo commentary," wherein one lone student sits in front of a camera and uses an "extra-diegetic gaze" looking directly into the camera to address the perceived audience (whether as a researcher or teacher or other conjured audience), and explains her/his work in English 101 through reflecting on the contents of her/his portfolio. There are also "interview commentaries" in which two visible students interview each other in front of a stationary un-personed camera or computer. Finally, there is the "off-camera interview," in which a cameraperson asks the pictured subject questions and records responses.

These commentaries are student-created and occur in different settings, but all are visibly taped on campus in such places as dorm rooms, university libraries, residential units, campus building hallways and other on campus communal areas. The lighting and sound are of varying qualities. Most students are dressed informally in jeans, sweats, and t-shirts.

All of the commentaries were scripted beforehand due to the students' own initiative and guided by a handout of suggested topics to cover in a reflection, including growth as a writer from the beginning of class to the end, challenges faced in class projects, and the experiences of peer review. Results show that students can be extremely insightful reflectors on their writing in digital audio/videos. Please note that all student names used in this dissertation are pseudonyms.

Viewing Frameworks

Following the method used by Calandra et al., I discuss each of the five digital video commentaries commentary individually, but will also consider them as representative of common features of all the digital video commentaries students submitted as part of this project. So, in essence, I am "sampling" from a handful of video commentaries, so that I can discuss and rhetorically analyze several familiar characteristics of all (75). Since this is an early study of digital commentaries in writing courses, my goal is fairly limited to beginning observation and analysis of commentaries. In line with my premise that digital video commentaries can both provide students with a viable forum for reflection and discovery and be a basis for assessment.

In *Reflection in the Writing Classroom*, Yancey discusses three different types of reflection. The category I will discuss is "Reflection-in-Presentation," or the end-of-term reflective letter. Yancey describes this type of reflection as the most common and the "least theorized"(69) in composition studies, consisting of a "dual nature" of reflection and presentation "a public text representing the self"(70), "Rhetorically, it is occasioned by a call to explain to someone outside the self how a practitioner-a teacher, say, or student-works to define and address problems, and/or to summarize and interpret what she or he has learned"(70). Thus students are often asked to simultaneously think about their own learning and represent themselves to an audience. Creating a self in writing, it can be argued, "is multiple, is shaped, is constructed; is necessarily contingent, transitory, and filled with tension"(73), in other words, a constructed and unstable performance. As a scholar and teacher

interested in assessment, Yancey is very interested in reflection as related to evaluation. As such, she emphasizes four functions for her student reflections: 1) the creation of a clear context by the student, 2) description and self-assessment of the process the students followed in composing texts, including drafting processes, 3) a self-assessment of student goals, and 4) and an articulation of the portfolio in relation to curricular goals (73). As stated previously, though I value the move to assessment, I reject this neat process in favor of a broader structure for reflection.

Since Qualley focuses more on the presence of "others" to develop critical thinking and writing and is not as focused on issues of assessment and insists that "writing (like teaching) can be a useful medium for making ideas, beliefs, and assumptions more fully manifest—not only to another audience but also to oneself"(35), I use this as my own basis for reflection. By relying on the work of Donald Murray, who describes reviewing ones's written works as "internal revision" that produces discovery, Qualley also incorporates Thomas Newkirk's concept of "earned insights" to describe what writers learn when they review their work(35). An "earned insight" according to Qualley is an "understanding who essential truth is only realized or more fully grasped as it is made manifest through the individual's experience and contemplation of that experience"(35), which contrast with "ready-made" conclusions described by others. Like Qualley, I am investigating the "earned insights" that students can produce when they take a look back at their work. Unlike Qualley, I am investigating the potential digital videos hold for student realization of such earned insights in light encounters with "others." Thus, I will be looking at both earned insights and digital videos as an reflective tool. In addition, Qualley's concept

of reflexivity produces less of what Irwin Weiser calls "Shmooz." Weiser defines Shmooz as "the often indistinguishable evil twin of 'glow,' the-telling-the-teacher-what-he-wants-to-hear that students very well may write in their reflective letters"(qtd. in Yancey, 81). Yet, as Irwin argues, because shmooz "introduces the personal" it pushes "us to recognize the subjective nature of our readings"(qtd. in Yancey, 81).

There's a certain intertextuality to these videos; they are supposed to be viewed as commentaries in conjunction with each student's work. The ideal here would be for readers to view the videos along with the students' portfolios. In the future, perhaps, this will be an option, but for now, I will use description and transcripts. One aspect of reflective writing that seems to work well, be it in writing or audio/video, is the show-and-tell method of reflecting; a learner makes a claim about learning and supports it with clear examples. The subjects of my digital commentary project perform these tasks by discussing the following areas: growth over term, peer revision, and strengths and weaknesses.

In order to maintain the sense of student voice and personality, I left the unconventional language of participants intact. For example, I transcribe words "uhm" and "like" as stated by students and also include any laughing or significant facial changes. This gives a sense of the roughness of some of these videos. I want to make it clear that in my first data collections, I did not stress the importance or primacy of perfect diction or formal language, or even the editing of such elements. Instead, I wanted students to emulate the casual character of DVD commentaries and to focus more on content issues.

Multimodal Rhetorical Analysis

As stated in chapter two, I find Kress and Van Leeuwen's concept of multimodal rhetoric to be of use in analyzing my digital reflections. According to Kress and van Leeuwen, multimodal theory proposes that modes are interactive forms that operate within a sign system understood by a social collective. The authors define and demonstrate multimodality from a semiotic viewpoint, claiming that multimodality is "the use of several semiotic modes in the design of a semiotic product or event, together in the particular way in which these modes are combined"(20). Modes, in this framework, refers to the "semiotic resources which allow the simultaneous realization of discourses and types of (inter)action"(21) and include language, writing, image, gesture, and sound. Kress and Van Leeuwen emphasize the notion of *practice* to stress the social aspects of multimodality, and advocate for a four part "strata" (9) of discourse, design, production, and distribution of multimodal texts that combine verbal and non-verbal elements and requires invention, transmission, and reception in interpretive communities or discourse communities (110-124).

