Summer 2012

Moments When the Weak Gained Ground: Viral Video as a Curriculum of People

Michael J. Ryan

MOMENTS WHEN THE WEAK GAINED GROUND: VIRAL VIDEO AS A
CURRICULUM OF PEOPLE

by

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(Under the Direction of Daniel Chapman)

ABSTRACT

The public school curriculum has devolved into merely being a political football

for the forces of the dominant culture, no longer even attempting to serve the People of

the community or the students that the school ostensibly should serve. In the absence of

a curriculum that is meaningful to People, another curriculum has spontaneously

appeared outside of school via shared online media between social networks. This new

curriculum, identified by a relatively wide viewership and its challenge to social injustice,

oppressive conventions or hegemonic forces, is a curriculum of viral videos shared

because of their meaning and cogence in the moment. This inquiry examines a number

of these videos through a modified method of Critical Discourse Analysis that utilizes

aesthetic analysis as its primary lens to attempt to determine meaning.

INDEX WORDS: Aesthetics, Critical Utopianism, Cultural Studies, Curriculum,
Curriculum Theory, Media, Shared Media, People, Viral Video

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of Georgia Southern University in

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

STATESBORO, GEORGIA

2012

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Electronic Version Approved:
July, 2012

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DEDICATION

For Susan

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, I offer my thanks to Evelyn and Shelby (one who gave me life, and the other who gave me the love of my life): I wish you both were here to celebrate this achievement with me.

I am forever indebted to my incredible family for their encouragement, support and tolerance. Susan, I am so grateful for all the times you proofread, acted as a sounding board, made comments, and refrained from making comments when you knew my ego could not handle it. Camille, I find it amazing that I was teaching you how to drive when I started this degree and by the end I was calling you for clarification on the subtleties of Foucault. To Coleman, who has had a parent in "Doctor College" ever since he can remember: we can now turn supper table conversation to the important stuff: baseball, Legos, video games and stories about how you made your friends at school laugh.

To my committee, thank you for making me feel special and worthy of your attention. Every time one of you said, "You are a good writer", it provided a much needed shot in the arm. To Dan Chapman, thank you for your gentle direction, steadiness, miserly dispensing of compliments and too many other things to mention. I wish to thank Ming Fang He for her humor, eccentric brilliance and nurturing my love of writing narrative. To John Weaver, thank your for sharing your superhuman intellectualism and wit. To Henry Jenkins – I hope you don't regret responding to the fan email I wrote that began our correspondence. Your encouragement has been astonishing. You provided invaluable commentary about my writing, gently challenged me on my

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scholarship and nudged me in the direction of scores of valuable ideas and academics that

I otherwise would have missed. Perhaps most importantly, you taught me – by example

– the meaning of the term "intellectual generosity."

Duane Kline, thank you for all the support and interest you showed in my work.

Finally, I give my thanks to Gary Kittrell for saying, "Yes, you have ADD, and yes, we

can do something about it."

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CHAPTER 1

WHILE WE WERE JUST TRYING TO TEACH CHILDREN GREAT THINGS

To the reader: This dissertation has been simultaneously published as an interactive e-book on the Apple iTunes website. The reader's experience with the e-book will likely be a more enhanced, immediate experience. An iPad with iBooks 2 is required to read it. The book is a free download from the Apple iTunes website or from

http://itunes.apple.com/us/book/moments-when-weak-gained-ground/id525592190?ls=1.

Refining Our Mechanics

Everyone stood. Attendees from one school system – all dressed in electric powder-blue, polo-style shirts – led a conga line that snaked across the stage. Others danced in their seats and made racket with noisemakers. We were a group of about 250 school system-level administrators, school building-level administrators and a smattering of teachers. We were at a leadership conference devoted to school improvement. They were going to tell us how to make our students achieve – the most important part of our mission as educators. It is urgent, we are told, because education is in crisis. Children are being left behind all over the place, and the conference organizers have the data to prove it. Our school is one of the biggest contributors to this crisis because of our failure to make AYP – Adequate Yearly Progress. Our students are just not achieving as they should be.

In order to understand what the schools were being blamed for, I recently conducted a search based on the term *achievement* on the video sharing web site YouTube. There were nineteen videos with over one million viewings. Videos with such high numbers of views are relatively common on video sharing sites such as YouTube. They acquire these views because they are shared – passed on – within social networks. Often, videos will move wildly and seemingly without control through and between social networks via email, exposure on online communities such as Facebook, and even on television, when their popularity becomes a news item or a bit of television infotainment. When videos become very popular very quickly, they are often referred to as *viral videos*. Among these viral videos that came up in my search based on the word *achievement*, two were about athletic achievement, three involved lifetime achievement award winners and twelve were about video gaming. None were about academic achievement. At first, there seemed to be little connection between the public school notion of achievement and what that collection of YouTube viewers consider it to be.

Who are these YouTube viewers? My impulse – my desire, if you will – is to refer to the viewers as The People. Viral video is, in my opinion, a very organic form of democracy; it is The People speaking about what is important, meaningful and relevant. At the same time, using The People is also a bit of a leap; one million – or even a few million – people cannot speak for our society or our culture; relatively speaking, it is just too few citizens. Nevertheless, it is a group that speaks by acclamation – by viewing and enjoying and sharing and celebrating an idea that is manifested in a video; it is a social network or a faction, and there is some benefit in identifying those individuals as a group, because collectively, our voices are stronger than they are individually. On the other

hand, to call them viewers does not do justice to their roles – it is too passive; it does not note the voice or acknowledge the agency of the participants.

Lievrouw and Livingston (2002) offer the term *people*:

People is as good a term as any, and better than some…. [H]uman interests, concerns, knowledge and rights leap into focus…. People captures their individuality and their collectivity; the word is neutral about their abilities and interests, but resolutely advances their needs and rights and takes their plurality and diversity for granted. People can be used by any academic discipline, introduces no new jargon, and includes us, the observers, in the frame of analysis. (p. 8)

For those reasons, as well as an homage to the term used to collectively identify the citizens of a democracy – *The People* – *People* is the term that I intend to use when discussing viewers as active agents in the system of viral video.

On YouTube, the most common use of the word *achievement* is in reference to play, referring to successes such as reaching a certain number of wins in a season, beating a video game, or winning a national championship. With that in mind, I considered this conference's approach to school improvement. It was clear that, even though the mission of school is arguably to work toward the best interests of the children, that was not the focus of the conference; instead, we were striving to achieve Adequate Yearly Progress – a level of recognition that brought accolades to our schools and assured our professional survival. That was the achievement we were after. In order to reach our ultimate goal of AYP, the conference would teach us strategies we could use to meet our interim objectives such as analyzing our weaknesses, determining target populations and using

human resources. Those objectives sounded more like ways to improve a business than ways to help children learn how to participate in a democracy.

The meeting room was a double hotel conference room and set up like a talk show studio. Dance music was deeply yet softly thumping through the sound system. There was a stage in the center of the room and a twenty-foot video screen on either side of the stage. The conference corporate logo was projected on the screens, and a countdown clock was just below the logo. Apparently, something big was going to happen in nine minutes and eleven seconds.

The attendees milled around and hunted for their seats. I found mine – it was in the front row and was marked with a table tent with the conference logo, my name and a picture of a teenaged girl. Her innocent, smiling face was to motivate us and remind us for whom we were working: the children. Each attendee had a picture of a different kid on her table tent. We were asked to give our student a name and to write a sentence or two on the inside of the table tent about our fictional student's future hopes. At the end of the conference, we would be told which of our table tent kids would be randomly chosen as among the 46% who will drop out of school before they graduate (the same dropout rate as Georgia). I hoped that my little girl – Amanda – would be from a middle class family with two college-educated parents because there was a major flaw in this little exercise; dropouts are not random occurrences, and it seemed disingenuous to imply that there was no way of foreseeing who would be among the 46%. It was necessary to pretend that it was random, however, for the conference to proceed as planned. If the

conference did not view students in this way, it could not exist; we would have to focus on who the children *are* rather than what the *teachers* are *doing*.

Academic achievement has become an indicator that the schools know how to play the game. Perhaps the YouTube community was correct. Achievement was not so much a noble intellectual endeavor any more because, the focus of schools is overwhelmingly devoted to just raising test scores; the ideas that I have always felt devoted to such as helping children (with an eye on social justice) are hardly mentioned, if they are mentioned at all. I have had an increasing number of conversations with teachers who say that the public education system is so broken that educators are becoming discouraged about their diminishing ability to labor meaningfully. Pedagogy is becoming a dinosaur. Attention to standards, analyses, committee visits, administrative walkthroughs, state department of education mandates, Federal Government mandates, abbreviated class periods along with standardized test preparation, administration, and remediation are all consuming; all that there is time left to do is become better at playing the game. Achievements used to be the great things our students did after we taught them. Now they are about the statistics we manage to generate. The definition seems to have changed in order to more easily make the schools accountable (emphasis on count). In order to make an airtight case against the schools there cannot, however, be too many variables. In my more cynical moments, I sometimes suspect that he biggest variable – what the child accomplishes – must be excluded lest the schools wiggle out of their responsibility to educate all students no matter what. Statistics are used to pick the winners and the losers among the schools. Once the winners and losers are determined,

the children at the winning schools are deemed achievers and those at loosing schools are labeled as non-achievers. All that is determined without ever looking at where the student *goes* with what she has learned. What happens to the student – how she is ultimately transformed and elevated by our work with her – is not part of what the school considers to be her achievements nor was it the focus of this very popular conference.

At a recent baseball clinic, I heard former Atlanta Braves pitcher Brad Clontz discuss the importance of "refining his mechanics."   His point was that he was at his competitive best when he blocked out all the mental stuff – who was batting, the effect the game was having on his ERA, the score of the game and his upcoming contract negotiations, for example – and simply focused on the mechanical aspects of his pitching such as the positioning of his feet, his grip on the ball, the height of his kick and the direction of his follow through. Perhaps Clontz's approach to the game is what we have come to do in our quest for improving achievement – find ways to deliver our pitches unburdened by the influence of the people around us and unaffected by the conditions in which we are playing, like who we are teaching, where we are teaching and what we are teaching. We have to focus on the mechanics and block out the other stuff. We were ostensibly attending this conference in order to help our students and, by extension, our schools. The conference, however, was not really about that; it was going to teach us how to play the game better – that is, refine our mechanics.

I pulled out my chair, and on my seat was a book bag silk-screened with the conference logo. Stuffed in it was a three-inch thick notebook. On the cover of the notebook were printed two words: *Base Camp*. The conference had a mountain climbing

theme – I wondered if it were supposed to invoke Edmund Hillary or Sisyphus. Either

way, this survival kit contained the playbook for having a successful school. To bring

the mountain climbing expedition theme to life, the presenters had a standing offer that

any school system that had a team member climb to the top of Stone Mountain

(conveniently located behind the hotel) during the conference would receive ten thousand

points. During the conference meal breaks and afternoon social time it was a common

sight to see conference members racing up the mountain past all those families and nature

lovers who were leisurely climbing the mountain. Every school system in attendance

achieved this goal. I do not, however, think any of us knew why it was important or how

it would help us.

We were prepped during our pre-conference strategy sessions that we would be

able to earn points while attending the conference. The conference staff was authorized

to award points for anything they wished, and the result was a room full of school leaders

doing anything they could think of to get the attention of the point givers. Many schools

were not above soliciting points any time they did anything they thought was even

remotely notable. I felt embarrassed for them as I watched them scamper for points.

After a while, points became the motivation for just about everything we did during the

conference. The points transformed from a reward for doing things worthy of recognition

to the reason for doing everything.

Interestingly enough, we were never told what the points were for. It was clear,

however, that we were in competition. Perhaps the goal was to get us to work harder. If

we were constantly competing for points, the staff did not have to concern themselves

about whether we were passionate about the content. Maybe learning about improving

education is even more exciting when you include the opportunity to beat other people's asses as you do it. We were involved in some kind of game, so everyone seemed to naturally become concerned about winning. One thing was clear: we were accumulating points so the staff could measure us. The staff was very thorough in telling us how to acquire points, but never really told us why we should want them. Oddly, I was not clear what that measurement would mean, but knew that it would certainly be precise. Perhaps it was to get us caught up in the practice of trying to find ways to squeeze every point we could out of the conference. That would make sense; we would be taught to then apply the same type of strategies in our pursuit of raising test scores at our schools. This conference was not going to be about content or learning or pedagogy; it was going to be about competitive strategies. I wondered if the conference staff was evaluated by how many points we earned.

Looking back, the points race at the conference was very much in line with what I believe has become public education's collective philosophy about standardized testing; the object was accumulating points; the random, meaningless accumulation of points. We would then use those points as proof that we have been working hard and achieving. If we got enough points, we might even win. And there you have it; we got caught up in it. Just as the YouTube search had shown, people feel that achievement is primarily success at a game.

When the countdown clock got down to two minutes, the music cranked up, and a familiar theme thumped through the speakers. I sheepishly clapped my hands on beats two and four, which seemed to satisfy those around me that demanded exuberance. The

music finished, and an energetic woman in an expensive business suit leapt onto the stage. "Houston County Schools! You get a THOUSAND points for that amazing conga line!" "I think we should get at least a thousand points for these spiffy shirts, don't you?" said someone from Houston County who clearly must have been one of the leaders. "Right you are! Another THOUSAND points for those beautiful shirts that show you are a team and that you think with one mind!" At this news, the thirty Houston County folks hopped up and down and quickly clapped their hands in front of their chests, elbows tightly by their sides like contestants on Family Feud. I was quick to forget that the point values were completely abstract, and I was frantic. We were already behind by two thousand points and the conference had just begun. "A thousand points?" I thought, "Holy shit! This is serious." A thousand sounded more spectacular than say, five points – even when used as a value for something meaningless.

I believe the lesson of the points contest that ran during the conference was that we were to always be looking for ways to generate points. Once we got back to our schools, points were not meaningless; they were the only things that were meaningful, and the more points we could acquire, the more we could prove to the world that we were winners. This conference would teach us how to find every possible point, how to obtain every competitive advantage and how to play the No Child Left Behind game to win – content be damned. This conference would demonstrate that there was no need to concern ourselves with the mental stuff; we were going to refine our mechanics. My experience at this conference was hell. Not only did I *not* find it helpful; I felt that it embodied much of what is wrong in public education.

This dissertation will be a conversation about a curriculum that appeared and developed seemingly on its own – like a weed that unexpectedly appears in the crack of a sidewalk. Its appearance only became possible when conditions were ideal; just as a plant would need a seed, soil, light and a crack to germinate, this curriculum required a convergence as well – a convergence of political circumstances, the formation of an aesthetic vacuum and the increasing availability of technology. A viral video curriculum has appeared that is constructed, shared and embraced by People. It is relevant, timely and is based on that which is meaningful to People rather than its ability to be measured. It is a curriculum that celebrates what could be and stands in stark contrast to what is.

Mission Accomplished

Over the last twenty-five years or so, I have had a front row seat to watch the institution of American public education be destroyed. I believe the cause to be almost entirely political.

The Information Super Highway may have accelerated the damage. Regardless of one's political leanings, the Internet offers unlimited sources of ideological justification. It has become possible for one to "inform" herself without ever considering – or even hearing – what the other side has to say. If she is a conservative, she also has the masterful misdirection of conservative talk radio. Taking a page from talk radio's book, Fox News has found a profitable business model in pandering to political conservatives. This biased "news" channel seems to exist not to inform, but rather to provide fodder for its patrons' political beliefs (Mooney, 2012). Remarkably, the fodder does not just emanate from the traditional editorial sources; it also is part of their journalistic policies.

Its news production seems to have become less devoted to journalistic integrity and more devoted to bolstering the conservative side of the debate – often by misstating facts and outright lying (Aravosis, 2011). The Internet, rather than enriching the debate, drives the factions further apart. Hineman (2009) points out that "…online discussions seem to have difficulty generating the mutual respect that democratic deliberation requires" (p. 138). Discourse has been cast aside and has been replaced by justification. Being able to arm ourselves for the ideological debate has become easy. As if it were some sort of game, winning the argument seems to have supplanted thoughtful consideration and discourse.

My fellow citizens' practice of seeking out justification to "win the argument" leaves me with little hope or encouragement that the present conservative and progressive factions in our political system will collaborate on many social issues. Politically, our country is polarized nearly to the point of paralysis. There is, however, one exception. There seems to be complete agreement about education; the entire American political spectrum appears united in keeping the narrative alive that public education is broken. The theme is that the people must be saved from schools that are alternately evil or incompetent. McChesney (1997) offers that the attack on education is part of our capitalist culture. Education is naturally autonomous from the capitalist process, which McChesney (1997) refers to as "the market" (p. 45). The autonomy of education makes it uncontrollable, and that which is uncontrollable is perceived to be a threat to the market. To counter this threat, the market forces must then weaken it through continual attacks. Once weakened, it can then be harnessed, controlled and used to serve the market. These unrelenting attacks keep the schools in a defensive posture; subsequent legislation and school board policies force the schools to use virtually all of their

resources to address their perceived deficiencies in order to appease the critics – setting up a system where they essentially use the scores of the tests they have created to attack themselves. Regardless, it is unlikely that the schools will ever be able to attack them selves or defend themselves to anyone's satisfaction; they are judged by the standards of the market, yet have nothing that correlates to the idea of profit to which these standards all ultimately aspire. This futile battle is so consuming that the schools are unable to undertake any meaningful curricular changes.

Education has seemingly always struggled to clarify its purpose as it serves society. Kliebard (1987) extensively discusses a seventy-five year span of turmoil that began in1893. Throughout that period the purpose of public education was perpetually in debate. Some thought that education existed to train employees for industry; others, to make up for the moral/child rearing deficiencies of home and church; others, to prepare everyone for college; yet others, to maintain the social order. The institution of public school had little to do in this debate beyond responding to whatever expectations were blown their way by the political winds of that particular moment.

Education's most recent identity crisis is generally thought to have begun with Sputnik – the point where Kliebard's chronicle stopped. With the launch of Sputnik, the Soviet Union initiated the space race and established themselves as leaders. The response of the United States was to establish NASA, make education the scapegoat and then provide funding for new curricula and programs to advance the learning of science and mathematics. Arne Duncan (2009), Secretary of Education under Barack Obama credits the Eisenhower and Congress with great foresight, stating, "[t]hey understood that education would help us win the Space Race – and any other race" (p. 558). Duncan's

reference to the entry of our apparently intellectually chubby and out-of-shape children in that race takes us back to the origin of our nation's self-proclaimed obsession for math and science curriculum.   The obsession is, of course, in name only; Krause, (2010) points out that since Sputnik, our government's investment in non-military scientific spending has been in a continual decline, and conservatives have been on an anti-science bender nearly as long with little protest from liberals. It appears that political forces are much more enamored with the *idea* of our children learning about science than they are about the children actually *learning* about it.

The struggle over the purpose of education is over. The debate that raged until the beginning of the space race has ended. Since running in and supposedly winning that race the purpose of public school has become situated, and its purpose has been established and refined. It is a political football. It is nearly perfect for what it does, which is to be a source of rhetoric so flexible that it is – politically at least – all things to all people. Kincheloe (2008) sums it up: "education is a political activity…[where] decisions all hold profound political implications…[and] dominant power operates in numerous and often hidden ways"(p. 8).   Political incumbents can show statistical proof that they have improved education while their challengers can show statistical proof that the schools are failing. Schools scamper after the remedy or analysis of the day so they can prove that, at least for the moment, they are not terrible. As the schools do this, the press giddily reports stories that illustrate school is not only terrible, it is falling hopelessly behind all of the neighboring school systems as well as the entire country of Japan – or China – or whomever has been established as the most recent threat to the American way of life. In an article titled, "Outsourcing Report Blames Schools" Delio

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(2004) blames the American school system for technology companies outsourcing. *Wired News* published it even though *Wired* admits that it was unable to confirm all of the author's sources, leading the story with this caveat: "***Reader's advisory****: Wired News has been unable to confirm some sources for a number of stories written by this author. If you have any information about sources cited in this article, please send an e-mail to sourceinfo[at]wired.com*[original emphasis]" (Delio, 2004, para 1). Apparently *Wired News'* desire to publish a story that makes school the scapegoat exceeded its desire to be certain of the story's credibility – even when the author has apparently shown a pattern of sloppy practices.

As a nation, we fall for this type of spin over and over again because of the media's active participation in these ruses in spite of our belief that the media is the watchdog over the government. The setting for the ruse is typically one of impending attack, such as McCarthy's "heroic" exposure of communists within our ranks plotting the eventual takeover of our country, or the dramatic reporting of the fictional Gulf of Tonkin incident created by the Johnson administration. Most recently, our generation witnessed the exposure of a gargantuan abuse of data analysis and government influence over the press as we watched the Bush administration make its case for attacking Iraq in 2003 based on Iraq's possession of "Weapons of Mass Destruction." History tells us (as did the United Nations inspectors at the time) there were no Weapons of Mass Destruction; those who reported the data – the trusted and thought to be apolitical General Colin Powell among them – knew it was a shaky premise yet presented it with great confidence while ignoring a considerable amount of contrary data (Baker, 2006). The contrary data was ignored of course because it did not agree with the Bush

administration's predetermined conclusion that the United States must go to war with

Iraq, a maneuver seemingly designed to show decisive leadership after 9/11.

Our American aversion to losing – be it a war or a contest – is so strong that the

obvious costs of winning do not seem to matter. In the case of the challenge placed

before us by the countries that pose our most recent economic threats – China and India

among them – little mention is made that large parts of their workforces are exploited,

oppressed and abused. Perhaps it is thought that to compete with India and China, our

workers need to be treated more like Indian and Chinese workers. Recent American

political decisions that are against the interests of the worker, such as the quick

disappearance of the public option (signifying that it was a hopeless cause) from the

Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (derisively known as ObamaCare), recent

deep cuts in state public education budgets and the constant vilification of the labor

unions by the political right appear to me as indications that the future is dark for the

American middle class, and dismal for the American poor. Critical thinking skills have

been marginalized. Given that work readiness seems inexorably tied to public education,

as noted by Georgia's requirement that work ready communities be committed to

improving their graduation rates (Georgia Work Ready, 2009), public education does not

seem to offer much hope toward improving the lives of American workers.

An Era of "School Improvement"

The same rhetorical techniques that have been used to declare war on Iraq have

been used to build the case to declare war against our public schools. Using the

inflammatory language to imply that we were in danger of some sort of attack, *A Nation*

at Risk (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) referred to our educational system as "an act of unilateral disarmament" (p. 9) – apparently somehow rendering ourselves intellectually impotent – and claimed that the future of America was in danger as a result. Once again the scapegoats, our schools were driven into the ridiculous position of, as Moravec (2010) presents, proving the efficacy of our teaching entirely through quantitative measures. Just as the "crisis" of Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction was a contrived one, the crisis reported by the National Commission on Excellence in Education's report, *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) was contrived as well. Capitalizing on the what Apple (2001) refers to as a neoconservative, paranoiac "fear of the 'Other'" (p. 47), the commission's report dramatically warned the American people that we were in an educational crisis; our children were academically falling behind the children in other countries and an immediate and total overhaul of public school education – from content to seat time to teaching – should be performed as soon as possible. Carson, Huelskamp, and Woodall (1993) as well as Bracey, (1997, 2008) have deconstructed, debunked and disproved much of *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) by pointing out the report's poor scholarship, inflammatory language and misstatement of facts. Bracey (2008) credits the report with starting the present long-lived wave of anti-school sentiment, stating that it "launched an unprecedented orgy of school bashing that continues unabated today" (p. 81).

Regardless of all the repudiations of the report, we as a society have been working feverishly to recover from that crisis – even though it never happened. Like the heroic American soldiers in Iraq, who fought valiantly in the face of political gamesmanship and

charges that the war was not started honorably, our teachers and administrators have fought valiantly even when it became clear there was no apparent reason to continue fighting other than our leaders had committed us to do so. On the subject of the Iraq war and the so-called crisis in education, because they are loyal citizens, many teachers have been optimists; rather than believe that our leaders are wrong, misled or even dishonest, we have listened to each new justification with an open mind, believing we have found the real problem and the recipe to fix it. As a result, the public schools have been jerked around and messed with by so many justifications and subsequent political solutions to these cooked up crises that a real crisis has been created in the public schools by those who claim to be its saviors. The 2009 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) scores, used to attack public schools by Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, are an excellent example. Gerald Tirozzi (2010) reinterprets the data and convincingly shows that the results illustrate the "persistent correlation between poverty and performance" (para 3). Once the American students economic circumstances were taken into account, the scores were actually shown to be an indictment of poverty. The real crisis is that the identification of the causal role of poverty as a barrier to education has been pushed aside in favor of the more politically addressable yet intellectually dishonest notions such as unmasking failing schools, blaming teacher unions, bemoaning accountability, accusing schools of abandonment by leaving children behind or accusing public education of being a poor competitor – be it in racing to space, or simply to The Top.

In 2001, President George W. Bush unveiled his "No Child Left Behind" education initiative. Keeping with the war theme that was so effectively used in *A Nation*

at Risk (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), No Child Left Behind

uses the language of war and warnings of appeasement. Bush chose a name similar to the

Army Rangers motto, "No Man Left Behind"; a pledge that the Ranger makes to his

brother that he will never leave him in the clutches of the enemy. The idea of not

abandoning one's comrades was a popular one at the time. The very popular 2001 film,

Black Hawk Down used "No man left behind" as a tag line in its previews.

Boards of education, school administrators, teachers, parents and children were all

drafted to fight valiantly and make sure that no child was abandoned to the enemy,

which, ironically, could be easily be interpreted as the schools themselves. It was, after

all the schools that were under reconnaissance, and the intelligence collected against the

schools was the students' data, all of which was fundamentally influenced by the

students' socioeconomic status rather than any given school's efficacy.

Similar to the justification of the Iraqi invasion, in No Child Left Behind the

public has been given – and has generally accepted – data carefully chosen to support a

predetermined conclusion – in this case that the public schools are failing. This

conclusion ignores clear evidence such as that which is reported by Carson, Huelskamp,

and Woodall (1993) that graduation rates have been consistently increasing for decades,

or by Bracey (2003), who convincingly argues that SAT scores have in fact been

continually rising when one considers the change in populations who take the test. It has

been relatively simple for the politically motivated to build the case that schools are

failing by taking advantage of our flawed cultural conviction that the scientific method is

the most fair, accurate and objective method of evaluation, and then picking the data that

proves whatever it is that needs to be proven.

McChesney (1997) unmasks the abuse of data as a political tool: "…mainstream research had accommodated itself to the ideological needs of the powers-that-be and defined that accommodation as neutrality" (p. 41). The citizenry were led to believe that education was in crisis, and the data (not coincidentally) supports the suspicions of the political forces. The chosen data led to a test- and data-driven curriculum that functions as a hegemonic tool that redefines the purpose of public school education. The local school boards responded to this data-proven crisis by intensifying English, math and science instruction while state departments of education increased math, science and language arts requirements. Critical thinking and aesthetics were not subject to the intensification, presumably because of the difficulty testing discrimination and expression. The result would be an emphasis on the functional skills that would make a student a good employee as opposed to an adult with the skills to live in a democracy.

A critical part of No Child Left Behind is the use of high – stakes tests designed and refined to ostensibly track the effectiveness of the instruction. For the tests to work, competencies had to be established that could be examined quantitatively. Eisner (1978) explains the trap that this creates and predicts the crisis it will cause: "I believe the current emphasis on the production of measurable competencies in the three Rs is creating an unbalanced curriculum that will, in the long run, weaken rather than strengthen the quality of children's education" (p. 615). The emphasis on those measurable competencies makes them a high priority in the school, and so increased requirements will be imposed in order to raise the students' performance on those particular competencies. Eisner (1978) warns that such increased requirements send a message:

Decisions about what the curriculum shall consist of with respect to

content are important, not only because such decisions define the

opportunities students will have for learning that content, but because they

also define for students what is regarded as important in school. (p. 616)

Whatever is emphasized in a curriculum is therefore identified to the students as

important. It is not difficult to imagine how this would be so; after all, by defining that

content as what is important, the curriculum also defines the students as well. The

curriculum is expressed in the tests the students take, the teachers they have, the other

students with whom they interact and the nature of their interactions. Even students who

rebel against school acknowledge the school's import by doing so; one does not rebel

against what one deems insignificant.

The converse is also true; in order to make way for the increased requirements,

subjects that did not generate succeed/fail data would then be, by default, assumed

"unimportant" and were then were marginalized and minimized. The scarcity of any

particular content in the curriculum indicates to the students what is insignificant just as

the inclusion content indicates what is important.

One casualty of the emphasis on the politically influenced, test-driven curriculum

has been the arts, in spite of the fact that Eisner (2002) compellingly states that the arts

are a necessary part of the development of the mind:

Through the arts we learn to see what we had not noticed, to feel what we

had not felt, and to employ forms of thinking that are indigenous to the

arts. These experiences are consequential, for through them we engage in

a process through which the self is remade. (p. 12)

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The arts give us the ability to continually remake ourselves as we continually search for new ways to express who we are – an ability currently not emphasized (and often not even mentioned) in other disciplines.

The arts have not been overtly eliminated from the school curriculum. A representative of the department of education referred to the disregard of the arts as one of the "unintended consequences" (Roberts, 2007, para 13) of No Child Left Behind.

As a result of that unintended consequence, the arts were de-emphasized to the point that they were excluded from the conversation about what is critical for children to learn and what skills children acquire. Their exclusion, however, effectively identifies the arts as an insignificant part of the school curriculum without ever stating it is so. Eisner (1978) also explains the importance – or perhaps the cost – of these choices: "…when we choose to become 'literate' in the use of particular symbol systems, we also begin to define for ourselves what we are capable of conceiving and how we can convey what we have conceived to others" (p. 618). The arts are important then because, according to Eisner, they offer alternative ways of knowing, and by extension, alternative ways of looking at understanding and conversing about the world. Brecht (1992) declares that "…the great and complicated things that go on in the world cannot be adequately recognized by people who do not use every possibly aid to understanding" (p. 71). The exclusion of the arts closes off those ways of knowing thus narrowing our vision, our perception and approach to the world. Brecht (1992) states it quite simply: "[d]ifficulties are not mastered by keeping silent about them" (p. 29). The marginalization of the arts handicaps children by minimizing the ways that they can make sense of the world. Important, critical voices are left unheard.

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Accomplices to Our Own Demise

The passing grade on any given standardized test has become the dividing line between success and failure, and schools, school administrators and teachers are all judged based on that binary standard with no consideration for the children they teach, the community they serve or the goals that the students have accomplished that may not be reflected in the standardized tests. This is what Eisner (2003) refers to as an industrial culture: "What we are now doing is creating an industrial culture in our schools, one whose values are brittle and whose conception of what's important narrow" (p. 375). It is an ethical paradigm shift for many of the teachers that attempts to shift their purposes ever further away from altruism and ever closer toward only training students for industry. Current approaches to the design of and preparation for standardized tests supports this emphasis. Kincheloe (2008) declares, "[s]uch pedagogy fails to produce transformative action or intellectual challenge" (p. 23). Such standard-based instruction is unacceptable, even though it may help generate high test scores. It is shallow: a veneer that sits on top of what is truly important. Volante (2004) reminds us that teaching to the test was once thought to be a professional failing that alienates the impoverished, undermines validity, and negatively impacts the teaching profession. Smith, (1991) noted that teachers in the early 1990's felt dissonance, alienation and guilt over their role in high-stakes testing. Nevertheless, it is now an accepted and encouraged instructional strategy. Kober (2002) maintains that teaching to the test as a general principle is

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appropriate and justifies it by offering guidelines as to which practices of teaching to the test are bad, middling or good. Introducing good practices for teaching to the test, Kober (2002) offers this endorsement: "This type of teaching to the test is pretty much the same as good teaching" (p. 9). All of this is demoralizing, but not surprising. When school becomes "all about the test," instruction will be all about the test as well. The meaning of achievement also seems to have shifted. While high achievers were once the recipients of high grades, moderate achievers the recipients of moderate grades and so forth, achievement often seems to be just passing all of the tests – successfully playing the game. It has become a dualism; achievers pass, failures fail. When the goal is just passing, there is little motivation or encouragement to excel. Passing becomes equated with achieving; anything else is unnecessary overkill. This is especially harmful when the tests are of minimum competency; there is little reason for a student to aspire to high scores if passing by one point gives her the same designation. I believe that the school's definition of achievement will become the norm for the students as well and our country will soon be awash in students who are merely minimally competent – even those from the so-called highest achieving schools.

High passing rates on standardized tests are considered to be the gold standard for determining if a school is a good school. In order to comply with this nonsensical beau ideal, the schools responded to this new standard by cooking up processes – trick plays if you will – to raise more and more test scores to passing. Teaching better – that is, improving teachers' pedagogical understanding or seeking out more meaningful, relevant content – is not really an effective approach for increasing high stakes test scores. In order to increase test scores, individual student weaknesses or specific at-risk

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demographic student profiles must be targeted and addressed. Various processes are initiated for these target groups, which effectively raise test scores. These processes attend to such things as attendance on test days as well as directing extra instruction to the targeted subgroups. The effect of that strategy means school reform has become almost entirely focused on process rather than content; the conference I attended is a clear example of that. By refining processes we can wring every possible point out of the test without adding one thing to the curriculum or taking so much as a peek inside of the children's lives. In addition to higher test scores, the result is intellectual stagnation and diminishing returns. Whitehorne (2006) states it clearly: "…a narrowing of the curriculum due to the law's emphasis on testing…is increasingly evident" (para 5). As these processes are refined, the content is diminished; that which is difficult to test or unlikely to be a successful target of remediation is marginalized. Whether the curriculum is formally changed or not, the diminution of the content is a de facto narrowing of the curriculum.

A strategy that ignores the circumstances of the children can only serve the school. Rather than go to the source of the problems – the politicization of the curriculum and the deeply cut grooves of poverty, race, class and gender – it is faster and more efficient to turn the kids into better test takers, even though Lupton (2005) cautions that "[a] concern with social justice demands school improvement strategies that are based on an understanding of the critical importance of what goes on outside the school for the quality of education that is delivered within it" (p. 603). The little girl whose picture was on my table tent was hardly mentioned between the time she was introduced and the time her fictional fate was announced. I think it is because she was little more

than a vessel into which we have come to pour our solutions and processes. In spite of her introduction at the beginning of the conference as our reason to exist, she was never the focus; the processes were.

Finite resources and energy are directed at raising the passing rates on standardized tests as well as establishing an airtight system for ultimately assigning blame to the school. What I saw as a young teacher as the quest for new content and a dynamic curriculum that is responsive to the local community and devoted to social justice seems to have ended in the public schools. As an institution, public education has stopped thinking about *what* to teach and doing so has effectively frozen the curriculum in time; there are no meaningful adaptations made in content to better fit the culture of the students, the needs of the community or the changes in the world at large. All those so-called achievements are the results of new and better processes churning up the same old content. Creating and measuring these processes has become all-consuming; the institution of public school now can only keep up with all this measurement and all these school improvement movements if the curriculum does *not* change; keeping the curriculum frozen makes it easier set up and follow systems crafted to refine delivery and measure teachers. The evaluation of our schools and our teachers has become deformed and twisted. Instead of continually challenging ourselves to rethink what is important to teach our students and re-evaluate what the community's priorities for its children are, schools have had little choice but to institute policies directed at assessing teachers, documenting approaches, determining accountability and avoiding blame. Curriculum change is considered to be merely a confounding factor in the strategy to determine culpability.

Public school has become moribund; while it still may be changing, the changes are increasingly meaningless and removed from teaching children that which the community finds important, relevant or meaningful. QBE, QCC, NCLB, GPS, National Performance Standards, and Race to the Top are all about political forces controlling schools; those initiatives do not seem to be about teaching children. In spite of all of that change, school has stopped growing and evolving intellectually, and it has stopped serving the community. The purpose of education has become to continually create and refine processes that make it simple to determine if the processes are being followed. Aesthetics have been marginalized because both the aesthetic approach to learning (that is, where the child learns as the recipient of the aesthetic experience) as well as aesthetic outcomes (where the child is the creator of art or artistically constructed solutions) did not philosophically "fit" well with the politically fashioned curriculum: one that is test-driven, influenced by the needs of commerce, and founded upon the principle of one correct answer for every question. Boyer (1988) laments "[w]e are systematically training pedants who have lost a powerful view of themselves as creators, significant makers of meaning, and as interpreters of personal experience" (para 5). Student learning and growth and finding new ways of knowing and expressing have stopped being the point; students are now just a source of data, and it is the data that contains all the life and depth in education; the real focus – the children – are as flat and lifeless as the little girl on my table tent.

Steve Jobs once said that one reason Apple lost the platform war to Microsoft was because Apple did not know it was in a war; they were just trying to make great products (Engadget, 2010). This petrification of public school curriculum indicates to me that the

war over control of the school has ended, and we who love children and teaching and curriculum have lost to the political forces. Perhaps we lost because we did not know we were in a war; we were just trying to teach children great things. Teaching children has consistently remained the passion of most teachers; their fury, frustration and disgust with the system have been a result of all the changes, all the fads, all the school improvement movements and all the times they have been scrutinized, criticized and judged. The more education is constrained, scripted, regulated, observed, processed and program-ized, the less the teachers get to interact with the students on a personal, meaningful level. Thoughtful pedagogy, practiced after learning about the students and then finding out what they know and why they know it, has become impossible.

