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COMPOSING @PLAY

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A Thesis
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

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In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
Professional Communication

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by
Jonathan W. Lashley
August 2011

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Accepted by:
Dr. Cynthia Haynes, Committee Chair
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ABSTRACT

Modern college students traverse the boundaries of traditional literacy daily. Maturing alongside Web 2.0 and multimodal social networking, these young people tweet, blog, email, film, photograph, illustrate, hyperlink, and compose their lives regardless of formal instruction. Therefore rhetorically analyzing a student's recreational play with image, video, audio, and oral mediums often proves helpful for writing instructors who wish to better mentor and engage the communicative capacities of those born in the late 20th century and after. Yet few educators have actively pursued this line of inquiry over the last couple of decades. Many continue to favor traditional pairing of academic discourse with alphabetic literacy, logic, and media. Unfortunately, this means academic writing in general, and composition studies in particular, grow increasingly obsolete when facing a generation of young people whose nearly native relationship with new media encourages them to transcend the computer screen and channel their digital fluencies toward (re)composing physical reality. Few incidents illustrate the stakes and values of such conditions more clearly than the recent case of the Barefoot Bandit–a seemingly average teenager from Washington State, who made international headlines for his two-year joyride with reality: stealing vehicles, flying planes, evading police, robbing businesses, and hijacking the hearts of his peers.

Armed with little more than an Apple laptop and iPod, Internet access allegedly sponsored the Barefoot Bandit's specialized education in breaking the law. Not wishing to validate his unlawful behavior, my research awards importance

rather to the hardly exceptional nature of his personal technologies, literacies, and motivations. In an age where any given American teenager may access the same technological resources, the lasting influence of formal education seems questionable when facing a digitally literate generation of perpetual bandits. By rhetorically analyzing the discursive conditions instigating young people to (re)compose their own educations, the following study elucidates and tests a new interpretive model for educators to use in assessing and challenging the abilities of a generation whose multifaceted literacies seem best nourished by banditry. For writing education to retain relevancy, composition pedagogues must look to the fringes of modern composing practices–where students (at least digitally) know and compose valuable non-institutional texts for diverse audiences.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to Mike Skinner, whose work as The Streets inspired much of my own theoretical, philosophical, and linguistic play as a recreational writer and thinker.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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I. ON OLD/NEW MEDIA WRITING

A blip on a screen
You don't know me
I think about you
And what you'll grow to be
– The Streets, "Blip on a Screen"

This thesis consults the future(s) of student writing–composing practices
that seem as far from reach for some educators, as they are immediately familiar to
others. Among these upcoming writing opportunities, a child in grade school will
receive her first smart phone. By way of its full QWERTY keyboard, online
functionality, and user-centered software, this young person will find recreational
occasions to write, text, email, tweet, and video message with little to no need for
outside direction. Elsewhere, a group of young people, whose understandings of
human rights and politics have pluralized via digital communication with peers on
other ends of the globe, will quickly organize meetings, agendas, and even protests
under a blanket of tweets, hash-tags, and re-tweets. In an American city whose
economic infrastructure and cultural identity collapsed as past generations passed
on or fled alongside manufacturing industries, a diverse group of twenty-
somethings will remodel buildings, open businesses, and plant urban gardens under
the instruction of Google searches and social networks–both online and offline. All
over the world, teenagers who are unhappy with the lives they lead at home or at
school will re-write their identities online as they organize dungeon raids and
cooperatively solve puzzles with people they may never meet face-to-face. For most
members of the millennial generation, such writing climates are increasingly
commonplace. By testing the boundaries of traditional composition and literacy

frequently, it is just a matter of time before these users recompose the nature of education as well.

Maturing alongside the multimodal social networking of Web 2.0 and the handheld immediacy of Web 3.0, members of the millennial generation may easily tweet, blog, email, film, photograph, illustrate, hyperlink, and network their lives; regardless of influence from formal instruction. Rather than solely emulate the composing practices they have learned in a classroom, the Internet offers open access to a digital toy box of composing software and media. Such opportunities have existed throughout the lives of students born near the end of the 20th century. As they document their literate behaviors through online texts, a collage of self-sponsored education takes shape. In her book, *DIY U: Edupunks, Edupreneurs, and the Coming Transformation*, Anya Kamenetz explains:

> Technology upsets the traditional hierarchies and categories of education. It can put the learner at the center of the educational process. Increasingly this means students will decide what they want to learn; when, where, and with whom; and they will learn by doing (x).

As opportunities in self-publishing positions these users as authors and critics at increasingly younger ages, reading, writing, and learning skills develop outside the influence of the academy's rules and regulations. Furthermore, up and coming generations of college students will have performed dazzling communicative feats long before they enter their first–year writing class. What remains unfortunate however is that the motives prompting these recreational compositions seldom influence the writing students turn in for class.

Referring to my students' age group as a Digital Generation, Heather Urbanski suggests they "see texts as more interactive than perhaps previous generations" (loc. 3,202). In other words, members of this Digital Generation hold the potential to influence knowledge and value on a peer-to-peer level that well transcends the cultural and geographical limitations of the past. In doing so, writing becomes perpetually communal, multimodal, and interdisciplinary–all of which challenge English composition's more traditional privileging of individual voice, alphabetic literacy, and genre distinction. Despite how much I may also criticize the representational capacities of alphabetic literacy, definitions, and so on, I am still an arbiter of academic discourse at the end of the day–I am still in the game of selling students a system of communication that may or may not be immediately valuable to them. As the technological prowess and digital literacies of students heighten, I find little surprise in Urbanski's suggesting, "[T]he Digital Generation seems to be no longer content to remain passive receivers of messages but instead demands to be part of their creation" ("Blurring" loc. 64). These young people actively document their lives in text, with seemingly little more reason than having opportunity to do so, in dynamic ways, for a varied audience, with immediately socialized results. The more traditional (analog) lines of communication maintained by academic discourse really cannot touch the Web's breadth and efficiency in producing audience commentary (socialized values).

Under the influence of Web technology, the millennial composition seems one of immediacy and multimodality. Because an audience (of some general sort) is ever-present, the capacity of a message to reach others seems assured. As members

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of an online audience harbor diverse identities, interests, and motivations, the impact of a Web text often correlates with the range of communicative modes (visual, aural, alphabetic) it excites. Influenced by text-wealthy digital archives and by the ability to self publish expressions in various online forums, the Internet increasingly become a playground of non-institutional composing practices. As young people flood the web with creative expression and reception, their resulting practices showcase ambitious examples of what actively influenced and proactively educated writing looks like. Unfortunately, such dynamic writing practices seldom follow students into formal composition classrooms. Though formal instruction in reading and writing academic discourse underlines the American education system, these structures do not necessarily influence the kinds of writing young people compose in abundance outside of class. When an up-and-coming generation's multifaceted literacies find best validation outside formal institutions, the value of formal education wanes in the face of modern composing practices. Kamenetz warns, when educators pass off informal, D.I.Y. student learning as trivial play while alternatively regarding academic discourse as some general *panacea*, "there's a dangerous confusion between ends and means–between growing educational institutions and advancing the cause of learning itself" (Kamenetz ix). Miscommunication may only ensue as teachers and students try to sell each other what valuable texts, research, and education looks like. While such mismatches are not new, the highly communicative capacities of a Digital Generation truly challenge what it means to communicate clearly (write technically for a particular situation) and study well (discern utility in a particular situation).

Academic Discourse and the Rhetorics of See-Through

I looked at your status...
"In a relationship"
Plainheld bettyka
So walk away and let it go
– The Streets, "OMG"

Whether or not writing instruction preoccupies any portion of a given course syllabus, every educator advocates and sponsors academic discourse. Yet, academic discourse–the culturally acceptable patterns, values, and rules guiding college-level writing–hardly seems natural for anyone. Still, those of us in composition studies in particular continue to labor over lessons on MLA formats, thesis statements, citation practices, and research methods, as if they inevitably constitute the pure accessibility and effective argumentation of a good text. While academic discourse should indeed garner institutional favor as the most socially agreed-upon (and therefore communicatively transparent) formal form of English communication, it is problematic to consider the ability of any person to write in this discourse as a natural or even desirable practice. As David Olson suggests in his essay, "Writing and the Mind," "Awareness of linguistic structure is a product of a writing system, not a precondition for its development" (110). In other words, our ability to understand and value composition comes only by way of experiencing the act of writing. This experience-to-know reality of social communication is no different for academic discourse than it is for Internet shorthand. The usefulness of either relies on a user's ability to find fidelity between lived experience and its representation in a language system. Olsen observes, "To learn to read any script is to find or detect

aspects of one's own implicit linguistic structure that can map onto or be represented by that script" (120). Therefore, the communicational properties of writing are only as strong as the technology's ability to broadcast an author's voice. Few problems presumably exist for writers who find common ground between the rules of a particular writing system and their own expressive desires. But, of course, only insecurity and frustration may arise for those who feel misrepresented or underrepresented by a writing system they are forced to practice. Though "[a] glimpse at our own alphabetic writing systems suggest that what a writing system 'represents' is what is said–an ideal writing system is a fully explicit representation of oral language," no person is ever free from encountering difficulties when attempting to communicate through a socialized symbol system (Olson 108). In turn, any writing system may act as a type of *pharmakon*–capable of equally offering pain or pleasure. But few language systems have sponsored more published accounts of social strife than academic discourse's struggle to connect with students.

Plenty of scholarship continues to recount tales of instructors encountering socio-cultural barriers when trying to reach the subaltern discourses holding certain students from embracing academic discourse. Though some social groups certainly hold more stakes in the creation (and maintenance) of academic discourse than others, it is not uncommon to view language education as the "primary means of acquiring the folkways of a culture" (107). In learning the Japanese language, I should simultaneously develop some understanding of the folk values informing it. This understanding may never be exhaustive, however, as long as every lesson is compounded with my non-Japanese language, values, and nationality. Similarly,

while most of my students are native speakers of American English, this English dialect does not necessarily hold much in common with more academic varieties of English discourse. While "a glimpse at our own alphabetic writing systems suggest that what a writing system 'represents' is what is said–an ideal writing system is a fully explicit representation of oral language," an individual does not necessarily sense, think, or dream in alphabetic text (Olson 108). Therefore, the ideals of transparent language accompanying academic discourse ignore the fact that language itself, as a socially regulated system, does not and will not develop evenly between users. When considering the ability of the letter "I" to at any given moment be considered a pronoun, a numeral, a vowel, and so on, a letter of the English alphabet is no less abstract in application than all those various meanings the color orange may symbolize. It is at this precipice, "when the word is thought of as representing a thing rather than as an intrinsic property of the thing," that Olson suggests, "word magic loses its power" (Olson 114). The see-through metaphors often attached to formal language structures ultimately cannot transcend the abstract inflections, contexts, and mediums in which writing (meaning making) happens.

A message, whether it is alphabetic or otherwise, simply cannot escape the rhetorical situations in which it is composed or read. The representational shortcomings of alphabetic writing in particular begin to form when, "An utterance spoken with an ironic tone is represented in writing the same way as the same utterance spoken with a serious tone" (Olson 121). Therefore, the representational fidelity of alphabetic representation may only extend as far as the unemotional

content of a particular message. While practicing academic discourse may seem valuable for the suggested clarity it may afford everyone, how lucid may a person's arguments and abstractions be when more intuitive moves don't align with what is acceptably formal? A keystroke emoticon of a happy face may communicate the warm feelings of its writer [:-)], but employing such a move remains too unconventional for academic writing [:-(]. Along these lines, Olson observes: "[W]hile writing provides a reasonable model for what the speaker said, it does not provide much of a model for what the speaker meant by it or, more precisely, how the speaker or writer intended the utterance to be taken" (122). Among the visceral experiences new media funds through image, sound, and mode, it is difficult to understand why basic reading and writing practices still characterize so much of academic writing. When writing may only, at any given moment, reproduce a fragment of what one means to articulate, it is little wonder that students grow anxious when academic discourse–with all of its strict hold over classroom communication–serves as the proper regulatory channel through which students must express themselves. As the Internet further abstracts a user's perception of both writing technology and topics at a global scale, what is simply on each student's mind may only become more abstract and less generalizable for others via alphabetic modes.