The discourse of the digital video commentaries is a discourse of reflection in a college writing class. Thus, the words students use in these commentaries will reflect first year composition circa 2006. Students will use words such as feedback, revision, peer critique, grammar, punctuation, syntax, introduction, conclusion, strengths, weaknesses, drafts, thesis statement, etc. Because students are aware of

their instructor as a primary audience for the videos, they feel comfortable using this language to discuss their work. Due to the fact that these digital videos are also end-of-term reflections, students will use words that represent growth and change over time. As Kress and Van Leeuwen note, discourses "may be realised in different ways"(5) whether it be in writing or in multimodal videos because discourse is relatively independent of genre, of mode, and (somewhat less) of design. Yet discourses can only be realised in semiotic modes which have developed the means for realising them"(5), and often the modes lag behind the technology or vice versa. In this case, I think we can that reflective discourse can be realized in the mode of digital video commentaries and that we should extend the "semiotic reach of the medium"(5).

According to Kress and Van Leeuwen, "design" comprises the conceptual aspects of multimodal projects. In terms of the digital videos, the design elements include the planning, scripting, storyboarding the digital reflections. The production of multimodal texts refers to the "actual material articulation of the semiotic event or the actual material production of the semiotic event (6), which means the set up, filming, and editing of a digital reflection. Distribution refers to the preservation and distribution of the digital video commentaries. This step requires the ability to save digital commentaries in appropriate files, and in a distributable form and size, such as on flash drive, DVD, CD, or video stream, and that you actually get it to an audience, in this case, the instructor or class peers.

Digital Video Commentary #1: Alex – Potential Points of Entry

Alex is taking composition in the Spring semester of his first year at Washington State University. Alex's solo digital video commentary is filmed using my Sony VAIO in a communal space on the fourth floor of the Center of Undergraduate Education (also known as the CUE). There is a blank white wipe board behind him as he speaks from a sitting position. He is a six foot tall husky young man with black hair and a cleft in his chin, wearing a blue sweatshirt over a grey t-shirt. Alex begins by introducing his video in a general manner. "Hi. My name is Alex and I am here to talk about my English 101 class." He quickly moves on to discussing his papers using a chronological approach, beginning with his first paper. Alex states:

> I want to start by talking about my first paper, and uh, it was a paper about a life experience that changed me, and I decided to write about my hunting trip. I grew up in Orange County, and hunting really isn't a big thing where I'm from, so it was a fun experience for me, kind of. I thought it was going to be a lot of fun because my friends told me that it would be fun, and, uh, I went to the Sierra Nevadas to hunt deer, and I ended up shooting one and I felt really bad. And I decided to write about it because it was an experience that changed my life and the way I look at things. And one of the funny things was that did a peer critique on a young woman in my class, that uh, she had a hunting experience that was the total opposite of me, and it was nice

> to hear from both sides, and uh, how each person looked at it. And I wrote about that too, in my final draft.

In this segment of the video, Alex is enacting Qualley's concept of the encounter with the "other" when he discusses his interaction with his peer who had a different experience than his own. We also get a sense of his personal context in relation to hunting, for example, the physical location of his home and where the hunting took place, the influence of his peers on his expectations, the end result of feeling "really bad" when he shot a deer, and that this experience changed his outlook. In this case, one of the "other" perspectives he encounters occurs in peer critique. It is clear from this video that Alex's female classmate discusses hunting as "the total opposite" of his own experience. From this, we can conclude that Alex's classmate had a positive experience with hunting. Not only does this description of peer critique provide the viewer with Alex's encounter with an "other" and that it changed his next draft (though exactly how it changed his thinking or writing is not discussed beyond "it was nice to hear from both sides, and uh, how each person looked at it"), but it also reflects well on the value of peer critique as a pedagogical practice.

In a predictable manner, Alex continues to his second paper assigned in the class, which asked students to find a three related photographs that were memorable in a cultural context. Alex selected three sequential photos of the destruction of the "twin towers" at the World Trade Center in New York circa 2001:

> And my second paper, was um, we had to look up pictures online and we could pick any pictures we wanted, so I was looking for something that was kind of memorable, that someone would remember, and I

> decided to pick three pictures of the World Trade Center. It was a before, during, and after picture, and I did the memorial. I really enjoyed this assignment because I got to pick what I wanted and it was about something that interested me because I remember in my sixth grade class actually seeing it on TV and it was a major turning point in our history and it was just a lot of fun to write about it and I got to use my personal experiences and how I felt and my personal thoughts about it.

Alex provides a context for understanding here in connecting the events of Sptember 11, 2001, with his own ideas and experiences. Though Alex's response to the assignment represents a level of choice and authority of subject matter and the integration of his own thoughts, it is interesting to note that he connects the word "fun" with writing this paper, which seems to reflect a lack of connection with the subject matter of his paper. Alex does not seem to engage with the content of the photos at all in his video commentary, except to mention his own memories of the event. These photos can be considered an "other" depending on use. Perhaps this is a missed opportunity for earned insight in the video commentary, or perhaps this appearance of emotional disconnect reflects how photography and video, and even writing itself, can both connect and disconnect us to the suffering of others. Alex also misses an opportunity to use video technology to enhance his discussion of his portfolio; he could have "shown the viewer" his photos by holding them up to the camera or by cutting in still shots of the photos. I see this as a missed opportunity for me as an instructor. Clearly I should have emphasized the photographic possibilities

that cameras provide in my teaching or instruction. I have since changed my instructions accordingly.