The school curriculum was slowly and completely overwhelmed by political forces and has ultimately stopped serving the people. The teachers are still teaching long after the war has been lost, much like the legendary Japanese soldiers discovered vigilantly guarding their posts decades after the end of World War II. Relevance has disappeared, and a void formed and slowly grew when the public schools were forced to abandon the best interests of the students and the community. As Freire (2004) proclaims, "The starting point for organizing the program content of education … must be the present, existential, concrete situation, reflecting the aspirations of the people" (p. 95). By Freire's definition, education had abandoned its mission at its very starting point: the concrete situation reflecting the aspirations of the people. The content of education reflects political aspirations and the aspirations of the market rather than the aspirations of the people. Further, Dewey (1916) offers that "[s]ince a democratic society repudiates the principle of external authority, it must find a substitute in voluntary disposition and

interest; these can be created only by education" (p. 87). Dewey points out the equally

true inverse of what Freire stated. Freire tells us that education must start with the people

in order to have relevance; Dewey extends that to say that the people determine what is

relevant through education. In order to have meaningful self-direction, education creates

the circumstances that make that possible. While Dewey was speaking of education as an

emancipating force, his comment is just as germane when the "principle of external

authority" is the school itself. When this occurs, the democratic society must then find

another "substitute in voluntary disposition and interest." McChesney (1997) points out

that the people are primarily interested in social values over material values; in other

words, people come before things. As a political entity influenced by commerce, the

public school curriculum has come to ultimately serve the market, and this is a critical

philosophical break. McChesney (1997) argues that the market is ill equipped to address

social values in any way except to exploit them in order to sell commodities. This has

been reflected in the school curriculum as it shifted its focus toward "work ready" and

away from social values.

Ultimately, however, no amount of data can indefinitely convince the People

something that is not true.   McCarthy, Viet Nam and the Iraq debacle all bear this out.

Once McCarthy's attacks displayed a pattern of unproven accusations and his victims

became more and more like everyman, people stopped listening; once it became clear that

there were no Weapons of Mass Destruction, the Cheney/Bush administration was

typically seen as either dishonest or inept and once exposed, the Gulf of Tonkin incident

stood as proof of the Pentagon's lies. The war on education has lasted longer than those

other ruses because of the nature of the target and the attack. Education – even as an

institution – is a theoretical entity, quite different from a baseless or exaggerated accusation as with McCarthy, a concrete event like the Gulf of Tonkin, or the physical presence of Weapons of Mass Destruction. Unlike those examples, the misdirection, lies and head fakes used to tear down education have not been so easily debunked; further, advocates of public education are few and weak and the political interests are too strong. It seems that as long as the school is a scapegoat, the political advantages of blaming the school greatly exceed the political advantages of solving the problems. The system is invested in the school as a perpetual failure. As a result, any attacks upon public education that are disproved or weakened by the truth or rejected by the people are nimbly adjusted to accommodate and absorb the new notions.

<p style="text-align:center">The Absence of Relevance</p>

Nevertheless, People seem to be getting numb to all this; it is likely that education has been over-mined as source for society's ills. Each wave of attacks and political maneuvers brings on different changes, and each set of changes brings diminishing returns. The people are weary, and the improved school is a mangled mess that looks nothing like the school they desire for their children.

The marginalization of aesthetics, which was a result of the emphasis placed upon math and reading, has met considerable resistance. Dewey, (1897) explains that all must be part of the curriculum: "I believe that when science and art thus join hands the most commanding motive for human action will be reached; the most genuine springs of human conduct aroused and the best service that human nature is capable of guaranteed" (p. 32). While a marginalization of aesthetically based content may have served the

market and the political forces, people are driven away and seek out a curriculum that values aesthetics. Sir Ken Robinson (Azzam, 2009) makes note of it in this statement:

> It's a fundamental human truth that people perform better when they're in touch with things that inspire them…. We know this because human culture is so diverse and rich – and our education system is becoming increasingly dreary and monotonous. It's no surprise to me that so many kids are pulling out of it. Even ones who stay are often detached. (para. 9 and 10)

We cannot be content with the dearth of experiences that a curriculum that marginalizes art would provide. Curriculum that marginalizes aesthetics is limiting and deprives the student of important ways of knowing, expressing and communicating. Dewey (1934) explains it this way: "...each art has its own medium and ...[e]ach medium says something that cannot be uttered as well or as completely in any other tongue" (p 110). Each manner of expression – which Dewey refers to as *art* – contributes to an understanding of the world. As more and more manners of expression are experienced and embraced and learned, a more complete understanding of the world is achieved. Limiting the curriculum by marginalizing the arts controls the way that the world is perceived by the learners. Aside from the specific forms of art, aesthetics in general – which Dewey also refers to as *art* – allows more complicated thinking. Dewey (1934) says it this way: "[a]rt is the living and concrete proof that man [sic] is capable of restoring consciously, and thus on the plane of meaning, the union of sense, need, impulse and action characteristic of the live creature" (p. 26). Art then, in Dewey's eyes is a demonstration of some understanding of life.

Convergence

In addition to *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), the early 1980's brought the beginning of the home video boom and the introduction of Usenet, an early Internet tool for accessing and collaborating across the Internet on literally anything. These three entities had little – perhaps nothing – to do with each other at the time of their inception, but it is ultimately the convergence of their influences nearly thirty years later that brings us viral video as curriculum.

In 1982, Michael Jackson's *Thriller* video was released. Celizic (2008) pronounces that this merger of filmmaking and music video is the finest music video ever made, one that "…would change forever the way we thought about [albums and music videos]" (para 1). It was released commercially into the home video market, and its sales, seemingly bolstered by the strength of its artistic merit, sold over one million copies even though only 10% of U.S. households had videocassette recorders (The Independent Dealers of the Entertainment Merchants Association, 2005). This new exercise of consumer choice was an early step toward video sharing as a democratic act. Though consumer choice in itself is not a democratic act, such collective expression of beliefs is most certainly a democratic act. It is an aesthetic choice manifested in the market – a collective endorsement of the artistic statement. This fledgling exercise of consumer control over programming became a market force as more videos were produced with sales – rather than broadcasts – in mind. In response to demand, the market made more and more content available. I could argue that the purchasers of

Thriller were the figurative pioneers of a video culture in which the viewers would choose what they would watch rather than passively watch what was chosen for them. Even though the choices were still quite limited, it was a notable break from the total inflexibility of traditional programming. The content became a method of expression by the consumer when she shared it in her social networks. The sharing of content became a democratic act when the content became a representation of citizens' beliefs and gained visibility by becoming popular. Dewey (1916) explains that "[a] democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience" (p. 87). Viral video is a portable form of media that is a multi-sensory method of sharing experience.

In 1980, Walt Disney Productions announced its entry into the home video market, a landmark moment of the home video boom that was just beginning (The Independent Dealers of the Entertainment Merchants Association, 2005). Ownership of a home videocassette recorder allowed the average person the opportunity to create a viewing pattern of meaningful video images that collectively, as a reflection of her tastes and interests and passions, would define her. Be it through ownership or rental, the collective video viewing experience was a pastiche of images that moved the collector; it expressed her feelings and was comprised of images that resonated with her. It reflected what she believed and how she saw the world.

The home video collection grew both in size and purpose with the affordability of the home video camera, which quickly became popular as a tool used to document major life experiences and rites of passage such as school music performances, weddings and graduation ceremonies. Unlike its predecessors – among them the Super 8 movie camera

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– the home video camera was easy to use, blank media was easy to obtain and external laboratory processes were not required. As the cameras became smaller and less expensive to use, they were used to document life events that were more ordinary yet still meaningful. It became common to make video recordings of vacations, classroom presentations and amusing bits of life such as when little junior decides to paint the dog. As the technology has progressed, the video camera has produced higher quality media, become smaller and easier to use. The latest iteration of the video camera situates it as a part of another electronic device such as a cell phone or an MP3 player. These small, high quality, easy to use cameras can be and are used everywhere. Everything becomes a potentially recordable event, and the world becomes something more than what is experienced; the experience is something that can also be captured and shared.

The early 1980's also saw the inception and rapid growth of Usenet, one of the first popular Internet networking sites. Griffiths (2002) notes that he number of computers on the Usenet network grew from 15 in 1980 to 2500 in 1986; a growth rate of over 16,666%. This increase in the number of computers reflects the traffic that Usenet was receiving from users. In 1993, America Online offered access to Usenet, providing a final surge of use that overlapped the introduction of the World Wide Web in 1992.

Chester and Larson (2005) say that Usenet fulfilled "a decidedly democratic, collaborative function" (p. 190). Through Usenet, users could choose any number of topics that intrigued them. The consumers of Usenet were also the providers of the content. Once logged onto the Usenet, a participant could not only see all the content that others had written; she could also write content in any topic or newsgroup. Once "posted," she could see what others had written in response to her thoughts and then

respond to those entries if she chose, and so forth. These conversations were visible and available to all the other readers of that newsgroup; anyone could see and respond to her.

Usenet was important to the popularity of the Internet for many reasons. For the purpose of this inquiry, two reasons stand out. First, Usenet is a social network based upon the subscribers' interest. It is one of the pioneering Internet mediums for what Jenkins (2006) refers to as a participatory culture – a culture where the viewer actively participates rather then just be a passive spectator. Usenet, like the videocassette recorder, allowed the media consumer to control content to specifically suit her tastes and passions. Additionally, the contributors to the newsgroups were not corporate producers but rather individuals. Users did not just consume Usenet; they were also contributors to it, offering opinions, computer programs, photographs and even video. It was reflective of how People felt and how they saw the world in contrast to traditional media that was created to shape and change how the world is seen. Usenet still exists, but has become much less popular since the inception of the World Wide Web, which has the potential to share more technically complex data such as streaming video.

When broadcast television was the only source of video, only the privileged were able to create, schedule, or even influence content. As video became available in a greater number of ways, the sources of video became more and more common and the ability to create content became less and less exclusive. Video production gradually branched into and converged with the Internet; the result has been video-sharing sites such as YouTube. Virtually everyone is able to create and produce content; video production has become a tool of the people, and video sharing has become a method of communicating. Watching and sharing video has become a social/intellectual activity

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that created or defined or taught or cemented social networks. It was curriculum, and it continued Usenet's democratic, collaborative function.

The Internet accelerated and multiplied the relatively new opportunity for a viewer to freely choose content without necessarily being tethered to corporate influence. Because of their bottom-up nature and tendency to come directly from the people, video sharing sites became a twenty-first century blended descendent of the town crier, the town square, the town newspaper and the town gossip. Evidence that video has become a far-reaching, resonant, powerful uniting tool of the People is in the existence of video that is shared among various social networks resulting in great numbers of views, or "hits." For the purposes of this inquiry, this type of video will be called, "Viral Video."

I trace my definition of Viral Video to the iterations of "everyman" video that can be counted among its precursors. Candid Camera, itself an expansion of its radio predecessor, Candid Microphone, was among the first to make everyman a media star. Decades later, American's Funniest Videos brought us videos that were selected and showcased by a major television network, but were produced directed and starred by everyman. In both of these cases, the stars of the videos are typically unwilling or unwitting participants who are either unaware their experience is being captured or, while aware of the camera, will soon have their plans go awry. Initially, they have little control over their circumstances; they are part of the show because they were in that specific place at that specific time. Before they can regain control, the circumstances must run their course. This is, of course, just like how one experiences a virus. While not the common application of the term, that is the basis of why I refer to the descendants of those shows as viral video. Some academics take exception to the use of the term "viral."

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Jenkins (personal communication, August 7, 2010) objects, for instance, arguing the term "viral" is misleading because it implies that the media controls its own distribution rather "than factoring in the agency and agenda of people who are actively choosing which content to help circulate". Further, Jenkins stresses that it is the viewers who pass on viral videos because the videos are meaningful to them; the viewers are not simply "hosts" in which the video occupies until it finds its next victim. Solely the viewer then, determines virality; it is not determined by the video. While Jenkins' point is certainly compelling, it only applies to one aspect of shared video; the distinction I have noted some characteristics of videos that allow them to be described quite well by the term "viral", and it is those of which I speak. These videos are virus like in that they are so difficult to control; they are virus like because the powerful idea they bring lives in a "host" video; they are virus like in that we as individuals can not always control if or when we will be exposed to them; they are virus-like because they spread.

McChesney (1997) stated that it would be a long time before online video would replace television. I maintain that it will not and should not *ever* replace television; it is vastly different because of its collaborative nature, its instantaneous availability and its democratic potential. Shared video offers viewers a new medium, not just an improvement upon an old medium. As McLuhan (reganmead, 2009, January 14) points out, "the old medium is the content of the new medium" (0:24). Whereas the medium of television was the fusion of film and radio, the medium of shared video is the fusion of television and the Internet. Watching online video is no replacement for television; more accurately, watching online video is a new media experience that merely shares some characteristics with television.

The complications of this inquiry are compounded by the fact that the definition is still evolving; the leading voices in media studies are still discussing it, turning it over and floating trial balloons over the media studies mindscape. There are at least two camps: those that embrace the term because it is descriptive of the speed of which videos can be shared as well as acknowledging the power of the medium to resist constraint, and those who object to the term "viral" because it gives the videos themselves undeserved credit for their power to communicate and denies the agency of the people who are touched by them enough to share them. Like any good conversation, all of these definitions and their supportive arguments are true in their own right. It appears that while persuasive arguments are being made against the use of the term viral video, no term has surfaced that works as well and is as genuinely embraced by the People.

I am inclined to make no distinction between videos produced by individuals as opposed to those produced by commercial entities. Gauntlett (2009) believes that

> …it would obviously be wrong to believe that only industry-produced media is 'proper' media, and worthy of study…. If media studies becomes more agnostic about whether 'media' is something produced by the BBC, or by Sarah in her bedroom, I'd say that's a good thing, because that's how media-making and media-sharing is going. (p. 10)

In any case, a corporation – or any other entity – cannot create a Viral Video; that can only be done by and acclimation of People. This conversation will focus on what happens *after* the video is created; how it resonates, with whom it is shared and how it serves as curriculum. I am hopeful that the term at which I ultimately arrive is consonant with the contributions these videos make in both democracy and curriculum.

A New Curriculum

YouTube – and sites like it – provided relief for the vacuum of relevance caused by the conversion of the destruction of the public schools, media control and the perversion of public discourse. Jenkins (2010, October 18) says that "our society was ready for YouTube when it appeared" (para 6), and illustrates his point by noting a convergence of circumstances. Among them is that there was a considerable amount of amateur/noncommercial media that was in search of an outlet; communities much like those that were devoted to exchanging media on Usenet began to emerge on the World Wide Web, and media sharing was developing into a method of discourse in which People exchanged videos as a means of expressing their thoughts and beliefs. YouTube provided a space for that convergence to be satisfied. When YouTube appeared, there was not only a general need for that particular type of creative outlet, there was more specifically a need for a People's curriculum – a curriculum that was relevant to the people because it is, albeit informally, democratically constructed. Jenkins (2010, October 18) also speaks of the new opportunities offered by a place like YouTube, speaking of how such sharing both represents the thoughts of she who produced the video along with the thoughts of she who chooses to share it: "we do not simply pass these…on from mind to mind, rather each new group makes its own contributions, leaves its own mark on what the others have produced" (para 7). Shared video offers us a curriculum that involves a new way of conversing – to not just share what we feel is relevant but also to have a curriculum that we can also share with our own particular spin,

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stamp or personality attached.   This is done, of course, through the circumstances under which any particular video is shared. The sharer can introduce the video with a sentence or two intended to direct the viewer's focus toward a certain aspect of the video. A video can take on different meanings based on the context, the staging or the framing. Each setting can have a considerably different effect on the viewer; the statements that can be made are vastly different, based on the presentation. A viewer can be directed to look at a video and its characterization of the impoverished; the same video can be used to illustrate a particular perception of women; the same video can also be used as a study of difference and sameness.

The examples I uncovered on YouTube in my search of the word "achievement" were – by my definition – viral videos. Regardless of their assigned label, these video clips, shared through social networks and popular because of their resonance with viewers, have erupted as a people's curriculum that is democratic, genuine, relevant and sensitive to the community. Viral videos are a new voice, or, as Chapman (2007) puts it, "a different use of knowledge" (p. 94), that provides the viewer with "…an interactive, contested, and negotiated creation of knowledge" (p. 94). In addition to viral videos' obvious aesthetic value, they also provide us with a new method to more accurately and relevantly collaborate and converse directly with one another about the world. This method is more direct, offering us the opportunity to work around media that are filtered, managed, censored, twisted and deposited into our heads by the privileged, the political or those in power. YouTube's "achievement" – what I discovered to be the defined by the People as a way to describe an aspect of playing games – was more precise, insightful and relevant to the role of achievement in education than the traditional institutional

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definition that is used to describe academic success. The emphasis on testing and playing the game had taken over.

By embracing the more aesthetic curriculum of viral video, the people are making a statement that such aesthetic ways of conversing are important. Eisner (1978) provides the foundation for this assumption by establishing that curriculum is a symbol of what the people find to be important. As the curriculum stopped being meaningful, the result was not intellectual anarchy or an end to learning or even meaningful school reform; instead, the people created – or at least embraced – a new curriculum; one they believed was important; one that was relevant to them; one that spoke their truth; one that addressed the issues they found meaningful. Perhaps most importantly, one that gave them a voice of resistance. They could construct a curriculum that rejects hegemony, encourages critical thinking and questions authority.

Chapter two will be a survey of literature. I intend to look primarily to media, education and aesthetics. Media, of course is critical to this topic because it is fundamentally the way the curriculum finds it way to us. I will look into some of the fundamental characteristics of media and media sharing as part of social networks. I will look into education, but not because this topic has anything to do with school, but rather because it has appeared in part because of the moribundity of school. I will explore the purposes of education, how it should exist in a democracy and who should control it.

An aesthetic lens is critical for at least three reasons. The first reason is because of the key role that aesthetics plays in sharing media. The second reason is there is a palpable vacuum in the ways that we are taught to see the world as a result of the marginalization of aesthetics in school. The third and final reason that aesthetics are

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critical is because aesthetics can and should extend beyond art. Eisner and Powell (2002), state, "A curriculum that promotes aesthetic and artistic modes of thought would include opportunities for open-ended exploration, projects that engage students' imagination, experimentation, and judgment, and different media with which students can explore and test their ideas" (p. 155). Aesthetic thinking such as this crosses all disciplines.

In chapter three I will delineate my method. I hesitate to use the term *methodology* because I am intellectually tramping around an uncharted place, looking at things through a set of lenses that are an unusual combination. Basically, this inquiry will be a formalization of what I have come to love as an informal distraction: viewing, thinking about and talking about viral video as a force in our culture and a force as curriculum. It will, in large part, chronicle the creation of my personal viral video curriculum. It will demonstrate the way that I have filed videos away in my head as meanings; as a different way of knowing that which I deem important. While I have been quite clear about the characteristics of the moribund public school curriculum, I must also be clear about what a less political, more genuine, democratic curriculum would look like. The existence of video sharing sites and their great popularity are an indicator of the health of our democracy. Becker (2002) declares, "…the well-being of a democracy is in part manifested by how openly representations of its own complexity are embraced" (p. 36). Viral video then serves as both a democratically chosen curriculum and an indicator of the robustness of our democracy. Performance standards; objectives, testing, accountability and "data driven schools" are all links in the chains that hold us fast to the

hegemonic forces. I will certainly not then, discuss curriculum in the same way as do

political forces that control curriculum in public school.

I will use a cobbled-together method that borrows from critical discourse analysis,

narrative analysis, and personal aesthetic interpretation as my methodology for

examining and discussing these videos. This method looks somewhat like critical

discourse analysis, but the great emphasis that I have placed upon my interpretation of

the videos takes the method to a much different place. These videos are most certainly

discourse, but I see and acknowledge that much power lies in the personal effect the

videos have.

Chapter four will be my findings. It is there that I will share and discuss what I

have found to be particularly illustrative examples of viral video as curriculum.   In

curriculum studies, we find it easy to locate ourselves in a world where, as Bloomfield-

Jones (2003), states, "curriculum is everywhere." In using that term, Bloomfield-Jones

(2003), however, expresses concern that we are in effect pigeonholing all of life into a

few curriculum principles and does not see that condition as an improved way of seeing

the world, calling it a flawed perspective that "warps our consciousness" (p. 3). I must

disagree for the simplest reason: curriculum *is* everywhere, especially if one – as I do –

subscribes to McDonald's definition. If the curriculum is what is learned, then the

question becomes not *if* something is curriculum, but rather *how* it is curriculum. My

experience in curriculum studies has not provided me a few curriculum categories under

which I force the entire world. Instead, I feel as if my eyes have been opened to the idea

that there is an infinite number of ways to look at life and an infinite number of ways to

combine that which we have come to understand as curriculum. Viral video is part of life. I am eager to show how it is curriculum.

Chapter five will be implications and suggestions for future study. The philosophy of public school and the potential of shared online video seem to be at loggerheads. As a result I see two paths for shared online video. The inevitable path is a continuation of where it is right now – as a spontaneous curriculum that is a voice of People. The other path has yet to be blazed; I am hopeful that school will find a way to reinvent itself in a way that will embrace this as well as all the other manifestations of media. I have been encouraged by the work of the Macarthur foundation in this area. It is perhaps the first time I have seen the future sensibly connected to the present. It gives me hope.

As for further study, I find a number of topics interesting; among those, I include just about all the manifestations of the critical areas where social justice is a concern. Shared online video is a space where issues of race, culture, gender and economic justice can be the subjects of incredibly beautiful and compelling work. As a teacher, I have noticed that while much attention is given to the students' cognitive learning styles, little is being done to accommodate or even study the students' cultural learning styles. There is massive potential for shared online video to open channels toward a more culturally thoughtful and effective way of teaching. I have noted the sharing of other types of art in social networks, and can see that many of these are a discourse in their own right. Finally, I have observed what appears to be an increase in the use of shared online video used as a tool to initiate of social activism. I am intrigued about the efficacy of the tool the

techniques used, and the positive or negative affects that it many have upon the

participation and marketing of activism in our culture.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE: A BANDANA, A ZIPPER PULL AND A BROKEN SKI

POLE

A Lesson from Angus

Angus was an experienced skier. Fit, agile and smart, he knew how to ski as safely as anyone could. He had the very best equipment – skis, poles and clothing – all designed to be safe and durable.

It was a nearly perfect day. The sun was shining and the air was crisp. Angus decided to take advantage of the day and ski down from the top of the mountain on the fine, untouched powder.

It was a very fast run. As he went faster and faster, he got bigger and bigger air as he went over the natural jumps formed by the snowdrifts. He would be at the bottom in no time.

Angus heard a rumble. As he looked over his shoulder, he saw the top of the mountain collapse onto itself. The way the snow moved, it looked like sand – perhaps even water – as it poured down the mountainside. As if in a cartoon, the avalanche rapidly grew in size, taking the side of the mountain with it and forming a massive snowball. Angus was a half-mile from the avalanche and a mile from the bottom of the slope. He would just barely make it if he made it at all. As long as he skied well, he could keep a good distance from the avalanche. The gap was closing slowly, but at the rate he was going, he would soon be at the bottom.

Then he fell. More accurately, he tumbled; he cartwheeled down the hill, driven by the momentum of his panicked flight. His skis flew off; one pole disappeared and the other pole snapped in half. Then he stopped.

Before he could get up, the mountain engulfed him. He tumbled further down the hill, this time inside the snowball he nearly escaped. After a short time, he stopped again. The avalanche was over. Angus was trapped under about three feet of heavy snow.

Soon, the rescue workers arrived. They moved gingerly through the plain where the avalanche rested, pushing long poles into the snow in hopes that one would somehow make contact with a victim who, once found could be dug out and treated. The searchers, however, were nowhere near Angus.

Angus was conscious and in a tiny air pocket in the snow. He was keeping his movements to a minimum. As an experienced skier, he knew that the three feet of snow above him would crush him if it collapsed on him. He could not dig himself out, because there was nowhere to put the snow. Yelling would be useless; the three feet of snow above him would prevent any sound from reaching his rescuers. His rescuers would not be there very long. After an avalanche, it is impossible to ascertain if the mountainside is stable, so the emergency searchers can only search for a brief time. They move in the area, search as quickly and effectively as they can and then move out. Angus knew that he had very little time.

Taking stock of what was in his reach, Angus realized he had one chance to save himself. He pulled at the bandanna around his neck, and it came off. He then tore off a little piece of the red cloth. The zipper of Angus' ski pants had an additional large metal tab attached to it. Zipper pulls such as this were common on ski clothing; a gloved hand

could grasp the larger pull easily, so the skier would not have to remove her ski gloves in order to open or close the zipper. Angus tore off the zipper pull of his ski pants and brought it up to his chest. He noted that the wire loop that attached the pull to the zipper tab was still intact.

In those close quarters, each maneuver had to be done slowly and painstakingly. He could not afford to either waste oxygen or cause his little air pocket to collapse.

Angus gathered the four corners of his little swatch and then connected them with the wire on the end of the zipper pull. He fastened them tightly together. With that done he was almost finished. Three feet above him, the dejected rescue team was loading up their gear to leave.

The last thing that Angus had to do was also the riskiest. He gingerly removed the handle from his broken ski pole, and pushed the tip end up through the snow. If he were lucky, it would break all the way through the crypt-like layer of snow that trapped him. If he were unlucky, the movement would cause the snow pocket to collapse, and it would kill him.

As he had hoped, the end of the pole broke through. Angus could feel the cold air push through the tube and rush into his little air pocket. He placed his bandanna/zipper pull widget at the opening at the end of the pole and poked it into the tube with his thumb. Then he blew as hard as he could.

Nothing happened.

He blew again, and then again with every ounce of his strength. He felt the scraps of cloth move a little inside the tube and then pick up momentum as they moved up the tube. They popped out of the top of the tube and were caught in a gentle winter breeze. The scrap of bandanna opened up into a parachute, counterweighted by the zipper pull. The little red cloth floated past one of the searchers – the only searcher who knew Angus personally. He grabbed the cloth and held it up. "Look" he exclaimed, "This can only be MacGyver's!"

When I began this inquiry I had three core interests: Media, aesthetics and a Deweyan outlook on curriculum. Those were my bandanna, my zipper pull and my ski pole. Like MacGuyver, I would have to find a new way to combine them in order to survive.

<div align="center">Viral Video Defined</div>

Before turning to the literature to establish a connection between media, aesthetics and curriculum, it is necessary to establish a workable definition for *viral video*. There is no universally accepted definition of the term *viral video*, although the term is certainly popular, and has a variety of definitions. Further, there are very thoughtful arguments against using the term at all; its use concerns some academics that have shown thoughtful concern for the term's potential to mislead and its disregard for the agency of the individual.

The advertising industry has a relatively clear idea of the meaning of the term *viral*; advertising is thought to be viral if it becomes popular and is seen outside of typical

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advertising venues (Howard, 2005).   It could certainly be argued that the term viral video is derivative of viral advertising – especially when one considers the plethora of commercials that are widely shared on the Internet because of their message or entertainment value.

I have found what many consider to be viral video as a broad and sweeping term. It is not bound by any particular format; viral videos can range from very professional and polished productions intended for commercial use to primitive amateur videos spontaneously recorded using a cell phone. Generally speaking, there seems to be three characteristics that serve to define videos as viral; their transmission occurs on the Internet, their popularity and the speed in which they are shared. Such an overly inclusive definition might seem so general that it is difficult to imagine it having any value.

The word "viral" itself is distractingly inaccurate to many. It is of great concern to media scholars such as Jenkins (personal communication, August 7, 2010) who concludes that the term seems to deny the role of individual agency of the sharer. Jenkins concludes that *viral* implies that the video moves and functions independently of the individual as a virus would. His objection is that this scenario is far removed from the true dynamics of video that is shared on the Internet.   If that were so, the viewer would be a passive recipient, and that somehow the video is passed on inadvertently. Caddell (2009) rejects the term for the same reason, noting that viral "…assumes the mechanism for distribution is built right in. It's not" (para 10). The term is overly broad and horribly inaccurate, because, as Jenkins (personal communication, August 7, 2010) points out, the videos are not dangerous or threatening to the receiver.

In my formation of a definition of viral video, the popularity of the videos in this

analysis is an important factor. This particular inquiry is vested in viral video as a

democratic act, so attention would be given to those videos that are widely shared. They

are, in effect, deemed important by acclamation. Some sense of relevance is established

because it garnered the attention of a social network. Conversely, while it is likely that

there is a plethora of cogent shared video that is *not* widely seen, it will be excluded from

analysis in this inquiry. I propose that this curriculum of People is one that forms and

gains viewers spontaneously; accumulating a viewership or a social network that

identifies with its content and message. A higher number – such as one million – gives

some assurance that the video has some impact in our culture.

Typically, viewers become aware of a video because it appears in their social

network or the media that surrounds their social networks. Once seen, the video is either

forgotten or passed on to others in the network, or perhaps even passed on in different

social networks. The most popular videos are, of course, the ones that get shared the

most. I reject, as Jenkins does, that viral implies that the viewing is somehow

involuntary. Fundamentally there is, after all, no way to force someone to view or share

a video. The sharing of these online videos is a purposeful act that begins then with the

viewer choosing to view the video that comes to her attention. Once it is viewed, she

then decides whether to share the video within her social network. Those acts – of

choosing to view a video that has been proffered, as well as the act of passing it on –

demonstrate a considerable degree of agency. The notion that the viewer is the target and

host of the video as if it were a virus attacking her is illogical. There is very little of this

process that is passive and arguably nothing that would give the impression that the

viewer has been "attacked" as if by a virus; the process is simply too voluntary and purposeful for that to be so. Further, the negative effects associated with viruses do not seem to be present in the sharing of these videos. If anything, the videos chosen to be shared are often quite fortifying or edifying; when looking at the process as an aesthetic act, it is quite common that through the video, the viewer discovers a way of knowing that resonates with or expands her beliefs and offers something that she feels would be a welcome addition to the conversation in her social network.

When a video becomes widely shared, it is because it resonates with its viewers; it speaks a certain truth to them; it is a different, more eloquent way of knowing, or perhaps it supports a belief not widely held. The focus, however, is misplaced. The term *viral* may not be so much inaccurate as it is misapplied. We are, I believe, looking at the wrong entity as being the viral aspect of our viral video. The videos are not virus-like to the viewer because the role the video has with her is more thoughtful than contagious. The video offers something desirable to the viewer. The videos are pithy and resonant to the viewers who ultimately share them because although the videos may run counter to convention, they provide clarity, and they reinforce a notion held by the sharer.

The viral nature – the contagious and malaise-causing aspect – of a video is in the effect the video can have on the theme or topic or person that it challenges. When a video depicts a college student stunned by a Taser because he will not cooperate with the agenda of the meeting as he poses his question, the victim of the virus is not the viewer of the video; the victim is the charade that politicians in the Democratic Party are more in tune and empathetic with People than the Republicans are. When a video depicts a young woman gunned down as she merely walks in the direction of protests, the victim is not

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the viewer; it is the lie that the government that caused her murder has the concerns of the People at heart. Viral videos expose a weakness and then attack it. When a transgendered female is brutally beaten in a fast food restaurant and the assailants are cheered on and assisted by employees of the restaurant, the victim of the virus is not the viewer, it is the notion that corporations care about People. As the video spreads through social networks, the virality of the video increases its impact and the effect it has on its victim. Each time the video is shared, it becomes stronger; it chips away at the credibility of its victim. Like a virus, the video weakens and possibly even destroys its victim. Further, once begun, the victim cannot stop it. It must run its course.

It is clear that the term *viral video* is not appropriate for all the videos to which it has been applied. By narrowing the definition, I attempt to give the term meaning. I do not propose that all shared online videos are viral videos. It is impossible to construct a definition of viral video that is accurate, meaningful and all-inclusive. Instead, I have identified certain characteristics that are present in the videos of which I speak and also are in agreement with the characteristics of a virus. Those that do meet my definition of viral videos challenge a convention, person or institution and it is the target of the challenge that is the victim of the virus. This is true for many videos – even some of those that appear to just be merely amusing little time killers. What Eisner (2002) refers as the surprise that exists in art is often what I perceive to be the challenge to a convention, person or institution. It is the surprise and its subsequent result that makes the video remarkable and worth sharing.

There is also no assumption that all shared online videos are part of a thoughtful curriculum rooted in social justice. In fact, nothing could be further from the truth. It is

likely that the vast majority of videos offer nothing in the way of the advancement of social justice. The curriculum of social justice is out there, however, and I am including some of those videos in this inquiry.

The viral videos that I include in this inquiry the video must have at least one million views as evidence of its popularity. It must challenge a social convention, hegemonic force or other accepted "truth." Further, I will direct my attention to videos that address issues of social justice.

Having established a working definition for the sake of this inquiry, I will now treat the term as a proper noun and will subsequently capitalize it from this point forward. When used as a proper noun, Viral Video will mean a video that is shared online, has garnered over on million views and challenges a convention, person or institution.

Viral Video is a genre that is the result of the Internet combined with home video, amateur-produced video, commercial broadcast video or video especially produced for Internet sharing. While the function of Viral Video is simply a means of sharing, its power is the potential sphere of influence along with the possibility that it can reach its audience unadulterated by the elite that it attacks.

While the impact of Viral Video is difficult to deny, one cannot generally judge the positive or negative nature of Viral Video any more than one could judge the nature of a library or a clubhouse or a museum because taken as a whole, it is a channel or a showcase or a storehouse or a place to network. It has no inherent message; it is content-neutral. While it has to potential to have great impact on the beliefs and actions of a social network, it will not necessarily do so. The uniqueness of Viral Video is not its potential to reach People; the uniqueness lies in the manner in which it reaches People,

how agile the network is within which it works, how many People it can reach and how much it can avoid the influences and twiddling and tweaking of the dominant powers.

Viral Videos reinforce the way the sharer understands the world; they make sense. It is, the message that McLuhan (1967) refers to "the personal and social consequences of [the] medium" (p. 7). Viral Video is not produced in any particular way; it is not necessarily amateur, commercial, or anything in between; it is not of any specific medium, but may be from any particular medium or a confluence of different media. Viral Video is not, then, what something is; a video becomes a Viral Video because of what it *does*.

Rushkoff (1996) defended the term "viral media," a possible precursor to Viral Video, saying that these media viruses attached themselves to things like events, scandals, styles or other entities that garner attention. The virus itself is the hidden agenda embedded in the subject. Rushkoff makes one very important point that assists in my definition; perhaps the viral nature of a video is not the potential harm that it can cause to the *viewer*; rather, it is the potential threat that it poses to the dominant culture. The viewer is not the victim. She is perhaps a symptom or a temporary host; evidence that the virus exists and is multiplying. The victim of the virus is the convention or stereotype or system that suffers as a result of the video becoming popular – the Hollywood "Star" system; the piety of a marriage ceremony; the notion of the brave, decent, always honorable American soldier. I establish, then, that a Viral Video is a video that is shared widely online and that expresses an idea that is threatening to the dominant culture. As an experience, it is a vignette or snippet of how things are or how things should or should not be. As a text, it is a statement about our culture and our

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perceptions. Viral Video is also used to identify the presenter. When one shares a video through her social network she is, in fact saying, "this is what I think; this is who I am."

As a new genre, Viral Video is a new way to converse – a new form of discourse. One of Viral Video's fascinating characteristics is that the original purpose of the video may not necessarily have anything to do with the intended purpose of the video when it is posted, or why it becomes viral. This change of context of discursive elements is a function of discourse that Wodak (2010) refers to as recontextualisation. Further, the original presentation of a video may be unremarkable, but when offered in a different context or in a different social network, it suddenly becomes resonant, meaningful and viral; Wodak (2010) considers this to be a function of recontextualisation called transformation.

When transformation occurs through recontextualisation of a Viral Video, the perception shifts; the original context may not attack any conventions that are of that the social network, and in fact may reinforce them. When the video is recontextualized and transformed, its meaning and import can change; what was pedestrian in the original setting becomes part of the discourse of social justice in the new setting.

An example of such a transformation is the Viral Video of the transgendered woman that was dragged from a McDonald's restaurant women's room and beaten by two teenaged women ("McDonald's Fires Employee," 2011). When the employee who recorded it on his cell phone posted the video on his Facebook page, it was posted as something amusing; the poster later even attempted to justify the beating based on the victim's conduct. The video was originally presented in a manner in which the victim was an interloper in the restroom; her subsequent beating was just her understandable

consequence. The event was unremarkable because it is just an example of common social beliefs being followed and perhaps became popular because of its extreme nature. It later became viral, however, when it was recontextualized and transformed; when it was shared in social networks that saw the event as an affront to social justice.

Writing this review of literature has been exceptionally difficult, because this topic is relatively unexplored; Viral Video as curriculum still seems to be wanting for founding fathers and mothers. There is no one from whom to take the baton; no one to grab an idea upon which I could riff. It soon became clear that if I was going to be a trailblazer, I had to figure out where to start the trail. As I considered lenses with which to look at this subject, I attempted to consolidate my ideas into a three perspectives: Viral Videos are curriculum; Viral Videos are art, and Viral Videos are media.

Shared online video is a manifestation of popular culture. John Storey (2009) defines popular culture as "…the culture that originates from 'the people' [and] it is a culture of the people for the people" (p. 9). Popular culture is a grassroots, bottom-up culture. It is a contested site for what Storey (2009) refers to as "political constructions of 'the people' and their relation to the 'power bloc'" (p. 9). Fisk (1989) offers some characteristics of popular culture that are especially harmonious with the notion of Viral Video as curriculum:

> [p]opular culture is deeply contradictory in societies where power is unequally distributed along axes of class, gender, race and the other categories that we use to make sense of our social differences. Popular culture is the culture of the subordinated and disempowered and thus always bears within it signs of power relations, traces of the forces of

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domination and subordination that are central to our social system and therefore to our social experience. Equally, it shows signs of resisting or evading these forces: popular culture contradicts itself (p 4-5).

Viral Video as curriculum is part of popular culture, and as Fiske (1989) says, it is deeply contradictory; it is where People use successful commodities of the market of the dominant culture – among them the highly financially successful video sharing site YouTube – as repositories for a curriculum that challenges the dominant culture; a curriculum that discusses inequality and oppression and champions social justice. Because this Viral Video curriculum is typically shared on commercial sites, and because it often uses bits from commercial broadcast media, excerpts from commercial video productions or bootlegged government surveillance video, it is *of* the dominant culture. At the same time, it uses that media to *attack* the dominant culture. It subverts the culture yet uses its own products to do so.