If a writer's main agenda is to stay true to herself and her culture, student disdain for academic discourse seems predictable as Patricia Bizzell's claims, "[T]he ability to participate in a new discourse will change the student's relationship with other discourses" (43). In other words, an assent to academic discourse inevitably

spurs a change in the more personal or commonsense values of a language user.

Furthermore, "Because academic discourse is identified with social power, to show

familiarity with it can mean being completely alienated from some other, socially

disenfranchised discourses" (Bizzell 43). Thus, accepting the rules and regulations

of academic discourse not only limits how a person writes but also what they write.

This comes with the understanding that the scope of academic discourse, itself, is

culturally limited. "What the community 'knows' is never some truth external to its

own discourse; it knows only what it can frame, test, and establish in its discourse"

(Bizzell 50). Ultimately, the evaluations made under any discourse are restrained by

the need of its practitioners to evaluate others' participation in the discourse.

Though "Students who have mastered the method are thus presumed to be

autonomous agents in the universe of discourse, capable of making individual

choices about which discourses they will or will not participate in," those who

experience difficulty in expressing themselves through academic channels may be

mistakenly viewed as poor students (Bizzell 39). In an age where students

increasingly build concepts of personal and social identity among online

communities, it is difficult to imagine any student lauding to the rigid structures of

discursive exchange found in a classroom–where the values and politics associated

with academic discourse confuse or confiscate an individual's desire to simply say

what is on her mind; especially when what might be on her mind runs in opposition

to academic discourse's foundational values.

When the Web's diverse array of digital, cultural, and communicative stimuli

color a 21st century student's world view, Bizzell's discussions in "Foundationalism

and Anti-Foundationalism in Composition Studies" may matter more today than when it was published in 1986. In the essay, Bizzell notes academic discourse's role as "the principle means of establishing and disseminating foundationalist attitudes" (Bizzell 38). Certain justification continually lies behind maintaining foundational homogeneity in a discourse, however, when educators need to evaluate student writing in fair and balanced ways. In contrast to the foundationalism necessary to this scenario, Bizzell reasons that anti-foundationalism, "includes the belief that an absolute standard for the judgment of truth can never be found, precisely because the individual mind can never transcend personal emotions, social circumstances, and historical conditions" (39-40). As any good (critical) rhetorician knows though, such abstractions do not exist in a vacuum. An educator may follow or develop means for tracing the values influencing a text if they invest enough effort. But conducting such analyses suggests far more investment in individual students than what teaching and evaluating academic discourse demands. Though we regularly demand critical investigation efforts from students, educators stand to set a fairly destructive example with our institutional reluctance to thoroughly investigate the anti-foundational discourses influencing student writing. For such reasons, Bizzell recommends American intellectuals are anti-intellectual by way of our "reluctance to emerge from our respective disciplines, to act as intellectuals in the larger community of the whole university and the whole society" (54). For Bizzell, change for the better may come if and when "we should acknowledge the implicit pluralism of academic discourse, the continual presence within it of both normal and revolutionary strands" (52). And indeed, composition pedagogues have increasingly

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embraced the influence of more marginal classroom voices over the past few decades. This value transition however, does not mean the accompanying pedagogical shifts (even the popular ones) have successfully garnered critical engagement from students.

After Conflict: Though All News is Good News, Writing Still Sucks

The fossil-ed remains of locked of ancient ways
Are buried or lost in every of my mates brains
But I can't find it because they like blazing
Solving that problem brings priests and doctors and poets maybe
– The Streets, "Outside Inside"

Many major pedagogical shifts over the last few decades have conceded to the reality that interpersonal communication is perpetually opaque via abstraction. Rather than prioritizing efforts to determine common discursive grounds between students and academia, educators backing conflict or process in pedagogy attempt to assist students in defining common grounds within themselves (and therefore, within their own social discourses) first. For many, the modern first-year composition classroom serves as the premiere interdisciplinary environment for cultivating skills in critical analysis and student reflection. Often, in order to spur analytical debate among students, composition instructors mediate class discussion around politically up-to-date and seemingly controversial topics. Since the 1990s, conflict pedagogy's popularity continues to soar as its curriculum utilizes socio-political controversy to provoke student ideological reflection. Gerald Graff, a former president of MLA, advocates this form of instruction as "teaching the conflicts." By immersing students in today's political arguments, a critical exchange

ideally occurs as students negotiate their values with others as instructors "bring controversy to the center of the academic curriculum" (12). Just because students are exposed to different and conflicting perspectives, however, does not mean that they automatically invest in the foreign value systems of others. Even Graff acknowledges, "Students won't become engaged in academic debates about ideas unless they have a reason to be interested in them and can gain the rudiments of the public discourse in which these debates are conducted" (Graff 13). Therefore, for conflict pedagogy to succeed, conflict must excite interest while not completely offending students, and offer novelty alongside discursive utility.

While controversial class arguments may offer a thrill, the critical engagement of students is still not guaranteed. The inability or even refusal of students to think critically about the various social topics they encounter sets forth a dilemma that has likely existed as long as the liberal classroom–a discussion-based forum in which student opinion has become increasingly authoritative. As Graff observes when surveying students, "[M]any admit they have a problem with academia's tendency to turn everything it touches into grist for the analytical mill, almost as if teachers were deliberately trying to spoil everybody's fun" (44). In a liberal classroom, any value, conviction, stance, or observation cannot just simply be. To participate well in discussions or writings of a liberal classroom, it is necessary students communicate, "not that they love their subject, but that they are ready to join an intellectual conversation about what they love" (Graff 193). Though we educators often petition such intellectual conversations (debates) as means in providing even more value to subjects, Graff claims, "Such mystification can only

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encourage undergraduates to assume that when they come to college or a university they have to set their everyday rhetorical and conversational competence aside" (200). In turn, even classroom discussion is intimidated by impending intellectual debates–students are encouraged to both say what they mean and mean what they say while upholding critical conviction. When the highly subjective and controversial topics of conflict pedagogy are on the table, is there really any surprise in the way anxiety–spurred by impending arguments–commonly silences classrooms? Teaching the conflicts inevitably positions participants as caring too much or not enough about the topics at hand.

As many composition instructors might attest, some of the luxury afforded by studying language comes by way of its positioning all texts as fair analytical game. As the understanding of what constitutes texts for students and educators alike grows exponentially via digital media, so too may the resources and threats that accompany classroom topics in text. For conflict pedagogy in particular, it is difficult to imagine many of the taboo topics affecting students a decade ago will seem just as striking or unfamiliar for today's students. Today, any young person with a smart phone holds greater access to world news, media, and information, than even the most active researchers of ten years ago; let alone their students. As Graff reminds us however, "becoming educated has more to do with thinking and talking about subjects or texts in analytical ways than with the subjects or texts you study" (222). Though modern students may have access to, and by all accounts be desensitized to, a broad range of social controversy, conflict pedagogues would claim this access is not necessarily complete. "Mere exposure to diverse perspectives, with no

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engagement with what is at stake in the differences, can be as thoughtless a process as surfing TV channels or flipping through a discount catalog" (Graff 65). In 2011, I like to think the same may be true for students as they click through Wikipedia hyperlinks or various friends' pictures on Facebook. Even though the network of information is larger and more interdisciplinary than what one might find in a printed catalog, it is equally valueless if the viewer finds no active stake in the activity. But certain valuable stakes may (and often do) arise as users mindlessly surf the texts of social networks, as they find themselves better situated in the thoughts and artifacts of a community–something liberal classrooms desire, but seldom find.

Since a classroom imposes only temporary community on the lives of a diverse group of individuals, the reservations students harbor about intimately expressing themselves in front of otherwise strangers seem reasonable. To speak in a conflict-driven environment is to cause violence to one's self or to others. In turn, Graff admits, "We teachers often settle for a level of classroom talk that falls short of what students could produce if we asked them and provided more models and help (177). If presented with a silent group of college-aged adults, any commentary may seem better than no commentary. Because of this, "We tolerate a low level of articulation and let students vent opinions and feelings instead of really engaging with–or even listening to–their classmates" (177). It is important to note here that the pedagogical standpoint from which Graff observes student behavior is one that grants the highest value to critical engagement of social controversy. As in-class participation grades compete with a student's willingness to contribute to class

discussion of socio-political controversy, educators like Graff are likely to confront either no responses or uncritical (and therefore unsatisfactory) responses. While I, like many educators, may try to circumvent discussion lulls by breaking a quiet class into groups, Graff argues, "though breaking the class into small groups does tend to get most students more engaged, it does little to raise the quality of discussion and at worst results in the blind leading the blind" (179). This is not to say that everything students might discuss in groups is unimportant or under realized. Rather, the ongoing insecurity or apathy of a student in class seems tied to a general understanding that she need not say anything more than necessary, if frequent participation ultimately usurps quality content as valuable contribution in classroom discussion.

Though the socio-political controversy conflict pedagogy mediates may not be as capable in motivating critical student response as some educators might hope (especially now, in a digitally refined age of mass media), I am inclined to side with Graff's good intentions to play midwife to students' critical arguments. After all, his more humanistic ambitions seem more compelling than those of "teachers who so overemphasize surface correctness in spelling, grammar, and punctuation that they ignore the quality of student's thinking" (Graff 37). Shackling the worth of student arguments to their abilities in perfectly proofreading a document surely distracts students and teachers alike from appreciating the core value of writing technology: the ability to express one's self. It is here where the argumentative slant accompanying "posing problems and asking questions" only adds further foreignness to the "jargon, specialized terms, and ten-dollar words" of academic

discourse (Graff 25). Even as other educators allow students to choose their own research topics, we may only award them as much freedom as is acceptable under academic discourse, MLA style, and alphabetic literacy. Because the institution, educators, and assignments composing a syllabus continually uphold a distinctly different way of doing and observing things than what a student maintains elsewhere, I appreciate Graff's suspicion that "in such cases what such students learn is so tied to the specifics of the course that it remains in a 'for school only' compartment in their minds" (69). Though conflict pedagogy may not get us where we need to go in engaging the minds of students, I draw a little inspiration from Graff's decree that "it is crucial that students come away from basic writing courses with the understanding that entering the public argument culture is the name of the academic game" (78). Being able to argue effectively certainly qualifies as one aspect of conventional academic gameplay. But, as academic writing presents us all with (let's face it) not particularly fun language and writing play, we educators are foolish to think of academic discourse as anything more than a game our students probably would opt out of playing if they could. Hence more process oriented pedagogy attempts to offer forth the rules of academic games, that students may find roles as new and innovative game designers.