Alex's third paper also focuses on a famous photograph. This time, the subject and action of the photo centers on Dorothy Counts, who was, according to Dan Miller "one of the first black students to attend Harry Harding High School in Charlotte, North Carolina" (qtd. in Alex 1). Alex describes his experience writing this paper on a "controversial" subject:

> Um, my third writing assignment was another picture, and I wanted to find kind of a controversial picture and um, I chose a picture during segregation at a high school and it was Dorothy Counts and she was one of the first people to be segregated to high school, and the picture was a bunch of white people around this young black woman and she was only fifteen at the time and they were all making fun of her.

Alex also describes his experience researching and writing this piece, basing his level of interest on the relative lengths of his assignments:

> I really enjoyed it because I had to research about it and I found out more about it, and how hard it was for the girl, and what time it was. That was probably one of my favorite ones: I wrote a lot about it. My first two [papers] were kind of short in length, I would say. They were about two pages, and this one made it to about four, so I definitely enjoyed writing about this.

Again, the potential of this discussion is limited by the lack of specificity and the missed opportunity to display the photo. Alex's next description deals with the "other" in much more tangible ways:

> My fourth writing assignment was kind of another one about racism a bit. It was about communities and I used kind of how different communities celebrate different holidays and I took examples of my friend's church. He's African American and I went to his church and compared it to mine to see what the differences were, and how they were alike, and just the way they celebrate. And then I talked about, um, my friend's Quinceañera, and the Quinceañera is a girl's fifteenth birthday and it's for her to celebrate her becoming a woman, and it was really eye opening for me because I didn't think a fifteenth birthday was that big of a deal, and it was it was really impressive because she wore almost a wedding dress. I really enjoyed talking about it because it was a personal experience and really easy to talk about for me even though it wasn't my most enjoyable paper.

In this segment, Alex describes encounter the ideas of others trough different cultural and religious events, and comments on issues of gender and race. However, again, he does not get to the point of earned insight as far as the viewer knows because he does not explain how these experiences changed his ideas or writing.

Alex discusses what he thought of writing at the beginning of the course:

> My overall writing of the class. In the beginning, I came in and I didn't know what to expect. And my first paper proved it a little

> because I got marked down a lot on it. It was an okay paper, but I can definitely see an improvement in my writing throughout the whole year, and I think my writing improved a lot, my writing style changed, and I took a better look at my writing and I think it improved a lot. And overall, I really enjoyed the class. It wasn't too tough of a class, just a lot of writing, which makes sense because it's an English 101 class [laughs]. It was just a lot of fun writing about the stuff we did.

Alex's last statement represents a familiar move: the gesture of the narrative of progress, in the vein of "at the beginning of the semester, I was a bad writer and now I am a better writer." Alex's beginning statement lacks specificity required for critical reflection in general, and the requirements for this particular assignment of mine. Thus, in some ways his digital video accomplishes the beginning requirements, let's say, a rough draft of a good critical reflection, but does not clearly indicate any "earned insights" or provide a persuasive performance of demonstrated learning for purposes of assessment. In many ways, this has value only as a draft and is reflective of many promising videos that were submitted but not entirely successful in terms of critical reflection. Furthermore, this student could have written this commentary and the end result would have been much the same. Therefore, the potential of digital commentaries is unrealized and cannot be recommended in this particular case.

Digital Video Commentaries #2 and #3: Cait and Alicia; Lilia and Brandon

The Benefits of Collaborative Digital Interview Commentaries

One of the great potentials of digital video is the opportunity for collaboration it provides. As most students know, movies are not made by a single individual but by many, as evidenced in the credits. Though usually a director is responsible and given credit as the master and commander of a film, many people contribute to the final product. This collaborative process is acknowledged in DVD commentaries, which is one reason why I use commentaries as models in class. In terms of student digital commentaries, some students elected to perform a collaborative commentary in which one student asks another about their work. Interview commentaries create a different relationship between reader and writer of reflections. The individual writer is no longer the main focus of the piece; both participants have a presence in commenting on and discussing writing, the class, different assignments, and other aspects related to the class. This is different than a individually constructed reflection. The embodied interaction between writers in interview commentaries is more representative of student-centered, collaborative pedagogy than most written reflections.

For example, Cait and Alicia, both freshman, perform an "interview commentary" asking questions of each other. They take turns with questions first being addressed to Cait and then to Alicia. Similar to the shooting location of Alex's video, Cait and Alicia's commentary is also recognizably filmed on the fourth floor of the CUE at WSU. Both women are seated and hold scripts and notes on the table in front of them (most of my students had some written materials or scripts for their

videos they created without prompting from me). The background is comprised of a see-through glass door framed by a silver metal frame. When prompted by Alicia, Cait begins by discussing her identity as a writer prior to English 101:

> Alicia: Okay, so how did you view yourself as a writer at the beginning of the semester?
>
> Cait: Well, I should first start off by saying that at the beginning of the whole year I was taking a lot of General Education and anthropology-type classes and I thought I was a great writer, but then when I got my essays back, I realized I wasn't as good as I thought I was in high school [laughs], so coming into this class this semester I didn't really have much confidence and I was really nervous for the class and I didn't feel like I was a very good writer because of the grades I got on my other papers last semester.

Cait's comments are not unlike ones instructors encounter in written reflections, in that students often base their identities as college-level writers on instructor assessment. For example, Cait states that she originally considered herself a great writer before she attended college, but during her first semester she received low marks on papers, leading her to the conclusion that she "wasn't as good as I thought I was in high school." After her early college experiences with writing in other classes, she questions her abilities as a writer and lacks self-assurance coming into English 101. She also describes feelings of anxiety when beginning the course due to these

experiences. However, when Alicia asks Cait about her sense of herself as a writer at the end of the sixteen-week semester, Cait suggests that her concept of herself as a writer has changed:

> Alicia: So how do you feel about yourself as a writer now?
>
> Cait: I feel a lot more confident and I think that all the different writing that we did, all the different types really helped, so I can do a lot of different types of writing now and I feel I can do better in my classes next year, and I feel like I can tackle pretty much any type of writing. Probably [both women laugh].
>
> Alicia: What contributed to that change?
>
> Cait: The frequency and variety of writing really helped my writing skills and helped me understand what I need to work on and when we got our evaluations back, the positive and the negative has really helped me realize what I need to work on and the positive reinforcement of what I was doing right was really helpful and I feel more like a writer and relaxed and not so uptight about it.