There is a benefit in this contradiction, and the benefit is to the People who view it. Fiske (1989) notes that the contradiction that occurs within popular culture "…enables the readers of a text…to partake of both of its forces simultaneously and devolves to them the power to situate themselves within this play of forces at a point that meets their particular cultural interests" (p. 5). The forces to which Fiske refers are the forces of the dominant culture, which in the case of Viral Video is both the sharing site as well as possibly some of the content, along with the forces of People – the challenge that they make to the dominant culture which, for the sake of this inquiry is the curriculum.

The style and/or content of Viral Videos can move in two directions: from the dominant culture to People, or from People to the dominant culture. Fisk (1989)

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describes the two directions of movement as manifestations or characteristics of popular culture. He refers to the movement from the dominant culture to the people as excorporation: "[e]xcorporation is the process by which the subordinates make their own culture out of the resources and commodities provided by the dominant system, and this is central to popular culture, for in an industrial society the only resources from which the subordinate can make their own subcultures are those provided by the system that subordinates them" (p. 15). In the case of shared online video, an example of excorporation would be the use of video shot from an Apache helicopter gun sight by a non-governmental entity called Wikileaks to show the indiscriminate killing of innocents in Iraq, among them two Reuters employees. The original intent of the video was to provide a record for the military that was only to be seen internally. Wikileaks obtained the video and used it as evidence of the United States' violation of human rights.

When the content moves from People to the dominant culture, Fisk (1989) refers to it as incorporation: Incorporation is when the oppressor (which Fiske refers to as the producer) adopts the signs of resistance, and incorporates them into the dominant system. Doing so "robs them of their oppositional meanings" (p. 18). There are myriad examples of this, among them the "amateur-looking" video that is shot by advertising agencies. The amateur look and feel of the videos lends cultural credibility; it appears that the message is that it did not come from the dominant culture, but instead from People who can be trusted much more than an agent of the market.

Fiske (1989) recognized a third piece in power relations in popular culture. This piece accepts the power of the dominant culture, but simultaneously focuses on popular tactics that illustrate how to deal with, resist or avoid these forces. This is most certainly

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seen in shared online videos. A recent example depicts campus police pepper spraying students who were peacefully and legally protesting as part of the Occupy Movement. The shared video that depicts the spraying empowered the students because it addressed the abuse of power by the campus police yet did not require the protesters to put themselves in any additional danger or attempt to offer testimony against the campus police that could be dismissed or refuted by those in power. The shared video was edited and enhanced to clarify – and even emphasize – the acts of the campus police and it is likely that it was a more potent rhetorical weapon than an unadulterated video might have been. More symbolically, flash mobs would fit here because they attack convention; they tweak the nose of those in power and the videos offer others both information and inspiration to do it as well.

John Dewey is central to this discussion, because Dewey (1934) offers the notion that there is a bridge between curriculum and aesthetics and media: experience. Dewey's extensive writing about education includes a comprehensive look at art as well as some thoughts on the nature of media (Dewey, 1934).

Dewey has provided the philosophical standard that seems to reflect all that I think education should be. Nearly everything I have valued in my personal and professional educational journey can be traced to an idea that Dewey supports, expects or even demands in a child's education. I am especially fond of Dewey's belief that experience is central to learning (Dewey, 1934, 1938, 1959). Dewey (1959) states it succinctly: "…education must be conceived as a continuing reconstruction of experience; that the process and the goal of education are one and the same thing" (p. 27).

Through all of my years in public school, learning has been most relevant to me when it involved something that I experienced rather than simply told.

I had been a musician for nearly forty years before I was exposed to the ideas of Elliot Eisner. I had toured the country, performed as a musician in the Olympics, played jazz in little tiny nightclubs and sat in the orchestra pit of garish concert halls while accompanying operas. Until I read Eisner, however, I never understood the cognitive importance of the arts or how the arts related to each other. I *felt* the importance of music; I just could never relate it to dance, or drama, or literature or any of the visual arts. I could never explain what purpose the arts served.

There is some irony in that statement. Eisner (2003) teaches us that not everything can be expressed with literal language, and we all are in some way aware of that: "…hearing a wonderful piece of music, or experiencing a fine play is more than becoming aware of its qualities. It is a way of being moved, of finding out something about own capacity to be moved; it is a way of exploring the deepest parts of our interior landscape" (Eisner, 2002, p. 84). As a result, we turn to those expressive forms to view, interpret and express our impressions of the world and to expand our understanding of ourselves. The arts collectively are uniquely tooled for this; each of the arts – music, dance, literature, drama and visual art – offers a voice like no other. Viral Videos are a method of expression and understanding; they offer a unique voice.

McLuhan's notions are so powerful and timeless because he seems to focus so little about the details of the evolution of media and so much about the way human nature is affected by media and how media is affected by human nature. He speaks of media, not technology, and it is his understanding of people that allows him to accurately predict the

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path of media. McLuhan never attempted to predict the Internet, or YouTube or Viral

Video. Yet he anticipates how they could work in our culture:

> [e]very age has its favorite model of perception and knowledge
>
> that is inclined to prescribe for everybody and everything. The mark of
>
> our time is its revulsion against imposed patterns. We are suddenly eager
>
> to have things and people declare their beings totally. There is a deep
>
> faith to be found in this new attitude – a faith that concerns the ultimate
>
> harmony of all being. (p. 4-5)

McLuhan could have predicted the moribund role that school shall come to play.

McLuhan's description of a "favorite model of perception and knowledge" seems to be

sarcastic, or at least ironic it has increasingly failed us as it has become less of a flexible,

dynamic response to what the People deem as important and more of an imposed pattern

– a cure-all prescription for everyone. As our public educational system has moved

closer and closer to unbending national standards, public school has become the place

that has been prescribed for everybody and everything. At the same time, public school

seems to have moved further from answering what Schubert (2010) considers to be an

essential question: "[w]hat's worthwhile? [W]hat is worth knowing, needing,

experiencing, doing, being, becoming, overcoming, sharing and contributing?" (p. 15)

Viral Videos are a manifestation of what McLuhan saw as the inevitable revolt

against or perhaps disengagement from the established patterns of public school. We use

these videos to define ourselves and we share them with harmony in mind.   McLuhan

himself used media as a method of self-definition. Jenkins (2008) points out that

McLuhan used media to define himself in his workings with the press, industry policy

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makers, and artists, appearances on television and in film and even in a communications network of his own making. While McLuhan's mediums for defining himself were typical for the 1960's, he used those mediums in a manner consistent with present communications and networking mediums. Jenkins (personal correspondence, 2012) notes that McLuhan published newsletters, which functioned like blogs do, and he employed mailing lists and produced recordings, which functioned like podcasts.

My major premise in this inquiry is that Viral Videos are curriculum. Having established that curriculum is what is learned (Macdonald, 1986), The videos that I intend to discuss, then, must be more than just curriculum; they must be educative. That then, begs the question, "What is educative?" Dewey (1916) uses the term   That determination rests upon why they are meaningful, to whom they are meaningful and how they serve to educate.

Next, I consider Viral Videos to be an art form. They are expressive and require interpretation. Their meaning is not inherent or concrete; rather, it is constructed from the background of the viewer – we look at them as Fenner (2003) notes, *contextually*, and how their context – social, moral or taste – informs our experience. Their message – they way each video makes its point – is unique. Viral Videos offer a way of knowing that is not possible through literal language.

William Schubert (personal conversation, 2008) once offered, as an informal intellectual exercise, many of Dewey's ideas could be simplified and clarified by changing the middle word of many of his book titles from *and* or *as* to *is*. An example would be that Dewey's general notion in the book Democracy and Education (Dewey, 1916) might be democracy *is* education. Schubert's point was that while Dewey's

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various tomes investigated the connection between the first and last words in the title, one consistent conclusion could be that there is required presence; that the first term could not exist without the second; in other words, democracy requires education, and education requires democracy. There is more than a relationship between the two; there is a dependency, a definitiveness. The first cannot exist without the second. The school *is* society. The child *is* the curriculum. This little exercise is clarifying, but also challenges us to look at the relationship differently – it is not a commensalistic relationship, it is a symbiotic one.

As we participate in artistic endeavors, there is the potential for an aesthetic experience – a complete experience received from artistic participation that creates new meaning or new understanding. To me, that term – aesthetic experience – represents the marriage of Dewey and Eisner's ideas.   Moreover, by applying Schubert's mechanism to the title of Dewey's *Art as Experience* (Dewey, 1934), we see that art *is* experience; one cannot exist without the other.

Finally, Viral Videos are media. Media can be an unclear concept because the term is used so generically. Media can be as simple as a method of transmitting an idea, such as through the news *media*. Media can also be a method of rendering, with examples being the artistic *media* of paint or sculpture. Viral Video as media is much more complicated than that. Viral Videos can serve as a way of validating one's allegiance to a social network, and they can serve as a way of self-identifying as well as a way of identity creation. Viral videos gain power as they are shared, and they are shared because they are powerful. Media in this sense is an amalgamation of the musings of

McLuhan, of the influences of popular culture, of the dynamics of social networks and of the evolution of technology.

<center>Viral Videos are Curriculum</center>

Dewey tells us that experiences are the rewards of interaction. Dewey (1934) defined experience as "…the result, the sign, and the reward of that interaction of organism and environment which, when it is carried to the full, is a transformation of interaction into participation and communication" (p. 22). Interaction is a relatively passive endeavor, and while interaction is an experience of some sort, it is not an experience by Dewey's definition. Interaction is happenstance; it is pedestrian. It is likely that every experience begins with an interaction, but every interaction is not an experience. An interaction becomes an experience when the communication rises above that of the business of existence. The distinction comes at the end – the reward. Moreover, rewards are what *distinguish* interactions from experiences. Framed that way, experiences are the stuff of relevance; interactions may be important to someone or some thing, but they are not to the children. They offer no rewards.

Dewey (1938) felt that experience was critical to education, stating "education in order to accomplish its ends both for the individual learner and of society must be based upon experience – which is always the actual life-experience of some individual" (p. 113). A shared online video has a dichotomous role; it can be a description, record or interpretation of an experience, but regardless, all the while it is itself an experience.

One especially critical point that Dewey makes in regard to experience is that for humans, a continual stream of experiences is necessary. We demand variety because it

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is, as Dewey (1934) notes "…the manifestation of the fact that being alive we seek to live, until we are cowed by fear or dulled by routine" (p. 175). Dewey (1990) notes that the learner's mind is not a fixed thing, but rather a process. Freire (2004) says it more broadly: "…reality is a process, undergoing constant transformation" (p. 75). Because it is a process, it continually needs new experiences or the processing will cease. The highly dynamic nature and the ability to appear and be shared on a moment's notice allow Viral Videos to be socially relevant and resonant; it is their instantaneous nature – their agility in appearing and being shared that gives them relevance and resonance *in the moment* that make them important. There is not – nor will there ever be – a canon of Viral Videos similar to the canon of literature one might learn in school because relevance and timeliness are critical. Fenner (2003) develops the idea that beauty is relative because beauty is dependent upon pleasure, and pleasure comes from values gleaned "from emotional consciousness, appreciations, appetites, and preferences" (p. 42). This is in powerful contrast to public schools that have five-year spans in between textbook adoptions – and then only adopt new textbooks when it is financially feasible. If a school system skipped the adoption of their history textbook just one time, critical social events will be absent from the students' framing of the world; the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center might be missing as well as the election of the United States of America's first African American president. Sadly, this would not be an issue if curricular materials were more dynamic, such as would be possible via an constantly updated "textbook" in the form of a website that school districts could access for a of time rather than purchasing a certain number of books.

In a contrasting view of the usefulness of shared online video, Alex Juhasz (2010) taught a class and subsequently published an online book as a result of that class; the book is titled, *Learning from YouTube*. Juhasz (2010) arrived at a number of conclusions as a result of this class and the book it produced. Calling her inquiry an investigation into "what YouTube is and might be" (first video, 2:36), Juhasz seems to examine YouTube's potential as an intellectual resource; a repository where one can find videos relating to her topics of interest.

Juhasz is critical of the YouTube platform, noting that although it is thought to be democratic, "users routinely service the corporation by flagging content whenever it strays from the confortable confines of the hegemonic" (Juhasz, 2010, caption). The corporation to which Juhasz refers is, of course, YouTube – or perhaps more accurately Google, its owner. Juhasz sees YouTube's self-policing of content a service to the elite rather than an act of community, and seems to assume that the YouTube community does not want objectionable material purged. Moreover, Juhasz implies that anti-hegemonic content is the target; I know of nothing that supports that conclusion, and equating "objectionable" with "anti-hegemonic" is inaccurate, in my opinion. The truth, I offer, is somewhere in between; while it is likely that YouTube's policy of content flagging is subjective in regard to what comprises objectionable material, it is also possible that People have a considerable amount of power to exercise in regard to what they choose not to flag – that it, point out to the YouTube management. Juhasz's criticism, however, offers little hope for altruism.

Ultimately, Juhasz sees little value in YouTube. She declares in an interview (MediaPraxisme, 2011) that YouTube is so difficult to search that "it stinks" (6:55).

Further, she titles one of the chapters of her online book, "YouTube is a mess." Juhasz

notes that a user, sitting down and exploring YouTube, would have little luck finding

videos that she might find interesting or enlightening or resonant. What Juhasz neglects

to acknowledge is that YouTube is a social site. While it is true that one could conduct

searches of topics, or keyword items in YouTube, that is not the only way videos are

distributed; Burgess and Green (2008) note that "[p]roviders like YouTube are no longer

only in the 'media' business; they now are also in the social network business" (p. 15).

YouTube is merely a container with no responsibility to make things easy for someone

looking for particular videos or specific content. YouTube is the place that holds the

videos, and it is the responsibility of the sharer to spread the video among her social

networks. Juhasz does not acknowledge the power of social networks, and because she

did not have much success navigating YouTube by herself, has determined that it is of

little worth. Perhaps what Juhasz perceives to be the disorganization is in fact a guard

against hegemony. Becker (2002) notes, "[o]ne could argue that the well-being of a

democracy is in part manifested by how openly representations of its own complexity are

embraced" (p. 36). If it were thought to be necessary to *avoid* open representations or our

complexity, the ease that topics could be searched on YouTube would work against those

outside of the dominant culture. In that case, patterns or categorization or constructs are

the tools of the hegemonic forces; the informality of YouTube as well as many other

video sharing sites is a way to fight the hegemonic forces because it defies their ability to

uncover, pigeon hole, demonize or marginalize.

Schubert, (2010) saw the purpose of public pedagogy to be "…to perceive more

fully the great diversity of venues that shape who we have become, are becoming, and

might become. Focus on curriculum and pedagogy in schooling alone presents a myopic

view of what shapes human beings" (p. 16). Schubert's statement is, of course, a

contemporary restatement of Dewey's declaration that all social communication is

educative. In its role as part of popular culture and a container of pedagogical messages,

shared online video is to be considered a public pedagogy. One rare if not unique aspect

of shared online video as public pedagogy is its potential to be transmitted within social

networks with little influence from corporate or state interests. It has the broad reach of

commercial communications with the relative intimacy of a personal social network. In a

culture where, according to Giroux (2004) it "becomes difficult to create alternative

public spheres that enable people to become effective agents of change," (p. 74), this

combination is an extraordinary amplification of the thoughts of People who participate,

yet free from undue influence of the corporate interests or those in power.

Shared online video is a unique public pedagogy because it offers all of what a

typical public pedagogy offers with the added benefit of circumventing the mass media

yet simultaneously benefitting from the mass media. These benefits are manifested in

two ways: first, shared online video often uses material from the mass media for its

content, making it its own through such methods as repurposing and other changes in

context, thus, in effect turning the media on itself. Additionally, the rapidity with which

a video travels can be multiplied exponentially should it somehow become broadcast in

the same mass media it initially circumvented. A video played on the *Today* show is

quickly jettisoned from whatever social networks in which it may have circulated into the

households of millions – with the blessing and endorsement of its *Today's* trusted hosts,

Matt, Ann and Al. Online shared video as a manifestation of popular culture acts in the

same way as it continually questions, supports, attacks, defends, honors and tweaks the nose of the power bloc – which I interpret to be synonymous with the dominant culture, or perhaps the Market, as described in the Introduction of this dissertation. Daspit and Weaver (2000) see "many forms of popular culture as critical pedagogical texts" (p. xiii), and shared online video should be included among those forms. Daspit and Weaver (2000) note that these texts "contain their own pedagogical messages" (p. xxvi), as I maintain. As curriculum, Viral Videos, as a manifestation of popular culture are a text that contain those pedagogical messages.

Viral Videos are Art

Villaverde (2000) notes the arts have been ignored or their purpose sullied in numerous education reform movements, and the present reform climate is no different. This particular marginalization of the arts in school may have had a contributory – perhaps even causal effect – on the role of shared online video as curriculum. The de-emphasis of arts in school has created a sort of intellectual vacuum that shared online video may be able to help fill.

There is certainly a hegemonic potential to the way public school has marginalized the arts. Eisner (2002) notes, "A culture populated by a people whose imagination is impoverished has a static future" (p. 5). By focusing on testing, the present manifestation of school minimizes imagination; With the marginalization of the arts in the present public school setting, it is sadly ironic – perhaps even disingenuous – that a nation supposedly devoted to a society/economy where the "sky is the limit" actively marginalizes curricula that teach a child to challenge and see past her limits.

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Marginalizing curricula that teaches children to challenge and imagine serves to constrain

change. The schools crafted, designed and influenced by those in power support a system

that reinforces the status quo – the impoverished remain impoverished and the chasm

between the classes remains intact. This marginalization of the arts as a method of

retaining power and quelling dissent is neither accidental nor even symbolic. The United

States thought enough of the power of artistic expression to throw a cover over Picasso's

Guernica as Colin Powell sat in front of it and made the United States' case to invade

Iraq. Maureen Dowd (2003) noted that Powell could not "…seduce the world into

bombing Iraq surround on camera by shrieking and mutilated women, men, children,

bulls and horses" (para 3). It seems that the United States government feared that there

was no rhetoric or "evidence" that Powell could offer that could offset the profound

impact of Picasso's moving commentary on the bombing of civilians by a powerful army.

This is in contrast to Maxine Greene (2001), who seems to consider aesthetics not

so much an alternative way of knowing, but rather as a way of gaining greater coherence

of the world. Greene explains the aesthetic experience "… offers a particular kind of

pleasure, that illuminates in a distinctive way, that can be cherished in a distinctive way"

(p. 29). Greene's idea of aesthetics is more traditional in that it focuses on pleasure and

beauty as opposed to Eisner's notion of aesthetic experience, which deals with

comprehension and cognition.

There are some similarities between Eisner and Greene. Like Eisner, Greene

(1995) does see that we "…engage with artworks…to experience the artworks' capacity

to enable us to see more…" (p. 102). Greene notes that the various art forms each have

their own unique way of knowing. More often, however, Greene speaks of art not so

much as a way of knowing or a way of expressing, but rather as a way of exalting the senses beyond what they learned in other disciplines. Greene (2001) offers the goal of aesthetic education is "to seek a greater coherence in the world… [in order to] …break through the 'cotton wool' of dailyness and passivity and boredom and come awake to the colored, sounding, problematic world" (Greene, 2001, p. 7). Rather than an independent way of knowing, Greene sees art as a way of clarifying the other ways of knowing.

Perhaps the thing that distinguishes Greene's work from Eisner and to a lesser degree, Dewey, is that Greene's focus seems to be more on imagination and less on expression. Greene (1995) convinces us that imagination is a powerful force in art that gives the artist the opportunity to create a world that should be, rather than the one that is, stating that the use of imagination in art breaks "…through barriers – of expectation, of boredom, of predefinition" (p. 14). Art, to Greene seems to serve as an escape the world rather than a way of learning about the world.

Greene (1995) speaks specifically of hope: "Art offers life; it offers hope; it offers the prospect of discovery…" (p. 133). Again, Greene characterizes art as a source of hope rather than a source of knowing. Greene speaks as if through the arts we get some sort of secret elevator that allows us to have a better view than everyone else; that it takes "traditional understanding" a step further and opens up wide vistas for us intellectually. To me, it sounds somewhat privileged and ignores the success individuals have exploring new ways of knowing *without* any of the old ways of knowing - for instance aesthetic adhocracies – a term credited to authors Alvin Toffler and Cory Doctorow – for more grassroots and spontaneous forms like folk music, rap and graffiti.

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Greene (2001) says that "every experience has a sense of the "not yet – of the untraveled" (p. 46), maintaining that aesthetic experiences are a depiction of the possible that has not yet happened. There is a more plausible way of describing these experiences – not so much the untraveled as they are exciting places to go, or wonderful or even terrible places to which we can return. Through art, we can relive or re-view circumstances to gain understanding, to relive joyous moments or in an attempt to come to terms with our pain – once again, an illustration of Eisner's alternative ways of knowing. Greene seems to skirt the idea that there are plenty of experiences that one has had that can be clarified by aesthetic means by seeing them from a different perspective or focus or through the eyes of another.

Maxine Greene offers a contrasting view to McLuhan's. Greene does not say that art provides a unique way of knowing that enhances our understanding of the world, instead, Greene (2001) sees aesthetics as a method of bringing about "…a new readiness, a new ripeness…an increasing awareness of things in their particularity, of beauty and variety, and form" (p. 28). Greene indicates that art simply elaborates and clarifies that which we already know; it exalts us rather than edifies us. Such a definition of art and idea of its purpose is very exclusive – to the point that it excludes many. I do not propose or mean to imply that Greene's beliefs are, however, categorically wrong; in her writing, she speaks for and to a social network with whom her work resonates. In that a well-known and popular piece of her work – *Variations on a Blue Guitar* – is based on lectures she gave at Lincoln Center, one could postulate that her work is particularly resonant to those who would be attendees to a set of lectures at that hallowed place in the tony Upper West Side of Manhattan.

Dewey was, among any number of other things, an aesthete. Speaking of art, Dewey (1934) said that it "…is the living and concrete proof that man is capable of restoring consciously, and thus on the plane of meaning, the union of sense, need, impulse and action characteristic of the live creature" (p. 26). He saw art as a reliving of every sensual, emotional, motivational and kinesthetic aspect of an experience and, along with that recreation of the existential text, the meaning gleaned from it. Dewey saw art as a method of recording, expanding, exploring, reliving and even creating experiences. He valued those aesthetic (for which he used the alternate spelling, *esthetic*) experiences as much as he valued flesh and blood experiences for the benefits they offered cognitively. He established in *Art as Experience* (1934) that aesthetic experiences were a way of seeing and sharing and learning about the world.

Dewey (1959) sees the fundamental purpose of education to be social progress and reform. For this to occur, the child's education must be current, relevant and dynamic, as well as challenge the status quo. Relevance is socially determined importance and therefore a critical aspect of social progress and reform. To have relevance, then, experiences must be constructed founded upon socially established meanings and values. Aesthetic experiences vary from person to person depending upon what Dewey (1934) refers to as "the cultures in which they participate" (p. 339), which are currently referred to as social networks. Social networks, according to Barnes (1954) have no boundaries or formal organization, may cross social status lines and have no fixed elements. These networks arise from various types of relationships ranging from blood relatives to acquaintances. While social status may be crossed, it is more common that the members of the network be social equals.

Within social networks meaning making occurs, a process to which Jenkins

(2009) refers to as the "social production of meaning" (p. 32), which he describes this

way: "[t]he social production of meaning is more than individual interpretation

multiplied; it represents a qualitative difference in the ways we make sense of cultural

experience…" (p. 32). This determination of meaning gives the aesthetic experience its

message, timeliness, meaning and relevance to those with whom it resonates.

Dewey (1934) felt that art simultaneously relays experience as well as creates a

new experience: "art, in its form, unites the very same relation of doing and undergoing,

outgoing and incoming energy, that makes an experience to be an experience" (p. 50).

This is a unique characteristic of art as a way of knowing; we deal with art first hand as

direct experience whereas what Dewey (1934) refers to as *intellectual inquirers* deal

indirectly – once removed – through symbols that do not attempt to replicate or create an

experience but rather to simply notate the results of the experience. Dewey (1934)

illustrates the distinction this way; "[s]cience states meanings; art expresses them" (p.

87). Science chronicles what is observed; it is a description. Art provides an experience

that collaborates with our experience and ultimately clarifies the idea.

Dewey (Simpson, D., Jackson M., and Aycock, J., 2005) indicated that one could

have an aesthetic experience in regard to things other than art; one could conceivably

have an aesthetic experience over just about anything – a beautiful vista, a newborn

baby's eyelashes or the successful completion of a real estate transaction. Further,

Dewey notes that aesthetic experience has the same educative potential whether inspired

by a made creation such as a painting, or the natural beauty of existence – those things

which inspire an aesthetic experience absent of any intention or manipulation in order to

do so. I, however, will limit this particular discussion of aesthetic experience to the experience that is more determined and purposeful – the person-made variety of aesthetic experience. All aesthetic experiences that might be inspired by a video shared online must travel through human hands. Because it must be somehow managed by a someone – a videographer, a tourist, a computer enthusiast – it can no longer be a naturally occurring event; it is presented and edited – framed, if you will, and therefore has been embossed with someone's interpretation.

Aesthetic experience – for the sake of this inquiry – is the act of being exposed to a piece of art that is in some way meaningful. The creation of that piece of art is an intentional act rather than a serendipitous occurrence. The aesthetic experiences in this conversation will be the result of intentional acts, because all shared video is an intentional act.   This inquiry does not deny the role of naturally occurring beauty and its ability to inspire an aesthetic experience; it is just not possible in the realm of shared video.

Art can be difficult to define. It can be categorized, as in *commercial art* or *fine art*, but such categorizations seem to indicate its use rather than its content or even its message. Beyer (2000) offers the opposite approach – a definition of art that speaks of its effect rather than its use: "a work of art is a work of art…when…the work becomes the source of an aesthetic experience" (p. 13). This very encompassing definition speaks of the experience that the work generates, and that, I believe, is important to this inquiry. With an acknowledgement that the source of an aesthetic experience can be inspired by virtually anything, for the purpose of this inquiry I shall refer to that which is the catalyst for aesthetic experience as art. Shared online videos have no allegiances to any particular

sources; a video can be considered powerful and educative whether it is obtained from a

television commercial, a handheld video camera, a concert film, a cell phone or any other

source. Regardless of its origin, using Beyer's (2003) definition, that which is the source

of an aesthetic experience is art. Jenkins (2009) speaks of this use of conscripting various

media for one's own purposes, calling it *appropriation* – the act of sampling and

remixing media content. Appropriation is fundamentally repurposing media, and that is

what is done when one shares video online. With appropriation, Jenkins challenges us to

think of media as artistic elements – building blocks so to speak – similar to paint, or clay

or arabesque or the timber of a violin. Shared video is an artistic medium, and

appropriation is the method. In the case with shared online video, the sharer "paints"

with clips of video. The critical factor in appropriation, in my opinion, is that the media

is repurposed. Repurposing involves using the material to do something different.

Repurposing can be using just the tiniest snippet of video to show a particular meaningful

moment, or overdubbing the original audio of a video clip to include the sharer's infused

commentary. Repurposing can even be a relocation of an unaltered clip to a different

social network. The Scientology community enthusiastically welcomed a video that Tom

Cruise made for his fellow members of the scientology movement (Patterson, 2008).

The video was created in recognition of Cruise being awarded Scientology's

Freedom Medal of Honor, and was ostensibly to serve as a portrait of this hero of the

movement. When viewed by the non-Scientologist populace, a much different response

was generated. Patterson (2008) treated the video in a mocking fashion, noting early in

the article that the founder of the Scientology movement was also "the author of

Battlefield Earth" (para 1). Patterson appropriated the video and the video's repurposing

occurred when it was used to mock Cruise in contrast to the original intent of the piece, which was to honor him.

The legality of appropriation is the source of some debate and considering appropriation to be theft is sometimes only selectively applied. Some acts of appropriation are referred by Jenkins (2009) as "arguably illegal" and he specifically mentions music sharing as a point of concern. Many believe it is stealing, including those who use appropriation to achieve success. Metallica conducted a highly visible, closely watched war against the music sharing website Napster and won on the legal front and garnered considerable public support. There was great irony is this; Metallica achieved much of their fame through a practice called "tape trading", a practice that involved sharing media in social networks (Lew, 2000). Metallica seemed to turn their back on the means to their success once they joined the elite of the recording industry.

Ultimately, Jenkins' (2009) argument is powerful: "The digital remixing of media content makes visible the degree to which all cultural expression builds on what has come before it" (p. 55). Appropriation is what artists have always done. What makes the practice valid – meaning not stealing or plagiarizing – is repurposing. Art, after all gains meaning as much from its viewer as it does the artist that creates it. The combination of how it is presented and the complicated cultural recipe of the social network as well as the viewer determine its cogence. In the case of shared online video, it is not simply the source of the video that necessarily determines the aesthetic effect. Once shaped and framed and presented by the sharer, it is handed over and the aesthetic effect comes from inside the observer.

Communication and art share a fundamental characteristic; they both are based on experience. Dewey (1916) said, "all communication is like art" (p.6). Communication is a broader category; for that matter, art is a type of communication. Whereas there are many ways to communicate, communication is at the core of art. Similarly, communication is also at the core of social networks. Dewey pointed out, "any social arrangement that remains vitally social, or vitally shared, is educative to those who participate in it" (p.6). One of the characteristics of video sharing is that it is done within social networks. The members of the network are actively participating either by producing, sharing or by watching videos. This video sharing is social, it is communicative, and it is vital. Video sharing then by Dewey's description, is educative.

Dewey (1934) surmises that art is actually many languages, with each medium speaking a different language and with each medium exclusively able to communicate certain ideas in an apt manner that is more complete than any other medium. Dewey notes that one important purpose of art is to assist us make the tiny, subtle discriminations. Dewey's (1934) use of the word *language* in that context must be applied somewhat loosely here because there is no implication on Dewey's part that the various mediums each has its own concrete structure and usage. Eisner puts that notion differently, but it is clearly the same fundamental idea. Instead of saying that each medium is a language, Eisner (2002) offers that art offers a unique way of knowing. Eisner's ways of knowing are quite similar to Dewey's "complexity and minuteness of differentiations" (Dewey, 1934, p. 23) because each way of knowing allows one to make finer and finer discriminations about what she is experiencing. I am reminded of the legendary perceptive skills Sami people of the Arctic region of Scandinavia, who

reputedly have over one hundred names for snow (Sweden.se, n.d). The dozens of

varieties of snow that they have identified each have different meanings and a different

effect on their lives. In a place like the Artic, where exposure to snow is continual,

differences – regardless how small – will be relevant and discernable to those in the

culture. Aesthetic experience exposes us to new differentiations in expression and to

isolate, magnify and expand increasingly fine and more sublime emotions. Monet's

primarily monochromatic paintings, which are nearly devoid of lines

(http://www.ibiblio.org/wm/paint/auth/monet/parliament/brouillard.jpg), lead us past the

details of a scene and into the *impressions* of that scene. In doing so, we are challenged

to tease out the differentiations; to fill in the gaps with our past experiences. Moreover,

each artistic medium has its own distinct, unique ways of showing and expressing those

differentiations. Greene (1995) notes that the arts allow us "…to discover nuances and

shapes and sounds inaccessible without them" (p. 102), Greene's acknowledgement of

the ability of art to characterize the minuteness of differentiations.

Brecht (Willett, 1992) proposes that it is not possible to fully understand the

world unless one garners – and uses – all possible ways of knowing. The knowing that

comes from aesthetic experience allows the viewer, by her experience with the art, to see

and comprehend new and different facets, ideas and emotions from different

perspectives. Different ways of knowing allows one to grasp the complexity of the idea.

Brecht teaches us then that to marginalize art is to close off the potential of fully

understanding the world.

Elliot Eisner (2002) describes the arts as the place where "[c]ulture and

experience interact" (p. 17). Eisner, building upon Bruner's (1986) notion that there are

different modes of thought, identified aesthetic discovery as a unique way of knowing, and expanded considerably on that idea. Eisner maintains that because aesthetic discovery was a unique mode of discovery, it offered a different yet equally meaningful way of knowing than literal language and numerical language did. Eisner (2002) specifically notes that there is benefit from the experiences that come from both the creation and the perception of art, and that many of the benefits are the same regardless of which side of the paint brush or trumpet or quill that the learner resides: the discrimination of subtle differences, understanding the injection of feeling into form and the refinement of sensibilities. Further, as the learner has more and more and more aesthetic experiences, she has an increasingly broadened repertoire with which to see the world.

> Maxine Greene (2007) sees art as a philosophical entity:
>
> [a]esthetics is the study of the arts: the nature of art objects. The making of art, the art (or aesthetic) experience, the relation between art and culture, the role of the perceiver, the sensual and imaginative aspects of art…. (p. 1)

Greene defines art by its relationship with the perceiver and the observer and by its relationship to the culture that surrounds it. Eisner's definition of aesthetics differs from Greene's; it is fundamentally cognitive, rather than philosophical. Eisner hardly steps into the debate over what is beautiful, or the characteristics of art; rather, much of his writing is instead directed at the need for aesthetic experience as a function of the development of mind. Eisner looks carefully at feeling as a way of knowing and closely relates to Fenner's (2003) notion that at least part of the role of the arts is that each of the

arts provides a unique way of knowing. In establishing this theory, Eisner (2002) employs a broad definition of knowing – one that sees knowing as far more than collecting facts or learning processes. Eisner (2002) reminds us that a variety of possible outcomes exist for many problems and the arts help explore all the possibilities; the arts celebrate rather than discourage the variability of outcome.

Whereas the arts are marginalized in school, in the past societal division has lead to the access that some may have to the arts. Leddy (2006) indicates

> Dewey emphasizes the connection between aesthetics and issues of social justice. Those in society who contribute to the maintenance of life or to its decoration cannot today have full and free interest in their work. Instead of transforming things and making them more significant, art today merely feeds fancy and indulgence. Dewey insists that this sad state of affairs is caused by the current separation between laboring and leisure classes. (para 26)

The division is between those that labor and the elite. Art only fed fancy and indulgence because those that need social justice – the laboring class – did not have access to art. The resulting art did not challenge hegemony or even the status quo because those whom the hegemonic forces benefitted patronized art.

This has perhaps been turned around – at least in the sense of accessibility. The Internet is, for the most part universally available to everyone, and prior to the Internet's wide availability, much of that particular divide has been bridged by commercial television and radio. The failing of commercial TV and radio is, of course, that it is

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completely controlled by the elite. Online sharing sites are not, and that is certainly

movement in the direction that favors our contemporary laboring class.

Similarly to Dewey and contrasting with Greene, Eisner maintains that art is not a

supplement to existence; it is not so much a way to enrich the way we look at the world

as it as a way to understand parts of our world that cannot be understood any other way.

Eisner establishes art as both a tool of expression as well as a tool of cognition; it is a

way to make sense of the world that cannot be duplicated through any other means.

Viral Videos are Media

Media is more than simply a method of producing art – such as the *medium* of oil

painting, or simply a communications channel, such as the news *media*. It is a critical

part of being human; the use of media is so intrinsic to our being that it has not always

been distinguished from human existence itself. McLuhan smelted the notion of media

out of our daily lives and showed us its value and character and meaning as an entity.

McLuhan (1967) identified media as any extension of ourselves. He then took that

notion and studied it as a method of understanding how we interact with each other and

how we reach out into the world.

Dewey was conversant about media but in the more traditional sense. When

Dewey (1934) speaks of a medium he reserves the term for artistic media. In that role he

sees the medium as an intermediary; "the middle, the intervening, things through which

something now remote is brought to pass…[and] are incorporated in the outcome" (p.

205). Dewey's medium as intermediary is clearly different from McLuhan's notion of

media as an extension of self. McLuhan sees medium as an extension – a part of us –

rather than an intermediary, and he argues that we are approaching a time "…when the creative process of knowing will be collectively and corporately extended to the whole of human society, much as we have already extended our senses and our nerves by the various media" (p. 4). McLuhan sees media an extension and magnification of self rather than a translator or assistant or negotiator on our behalf. Possibly the most distinct difference is that an intermediary implies an outside influence: a translator or judge or referee. McLuhan's idea of a medium allows one to continue and expand and extrapolate on ideas; there is no translator; rather, the medium is an amplifier. The user of the media has the ability to take her ideas further. Through media, we extend ourselves out into the world.

In saying that media is any extension of ourselves, McLuhan took all that we use to understand, see, communicate, manipulate and create in the world and drew it together. It is a vast expansion of traditional notions of media. Media is, by McLuhan's definition, not what something is, but rather what it does. An event by itself, such as a tree falling in the forest, is not media (whether one can hear it or not). Media can only be when it magnifies or expands that which is already part of us. The tree in the forest becomes media when it is cut up and made into stilts.

While there are considerable differences between McLuhan's and Dewey's ideas of media, McLuhan's all-encompassing definition of media fits nicely with Dewey's universal understanding of experience. Both Definitions fit nicely with Eisner's expansion of our notion of what knowing is, how it is shared and how it is expressed.

McLuhan does not speak much of art because he believes that the content is not the main part of the message. McLuhan (1967) states, "[s]ocieties have always been by

the nature of the media by which men [sic] communicate than by the content of the communication" (p. 8.) McLuhan's basis for this is his premise that media is more than just the carrier of a message; it not only informs us in our individual roles in culture, it changes the culture itself. In the case of Viral Videos, the videos are not the message. While any particular message may be important, the greatest significance is, as McLuhan (1967) states, "the change of scale or pattern that it introduces into human affairs" (p. 8). The medium of Viral Video has brought about massive changes of scale or pattern. One change in the pattern is how elegantly and effectively public school has been cut – or perhaps schools have cut themselves – from the educative process. Whereas school used to have all the books (figurative for all the knowledge), we have found a medium where we not only collect and store knowledge, but *assemble* our own knowledge – we construct a curriculum that the People share with each other with no constraints; no influence from the Market or from those currently in power. The medium of Viral Video is a place where we are safely encouraged to show our concern and our ire. It is a place where we can safely and gleefully point out the king's lack of clothing even when the mass media and the public schools insist on playing along with the king, even though these observations are not always well received or widely circulated.