In Process: Computers (and *Blues*) in the Classroom

Choosing to lose time instead of doing what I like
Starts off black and white and lacking in life
Until pen in blue lends it a hue
– The Streets, "Puzzled by People"

The rise of process pedagogy in composition classes signals a certain value shift between educators as they disregard the fixed values often attached to finished language products and focus rather on the trip an author took to get there. By looking at the process behind a text, such composition instruction observes the reality that even authors with the best intentions may produce a finished product that rubs people the wrong way. Regardless of the conventional clarity of a person's message, a finished utterance may always stand susceptible to misunderstandings. Trouble arises for authors and audiences alike in the fact that abstractions–raw and inarticulate interpretations–comprise the roots of all communicative utterances. Ann Berthoff calls abstraction "natural, normal: it is the way we make sense of the world in perception, in dreaming, in all expressive acts, in works of art, in all imagining" (751). And so the prospect of cultivating clear agreement between any members of a group (and especially a classroom) seems a mythical one. Considering Berthoff's 1982 essay, "Is Teaching Still Possible? Writing, Meaning, and Higher Order Reasoning," dealt specifically with student difficulty in repackaging abstract observations for others in a classroom, this situation is hardly a novel one. Berthoff recommends, "What everybody finds difficult, what diplomats and doctors, of medicine and of philosophy, find difficult, is not abstraction but generalization" (750). Though a person may easily communicate values and understandings internally, the socially contingent nature of language becomes only more apparent as one tries to pass that information on to someone else.

Process pedagogy recommends that writers who spend their time considering effective means of better grounding abstractions in the conventions

demanded by a particular rhetorical situation are thus spending their time wisely. After all, "You can get from the symbol to what it represents only by means of a meaning, a mediating idea" (751). Because every language user is responsible for suitably packaging a message to fit a particular situation, a *good* communicator is one who has benefited from actively investing thought into the processes informing their utterances. Of course, audience too plays an important role in meaning making. Berthoff observes, "Speech is not articulated sound plus intention; it is not speech until and unless it is meaningful" (749). Regardless of where it is committed, a speech act may only occur socially. Without an audience, language or thought may at best appear unintelligible sound and symbol. This is not to say individuals are incapable of tailoring these unintelligible abstractions for generalizeable communications systems. Rather, Berthoff suggests, we educators are responsible for showing students the way: "We must guide their consciousness of consciousness so that it can become the means of freeing the self from itself" (753). For educators who have taken a more process-oriented stance toward student writing, this might even seem a simple task to accomplish; if only the attention and interest of our students were guaranteed.

In order to combat the ever-evolving disinterest that many students harbor for classroom writing practices, composition instructors have increasingly turned to the visual and digital mediums that students compose in recreationally. After its visual turn, blogs, websites, and images have increasingly influenced composition education's syllabi. This pedagogical embrace of the role of images in communication hinged on the idea that students may better express their private

observations through familiar visual and digital mediums. Scholars like Diana
George suggests:

> For students who have grown up in a technology-saturated and an image-
> rich culture, questions of communication and composition absolutely will
> include the visual, not as attendant to the verbal but as complex
> communication intricately related to the world around them (32).

The logic informing statements like "students enjoy these activities on computers,
so they'll surely enjoy doing them for class," may seem compelling, but guaranteed
critical student engagement may only remain a pipe dream. When assignments ask
students to employ the same technologies they use daily and on their own accord,
why would students exert any more critical effort than what is necessary for a
particular letter grade? Considering these same students might be (and often are)
far more literate in multimedia production than their instructors, it seems
problematic to blindly assent every coherent digital gesture as the fruit of critical
analysis. Yet, this is what happens as educators try to orient themselves around the
digital literacies of their students.

  Though visual literacy and computer use recommend valuable new
treatments to tired writing lessons, the success of such aids inevitably hinges on
how an educator uses them. In "From Analysis to Design: Visual Communication in
the Teaching of Writing, George observes:

> [V]isual and written communication continue to be held in a kind of tension–
> the visual figuring in the teaching of writing as a problematic, something

added, an anomaly, a 'new' way of composing, or, somewhat cynically, as a strategy for adding relevance or interest to a required course (13).

While her essay was published early on in the new millennium, George's reflection on how written often trumps visual communication remains a common occurrence. Cynthia Selfe recognizes:

> English composition teachers have continued to privilege alphabetic texts over texts that depend on visual elements, I believe, because such texts present familiar forms, forms with which we have developed a comfortable, stable intellectual relationship (71).

In "Toward New Media Texts: Taking up the Challenges of Visual Literacy," Selfe presumes most English faculty feel uncomfortable unpacking visual media, "unless they have some training in art or design" (71). As a fellow educator who often employs visual analysis in class, it is my first compulsion to disagree with Selfe's assessment of educator insecurity, but I also have background experience in art and design [:-P]. Considering how greatly my education in educating has differed from past generations of twenty-something greenhorn writing teachers, it seems reasonable that faculty who developed professionally under alphabetic literacy and learned to teach composition "before the advent of image-capture software, multimedia texts, and the World Wide Web" would also "feel inadequate to the task of teaching students about new media texts and the emerging literacies associated with these texts" (Selfe 67). Unfortunately, good intentions are not the key to unlocking the dazzling potential of student literacy.

For educators like Selfe and Urbanski, their optimism for new media cannot

counteract the limited technological fluencies inhibiting them from evaluating

multimedia texts like they might alphabetic ones. George claims:

> [I]f we are ever to move beyond a basic and somewhat vague call for
>
> attention to 'visual literacy' in the writing class, it is crucial to understand
>
> how very complicated and sophisticated visual communication is to students
>
> who have grown up in what by all counts is an aggressively visual culture
>
> (15).

Of course, adopting the behaviors (digital literacies) of individuals (their students)

who came by digital fluencies recreationally and discursively hardly seems an easy

task. It is really the difference between studying a culture from the outside and

growing up inside a culture. Urbanski accounts for three particular obstacles when

employing digital media across composition curriculum: (1) there is a "steep

learning curve that can be involved in manipulating and navigating these

technologies," (2) there are "questions of access" for socially or financially

underprivileged individuals, and (3) Humanities academics in general and

"especially those in the field of English studies" ("Meeting," loc. 3,205-3,210). While

the first and third points paint a picture of an educator who is trying to run alone

when she should stroll toward the assistance of her more technologically capable

students, I question whether or not her concerns about student financial access to

technology holds lingering importance ("Meeting," loc. 3,253). In an age where it is

increasingly difficult to purchase a dumb phone, and when children under ten often

have access to smarter technology anyway, consumer technology is rapidly

becoming available for all consumers.

Pursuing the Future of Student Writing

We can't change the past but we can ruin the present
By scratching on our heads and fretting on the future.
– The Streets, "I love my phone"

The field of composition studies has teetered on a tipping point for some

time now. Though academic investigations of socio-political strife, turns toward

visual rhetoric, and the embrace of computers in the classroom have helped adhere

our field to the fulcrum of educational relevance, the literate capacities of upcoming

student generations stand to challenge writing instruction in dynamic in new ways.

Those who accept this threat likely find a truth in Berthoff's reasoning, "Unless and

until the mind of the learner is engaged, no meaning will be made, no knowledge can

be won" (744). As a Digital Generation's composing, exploring, and creating in

digital environments facilitate play with little regard for professional or academic

utility, stimulation of the mind via computers in the classroom becomes a distant

notion. Students simply find too much familiarity in the technology; and educators,

not enough. When communicative standards are no longer as intergenerational as

they once were, it becomes difficult to imagine that those exhibiting the multifaceted

literacies of new media will find much reason to wait for (or wish to reengage) the

alphabetic literacies of the past. Urbanski admits, "With 'new' media–film, television,

gaming–there are so many ways to engage the mind that the conventional

construction 'reading is fundamental' starts to look rather provincial and nostalgic"

("Blurring" loc. 66). If "Literacy means more than words" and " visual literacy means more than play" to the majority of out students, then yesterday was the time for educators to reassess what it means to write in the 21st century (George 16). It is through analyzing the compositional performances of students that educators may better evaluate the processes informing new media texts. By this, the critical and deconstructive skills needed for such research are no less interdisciplinary than they are foundational for those of us in the Humanities. What has and will continue to cause problems, however, are the competitive understandings scholars harbor for the "text" in textual analysis.

Text, like any digitized–and therefore digitally pluralized artifact, cannot maintain the fixed and institutional definitions it held in the age of print publishing. Urbanski notes:

> Within the Humanities, we have long accepted a rhetorical view of reading as a transaction in which we re-create, or even rewrite, a text each time we read it, but today's 'Digital Generation' seems to take that theory to an entirely new level, often literally creating the narratives as they experience them ("Blurring" loc. 57).

Because performative gesture and ephemeral value now serve to further draw definitions of text even higher above the modes and media of alphabetic literacy, "The writing and/or rhetorical component of participatory entertainment has the potential to be significantly different from the centuries of printed text that proceeded it" (Urbanski, "Blurring" loc. 66). Though I favor Urbanski's general call for institutional "ambassadors" of the Digital Generation, she and I also share

speculation that some educators are more equipped than others in meeting students in their everyday digital playgrounds ("Meeting," 3,372). For many scholars who socialized and matured amidst a notably different media culture than those of modern students, nostalgia for alphabetic literacy may keep some from assenting the highly performative, transient, and visceral conceptions of text I pursue across the following chapters. But I, like many of our students, work from the position that if you can find meaning in an image, a gesture, a sound, or any other non-alphabetic text, then that text has an author whose values, motivations, and understandings sit ripe for analysis. Since the Internet does little to mediate the expressions students author regularly, the wealth of ideology-infused student writing available online only finds censorship among the gaze of an educator's definition for "text."

For members of a younger generation who recreationally developed writing practices within digitally networked frontiers, composing itself may rightly be as reverent as it is irreverent with regards to traditionally authoritative social structures. If a Millennial communicates in interesting and valuable ways through online mashups of visual, aural, and alphabetic texts, how do the regulations and limitations imposed by more academic or institutional discourses remain relevant? Furthermore, what happens when members of this younger generation look past the computer screen and appropriate digital literacy as a means of (re)composing physical reality? Hackers and do-it-yourselfers do so regularly, and their numbers and influence may grow only exponentially as they distribute information through how-to websites and Google searches. A receptive audience for such writers seems easy to anticipate when a tech-savvy consumer cannot learn to hack a cell phone's

OS from a service provider's site, but may find instruction from a 13-year-old's YouTube broadcast. With the increasingly important roles Facebook, Twitter, and other online social networks continue to play in organizing the messages and actions (digital or physical) of social groups, the Internet increasingly becomes less of an end showcase for archived expression and more of a useful means of cultivating the change users want to see offline. Excited by high speed Internet and globalized social networking, hacker-influenced practices in composing and editing one's life pitches a reality where formal education grows obsolete as any individual may well equip herself to know and compose anything she wishes, across writing occasions many educators have yet to recognize.

II. PEACEFUL PROTESTS : PLAY-FILLED PERFORMANCES

Published far and wide
To the public's alarm and fright
Everybody's private lives
for everybody's prying eyes
– The Streets, "Something to Hide"

Compositions studies' pedagogical movements over the last few decades, though often made in the best interest of student expression, hardly grace the literacies modern students exhibit outside of class. While classroom computer use may pursue the visual and digital media with which students have become so recreationally familiar, institutional applications do not necessarily excite the nuances empowering why, how, and when a student writes. Further complication lies in the unwillingness or inability of educators in catering to the individuals needs of student digital literacies, because these literacies may seem foreign or counter to academic discourse's agenda. In "Writing Offshore: The Disappearing Coastline of Composition Theory," Cynthia Haynes argues:

> [D]espite the tightly-built craft in which we entrusted our survival as a field, we kept too close to the shoreline, dragging the anchor of argumentative writing (a.k.a critical thinking) until it took hold among the bedrock curricula of grammar and style, aims and modes, claims, grounds, and warrants (668).