Again, here we have the narrative of progress, but Cait pushes further than Alex in her rationale as to why the changes in her self-concept as a writer occur. Cait discusses the different genres of writing that she performs in English 101 as being

crucial to her preparation for future college courses. Furthermore, she clearly values both the "positive and negative feedback" she receives from her instructor, and describes changes she makes from draft to draft, and recognizes that one of the audiences for her video commentary is her instructor. Cait remarks:

> Well, I expanded paragraph one and broke it into two paragraphs, and I expanded more in the beginning on what autism is, and the symptoms and impulses that he [Oliver Sacks] talked about in his paper, I mean his essay, and I also fixed some grammatical errors and word choice, I also corrected, well, I corrected Oliver Sacks' and other names because [laughs] throughout the whole essay I spelled the name wrong, and I could tell that probably, [looks at camera] Gwen, you were probably really annoyed with that [both women laugh] because I was really annoyed when I was reading that too, because like, why did I spell these names wrong throughout the whole entire paper, so I went back and I was getting so tired of correcting it because I felt like an idiot, yeah, so I fixed that, and I expanded the conclusion, and wrote more about what the author maybe should cut out in his piece, what I thought was unnecessary to his critical writing.

In this case, the narrative of progress is not unexpected nor useless. Though Cait is discussing several sentence-level issues, she does indicate her awareness of her audience and even feels comfortable in critiquing Oliver Sacks' writing. I think we

need to understand this narrative as part of the performance of self that Yancey describes:

> We ask them [students] to take up certain questions, we reward certain kinds of response, and at some level, many—if not all of them—understand, as Goffman puts it, that we ask them to put on masks that (we hope) bear some relationship to the ways they do or might see themselves. (93)

Yancey remarks that this eliciting of performance is both “ethical” and “dangerous” for instructors (93). It is ethical and appropriate to ask students to articulate their learning experience but also dangerous because as instructors, we can be too directive in making students create a cohesive and neat narrative of growth, instead of letting students embrace the contradictions in their work (94). As instructors, we need to be mindful of asking students to enact performance in generative ways that balance cohesion, complexity, and personality.

Lilia and Brandon also interviewed each other about strengths and weaknesses.

> Lilia: So Brandon, to start off, how did you change as a writer over the semester?
>
> Brandon: Over the semester, certainly with my first paper I talked about a camp that I go to every summer and when I first wrote it I had

my experience and what everything looked like in my mind and I didn't really expand on it or explain it when I started writing. But by my last paper, assignment five, I was able to clearly explain what I was thinking and visualizing in my mind, and I was able to analyze what I was talking about, and my sources, and ask questions within my paper.

Lilia: Did any of the peer reviews help you very much when you revised your papers, maybe for the next assignment?

Brandon: Yeah, peer reviews really helped because I have a little problem with run-on sentences.

Lilia: Yes, I know that after peer revising your first paper.

Brandon: And so when I would read peer reviews I would be able to hear from other people about what run-ons I had, and also my inability to discuss my ideas in greater detail. My peers would say that they hadn't been to the place that I been to and so they didn't know what it looked like so, what I was saying in my paper really didn't give a good enough and clear picture of what I was trying to say and tell my reader.

> Lilia: Is there anything else that helped you like maybe they suggested something that you really didn't agree with but that you realized that maybe they were just understanding what they were saying so it actually helped you?
>
> Brandon: Yeah, one of my, for writing assignment number three I think it was, somebody in our class reviewed my paper and she was very harsh about her peer review to my paper and I honestly didn't think my paper was that bad because I had spent a lot of time on it and she was very blunt and honest about how some of my grammar was not very good and other things that I didn't really realize about my paper.
>
> Lilia: I'm sure she helped a little bit.
>
> Brandon: Oh, yes, she helped. I was offended a little bit, but after I got over that I really looked at my paper and I did notice that I had some mistakes that I had to fix.

I include this segment because it demonstrates how students can push each other further in their reflections. When Lilia firsts asks Brandon about peer review, Brandon provides a short answer, "Yeah, peer reviews really helped because I have a little problem with run-on sentences." To her credit, Lilia asks Brandon to expand on his answer and to reframe the ways in which he views the peer feedback. She asks

"Is there anything else that helped you like maybe they suggested something that you really didn't agree with but that you realized that maybe they were just understanding what they were saying so it actually helped you?" This makes Brandon reconsider.

Digital Video Commentary #4: Miranda – WAC: A Sophomore's Perspective

Miranda is the only sophomore student who elected to make a digital video commentary. She also submitted the longest video of twelve minutes. She performed the solo interview in her dorm room. She talks about the differences of taking English 101 as a sophomore and her thoughts coming into the course:

> Hi, my name is Miranda and I am here to talk about my writing portfolio. I thought I'd start off with talking about why it took me so long to take this class, some of the fears I had coming into this class, and some of the things I feel like I learned because of this class. So to start off, I am a sophomore and normally kids take this class when they are a freshman. I never really prioritized taking this class and it wasn't until I realized that now I have Junior standing that I don't have any papers to show for it that I probably just need to step it up and take this class so that I could get some papers to put in my writing portfolio other than lab write-ups.