Bimber (1998) predicted that the Internet would be a catalyst for the "recasting of community and social relations" (p. 135). He was right, given the plethora of new or overhauled types of social interactions that the Internet has spawned. Presently, social interaction and structure and even the notion of community seem to be among the most noticeable changes that have come from the Internet. Burgess (2008) describes shared video as "the mediating mechanisms via which cultural *practices* are originated, adopted

and (sometimes) retained *within* social networks" (p.2). Shared videos, according to

Burgess, do more than emphasize or amuse; they are a cultural *source* in their own right.

For that reason, shared video, along with other types of new media demand fluency from

contemporary social networks.   Jenkins (2009) declares, "new media literacies should be

considered a social skill" (p. 28). Because after all, we declare, learn, interact, socialize

and question via new media. Jenkins' recommendation portends that media – and the

subsequent need for media literacy – will become a part of the social; it will be a way that

we communicate and a way that we conduct discourse. More importantly, media

literacies allow us to create meeting spaces in places that never existed before and will

exist alongside (or in a different plane from) the geographic spaces we physically inhabit.

Our degree of media literacy will affect how we interact with virtually everyone. Our

role in media is broad. We are now consumers and producers. On social networking

pages we define ourselves with media – a photo, a video, a song and more can be thumb

tacked to our Facebook page to assist and influence all who judge us. This use of a

bricolage of media bits to describe who we are, how we feel and what we believe is

consistent with what Jenkins (2009) points as an important incongruence in education:

whereas collage has been an important method of aesthetic expression, it has been met

with hostility in school – particularly as a method of creating art – because it seems to

threaten to violate the traditional (yet increasingly irrelevant) position on the repurposing

of aesthetic media as plagiarism; repurposing media can easily be mistaken for copying

and therefore considered to be an ethically treacherous, unimaginative practice.

Thus, everything is media. Everything is experience. Experience through media

expressed aesthetically is a unique, important way of knowing.

Jenkins (2006) offers that participatory culture, while not new, has exploded with new potential as a result of the evolution of media sharing from mere media spectatorship; in participatory culture, the distinctions between media producers and media consumers dissolves. Media producers are media consumers; media consumers can just as easily be (and often are) media producers. Taking Jenkins' idea perhaps a step further, I offer that sharing media can be a form of media production. Even merely posting pre-existing media on a website requires some production because production decisions such as the specific sharing website, the timeliness of the posting, and what portions of the media are to be shared are necessary. Interestingly then, one does not even have to create media to be a media producer. Nevertheless, producing media is becoming simpler and the tools more accessible. Jenkins (2007) points out that children have access to media editing and design tools and most have experience creating media.

The participatory facet of Viral Video is certainly harmonious with Freire's (1986) notion of dialogic pedagogy. It is dialogic when it is shared; it is dialogic when one tells another, "this is who I am and what I think"; it is dialogic in that it can serve as a voice for the marginalized and the oppressed; it is dialogic because it is unfettered and unencumbered by the forces of traditional power and the market. Jenkins chronicles that "[t]hose silenced by corporate media have been among the first…to transform their computers into printing presses" (p. 12). Not only is the computer a printing press, it is a telegraph, a radio, a movie theater, and a technological public square (Ryan, 2009).

Jenkins (2006) says that participatory culture is highly generative: ideas can come from any level and from just about any source: top down, commercial media or grassroots productions. Content is easily conscripted, adapted, adjusted and expanded

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upon. This highly generative nature gives all the participants the opportunity to speak and be heard regardless of their status. Through appropriation, even the most inexperienced sharer can speak with the highest production values. She is not constrained to use her own original idea, or camera, or actors or script. If it resonates with her, she can share it, regardless if the source is her cell phone or clip from a feature film a video from an Apache helicopter gun-sight or a report from Al-Jazeera.

This highly generative nature is important because the principal objective of visual participatory communication methods is to facilitate the voicing of narratives that were previously marginalized, silenced, overlooked or rejected (Singhal & Rattine-Flaherty, 2006). Further, Jenkins and Thorborn (2003) said that "computing's democratic impulses are likely to appear first…in cultural forms: in a changed sense of community, for example, or in a citizenry less dependent on official voices of expertise and authority" (Para 4). This is certainly the case with shared video; shared video deftly sidesteps the official voices, and the marginalized have a voice where they previously did not.

Vinicius Nararro (2010) discusses the emergence of new media literacies, noting that the concern should not be how to create or use or program new media, because media convergence is "primarily a cultural phenomenon that involves new forms of exchange between producers and users of media content" (para 1). We must grasp how the new social structures and practices that new media has unveiled will allow People to learn new mindsets, dispositions, collaboration, expression and how to be a contributing member of a participatory culture.

How media is used is a question that will answer itself, but only after the new social structures have begun to use it. Media does not just change how things are done;

as McLuhan (1967) has stated, it changes the *scale or pattern* of how things are done. Media changes everything; it shifts focus and intensity and pace. Its effects are wide reaching, and how it is used cannot be predicted.

The artificial constructs of the twenty-two minute television show or the two-hour movie have been ignored in Viral Video. A set length offers nothing to the quality or completeness of the video, and that is not just true for video. Jenkins (2006a) noted, "the art of vaudeville performance was structured around achieving [a] basic emotional impact" (p. 5). Viral videos have certainly built upon this; they are not constrained or bound to any structure or timeline and they are allowed – expected, in fact – to conclude once they've made their point. It is interesting, but I do not believe coincidental that this is so; different lessons take different amounts of time, and engagement is dependent upon content. The notion of blocks of instructional time, all of equal length is a construct devised to ease school scheduling, rather than to enhance learning. Much like vaudeville acts, the structure of shared videos is dependent upon their content. Unlike television, which is structured around commercials, or public school, which is structured and run in a factory model, the length of shared videos is based upon the idea they represent. The twenty-two minute moral lesson of a television sitcom, the forty-two minute search and discovery for a miracle cure in a televised drama and the forty-five minute class period are all constructs that have no bearing upon the content.

Why does this convergence of aesthetics, education, social networking and media occur in shared video rather than in school? It seems that the arts are a bad fit for our present structure of the public school. Unlike the learning that occurs in school today, the arts are messy; they bring up questions that cannot be answered, and each individual

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gleans different things from the same work of art, creating an untenable position for the corporations who write tests, the politicians who think in sixty-second sound bites. The arts talk about things that we are unable to say with literal language, and no work of art can teach each of us the exact same things. The learning that occurs is dubious to many because it cannot be measured. This messiness also flies in the face of what appears to be the present educational mission: to provide easily tested learning that makes the student a better candidate for employment in the market. Eisner (2002) tells us that learning in the arts teaches the student to seek meaning in the works they view.

Learning from the arts is not easily tested, and it does not make the student a better employee; it is quite possible that it offers the opposite of that; instead of creating an ideal worker – one who follows directions, can cipher and read unchallenging material and does not question authority – study of the arts promotes intellectual processing that goes outside of the typical public school thinking. It challenges traditional thinking and traditional form. It encourages originality and passion and anger. Study in the arts helps develop adults who actively seek alternatives and who question – or at least are not afraid or unable to question – the status quo.

The curricula that are valued in school are those that can be tested. Conversely, that which is not tested easily is pushed aside, regardless of any other value that it might have. Apple (1990) reminds us "…the body of the school knowledge itself – what is included and excluded, what is important and what is unimportant – also often serves an ideological purpose" (p. 58). The arts are marginalized because they offer little political benefit to those in power; they offer no clear comparisons, they are not helpful judging – or more accurately, giving the appearance of judging – the efficacy of schools, and

arguably do nothing to develop a competent, pliable member of the workforce. Apple (1990) cautions, "The school is not a passive mirror, but an *active* force, one that also serves to *give legitimacy* to economic and social forms and ideologies so intimately connected to it" (p. 42).

The arts are difficult to measure because measurement depends upon conventions – averages, lexiles, benchmarks, standards and the like – and art defies convention as a point of their existence. The arts do not reinforce; they surprise; they question the existence of the idea of any standard; the arts do not encourage compliance, they inspire revolt and change. This I believe that this has stymied and frustrated those in power across the country because if something cannot be measured, it cannot be controlled; if something cannot be controlled, there are infinite ways it cause discomfort, discontent, arouse passions and question authority. Art teaches us how to question the status quo, and the dominant culture does not find that to be a valuable skill for People to have.

Art is an open-ended process; even when a particular work of art is complete, it continues to affect. It affects the artist forever because she has, through that art, achieved an improved understanding of her condition; the experience becomes internalized and woven into her being. She will then carry that understanding to all her subsequent experiences and those experiences will in turn be richer. Those who have experienced her art will have had an aesthetic experience that shifted their cognition of the world. They have new understanding; they have new knowing. There is no specific time limit on the efficacy of art; a piece of art will continue to influence as long as it is relevant, resonant and continues to reach new viewers or consumers. The art in this inquiry is Viral Video.

The method I have employed for this inquiry is heavily influenced by narrative analysis, critical discourse analysis, and aesthetic interpretation. Marshall and Rossman (1999) refer to narrative analysis as [a]n interdisciplinary approach with many guises" (p. 5). My use of narratives to introduce chapters is particularly appropriate in that Viral Video as curriculum is also interdisciplinary and has many guises. Possibly the only aspects of content that are consistent among all Viral Videos is that they are used to tell a story – a narrative – that she who shares it feels is important and cogent and timely. Marshall and Rossman (1999), in their definition of narrative analysis, describe relatively precisely what I hope to do in this inquiry: "*narrative analysis…*seeks to describe the meaning of experience for individuals, frequently those who are socially marginalized or oppressed, as they construct stories (narratives) about their lives [original emphasis]" (p. 5). The main difference is that that in Viral Video, the stories (narratives) are not necessarily *constructed* by the sharer (although they could be) what is important is that they are *chosen* by the sharer and also shared with others.

Discourse

Fundamentally, discourse is a type of conversation. Fiske, (1996) says, "[d]iscourse is the continuous process of making sense and of circulating it socially" (p. 6). Wodak (2010) supports this broad definition and clarifies further by noting that different types of discourses are different types of conversations such as the specific discourses of critical issues such as race and gender. There can be a discourse *of* an entity, such as the discourse of a government, a political party or a person; there can be a discourse *about* such things as social issues like hunger or poverty.

The definition of discourse has evolved and broadened over time. McGregor (2003) defines discourse as expression using words. It is particularly problematic that McGregor considers discourse to be "the words and language we use", because by limiting discourse to words, she excludes other, non-literal methods of expression – most importantly to this inquiry, aesthetic expression. McGregor (2003) seems to consider words to be the primary method of conducting discourse, but at the same her writing seems to reflect a shift in this thinking; given the increasingly complicated notion of text, McGregor ultimately concedes that discourse can be things other than words.

Over time, Fairclough's opinion of discourse evolves as well. While the early work of Fairclough has at times referred to discourses as consisting specifically of words, he ultimately maintains that "…[d]iscourses include representations of how things are and have been, as well as imaginaries – representations of how things might or could or should be" (Fairclough, 2005, p. 6). Moving beyond how discourse is conducted, Fiske, (1996) looks at what discourse *does*, stating, "[d]iscourse does not represent the world; it acts in and upon the world" (p. 5). Both Fairclough's as well as Fiske's definitions of discourse clearly include Viral Video. By using "imaginaries" rather than terms like "words" or even "language", Fairclough leaves open the possibility to consider ways of knowing other than language. By broadening his notion of how discourse is conducted, he also broadens the notion of what it does. "Imaginaries" invokes – at least to me – the term imagination. Such a term seems to encourage aesthetic representations. Dellinger (1995) expressly considers media to be discourse. When describing the benefits of Critical Discourse Analysis, he notes that it "…offers the opportunity to adopt a social perspective in the cross-cultural study of media texts" (para 5).

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In my search for clarity of what the process of discourse analysis entails, and to determine if it would be appropriate for this inquiry, I was well pleased to find that discourse analysis is an exceptionally flexible method of analysis. Upon examining the work of Fisk (1996), Fairclough (2005, 2001, 1995 and 1992), Janks (1997), Barker, and Galasinski, (2001), Dellinger, (1995), McGregor, (2003), Sheyholislami, (2001), Van Dyke, (1993) and Wodak, (2010), I found that while they all generally agree upon what critical discourse is, Fiske (1996) perhaps offers the most elegant definition when he describes discourse as having three dimensions: a topic, a social position and a repertoire. The topic is the text. It is what is happening; what is being examined for meaning. The social position is the perspective; it indicates, among other things, who benefits. The repertoire is the mode of transmission; the images by which the meanings are circulated. I intend to discuss those three dimensions in this inquiry. Those three dimensions are well suited to my topic and they are flexible enough in their definitions in that each concept could be shaped and organized to optimize its role in this inquiry.

Critical Discourse Analysis

To understand Critical Discourse Analysis as a means of understanding texts, we must first look at discourse analysis. Chapman (2007) succinctly states, "[d]iscourse analysis asks the question why these words? Why now?" (p. 139). Barker and Galinsky (2001) indicate how complicated discourse analysis is, telling us that "[d]iscourse analysis is a far from straightforward enterprise. It involves a constant self-reflective trade-off between the researcher's interests, values and knowledge of the context against the practicalities of a microanalysis that cannot go on indefinitely" (p. 84). If discourse

analysis is a complicated study of texts, critical discourse analysis is a complicated study of texts that focus on issues of power.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) was a method of inquiry initially crafted to examine the use of texts by the dominant powers as a tool to maintain their control over the oppressed. McGregor (2003) claims that "…dominant discourse [has]...power to interpret conditions, issues, and events in favor of the elite. The discourse of the marginalized is seen as a threat to the propaganda efforts of the elite" (para 5). Ironically, through such outlets as mainstream film and network broadcasting, the elite has created – or at least developed – a discourse that has now entered the domain of the public, and the People are able to use the techniques and the structure that the elite has created as a tool to challenge the dominant culture. Traditionally, the elite has controlled most methods of transmitting information and effectively used it as a hegemonic tool. Viral video represents a break from this tradition because it allows People to participate in interpreting those things as well. It challenges the presumption that the oppressed have no voice equal to the voice of the dominant powers. Inexpensive computer hardware, affordable broadband Internet access – often free – and the availability of affordable video equipment – have become quite common. The combination of the wide accessibility of video recording equipment and the accessibility to an audience drawn from the massive number of people who make use of the Internet has caused a paradigm shift. This particular convergence of technologies has, in my opinion, made the production and distribution of video widely available to people outside of the elite. It can now be used not only a tool of hegemony, but as a tool of liberation as well. Because this paradigm shift precipitated other uses of critical discourse analysis, the message has

changed; this is the change in scale to which McLuhan refers. Within Viral Video, an entire genre of social justice – themed media is being produced and framed either by the oppressed or for the oppressed for the purpose of challenging the dominant powers.

The notion of using Critical Discourse Analysis to examine discourses that challenge the dominant culture is one that McGregor (2003) supports by saying that discourses can, among other things, be used for resistance and critique. Critical Discourse Analysis examines issues of power; this approach keeps the same lenses, it just changes the perspective of the inquiry. Whereas Critical Discourse Analysis typically looks at the discourse of the elite and the way that it retains or uses power, Critical Discourse Analysis can also be used to examine the texts that *challenge* the elite. Those texts offer the same evidence of oppression and point out the same inequities and hegemonic practices, as do the texts of the elite, yet they do so positively by examining the texts of or on behalf of the oppressed – to the practices of the dominant powers as opposed to merely identifying the texts the dominant powers use in their hegemonic discourse. Each text is victory over oppression, and there is value in determining "why these images? Why now?" Examining Viral Videos using the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis is an examination of this spontaneous democratic process.

In the definition of Critical Discourse Analysis offered by Sheyholislami (2001), Critical Discourse Analysis "…aims at making transparent the connections between discourse practices, social practices, and social structures, connections that might be opaque to the layperson" (para. 2). In using the term, "discourse practices", Sheyholislami embraces the widest possible range of methods of discourse clearly

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welcoming the possibility that discourse can include non-linguistic examples and perhaps even encouraging one to look outside of the linguistically based idea of discourse.

Viral Video is an especially good place to talk about the discourses of power because, at least for the moment, it is a relatively level playing field; it is not controlled by the elite, the state or the market. Online video sharing has contributed to a reframing of how media can be used, and as a result, certainly changed approaches initially crafted for Critical Discourse Analysis. In his writing about Critical Discourse Analysis, van Dijk (1993) looks at media as something that can only be a product of those in power. In that time – which preceded YouTube by over a decade – Critical Discourse Analysis could only be an analysis of how those in power used media as a tool of hegemony. No mention is made at that time about even the possibility that media could be used as a voice for the oppressed. Looking only at the discourse of then empowered often forced the researcher to dig quite deeply and base theories on the discourse that is devoted to appearing as the voice of the status quo. van Dijk (1993) laments that Critical Discourse Analysis is "far from easy…the toughest challenge in the discipline" (p. 253). Analysis of the oppressors' discourse and the often-subtle subtexts that reinforce hegemony would be very difficult. Disguised as "normal", the evidence of oppression could even seem ephemeral.

One of the strengths of Critical Discourse Analysis is its flexibility. McGregor (2003) notes that there is no consistent theoretical framework for Critical Discourse Analysis. There is no specific procedure or method for Critical Discourse Analysis, and this dearth of specificity provides considerable flexibility that I find to be an attractive aspect because it invites examination of all types of texts in all types of discourse. It can

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be used in an inquiry about Viral Video without getting tangled up in the differences between Viral Videos such as differences in production, method of sharing or original intent of the producers.

While there is no set procedure, several academics have opinions about both procedure and structure of Critical Discourse Analysis. Fairclough (1989) and McGregor (2003) observe that CDA has three tenets: social structure; culture and discourse. McGregor says that there are three levels of analysis: the actual text, the discursive practices and the larger social context. The text and the discursive practices align with Dewey's (1934) ideas of form and substance. These three tenants are surely present in virtually all shared video and will certainly be notable elements in video that I share in this inquiry. While there is no specifically dictated procedure for Critical Discourse Analysis, Fairclough (2005) directs the establishment of a methodology that requires "…selecting theoretical frameworks, perspectives and categories to bring to bear on the research topic" (p. 10). Such selections will then allow the researcher to determine how she will select, collect and analyze data.

In this inquiry I will look at Viral Videos in their simultaneous roles of curriculum, art and media. By twisting, attaching, and combining those roles, I strive to create ideas that are unique – and possibly even fascinating – just as MacGuyver did with his bandanna, zipper pull and ski pole.

CHAPTER THREE

NOT EXACTY A METHODOLOGY

High School Initiation

We were going to high school! I was headed for UFA – Utica Free Academy –

one of three public and three Catholic high schools in our city of 100,000. The idea of

high school was daunting; it meant we were practically adults now. Everyone in my

family went to UFA; my brothers graduated right before they were drafted and Ma and

Dad went there for a year before going to work in 1934.

High School was different; we weren't just dumbly going to classes as we did in

junior high – we were really working on our futures. We all thought in the space travel

metaphors of the early 1970's: high school was going to be the launch pad for our future;

the sky was the limit; our potential was boundless.

Most importantly, high school was a fresh start. The teachers didn't know us, so

they couldn't label us. We all had a chance to put our best foot forward and not be

saddled with our pasts, the company we kept, the drinking habits of our parents, the

stupid things we had said, or the grades we had earned because we were "lazy" or

"daydreamers" or "classroom sleepers."

The high school was a couple of miles away from my house, and there were

sacrifices one had to make when going there. I had to lug my trumpet to school every

day. The handle on my trumpet case was so small that I had to pull off one of my gloves

to wrap my fingers around it. Squeezing that plastic handle in the cold Adirondack fall

made my hand sting and ache. At fourteen, I was a little guy. As I walked, the case

would swing back and forth with my steps and it would rub and chafe the outside of my knee. Lighting a cigarette was a chore. I couldn't put the case down on the ground, because if I did, one of the guys would probably grab it, and then they'd toss it around, mess with it, try to play it, and probably break it. So before I did anything, I had to stop and clutch the trumpet case between my knees. With my knees clutching my horn case, I would cup my hands around a match (several matches if it were a windy day) in order to light the cigarette that I had stolen from my mother. Once my cigarette was lit, I would be on my way again – one glove on and one glove off, clutching the case, scraping my leg and puffing on a cigarette – looking cool, smooth and grown up.

Initiation was another sacrifice that everyone had to bear, and my older friends in the neighborhood teased us about it for weeks ahead of time. They would cackle and taunt us because we were about to be, as they pronounced it, "nee-she-ated." Here's how it worked: For the first week of school, any upper classman could grab a freshman and mark up his face with lipstick – usually some shade of scarlet from a small white Avon lipstick sample. The markings could be just about anything, but the favorite designs were spots, stripes, war paint, and/or the word "retard" on your forehead. The freshman then had to wear the lipstick on his face for the entire school day – those who dared to wash the lipstick off were doomed to receive an even heavier coat the next day.

It was against the rules to initiate freshmen, but the school administration was usually unable to catch anyone. They didn't even seem to try. We did not mind. As initiated freshmen, we wore the lipstick with a mixture of embarrassment and pride – we looked like clowns, but it somehow also made us feel grown up; anyone could tell by looking at us that we had friends who were upper classmen. We belonged. Initiation was

such an important ritual that even some of the kids that had dropped out of high school hovered around campus after school that week looking for the chance to mark up some of the freshman.

The first day of school, one of the teachers sent me (against my wishes) to the rest room to clean the lipstick off of my face. I did so, praying that I could avoid anyone from the neighborhood and thus an even heavier paint job the next day. After cleaning up, I went on to my next class. It was Social Studies 9R – the "R" indicated that it was an advanced class. I went inside the room and took a seat.

Just as the teacher began class, she was interrupted by a knock on the door. It was Bill Taylor, one of the other freshman guys from the neighborhood. He stood at the door with his schedule in his hand, obviously lost. His entire face was covered with lipstick – every inch. Only the whites of his eyes and his yellowish teeth were untouched. He beamed with pride that he was so popular with the older kids. In his best, politest, most intellectual sounding voice and with his face shiny, moist and red, Bill asked for directions to his class. The teacher directed him to a room down the hall and closed the door.

As the teacher found her place in her roll book and resumed calling our names, the students in the class murmured about Bill. He repulsed them. They didn't see initiation as a rite of passage. To them, it was not a quaint, charming tradition that proved a new student's popularity and acceptance. They saw it as a sign of ignorance. In an instant, they sized Bill up – poor, stupid, nasty and hopeless.

I then realized that I was the only kid in the class from my part of town. No one knew that, however, because when I had cleaned the lipstick off of my face, I had also

removed the label that was attached to me by my older peers from the neighborhood. I blended in with the others in the class. I was inadvertently included as one of them.

It turns out that the rite of initiating freshman boys was not as universal as I had thought. Only the poor kids from my side of town practiced it. With a few strokes, the older boys of the neighborhood claimed the youngsters as their own. They also wiped away our fresh start. Our background, neighborhood and probability of failure were as plain as the noses on our faces.

The older impoverished kids' initiation of the younger ones was very complex. Through this act of social reproduction, our culture of poverty was holding on to us as much as the middle class was pushing us away. Like a species fighting for survival, our impoverished community was fighting to exist, and the initiation ritual was an important weapon in that fight, albeit unconsciously. As a result of that ritual, we were tagged, marked and located; we were identified with our part of town. Our marginalization and exclusion by the middle class was virtually assured. We would remain with our own.

That story from my first week of high school can be read as a text. Fairclough (1995) refers to text as "social spaces in which two fundamental social processes simultaneously occur: cognition and representation of the world, and social interaction" (p. 6). More succinctly, Fiske (1996) includes text as one of the dimensions of discourse, considering the text to be the topic of the conversation. Fairclough's evolved definition of text is the one that I have chosen to embrace for this inquiry; it pays homage to the older, words-only definition of "written and talk" (p. 63) employed by Barker and

Galasinski (2001) and the more developed but still lacking definition of van Dijk (1993) that includes media in his definition, but only for those in power.

As time has passed, the text of my story has remained unchanged, but my thoughts about that day – my interpretation of those events – have changed and become more complicated. Prior to my first week of high school, I saw the initiation as a rite of passage where we were welcomed to high school by our older, wiser friends and our devotion to our new school was ceremoniously tested as those friends ran us through the embarrassing ritual of painting our faces with lipstick. Like many rites of passage, it was something that we simultaneously looked forwarded to and dreaded. We relished being acknowledged by the older kids; it seemed like an act of love to have them take the time to mark our faces. At the same time, as with any test, we were not sure that we would pass. What would happen if we got pissed off and punched an initiator in the nose? What if we did not have the courage to enter our new school once we were marked? What if we got in trouble with the school for refusing to wipe the stuff off of our faces? Typically we learned from the initiation that, unlike junior high school, this new school did not care if we came in the building looking silly. We also learned who are friends were.

When I realized that it was not everyone that was being marked, however, my interpretation of the initiation ritual shifted considerably. When I saw the way the students in the class reacted to Bill, my perception changed drastically. I suddenly doubted the worldliness of the older guys in the neighborhood because their idea of "everybody" excluded the population of the North, South and East side of town. I questioned my own courage and good sense for letting those apes do that to me,

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apparently for no reason at all. Probably worst of all, I felt stupid and unworthy around the advanced – and not coincidentally, middle-class – students in that social studies class. I felt ashamed of the people with whom I grew up, and by association felt ashamed of myself.

Over thirty years later, my interpretation of the initiation ritual has shifted once again. As a curriculum theorist, I recognize it as a fascinating hegemonic mechanism that was nearly perfect in the way that it perpetuated itself from *within* the oppressed class rather from above. It is also an excellent illustration of how the economic theory of pulling yourself up by your bootstraps in order to rise out of poverty is simplistic bullshit. I do not recall ever thinking I was poor. Dad certainly never thought that. He would often remind us how rich we were. He never let us forget that we had a roof over our head, food in the refrigerator, a nice car in the driveway and all the beer he could drink. Whether it was my peers initiating us into high school or Dad explaining what it meant to be rich, we were kept in the dark. We kept each other in the dark. We did not know we had bootstraps. If we ever realized that we had bootstraps, one of the people in the neighborhood would have slapped our hands if we ever reached for them.

The difference between the three ways that I read the text – as willing participant, as embarrassed outsider and as a (somewhat) dispassionate academic – is entirely attributable to my experience. When all I knew was the workings of the West Utica social network, I was happy and perhaps even proud to go through the initiation. Like all rituals, it gave me comfort, a sense of belonging and would probably have given me a sense of accomplishment had I finished the week in the state of ignorant bliss in which I began it. As soon as I had the experience of seeing the students' revulsion toward Bill

Taylor as I sat invisibly in social studies class, I saw things much differently, and would continue to see things differently for the rest of the time I was in high school. I had a different lens with which to see the world.

When I look back on that day as a curriculum theorist, I have another lens through which to see the world, and through that lens I see many other things. It is noteworthy that this happened in school and with the school's tacit blessing. I posit that the teacher who made me wash my face may have had an insight into what was happening to me, and if she did, had some success in her attempt to disrupt it. I see that the school and the community both are part of a powerful curriculum of separation. The people from my part of town supported it, the people from the more affluent parts of town supported it and the school tacitly supported it.

As a teacher, I also wonder what happened to Bill Taylor.

TextualSocioHistoricalAestheticCriticalDiscourse Analysis

Just as I have seen that same text through different lenses, I will look at the text of the videos in this inquiry through a number of lenses as well. There will be two sets of lenses; the lenses of the method of inquiry and the theoretical lenses.

The method that I followed in this inquiry had to be as flexible as the types of videos I intended to study were variable. Such flexibility required that I think in very broad terms; this method had to cover broad conceptual ground.

In order to consider the elements of the videos that may influence my aesthetic experience, I have structured a critical discourse analysis to be in three dimensions, each

quite different from the other, and each able to stand independently – that is, each

dimension can and does exist as an analysis separate from the others. While there may be

some overlapping, none of the dimensions requires the results of the analysis of any of

the other dimension in order to be complete. While no observation is objective, these

three dimensions, in the order I have listed them, are increasingly subjective – or perhaps

increasingly allow for me to interpret what I see as opposed to merely reporting what I

see.   A summary of the dimensions and their characteristics follows:

Textual Analysis is my attempt to relate what I take in when I watch the video. It

was what I see; my perception of the event. It is referred to by McGregor (2003) as the

actual text, and by Janks (1997) as textual analysis. This phase will begin with a general

deconstruction of the videotext. Certainly, there will be texts inside of that text, such as

verbal texts, visual texts, technical texts and so forth; those will be examined as well.

Because there is no equivalent to seeing the actual text, I will make the video available as

part of this inquiry.

The textual analysis describes the setting, the appearance and actions of the

individuals, what is said, and what is done. It is my goal to relate what happens in the

video without interpreting the actions or putting it in any historical context. I am sure

that I will not be entirely successful with that venture; I have found it nearly impossible

to observe and relate without interpreting. Having acknowledged that failing, I

unapologetically apologize in advance.

The textual analysis also includes an informal description of the practical and

technical aspects of the video. Referred to by McGregor (2003) as the discursive

practices, this refers to the means by which the object is produced and received by human

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subjects. This would be an appropriate place to look the type of production. The technical process is about the construction of the video. Examples might be if it were a professional or an amateur production or if its original intent were a product advertisement or a personal rant on Facebook. Other factors might include by what means it became viral, and if known, the original manner in which it was shared.

The examination of the practical and technical aspects is informal by necessity because virtually none of these elements is accessible all of the time, and I have no way of knowing what *is* as opposed to what is supposed to *look like* what is. For example, I have found it impossible to distinguish an amateur video from a professionally produced video that is crafted to look like an amateur video. Typically, whether it is genuine amateur or faux-pro amateur does not matter; what ultimately matters is how I perceive it. This dimension can be of some value then because it describes things that, regardless of the original intent, contribute to the tone of the video.

Socio-Historical Issues often have, in essence, two facets as they apply to these videos. There are the general socio-historical issues that might be valuable to understand the jokes or the message or the timing of the video, and there are the socio-historical issues that are part of the foundation of my interpretation of the video. My earlier example of the video of the Whitney Houston video can provide a clear illustrative example of the role that socio-historical issues can play when examining a text. Houston's performance was for the opening of Super Bowl XXV and was seen by millions of people. We were embroiled in a war in the Persian Gulf, and patriotic sentiments were high. This performance occurred early in Houston's career, and it was a seminal moment for her image as a performer. A personal socio-historical issue that

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affected me was that I was a high school band director at the time and conducted various

arrangements of the National Anthem for dozens of school and civic functions each year.

That performance of Houston's was a professional and artistic watershed for me as a

musician.

This examination of the socio-historical conditions that govern these processes is

a critical step in the birth of a viral video because a video that is unremarkable in one

social network or time or setting might be very important in others. Dewey (1934)

observes that [m]eanings, having their source in past experience, are means by which the

particular organization that marks a given picture is effected" (p. 123). The work has to

be observed in the right place at the right time – shared in the "right" social network (that

is, among People with similar past experiences from which to build) and address a timely

concern in order to resonate. The relative import of the various social conditions waxes

and wanes; attention to issues depends on, among other things, current events, the time of

year and political and economic climate. Presidential politics is a much-discussed topic

in election years while somewhat less intensely discussed in others. The plight of the

Third World poor seems to escape Western consciousness until there is an earthquake or

Tsunami – spectacularly catastrophic conditions, if you will.   An examination of these

conditions will explore the setting and allow me to address the timing of particular

videos' popularity.

Aesthetic Experience is my attempt to describe how I was affected by the video.

Whereas the Socio-Historical Issues describe the world around the video, The Aesthetic

Experience is my interpretation of the action, the symbolism, the subtext, and it identifies

the person or convention that is attacked by this Viral Video. It is definitively what the

video means to me. Dewey (1934) that the aesthetic experience "is not employed as a bridge to some further experience, but as an increase and individualization of present experience" (p. 127). The aesthetic experience is entirely rooted in my experience as, among other things, (in no particular order) a man, a teacher, a husband, a patriot, a liberal, a smart ass, a musician, a father, a son, a curriculum scholar and a lover of technology. It is how the videos grab me and why I want to pass them on to People in my social networks.

I have noted that each dimension can stand-alone in order to assist me in my analysis. This is because each dimension has something to offer – a description of the storyline, the method of production, the place in time or the aesthetic effect of the video – and each contributes its part to the whole. It is, however, the aesthetic effect that establishes what I see as the meaning of the video. When discussing the aesthetic effect, I do not make any attempts to be objective because, once again, I can only draw upon my experiences – it is the ultimate in subjectivity. I am hopeful but not certain that the videos will have a similar effect on those who read this inquiry.

<div align="center">Define, Delineate and Defend (Theoretical Framework)</div>

In broad terms, my methodology is this: I will examine a number of viral videos and discuss their popularity and contribution to the conversation on social justice. In order to proceed, I must first define, delineate and defend my idea of *viral videos;* define a structure for how I will *examine* them*,* and explain how I intend to *discuss* them.

For my theoretical framework, I will draw upon aesthetics, critical theory, and curriculum. Aesthetics are the means by which viral videos reach us, and I find aesthetics to be an especially rich way to look at texts.

Art is a discursive act, and using painting as an example, Foucault (2004) explains how this is so:

> It would not set out to show that the painting is a certain way of 'mean-ing' or 'saying' that is peculiar in that it dispenses with words. It would try to show that, at least in one of its dimensions, it is discursive practice that is embodied in techniques and effects. In this sense, the painting is not a pure vision that must then he transcribed into the materiality of space; nor is it a naked gesture whose silent and eternally empty meanings must be freed from subsequent interpretations. It is shot through — and independently of scientific knowledge (connaissance) and philosophical themes — with the positivity of a knowledge. (savoir) (p. 214)

Art does not replace or supplant literal language; it exists in the spaces which are not scientific or philosophical, yet a knowledge nonetheless. Foucault's description is a poetic restatement of Eisner's (2007) observation that art provides a different way of knowing.

As a medium that works through feelings and emotions, it may appear that art lacks the certainty that literal language offers. It is, after all, nonspecific; it offers no arguments, no logic, or no definitions. There is no explanation that accompanies art; because if an explanation were possible, the work of art would not be necessary. Art does, however, offer its own certainty; it is *res ipsa loquitur*

– it speaks for itself. Art creates new symbols and reshapes others; art constructs

a language "on the fly" that does not attempt to describe our reality, as literal

language does, but instead works to *expand* our reality by continually connecting

and weaving our past experiences with aesthetic experiences. Art does not say

how we feel; rather, it *makes* us feel. The meaning that we find in it comes from

within us – we whisk our experiences together with the aesthetic experience that

the artist has provided and our perception of the world is ultimately affected.

While art may not offer concrete answers, it helps us clarify our questions it

enriches our understanding.

Barone and Eisner (2012) have recently conducted a thorough examination on the

topic of art and intellectual inquiry. They note that "[a]rts based research emphasizes the

generation of forms of feeling that have something to do with understanding some

person, place, or situation…. It is the conscious pursuit of expressive form in the service

of understanding", concluding with certainty that art be included as a form of inquiry.

Eisner (2002) objects to the idea that inquiry is a words-only proposition, and laments the

marginalization of the arts in education: "[a]nother lesson that the arts can teach

education is that literal language and quantification are not the only means through which

human understanding is secured or represented" (Eisner, 2002, p. 204). Barone and

Eisner (2012) offer an elegant description of the contrast between how language

communicates compared to how art communicates; the symbols in art adumbrate rather

than denote. Art provides a lattice for us to entwine our ideas and experiences in order to

construct our understanding. Art serves us in different ways than literal language does.

Eisner (2003) observes, "[i]t's clear to virtually everyone that we appeal to expressive

form to say what literal language can never say" (p. 380). Art is not an alternative form of expression; rather, it the only way that certain notions can be stated. Moreover, Eisner makes what I believe to be a critical point: art it is not a language. To say that it is ignores its potential power to communicate. Art fills the spaces that literal language cannot reach.

While it may be a form of inquiry, art is not, however, discursive in the eyes of Barone and Eisner (2012). Their belief that art is not discursive appears to be because their notion of discourse is the more traditional one that is about words and language rather than conversation. Somewhat contradictorily, there is no doubt, however, that they understand the power of art to communicate. Barone and Eisner (2012) offer a method of aesthetic inquiry that requires the investigator to create art. Such a model excludes those who do not create art, yet love art appreciate and identify with art. Viral Video provides no such exclusion; it allows us to conduct our inquiry by assembling, conscripting, shuffling and recontextualizing preexisting pieces of art. It transforms works of art from an independent, stand alone finished products to pieces of the quilt in which we wrap ourselves. Identifying and sharing videos that resonate with us is still a creative process, because the artistic recontextualization of the videos gives them different meaning. Placing the videos in a different setting generates a different meaning, and the arrival at that meaning is an artistic process (Gude, 2004). Instead of paint, or marble or the sound of a trumpet, the creative tools of the video sharer are selection, arrangement, timeliness and relevance.