In other words, our reluctance to change as a field relates to our reluctance to set out and explore the lesser-known aspects of writing. Rather, our curriculum sits secure in the values prescribed by alphabetic reading and writing–a shoreline modern young people likely treaded after or alongside exploring visual and digital forums. As time passes, communicative exchanges brought forth by new media may

only influence users at younger and younger ages. Just recently the Auburn school district in Maine unanimously approved the $200,000 budget needed to supply all its kindergarten students with iPad 2s ("What Budget Cuts?"). Rather than explore the significance of what a five-year-old's iPad authoring looks like or consider how such technologies alter the values of more traditional writing, Haynes reminds us:

> "Recurrent bouts with plagiarism, student diffidence, and service-oriented curricula, continue to plague composition programs and prompt further shoring up of each foundational outcome in each departmental strategic plan" ("Writing Offshore" 673-74).

Curricula built in response to economic and ethical social challenges do little more than treat the symptoms of a greater disease: the foundations valorizing new media writing for students seldom complement the foundations of our universities.

In looking to the roles maintained by students in a composition classroom, I find Haynes' metaphor for them as refugees to be a valuable one. She considers a student to be a refugee when he or she is positioned as "the subject of an *unreasonable* pedagogy and seeker of *abstract* asylum" ("Writing Offshore" 696). As discussed in the last chapter, though every person experiences the world through abstractions, those that seem or remain ungeneralizable for a classroom serve no practical purpose in formal education. In turn, the rules and regulations regarding proper language use in the classroom may position any and all participants as refugees–perpetual strangers (homeless) in a strange land (academia). As Haynes elaborates:

While it maintains an affinity with other displaced people, the refugee

occupies a more *generic* condition affecting one's relation to home, land, and

nation that crosses beyond other defining markers of marginalized people

such as race, ethnicity, religion, class, or gender. The generic condition of

abject forced mobility could happen to any of us, at any time ("Writing

Offshore" 696).

Under such descriptions, the refugee metaphor pits students against ongoing states

of flight from their homelands as they are asked to engage the various arguments,

debates, and positions populating a classroom. Furthermore, Haynes is right to

highlight the "throwness" our students find when "forced mobility is constitutive of

their constant moving from classroom to classroom, from pedagogy to pedagogy,

from discipline to discipline, from technology to technology, from this settlement to

that camp" ("Writing Offshore" 697). If the opportunity arose to break off and sail

away toward valuable opportunities outside of formal education, would it be

difficult to imagine students pursuing it?

What new media writing via consumer technology affords a Millennial

generation is not only the chance to break off from the formal institutions that long-

held their writings offshore, it also allows these young people to explore, meet, and

create their own abstraction-honoring networks of writing. With Haynes' reasoning

that an educational embrace of "abstraction (as *detachment from pedagogy*), rather

than argumentation (as *learning to teach*), would place in students' hands the power

to resist teaching itself," it seems unlikely that these digitally literate refugees, once

freed from the persecution of formal education, would find much reason to come

back ("Writing Offshore" 673). And if they were to return, such students might do so only in protest of the complacency and politics governing more foundational social discourses. Educationally, there is little at stake for digital natives when the performances these young people network digitally also fund a fairly comprehensive education at sea.

Digitally Literate Refugees Perform

Students revolt...
Words of abuse such as sentimental
Enough for no man to go damn and go mental
Set me off a tangent Tangerine Dream of a scene
Where people get into teams and then scream
– The Streets featuring Scru Fizzer, "Breakbat Barz"

If students author more valuable texts outside of class, logic dictates scholarly analysis would benefit from following them there. Studying the compositions young people author on their own time and volition has indeed become an important practice for educators hoping to better understand the ideological components motivating modern students. By rhetorically analyzing the non-academic texts and venues of modern recreational writing, educators may develop new frameworks for evaluating what, how, and why students compose outside of formal classroom contexts. The necessity of such scholarly pursuits takes rise when articles like, "Clive Thompson on New Literacy," recount increasingly stark divisions between the values of older and younger generations when it comes to writing. Thompson surmises, "We think of writing as either good or bad. What today's young people know is that knowing who you're writing for and why you're writing might be the most crucial factor of all." Thompson's call to reconsider black-

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and-white notions of text comes in response to the Stanford Study of Writing (2001-2006). Over the course of the study, the group collected and scrutinized nearly 15,000 samples of student writing. Texts ranged from in-class writing to formal essays, journal entries to blog posts, emails to online chat, and so on (Thompson). The scholars involved with the study suggest they took interest in sampling "everything from the group's conventional academic texts to their new-media compositions" (Fishman et al. 225). As participants volunteered a plethora of electronic texts, a concept of student writing arose that looked less like composing texts and more like directing performances.

Working from the understanding that "composition is not limited to school subject or school texts," Stanford's researchers discerned performance theory as the best means in unpacking what it means for students to write in the 21st century (225). They reason:

> Although 'performance' often refers to demonstrable mastery over skills or knowledge, and in writing programs we tend to treat student performance like something we can measure and assess using rubrics, grades, or test scores, our students compelled us to pay attention to the live, scripted, and embodied activities they stage outside the classroom: everything from spoken-word events to slam-poetry competitions to live radio broadcasts, public speaking, and theoretical presentations (Fishman et al. 226).

Observing performances across these non-traditional mediums of composition, Stanford's study prompted researchers to "consider how the act of embodying writing through voice, gesture, and movement can help early college students learn

vital lessons about literacy" (Fishman et al. 226). As a result, these researchers

broadened their understanding of composition beyond the written texts of

classrooms, to the documented acts of students in life. Certainly, the privileging of

recreational writing makes sense when "classroom talk is too often desultory,

focused on half-hearted discussions that are usually dominated by the teacher, and

more than not print-based" (Fishman et al. 244). What Fishman and others refer to

as "secondary literacy" seems far more interesting and prevalent in out-of-class

writing. The researchers refer to "secondary literacy" as "a term we use to name a

literacy that is both highly inflected by oral forms, structures, and rhythms and

highly aware of itself as writing, understood as variously organized and mediated

systems of signification" (Fishman et al. 245). What then differentiates vocal

cacophony or mindless arm flailing from the acts of "second literacies," is the

conscious decision making apparent in a gesture's execution. Therefore, when

"second literacies" sponsor an act, they do so for the same reason that funds written

composing: authors seek an audience.

Consulting the conclusions Andrea Lunsford drew as one of Stanford's

researchers, Thompson reports, "young people today write far more than any

generation before them . . . and it almost always involves text." Of course, in order

for an utterance to communicate, some sort of receiver must find meaning in the

message. A good 38% of the messages Stanford students composed fell into what

Lunsford characterizes as "life writing"–writing that takes place outside of class.

Despite the associations of informality that often accompany such writing,

Thompson muses:

The fact that students today almost always write for an audience (something

virtually no one in my generation did) gives them a different sense of what

constitutes good writing. In interviews, they defined good prose as

something that had an effect on the world. For them, writing is about

persuading and organizing and debating, even if it's over something as

quotidian as what movie to go see.

Observations like this may only come off as frustrating to educators who regularly

struggle with teaching concepts of audience, rhetoric, and argumentation. It seems

modern students already know these things well. But this is where the crux of my

ongoing argument lies: just because students are capable of doing what educators

want them to; it does not mean that they will do it. While students may feel unstable

as they try to relate to the formal standards evaluating their academic writing,

Stanford students confidently "see themselves as savvy, risk-taking writers when

they reflect on their self-sponsored writing activities" (Fishman et al. 231).

Stanford's research also mentions that while self-sponsored writing is "[e]motional,

immediate, and unconstrained," this writing also takes on additional characteristics

when it is directed toward external audiences, especially public rather than

personal ones (230). If the content of a message concerns the social well being of an

author, than consideration of how a composition might affect others seems natural.

Fishman and co. suggest:

Immediate and face-to-face, performance encourages active participation

and collaboration, and thus it models many of the qualities we value both in

real-time new-media writing, while at the same time it brings renewed

attention to talk and scripted forms of oral communication (226-7).

Thus the media outlets students perform in recreationally seem to offer the same

senses of accountability, collaboration, and inspiration that educators have hope for

but often fail to garner in class.

As students develop a flexible understanding of audience via networked

performances outside of traditional classrooms, Stanford's research team suggests

these students are general rhetors: "individuals who, singly and in groups

participate in numerous communication situations that involve a dazzling,

sometimes staggering, array of literate practices" (245). When non-written

performances may be read as texts, these practices both composed for and

communicative to an audience, they maintain rhetorical value. The valuable lesson

observed by those conducting the Stanford study is their acknowledging that time

spent in class in not the same as time spent outside of class, but all performances

across time may be communicative. Though such acknowledgments pluralize

understandings of texts above conventional notions of reading and writing

alphabetic texts, Fishman and her colleagues remind us that to be human "is to

speak and write and perform through multiple systems of signification" (228). The

group is quick to point out however, assenting writing as performance is not a

simple task:

In an age of (multi)media, we can no longer ignore the embodied nature of

discourse, and we are having to rethink almost every aspect of the teaching

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of writing, from ways of being in the classroom to the kinds of assignments

students do and how those assignments are delivered and assessed (229).

While associating performance with writing may open up valuable new

considerations when teaching composition, the infrastructures regulating how and

what we teach will need to change. Of course, these findings arose in the middle of

the last decade, and a great deal has changed online over the last ten years; let alone

the last ten months.

Since beginning my college career in 2004, computers, new media, and

Internet connectivity have increasingly influenced the research I do, the courses I

take, and the lessons I plan. Considering Facebook too took off for the first time in

2004, it seems staggering to consider the impact online social networking has found

on interpersonal communication in such a short time. Craig Watkins suggests, "Now

that the social- and mobile-media lifestyles are more routine and remarkable, more

everyday than occasional, increasing speculation about the behavioral and societal

impact is inevitable" (Watkins 49). The importance of understanding how this

technology affects users grows alongside the rising ubiquity of handheld, Wi-Fi

enabled devices. Despite the abundance of Wi-Fi hotspots, moves toward 3G, 4G,

and later generations of wireless technology, generally afford individuals a chance

to "plug in" as often as they like. I doubt many of us are inexperienced in being or

simply being around "that person" who regularly punctuates face-to-face

conversations with calls, text messages, emails, and Google searches. Indeed, at its

most modest, the cell phone's social presence has removed a great deal of debate

and speculation from the dead ends that once peppered in-person dialogues.

Needed information, after all, is only a few clicks away. With all of this in mind, "the rising suspicion that children who grow up digital will become slaves to technology and, consequently, become less social, indeed, less human," seems a natural reaction for those observing dramatic change in familiar social structures (Watkins 49). Certainly these concerns mirror those of educators who feel Internet shorthand will infiltrate the writing of students. Some might even view LOL's recent induction to the Oxford English Dictionary as a confirmation of mobile media's increasingly hold on proper (traditional) language. Alternatively, scholars like Watkins remind us that such evolutions in language are only natural.

Watkins begins "The Very Well Connected: Friending, Bonding, and Community in the Digital Age" with a reflection on exchanges he had with his fifteen-year-old cousin at a family get together. Observing her regular cell phone use, and later asking her about it, Watkins recounts, "What I came to understand is that my cousin's true interest is not in technology per se, but rather the people and the relationships the technology provides access to" (49). For Watkins' cousin, it is the access her phone offers–its touch-and-go utility–that is valuable; not the phone itself. When first organizing my research for this thesis, I recall drawing similar conclusions while interviewing a twenty-something-year-old friend about her relationship with her iPhone. With a large, diagonal crack running across the touch screen, it was not the phone's hardware that she appreciated. Rather, she found her phone most valuable for its ability to connect her with information and other people. Considering modern teens and young twenty-somethings, Watkins notices, "For this growing sector, mobile phones are a constant feature in their daily lives

and a multipurpose platform for communication, content creation, and life sharing"

(57). Generally, it is not only a matter of what the device is–something that of course

matters for most (if not all) consumers–but also what opportunities its technology

might offer a user. Considering committed users might further reprogram or hack

these technologies toward other(ed) utility, the motivations instigating and

performances resulting from a young person's use of Web 3.0 and mobile media also

deserve attention.