Miranda states that the WSU Junior Portfolio is one of the reasons why she decided to take English 101 before she progressed much further in her college program. This indicates that the required Junior Writing portfolio does make students conscious of

different genres of writing and that they must show a range of writing to pass. This, in turn, reinforces a broader understanding that writing is emphasized across the disciplines at WSU, so even if taking this class is a means to an end, it does represent an understanding of the value the university places on writing. Miranda continues to discuss writing across the curriculum as well as writing in English 101 being revision-based:

> So I took this class, you know, and I was kind of, I don't know, I don't want to say "careless," but I didn't really want to take this class. And I was really like sloppy in my writing in other classes because most of the writing I need to do is just in labs and stuff and I feel like you know I present my data and just do math and stuff for half of it or something and then I just write a quick summary you know. I haven't' really written too much since Gen. Ed. and I didn't really write that well in Gen Ed because I didn't really care but um I really wanted to get some strong papers for my writing portfolio so I thought this would be a good class to take and focus on and I heard about the draft process and I was excited about that because I could go about and continually fix my work if I needed to.

This segment suggests that Miranda knew about aspects of English 101 before she took the class. She also displays knowledge of herself as a writer. Miranda discusses her weaknesses coming into the class:

> Some of my weaknesses coming into this class that I knew about, that I could actually acknowledge was writing for an audience. I never

> really wrote for an audience before, I just kind of wrote for myself and I know that you shouldn't really do that because it's not your paper. I mean, you're giving it to someone for a grade and you want to make it enjoyable for others to read so you need to adapt. I always knew I need to do that but I never really know how and I think that writing papers for this class, especially having numerous drafts definitely helped me the most with my biggest weaknesses coming in to the class.

Miranda's identified weaknesses are still too general, but her video does indicate some rhetorical awareness. Miranda also identifies her strengths:

> Something I though I was pretty good at off the bat was writing good introductions and writing like, strong conclusions and making my paper really organized, um I thought that I had done a pretty good job on that and I learned that this semester that I could definitely improve, that there is always room for improvement and I definitely acknowledge that now.

Interestingly, Miranda was one of the few students among thirty who actually took the opportunity to use an advantage of video and display the photos she analyzed her papers. This indicates that I should have provided my students with more guidance in the digital video assignment. Miranda describes her third paper:

> For the third paper we had to choose a provocative picture, or not a provocative, but a controversial picture. Mine was kind of provocative

> too. I choose an album cover from The Strokes that was banned in the United States. Actually, I have a picture of it right here.

Miranda takes this opportunity to display an 8 ½ X 11 color copy of The Strokes' *Is This It* album cover and holds it up to the camera lens for approximately thirty seconds. It is a photo of a side view of what appears to be a white naked female torso, framed from the stomach to mid thigh. A black-gloved hand rests on the lower back above the buttocks area. No genitalia or breasts are shown. In her video, Miranda clearly assumes that her audience is aware of this image. She discusses how she came to write about the album cover:

> You've probably seen it a million times but I think it's a pretty cool picture. So I read about this picture because I was really kind of stuck for a long time about what picture to write about and I was listening to The Strokes and then I was just searching on the internet like mindlessly and I came up with this picture, and I had known that it was banned but I didn't really like think about it, you know, so it was just like, oh, this fits nice, I'm going to write about this. And then I started doing a lot of research and there wasn't much research I could find as to why it was banned and all these questions were arising in my mind like "Why was it banned? Who banned it? Who had the final decision? Why did they do that?"

Miranda uses this as a springboard into a discussion about the larger context of music album covers. In this way, she enacts Qualley's notion of reflexive inquiry.

Miranda is listening to music, has an idea and uses the ideas of others, in this case, the opinions on whether or not to ban an album cover, to develop her own inquiry:

> You know, there's way worse album covers out there that are actually in the United States. And I didn't really get to find all much information, and that was probably part of my biggest struggle with this paper. A lot of the stuff that I found was from bands that were really pissed off about, you know, the picture not going to, or the album cover not getting published in the United States, it was just a lot of trash talk and stuff you know. So, I decided not to use that and I stuck with articles that I could, that kind of gave me some information but not all the information that I needed.

Miranda discusses her writing process and the presence of the "other" also in terms of her peers, in developing her ideas:

> Um, on the draft process on this, I think this one is probably my favorite draft process because the first one, I realized that I needed to add a lot my detail. My peer reviewer told me she didn't even know who The Strokes were, and that made me realize that I need to provide a lot more detail than I think I do, you know, to make things clear and precise, and so everybody knows exactly what I am talking about. So, I provided, I think I provided a couple more details, and it was still kind of, there was still some questions on my draft two which I tried to address and stuff that I could in draft three, like I said I couldn't really find a lot of those sources, um, but I think, all in all,

> my papers, on these drafts, like they didn't change that much but the small additions that I did made definitely made the paper so much stronger you know um, and definitely gave me experience in researching, you know, tough articles like these where I can't find much and I have to work with what I have um, so…this was a pretty fun assignment, I like looking at pictures and you know, trying to talk about them as best as I could.

Miranda also discusses the impacts of images on her portfolio by describing her second photo analysis assignment, displays the image, and discussing her writing process:

> The next one that I will talk about is the writing assignment number four where we were supposed to analyze a picture and the picture I chose was of a child who was in Burma over in Asia and it was talking about children being used in wars as soldiers. And so in my original draft in the very first sentence of the introduction I made a general statement about how Americans view childhood. To revise that I found a quote which is the very first thing you will find in my final draft which I think is more powerful because it is more credible because someone else was thinking what I was really saying too and it leaves you with something to think about after you're reading the essay.

Miranda is able to incorporate and value the perspectives of others in developing a persuasive essay. Tone, voice, and revision are also elements that Miranda

emphasizes in her narration. Miranda specifically discusses integrating her personal experience and filling in gaps:

> And I also, after the quote I talked about my essay, how different things I've seen with childhood like with my family and younger cousins and stuff, to give it more of my voice in there instead of just saying that this happens to other people but I think it makes it more interesting when I have my own voice in there. And that's a lot of what I changed in the introduction. And I added a lot more information and kind of questions I had about the picture and just filled in a lot of gaps in the body.