Viral Video displays art discursively and in a manner that is unique from other aesthetic mediums. The art in Viral Video becomes a tool to create – or at least a tool that

the sharer uses to provide – an aesthetic experience. Whereas traditional art is created by the artist and experienced by the connoisseur, the art in Viral Video is conscripted by the sharer who effectively holds it up and says, "This is how I feel". Through the sharing process in Viral Video, People are equally equipped to be both the recipients of the aesthetic experience and the providers of the aesthetic experience. The sharer uses the art of video as a tool of expression. The art becomes the text of the conversation. Aesthetic experience becomes a bi-directional process between conversants rather than a unidirectional process that only moves from artist to connoisseur. Instead of exchanging words or signs, through Viral Video we proffer aesthetic experiences to each other as a way of sharing our understanding.

Clearly then, online videos are – or at least have the potential to be – aesthetic. Because aesthetics is about feeling, the videos that I will include in this inquiry are ones that have generated certain feelings within me. One video gave me a great sense of rightness in the world; another, a sense of umbrage and of horror and deep empathy for my fellow human being. A third video made me feel deep feelings of betrayal. Those responses that I felt – rightness, umbrage, empathy and betrayal – are as real as anything that I know. But they are feelings, and the words in the videos (if any), or images, or sequences of events do little on their own to explain my reaction. It is the experience in total that made me feel as I did. As Dewey (1934) maintains, a considerable part of experience is making connections to past experiences. That is why aesthetics are an appropriate lens as opposed to semiotics; these videos do not contain an agreed-upon set of symbols; instead, they adumbrate; they reach inside of us help us reorganize and reevaluate what we already know – what we have already learned from our past

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experiences – and build upon that to give us a new experience, a new way of understanding. Is it likely that many – perhaps all – of the viewers of a video from a social network will have the same experiences? Perhaps not the same, but given the same framework, they can certainly reach the same conclusions. The difference is exactly how they arrived there: how the complicated recipe of past experiences and new images is stirred together. No one video I offer will have the exact same effect as anyone else. From the point that the video becomes part of our experience we will, I offer, arrive at that place together even if we did not travel the same paths. I will discuss how these videos affected me aesthetically. While the details may vary, I believe we can expect those in social networks similar to mine – or even shared with me – to reach the same conclusions.

Critical theory is perhaps the core of these experiences. While there may be some debate over the medium in which we are inquiring, there should be no debate that critical theory is the message. The democratic nature of how videos become viral along with their potential to expose abuses of power lead me to focus on their role as a democratic pedagogy, that Fischman and McLaren (2000) state is "…singularly dedicated to creating critical citizens who can analyze the social contradictions that constitute everyday life within capitalist democracy and transforming relations of exploitation and oppression" (p. 168). The videos that I will discuss will be part of a democratic pedagogy and will all in some way address issues of power. My intention is to examine and discuss some of the ways that those issues are addressed. It is here that must I be as fully aware of who I am – where I am located as a person in all of this. Images that support hegemony will be problematic to me because I am on the side of the hegemonic forces; I am middle class (if

not born there), heterosexual, white, male and middle aged. I am at the time in my life that what The Man thinks and does will appear the most sensible to me because I am he.

Curriculum is perhaps the simplest of the three to examine, especially if one subscribes as I do to Macdonald's (1986) simple definition that curriculum is what is learned. Does learning occur in the sharing of video? I feel assured that it does. I have learned something important from these videos, and that is the reason I share them. I expect learning will occur with those whom I choose to share as well. These videos have curriculum of social justice that I find important and cogent. I share these videos as a way of saying "this is who I am."

. I understand, as Chapman (2007) does in his discussion of discourse analysis, that I must not assume "…the knowledge I create is final" (p. 137). The meaning of any Viral Video is rooted in the time and place it occurs and is seen; it derives its meaning from its context and from the background of the viewer. There are no definitive interpretations. As a result its analysis should be equally subjective and the results of any analysis of Viral Video should be considered momentary or perhaps even ephemeral. Moreover, I have come to embrace the idea of considering myself to be a critical utopianist. This was inspired primarily in the way that Jenkins (2010) referred to Fiske as a critical utopianist as one who "…embraces the promise of local and short term victories and gradual progress, identifying moments when the weak gained ground in relation to the powerful" (p. xvi). The idea then, is not to place any of the knowledge produced by any particular Viral Video in a nicely bordered box or as part of a canon, but rather to acknowledge the role that Viral Videos play as they identify those moments when the weak gained ground.

Chapter 4

FINDINGS: MOMENTS WHEN THE WEAK GAINED GROUND

A Hell of a Trumpet Player

While I was in school, I was a hell of a trumpet player. Back then, it seemed that just about every time I would practice my trumpet or attend a lesson, I would learn something new. As I got better and better, there were more and more things I could do. I eventually got good enough to play recitals and later, play in brass quintets, or opera orchestras or the pit orchestras in musical theater. I could march down the street and play in a parade. I could even play jazz.

When I was thirteen or fourteen, I was asked to play Taps at the Soldiers and Sailors Monument after the city's annual Veteran's Day parade. The Veteran's Day festivities began with speeches that were followed by a parade that was then followed by some more speeches. The playing of Taps at the monument was the last part of the celebration. Traffic was stopped around the square where the monument stood. I was positioned at one side of the monument and a firing squad, poised to fire a salute to the deceased Veterans, was on the other side. After a final speech, the firing squad would fire three volleys. Before the last shots were finished echoing, I was to begin playing.

As I played, everyone around the square was very still and very quiet. When I finished, I looked around and saw grown men, wearing the garrison caps of the Veterans of Foreign Wars and the American Legion, weeping. Through the speeches, the parade and the tributes, they held their composure, but when they heard Taps, they wept. I marveled that I could have that effect on People by playing my trumpet.

No matter how good of a trumpet player I got to be, however, there would always be some things that were impossible to do on the trumpet; I could never balance my checkbook by playing it, or find out what television show was about to come on, or decide what kind of wedding I wanted to have. Through these extreme examples I illustrate my point: different ways of knowing are necessary to fully understand what we see and what we experience. Using those examples, it is easy to see that art is a terrible way of constructing a budget, or planning a social function. At the same time, you could never play the *Haydn Concerto for Trumpet in Eb* on a rectal thermometer.

My wife's uncle Joe taught me this maxim: any job is easy if you have the right tools. Taking Joe's maxim a step further, it is the circumstances that determine what the best tool is. Art can be one of the best ways of knowing, or using a calculator can be one of the best ways of knowing or wetting your finger and sticking it in the air can be one of the best ways of knowing. It just all depends on the job – in the case of intellectual inquiry, it depends on what you are trying to know or with whom you intend to share.

I have come to believe that shared videos are often among the best tools for us to frame our beliefs, to illustrate our concerns and to affect the beliefs of others. When an aesthetic impact is desired, when one wishes to share an experience rather than literal language or numerical data, videos can serve beautifully.

The videos themselves are merely the containers for the ideas; they do not prescribe how the experiences are presented. Within the video is where the content lives and how the content is produced. There is a vast variety of technical means and effects as well as styles of presentation. Each kind, or style, or look, or sound, or texture offers a different way to reach the viewer, and each has the ability to tap into different kinds of

experiences and to stir different kinds of emotions using its unique combination of all of those elements.

I have provided a variety of videos and each video will, in return, utilize a variety of styles, approaches and effects. Among the nine videos examined in this inquiry there will be monologues, videos with virtually no speaking and a video where the speaking is entirely in a language other than English. There will be the addition of musical sound tracks to one video; some videos will be shot with professional studio video equipment, while others will be shot with handheld home video cameras or camera phones. Some videos will be raw – completely unedited and unadorned, while others will be highly produced, filtered and manipulated. Some videos will present their text as comedy or dance while others will present their text with actual depictions violence and even death. One video will be financed by a commercial entity that asks for consideration in the credits, another will be submitted anonymously, and yet another will be a segment of a major network television show. The videos will include public figures, children, activists, professional entertainers, dogs, monkeys and a whale. All of these elements will, in some way or another, ultimately affect the video's impact on the viewer.

For years, I have watched and collected shared videos that represent a rich curriculum of People. The ones that I enjoyed or loved or found resonant have impacted me. Albeit informally, I have noted their aesthetic impact, and I try to share their meaning by passing them on to People who I think will appreciate them; that is, People who are in one or more of the same social networks as I am. I share the videos with the hope that the people in my social network will have the same aesthetic experiences that I did – and they usually do –

but not always.

It is our experiences that form our consciousness, and we naturally draw on our experiences as we look at and interpret texts. When we look at aesthetic texts (or perhaps look at texts aesthetically), we are challenged to do more than just reason our way through them. We are also required to examine how those texts invoke our emotions, tap into our fears and challenge or bolster our beliefs. We have to search the text for symbols that generate an almost ad-hoc meaning to us as individuals and are specific to that moment and as they exist in the context in which they are presented.

For example, before February 11, 2012, the video of Whitney Houston's performance of the National Anthem at the 1991 Super Bowl (http://youtu.be/YHmdu_I_0zI) filled me with joy and feelings of patriotism. After her death on February 11, the same video now makes me teary as well. I am reminded of a premature death and the destruction that addiction can cause. The text is the same, but what the text means to me has changed; my experience with those symbols has an added dimension, and therefore what I glean aesthetically has changed.

This space where personal and aesthetic experience are examined as a path to knowing are a convergence of the ideas of Eisner and Dewey. Together they have formed a basis for my ideas and opinions about using art as a unique way of creating as well as sharing experience and knowledge.

Of course, no two People have the same experiences. Aesthetic impressions are very personal. While I am hopeful that the videos that I share with People will resonate

with them, I can never be sure that they will. I can only make a reasoned guess based on the social network(s) that we share.

That said, it would be difficult, and probably impossible, to discuss videos in this inquiry that will resonate with all of my potential readers. The pool is simply too broad and deep, even when it only includes the members of my dissertation committee, People in my family and a colleague or two.

The only thing I can do then, is offer videos that resonate with me. These are not the most recent videos or the videos that have acquired the most views or the most shocking videos; I made no attempt to find the best or the most of anything. The videos I have chosen are ones that impacted me aesthetically; sometimes they induce just a little twinge and other times leave me with a heavy heart. As my readers pass through each analysis, they may not agree with my conclusions, but they will know how I got there.

There have been times in my career as a teacher when I absolutely "nailed" a lesson. When that happened, it was an almost magical moment that seemed to be a result of having a strong emotional/personal/intellectual connection with my students; knowing the exact words to best illustrate my points; telling every joke as if it were new; offering illustrations that reflected a vivid, a deep understanding of what I was teaching and perhaps scores of other things of which I was not aware or could not grasp. When I was locked to the minds of my students and the content and the moment, it was if I could see the light bulbs come on over their heads as they connected with me and with what I was teaching. Often, I would muse about how great it would be if I could somehow save and reuse that delightful, symmetrical, rich and beautiful lesson.

These videos come as close to capturing this exciting yet ephemeral aspect of teaching as anything I have ever seen. Each is a complete, portable experience. Dewey (1934) makes a clear distinction between experience and *an* experience. Whereas experience is something we have continuously in life, *an* experience "runs its course to fulfillment" (Dewey, 1934, p. 36). *An* experience is in itself complete. It stands on its own, and, while it cannot necessarily be repeated at will, it can certainly be recalled – along with the message it carries – at will. Each of the videos that I share in this inquiry is a complete object lesson in the realm of critical theory. Each meets the Deweyan description of an experience, and as such, is in its own way complete. Shared videos are, however, portable experiences in a new, exciting way – portable to a much greater extent than recalling an experience in the Deweyan sense. While an experience is something we carry with us and is something we use to understand our world, shared video as an experience allows the sharer to carry the root of an idea. With shared video, we are no longer taking our beliefs from place to place, sharing them aloud in hopes of convincing those around us that they are cogent and meaningful; we can now share the experiences that form these beliefs first hand. By carrying (by way of posting online) these experiences to those in our social networks, those who view them are, if only for the time it takes to view the video, able to participate or at least imagine themselves, in the experience.

As a means of sharing critical theory, shared online video brings us right into the middle of an infinite variety of episodes of struggle – if not from the point of view as one of the oppressed, then at least as a first hand witness. While I, as a man of privilege – middle-aged, college educated, middle-class (at least as an adult), American, white, and

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heterosexual – can never really know what it is like to be among the oppressed, I can walk along side of them for a moment.

Following are nine viral videos that I have found to be cogent to this inquiry. Each has more than one million views and each fits into a curriculum of social justice. These videos have influenced my perception of the world, have given me another way of knowing and are part of a curriculum with which I identify. I share these videos in my social networks as I am doing by sharing them with you, my reader. If you respond to them as I have, I expect you may have experiences that cause you to smile, laugh, become angry, become sad, be engaged, be repulsed, and most of all, think. Curriculum is everywhere.

A Celebration of Globalism: Where the Hell is Matt?

Where the Hell is Matt? (2008) http://youtu.be/zlfKdbWwruY

This video is important to me because of its curriculum of inclusion. Matt

Harding's video travelogue begins by looking like the travelogue many of us would

make: using these exotic places as backdrops and keeping the locals safely at the

margins. Harding's video comes to life when living people join him and dance with him.

Once they share the same space, Harding laughs, dances and often disappears among

them.

The structure and the text of this video are tightly intertwined because for the most part; the text is Matt dancing with locals in front of scenery and a caption that identifies his location. In the absence of any different action, the structure of this video – the type of shots used, camera perspective, casting and how Matt is situated *becomes* the text. The only other notable text is when his behavior is altered: when there is a variation from the formula delineating location, shot, locals, and Matt's behavior.

The video begins with a behind-the-scenes feel; Matt is directing an unseen camera operator where to stand, where to point the camera and to "hold it steady" (:08). Matt begins to dance, with the locals noted at the bottom of the frame: Mumbai, India; Paro, Bhutan; Giant's Causeway, Northern Ireland; Stone Town, Zanzibar; Lancelin, Australia; Lisse, The Netherlands; Christmas Island, Australia; Kuwait City, Kuwait; Teotihuacan, Mexico; and Seljalandsfoss, Iceland. Initially, each shot is for two measures – eight beats – of music. The size of the frame is dictated by the setting. Matt's location – where the hell Matt is – is the object of the shot; his presence in the shot, dancing alone, almost seems superimposed; he is clearly present yet clearly detached. But for the background, he could be anywhere. It is as if he is a character that is moved from page to page in a child's static sticker book about travel. His presence is minimized to the degree that in the last shot of the segment, he is shot in silhouette.

A rapid transition occurs and the shots come eight times as fast as people – presumably locals – enter the shots from the side. In each of these next twelve shots Matt's image gradually becomes smaller as dancing partners rush in.

The next segment comprises the rest of the video, and the remainder of the shots are dynamic and filled with life – it is not, however, entirely formulaic; there are shots of

Matt alone as in the first segment, and there are a couple of shots in which Matt is the only person, in a setting that is rich with movement – a giant wave crashing on top of Matt, a container ship passing through the Panama Canal, dancing with a whale underwater in an aquarium or in the jungle surrounded by wild lemurs on Lemur Island, Madagascar. One of the delightful contrasts in the video is when Matt breaks out of his standard four beat dance move to match the choreography of some Bollywood dancers in Gurgaon, India. Throughout the video, the only time that Matt seems to overtly acknowledge any of the People in the shot are in those shots that include children. His response to the children is consistently pleasure as the children play, dance, laugh and even sometimes mess up the shot (1:39)

All transitions are simple cuts. There is a title – "Dancing" – made up of white letters on a black screen for the first three seconds. Each location in the video is identified with the same font, also in white, at the bottom of the frame. The feel is that of a well-organized amateur video.

Seemingly with a nod to "Where's Waldo?", Matt Harding has spent considerable time travelling around the world. As he visits different locations, he films himself as he dances in front of various landmarks or at least culturally stereotypical settings.

Later, many locals join him. Their joy is infectious. He usually proceeds the same way, meaning he doesn't even seem to acknowledge the people that have joined him (he's already smiling). For the most part, the perspective never changes. Exceptions to this are when he's around those little kids, when he dances with those Bollywood dancers and when he dances in N. Korea. If that's the demilitarized zone, it looks decidedly un-peaceful. Throughout the video, the camera never moves. Harding's

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distance from the camera only varies depending upon the other elements involved in the shot.

Socio-historically, this is a video that is filmed and directed and shot on locations around the world and financed by Stride Gum, a subsidy of Kraft Foods. Harding was originally a video game designer who, at the age of twenty-seven, decided to quit his job in Australia and spend several months traveling around Asia. Matt created a blog, wherethehellismatt.com in order for his friends and family to keep up with him. As he was shooting a location video of himself to put on the website, a friend suggested that he do a characteristic dance of his instead of merely standing at the location (www.wherethehellismatt.com/about). At the conclusion of his trip, Harding compiled the video clips into a single video with a soundtrack, and the video subsequently acquired millions of views: http://youtu.be/7WmMcqp670s.

After his trip, the Stride Gum Company contacted Harding and offered to finance a second trip. That trip covered thirty-nine countries, and that video was viewed millions of times as well: http://youtu.be/bNF_P281Uu4. Harding proposed a third trip and video to the Stride Gum Company. His intention was to make this different from the others in that Harding would engage locals – many of who had emailed him in the past – and invite them to dance with him. That video is the subject of this analysis: Where the Hell is Matt (2008). Harding is an active speaker and has done commercial videos for South African Airways and Visa.

The musical soundtrack to *Where the Hell is Matt?* is a song titled, Praan, by Garry Schyman, a prolific composer of soundtracks for video games, films, television and documentaries. The lyrics are from a poem entitled *Stream of Life* by Rabindranath

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Tagore (Gary Schyman Official Website,

http://www.garryschyman.com/garrymain2.html). Praan provides a beautiful musical

backdrop to Harding's video, and is itself a metaphor for globalism through its blend of

Bengali lyrics and Western popular musical style. Praan is not a piece of music that

Harding found in a moment of serendipity. Schyman was hired by Harding to write the

piece and wrote it as Harding sent him rough cuts of the video while it was in production.

Harding suggested the poem that was the basis for lyrics to Praan (Garry Schyman

Official Website, http://www.garryschyman.com/garrymain2.html).

When I view this video aesthetically, there is a continual challenge to cultural

separatism. Matt's videos seem to come at a time of American cultural isolationism, and

the video seems to fly in the face of the jingoist leanings of many of our politicians –

going back to George H.W. Bush's fictitious "Axis of Evil." It seems there is a narrative

to which many in our culture subscribe is that there is "us" and "other," I was surprised

when those feelings registered with me the first time I watched the video. I felt a twinge

of uncomfortable surprise as Harding joined the female Bollywood dancers in a few of

their steps and stood among the Huli Wigman as they jumped up and down in their tribal

dance. Was it acceptable to do that? After all, that was their dance; what right did he

have to just get right in there and dance along with them? Of course, that was my sense

of separatism; for Harding to get right in there and dance with them was the point.

Harding's dance next to the austere North Korean soldier reflects a situation that

contrasts the others. Whereas in all the other shots Matt's interaction with the locals is

light, fun and cooperative, in the shot of the demilitarized zone, the North Korean soldier

wants nothing to do with Harding. For an instant, we are reminded that there are People

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in the world who want nothing to do with *us*. Not only will they decline to dance with us; they will not even acknowledge our presence when we try to dance for them. A country that Bush included in the Axis of Evil apparently does not think much of us either.

Matt's video – a joyous metaphor of cultural globalization – certainly challenges this notion as the "Other" is seen dancing with him, laughing with him, allowing him to be playful with her children, learning his dance and teaching him hers. One theme of the video seems to be Matt's interaction with these places with emphasis on the people. When there are people in the shot beside Harding, he no longer seems to be superimposed on these settings and landmarks; he blends in instead. Sometimes just his head is visible. He disappears into the crowd, becoming almost indistinguishable from the locals. Their presence includes him, envelopes him, embraces him. Even when he is alone in the shots of the last section, he is still interacting with his surroundings; he is enveloped by the giant wave and he looks leery of the monkeys. Harding is engaging his surroundings, seeing just for a moment what it feels like to break out of his dance in order to hop like a Huli Wigman. His behavior is decidedly unlike the static sticker storybook where the characters are unchanging and unresponsive to their surroundings.

Harding does not attempt to preach, or frame or coach those who watch his videos; he offers up the videos without comment and is for the most part silent in the videos. When a visitor to his website asked Harding the message of the videos, he still avoids preaching and leaves it up to the viewer, saying, "Up to you. I'm just dancing" (question 15, http://www.wherethehellismatt.com/faq.shtml). In the spirit of a true artist, Harding seems to understand – or at least allows for the possibility – that one cannot prescribe an aesthetic experience. I offer that Harding's video is about cultural

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globalization with an emphasis on innocence (children), inclusion, experience, and cultural immersion.

Using joy as his weapon, Harding attacks the convention that people from other cultures should be considered as Other – as outsiders, or savages, or Godless, or any other thinly veiled pejorative statements that simply mean they do not look or act or speak or pray as we do. This video is joyful; it is exalting. I have consistently experienced delight as I have watched this video, and I have viewed it dozens – perhaps hundreds – of times. I recently showed it to a graduate class on media. At least one of the members of the class was affected in the same way that I am. She said watching it made her emotional; she was so touched by what she saw that tears came to her eyes. The class was just a few minutes into discussing it, and she had already planned to show it to her elementary school classes in hopes that she could share that experience with them. It is difficult to know if she will be successful, but I would certainly think she would be successful sharing an experience, even if it was not exactly like the experience she had. This circumstance provides an interesting twist to the idea of a social network. Her elementary children, while likely to have a vastly different set of experiences, may have an equally powerful aesthetic experience if they attach it to their experiences with her as their teacher. While it is unlikely that they will have a base of experiences like hers, they will have experiences with her as their teacher, as someone they trust and depend on. If she offers it to the students as a look inside of her beliefs and values, as something that is important to her, it will certainly offer them an effective way of knowing another way to look at the world.

While the lyrics of the song are quite beautiful, they were certainly not part of my initial aesthetic experience – at least not in a way that involved literal language. While I do not understand any of the words, the sound of the Bengali language, however, certainly contributes to a feel of the blending of cultures. It lends to an overall sense that Harding drew from resources all over the world. It is not just the scenery that speaks of globalism; it is the soundtrack as well that demonstrates a soothing blend of the exotic and the familiar.

This video makes me feel joyful. There is a certain sense of relief and release as I watch this video convincingly portray the world as a place where people are eager to laugh and dance together. It reinforces the possibility that these far away places are not inherently enemies, or Other, or even all that foreign. The curriculum of this video – what I learned – is that the nations and people that I had been indoctrinated to believe were somehow antithetical to our culture were, in fact, very similar to Matt when they met on Matt's little tiny place in the world – the place where everyone is invited to put everything else aside and just dance with him.

The Best Revenge: It Gets Better

It Gets Better – Dan and Terry http://youtu.be/7IcVyvg2Qlo
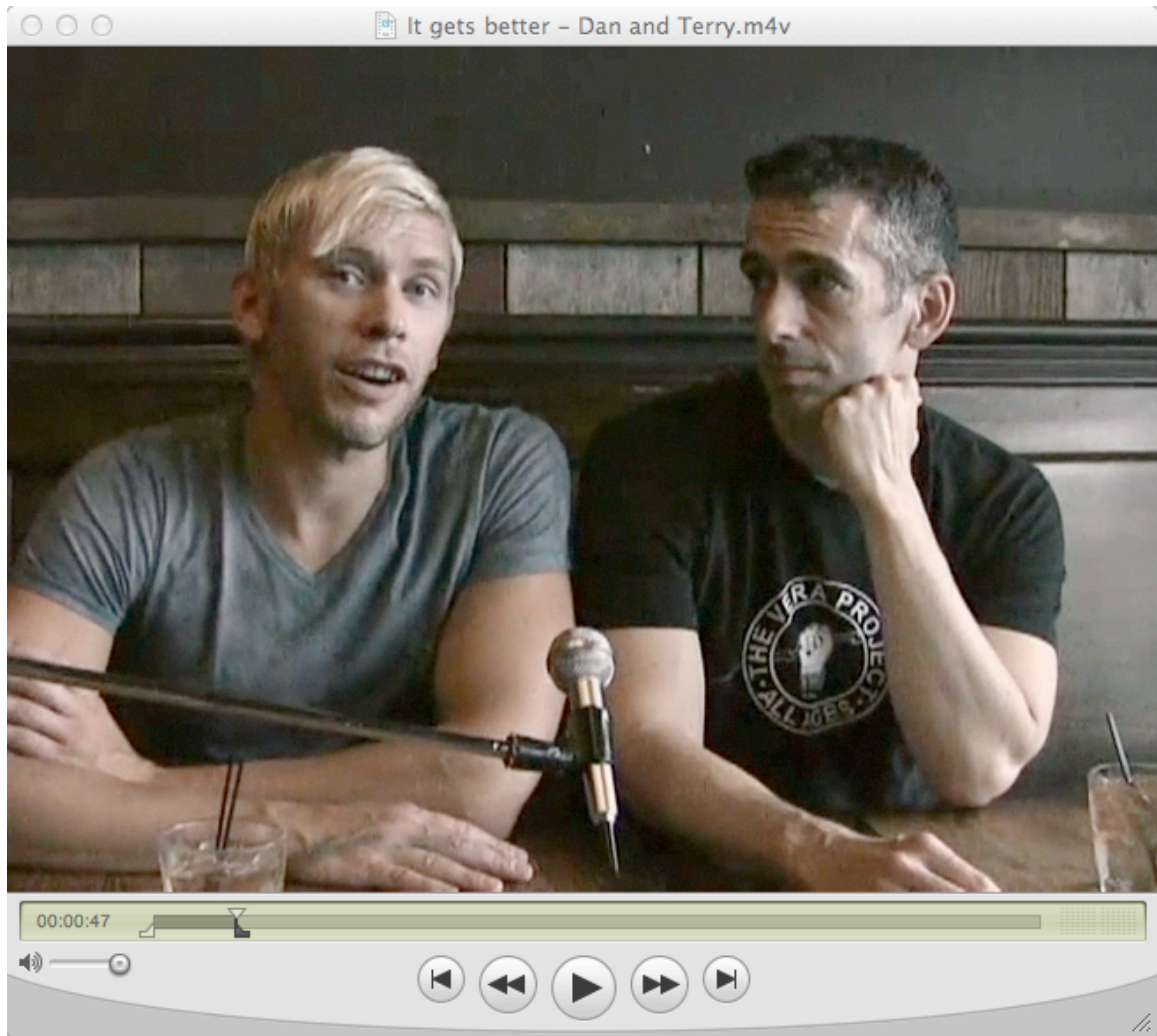
Dan Savage began this project to share a message with gay adolescents that are

victims of bullying, harassment and exclusion: it gets better. He presents himself almost

as the ghost of their lives yet to come, encouraging them to be strong, patient, and secure

in his promise of a terrific life as an adult. This video presents a curriculum that

counteracts a hidden curriculum in school that teaches difference is unacceptable,

attacking those that are unlike us is tolerated and nothing that can be done to help them.

In the text of this video, two men – Dan and Terry – are sitting at a table, or perhaps a booth in a bar or restaurant. The swizzle sticks in their drinks lead me to think they have cocktails in front of them. The tone of their discussion is that of people sitting down and conversing in a relaxed, friendly atmosphere. The men first take turns speaking of their experiences as gay men and coming out with their families, as well as their courtship and subsequent establishment of their own family. Dan speaks of his upbringing as solidly Catholic with no gays in his family and no openly gay people in his school. Dan claims that one of the reasons he was picked on was his love for musicals. The first six minutes or so of the video establish the men as genuine, content, committed gay men who relish their relationship with each other and wish to share the joyous the family life they have together with each other and their adopted twelve year-old son.

Once they establish who they are today, it is clear that they wish to hold themselves up as examples of how good and fulfilling life can be, regardless of how difficult and painful and seemingly hopeless one's adolescence might feel. Dan and Terry do this by sharing some of the terrible treatment they had to endure while in middle and high school.

Terry speaks first of his town, Spokane, Washington, calling it "…a midsized town with a small town mentality" (:30). He relates how he was picked on and bullied. Terry recalls when his parents went to the school administration about his bullying. They were told, "[i]f you look that way, talk that way, walk that way, act that way, then there's nothing we can do to help your son" (:58).

In a close up shot, Terry reports that everything got much better as soon as he got out of high school. He attributes this to not having to "…see the bullies every day…the

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people who harassed me every day, [or] the school administrators who would do nothing about it….[after high school] Life instantly got better." (1:11).

Dan then overtly states both who the intended audience is and the purpose of the video: He tells all twelve, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen and sixteen year old kids that it (referring to life itself) gets better. He promises them that their life will get better and be potentially amazing, but first they must tolerate the conditions they are in right now. Dan is encouraging as he promises that "[y]ou have to tough this period out and you have to live your life so you're around for it to get amazing" (1:39).

Dan then talks about the difficulties that he had with his family while growing up as a gay man. Primarily, they wanted nothing to do with his romantic interests. Dan then notes that he has reconciled with his family, and they how they came to accept Terry, and how Terry's family came to embrace him as well. Terry concludes with, "[w]e're treated with the love and respect we deserve as members of the family" (2:40).

Terry then tells the story of how they met; it is a story of single guys out dancing, ogling each other and swapping corny pick-up lines. They proudly proclaim that they are still together sixteen years later. Terry talks about their adopted son, D.J., Dan joins in, and they brag in tandem about D.J. as any fathers would, trumpeting his intelligence, wit, humor and athleticism. Dan muses that he never thought he would be a father and give a grandson to his parents or a nephew to his brothers and sister. His tone and demeanor seem to indicate a sense of his awe that he has done the impossible.

In sharing a happy memory, Dan recalls the trip that Dan, Terry and D.J. took to Paris. One night when D.J. could not sleep, Dan and the five-year-old D.J. walked the streets of Paris seeing the sights, eating pastries and juice and watching the sun rise

within sight of the Eiffel Tower. Terry says that his fondest memories are the times that

the three of them ski together in the mountains. Terry observes, "[t]hose moments make

it so worth sticking out the bullying and pain and despair of high school" (6:09).

Dan begins the concluding section of the video by paraphrasing from *West Side*

Story: "there really is a place for us; there really is a place for you" (6:56), and offers,

"[o]nce I got out of high school they couldn't touch me anymore" (7:24). Terry's

message to adolescents is, "living well is the best revenge, and, if you can live through

high school – which you can – you can totally live through high school – you're going to

have a great life, and it will be the envy of all those people who picked on you in high

school and middle school" (7:42)

From a socio historical perspective, this video was not only intended to be shared

with at adolescents at risk of bulling; it was also intended to inspire others to make

similar videos and perhaps even to generate empathy for teens as they suffer these terrible

conditions. Circulation of the video was almost a forgone conclusion. Savage already had

a bully pulpit; millions read his advice column, *Savage Love*, making it a social network

in its own right (http://www.kepplerspeakers.com/speakers/?speaker=dan+savage).

It Gets Better was produced in September 2010, and the video was shot with a

wide audience in mind. Dan Savage and Terry Miller are Dan and Terry. *It Gets Better*

was a formal project from the start, motivated by recent suicide deaths of gay adolescent

victims of bullying and aimed at assuring gay teens that their life would improve after

high school. Dan and Terry's video became viral, and as they established their

movement, they encouraged others to tell their stories about how their lives got better on

a website called *It Gets Better Project* (http://www.itgetsbetter.org/). The website is a

rich resource that offers, among other things, ways for

Gay/Bisexual/Lesbian/Transgender adolescents to get help, ways for supporters to get

involved, a source of news items germane to the project, and a link to the vast collection

of videos contributed to the project.

The official timeline of the *It Gets Better Project* begins on July 9, 2010, the date

that Justin Aaberg of Anoka, Minnesota died by suicide

(http://www.itgetsbetter.org/pages/about-it-gets-better-project/). Aaberg was a bullying

victim because of his sexual orientation. His suicide occurred during the summer after

his freshman year of high school. His mother attributes his suicide to the inactiveness

and inability of the school system to protect her son

(http://www.lgbtqnation.com/2011/07/remembering-justin-aaberg-in-the-year-since-his-

death-much-has-changed-much-has-not/).

Savage's video – along with the *It Gets Better Project* – has resonated widely.

Since its inception, over 30,000 videos have been created and have garnered more than

40,000,000 views. Those contributing videos to *It Gets Better* are from all segments of

our culture, and include high profile performers such as Anne Hathaway, Ke$ha and

Sarah Silverman; political figures such as President Barack Obama and Secretary of State

Hillary Clinton; the employees of companies such as Google and Apple Inc.; University

sponsorship of videos by Ohio State University and a personal video by Jim Wagner, the

President of Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia; the casts of the television shows *Glee*

and *House* and the Broadway show *Pricilla Queen of the Desert*, and countless private

individuals.

The role of the mainstream videos, such as those made by some employees of Apple Computer, Inc., the casts of the hit shows "*House*" and "*Glee*", and the one done by the President of the United States are more complicated than the role of those offered by people who submit videos in order to share their personal testimony. First, all of these are commercial entities that only exist to make money (arguably even the President). One must, therefore, question their motives. It is likely that they are hoping for or even expecting a benefit – either to sell computers, raise Nielsen ratings among key demographics or reach out to a targeted population in the electorate. At the same time, the benefits are symbiotic; these entities do have a certain amount of power from which the *It Gets Better* movement will benefit. Apple's fans, for instance, are notoriously loyal, sometimes to the degree that others question their common sense. Viewers of *House* and *Glee* count many fans that not only enjoy the show but also connect with or perhaps admire certain characters as well. Similarly, there are citizens who are influenced by president Obama's personal magnetism; I have noticed that my wife, for instance, has been extra supportive of his policies ever since he sang Al Green's *Let's Stay Together* at the Apollo Theater.

These devotees, fans or supporters are each a social network in their own right, and the result is that the idea behind *It Gets Better* is carried to more People, and with an endorsement that is meaningful to them.

The curriculum of this video is powerful, and the message is something I have received very often: there are fulfilled, content gay people, and becoming an actualized adult, comfortable in her own skin and living on her own terms is worth waiting for. The informal approach to the video makes watching it a more intimate, personal experience.

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As I viewed it, I listened to Dan and Terry's story as individuals rather than representatives of a business or even a charitable organization.

In my aesthetic interpretation, I found it interesting (and profoundly disappointing) that Dan and Terry never implied that the school could or would be of any help to adolescents suffering this type of crisis; in fact, their stories were about *tolerating* high school because it could possibly all be worth it. Terry's reflection on high school notes that after his parents reported episodes of harassment to the school officials, the message was, as Terry notes, "…if you look that way, talk that way, walk that way, act that way, then there's nothing we can do to help your son" (:58). Terry's recollection is important because it not only reflects the school's unwillingness to help; it also reflects the school's cultural and institutional *inability* to help. It is a case where it is possible that the attitudes of the dominant culture clearly override principles of social justice. The school declared itself unable to protect Terry because he was unable or unwilling to act in a way that is accepted (or perhaps demanded) by the dominant culture. In other words, the school caved to the pressure of the dominant culture even though it was clearly the wrong thing to do. Terry's ultimately damning statement of school is when he says, "…honestly, things got better the day I left high school" (1:07). Terry was not protected or defended; he endured. When the administration says things like "…there's nothing we can do to help your son" (:58), The school has failed because the culture would not allow it to succeed. The administration has given up, even though they know who the victim is, who the bullies are and what the inappropriate behaviors are. In this case, it is the culture that is driving a behavior that the school cannot (or will not) control. It is as if the administrators have given up on that battle because they feel that they cannot punish

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everyone, and virtually everyone is involved. Bullying gays is socially acceptable, as established by mob rule. Regardless of the mission that school should have or even purports to have, it cannot do what the dominant culture does not accept, and apparently the culture does not accept school as a place where everyone can learn in safety regardless of their sexual orientation. Dan speaks of how his family came to accept him – something the school never did. Perhaps it is because his family loved him, and all the school did was give him standardized tests.

Ironically, what Dan and Terry proclaim as triumphs – the acceptance by their families and the chance to raise a family of their own – are things that one should expect from our culture as fundamental rights. What they consider to be triumphs are just to be treated like anyone else.

There is a common notion here between the Matt Harding video and this video by Dan and Terry: both reject the dominant culture's notion of the Other as a threat and demonstrate that rejection as they live a peaceful, joyful existence. Dan and Terry's victory is won quietly. It is done without combativeness, or anger or aggression; they simply ignore the oppressive convention. At the same time, there is a contrast between Harding's video and It Gets Better: Harding overlooks difference; Savage celebrates it.

Although it may occur as a byproduct, the *It Gets Better* videos do not seem to be devoted to overtly changing the culture. Instead, the purpose of the videos seems to be to offer a sort of emergency response to the conditions that exist in school for gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender adolescents. By acknowledging the failure of school to effectively address these children's needs, the project proposes a plan to survive by tapping into one's own resources and inner strength and will. Like the hero in the story

in the beginning of chapter two of this inquiry, these adolescent children are encouraged to get themselves through this period of crisis on the strength of their own guile and ingenuity as their supposed rescuers (the school) flail around poking poles into the wrong snow banks. Engineering their own escape takes them out of the role of victim and into the role of crafty hero.

The video's message to these adolescents is wait; don't give up, just wait it out. While this passive strategy seems to lack strength and do nothing to rise up against victimization, it invokes a sort of martyrdom – not an entirely unlikely possibility given Dan's mention of his strong Catholic roots (:01). Just as a martyr is thought to go on to a better place, Dan and Terry promise that these adolescents will go on to a better place as well, manifested in the notion that "living well is the best revenge" (7:40). Also in a martyr-like manner, the notion of outlasting your enemies has a certain power. Dan and Terry seem to promise that, although difficult, such treatment can be endured and great rewards wait at the other end of the journey. In effect, when these adolescents heed the message to be patient, rather than give up, fight back, or tell the authorities, it marginalizes the bullies by not following their rules of engagement in a cultural system that gives the bullies a massive advantage. It removes these adolescents in crisis from a game they can never possibly win.