Like the Stanford Study of Writing, Watkins' 2006 study consulted college-

aged students. Specifically studying those who "came of age just as the computer

and the Internet emerged as commonplace technologies in American households,"

Watkins' sample population solely pursued students in their teens and twenties

(57). Rather than collect volunteer samples from students' in- and out-of-class

writing, Watkins' research team surveyed and interviewed hundreds of students

regarding the relationship between digital communication and face-to-face

communication. Interestingly, eighty-four percent of the student participants did

not consider online worlds to be "more exciting" than those off-line (Watkins 60).

This same percentage also disagreed with the claim, "Online relationships can be

just as fulfilling as off-line ones" (Watkins 62). Along these lines, Watkins study

challenges the anxiety that many parents (and I imagine educators) exhibit when

considering student attachments to personal computing and online networking.

"While it is common to describe young people as more comfortable in front of a

screen rather than a real person," Watkins research did not find enough evidence to

"substantiate the claim" (60). Rather, "[T]he evidence suggests the opposite effect:

that young people are using communication technologies to facilitate face-to-face

interactions across a dynamic mix of informal places" (Watkins 60). Though many of

our pedagogies (especially those related to computers in the classroom) seek to

further student writing digitally, Watkins' findings suggest the digital aspects of

student writing outside of class has far less to do with constructing communicative

ends (digital literacy artifacts) and serve more as a means (digitally literate

performances) for change elsewhere, offline.

For those whose understanding of self developed alongside online social

networking, the lines of writing and living blur under an existence that seems as

digital as it is analog. In turn, the relationships and conversations these individuals

compose across digital and physical media inevitably breeds something young

people have wanted for generations, a place to call their own (Watkins 59).

Historically, Watkins reasons, "Faced with few places to call their own, teens have

converted an array of venues–street corners, convenience stores, parking lots,

arcades, and theater's–into their very own third places" (59). For students, the third

place serves as a passive zone–an area of respite–between more formal institutions

like schoolwork and family. Watkins is quick to acknowledge however, "As the

picture our data paints grows sharper, it is clear that young twenty-somethings do

not view online platforms as a third place" (64). Rather, the channels young people

consult online only help compose the performances and situations students might

find relief in. Returning to Haynes' refugee metaphor, a student empowered by new,

mobile, and digital media might challenge the image of a lone, prosecuted, and

homeless hostage of academic discourse. Instead, via new media performance, such

writers appear confident in their abject status and abstract values. As Watkins observes, "The social changes wrought by technological changes symbolize human's inexorable yearning for new and improved ways of living that often involve altering or even abandoning more familiar ways of life" (51). When online networks and ubiquitous access positions a user's gaze past these "familiar ways of life," it seems only natural that rhetorical (re)negotiations of value might emerge. Such understanding certainly breeds further thought when reflecting on recent uprisings in Arab states like Egypt and Libya.

Among Revolutionary Social (Network) Discourses

We all fear of company
But we are fierce anonymously
– The Streets, "Trust Me"

A recent Washington Post article finds core Egyptian Facebook activists, the group whose page instigated the overthrow of former Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak, suffering from an "identity crisis" of sorts. What started as a message of resistance among a small group, eventually contributed to February's call for mass action in amending Egyptian politics. Though the majority of the Facebook page's nearly 101,000 members "are educated professionals in their 20s and 30s" who "have experience in opposing government," few are familiar with reforming or working with a government; let alone one that needs reorganization (Wan). William Wan reports:

> When one member suggests that the group become a political party, the
>
> meeting turns into a full-fledged shouting match. Politics–with its

accompanying machinations of power, self-interest and corruption–are what

pushed Egypt into a three-decade authoritarian regime, one member says.

Why not focus on activism instead of wasting time on a political party?

Relating this post-revolution back-and-forth to the actions shared by the same

group in February, it is clear the desire for change outweighed their understanding

of what change should ideally look like in the long run. Wan recalls, "For those

heady 18 days, Egypt's young activists shared one vision and focused all of their

efforts–tweets, Facebook posts, videos and blogs, as well as fists and stones." Wan

reason's the group's unified strength online is ultimately also their current

weakness since "everyone has a right to post a comment" on a communal online

forum. In relation to the research discussed in the last section however, the group

continues to find most importance in the collaborative–though occasionally

combative–forum they created for peer-to-peer networking. Though there is little

consensus among members on what the group's next move should be, Egypt's

younger generations still seem encouraged by their organized strength. As one

member of the Facebook group reasons, "A leader can be arrested, slandered,

dragged down into the mud. But if your leader is an idea, this is something no one

can kill" (Wan). As long as users can broadcast a message, the utterance may find an

audience.

In the months following the Egyptian revolution, the powerful performances

of young, digitally literate individuals have sparked dramatic reactions from the rest

of the world. Various governments have found opposition and Egypt has pushed

legislature to ban public protests (El-Wardani). Even Facebook has pursued more

responsibility in mediating activists' messages by recently pulling a Palestinian page advocating the next Intifada (uprising) ("Facebook Drops"). Increasingly evident in all this is the power of a message, once spread through online social networks, in sponsoring revolutionary performances in the off-line world. Though messages of protest or frustration are certainly not new, the hypertextual ability of users to pair these messages with images, videos, histories, and other media inevitably crafts each online performance in linking as a dynamic text–capable in traveling across geographic, cultural, and lingual boundaries. As the discursive legs of such messages also grow, those who might have otherwise curled into balls as refugees in the face of discursive institutions now seem far more revolutionary as large, diverse groups join together (and unpredictably quickly) behind common messages. Such behavior is not merely exclusive to disgruntled citizens in Arab states however. Younger generations of Internet users have so internalized their interactions with the loosely malleable and uncensored digital structures as a regular (maybe necessary) part of day-to-day life that there really cannot be much surprise in how discourses adopted online color the way they see the world.

Once structures of publishing, distribution, and communications went online, a virtual playground emerged. Decentered even further from its foundational and historically situated physical structure, the digitized text ultimately becomes a new appropriation with new assets. In physical reality, Jacques Derrida reminds us, "The center is at the center of the totality, and yet, since the center does not belong to the totality (is not part of the totality), the totality has its center elsewhere. The center is not the center" (278-9). With regards to the interplay of semiotic centers online, if

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the *essence* of a symbol's identity cannot be perfectly realized offline–where historically situated notions of morality, ethics, and prudence govern social meaning making–there is even less chance of artifacts maintaining predictable patterns of social value and application when distributed online. The mainstream rise of file sharing and piracy in the late nineties may illustrate a discursive situation where the abilities of users to alter structures in their favor online outshined the ethical and moral judgments they probably revered as an offline consumer. After all, society generally still finds more at fault with shoplifting than it does with pirating music files. In turn, those young and digital individuals who continue using online social networks to provoke off-line social change in Africa share much with early pioneers of online piracy: both groups played with digital structures in ways that foundational off-line institutions could not predict nor counter. In "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," Derrida suggests, "By orienting and organizing the coherence of the system, the center of a structure permits the play of its elements inside the total form" (279). Not insignificantly, African activists, hackers, and file sharers alike have found means in (re)organizing the coherence of others' structures via Internet media. While this landscape of play certainly constitutes the foundation for online hacking and piracy, it is naive to think composition in general is free from its influence.

Even in the modern composition classroom, pedagogy has placed play as a viable consideration in teaching deconstruction. Because academic discourse–the master game played by students and educators alike–maintains what is often considered a fixed (and therefore teachable) center, educators should find little

insecurity as they encourage students to deconstruct or compose "unconventional"

texts like images, comics, music videos, pop-music, websites, and so on. Derrida

observes, "The concept of centered structure is in fact the concept of a play based on

a fundamental ground, a play constituted on the basis of a fundamental immobility

and a reassuring certitude, which itself is beyond the reach of play" (Derrida 279).

In relation to composition pedagogy's advocacy of play, an instructor likely

encourages such playful performances with an ideal center in mind–one that

homogenizes all student expressions towards a certain outcome. In this situation,

student composing is simply not at play–in the unpredictably decentered sense of

the word. Under Derrida's definition of play, an audience may not predetermine the

ends of a play-filled act. If an educator wished to pursue this sense of play with

students, it is difficult to imagine something like a fair and balanced method of

evaluating one student's text in relation to another. While I would love to receive a

thoughtful clay sculpture in place of an uninspired paper as a student responds to a

research assignment, it's difficult to imagine how comparably I or any other

educator might grade the effort. This, in part, is why many educators continue to

find anxiety in playing with academic discourse at all. Derrida claims, "[A]nxiety is

invariably the result of a certain mode of being implicated in the game, of being

caught by the game, of being as it were at stake in the game from the outset (279).

When academic discourse sets the foundation for how students must present texts,

it is no wonder the students in my first-year-writing class find as much anxiety in

formatting works cited pages, in-text citations, headers, and figures as I do teaching

these things. MLA in particular and academic discourse in general sets forth little

more than a high-stakes game in which students must master an array of foundational centers before an audience for their writing might be assured. Of course, this game (like all language games) is crooked–a receptive audience is never guaranteed.

In academia, opportunities in which students may just sit down and write appear to be nothing more than a pipe dream if their texts stand to be evaluated. Even in informal writing, complete sentences, proper punctuation, and clearly defined paragraphs, inevitably shackle the freedom implied by free-writing activities. Of course, textual communications on Facebook, Twitter, and elsewhere are just as imbricated with particular ways of committing communicative violence. In line with the desire for audience, a writer's pursuit of acceptance models itself on a reflection of certain socially constructed signs. There is good reason behind children learning the alphabet early, as learning the individual characters is a necessary step in learning the words, punctuation, grammar, and other structures that inform signs and communicate rhetorical value for others. Therefore, any play is governed by its inherent capacity/need to signify value. Derrida observes, "The concept of the sign cannot in itself surpass this opposition between the sensible and the intelligible," because all signs spring forth from "this opposition and its system" (Derrida 281). However, this is not to say the meanings governing a text, and artifact, and utterance at one moment are the same in every other. Derrida recommends, "play is always caught up in tension" (Derrida 290). The signs funding and created by one's play carry the colors of both "history" and "presence." In defining play as, "[T]he disruption of presence," Derrida implies that a play-filled act

is highly contingent regarding both time and space (Derrida 292). When online play travels greater distances and at higher speeds than play off-line, it is no wonder the institutions that once defined and maintained the foundations of society–ethics, morals, and language–cannot keep up.

Beyond having the capacity to play online, average users also find themselves immersed in a treasure trove of resources to play with. As long as power stays on, users keep uploading YouTube videos, Google keeps scanning books, and bloggers keep posting, the multicultural well housing the world's digital samples will run ever deeper. Educators might assume general Internet users, like general students, always possess the capacity to lose interest in a discussion forum, online, in-class, or otherwise. But when writing behavior is mediated by a certain set of rules of procedures, it seems reasonable that online resources might encourage anti-foundational behavior in hacking, pirating, and protesting. These figures cast an interesting light on Derrida's discussion "bricoleurs." Channeling Lévi-Strauss, Derrida defines a bricoleur as:

> someone who uses... the instruments he finds at his disposition around him, those which are already there, which had not been especially conceived with an eye to the operation for they are to be used and to which one tries by trial and error to adapt them, not hesitating to change them whenever it appears necessary, or to try several of them at once, even if their form and their origin are heterogeneous–and so forth (285).