Again, Miranda is able to connect her perspective with a larger context by revising her paper:

> I added a completely new paragraph where I talk about why these children are being used in the war and questioning if there aren't enough adults or if the adults are just exploiting them because they know they are naive and will go along with it. And even though these questions are unanswered I think they are really important to ask and for the reader to wonder about too, so that they understand how horrible this is. So one of the biggest changes I made in the body was adding that completely new paragraph and just adding more information about how I felt about the photograph.

She describes her revision process in some detail in her video, including more focus on analysis than on description, and less of a neat analysis. Miranda develops her paper to actually be messier and more complex. She states:

> I took some things out where I was repeating a lot of what I said before about how I felt about the photograph and I tended to repeat a lot in the beginning in the first draft about what I saw in the photograph which wasn't as important as analyzing what I interpreted. what I saw as to like analyze what it meant, what was in the picture, and why the photographer shot it like that, I kind of changed it around a lot so it wasn't so black and white, like this is what I saw and this is what it means. I analyzed it a lot more and asked a lot more questions.

Earlier in her video, Miranda identifies conclusions as a weakness of hers. She investigates this further in her photo analysis:

> In my last conclusion, I kind of just summarized what I wrote which is good because it sums up everything for the reader so they can remember everything they just read, but unfortunately I did it in a way that's kind of boring. So in this draft, in my revisions, I talked about what childhood means to me and how I view it and what I see in the photograph and contrasting the two, how they're a lot different and how different cultures have many different views on childhood and I kind of leave the reader with the question of why there are such diverse views on what childhood should mean.

Miranda remarks on how she learns to balance differing perspectives, again during the revision process. She also again demonstrates a commitment to significant revisions from draft to draft:

> In the final writing assignment that I focused on to revise was writing assignment number four where we were talking about two different cultures or groups that we belong to, and the groups I talked about were my hometown and Pullman, being here in college. And the first thing I revised was my introduction because in the beginning I kind of made a general statement about how America has always been a melting pot of different cultures which is good because that gives the reader a tone or an understanding of what I am going to be talking about but I wanted to add more of my own view and so I made a completely new introduction. It was sort of like a personal narrative of an experience that happened to me in my hometown of Sammamish dealing with two people and being judgmental of someone outside of the Sammamish culture, if you want to call it that. And I think I really like this introduction a lot more because it has a lot of my own voice in there and will give the reader a sense of what I'm going to be talking about and the tone of how I feel about Sammamish and how I feel about Pullman. A lot of it in the body that I changed was including more information about Pullman because in the first draft I talked a lot about Sammamish and I kind of wanted to

> even that out, so that it was comparing two cultures not talking about one more than another.

Again Miranda discusses encountering the ideas of others and reflexively delves further into her inquiry and persuasion.

> And I also found a new source where I was talking about the Hare Krishna temple that opened up in my hometown last year and I though that was an important source to include so I created a new paragraph on that because I think it really shows how more diversity is coming to Sammamish and how people responded to that, something that is outside of what they are used to. And then in the conclusion what I changed a lot was talking about diversity and that it's a good thing and how even though I haven't been used to it in my life, being in Pullman has taught me a lot. And just talking about diversity in general and how people deal with it and how people are afraid of the unknown, which I didn't really talk about in my last conclusion, just to give a general idea of how people view diversity.

In discussing her final paper, Miranda describes it as a paper she simultaneously likes and struggles with. It is a "social location" paper in which students explore their subject positions in their worlds on the basis of race, class, gender, sexuality, and ethnicity. Miranda remarks:

> And the last writing assignment I'm going to talk about in my writing portfolio, actually the last paper we wrote, is the Social Location Paper. This one was, I did like writing it, well actually, I didn't like

> writing it at all, but I really, really, really loved researching it because I came across some really interesting articles. I decided that this was probably my favorite paper and I really wanted to put it in my writing portfolio, my Junior Writing Portfolio, too I mean, if it's, um you know, good enough and stuff. I think it's pretty good. The reason I didn't really like writing this was because I though that I sounded really, really like [sighs] arrogant and spoiled, you know like stuck up and you know, like just "oh, I'm so privileged and la la la la" and I tried my hardest not to sound like that, but it's kind of hard not to when you know, I am privileged, middle class white women who basically has everything handed to her, you know, has everything at the tip of her fingers all throughout her life. It was really hard for me to address that because it made me feel really guilty because I am this and I do feel like I take these things for granted way too much.

I love this aspect of Miranda's video because it is a moment in which she demonstrates understanding of privilege as a concept, instead of just talking about how her paper has changed on global and local levels. She is talking about Qualley's reflexive turn and Yancey's earned insights in one statement. It also reflects the multiple fragmented senses of self, and by this I mean the sense of self as other too, and being able to have simultaneous conflicting thoughts and emotions in one moment or during an event.

Digital Video Commentary #5: Jackson – "The Off-Camera Interview"

I only had one off camera interview submitted, and I would like to describe it, not only because it is unique in its form, but because the student also uses some creativity in presentation. Jackson, the subject participant, is dressed to show off his big personality. In addition to his formal dress shirt, he wears slotted white sunglasses and a big straw cowboy hat with decorations on the band. He sits at a desk in the Holland Terrell Library on the WSU campus, a microphone in hand, and a smile on his face. The camera person, a disembodied voice referred to as "Joe," asks questions, and Jackson answers them. Another noteworthy aspect to this digital video is the use of title pages embedded in the video. The video begins with a blue title frame with superimposed white writing stating: "Jackson's Video Commentary on his English 101 Portfolio." The second slide states "What was your worst piece of writing this year? Why?" Camera person Joe also can be heard in the background, stating "Let's start off with the worst," and repeats this question. There is a transition effect, and then Jackson appears in black and white, which shows he used an effect option when editing his footage. Jackson reads from a script in front of him, "Well, Joe, my worst piece of work this year would have to be my writing assignment number one, with writing assignment #5 right behind it." Jackson proceeds to explain:

> There were many things wrong with the first paper. To begin with, my header was wrong, I forgot a little thing called the title [laughs]. Then throughout my paper, I didn't use proper punctuation marks, I misused quotes and parenthesis, my sentence structure was wrong in

> every single paragraph. My spelling was horrible and I was capitalizing words that weren't meant to be capitalized.