There are several places in this video where the school is indicted for its lack of action. Terry's remark that things got better the moment he got out of high school was certainly an indictment of his school, as well as his depiction of school as a place of pain and despair. Terry's message is somewhat gentler, but the same nonetheless: he had to get out of school before it got better, implying that the school did not protect him. Dan

even notes that while he found it possible to reconcile his sexual identity with his parents – even after his mother forbade him from bringing men he dated to the house – the glaring omission was that acceptance never came at school.

This video does more than encourage these adolescents in crisis; it also seems to be a space created for gays to declare their victory over their high school experiences. Further, it serves as a safe space for mentoring – a space where adolescent lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered people in crisis can look for guidance. There are advantages to this: first, the mentoring can be done without the inevitable distractions (or worse) that would occur should such a mentoring program be attempted at school. It hardly makes sense that school, the scene the abuse, would be a nurturing place for a confused adolescent her to learn about herself. Second, it is a space that is accessible and welcoming and safe for closeted gays. As a school administrator, my heart aches for bullied gay students who have yet to come out; they are forced to keep all that emotional turbulence bottled up inside of them without the supports that family or friends might have to offer. At the same time, they are often still victimized by their peers because of their demeanor or affect. It is a painful existence: children who have not yet completely come to terms with who they are, who lack the supports of those who they depend upon who are not yet aware of their sexual identity, and yet bullied and taunted about that same identity that they have, for the time being, chosen to keep as a private matter. The space created by *It Gets Better* is a place they can go to privately, yet witness – and thus experience – a lively discourse about the life they can anticipate once they have weathered their present circumstances. It is a place that does not exist anywhere else and may never have existed before.

It Gets Better is done in a way that is engaging and resonant, and perhaps also meets the need for an ever-growing community of gays to declare their victory over their oppressors. *It Gets Better* is a message of encouragement to adolescents who are struggling and documentation that many people like them are living well.

Trixster Meets AutoTune: Bed Intruder Song

Bed Intruder - http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VKsVSBhSwJg

Antoine Dodson rides a character arc of ridiculed, admired, popular and back to ridiculed as a result of an interview he gave to a local television station about his sister's attempted rape. This video is from the popular segment, when his interview was transformed into a hit song.

I will share the socio-historical setting of this video before I discuss the other aspects because arriving at the video was the culmination of a string of events of which many viewers were aware. An engineer/musician pair of brothers known as the Gregory brothers, took the news segment of the rape attempt of a young woman named Kelly Dodson and turned the interview into a song by creatively editing the video and putting pitches to the words by using an auto-tune audio processer. The conversion to music somehow makes Dodson's statements poetic and poignant. Further, the song is gently humorous, and affectionately retains Antoine Dodson's pique.

The original video (http://youtu.be/EzNhaLUT520) is originally a news report about the attempted rape – which has received over 40,000,000 views in its own right. It is likely, then, that the interviewer was a professional journalist; the interview was shot with a broadcast quality video camera and edited by a professional video editor using professional, broadcast quality editing equipment and/or software.

The text of the video, taken from a professional production of the interview makes Antoine Dodson's segment of the interview even more quirky and edgy by contrast. Antoine Dodson, perhaps in a state of shock or a state of rage, speaks openly, flamboyantly and candidly. He seems completely unselfconscious, poised and unaffected by the camera. He seems focused on telling his story and unconcerned about the fact that he is likely to end up in a television broadcast. Often, he looks into the camera and speaks to the viewers instead of his interviewer, seemingly breaking the traditional fourth wall.

The original television news piece reported that an apartment in the projects is broken into, and a resident of the apartment, a young woman named Kelly Dodson, was

nearly raped. Her brother, Antoine Dodson, ran to her aid. He prevented the rape but was

unable to catch the intruder. In the segment that is broadcast on the local news, the

victim and her brother are interviewed, and both speak derisively of the intruder. Kelly

Dodson refers to him as an idiot (:42). Antoine Dodson looks into the camera and

announces to the world that "Obviously, we have a rapist in Lincoln Park. He's climbing

in your windows, trying to snatch your people up" (1:03).   Occasionally speaking as if to

the intruder through the television camera, his interview is powerful yet humorous.

Through the camera, he taunts the intruder, saying, "[y]ou are so dumb". Dodson does

not seem surprised something like this has happened, and complains about living in those

projects, noting that they are not safe – "hide your kids, hide your wife" (1:12). Antoine

Dodson then wryly questions the sexual preference of the intruder: "…and hide your

husband cuz they're raping everybody out here" (1:14).

When the video was originally shared online, Antoine Dodson was mocked

(http://perezhilton.com/2010-08-23-antoine-dodson-profiting-from-

mockery#.T23PZ3g7zxY). Given the context of his race, the identification of his sister

as a teen mother, their location in the projects and Dodson's effeminate affect,

stereotypes about race, poverty and sexual identity were reinforced and even enriched by

the details of the story and the memorable quotes that Antoine Dodson provided. His

unpolished way of speaking and effeminate mannerisms made Dodson look silly. It

seems that millions laughed at him and at his expense.

As a result of the videos – particularly the music video – Dodson rode a wave of

increasing popularity. The video and the song and Antoine Dodson's words went

through many incarnations; as the song sold wildly on iTunes, Antoine Dodson

performed the song along with the Gregory brothers on a number of award shows, and Dodson sold T-shirts with his likeness and quotes from the interview. I recently watched Antoine Dodson perform the song with the Gregory brothers on the BET Awards and Dodson's star seemed to be fading. As he performed, there were shots of people in the audience who appeared to be mocking him, and the performance itself was unpolished and weak – especially notable because it was a music awards show.

For the text, the Gregory Brothers took Dodson's funny, engaging, self-confident and often witty portions of the interview and transformed them into a music video. The video was constructed by cutting, splicing, repeating and auto tuning the extracted material from the original piece then adding some stock video and superimposing it on a musical background track. The re-mastered music video passed the number of views that the original news piece received and had garnered over 98,000,000 by February 10, 2012.

In my aesthetic impressions, I find that the Bed Intruder music video is delightful and rich with the empowerment that Antoine Dodson expresses. The re-engineered video seemed to retain the wittiness and edginess of the interview, but somehow made it less likely to illicit scorn. My impression was that the Gregory Brothers' repurposing of Dodson's interview emphasized the strong, original and poetic elements of what Antoine Dodson said. Neither Antoine nor Kelly Dodson is acting in the role of victim in the conventional ways that one might expect to see on the news; there is no crying, and they do not speak of being injured. Even though they are afraid, they do not express any fear for their safety. Instead, they appear to talk openly and candidly speak of the episode. Antoine Dodson speaks freely of the rampant crime in their community, and both Antoine and Kelly Dodson scold and taunt their attacker – perhaps in the manner that

they would even without the presence of a television camera. Antoine Dodson is particularly scornful of the attacker, noting that not only did he expect him to be caught at some point, but that they were turning the tables on him; they were now looking for him, turning him into the one who is pursued.

Antoine Dodson's announcement – delivered with a mocked demeanor of shock – that there is a rapist in Lincoln Park – appears sarcastic. It implies that crime is rampant in the Lincoln Park housing project and such attacks were commonplace or at least inevitable. Dodson's announcement challenges a perception I recall from my youth that that the projects are a good, safe place to live as long as you are poor and black.

This video stares down a couple of myths of which I was aware, the first myth being that black women are oversexed and perpetually "asking for it", and therefore cannot be rape victims. This is supported by at least one women's advocacy website (http://crunkfeministcollective.wordpress.com/2010/08/20/antoine-dodsons-sister-on-invisibility-as-violence/). Further, the video debunks a myth that I can recall going back to my childhood in the 1960's that the projects are safe, as long as you "belong there." That particular myth is double edged: It cements African Americans into the projects "for their own safety," and keeps non African-Americans away from the projects – and thus mixing with the marginalized because it is only safe if you are Other.

Dodson is gay: http://voices.washingtonpost.com/postpartisan/2010/08/the_smarts_and_strength_of_ant. html. That point is rich in meaning to me in this video, and its richness increases as I reflect upon it. Although gay, Dodson insightfully plays on the fact that our culture is homophobic in at least two ways – in the event that someone would dismiss the intruder's

break in to be acceptable because of the socioeconomic, racial or gender status of his sister, he warns the viewers to hide their husbands as well. While women and children might be on the margins, Dodson's statement acknowledges that it is far less likely that a danger to men might be overlooked so easily. Second, Antoine Dodson seems to question the sexuality of the intruder, and implies the intruder is gay seemingly as a challenge his manliness. This taunt, proffered in spite of the fact that Dodson himself is gay is a classic trickster tactic of introducing a paradox (Durwin, 2004). Dodson's taunt also reminded me of one of the ways that we tried to manipulate each other as junior high school students in the 1970's by ascribing whatever behavior we wished to curtail in our friends as "gay". Evidence of "gayness" was ascribed to choice of television shows we watched, the music to which we listened, the way we dressed, talked, ran, expressed anger, threw baseballs, ate french-fries, and spit on the ground to name just a few things. For fear of being labeled as gay, we all would quickly straighten up and fly right, even – ironically – those of us who eventually came out as gay.

The strongest parts of Antoine Dodson's defiant message are deftly carried over to the music video. He disregards the conventional beliefs of the dominant culture, and he delightfully manipulates some of the conventions of the oppressive dominant culture by turning its logic upon itself. He explodes a myth of African American sexuality and the perception of the supposed safe haven that the projects offer for African Americans. His monologue capitalizes on the homophobic nature of the dominant male. Again in classic trickster fashion, Antoine Dodson paradoxically makes no effort himself to subscribe to its heteronormative precepts. Finally, Antoine Dodson ratchets up the urgency of his and his sister's crisis by telling the men watching that they are equally in

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danger and that no one is safe. He appeals to their fears by indicating that not just the marginalized are being victimized; the oppressors are threatened as well.

Unlike *Where the Hell is Matt* and *It Gets Better*, Antoine Dodson does not challenge the dominant culture by ignoring it; he challenges it by using it rules and prejudices against his oppressors. Dodson acts in the classic role of trickster, fitting many of the characteristics that Durwin (2004) notes. One such characteristic is the practice of breaking taboos, such as he did in his announcement in the interview that he is now pursuing the intruder as well as his practice of speaking directly into the camera. Another characteristic that Durwin (2004) notes is that of acting as a destabilizing force. One of the ways that Dodson does this is when he openly and publicly speaks of the crime in Lincoln Park. Durwin (2004) further notes that tricksters are marginal characters usually living on the boundaries of society and that they "introduce paradoxes, blur boundaries" (p. 7). Dodson demonstrates this beautifully when he questions the heterosexuality of the attacker even though Dodson himself is gay.

A message of social justice is beautifully shared because the dominant culture is trapped in a conundrum of its own making. As I viewed this, I cheered for Antoine and Kelly Dodson as they refused to submit to being seen as victims, refused to give in to the one-sided rationalizations of the dominant culture yet all the while refusing to submit to any stereotypical roles.

Witnessing Her Last Breath: Her Name Was Neda

Iran, Tehran: wounded girl dying in front of camera, Her name was Neda
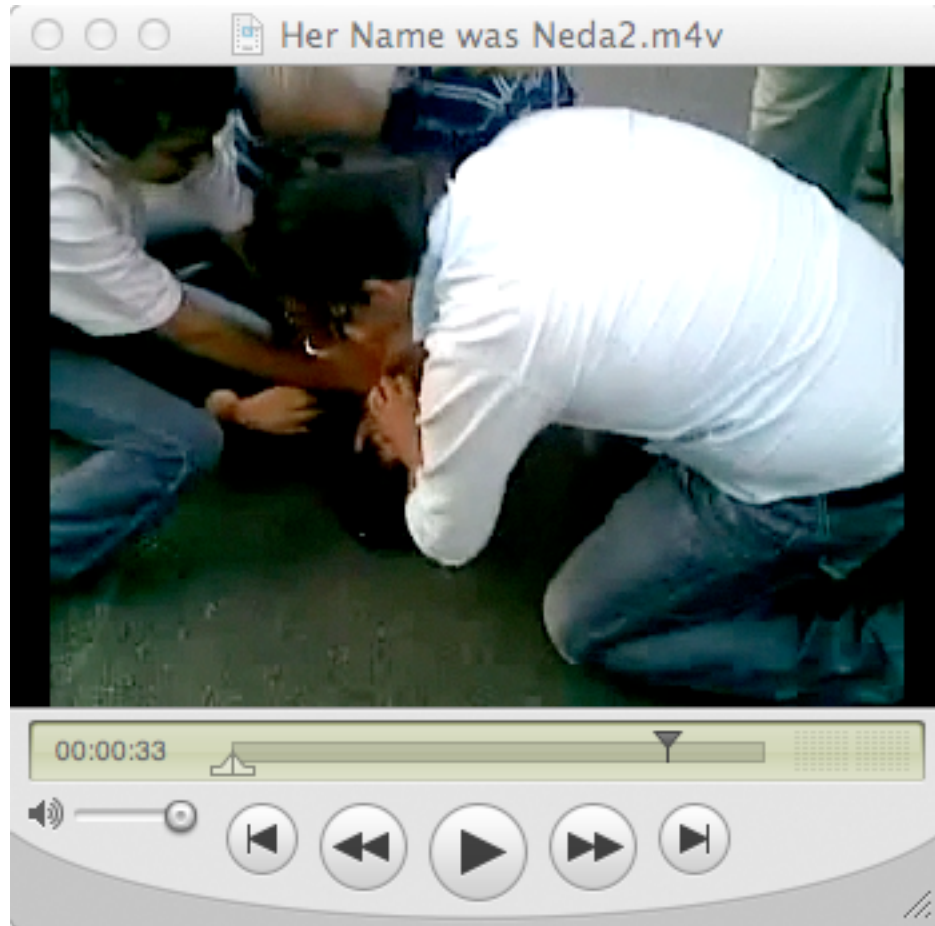
This video is a chronicle of less than one minute of the Iranian Green Revolt. It is a curriculum that examines the manifestations of oppression and the brutality that can be exhibited in an attempt to silence the People's voices. The video also has a subtext regarding the role of gender and what I see as portrayal of veiled woman as a metaphor for innocence, fragility and defenselessness.

The text of this video begins as camera moves toward a woman who is being eased to the ground by two men. She is wearing a black blouse, jeans, tennis shoes and a

traditional Muslim head covering referred to as a hijab. There is a large red stain on the

ground under her that appears to be blood. Several men are speaking excitedly, and there

are traffic noises in the background.   As she is laid on the ground, the men kneel on

either side of her, and the camera, now at her feet, moves around her right side to focus

on her face and the hands of the men who appear to be offering her aid. Her eyes roll

back and to the right, and one man is pressing down on her upper chest with the palms of

his hands while the other touches either side of her face with his hands. Blood begins to

come from her mouth and nose and the men's speech becomes louder and sounds more

agitated. More men crowed around her, and a woman's scream is heard. As the other

men kneel, the camera moves around her head to her left side the shot is kept on her face.

A man puts his hands on her face, seemingly in attempt to staunch the flow of blood from

her nose. Her eyes roll back, and blood pours from her nose and mouth. The yelling gets

louder, and the clip abruptly ends.

The socio-historical factors teach that it was an agent of the government that shot

the woman, identified as Neda Soltan, during the uprisings in Iran following the

presidential election in June, 2009. The perspective of the video is that of an onlooker

rushing in as she falls after being shot. As the camera moves in, the viewer watches her

die. The video was recorded on a cell phone, which gives the video a powerful sense of

gritty reality and first-person feel. The video was uploaded to YouTube the same day

that Neda Soltan was killed.

The poster, who uses the YouTube username FEELTHELIGHT, had posted two

other videos about the protests in Iran, but neither has ever had more than a few thousand

views. This indicates, perhaps that FEELTHELIGHT was in search of compelling media

to show the righteousness of the protests. The video of Neda Soltan's death was a powerful example.

The events that precipitated this killing were citizen protests over recent Iranian presidential elections, called the Green Revolution. Social media was considered to be a critical factor in the organization of the protests, with the Washington Times even referring to it as a "Twitter Revolution" (The Washington Times, 2009). The Green Revolution was a catalyst for the later – and perhaps still ongoing, depending on whom you ask – revolts across the Middle East referred to as the Arab Spring (Kurzman, 2012).

While this video most certainly offers a curriculum of social justice, it does not mean that all of these stories have a happy ending. The Green Revolution was crushed. The Arab Spring that it helped to inspire created considerable instability in the region: dictators have been overthrown in Egypt, Libya, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Kuwait. Further, the United States has weakened or defeated two of Iran's enemies in the region – Iraq and the Taliban. As a result, the Iranian government is – at least for now – the big winner from all the tumult that resulted from the Arab Spring (Goodspeed, 2011). The successful toppling of dictators in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yeman, and the threat of the same in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Kuwait, has, ironically, shot Iran to the top of the list of countries in the Middle East that are stable. Where it was once one of the weaker countries in the region, it is now one of the most powerful. Inadvertently, the Green Revolution is at the roots of Iran's ascension to power. While the example of the Green Revolution was inspiring the citizenry in neighboring countries to rise up – many successfully – the oppressive Iranian government that the original Green revolutionaries had hoped to vanquish instead crushed its opposition. The Iranian regime's ability to

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successfully fend off a public uprising while its neighbors has resulted in Iran becoming among the most powerful. It is, in a sense, an international manifestation of the notion of survival of the fittest. Not only did the most fit survive; it became stronger in the process.

The Neda video won a 2009 George Polk Award in journalism, awarded by Long Island University. It was the first time in the history of the awards that a winning piece was produced anonymously.

One interesting twist was the attempt by the government to undermine this video. Whereas I would offer that the hegemonic forces in the United States are, for the most part, ignoring or accepting the impact of Viral Video, Iran – or individuals sympathetic to the Iranian government – staged an attack upon the evidence to discredit the video of Soltan's death that was at least three-pronged. There was a movement that said the murder was staged in order to bring attention to the riots and put an innocent face on the victims of the government's oppressiveness: http://youtu.be/9hdEwKImeiI. Proponents of that story believe that it concludes with Soltan being assassinated by her own companions after the staged murder. That story – particularly with that last angle – makes the protesters look even more heartless than the government. Another subsequently shared video is of the same event taken from a different angle. In that video, much of the "evidence" produced by the government's analysis of her death – such as a bottle of fake blood that she poured upon herself – was debunked. A YouTube video that addresses this is here: http://youtu.be/SPsrGXtAng0. A third theory was floated by the Iranian government proposing that she was murdered by the United States Central Intelligence Agency (Malcom, 2009).

Ultimately, the veracity of the video is not the measure of its power. Un:dhimmi (2009) observes, "The authenticity of the video, and the source of the bullet, cannot be verified independently but that hardly matters any more because millions of Iranians and hundreds of millions of others around the world firmly believe the story to be true" (para 8). The power of this video lies in who shared it, with whom they shared it, and the effect the experience had upon them.

Using the same video to report an event that contradicts the original poster's report – as those who attempted to discredit the video – is a variation on the act of repurposing. It does not repurpose the original video, but rather repurposes the context – and therefore the meaning – of the event by offering a different interpretation. That attempted counter theory supports the falsity of the idea that a video can be an objective, unquestionable piece of evidence; the same video was used by both the protestors and those supporting the government position as evidence.

Aesthetically, I found this incident horrifying and the video electrifying. At the risk of stating what should be obvious, it is very difficult to watch the life slip from this young woman who is surrounded by people who wish to help her, yet are helpless to do so. Earlier in this inquiry, I noted that one of the purposes of art was to provide a different and sometimes more complete way of know that one could achieve by spoken language alone. This video is a terrible yet fascinating example of this. This video was originally posted without translation, secondary audio program or subtitles; everything was spoken in one of the indigenous Iranian languages. Being an English-only speaker, none of the words spoken in this video were understandable to me. I suspect, however, that understanding the language of the people in the video would have done little to add

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any depth to my experience as an observer. Much like my aesthetic impression of *Where the Hell is Matt*, even though I did not understand any of the literal language text, the sounds have a tremendous impact on the tone of the video. I did not need to understand any specific words; the panicked staccato as they first attempted to revive her said enough. The moans, the anguished wailing and the pure grief that followed her death were torturously explicit. I responded to the language of the event in a nonliteral way and as a result was not constrained by what was said; I was moved by the mood and the grief and the fear that is likely to be inexpressible in words alone. I have watched this video with English subtitles, and I cannot remember any more that a word or two here and there. I know that I will never forget the sounds those people made as they watched her die. Watching Soltan die was watching a beautiful innocent die, and viewing her death filled me with feelings of anguish and helplessness.

I found this video extraordinarily rich in powerful metaphors, perhaps *because* I could not understand any of the spoken language. I suspect that, because the language did not have any meaning to me, I may have focused more on the other elements of the video – the sights and movements and sounds – and knitted those together as symbols in an attempt to make sense of this crime. I saw Soltan's murder as metaphor for a number of things. First, and possibly most obviously was the way it was used by the original posters. Soltan's death is symbolic of the brutality of the Iranian government. It is confusing and angering to see a theocracy murder innocents, as it appears to have happened here. While I am aware that horrible things have been and probably always will be done in the name of God, it is still shocking for me to see a government that is founded upon religion to treat its citizens so brutally. The death of Soltan, while

senseless, effectively demonstrated what the present regime in Iran is capable of when faced with being overthrown. It certainly makes me suspect that Iran is hypocritical in regard to its actions. Perhaps it is a theocracy in name only, using religion as a convenience to control the People rather than as a foundation of culture that saves them.

Second, it is a metaphor for how much of the Middle East treats women. Soltan presents as a modern Iranian woman. Un:dhimmi (2009) notes that in the beginning of the video, "[h]er long black cloak falls open to reveal Western jeans and sneakers below. On the surface, she is dressed in traditional modest hijab – a black cloak and black scarf; she is, at least to the observer, a typically conservative Iranian woman. Beneath that, Soltan is wearing jeans and running shoes; her traditional Iranian veneer covers that she is a practitioner of Western culture. As she dies, her headscarf – the last part of her traditional modest garb – falls away. In her death, she is fully modern and freed from the oppression of the theocracy. Soltan's end is a metaphorical comment on religion that turns the notions life and death and the afterlife inside out. The popular notion of the death of a believer would be freedom from the world as one enters an existence with her creator. Soltan's demise says precisely the opposite: In death, she is freed from the oppression invoked in the name of her creator.

The video is symbolic of the end of the green revolt as a result of what I perceive to be the West's encouragement yet inaction. The West – through the press and official releases – whispered their cheers from the sidelines as we watched the Iranian People take to the streets. Once they reached the streets, however, the People, like Soltan, were on their own. Little real help was proffered even though it was believed from early on that the revolt would have a greater chance of success if it were supported by the United

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States (Gershon, 2010). Like the Green Revolution, Soltan stepped into the streets and was attacked. She expired while those around her begged for help.

This video stands in stark contrast to *Where the Hell is Matt*, *It Gets Better* and *Bedroom Intruder* because there is no joy; there is no victory. It does not show that right beats might, or justice always finds a way to triumph, but rather the opposite: The dominant culture, in order to assure hegemony can be so brutal and arbitrary that a defenseless woman is killed unjustly, seemingly as she attempts to cross the street. The power of this video lies in that it is proves the brutality of the Iranian government. It makes us witness to the government's commitment to crush the rebellion even by resorting to committing acts that are inhuman, unjust and indefensible. This video is a demonstration that hegemony is difficult to overcome even when the practices are unjust and those in power are corrupt. It is also an appeal for more cultural globalization – that we are our brother's keeper even when our brother is represented by a woman who does not use the same bible as we do. The video is much darker than Where the Hell is Matt even though at its core the message is similar. Soltan did not need someone to dance with her; she needed someone to stop the bullet from tearing into her chest and exploding her heart.

Also unlike the other videos, this video includes an oppressive cultural stereotype that of the defenseless, helpless, frail woman. As I viewed the video, I felt no urge to challenge the stereotyping, perhaps because the aesthetic effect of the video depends upon it: Soltan is not a figure of strength; rather, she is a fragile treasure that is callously destroyed. The incident is more horrible because it capitalizes on the gallant yet

oppressive cultural belief that women are to be protected. The impact of the video seems to depend upon the viewer's sense that a woman is somehow less capable of taking care of herself than a man would be. Soltan, as the beautiful, young, innocent woman tapped into my culturally established sense of responsibility to protect the helpless.

I found it intriguing that the video stirred up feelings of man-as-protector of women in me, yet I have none of those protective feelings when I note that Soltan is victimized over and over in the conscription of her death for political purposes. While I note that logical incongruity, I shall leave its deconstruction for another time or another place.

Our Education Over Here in the U.S. Should Help the U.S.: Miss South Carolina

Miss Teen South Carolina http://youtu.be/qQdhMSEqhfg

This widely viewed video offers a curriculum that examines the demeaning nature of beauty pageants from a different angle than I had become accustomed. Instead of discussing the objectification of women in these pageants, it exposes the charade that these pageants are interested in the contestants' intelligence.

This video takes place during the interview segment of a beauty pageant. Taken from a live broadcast, it shows he first contestant of the segment in a sequined evening dress and wearing a banner with "South Carolina" on it. The contestant, presumably a Miss South Carolina Something Or Other is asked a question about geography: "Recent

polls have shown that one fifth of Americans can't locate the U.S. on a world map. Why

do you think this is?" (:02). The questioner is identified by a graphic on the screen as

Aimee Teegarden, and both questioner and contestant share a split screen. The

contestant's answer is as follows:

> I personally believe, that U.S. Americans, are unable to do so, because
> uh, some, people out there, in our nation don't have maps. and uh… I
> believe that our education like such as in South Africa, and the
> Iraq, everywhere like such as… and, I believe that they should uh, our
> education over here, in the U.S. should help the U.S. or should help South
> Africa, and should help the Iraq and Asian countries so we will be able to
> build up our future, for our. (:59)

The video is an excerpt of the live broadcast of the 2007 Miss Teen USA Pageant.

Two thousand seven was the final year that the Miss Teen USA pageant was televised

(Pageantlovers, n.d.), and the 2007 Miss Teen USA Pageant's ratings were the lowest in

the pageant's history. As an interesting side note, the finale of *America's Got Talent*,

which was broadcast that same week, received the highest ratings for any show in the

past three months and the *America's Got Talent* series was that summer's most watched

series (Los Angeles Times, 2007)

Perhaps that contrast shows that our culture had (finally) become weary of such

foolishness as attempting to ascribe meaning to a thirty second answer about such things

as world events or the never ending narrative about the crisis in education. The American

viewers' shift of attention to *America's Got Talent* may even indicate that our culture is

becoming more interested in the traits of talent and ability and competence – even as it is presented on a show that could never be called *America's Got Taste.*

Some time after the pageant, Lauren Caitlin Upton, the casualty of this mess, signed with Donald Trump's modeling agency and not coincidentally, Trump is the owner of the Miss USA brand. At the time of signing, Upton hoped to command daily fees of up to $25,000 (Horne and Janelle, n.d.). Upton's Mother was grateful that she has the opportunity, given the harsh attention she's received: "I would like for people to judge my daughter on more than a question, and one answer. There's so much more to her than that" (Horne and Janelle, n.d., para 10). Perhaps should have directed Caitlin to a pursuit other than beauty pageants where judging women on the one-question/one answer format is literally written into the script.

One article from that same year seemed to sum it up in the first sentence: "The future is looking uglier for televised beauty pageants" (Vasquez, 2007). While I consider Upton to be a casualty in this circumstance, I do not believe that she was the victim here; the victim is the pageant system. Upton was a sympathetic character to many; The Today Show had Upton come on the show soon after the Miss Teen U.S.A. Pageant in order to give her a chance to hear and answer the question again. Upton gave a perfectly meaningless but understandable answer and Ann Curry, along with much of the *Today* Stage crew applauded like mad when she finished. All snarkiness aside, there is evidence that many people took this opportunity to watch Upton answer the question successfully; the *Today Show* video of her redemption (http://youtu.be/fQKNvPn3V-8) (such as it is) has acquired over four million views.

Jimmy Kimmel did an exceptional humorous deconstruction of her pageant answer: http://youtu.be/UnQRddkk2to. His commentary was a parodic attempt to show that Upton's answer was, in fact, thoughtful after all. It succeeded in showing the whole concept as trite and contrived.

Aesthetically, I was first struck by the setting; a teenager in an evening gown having thirty seconds to answer a question about curriculum that was posed by an evening-gown clad woman with a name that sounded like that of a porn star. As ridiculous as it all looked, it got much worse as Miss South Carolina – Lauren Caitlin Upton – proceeded to attempt to answer. Upton's answer showed little about her understanding of culture or even geography, but it spoke volumes about the structure of answers expected in the interview segment of a beauty pageant. Seemingly wracked with nerves, all Upton seemed to do was take hot button words – likely to have been deliberately preselected for their anticipated effect – and fling them like water balloons at the pageant judges. There was no evidence of any critical thinking of any kind; instead, Upton attempted to create just the right verbiage for a good answer: her globally conscious lobs included children who were deprived, international boiling points like Iraq and South Africa, and even concern for entire continents, stated as "Asian countries." As amazed as I was by Upton's disastrous answer, I was equally amazed that no one – not the audience, not the judges, and not even Mario Lopez, the former teen actor serving as Master of Ceremonies – was shaken by Upton's poorly executed sortie.   On subsequent viewings, I have searched Lopez's face for some clue that he was struggling to retain his composure. I saw nothing to indicate this was so. Having seen several episodes of his television series, *Saved by the Bell*, and having some sense of his limited

acting ability, I concluded that it was probably not brilliant acting on his part; there were

no gasps, guffaws or squirming because no one was surprised that it had occurred.

Everyone there – all the pageant folk, if you will – acted as if they knew that just

happened sometimes.

I found the whole thing terribly funny, but at the same time I was clear that I was

not laughing at that poor teenaged girl; the entire mess was much bigger than her

mutilated answer. She was merely a casualty in this battle in the gender war. I was so

wildly amused because in an instant, the whole pageant mystique was showing evidence

of collapse. In that moment, the pageant finally buckled against the accusations that date

back to what was perhaps the first attack on the oppressive and demeaning nature of

beauty pageants – the legendary1968 Miss America Protest. I felt that as a result of that

moment we could finally stop pretending that these pageants had any societal or

educational value. We could finally stop giving credence to the argument that these

shows somehow benefit women because they award scholarships to the winners.

Pageants do not breed intellect, or refinement, or poise or the understanding of world

affairs. Pageants breed contestants. They breed contestants whose focus is on winning

pageants, and these intellectually inbred skills that are necessary to win are demeaning

and oppressive to women. Improving as people is not even on the radar.

There is a vivid contrast between the perception and treatment of women in this

video and the video of Neda Soltan's murder in the streets of Iran. In Iran, women are

weak, helpless and often treated inhumanely. The video of Soltan depended upon the

image of woman as a weak and helpless character. The disconnect of the Miss South

Carolina Video is founded on the fact that in our culture we at least like to pretend that

women receive the same treatment and respect as men. The debacle in the Miss South Carolina Video seems to be a confirmation that the notion of women as object is an idea that is so inane and far from reality that it cannot even sustain itself in a beauty pageant, which is arguably its most revered showcase.

Justifying or perhaps just understanding how I can accept such opposing positions in the two videos is somewhat challenging. After much pondering, I concluded that which I had already established: that each video is both an aesthetic experience and object lesson. While the videos both exist in my mind as parts of a curriculum of social justice, the videos are not bound to all of the tenants of social justice all of the time. They both can be true. I take them as they are; a young woman walking the streets in Iran embodies woman in that culture – one who has oppressive legal, religious and social responsibilities forced upon her. Every facet of every video that I find to be resonant does not have to line up with my values. The value systems of the cultures in which the two videos are set have little to do with each other, so they cannot and should not be held to the same standards.

Is Anyone Watching This? Don't Tase Me, Bro

University of Florida student Tasered at Kerry forum http://youtu.be/6bVa6jn4rpE

In an allegedly open forum, a college student was dragged off by campus police and shocked by a Taser seemingly because he asked an inappropriate question. The video has a curriculum that discusses elitism, democracy, and freedom of speech. The video also calls into question the notion that elected officials are servants of the People.

At a speech given by Senator John Kerry at the University of Florida in 2007, an undergraduate student named Andrew Meyer was arrested while at the microphone

during a question-and-answer session with 2004 presidential candidate. The text of the

video begins as Meyer asks Kerry about his membership in the Skull and Bones Society,

the secret senior society at Yale of which both Kerry and his opponent in the 2004

election, George W. Bush were members. Standing behind Meyer are a man in a suit and

two campus police officers. After Meyer speaks for a moment or two the man in the suit

gestures by moving his hand vertically across his throat in an apparent signal to cut to

power to Meyer's microphone. The officers then step toward Meyer, and Kerry is heard

saying, "That's alright; let me answer his question" (:15). Meyer begins yelling, "Excuse

me, what are you arresting me for? Is anyone watching this?" (:16). As the police

officers continue to try to subdue Meyer, the crowd can be heard murmuring and a

number of those in the audience applaud, presumably in support of arresting Meyer.

Meyer continues to successfully resist the officers' attempts to handcuff him. As they

lead him away, he begins to yell for help. As the officers lead him to the exit Meyer

attempts to break away and is pushed to the ground.   Six officers are seen around him as

they once again attempt to handcuff him.   As Meyer continues to yell his protests; one

officer says, "Stop resisting" (1:16), and another is heard to say, "You will be tased if you

do not comply" (1:19). As Meyer continues to protest and the police continue to hold

him down and yell orders, Kerry can be heard in the background, his voice seemingly

unaffected by the hubbub. Kerry seems to be trying to calm the crowd and return the

focus to the meeting; the student and the officers, however, drown his words out. One

Kerry ad-lib is heard: speaking of the student, Kerry says, "[U]nfortunately, he's not

going to be able to come up here and swear me in as president" (1:38). Meyer continues

to protest and continues to plead to the crowd for help. Meyer seems to get more

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desperate and panicked, saying "Get the f--- off me – I didn't do anything! Don't tase me, bro!" (1:55). The clicking of the Taser can be heard at 1:59 and Meyer begins to scream in pain. At this, protests can be heard in the audience, a woman can be heard screaming, seeming to get the officers to stop. One young man seated in the row right next to where Meyer is tased by the officers can be seen doubled over in laughter as the Meyer screams in pain. Meyer is brought to his feet by the officers and led out of the building.

The video was posted to YouTube. While shocking, it got much of its attention from its informal title, which is a phrase that Meyer uses to plead to the officer brandishing a Taser: "Don't tase me, bro!". The phrase has tones of naiveté, desperation, and fear and is also darkly humorous. There is an alternate video (that is also viral) of the same incident from a different perspective:

http://youtu.be/SaiWCS10C5s.

Looking at the socio-historical angle, I saw that it was reported that the Meyer was engaged in activities crafted to cause mayhem prior to the beginning of the video, and there is evidence that Meyer planned in advance to cause a disruption at the meeting (Jett, 2007). Reportedly, Meyer's conduct in the meeting was combative; he demanded to be allowed to ask a question, and the police had begun to escort him from the building earlier but was allowed to stay once Kerry intervened on his behalf. Kerry intervening on his behalf in order for Meyer to ask a question is not in the video as it was posted. If it were, it would likely have clouded the simplistic message of the video that those in power are either jackbooted thugs or disconnected millionaires.

Kerry was the Democratic Party nominee for president in the 2004 presidential election. He was the opponent of George W. Bush, the sitting president at the time. Up to the time of this video, the Bush Administration had received criticism when it seemed to abandon the classic American narrative that it was a nation that treated its prisoners of war humanely, seemingly adopting a torture-them-if-it-will-get-intelligence posture (Charges and Evidence, n.d). It is ironic then that Kerry, the representative of Democratic Party and what many believe is the party concerned with human rights and social justice tolerated the treatment of this man as he was subjected to what was arguably an act of torture.

The video sympathetically portrays this man's arrest and his being publicly subjected to a charge from a Taser gun for merely asking a question. Certainly part of the message is Kerry's disconnect from the situation; as the UF Police were subduing the man, the officers seem to ignore Kerry asthenic protests and worked diligently to silence the student. Meyer says, "What have I done?" and "What did I do?" over and over and never receives an answer – certainly not from the police officers. He then begins crying for help as the stunned crowd looks on. When told that he would be shot with a Taser if he continued, the man pleaded with the officer, saying, "Don't tase me, bro".

There is also conundrum of sorts that becomes apparent. The purpose of the video is presumably to document Meyer's helplessness and subsequent mistreatment by the authorities. Yet I wonder how oppressed and helpless is Meyer when he creates a message that millions of People end up seeing. Through the interconnection of social networks his power to reach so many is substantial. He was oppressed in the video, but posting it and getting millions of views is one way of breaking out of that oppression.

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The oppressed man, then, is raised up by the virality of his video. It is not necessarily why he is being watched, but rather that he is being watched at all that is empowering. Andrew Meyer spoke, and millions listened.

Finally, those who looked on in horror were shocked at his treatment, his shock from the Taser, his ignored pleas to those whom he considered to be his brothers, and the apparent obliviousness of the guest speaker. There is considerable irony in that Kerry, as a member of the Democratic Party, should be considered an advocate of everyman rather than oblivious to his plight, albeit the plight of that moment or the plight of his class and culture.

Aesthetically speaking, the initial tone of the video causes unease; the open microphone at the town hall meeting has two police officers just a step or two away. The image calls into question how open the open microphone is. Are the police there to keep the speaker from asking uncomfortable questions? The proximity of the officers to the microphone certainly casts some doubt upon how much free speech will be tolerated at this forum.

There is also a sense of the ridiculous; did the police really swoop in when he asked Kerry about his membership in a college club? Did he really get dragged away for that? It smacks of elitism; the student wants to know about something the rich people do, and he is silenced – not because he is prying into something important, but because he is prying at all – asking questions that shouldn't be asked.