Considering much education in online hacking and piracy comes by way of the trial-and-error methods of self-sponsored education, the digital do-it-yourselfer seems a

modern bricoleur to the nth degree–whose skillfulness may only be more

exceptional for the seemingly endless trials she may run on digitally protean

structures. This connection with a modern hacker's performances becomes a logical

one when "it is even said that bricolage is critical language itself" (Derrida 285).

Indeed, if the English language itself may be identified as a quagmire of perpetual

incoherence and ruin, any discourse maintains a bricoleur quality. Though it is

idealistic to consider a bricoleur or hacker to be like an "engineer who supposedly

breaks with all forms of bricolage" it is this ideal that spurs on individuals who want

to create change. When funded by a seemingly endless set of resources for

decentering, remixing, and hacking the status quo, it seems understandable that

Egypt's' Facebook activists have difficulty in predicting where they will go next.

They have been and continue to be @play.

@play

The world is outside but inside warm
Inside informal, outside stormy, inside normal
– The Streets, "Outside Inside"

Over the course of the last couple of chapters, I have sought to rattle

foundational or totalized conceptions of text, literacy, and education, which are both

hurting and devaluing the study of composition in traditional classroom settings.

New literacies, as they are conceived by way of Internet access, mobile media, visual

rhetoric, online networks, and even hacking, securely position a millennial

generation of students as a group that may run circles around the digital skill sets

and institutional discourses of teachers. As today's young people learn and practice

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rhetorical strategies outside of the classroom, a formal education based in memorization, specialization, and argumentation, loses value in the face of relativism and social contingency. Derrida reasons, "If totalization no longer has any meaning, it is because the infiniteness of a field cannot be covered by a finite glance or a finite discourse, but because the nature of the field–that is, language and a finite language–excludes totalization" (289). While those in the field of composition have begun moving past the reading and writing practices that once totalized concepts of literacy, their transition to multimodal and performative texts has been dreadfully slow; much slower than it was for many of our current or recent students. Therefore, I consider the field of composition, to be one @play. I subscribe to these sentiments "because instead of being an inexhaustible field... there is something missing from it: a center which arrests and grounds the play of substitutions" (Derrida 289). I make use of the "@" out of reverence to the new literacies at work in the modern concept of play-filled composing.

Because the composing practices of new media writers position them in this field–@play–so too must educators find themselves in hopes of articulating centers as they arise. Rather than honor the definitions and expectations dictated by social traditions, institutional education, and ethical law, digital existence has revised the Digital Generation's ways of experiencing and communicating the world. Such skillful traversal through digital media is perhaps best described by Gregory Ulmer's coining of "electracy." In brief, Ulmer recommends, "Electracy is to digital media what 'literacy' is to alphabetic writing" (*Avatar Emergency* 12). This new "electric" literacy favors the shift past reading toward more visual, oral, and aural

expressions. Ulmer is quick to acknowledge (and I am quick to agree), however, "There is nothing bad or wrong with literacy (needless to say), but only that literacy is relative to its alphabetic apparatus" ("Elementary" XII). Of course, alphabetic structures are only one of many excited by digital media. Where I find Ulmer's work to be most striking is in how well it complements notions of text as performance and gesture. Ulmer recommends, "One may learn all the tricks of Photoshop, Dreamweaver, Illustrator, CSS/DHTML and still be anelectrate" ("Elementary" XI). The inventions and pursuits that inform new media texts thus become an important consideration in evaluating an author's skill–not as a ghost in the machine, but as merely a ghost traveling between machines.

While educators of a more traditional slant may hold a student's recreational digital play suspect, a text that has an audience is also a text that communicates value. If students are producing more critically interesting work outside of class, educators need to move beyond their given classroom or professional contexts– toward the expressions and artifacts that students actually take interest in. In the following chapter, I will continue to pursue such expressions but with the added consideration that young people do not view the Web as a final destination. Too often, a computer in the classroom pedagogy distracts students and teachers alike from recognizing the important and valuable overlaps between electracy and material reality. By analyzing how literate artifacts and behaviors represent practices in upgrading, the next chapter seeks a heuretical understanding of how educators may better spot, channel, and evaluate the performances of future student generations. In employing this heuretical approach, I refer to Ulmer's classification:

"Heuretics (the term is related to "eureka" and "heuristics") uses theory for the generation of new kinds of works, as distinct from hermeneutics, which applies theory to the interpretation of existing texts" ("Elementary" XI). Therefore, I will be pairing conventional theory with what I consider to be striking cases of young people's composing @play, in hopes of showing (1) that educators of any age might appreciate electrate performances and (2) that pedantic traditional value systems have become obsolete when factored alongside the play-filled acts of the young and deviously electrate. An easy misstep for such an endeavor is forgetting that students who can and do follow the standards of academic discourse are no real threat. It is these happily enrolled and participating students–like those at Stanford–who too often serve as fodder for published research. Because students learn and compose whatever strikes their interest outside of (and especially in defiance of) class, it seems imperative that educators attempt to embrace and harness the skill sets of academic discourse's digitally literate adversaries. Otherwise, formal instruction will surely fall obsolete to the free-yet-comprehensive education online play increasingly provides. The dilemma only grows more tangible when a poor teenager from Washington State teaches himself to steal vehicles, fly planes, evade police, and inevitably play Web 2.0 antihero for two years (Lacitis). The Barefoot Bandit's recent exploits allude to a type of electrate existence where to live is to compose, regardless of format.

III. WHEN COMPOSING'S @PLAY

Geezers need excitement
If their lives don't provide them this they incite violence
Common sense, simple common sense
– The Streets, "Geezers Need Excitement"

On July 11, 2010, Bahamas authorities apprehended Colton Harris-Moore

(the Barefoot Bandit). The teenager's two-year joyride across the United States–

stealing vehicles, flying planes, evading police, robbing businesses, and hijacking the

hearts of peers–culminated in a high-speed boat chase off the coast of a remote

island. Having jettisoned an Apple Macbook and an iPod touch during the chase,

many reason "Harris-Moore may have been nothing without the Internet" (Lacitis,

"Barefoot," par. 1). While Harris-Moore's out-of-the ordinary escapades launched

international headlines, the technologies funding his "voyage" were hardly

exceptional. Harris-Moore's generation traverses the boundaries of traditional

literacy regularly. Maturing alongside Web 2.0, the millennial generation find,

create, and exchange information at staggering paces across digital networks.

Despite electracy's dynamic and multifaceted implications, it is still a literacy–an

understanding of shared social semiologies. Like any alphabetic composing effort,

the limitations of an individual's electrate expression lie in the language and values

of the author. Therefore, rhetorical analysis proves helpful in unearthing the

motivations behind institutional and non-institutional composition alike.

As one's fluency for a particular medium does not develop or exist in a

vacuum, the social epistemic nature of one composition will ultimately offer

valuable suggestions toward other cases. Rhetorical considerations tell us that

although Harris-Moore's ideological and discursive navigation makes him distinct,

the values and discourses therein cannot be entirely exceptional. His role, most

simply, seemed one of an angsty teenager–sick of school, family, and "the man's"

institutions. And, of course, part of being disgruntled is finding the agency to

communicate dissatisfaction for others. In "Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing

Class," James Berlin recommends, "[I]n studying rhetoric–the ways discourse is

generated–we are studying the ways in which knowledge comes into existence"

(488). An individual's knowledge is therefore something negotiated with or against

the language of others. As Berlin puts it, "[T]he subject is itself a social construct that

emerges through the linguistically-circumscribed interaction of the individual, the

community, and the material world" (489). In turn, Berlin advocates social-

epistemic rhetoric as preferred means in tracking an individual's values in relation

to others'. Such analysis thus becomes a "political act involving a dialectical

interaction engaging the material, the social and the individual writer, with language

as the agency of mediation" (Berlin 488). In other words, reality for any one

individual is an amalgamation of past dialectical exchanges with other people,

discourses, and situations. When considering the multimodal forms sponsored by

electracy, every act–every abstract expression–harbors rhetorics with meanings

that are as ephemeral as the socially contingent situations they fund.

Rhetorical analysis situates Harris-Moore's Barefoot Bandit performances as part of

the same continuum in which writers appropriate from the past for future works. In

relation to the quaintness of Harris-Moore's Bandit title, I am further inclined to

point out how the unoriginality of our narratives and the diversity of our language

mean any writing system thrives off a certain degree of petty theft. In composition,

pastiche has become a mainstream necessity as film reboots, music samples, and zombified genre rewrites color so much of our popular media. As culture has grown increasingly gratuitous in its borrowing, we have seen the pejorative connotations attached to media piracy in the Napster era fade. Though I would argue upfront notions of artistic piracy are more prevalent today via digital means in archiving and distributing cultural artifacts, piracy's OED definition as "the unauthorized use or reproduction of another's work" has really not grown to reflect its business as usual employment in popular writing. Sure there is a nod to modern copyright law, but in a digital authoring landscape piqued by remix and sampling, what really constitutes another's work? Furthermore, modern media piracy suggests a system defined more by consumption than production. The text starts somewhere else and ends with the pirate (Figure 1). While this model surely describes the behavior of those

Figure 1 A "pirate" model of media consumption

who torrent files without seeding for others in p2p online networks, it hardly represents the new media writer–whose collection of others' digital works finds new and extended life at the hands of user-friendly (and often free) authoring software and hardware. The refugee writer not only performs, she finds a livelihood (re)producing stolen texts–many of which were property of the institutions formerly holding her at bay. In considering Harris-Moore's electrate riffing with

multiple digital and physical mediums as an extension of new media writing, I

propose the term "banditry" as a fitting companion to composing @play (figure 2).

Leveraging from the OED's "bandit," what better descriptions might there be than

(1)"a robber or outlaw belonging to a gang [or network] and typically operating in
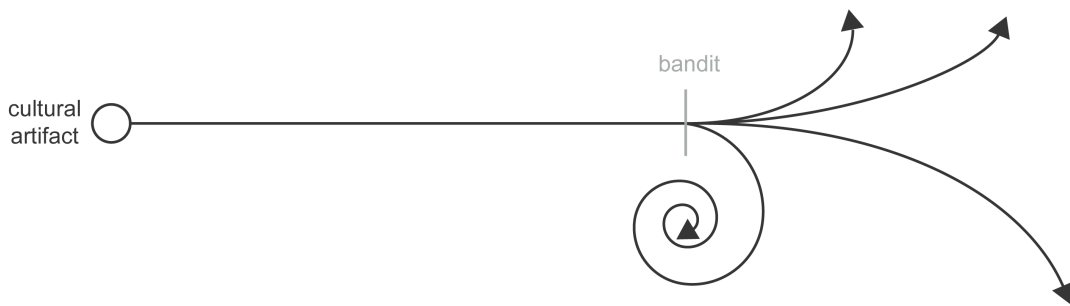
Figure 2 A "bandit" model of media consumption (production)

an isolated or lawless area [the Web]" and (2) "a person notably proficient at

something?" As we look ahead to the electrate performances of many Millennials, I

implore we consider media banditry not as criminal (in the conventional sense) but

in line with artistry (in the digitized, networked, and remixed sense).