The segment transitions to the next title page "What work did you do to help you through it?" Fix it?", which introduces the next segment of the video, now switching to a full color picture of Jackson. Jackson responds in detail about his revision process for assignment number one:

> One thing that I mainly did was look back at the feedback given to me by my teacher, Gwen Sullivan. The first thing I did was to compare the feedback given to me by Ms. Sullivan with the drafts that were peer-edited to see what I had missed. Then I went through on my own and edited each paragraph sentence by sentence. I then changed certain sentences and paragraphs that my readers were confused about, and finally, I reread the whole paper to see if it made sense, which I think it currently does.

The next title appears, prompting, "Why is the quality of paper five so low? Isn't the best usually saved for last?" As before, you can also hear Joe ask a close variation of this question in the background. Jackson replies:

> As you can see with the four edited copies of this paper I have provided, my writing really wasn't technically sound. My introduction was a little hazy and several of the people who read the draft felt the same way. And by hazy, I mean, it was just really bad. I really didn't distinguish people from the nation, size wise that is. My citations were not really there, and quite a few sentences just had

> horrible sentence structure. I really didn't say why restaurants were the cause. One of the things I wish I would have done was to find the piece of information that stated how many people go out and how often they eat out. Maybe that would have helped make my argument that fast food is causing obese and overweight occurrences to rise and is also the cause of heart disease. But I felt it was a good topic that would grab attention because let's face it, who doesn't like food. I know I love it. I don't know if my new draft will stand against scrutiny but I do know it is much better than before.

The next title is "What has been your best piece of work so far?" Jackson visibly relaxes when answering this question, and goes from an tense formality to a comfortable demeanor. He states,

> I am obviously going to choose something that has a little humor, a little
>
> comedy to it, right. Like assignment number two. I described three pictures: one, a plain rock, two, a diamond or "the rock," and three, the pet rock. You may be asking, what the heck, but you know you're intrigued now. There perhaps were only seven punctuation and grammatical errors. The reason I believe this paper was so good was because it was fun, and it gave me the freedom to write about a topic I am very adamant about. Look here, Gary Dahl became a millionaire because he slapped a pair of googly eyes on a rock, threw it in a box, put a little book of how-to's, such as how to teach a rock how to sit,

> stay and roll over. As I see it, he's a genius who hit the 70s at the right time, the time of the ganja. But seriously, I will not claim this as my best paper because I already knew I could write comedy. I didn't know I could be serious, and that is why I have selected paper number four as my favorite paper. It was on divorce and suicide rates. I did a lot of research for this paper and found statistics to back me up.

What I appreciate about Jackson's digital commentary is that he uses comedy in his responses, and creativity in his video editing. His video represents the potential for video editing, playing around with effects to finally create a purposeful product. Right now his video reflects more play than purpose, but it does emphasize the flexibility of the genre of digital commentaries. Since gathering my data, my students have included music, visual effects, and still shots in their videos and have achieved effective results. Of all the videos, Jackson's relates most to Kress and Van Leeuwen's vision of multimodality in which students learn and incorporate techniques such as color, juxtaposition, framing, sound, foregrounding, backgrounding, metaphor, action, and other effects. As I continue to ask students to create digital videos, I must also train them to understand these techniques and effects of meaning-making.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

> What we call the beginning is often the end. And to make an end is to make a beginning. The end is where we start from.
>
> —T. S. Eliot, "Little Gidding"

The end of this dissertation truly serves as a beginning point for me in developing ideas and intelligent pedagogical practices around the concept of DVD commentaries and student multimodal digital video projects. By writing this dissertation, I have attempted to demonstrate that digital video commentaries offer not only another mode for reflection, but perhaps a generative and multidirectional process of reflection that may be more engaging, dynamic, and effective for students. Since the writing of this work I have continued to assign and work with student on digital video commentary projects and refine my process from the original design, with good results.

I am now teaching in a more rural setting than when I began this project, and I initially worried that fewer students would be interested in or have access to the technology required for the creation of their digital commentaries. I was surprised to find that student familiarity with digital technology had only increased, even in a economically depressed area with many older students. I had an overwhelming majority of students elect to make digital videos and this time, no one needed my help or my laptop. In addition, I found that they helped each other quite a bit when they had a technology question or were trying to navigate the assignment. The

younger students often helped the older ones with some of the technology, but several older students were comfortable with filming techniques and eager to try the project. All students appeared to have spent several hours on their reflections.

I still believe that digital video commentaries foster reflection by engaging students into something "cool" and familiar to in terms of a filming event or events. I now advocate for the strategy of several different filming sessions, editing, workshops, and more complex final projects. I have also asked that students go back and "revise" their videos with textual overlay, reshooting, or video addendums. Students are also required to create and turn in a script of their video and include a SOCG with it, like they do for all of the projects I ask them to complete.

My most significant finding in the dissertation is that collaborative digital videos, which include two or more students, are actually the most interesting, effective, and rich use of digital commentaries as reflection. When working in pairs or groups, students reflected the social context of our class and subject matter, they pushed each other to engage more in reflection, and just produced better reflexive texts. As discussed in chapter two, meaning is made in different ways, and, as educators, we may benefit from further examination of the ways in which students communicate in their daily lives and consider utilizing those methods. Since I began this project, I have continued to refine my process.