I am reminded of when my daughter was a little girl and we enrolled her in lessons at the Descending Gently School of Ballet. As the two dozen four year olds prepared for their presentation of Giselle, the teacher (and ballerina dancing the title role

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of Giselle) was Madame Fortier. Madame not only taught the children how to dance; she took an equally serious responsibility in teaching the students how to behave with sophistication; Mme. Fortier knew all of the rules of the upper crust. The rules did not come with explanation or justification; Ms. Fortier would simply make this proclamation: "That sort of thing *just* isn't done." Going forward, the children knew the rule even if they did not know *why* it was a rule.

The Skull and Bones Society seems to have one main purpose: to establish who was the top of the top. It distinguishes those will be in control from the merely powerful. Alumni of The Skull and Bones Society have included presidents, members of the presidents' cabinet, and the founders of national magazines (Leung, 2009). Their rituals and practices are secret. If you are not an insider, you will never know and should not even ask. That sort of thing just isn't done.   I find the whole thing difficult to understand, perhaps because I am not of the cultural elite that keeps club memberships secret.

Meyer is a pathetic and somewhat comic character. His protestations seem to imply that he is owed some sort of answer as to why he is being taken into custody. The opposite seems to be true; the more he protests, the more he demands an explanation, the more force seems to be used against him. What he believes to be his right to question is not shared by those in control; to them, his questions are just evidence that the police need to intensify their grip on him and accelerate his removal.

The setting is loaded with irony. The town hall meeting is a symbol of democracy. It is supposed to be an event where we can question our leaders: a place where our voice is heard.   That is certainly not the case here. My impression was that

the student was dragged away not because he was threatening, or disrespectful, but because he asked a stupid question. His foolishness would have been better tolerated than squashed.

Nevertheless, his cries for help and demands for an explanation seem embarrassingly naïve. It is as if everyone there knows what he does not seem to know: that Meyer's freedom of speech is controlled by who is answering the questions and who is conducting the meeting. Screams for help to your fellow citizens bring murmuring and derision at best. The phrase, "don't tase me, bro" is pathetically ironic. Meyer sounds as if he's appealing to those who he believes to be his bros on the campus police force. Clearly, they are not his brothers; they work for the elite. There is no solidarity between Meyer and the police officers. As Meyer speaks, the police officers barely listen to him because they are looking past him to their superiors for the signal to silence him. They are under the control of the elite as well. Once given the signal, they are prepared to bind his hands and use weapons against him. He does not have any brothers; he is completely on his own.

Kerry is able to keep is image as a man of the people because he doesn't have to get his hands dirty. He even gets to protest the man's arrest by saying that he'd like to answer his question. I noticed that Kerry did not stick up for the man or demand his release, however. It is hard to see why Meyer is being tased. Is it an attempt to silence his voice? Is it an attempt to marginalize him and his questions? Meyer's crime seems to be that he is a pain in the ass. That is hardly a Tase-able offense, although it might have something to do with why Meyer only garnered one eighth as many views for his appearance on the Today show – an appearance that was marked by, an overt lack of

regret the presence of Meyer's lawyer and the absence of Ann Curry's supportive applause. Overall, the interview did not have the tone of redemption that Upton's appearance did.

The audience response is mixed; some look on with amazement, others amusement and yet others, horror. The setting was almost surreal; a man was being held down by four police officers while the politician – seemingly disconnected from the people he is supposed to represent – nattered on as if the entire incident was not happening. Throughout much of the video Kerry's voice was a low-pitched, garbled, meaningless collection of sounds. It is, perhaps, reminiscent of the voice of the adult in Peanut's cartoons or Ben Stein's voice as the unnamed economics teacher in Ferris Buhler's Day off.

The question that precipitated the arrest was a reference to the "Skull and Bones Society", a secret society of which both he and President George W. Bush were purported to be members. Meyer was certainly thought to be a paranoid conspiracy theorist by some; his implication was that Kerry's membership in the Skull and Bones Society had something to do with his defeat to Bush in the 2004 election. There is a tacit accusation that somehow Kerry's allegiance to a fellow member of the society was stronger than his devotion to country or his desire to become President of the United States. Meyer invoked the name of the Skull and Bones Society, and he was subsequently dragged off. That is a question left unanswered by the video: Was Meyer onto something?

Boys Don't Like Pink Stuff: Riley on Marketing

Riley on Marketing http://youtu.be/-CU040Hqbas
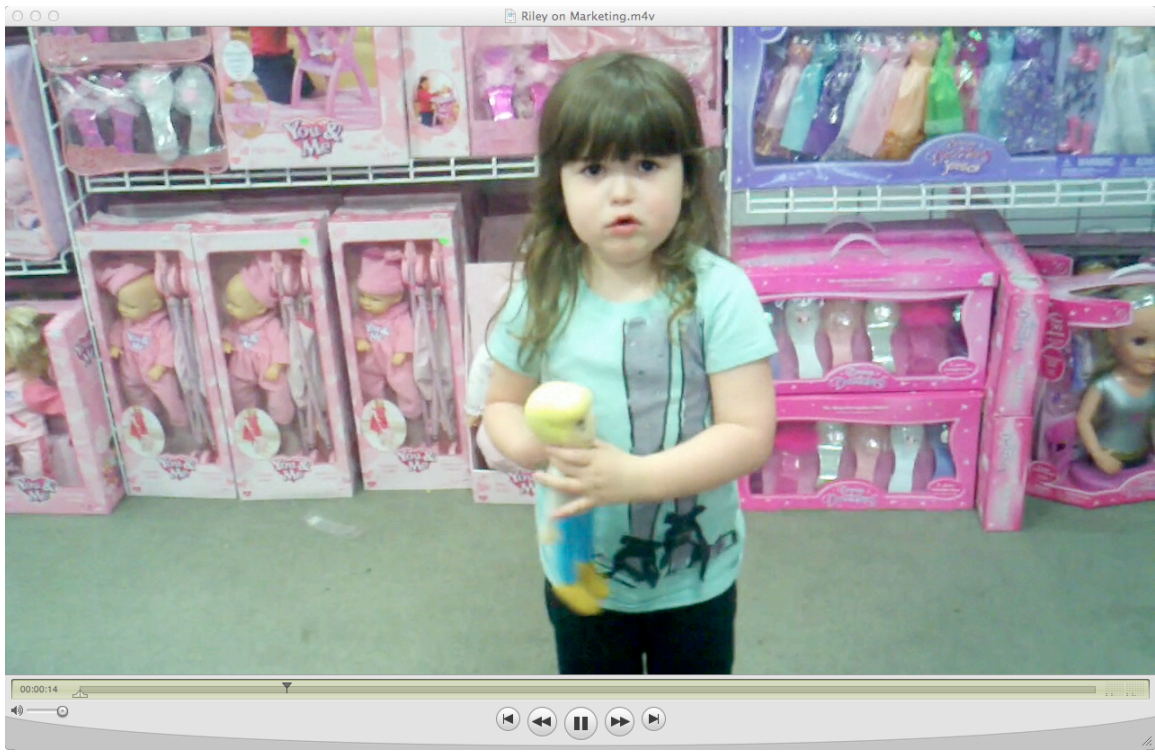
When a little girl asks her father a question in a toy store, she initiates a conversation about gender roles that cuts deeply into hegemonic practices. By asking simple questions and pointing out the obvious, her curiosity is simple, naturally childlike and very powerful.

The text of *Riley on Marketing* is set in a Toys 'R' Us store with a little girl named Riley, who is standing in front of shelves containing dolls and doll clothing displayed for sale. She is holding a doll and is wearing a graphic t-shirt with a ballet motif. As the video begins, it appears that Riley has reached the complicated realization that girls have to buy princesses, and boys get to buy superheroes. She is so frustrated that she even strikes herself on the head as she makes her case. Initially, it appears that

she is lamenting that she is limited to buying toys designed for girls "pink stuff" as she calls it – when she would like to buy stuff for boys, which she refers to as "superheroes". As she speaks, Riley seems to realize that something is amiss; the constraints are not reciprocal because the acculturation and desires of the different gendered children – generally are not reciprocal: "girls want superheroes and the boys want superheroes. The girls want pink stuff and the g… and the boys don't want pink stuff" (:11).

Dad tries to imply that boys have equal interest in both "superheroes" and "pink stuff", but Riley isn't buying. Riley blames the market, saying, "The companies who make these try to trick the girls into buying pink stuff…" (:30).

Riley also seems to realize – or almost realize – that while the girls like both types of toys, the boys don't like the girls' toys. Riley's dad coaches her a bit, but the appearance of the video is that the camera was turned on to record Riley's realization of gender inequity.

In spite of what appears to be Riley's father's best attempts, the conversation is still loaded with the language of gender inequity: while dad says, "if the boys want to buy pink, they can buy pink… Riley says, "The girls *have* to buy pink stuff" (emphasis added).

Riley on Marketing was uploaded to YouTube by her father to his YouTube video channel, http://www.youtube.com/user/dbarry1917. The video is relatively primitive; slightly better primitive than a low quality cell phone video but without the polish of an overtly commercially produced video. The video is shot in Point Of View with a man – who is presumably both Riley's father and the camera operator – occasionally making comments or asking questions in order to help Riley clearly state her concerns.

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Looking at the socio-historical setting, it is not remarkable that children talk to their parents about the toys they desire. There was, however a certain resonance to this video, as evidenced by over three million views. Further, it was certainly thought to be an issue worthy of the general public's consideration when Riley's video was played on CNN: http://www.cnn.com/video/#/video/bestoftv/2011/12/27/exp-riley-toy-rant.cnn. Apparently, that piece was so compelling that Riley appeared on the same show on CNN the next day to be interviewed on Ali Velshi:

http://www.cnn.com/video/#/video/bestoftv/2011/12/27/exp-outfront-with-ranting-riley.cnn.

The video of a little girl noticing a glaring gender inequality in our culture is powerful. One of the ideas that Riley seems to have grasped is the different ways that boys and girls are reared in regard to gender and how it clearly manifests itself in toys. The website www.pinkstinks.co.uk is dedicated to "Challenging the culture of pink and giving girls inspiration to achieve great things" (line 2). Toys are often gendered active and passive, with active or action fantasy toys typically intended for boys and with typically passive, or domestic fantasy toys intended for girls (Blakemore and Centers, 2005). This practice reinforces stereotyped gender roles which, given traditions and hegemonic forces, work to the disadvantage of women.

Riley is not entirely discouraged from playing with superheroes, but it is certainly not encouraged by product placement. The main point of her monologue seems to be that the toys are gendered based on their location in the store – pink stuff in the girl's section of the toy store and superheroes in the boys' section. So, although the stigma for girls to play with superheroes is relatively small, Riley must first cross into the boys' section to

even look at them. Riley notes one point that I find especially interesting; that although girls are allowed – albeit with some reluctance from the culture – to at least dabble in active toys, it is not reciprocal; it is frowned on for boys to play with the pink stuff, and Riley knows it.

That said, it could be offered that while both genders suffer from gender stereotyping and woman have a long history of gender stereotyping combined with being oppressed by the male gender, the *boys* suffer some deprivation from this practice, even though heterosexual boys are not oppressed. While women are socialized passive, caring and empathy are punished and starved in men. While the deck is surely stacked against women in traditionally aggressive and assertive professions like law or business, they are still in the game. That is not quite so evident for men; there are woefully few childhood play circumstances where I can imagine a boy playing in the role of caretaker with what I would consider even a reluctant acceptance by our culture. The ability to be caring and nurturing is absent in the toys with which our culture directs them to play. It is easy to see how that would justify oppression later. My own brilliant twenty-year-old daughter reminded me of this when she said, "[f]undamentally, women are better people than men" (Camille Hankins, personal communication, February 6, 2012). Sadly, I believe her; that statement makes so much sense when one considers that nurturing has been starved out of my gender's toys – and by extension, our imaginations and perhaps even the ideal of the adults we aspire to be.

Riley on Marketing is an entirely different approach to the issue of gender than the Miss Teen South Carolina video. In this video, Riley is a hero; she is not going to let this go unchallenged. Unlike Miss South Carolina who nearly burst into flames trying to

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juggle her understanding of world events, the sad state of education, the expectations placed upon her as a person in this demeaning treatment of women, Riley is focused on resisting the path that seems to have been set for her.

Riley on Marketing teaches that pointing out oppressive practices is a grassroots way to address the oppression of women, and it can start when we are young. The world is full of practices and conditions that are oppressive, yet because they have been right in front of us for years, we are blinded to them. Riley's father had the right idea; he drew her out on her beliefs and helped her clarify her thinking as she made those observations and expressed her frustrations.

Miss South Carolina was, as I noted earlier, a casualty who did the opposite of what Riley did. Whereas Riley was questioning the entire system, and taking nothing at face value, Miss South Carolina tried to work within the system but it was so broken that she just happened to be there when it collapsed. Riley's message seems to be, "you do not have to take it", whereas Miss South Carolina's message seems to be, "Look at what happens when you take it." Most interesting to me is that Riley points out an interesting twist to gender identification and the gendering of the objects in our lives: there is greater room for masculine behavior than there is for compassionate behavior. Anyone can be a superhero, but be careful, guys – you'd better not get caught with the pink stuff

Boys Shouldn't Play With Pink Stuff: Transgendered Woman Beaten in a McDonalds Restaurant

Whaaaaat!?! This Is Fxcked Up: Tranny Gets The Beats In McDonalds In Baltimore & Starts To Have A Seizure! (Jumped By 14-Year-Old Girl)

http://www.worldstarhiphop.com/videos/video.php?v=wshhiHb913Lf4TpU4q5m
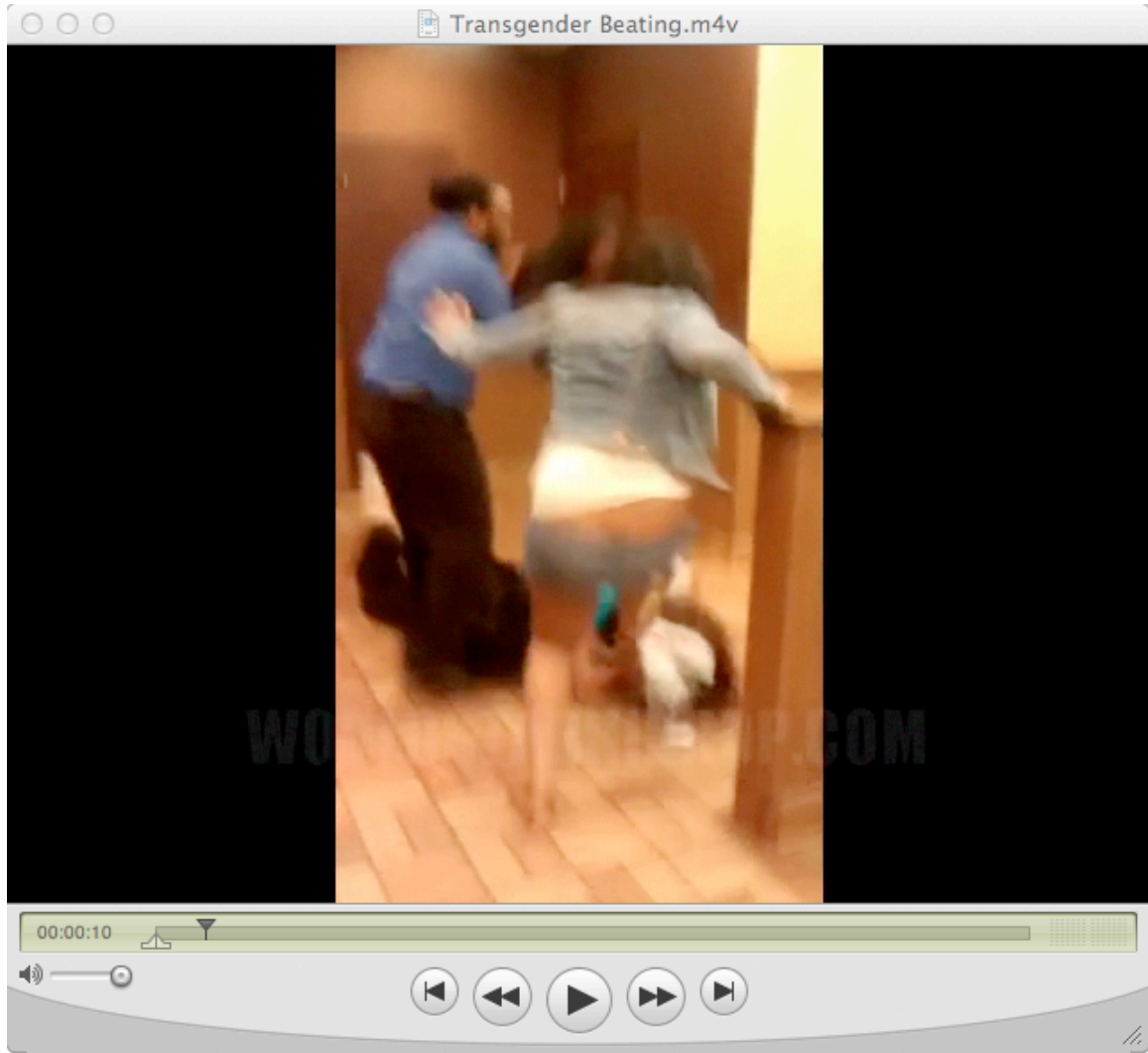
I like to think that I am an enlightened person. As a result, I thought that I understood the plight of the People among us that have had gender reassignment surgery. This video showed me otherwise. The brutality that this transgendered woman suffers in

an iconic American restaurant poses a curriculum about acceptance, difference, gender roles and gender identification.

The text of this video begins as two young African American females – one in white shorts, the other in blue shorts –are dragging a white female out of what appears to be a McDonald's restaurant restroom, presumably the woman's room. The female in white shorts is dragging the white female by the hair, and the white female appears to be holding her hair between her scalp and the hands of the person dragging her. The female in blue shorts is following behind her, attempting to stomp and kick the victim as she is dragged away. A male intercedes, and the female dragging the woman lets go of her hair and walks away. The female in blue shorts continues to stomp and kick the female. When the male turns his attention to her, the female in white shorts returns and begins kicking her as well. The male eventually pushes both of the females away. The white female remains sitting on the floor for several seconds, and the camera remains on her. There continues to be yelling, and a male's voice is heard to say, "stop, stop stop stop" (:30). The man enters the shot and walks between the camera and the white female who is still sitting on the floor. He bends over to pick something up, and as he does, the female in white shorts enters the frame to kick the white female again. The camera then changes position to record the female in white shorts as she confronts the white female yet again. A man's voice is again heard saying, "stop stop stop stop" (:45). The man in the blue shirt again approaches the African American females and directs them toward the door. The African American females leave the restaurant.

There is a cut – seeming to indicate an undetermined amount of time – and the shot picks up again with the female in white shorts again attacking the white female.

Hair flies, and the white female appears to begin to successfully fight back. With that, the female in the blue shorts enters the fray, punches the white female several times, grabs her hair and begins dragging her across the restaurant.

A middle-aged white woman then attempts to separate the females. They begin yelling at her, and the white female is seen wrapping her arms around the woman's leg. The camera briefly pans the dining room of the restaurant and at least three McDonalds's employees are seen standing by and watching. One of the employees briefly attempts to intervene, but seems to quickly give up and walk away. The middle-aged woman is pushed several times by the female in white shorts. The man in the blue shirt appears in the door and pulls the two African American females out of the door. At the same time, the white female begins having a seizure.

A voice behind the camera – presumably the person recording the event – notes that the white female is having a seizure and begins asking for someone in the room to call for help. The camera operator also encourages the African American females to hurry and leave before the police arrive. When one attempts to reenter the restaurant to retrieve her cell phone it appears that one of the McDonald's employees retrieved it for her. The video ends with the white female on the floor, bleeding from the mouth still in the throes of a seizure.

I find this video remarkable because it illustrates two things to me: the twisty path that a video can travel from inception to virality, and the seeming inability of a corporate giant to make decisions that are based on justice and fairness. The path that this video travelled is from one end of the social spectrum to the other – at amazing speed. A McDonald's employee named Vernon "Charm" Hackett, who captured the

beating on his cell phone, originally posted the video. He seems to establish himself as siding with the attackers when an off-camera voice – presumably his – advises the attackers to leave before the police come. Hackett subsequently posted the video to his Facebook page. It was picked up by the World Star Hip Hop website (http://www.worldstarhiphop.com/videos/video.php?v=wshhiHb913Lf4TpU4q5m). The viewer commentary about the video is mixed; some who comment support the attackers and others support Polis, the beating victim.

The victim is Chrissy Polis, a transgendered female. She was attacked, dragged from the restroom and beaten when the two females discovered her in the ladies restroom. Presumably, the two females believed Polis to be a transvestite rather than a transgendered woman.

McDonald's initial statement was, "[w]e are shocked by the video from a Baltimore franchised restaurant showing an assault. This incident is unacceptable, disturbing and troubling," (NewsCore, 2011, para 15). The failure to identify the role the McDonald's employees played is troublesome, problematic and misleading. In addition to failing to identify the role their employees had in the assault, it does not appear that McDonald's initially took any action toward the employee. My search shows that the restaurant only acknowledged Hackett's separation from the McDonald's restaurant five days later (Ali, 2011). By then, there had already been attempts to encourage an outpouring of complaints to McDonald's (http://www.bilerico.com/2011/04/transwoman_severely_beaten_at_baltimore_mcdonalds.php).

The comments, and more interestingly, the media back-and-forth were an energetic discourse and a dynamic curriculum that examined the meaning of transgender, the meaning of being a transgendered person in our culture. The discourse was broad and complicated; it was about transgenderism, race, gender and tolerance.

Aesthetically, the camera represents our own eyes – or, more accurately, the eyes of Hackett. We are standing in his footsteps. The jittery, swiftly moving style adds to the realism; it is much like how we would look at such a situation. The comments that Hackett made during the video quickly separated me from him. Those were not the comments that everyman might make; Hackett seemed to be on the side of the attackers, and expressed through his words and actions that the beating was justified, defensible and deserved by Polis. A posting on his Facebook page supports that he blamed Polis (The Smoking Gun, 2011, para 8). Throughout the assault, Hackett was looking on, remarking with amusement as the black females seeming were trying to kill Polis. None of the McDonald's employees appeared to show concern for justice or even Polis' safety. As the two continued their beating on Polis, the white male manager – the most privileged person in the video – only seemed concerned with pushing the problem out of the door. It is as if that through some twisted logic the assailants believed that they were protecting or maintaining their culture by beating Polis and driving her away; that, in their minds, Polis' crime of being – being alive, being in public, being in the ladies' room – necessitated their assault on her. They were, perhaps in their minds, protecting the family atmosphere of the place. The callousness of the McDonald's employees, the way Hackett encourages the assault and the brutality of the assailants frames Polis as a victim in my perception – one who is horribly abused and worthy of my concern, pity and sympathy.

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In my socio-historical analysis, it is clear that this video resonated with more than one social network. Hackett, the original photographer was affiliated with – and offered assistance to – the females who beat Polis, the white female victim. In his Facebook posting shortly after the attack, Hackett identified Polis as a man dressed as a woman (The Smoking Gun, 2011, para 8). The sharing site worldstarhiphop.com posts dozens of videos, but they are typically humorous clips, music videos, or some other type of entertainment. I believe it was originally posted to entertain those who visit the website by seeing Polis get what the assailants thought to be a deserved beating or merely to satiate a desire to see violence. Nevertheless, news websites posted a link to the video, indicating that it is perceived to be in the public interest as a news item. Advocates of the transgender community seized the video as a very effective representation of the abuses the transgender population has to withstand. The public umbrage over the incident was substantial; the website change.org hosted a petition that accumulated over 120,000 signatures in approximately nine days (Jones, 2011).

In a statement that is clearly not supported by the behavior of the employees who stood by as the beating occurred, McDonald's posted the following on its website: "Nothing is more important than the safety of our customers and employees in our restaurants. We are working with the franchisee and the local authorities to investigate this matter" (Fenton, 2011). McDonald's response was not reflective of any concern for Polis, or concern for the transgender community, or even the contribution it could make toward creating a more just world; rather, it was a non-statement that merely reflected the obvious and seemingly (to me at least) crafted to not offend anyone involved as the story continued to mature.

The company seemed locked into making the binary decision of whether to fire or not to fire each employee based on his response (or lack of response) to the beating. The only formal announcement was that Hackett no longer worked there. The fate of the other employees is unknown; McDonald's merely stated that decisions would be made about the conduct of the other employees as warranted. (Ali, 2011).

There was a subsequent violent incident at a McDonald's restaurant in Greenwich Village, New York City. In that incident, two women accosted a McDonald's cashier after he questioned the authenticity of a fifty-dollar bill they used to pay for their food. They argued with him and cursed him and one of the women slapped him. Both women then went around the counter, presumably to attack him.

The circumstances around this incident vary greatly from the circumstances surrounding the earlier attack on Polis. In this second incident, the cashier, Rayon McIntosh, was an employee who, unlike Hackett, remained at his post. Also unlike Hackett, McIntosh did not become part of the fray as a voyeur, camera operator or ad hoc lookout. Instead, McIntosh was arguably doing his job; he expressed doubt that his restaurant was receiving proper payment for its products and was attacked by the customers when he confronted them. Once the two women got behind the counter, McIntosh protected himself; he struck one and then the other with a metal tool used to scrape and clean the grills upon which McDonald's cooks their food. The video indicates that he would stop hitting them and then resume striking them if they tried to get up.

McDonalds did their best to try to get out ahead of this public relations crisis. Unfortunately, the company seemed unable to exercise any thoughtful judgment in their response. Seeming to ignore the fact that their employee was attacked and defending

himself, and also seeming to forget that their statement regarding the Polis incident pledged their concern for their employees' safety; McDonald's distanced itself from the employee, stating he "no longer works at the restaurant" http://articles.cnn.com/2011-10-15/justice/justice_new-york-fast-food-beating_1_cashier-cell-phone-video-women?_s=PM:JUSTICE – the identical words used in regard to Hackett's earlier separation from McDonalds.

The two situations were drastically different. In the Polis episode, the employee was clearly not doing his job while he was moving around the dining room recording the beating and assisting and protecting the assailants. McIntosh, on the other hand, was at his post, doing his job and was looking after the company's financial well being when he was attacked. The attack upon McIntosh occurred where customers are not allowed and in fact, his attackers had to enter the serving area by climbing over a counter to reach him. McIntosh's use of force, while difficult to watch, only resumed if either of his attackers attempted to get up, continue their attack or flee. In court, McIntosh was vindicated; all charges were dropped and his attackers were charged and convicted.

McDonalds did not learn anything from one beating to the next because regardless of what we may hear, corporations are not people, my friend – they have no institutional sense of right and wrong, what is just, or how to raise up – or even protect – the oppressed. Instead, every decision that the McDonalds Corporation makes is based upon making money.

I offer this later video as perhaps an exception to my principal premise. While I argue that curriculum is what it learned, and Viral Videos are curriculum, it is should be noted that that not everyone who views the video learns something. One could be just

about certain that the McDonald's management and legal staff deconstructed the Polis video. When I watched the Polis video, I saw that it is rich in curriculum about transgendered people and what they may face in our culture. The video encourages empathy, outrage and a measure of pity for Polis by offering an aesthetic experience that shows us what she must be prepared to tolerate as well as the closed-minded, belittling, violent reactions that some people feel about transgendered people. I do not know if the McDonalds Corporation understood any of that. Frankly, as I watched the McIntosh video I am doubtful that it did. My view of the McIntosh video mainly taught me that the McDonalds Corporation is incapable of caring about social justice and common decency, regardless of what its press releases might say. McDonald's is primarily concerned about selling burgers, and its method is to follow a formula that dictates the specifications of the building, the uniforms the employees wear, the number of pickles on each sandwich and the exact words that the cashier is to say when a customer approaches her. There is no corporate conscience that discerns right from wrong, or considers circumstances or context.

The reason, in my opinion, that McDonald's response to the second incident is so odd is because corporations cannot learn, at least not in the way that a person can. If anything, McDonald's poor response to the McIntosh incident illustrates the need for past experience to make meaning out of these new aesthetic experiences. McDonald's, as a corporation, has no capacity to develop these experiences this way. Its response makes that clear.

McDonalds cannot, therefore, be expected to make thoughtful socially responsible judgments. Judgments such as those require the ability to observe, to compare, and to

project oneself into another's condition. Judgments such as these require experience, and the use of that experience to decide how to proceed in similar experiences. The company's response to the second video clearly indicates, not surprisingly, that McDonald's did not learn anything about justice. In many ways, McDonald's responded to the situation with McIntosh as it did with Hackett, even though their incidents had little in common. What they did have in common – the situation was violent, the employees and the perpetrators were black, and that it was on video – was what McDonalds seemed to use to determine that they were similar. What the decisive factors should have been were not, however, what the situations had in *common*, but what made the two situations *different*.   There was only one meaningful thing that was common between the two events and that was that the incident was an act of violence over which the restaurant had little control. In the case of the Polis incident, perhaps more should have been done to protect Polis, but the fact that the woman bystander tried to intervene and was punched in the face indicates that it was dangerous for an individual to attempt to assist Polis. In the case of the McIntosh incident, McIntosh stopped the attackers – just as we would have had Hackett do – but the company perceived it as equally wrong and treated it so. McDonald's conclusion, based on the earlier event, seems to be "If there is a video of violent behavior at one of our stores, someone will be fired", even if the violence is an employee protecting himself when attacked by patrons.

Aesthetically, I found this to be a heart-wrenching video to watch, yet at the same time it had a powerful effect on me; it de-sanitized my image of this type of violent, hate-generated abuse, and put a face on its victims. When the heroines (who are often the victims, at least for a time) speak, they often appear to me as a representative of their

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People and at the same time, as speak *for* their People. As I watched Polis brutally attacked, it was easy to extrapolate her experience as one being in a marginalized position in society to the experiences of the transgender community in general, and her treatment by those females as the limitless abuse to which all transgendered persons are subjected. In an attempt to empathize with her plight, I attempted to reflect on what it must be like to be in danger while using the rest room of a public "family" restaurant, but found it impossible to do so. By being beaten into a seizure for using the woman's room, Polis is seemingly denied the right to exist. When confronted about using the women's room while she was being beaten, Polis said, "Where am I supposed to go?" (:59). As I watched it, I reflected that it could have been the entire transgender community pleading to the world to carve a space for them, asking: "Where are we supposed to go?"

Polis' beating seems endless, and her attackers beat her and dragged her all over the store. The contrast between where she was and what McDonalds purports itself to be was stark: there was no safe place for her anywhere, even in this place where billions and billions have been served, and a signature item on the menu is called a Happy Meal. People that I would have expected to lend assistance – in this case the young McDonald's employees – did not even attempt to help her. Even worse than inaction, they were participants in creating the environment that allowed her to be beaten. They stood by and laughed; one recorded it, solidifying their detachment from assisting her, and assuring that her humiliation would be documented and shared at some time in the future. The people who attempted to offer her protection or assistance were either overwhelmed by the task or attacked as well. In either case, those of conscience who saw the injustice Polis was suffering and who were willing to offer her aid were such a small number that

they were overwhelmed – they could not help her. On the part of the store, protecting the victim seemed out of the question; the objective appeared to be to get the problem to go away and out of sight. An employee even assisted an attacker in order for her to leave more quickly before the police arrived. It seemed that, getting the attackers out the door was more important than bringing them to justice.

No – *I'm* a Modern Woman: A Non-Partisan Message from Governor Sarah Palin and Senator Hillary Clinton

SNL - Palin/Clinton Parody http://www.nbc.com/saturday-night-live/video/Palin--Hillary-Open/656281

This brilliant piece of comedic social commentary demonstrates that by entering a discourse with those holding differing political beliefs, we can be miles apart although thinking we are speaking about the same thing. Originally shown as a skit on a major network, this video provides a curriculum that discusses gender equality as opposed to gender roles, and examines the politicization and perversion of principles of social justice that can occur in our national political conversations.

The text of the piece begins with the statement that it is a non-partisan message from Governor Sarah Palin and Senator Hillary Clinton. The camera zooms in on the two women; the Palin character is obvious, because it looks so much like Sarah Palin: Tina Fey is wearing a short red jacket, rimless glasses and has her hair up. Hillary Clinton is less obvious; the hair color is accurate, but Pohler's presentation of the Clinton Character does not even seem to attempt to accurately imitate Clinton's speech or mannerisms as Fey's Palin character does.

The premise is that Palin and Clinton are presenting a non-partisan message crafted to address the role that sexism has in the campaign. Palin begins by telling the audience how excited she is to be addressing the audience with Senator Clinton. Senator Clinton then says that she was told she would be addressing the audience alone. Palin concedes that it must be odd that the two are together; she, the running mate of John McCain and Clinton a "fervent supporter of Barack Obama" (:46).

The two then begin to outline their differences by comparing their positions on various issues. While Clinton declares, "diplomacy should be the cornerstone of any foreign policy" (1:19), Palin chirps, "I can see Russia from my house!" (1:24). Each of

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the positions Clinton expresses is thoughtful and rational; each of Palin's positions is simplistic and silly.

The two then address their concern: sexism in election. As they caution against using loaded language, it becomes clear that they two have wildly different experiences with sexism. Palin's examples are how she is objectified, while Clinton's are how she is insulted. Palin then notes that she is closer to being closer to the election than Clinton had been. When Palin says that "it's time for a woman to make it to the White House" (3:27), Clinton interrupts, saying, "I didn't want a woman to be president. *I* wanted to be president and I happen to be a woman" (3:39). Clinton then speaks of the difficulties on her road to the election compared to Palin's and as she does, Palin mugs for the camera. Palin states, "anyone can be president; all you have to do is want it" (4:29). Palin then invites the media to be vigilant against sexist behavior. Clinton interjects that it is not, however, sexist to question a candidates' credentials. Clinton concludes with, "[i]n conclusion, I invite the media to grow a pair, and if you can't, I'll lend you mine" (5:10)

From a socio-historical perspective, this video is rich in curriculum for a critical utopianist because it shines a light on the way Hillary was reviled by many while Palin was widely adored even though Clinton is an extraordinarily capable politician, thinker and stateswoman (sic) and Palin is, well, not. Recent history has born this out; since the 2007 election, Clinton has remained in service to the country by serving as United States Secretary of State. Palin, on the other hand, opted out of her job as governor of Alaska early to reenter the private sector. Although I see Palin in the news quite often, I am not sure exactly what it is that she does. What ever it is, it seems more like service to herself than any kind of service to her country.

Palin's ignorance became legendary during the 2007 presidential campaign. She made countless missteps, such as agreeing to an extended interview with Katie Couric, and then not preparing for it (Walshe, 2009). Beyond all the rhetoric behind the progressive thinking that cast her in her role as a the first female on the Republican Party presidential ticket, Palin seemed perpetually willing to throw her gender under the bus in order to pander to her base: those who subscribe to traditional roles of masculinity and femininity. Her chants of "drill baby, drill", while used to emphasize the importance of drilling for oil off the coast of the United States was thought by some to be a sexually charged double entendre that also implied sexual intercourse (GRITtv, 2010). Perhaps there was sexism in the coverage of her campaign, but the Republicans were using it to benefit the campaign. One clear piece of evidence of this was Rush Limbaugh's frequent comments about her sex appeal (Reed, 2010). There was a continual attempt to use Palin's gender and attractiveness to popularize her and is probably why McCain selected her. Sex sells.

During Clinton's campaign for the Democratic Party's Nomination, she suffered a constant barrage of attacks from the press and her opponents. Virtually all of those attacks were in some way connected to some sort of "unfeminine" conduct. Glen Beck referred to her as "the stereotypical bitch" (MediaMatters for America, March 15, 2007). New Gingrich's mother, Kathleen Gingrich, told Connie Chung that Hillary was "a bitch" in 1995 (Parker, 1995). In July 2007, on MSNBC, producer Willie Geist described a Hillary Clinton nutcracker that was being marketed. As if the mere reporting of it was not insulting enough; in the same piece, Tucker Carlson said about Senator Clinton, "I have often said, when she comes on television, I involuntarily cross my legs"

(MediaMatters for America, July 18, 2007, :39). Both statements were clearly insults

implying that somehow Senator Clinton was a threat to their masculinity. Mike Barnicle,

an MSNBC panelist, stated that Senator Clinton looked like "everyone's first wife

standing outside a probate court" (MediaMatters, January 23, 2008, 1:25).

A look into reports of Palin's sexist attacks has a much different result.

Seemingly, saying Governor Palin is not smart is somehow sexist. The website

palinsexismwatch.blogspot.com certainly notes some sexist reporting, such as the

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette referring to her as a diva and Keith Olbermann's post election

reports of Palin's expensive wardrobe being repossessed by the McCain Campaign, but,

for the most part, what are reported to be sexist attacks are, in my opinion not sexist at

all. The Clinton character in the video addresses this when she reminds the press that it is

not sexist to question a female candidate's credentials. The accusations of sexism by the

McCain/Palin staff were disingenuous; they were used in an attempt to silence criticism

rather than truly discourage sexism.

In my aesthetic observation, I find that the piece is rich in irony from the start.

Palin's expression of excitement that she and Clinton working together is immediately

offset by Clinton's claim that she believed she would be doing it alone. Immediately, it is

established that Palin is giddy while Clinton is self-confident and in no need of any

histrionics.

When Palin remarks that she is the running mate of McCain and Clinton calls

herself "a fervent supporter of Barack Obama", it is again powerfully ironic. Palin is on

the ticket for the presidential election while Clinton on the other hand identifies herself as

an outsider – merely a supporter of Barack Obama. The irony is that Palin, although on

the Republican ticket, is a political and intellectual lightweight. Palin was chosen as an unqualified unknown; Clinton was extraordinarily qualified, yet lost the primary in part because she faced continual insults, mischaracterizations and sexist attacks. Palin states their purpose to address sexism. Clinton notes her surprise that it is now an issue, apparently reflecting upon what she thought to be a dearth of complaints about sexism during her primary campaign.