This chapter explores a heuretic framework invented by rhetorics I observed

in the Barefoot Bandit's documented performances. In pairing various electracy-

funded examples of searching, collecting, upgrading, and gaming with both

established and novel composition theories, the following sections serve as an

illustration of what I describe as a banditry model of writing—a model that seeks to

better describe and evaluate the compositional influence electracy may fund in off-

line writing occasions. After all, regularly oscillating between digital and material

resources is where many modern student pragmatists exist. They seek ultimate

utility in the juxtaposition of pixels with picket signs, computer screens with vocal

screams, and online play with serious careers. By encouraging others to devote

analysis to the non-academic and often anti-foundational behavior of young people like the Barefoot Bandit, the following analysis begs educators to look past classroom convenience samples if they hope to interpret, encourage, and evaluate the literate potential of modern composition students. If we ignore the importance of recreational discursive play outside of classroom walls, Bizzell's assessment that, "We American academics are anti-intellectual precisely in our reluctance to emerge from our respective disciplines, to act as intellectuals in the larger community of the whole university and the whole society," certainly seems as appropriate as ever (54). When we instructors take our discourse and ourselves too seriously, we risk misinterpreting a younger generation's dynamic play with abstract variables like learning/participating, observing/authoring, and constructing/remixing as trivial online dawdling. We must look to the bandits, hackers, and players on the fringe of communication if we wish to continue justifying formal education in composition as culturally valuable and necessary.

Searching Stranger Screens//Screening Stranger Searches

If you don't know where you're going
Any road will take you there
– The Streets, "The Way of the Dodo"

In unpacking Harris-Moore's electrate potential, we must first consider the nuances of his orientations and motivations. I do so with the question, "What was Harris-Moore searching for?" Growing up on Camano Island, Washington, in a tarp-riddled, single-wide trailer–boxed in by cedar forests, broken-down vehicles, and "No Trespassing" signs–Harris-Moore's past home life seems far from privileged

(Johnson, par. 19). A CNN review of more than a thousand pages of court documents illustrates a childhood of ongoing neglect and disappointment with regard to authority figures like his parents, his teachers, and local police (Oppmann, par. 10). While it is common to pin deviant behavior to a broken home situation, Harris-Moore's desire to leave his home situation certainly seems warranted. An earlier psychological evaluation suggests Harris-Moore's recent escapades sought respite from his demons and "a home situation marked by instability, loss and alcohol abuse" (Oppmann, par. 8). In an effort to not validate the Barefoot Bandit's past, however, it is important to note an early history in petty theft and breaking and entering. Harris-Moore was even sentenced to four years in juvenile detention in 2007, after police caught him living in an unoccupied home. After being transferred to a halfway house on good behavior in 2008, Harris-Moore crept out an open window and fell into his two-year stint as the Barefoot Bandit (Johnson, par. 26). While court transcriptions and news articles author the Barefoot Bandit's origin story as one of broken homes and social unrest, it is also a broadly familiar tale across America. The differences between Harris-Moore and most other troubled teens, however, lie in the lengths he went to in seeking liberation from his home situation. Berlin reminds us that "Conceived from the perspective of rhetoric, ideology provides the language to define the subject (the self), other subjects, the material world, and the relation of all these to each other" (479). If Harris-Moore's ideological values stood in opposition to the discourses of his past, then he presumably found little value in the definitions of community, home, education, and law he grew up with.

Today, if one's orientations stand in opposition to conventional cultural values–and the ethical constraints that accompany–unmediated Internet access would offer someone like Harris-Moore limitless potential in shaping an adversarial discursive position. When online searches contribute to our local historical, cultural, or ideological background, the findings that result may be as immediate as they are fruitful–whether supportively or defiantly so. In turn, active practices in searching likely instigated and maintained the Barefoot Bandit's work via the new information, alternatives, and encouragement he may have easily found online. Under Harris-Moore's activist orientations, such searches were likely valuable to him for their utility in his unlawful situation. In *Permanence and Change* Kenneth Burke proposes:

> To live is to have a vocation, and to have a vocation is to have an ethics or scheme of values, and to have a scheme of values is to have a point of view, and to have a point of view is to have a prejudice or bias which will motivate and color our choice of means (Burke 257).

Because Banditry facilitated Harris-Moore's recent two-year vocation, the gazes and values he maintained during that time naturally conflicted with more conventional orientations and ethics. Therefore, the criminal aspects of a person's pursuits only arise when her orientations compete with more socially acceptable terms. Though casuistic, such considerations certainly raise arguments against the pejorative connotations unfamiliar or emergent orientations receive from more conservative societal structures.

Under the influence of an easily accessible World Wide Web, America's younger generations stand to face far more competition regarding their allegiance to the ethics of their parents. In a recent interview, Francis Ford Coppola locates an example in the way digital distribution continues to critique foundational values of ownership and copywriting. With regard to the arts, Coppola recalls, "In the old days, 200 years ago, if you were a composer, the only way you could make money was to travel with the orchestra and be the conductor, because then you'd be paid as a musician. There was no recording. There were no record royalties." Oriented by this reference to the past, Coppola encourages the illegal downloading of music and movies. Setting aside the fact that his directing career and (likely) the beginnings of his wine making career depended on his films making money, his questioning "who said art has to cost money? And therefore, who says artists have to make money?" locate his definitions for artistry and craft outside of conventional norms. As such definitions gain more prominence and popular acceptance, the mismatch between individual interests and social values are highly variable. Burke claims, "Life itself is a poem in the sense that, in the course of living, we gradually erect a structure of relationships about us in conformity with our interests" (254). As our capacity to seek and ever more frequently find complementary pairings for our anti-foundational interests online, institutions surely lose the ability to justify and enforce ethics of old. When searching online, satisfaction simply depends on the vocabulary of one's protest.

Returning to the Barefoot Bandit, cyber security experts speculate it was his Wi-Fi enabled gadgets that ultimately carried him on his journey (Lacitis, "Barefoot,"

par. 4). Erik Lacitis, a Seattle Times reporter following the case, reasons that "[i]t wouldn't have taken much cleverness on Harris-Moore's part, just spending time with Google" ("Barefoot," par. 19). He may have been alone in the woods, but an electrate existence is hardly one isolated from others where Wi-Fi is available. Considering Burke's recommendation that "[a] way of seeing is also a way of not seeing," Harris-Moore's capacity to search, network, and publish information would only find limitation in the scope of his search terms. Thus some fortune lies ahead for those whose Internet searches grow and diversify with the user's longing to gaze past familiar discursive barriers. It is down these hyperlink rabbit holes where one might come to terms with new social conflicts, provocations, and insecurities that have traditionally mediated a person's understanding of the unfamiliar. Alternatively, it is also probable that a person may search and hypertext their way into a destructively deviant place. It is in the limitations of a person's gaze that the idea of unrestrained and non-sequential online searching becomes mythical. A person may only ever navigate within the scope of what is readable from within her own familiar discourse. The necessity of relying on familiar terms when encountering new forms is a matter of what Burke observes in saying "Even if any given terminology is a reflection or reality, by its very nature as a terminology it must be a selection of reality; and to this extent it must function also as a deflection of reality" ("From Language" 1341). Such is the directing nature of what Burke refers to as terministic screens: "[M]uch that we take as observations about 'reality' may be but the spinning out of possibilities implicit in our particular choice of terms" (Burke, "From Language" 1341). When so many of the terms we explore

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online link to predetermined algorithms and addresses, even greater mediation may be traced in the modes of a person's electrate searching.

Considerations of how hypertext influences reading behavior are not necessarily new. Certainly more potential for distraction lies in the commonly blue and underlined hotlinks to other (un)related texts populating an online document. In "The Effect of Hypertext on Processes of Reading and Writing," Davida Charney recognizes:

> The very notion that hypertext designer-writers can create meaningful, useful networks in the first place depends on a whole range of assumptions about how to divide up and relate parts of texts, including which segments of text constitute meaningful nodes, which types of links are meaningful and important, and which types of text can or ought to be read nonlinearly (87).

The dangerous influence hypertextual structure poses on more traditional reading/writing structures is the removal of a document's bookends. Without a clearly defined and continuous end, all interlinked texts naturally constitute the body of a variable discordant search. While acknowledging that "[s]tudies of reading comprehension confirm that readers understand and learn most easily from texts with well-defined structures that clearly signal shifts between parts," Charney maintains a certain level of order exists in navigating hypertextual environments (85). The inability of humans to "think of everything at once" means a certain linear path develops out of user decisions. (89). As the sequence of a search spreads, a narrative of linkages forms, and memory presumably develops alongside. The relationships held between hypertext and my own students only enrich Charney's

final promotion of critical design and engagement of hypertextual spaces (88).

While the Freshman in my first-year writing class may not have built a website

before and therefore do not think about programming hypertext, more than one of

my students have made regular habit of highlighting certain key words throughout

their blog posts for class. When I asked one student about it, she simply replied,

"The text did not look right" without the colored highlights. As online reading

practices map an individual's searching for the relevant terms of a rhetorical

situation, the meanings afforded by a basic artifact stand to multiply under future

encounters with different exigencies.

Though a user carries out searches individually, relevance and further

motivation comes by way of participation in social networks. Last year, Palladium–a

footwear company–produced a human-interest documentary on Detroit, as part of

their online "Explorations" series. *Detroit Lives* (2010) follows host Johnny Knoxville

as he surveys Detroit from the perspectives of the few who either stayed or moved

to Detroit after its economic collapse in the last decade. This agenda clearly seeks to

offer an alternate perspective to the popular image of Detroit as a ruined and crime-

stricken city. In a blog post from last year however, Rice–a former resident of

Detroit–claims this counter narrative is really not a new or profound response to

what he so eloquently pitches as: "Once a prosperous, industrial city, Detroit

currently struggles to attract investment, new residents, and solutions to its

decaying infrastructure" (*The Rhetoric of Cool* 51). Rather than reiterating the tired

story about how "Detroit is in ruins or it is about to be rejuvenated," Rice would like

to tell stories of Detroit as a network, so that he might "move toward invention, and

not repetition of a commonplace" ("Inventing New Media"). For Rice, in *The Rhetoric of Cool*, such invention seems to take the form of former Michigan Governor Jennifer Granholm's campaign to promote Detroit as a "cool" city in the early 2000s. In viewing Detroit's coolness as appropriation, Rice reasons, "Detroit is a cool city not because of anything specific it has done (or not done) but rather because of how one individual appropriates imagery and ideas in order to construct a new place of meaning" (*The Rhetoric of Cool* 54). While the overt message of Detroit Lives is one of how the city is finding reanimation and not further demise, Rice neglects to link his call for network narratives about Detroit to the various groups of young people the film follows. While the efforts of these young people vary across real estate purchases, restaurant opening, urban gardening, planting local markets, and exploring artistic expression, these practices collectively fund Motown's changing face. In turn, regardless of what services, gestures, or performances these groups of twenty-to-thirty somethings provide the city, they are networked by a common search for opportunity in a space others have abandoned.