I have established a basis for using digital video technology in composition courses for the purposes of embodied reflection that is multifaceted and reflective of the rough and tumble processes of critical thinking, writing, and revision, but more work needs to be done to make digital commentaries and other options more

integrated in the writing sequence from the beginning of a course. As Peggy O'Neill insists:

> Acknowledging the benefits associated with self-assessment and reconceiving the response sequence are not enough. To make self-evaluation meaningful for students and teachers, we need to do more than just add a writer's memo, or give out a self-assessment worksheet; assessment and reflection activities need to be fully integrated into instruction. (66)

In fact, O'Neill's work "From the Responding Sequence to the Writing Process: Incorporating Self-Assessment and Reflection in the Classroom" has been instructive to me in remaking digital video commentaries and other digital options to be more pedagogical sound and effective. She provides nine suggestions for making reflection work in the classroom. They are as follows:

- Be consistent with the self-assessments and reflective writing
- Don't accept any drafts without a self-assessment attached
- Give students directions on writing reflective memos
- Allow class time for writing self-evaluations
- Review the purpose of the reflective writing each time it is required.
- Start out simple and get progressively more demanding.
- Count the self-assessment in the grading process.
- Read the students' self-assessments and reflections and respond to them explicitly even if they don't address the issues you want them to.
- Provide a mechanism for student feedback about your response. (66-68)

I have taken these recommendations seriously and now make digital videos in response to student work, and provide ways in which students can respond back to me, so the reflections are much more dialogues than merely performances.

In conducting this project, I have learned much about reflection, digital technology and rhetoric. I have examined five digital video commentaries made by students in a first–year college writing course and demonstrated that digital commentaries are as valid as written reflections, and in some ways, even more effective at delving into or representing student perspectives, agency, and interrogation. Student commentators are engaged in thinking about their writing, reading, critical thinking, and their educational and social contexts in some surprising ways. They demonstrate thoughtfulness and insight into their choices and actions, perhaps more than one can get from reflective cover letters. In this way too, students are able to apply their classes to their lives outside the classroom.

One of the areas in which I have already started altering my pedagogy in relation to these videos is to integrate the concepts of commentaries from the very first paper and then students will have both blog entries and extensive footage and other modes with which to experiment. This project simply represents a beginning to the options of reflection that digital technology can offer. I look forward to the a more developed and professional and interesting student projects that are yet to come as technology, software, and pedagogy improve in the future. Another way in which I have modified this assignment in more recent incarnations is to require students to develop and bring in scripts that I and the class can review and on which we can provide helpful feedback.

The areas in which further study is indicated are in the application of more digital techniques and discussing concepts of hypertextuality and intertextuality that digital videos offer within and without eportfolios, based on the works of Jacques Derrida and George Landow. Another aspect of my project that deserves much more attention is that of assessment of multimodal texts. As students and instructors keep moving forward with current digital technologies, universities at large will also have to change their criteria for what constitutes critical thinking, writing, and larger meaning making texts.

The final and most critical aspect of this project deserving of more attention is the question of access in the face of the digital divide. Though I believe that "non-traditional" students have participated in my digital video commentary projects with the same frequency as "traditional" students, more study is needed to examine access to the resources available and how different levels of privilege affect final projects and assessments. I hope to continue this research myself, but also expect that others will join me in investigating the different uses of digital video commentaries in the areas of composition, rhetoric, and Writing Program Administration.

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APPENDIX

Washington State University Consent Form: Using Digital Commentaries For Student Reflection In The Composition Classroom

Researcher: Kristine E. Kellejian, Graduate TA, English Department, 335-3413

Researchers' statement

I am asking you to be in a research study. The purpose of this consent form is to give you the information you will need to help you decide whether to be in the study or not. Please read the form carefully. You may ask questions about the purpose of the research, what I would ask you to do, the possible risks and benefits, your rights as a volunteer, and anything else about the research or this form that is not clear. When I have answered all your questions, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. This process is called 'informed consent.' I will give you a copy of this form for your records.

PURPOSE AND BENEFITS

The purpose of this project is to study the topic of critical student reflection of writing in English 101: Introductory Writing. This study asks students to create a portfolio reflection in the form of a short digital commentary which will be hyperlinked to portfolio papers electronically.

The benefits to subjects will include more knowledge of their own writing and of critical reflection on reading and writing practices. The benefits to society are pedagogical and apply most directly to the field of composition studies. This study

will further develop praxis and theory of critical reflection and expand the knowledge base of using of new media in the classroom.

PROCEDURES

This study asks students to create a portfolio reflection in the form of a short digital commentary of no more than twenty minutes, which will be electronically hyperlinked to portfolio papers. The principal investigator will provide all technical support and the equipment for completing the project. Students will also be asked to respond to a written survey. It will take 10 minutes to complete. Subject reflections (commentaries) will be examined, copied, and used in final reporting; the confidentiality of subjects will be respected through the coding of information and use of pseudonyms. The study will begin on immediately on April 6th and end on May 10th, 2009. Subjects may refuse to answer any question or item in any test, inventory, questionnaire, or interview.

RISKS, STRESS, OR DISCOMFORT

The risks to students are minimal. Possible risks are stress related to the perception that the study will affect grades in the course. Subjects' grades in this course will in no way be affected by their non-participation in the study. If subjects experience discomfort during the study, please contact the principal investigator.

OTHER INFORMATION

Data for this study will be confidential, and the principal investigator will have sole access to identifiable data. The data will be used to ascertain the best options for teaching/learning practices of critical reflection on writing, and data will be kept in a locked file cabinet and destroyed in August of 2009. Subjects that volunteer to be a part of the study will receive 25 extra credit points in English 101 if they complete the study.

Kristine E. Kellejian____

Printed name of researcher   Signature of researcher   Date

Subject's statement

This study has been explained to me. I volunteer to take part in this research. I have had a chance to ask questions. I understand that in order to receive the extra credit, I must complete my obligations in the project. If I have general questions about the research, I can ask the researcher listed above. If I have questions regarding my rights as a participant, I can call the WSU Institutional Review Board at (509)335-9661. This project has been reviewed and approved for human participation by the WSU IRB. I will receive a copy of this consent form.

____Printed Name

____Signature

____Date