As the two contrast their positions. Clinton's are thoughtful and principled while Palin's are pandering and silly. When she laughingly states that she doesn't know anything about the Bush Doctrine, it not only continues to show her as a political lightweight, it also gives the impression that she does not care about the Bush Doctrine. Rather than show embarrassment, she dismisses it with a giggle.

Clinton says that both agree that sexism has no place in an election, and as they admonish the audience, a great contrast appears in what each of the women characterize how sexism has manifested itself. Palin's complaints are about having her head photo shopped on a bikini clad body and being referred to as a milf. Clinton's examples of sexist language are vastly different references to her physical appearance "cankles", a flerg, a Harpie, a shrew, and finally a boner shrinker – a weak, sophomoric, almost desperately mean-sounding sexual insult – which is, in my opinion, lacking in any wit, humor or creativity.

Palin then invokes her much-used joke about being a hockey mom – a joke that by emphasizing her role as a woman who remains close to home, viciously protecting her children and encouraging their competitiveness, actually diminished the perception of her ambition, drive and (supposed) intellect. – In discussing her differences with Clinton,

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Palin says it reminds her of a joke they tell in Alaska. As she launches into her "hockey

mom vs. pit bull" joke, Clinton pipes in with the punch line ("lipstick") more than once.

Not to be dissuaded, Palin moves ahead with the joke that characterizes her as "someone

who didn't have much ambition beyond the PTA but got slowly sucked into electoral

politics on a grander scale" (Martin, 2008). Such a characterization makes her woman

who is nonthreatening and loath to overshadow her man (in this particular case, John

McCain).

Palin says that regardless of politics, it's time for a woman to make it to the White

House. Clinton finally blurts out, "[m]ine. I wanted to be president, and I just happened

to be a woman" (3:39). She tells Palin that she shouldn't compare their roads. As she

elaborates, Palin flirtatiously mugs for the camera. Once again, emphasizing the opposite

roles that sexism played in the two women's campaigns. As Clinton speaks of her hard

work in politics, Palin flirts, and winks and poses. In what is perhaps the strongest point

of the video, Clinton points out that she was a candidate who happened to be a woman,

whereas Palin was selected to be the Vice Presidential candidate because she was a

woman. Palin concludes by asking the media to be vigilant for sexist behavior. My

impression is that Palin was encouraging citizens to look for sexist behavior because that

was her strong suit. Palin was selling herself as pretty, simple, nonthreatening and

marginalized. Clinton reminds them that it is not sexist to question credentials. Clinton's

admonition is that criticism of a woman is not necessarily sexism.

Clinton concludes: "I invite the media to grow a pair – and if you can't I will lend

you mine." Clinton's last line is rich in meaning. During her campaign, Clinton had

been subjected to sexist attack after sexist attack, continually vilified as masculine and

emasculating by her political opponents as well as those merely threatened by Clinton's assertive, unapologetic public persona. It is, in my opinion, the ultimate in irony for her character to bring it all out in the light of day and then to point out that the media lacked the balls to say it was so.

Much like Antoine Dodson did, the Clinton character turns the unwritten rules of the dominant culture back onto itself and, as a result, is able to point out a contradiction that is arguably hypocrisy, ignorance, or cowardice. The Clinton character dares her critics to, in a manner of speaking, be as assertive and manly as they accuse her of being. It's a beautiful accusation because it cuts deeply and more than once.

First, I am not sure that I would describe any of Clinton's behavior that is being negatively targeted as masculine; her assertiveness, self confidence and refusal to comprise might be more accurately described as principled. The attacks against Clinton seem to me to be more of an attempt to control her behavior than define it. It is much like how Dodson used the implication that his sister's attacker was gay. Clinton's critics are trying to shame her into their notion of "acting right". I am sure that Clinton's attacks would diminish considerably if she would just act more "lady like", stop being so assertive and such a "boner shrinker." By turning the tables away from herself and onto the press, the Clinton character tries to shame the dominant culture into action against the way Palin was controlling the conversation. If the dominant culture were as assertive and uncompromising as it accused Clinton of being, it would not tolerate the foolish machinations of Palin.

Similar to behaviors gendered active and passive in *Riley on Marketing*, Clinton's behaviors are identified as among the active. Unlike the examples in Riley on Marketing,

Clinton is not welcome to dabble in the active domain. I suspect it was acceptable for Riley because the gendered activities were about play. Determining who will run the country, however, is no game. For Clinton, dabbling in the superhero stuff will not be tolerated.

Much like Miss South Carolina, the Palin character is a scrambling and pandering fool lacking in principled thinking and relentlessly pursuant of popularity. She also carries her own armload of hot-button catch phrases that she lobs about like water balloons hoping to hit something. Unlike Miss South Carolina, there is no seminal moment that exposes her shallowness. For the real Sarah Palin (as opposed to the character in the skit), there is, however, plenty of evidence; her lies about her positions such as in regard to Federal funding for the Bridge to Nowhere, her blown softball interview with Katie Couric and her rejection of the debate moderator's questions, ostensibly in deference to what she knows is important to the American People (Corley, 2008), are just a few examples. None were remarkable enough as the Miss South Carolina video to result in widespread online sharing among social networks, and without the bracing of shared online video, the media failed to call Palin out as incompetent. That failure is the "lack of balls" to which the Clinton character refers.

I find this video is the most fascinating of all I have chosen to discuss gender issues, because it underscores that which I am not sure I ever even recognized beforehand: that we as a culture do not all think the same way about what it means to be a women. One of perhaps many dichotomies that exist on this issue is between the progressive and conservative thinking citizenry.

As a man, husband, father and political progressive, I was baffled during the 2008 election that the Republican Party would not only accept Sarah Palin as their Vice Presidential candidate, but proudly embrace her as one who speaks for them and who is capable of crafting of vision of the future of the United States of America. I found her persona insulting to my intelligence and her candidacy a step backward in our march toward ending the oppression and marginalization of women. My original impression was that Palin was perhaps trotted out as the antithesis of Hillary Clinton, the United States Senator and recent presidential candidate who was reviled by conservatives. While Clinton had a reputation for being overbearing, emasculating, and hardheaded, Palin was engaging, flirtatious, a so-called risk-taker and a self-proclaimed maverick. Whereas Clinton had experience as a United States Senator and lawyer, Palin, aside from briefly being an Alaskan governor, had been a television sports reporter and beauty pageant participant. When it came to answering questions, beauty pageant training did not serve Palin any better than it did Miss South Carolina. Miss South Carolina had the distinct advantage of being able to escape after thirty seconds.

It appears that, in Palin, the Republican Party got what they considered to be a twenty-first century, fully actualized woman. Palin could be the whole package – beautiful, simple, beguiling, successful, and not the least bit threatening to the hegemonic forces that supported the dominant male culture. Further, Palin could have plausible deniability that she was a walking example of the oppression of women; after all, she was the vice presidential candidate, was she not?

That is the beauty of the Palin Clinton skit; the humor comes from the near complete disconnect between how the two observe the world. While Palin is boasting

about her role in moving her gender forward, Clinton (and the viewers) see the opposite –

Palin as an artifact of the time of woman as object, as beauty pageant contestant, as

soother to men's egos, and her party could not be prouder. Palin seems to see those

things as her calling, while Clinton sees them as shackles around the ankles of all women.

Palin sees herself and Clinton as comrades. Clinton would rather be anywhere else.

Aesthetically, I am left with an overall impression of this piece rather than a series

of aesthetic images. It seemed to be a seamless, flowing characterization of the two

women as metaphor for this societal issue. I find that I am inclined to absorb it as a whole

rather than chop it up into little evocative bits. . I attribute this to the fact that the major

network broadcast origins of the piece make it more cohesive. Rather than have to dig

and tease out meaning from various bits and pieces of text, I am presented with a highly

produced piece. The camera work, costumes, make-up, a well-developed script and even

a professional announcer providing the lead-in all fit tightly together to comprise this

experience.

It appears that while Clinton is seeking to escape the prison of sexism, Palin is

trying to become a trustee. I see the skit as representation of a gender issue that we face

in our culture: the disconnect between the perceptions of the achievements one can make

as a woman as opposed to the achievements a person can make.

Palin personifies the idealized objectified woman and Clinton personifies the

struggle of women to be acknowledged as People first. Representing the notion of person

who happens to be a woman, Clinton is not so much offended by the insults against her as

she is offended by the criteria by which she is being judged. The attacks on Clinton are

all attached to her departure from woman as object and her refusal to follow the edicts of

that role. The response of the dominant culture as oppressor is to attack her. Those attacks are quite in line with the response of a disaffected oppressor (Freire, 2004), who attacks the oppressed through characterizations of wickedness, violence or ferocity.

Palin, on the other hand, would likely score high on the achievement scale of the well behaved oppressed woman; she is attractive, witty, and non-threatening. While she checks all the boxes of woman-as-object, it appears that she has no idea that she is aspiring to be the best victim of oppression she can be, holding up her candidacy to the Vice Presidency as proof of her capabilities. I found this ironic, given that the job of vice president is not a role of much substance; it is not entirely unlike the role of first runner up in a beauty pageant: a pretty face, just in case.

The text of the Palin character titillates the base interests of her base: the stereotypical man-as-oppressor. She acknowledges her role in a beer drinking game, mugs for the camera while pantomiming cocking a rifle, and issues what I took to be a coquettish false protest against those who imagine her in a bikini. Among those who would find these collective self-ascribed images attractive could easily be a beer chugging, weapon toting, bikini-ogling Neanderthal who would want the mother of his children to be a pit bull with lipstick.

The frustration and disbelief that Clinton exhibits is not at Palin, or even the people that support her. Clinton is beside herself over the inaction of those who she believes should know better yet stand by and do nothing. Who might that be?

Me.

All nine of these videos have been illustrations of what I believe, and I cannot imagine a clearer, more passionate, more impactful way of sharing those particular beliefs. I share these videos – and others – with People in my social networks to express how I feel, and these videos discuss, deconstruct, uncover, clarify and enlighten in a way that I could not imagine being capable of doing with literal language. When I share these videos, I also share their influence and their message. If those in my social networks find these videos compelling as well, they can also embrace them as an expression of their identity and as a part of their personal curriculum.

CHAPTER FIVE

IMPLICATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

Implications: Letting the Jazz Band in to Practice

While attending college for my Bachelor of Music degree at the State University of New York at Potsdam, I played in several jazz bands; some were school-sponsored, some were independent of the school although populated entirely by students. All these bands practiced in the rehearsal halls of the music school.

As new students to the college, we were surprised to find that the practice of holding the independent, non-school sponsored jazz band rehearsals in those rehearsal spaces was relatively new. We were, in fact, the first generation of music students who were able to hold their independent jazz band rehearsals in the school facilities for all four years of their undergraduate studies. Prior to our graduating class, those jazz band rehearsals were relegated to off campus locations at least part of the time, such as when the dean or any of the ensemble conductors were sure to be in their offices and therefore within earshot.

While it may not sound odd that an independent group might be denied to use school facilities, this was, in fact, *very* unusual. Plenty of independent groups were allowed to practices in the rehearsal spaces; the most obvious examples were string quartets and brass quartets. There was no issue with independent chamber groups rehearsing in the school of music even while independent jazz bands were frowned upon. Why? The content. It was not that independent groups in general were unwelcome; in fact, they were encouraged.

It was Jazz that was discouraged. Jazz was a discourse that was unfamiliar to the institution. It seemed that the school was concerned that it could not control the conversation.

The culture of the school of music was one where they did not seem to want us to go around playing that jazz stuff willy-nilly. It was uncouth. We played in bars; sometimes for money, sometimes just for free beer. There was a counterculture of small town stars that was created without the school of music's endorsement and who did not necessarily meet the School of Music's definition of excellence. We did not worry about who attended all of their lessons, or passed their level C performance exam or auditioned for the wind ensemble. Great jazz players played great solos and could swing. Great jazz players had chops.

These independent jazz bands flourished without the school of music and regardless of whether or not it had the school's endorsement. Eventually, it was clear that the school of music could either welcome all the jazzers to the school community or become increasingly irrelevant in the eyes of the students.

This was not isolated to Potsdam, New York; the same conditions were occurring all over the country in the late 1970's. Jazz seemed to be moving past its role of music's rebel outsider and was gaining favor as a legitimate art form. Some schools – such as the Eastman School of Music and the music schools at the University of Miami and North Texas State – already had thriving jazz curricula. Other schools were behind Potsdam in this evolution. As of April 5, 2012, the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia still has no jazz programs.

At any rate, the conditions were such in Potsdam that it was time to move all the jazz bands inside the building and embrace them as part of the School of Music. It was wise; it was what the students were doing whether it were listed in the course catalog or not. The school of music joined with these bands and both benefitted. The bands would begin to experience the benefits of the mainstream – things like rehearsal rooms with heat and a safe place to lock up the drums after rehearsal. The school of music could riff off of the bands' relevance to us, bring jazz more fully into the curriculum and enrich our experience there.

Within a few years of my graduation, most music schools had majors in jazz studies, jazz scholarships and established jazz artists on the faculty. This was not spontaneous. In order for this pretty radical change to happen, it took a philosophical shift on the part of the university and a restructuring of the curriculum. It was not easy and required humility. The university had to embrace something that it had overtly rejected.

In many ways, I see the curriculum of shared online video in the same position that the jazz curriculum was in when I was in college. To many, its relevance is a foregone conclusion. It is engaging, educative, and meaningful. Welcome in school or not, this curriculum will continue exist even if we close off our facilities to it. The time has come when it makes sense to accept it and embrace it. To do so, however, requires a drastic philosophical shift. That shift is a daunting one. Today, the public school has more to worry about than the students' experience. Along with everything else, there is still data to be skinned, sliced up, and sewn into political footballs.

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As I selected videos for this inquiry, I established their democratic nature, prominence among social networks and emphasis upon social justice. In doing so, and in those very narrow circumstances, I labeled them Viral Videos. In this chapter, however, I feel that it is beneficial to use a more general term. I will, therefore, transition to using the broader term, *shared online videos.* As I make this transition, I will make use of both terms – Viral Video and shared online video – as I proceed through this chapter. The term Viral Videos will refer to the content discussed in chapter four of this inquiry. Looking forward, I will use the term shared online video.

The reason is simple: while popularity might have something to do with democracy, the ability for each individual to have a voice is imperative. Shared online videos have no constraint other than that which their title implies: they must be shared online. The reason that I feel it necessary to be free to speak more generally in this chapter is because there is a plethora of video that is shared online that is valuable to education and social justice, but may have a somewhat limited number of views. People must have access to more than the most popular ideas, lest they be driven by salesmanship as opposed to thoughtful discourse. Shared online videos, regardless of whether they are widespread or not, give each of us a voice – and a powerful voice at that.

As we watched the school curriculum ripped from the arms of the parents and the teachers and dragged off by the politicians, a Viral Video Curriculum appeared, not exactly in its place, but in a space where we all could have access to it and use it as we saw fit. My examples in this inquiry all served as object lessons directed at specific issues of social justice; gender, sexual orientation, abuse of power, poverty and cultural

globalization.   The lessons are compelling, because these videos transcend mere images, words, facts or numbers. They are more than little movies; they are experiences. I noted that this curriculum appeared because school had become moribund and a withered political football. While true, that is not necessarily the exclusive reason; there is likely to be other factors that contributed the appearance of this curriculum. I have wondered as I have examined this topic that perhaps this curriculum also appeared because Viral Videos offer what school has offered with increasing rarity: experiences. Dewey (1916) reminds us that experience is required in order to establish meaning. Public school seems to have more important things to do. After all, providing a child with an experience is a lot more time consuming than pumping her full of measurable stuff. The Viral Video curriculum may have appeared, therefore, to fill an experience vacuum as well.

Determining the value of experience is tricky when one considers its role in a public institution like public school. Much of the value of experience is variable and intrinsic; the meaning of the experience is based on other past experiences and the outcome of any given experience – while possibly valuable – is not necessarily measurable or quantifiable. Two People participating or witnessing the same event at the same moment would not necessarily have the same experience, because experiences are based on culture, past experiences, and ones' social networks. The actual moment of the experience is just one part of its effect; it is but the final ingredient in a very complex recipe. Even if the public schools somehow became relevant (granted, a stretch), Viral Videos could – and likely should – still offer a viable, dynamic, meaningful curriculum in the space where they already thrive. These videos are timely, flexible, resonant, engaging and compelling. Further, those that fit the definition that I have established for

Viral Videos frames them as a pedagogical force of People that questions and challenges conventions and hegemonic forces. That is the critical thinking curriculum that is certainly what I want my children to experience as they go about learning how to participate in a democracy.

Regardless of its ad hoc organization and its spontaneous – and therefore sometimes unpolished – appearance as a curriculum, shared online videos are a powerful way to communicate ideas. Shared online videos are not an alternative to the curriculum offered in public school; they are a curriculum that exists in an entirely different space. Shared online videos are a not a new way to do old things; they are a new way to experience and a new way to learn. Due to their aesthetic, experiential nature, they are a different and powerful and effective way of knowing.

Throughout this inquiry, I have been aware that sharing these videos is often more than a means of sharing meaning; it is often a way of *expressing* meaning as well. The difference may be attributed to recontextualization and repurposing. Sharing a video under different circumstances or different social networks than it was originally intended can be a means of expression through the use of, among other things, emotion, empathy, irony, caricature, parody or satire. The resulting expression is a new aesthetic statement - a work of art – "a cultural source in [its] own right" (Bimber, 1998), that begins a life of its own and the source of a new aesthetic experience. Barone and Eisner (2012) allow "…[t]he availability of new media makes possible the generation of new concepts and the creation of new possibilities" (p. 5). Barone and Eisner (2012) allow for the possibility of sharing and repurposing as a means of expression even if they do not state it overtly.

What we now have then is a space for discourse. Happily, it is a space that is secure and relatively uninfluenced by the dominant culture. My own suspicions as to why the dominant culture allows it to exist include four reasons that I find salient. First, the act of posting a video to a sharing website offers little opportunity for resistance from the dominant culture; it is done quickly and directly and there is no publisher, printer, retail outlet or government agency through which it must pass. It can be done so quickly and with such ease that stopping the postings would be difficult to do discreetly or justify satisfactorily.

Second, the vast numbers of views that occur on video sharing sites indicate to me that too many people participate in video sharing for it to go away quietly. It is already a social practice. Zuckerman (2011a) notes that the power of online sharing is protected because the spaces and methods that allow people to share rebellious ideas are the same spaces and methods that have become wildly popular as spaces for sharing innocuous things like pictures of cute cats. Attempting to shut down those spaces would likely to be not only unsuccessful, but would paint the culture as heavy-handed as well. Prohibitions are not very effective in prohibiting that which People wish to do; rather, they just piss us off.

Third, the messy hodgepodge of videos in shared video sites such as YouTube is difficult to sort through, as noted earlier in this inquiry when I addressed the concerns of Jusaz (2010). The massive number of videos posted daily makes it nearly impossible to find a particular video; each is, effectively, a needle in an ever-growing haystack. YouTube, which is arguably the largest video sharing site, has given up – or perhaps never attempted – any direct method of monitoring the videos that are posted. The

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People who patronize the site do the monitoring and only report that which they – the

People – deem offensive. Even then, videos are not immediately banned. It is not

uncommon to happen upon videos in YouTube that have warnings attached because their

propriety has been challenged. Nevertheless, without some kind or collect outcry or an

over violation of YouTube's Terms of Service, the videos are still available to be watched

and shared. I have always felt that this method of policing this space for discourse is

more of an act of community than an act of censorship.

Fourth – and perhaps the most delightful to reason to me – is that art is a

wonderful place for a message to hide, and that which cannot be found cannot be

repressed. As long as the dominant culture is not part of the sharer's social network, the

understanding gained from the experiences necessary to share in the aesthetic experience

(and therefore share the message) are missing. Moreover, the symbols and language can

change with tremendous agility. Even the Chinese government, legendary for its ability

to censor speech and close off communication conduits, is finding it impossible to

staunch the flow of information on the Internet. Chinese dissidents and social

commentators are embarrassing the government and gaining a following merely by using

puns and other twists of language to communicate and protest (Wines, 2009).

At the rate that information is created and technology is developed and the speed

that the world changes, it is not practical or even possible to purchase a pile of textbooks

to last the State-mandated five years when the political, artistic, popular culture, and

religious landscape is in a perpetual state of change. As cumbersome and inflexible as

traditional textbooks are, shared online videos are quite the opposite. They are not bound

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by any length or form. They are agile and are quick to appear to address issues that concern us. Shared online videos are portable; they can be accessed from our televisions, desktop computers, notebook computers, netbook computers, tablets, smart phones, handheld video game systems and mp3 Players. They are convenient, virtually perpetually accessible via the Internet, can be safely stored in any of an infinite number of cloud storage spaces, or can be stored in our ubiquitous computer hardware ranging from of desktop all the way down to a simple flash drive. Because these videos are so portable, they can be viewed and shared at will.

These experiences that are so easily accessible are also of greater quality than shared media of the past; they are more complex; more sensory. The media that preceded them were typically limited to apply to a single sense; they were, for the most part, purely auditory experiences such as music recordings or purely visual experiences such as paintings, drawing or photographs.

As we mourn the moribundity of the public school curriculum, we do not have to mourn the death of a meaningful curriculum. The reason, of course, is because school is not the only place where a cogent and responsible curriculum can be. In fact, Schubert, (2010) warns us against focusing upon curriculum in school alone. An intellectual vacuum has been formed in public school by political forces that have continuously pulled critical thinking and social responsibility out of the curriculum and put nothing meaningful in its place. Away and apart from school a curriculum of social justice formed, largely spontaneously. A space was created where People could sidestep the politically driven, test measured curriculum of school, and discuss what I believe to be a founding principle purpose of education as perhaps Dewey would define it (had he ever

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attempted to do so using just a few words): to learn how to live and participate in a democracy. This new space is where our voices could be heard, where we could recognize and affirm the voices of others, and where we could thoughtfully take part in a discourse that would promote and encourage social justice: shared online video. While the focus of this inquiry is what I define as Viral Video, I believe there are many characteristics that I can carry over into the genre of shared online videos for the sake of considering some implications.

Aesthetic interpretation goes much further cognitively than literal language does because it goes past facts to *meanings*, which are complicated concoctions of facts, beliefs, feelings, compassion, empathy and joy. Just as with Viral Videos, the curriculum of shared online video is also a curriculum of aesthetic experiences. While its aesthetic nature makes it potentially more meaningful, at the same time it is potentially more exclusive as well. While aesthetic experience does not require the viewer to know a specific set of symbols or a language in order to make meaning from it, there has to be some shared experience for it to be meaningfully shared within social networks. By going past literal language, shared online video is more than merely learning about social justice; it is about seeing the need for or the effect of social justice virtually first hand. It moves the experiencer from theorist or conversant to witness.

Presently, shared online videos do not seem to work well in school; when I typically see a shared online video presented in a lesson it is done so clumsily, as if the teacher somehow knows it is important but does know exactly what to do with it. An even worse case is when a video is offered as a replacement or substitute of something already done in the classroom. McLuhan (1964) would say that this sort of attempt is the

cause of the clumsiness. New media does not and should not *replace* anything; rather, it opens up ways to do new things or learn new things or have new experiences. Applying McLuhan's logic, it should be clear that the computer did not replace the typewriter; it used an aspect of the typewriter to launch us into completely new realm of experiences and to help us create new spaces in which to conduct discourse. Notable examples of these new experiences and spaces are desktop publishing, gaming, data collection, organization, and the Internet.

While putting shared media in the present classroom is often a clumsy and forced endeavor, newer approaches to teaching and learning and school are fertile ground for all the possibilities that shared media has to offer. Shared online videos are likely to have a place in the future of education – especially if public school education should reinvent itself, as I believe is necessary in order for the institution to survive. Because such new approaches and possibilities do not fit well in school as it exists today, it is necessary that, in order to create a space for shared online video in school, paradigms be shifted, envelopes be punched, boundaries be tested and tags be ripped off of mattresses. We must jostle and tug and question why; we must challenge the way things are done, particularly if they do not make sense.

While bureaucracy and hegemony exist all over, they seem to be particularly paralyzing in school. There is an illustration that I have used many times as I have spoken about the stagnancy of the teaching profession compared to other professions: If a lawyer, a doctor, an engineer and a teacher from one hundred years ago were brought into their professions today, what would happen? The lawyer would likely be lost; she would have missed generations of case law the passing of reams of legislation and the

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creation of an almost uncountable number of specialties in the profession that would

require a lawyer to understand such things as aeronautics, pharmaceutical trials or genetic

engineering. The doctor would be equally challenged; she would be faced with new

equipment, and new methods of diagnosis; she would be required to learn about scores of

new drugs, and would have to learn how to navigate the confusing, treacherous waters of

healthcare insurance. She would need to learn to measure her every word in order to

avoid being sued by patients. The engineer would experience much of the same; she

would be faced with new methods of measuring, more sophisticated types of calculation

and the common use of computers to create and test designs before they ever really exist.

The teacher? I suspect that the teacher from a hundred years ago could be

plunked down in most classrooms and get busy, picking up where the class left off

without so much as a moment's confusion, and perhaps may even know a trick or two the

students have not seen. Any changes that have occurred because of the introduction of

technology to the classroom could be taken care of by a student volunteer. The content in

school has hardly changed at all; as a result, the methods of instruction have stagnated as

well.

The inability to adapt to the issues of the moment with any agility or adeptness is

either a flaw or a hegemonic mechanism (or both) in public school curriculum. In public

school, it seems that it is easier to not change than it is to change. Shared online video is

in many ways the opposite; it is so nimble, so accommodating to the present that it loses

meaning once that particular context slips into the past. While permanent, it is also

ultimately disposable; in fact, it is *necessarily* disposable because its purpose is to help us

to interpret the moment in we experience it. Shared online videos must change then, in order to stay relevant.

There is some difficulty in bringing shared online video to People in any meaningful way. The same reason that this potential for depth and richness of meaning exists might also be a reason why these videos could exclude some People: the foundation of shared experience. If a video does not tap into the shared experiences of its viewers, it cannot share meanings. As a curriculum, shared videos do not offer any absolute truths, perhaps because there is no such thing. Any meaning they offer is relative to the experiences of the viewer. The curriculum is only meaningful, then to those in the same or perhaps similar social networks. Such a curriculum must be grass roots; it must come from within the social network, it cannot be top down because it must build from some common experience shared within the social network.

Prior to shared online video, the idea of catching an event with old style large film or video cameras the very instant it occurred – often requiring tripods and preloaded film cartridges or rewound tapes – was almost too much to hope for. The shrinking in size and the steadily decreasing price of equipment has given us the opportunity to be always ready to record – or even always be recording. This new ability to quickly and easily capture moments has, perhaps redundantly and probably ironically, given us an infinitely large library of once in a lifetime events.

Shared online video lends a sense of permanence to any behavior or phenomenon or event, because it can be saved, frozen in time and freely returned to, revisited and re-experienced. Nothing has to be forgotten; while we may continue to forgive, we will never have to forget again.

At this point, a conundrum surfaces; while the images can be saved, the same is not necessarily so for the relevance of the video, or its import in that particular moment. The boon of viral video is also perhaps the bane; it may be saved unchanged forever but its meaning will dissipate regardless of how carefully it is packed away. As Fenner (2003) points out, the meaning in an aesthetic experience rests in its context, and Freire (2004) notes that reality is a process, which indicates that it is continually changing. The value of these videos is not so much in their content but in their relevance in the moment. For this reason, I do not believe that these videos can ever be of lasting value. While we can easily save a record of the moment, we cannot permanently capture the meaning of these moments of clarity or the impact of these seminal moments in our lives. Aside from capturing the images and sounds, we have nothing that allows us to capture the intersection of the ideas, the precise timing of the message, or the way that experience touches us the first time we have it. While the video itself may achieve permanence, the new experience, comprised of past experiences, present conditions, and cues in addition to the videos still cannot be – and perhaps never can be – contained. Dewey (1934) teaches that without that moment of meaning and congruence, the experience is hollow.

There seems to be an irresolvable gap between the petrified curriculum of school and the wild, untamed curriculum of shared online video. By its nature, shared online video is ephemeral and disposable. That which is a must-see video today because of its wryness, insightfulness or pique can become passé quickly. Once out of favor, or having outlived their relevance, videos are transformed from a symbol of the insight and wisdom and hipness of the sharer to an indicator of the uncool. The sharer of the passé video stands as proof that oh-my-God-anyone-can-share-videos-now.

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Another reason for the school's lugubrious approach to change is likely to be the threat that change poses to hegemony. Control and change are not happy partners. Perhaps in anticipation of the potential threat to the dominant culture's view of the world, Governor Jeb Bush signed an education bill in Florida that outlaws schools that teach critical thinking about history, attempting to legislatively squash even the discussion that history is a construct rather than a set of immutable facts (Jensen, 2006).

In its present manifestation, shared online video offers what, in many ways, can be seen as an threatening force to the stability and meaning of the present public school curriculum, and therefore the stability of the dominant culture. In contrast, whereas political forces have frozen the public school curriculum, the curriculum of viral video is perpetually boiling over with ideas and new perspectives that People deem relevant. It may not ever be possible to fold the idea of shared online video into school as we know it today. I fear that the shock would just be too much. The difference may be too great for shared online video to become part of school without some type of bridge or movement in one direction or the other.

It is just too hard – and maybe even impossible – to allow for the amount of control necessary to accommodate the school bureaucracy and to fit under the under the school's hegemonic mechanisms. Even if shared online video were to somehow become more easily controlled by the dominant culture in order to be more institution-friendly, the controls that would have to be put in place would amount to a muzzle that would mute its bark and take away its bite. It would become shared online video without a backbone or a soul. It would turn into TeacherTube (http://www.teachertube.com/).

At any rate, it is not appropriate to compromise the integrity of shared online video because the content of the videos is not where the problem lies. It is school that is broken, and it is school that must change and adapt. Our culture has left education so far behind that it can never catch up in its present form. Some kind of reimagining of school is necessary.

The blueprint for at least one such a reimagining already exists. The MacArthur foundation has announced an initiative referred to as Connected Learning (http://connectedlearning.tv/what-is-connected-learning). Connected Learning is founded upon the principles of being fueled by interesting content and creating and nurturing educational opportunities for all. It is a model that considers how teenagers use social media and depends on learning to occur across a variety of settings. Online video sharing is not only possible in this model; it is of principal importance in its design.

Connected Learning is based upon three design principles: Production-centered, Open networks, and Shared purpose (Jackson, 2012). Each design principle refers to a focus upon drawing virtually everyone and every thing into working for the purpose of educating the children. The resources would cross generations, as well as cultures and the sources of knowledge would not only come from within the school but from within the community as well – the creation of partnerships between the school, resources in the community and the private sector.

The Production-centered design principle means that the priorities are placed upon creation and production. It speaks of Production-Centered environments, which "…are designed around production, providing tools and opportunities for learners to produce, circulate, curate and comment on media" (Jenkins, 2012, para 22). The essence

of shared online video lives in this principle. While it is possible that I am oversimplifying the meaning of production, I argue that even repurposing a video is in fact a form of production; decisions such as when to share it, where to share it, how to label it, and determining whom to notify of its existence are of critical importance to its viewing, sharing, and subsequent popularity. Regardless of the production facet, shared online video is an ideal way for learners to have opportunities circulating, curating and commenting on media.

Yowell (2012), outlines three key shifts that must occur for the educational paradigm to enter the 21st century: A shift from Education to learning, a shift from consumption of information to participatory learning, and a shift from institutions to networks. With ever-improving and ever-available access to media, it seems inevitable that the role of teacher evolve from the center of the learners' universe to the quarterback of a team of providers, docents, guides or experts.

<center>Suggestions for Further Study</center>

Shared online videos have the potential to express just about any idea, principle, belief, or message. I would find it an intriguing pursuit to see how shared online videos weigh in on just about a variety of subjects. In the broadest sense, I am personally interested in how the shared online videos could contribute to the issues of race, cultural, gender and economic justice. These issues are not only far from any kind of resolution in our culture; they are sources of divisive social discourse and activity. Perhaps this aesthetic, popular, engaging, relevant approach has something new – or better put, a different way of knowing – to offer to the conversation.

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Shared online videos gain much of their power because they are meaningful to specific social networks (Jenkins, 2009). That specificity indicates that there is a strong element of what school refers to as differentiated instruction – instruction adjusted to be effective with learners' various types of learners. The differentiated instruction that occurs based upon how the students learn (Tomlinson, 2012). A teacher could differentiate her teaching to accommodate visual, auditory, or tactile learners as well as addressing differing ability levels and levels of achievement. I find it fascinating that with shared online video, ideas are addressed differently based upon the social network in which the discourse is occurring. This is, then, differentiated instruction directed at different social networks rather than at the cognitive types of learners. I wonder: would it benefit us in our quest to find the best ways to teach children, if we consider the social networks that are the students' home cultures? On its face, it seems that it would for at least two reasons. First, my experience has been that school would prefer to ignore culture rather than embrace it; the result is that cultures other than the dominant culture are marginalized and alienated. Such a hostile atmosphere is anti-intellectual to say the least.

If, as I have maintained, experience gains meaning from past experience, the acknowledgement and embrace of the students' cultures is necessary in order to teach sensitively and effectively. Culture is a collection of experiences from a specific perspective. It seems that tapping into those experiences would be necessary in order to help a child build meaning in her learning. This inquiry encourages an inquiry of the consideration of the potential of cultural differentiation in the classroom.

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In my dissertation proposal, I offered that shared online videos could offer representations of many of the texts that Pinar et al. Specifically, I see a wealth of material that would demonstrate shared online videos as racial text, aesthetic text, theological text, and institutional text within the context of curriculum studies. I have watched many of the videos that address those texts, and I believe that due to the different way of knowing that that shared online videos offers, it is another way to contribute to the conversation. Any one of those texts could be examined in great depth as they are manifested in shared online video. It is a source of commentary that has much to say.

I offer that the method of this inquiry - critical discourse analysis with an element of aesthetic interpretation – has potential for other inquiries. Such an aesthetic discourse analysis has potential as a viable, valuable way of examining the contribution of art in discourse among social networks. Unlike the already existing aesthetic inquiry, aesthetic discourse analysis considers the sharing and repurposing of art to be a creative, communicative endeavor much like the creation of art. It is a form of discourse, but is more complicated in that the text being read is aesthetic text; it has multiple levels of meaning, and the meanings are arrived at based upon the shared experiences of the sharer and the receiver. It is a non-literal method of discourse that has gaps – places where we insert our experiences in order to complete its meaning.

While it may seem to be an extraordinarily narrow field, such sharing occurs in shared online video, shared narratives, photographs, fiction and other media through email. Despit and Weaver (2000) note that pedagogical texts exist in many forms of popular culture. As I type this, I am listening to a mixtape compiled by Martina McFlyy

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(www.martinamcflyy.com), an Atlanta-area club DJ who is gaining popularity as an artist in her own right. The music that she plays in clubs is the music of mainstream pop musicians, but McFlyy (as well as virtually all the other club D.J.s) manipulates these recordings by inserting, superimposing, layering, and otherwise manipulating the songs with other songs and audio clips that she has either created or repurposed. The resultant remixes are McFlyy's work, and are her original aesthetic expressions; they reflect her personality, sensuality, sense of humor, musical taste, and even some of her political views. Just as McLuhan constructed his public identity through media (Jenkins, 2008), McFlyy is constructing her public identity as well.

There are shared online videos that have the effect of starting, or at least accelerating a social movement. The potential of these videos, both to do good and to do harm is a complex and compelling issue. A notable example includes the previously discussed *It Gets Better*. (www.itgetsbetter.com), and YouTube has created a fledgling YouTube channel of activist videos, http://www.youtube.com/user/activistvideos/videos. A recent example is the KONY 2012 movement (http://www.kony2012.com/). The movement is anchored to a documentary video directed by Jason Russell titled *Kony 2012* (http://youtu.be/Y4MnpzG5Sqc). The documentary is credited for virtually all of the movement's publicity.   The video has been widely criticized for over simplifying the issue and perhaps even endangering the very people it attempts to help. The Kony 2012 movement has been beleaguered by criticism because the video not only drew attention to Joseph Kony, but it also drew attention to Jason Russell and the organization he co-founded, Invisible Children, Inc. Nevertheless, the video garnered the attention of millions of people; it had over 86,340,781 as of March 31, 2012. While the Kony 2012

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movement may be flawed, the idea may be in important one. "…we can make a difference in the world if we really care" (Cusick, 2012, para 4).

The difficulties and achievements of the Kony 2012 movement raise questions worthy of study that apply to this and similar movements: Is this a new method of creating activism? Or is it another manifestation of Slactivism, a term that (Jenkins, 2012) defines as "…practicing easy and thus meaningless forms of social action, actions that don't go beyond pressing 'share'" (para 3)? What do these videos achieve aside from popularity? Both the video and the movement are criticized for endangering, rather than garnering aid for the Ugandan people; following the video's great popularity, the Ugandan government lamented that the video had negatively impacted the Ugandan tourist industry (Villalva, 2012). Russell may have blundered into hurting the Ugandan people more than help them because the effects of his movement may merely be a high tech manifestation of the notion Freire (2004) proposes that it is impossible to help the oppressed if you are not among them – that is, not sharing their experience.

Russell is also accused of mismanaging the funds that are donated to *Invisible Children,* his charity devoted to assisting Ugandan children who are victims of Joseph Kony (Autry, 2012). His alleged mismanagement is not so much theft, but rather allotting an excessive percentage of donations to salaries and media production. Another potential inquiry, then, is to consider the harm that shared videos can do as a result of fostering misunderstanding, reinforcing generalities, and perhaps even enabling a type of colonialism where the solution – that is, the organization committed to correcting this oppression – is the beneficiary of the interest and empathy created by the video.

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