When young people optimistically embrace the D.I.Y. opportunities emerging from Detroit and other Rust Belt cities, their advanced capacity to objectively analyze social situations outside of historically fixed identities seems certain. A transaction with others is always taking place, regardless of whether the author cares to admit it or not. Because information and context are as readily available as they are transnational via uncensored online sources, this generation has every potential to form ideological preferences without falling victim to the social traps and insecurities that xenophobia instigated in earlier generations. By juxtaposing

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resources, information, and values, digital texts allow readers and writers to "interact with the unexpected textual and visual associations juxtapositions force us to encounter" (Rice, *The Rhetoric of Cool* 76). When the gazes of individuals overlap, certainly a network is formed by the performances that follow. Fittingly, Rice works to theorize, "how juxtaposition can thus function 'as dare' and teach students writing outside of 'the neatly, ordered' systems believed to be the only authentic method" (*The Rhetoric of Cool* 87). Unlike how the strict rules and policies governing authoritarian education formats bully students into defining the edges of *right* and *wrong*, a pedagogy founded on juxtaposition encourages invention and probability in the transient arrangement of collected things. Rice suggests, "The challenge for composition studies is to translate the theoretical principles of juxtaposition to a pedagogy appropriate for digital writing"–one where students both act as receivers and arbiters of juxtapositions (*The Rhetoric of Cool* 91). Under the breed of electracy I continue to push here, such pedagogy will only challenge millennial students if the accompanying juxtapositions take place across gatherings of both digital and material texts.

The "21st Century (Digital Boy)" Collects

I came to this world with nothing
And I'll leave with nothing but love
Everything else is just borrowed
– The Streets, "Everything is Borrowed"

Whether it is actively updated or not, the information an individual authors online sits open and ready for consult by others. For someone desiring to successfully pick locks or fly planes, open-access to relevant tutorials may be readily

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available through simple Google searches. Such is the educational behavior Harris-Moore is said to have conducted, as his iPod Touch alone could surf the web, send and receive e-mails, and store up to 90,000 email-shareable photos (Lacitis, "Ditched," par. 10). Some security specialists also speculate, "He wouldn't need to e-mail or call anyone, just log onto a website that for outsiders would appear to carry fictional stories, but which are actually scenarios people are writing, suggesting what steps Harris-Moore might take next" (Lacitis, "Barefoot," par. 28). While certain strands of this last speculation come off a bit paranoid, the potential for a bandit network of like minds and resources of course exist. The influential importance of resource networks and user-driven forums inevitably helped promote its primary sponsor as Time Magazine's "Person of the Year" in 2006. In that sites like YouTube encourage users to simply broadcast, a network develops as performances become the ends or juxtaposed parts of individual searches. User content that is helpful or interesting to others may spur further social engagement through comments, tributes, mashups and so on. Furthermore, searches that conclude without a fitting resource might spur on another's new production of searchable content.

These types of online environments sponsor creative production among the logic users develop between connections. Geoff Sirc recommends, "It is this associational logic of linkages that we need to develop in our classrooms, in order to help foster a personal aesthetic among our students" ("Box-Logic" 123). An active awareness of personal aesthetic inevitably motivates students to compose thoughtful compositions, when authoring a text also serves as a reflective process in

authoring one's self. There is certainly a reason that self-reflective and -referential

journaling riddles most personal blogs, when the objective analyses accompanying

other, more institutional, writing practices reflects less on the personal values and

individual ethos of a writer. In "Box-Logic," Sirc suggests:

> [A]s readers, we might best take the anticipatory stance toward texts: ready
>
> to enter an exhibit; students as curators, mounting another show of the ever-
>
> evolving permanent collection at their musées imaginaires. Text, then, as a
>
> collection of retrojective, idiosyncratic dream-moments, now electronically
>
> gathered, framed, and exhibited ("Box-Logic" 116).

In this scheme, the sense of responsibility a writer finds in curating "imaginary

museums" comes under the admittance that the things a person values and collects

also defines her to others.

In grappling with both the breadth and the influence of a writer's collections,

Sirc finds priority in opportunities "to show my students how their compositional

future is assured if they can take an art stance to the everyday, suffusing the

materiality of daily life with an aesthetic" ("Box-Logic" 117). An art stance may arise

when an otherwise trivial or useless artifact finds new and valuable use in the hands

of a caring collector. It is under this capacity to isolate, designate, and remix the

value of various socio-cultural artifacts that collecting garners, "the ability to give

new life to objects and, hence, renewing existence" (Sirc, "Box-Logic" 121). With

this, Sirc observes, "Materials are unoriginal, then, recycled, chosen on the basis of

exoticism and strong interest, as well as availability" ("Box-Logic" 118). What

matters is not what a resource is supposed to do for us in essence (since any essence

is easily destroyed by misapplication) but how we might valuably use the artifact in future applications. These notions of junkyard sponsored art collections certainly run in opposition to the various canons forming a foundation for "seminaries of higher learning," but Sirc argues "strong art, we see, can be created out of a collection of well-chosen interesting little bits of the everyday" ("Box-Logic" 122). The challenge for Sirc's student composers, "then, is to capture that memory-laden thrill for the viewer, inventing a uniquely visionary world from carefully chosen fragments of the existing one" ("Box-Logic" 117). While such promotion of emotional exploration defies the West's traditionally logic-centric commitments to representation, such pursuits have long authored the expressions of art from elsewhere in the world.

Heavily influenced by the tenants of Zen Buddhism, the motivations and practices accompanying Japanese artistry seem akin to what Sirc wishes to see in his students. In his essay, "Zen and Artistry," Thomas P. founds Zen aesthetics under (1) simplicity of form, (2) a celebration of "the ordinary, the everyday, and the natural, even the seemingly trivial or ugly," and (3) "genuine heart" or *makoto no kokoro* (Kasulis 363-66). This third concept, kokoro (heart) is crucial consideration in Zen artistry's "tendency to evaluate the emotion not on what it was, but how it arose, and how it was experienced" (Kasulis 369). It pursues the belief that when an expression speaks to an open heart, what we feel is a compulsion to do what is right for the situation. Not unlike the power of rhetorical analysis, Kasulis reasons:

> If we focus instead on what makes an act of artistic creation a Zen
>
> experience, we not only avoid these taxonomic issues but we also become

capable of penetrating the philosophical anthropology, the theory of person,

at the heart of Zen Buddhism (358).

Outside of alphabetically defined rhetorical structures however, "*kokoro* is not just a

human characteristic. For the ancient Japanese, things have *kokoro* (*mono no*

kokoro), as do 'events' or 'words' (*koto no kokoro*)" (366). In this transaction, both

writers and texts conduct agency as each expresses meaning for the other (Kasulis

366). Of course, even in the most technical of writing genres, a writer's ethos is

always endangered by a reader's regard for the texts she has authored. As Sirc

privileges student efforts in articulating the feelings they harbor for particular texts

or collection of texts, he seems to recommend that such emotional digression is a

comparable pursuit in learning to effectively communicate. After all, both creative

and technical forms of writing inevitably provide their fair share of social

misunderstanding.

When collecting hinges on "what feels right at the time," many digital or

discursive influences may seem acceptable when an individual is seeking to escape a

familiar situation. Donald Norman reasons this to be OK, however, in

that"[e]motions are always passing judgments, presenting you with immediate

information about the world: here is potential danger, there is potential comfort;

this is nice, that bad" (10). Therefore, scrutinizing the passionate valorizations and

applications that references, topics, facts, quotes, and other artifacts assume across

digital expressions should offer a general understanding of how critically students

rationalize the value of various collections to others and to themselves. In reflecting

on the individual and collective importance of teapots he owns, Norman admits,

"Sure, utility and usability are important, but without fun and pleasure, joy and excitement, and yes, anxiety and anger, fear and rage, our lives would be incomplete" (8). Emotion excitement sponsors an individual's play when it may be more useful to obey the rules. For Harris-Moore, his Wi-Fi and hard drive enabled capacity to collect digital materials, could have afforded play across a broad array of discourses, disciplines, nations, and so on. In turn, the collections and selections that any younger individual makes today will likely have more intercultural and interdisciplinary depth than those who lived most of their lives in a community marked by geographic isolation and homogeneity–the communities of a pre-Internet-as-we-now-know-it past. Perhaps it is only natural, then, that local concerns of utility and usability in a classroom would tarnish under a young person's excited pursuit of the unfamiliar. As Norman reasons emotions "are equally critical for intelligent machines, especially autonomous machines of the future that will help people in their daily lives," a formidable mismatch certainly occurs as user-centered technology design further infiltrates the often user-abusive writing practices of a classroom (13). Certainly the texting or Web browsing offered via phones or laptops during class time will stand as more immediately useful and interesting than any given lecture on MLA style. It is the emotional will to pleasure, not the logical adherence to classroom procedure, that inevitably leads their attention elsewhere and online.

Traditional institutions simply cannot compete with the immediate and interesting transactions found by way of the hardware housing mobile and new media. This reality brings to mind California punk rock outfit Bad Religion, and their

early nineties song 21st Century (Digital Boy). Regardless of society's limited cultural embrace of digital media at the time of the song's release, its chorus maintains a prophetic quality when considering the collections of consumer technology influencing the everyday lives of 21st century individuals. With, "I'm a 21st century digital boy / I don't know how to live but I've got a lot of toys," the emerging image of a young, unmotivated-yet-satisfied consumer does not necessarily seem an unfamiliar one. As this message rides the coattails of late 20th century consumerism, perhaps it was not much of a stretch for Greg Graffin and company to imagine a generation of consumers who would inevitably seek meaning in the media and collections around them. After all, as cultural artifacts and utilities find further digital distributions, the average user may maintain immense collections of playthings. Without the burden of physical clutter and within the ease of transmission, there is strong reason to presume the 21st century digital boy (or girl) as a hoarder of cultural media. Certainly the music files flooding my external hard drive over the last decade can attest to this reality. But is hoarding, in this digital sense, as destructive to one's health as it has been in traditional formats? In considering the social self, and how collections may influence conceptions of cultural value, the breadth of one's digital collecting may make all the difference when it comes to the discursive awareness of a new media writer.

Though neither genre has broken into the mainstream, artists and musicians involved with modern circuit bending and chiptuning refashion what by all accounts often constitutes collected junk into new composing technologies. While each genre of electronic music/cacophony appropriates collected Speak N Spells, Game Boys,

and other aging or neglected electronic toys differently, all modifications from learning or gaming device to new instrument market these collectors' performances as electrate curating. In "Everyday Curators: Collecting as Literate Activity," Liz Rohan recommends, "Curators of artifacts they have previously consumed become producers when they interpret artifacts in their collections and when these artifacts are used to develop narratives about selves and culture" (56). Because others may recognize chiptune or circuit bent expressions as valuable, the identity Nintendo originally assigned the Gameboy device is jeopardized by new and strange measures of rerouting, rewiring, and reprogramming the device into an alien music-making machine. In continuing to promote written expression as a form of banditry every person commits over the histories and texts of others, reassigning the identity or a person, thing or act is not novel. Rohan suggests:

> If we conceive of ourselves as lifetime collectors of meaningful, history-making, and transformative activities, we might better link what we do in school to the research and identity-shaping activities that give our lives meaning when "at home" (67).

When the value of collecting, evaluating, selecting, re-evaluating, and de-collecting is not new to literary tradition, it seems unreasonable to deny students opportunities of critically engaging the value of collections in class. It is here where facilitated analysis of collecting might "break down a strict distinction between production and consumption as literate activity when these artifacts act as mnemonics" (Rohan 66). As students become increasingly familiar with roles of production and self-publishing outside of class, class situations that pit students as consumers of an

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instructor's authoritative output will surely find the disrespect they deserve.
Because technological prowess of our students will continue to flourish, we
educators need to upgrade our expectations accordingly.

(De)Composing Upgradable Me(mes)

I'm not full of fear
'Cause I'm not really here
I'm nowhere near here
– The Streets, "The Escapist"

With regards to the collections funding one's view of the world, the highest of
possibilities arise for a conception of self that derives from recreationally plugging
into the multicultural and multimodal environments of the Web. For Harris-Moore
an interest in flying spurred his searching for and collecting of the information that
helped him realize a new, enhanced way of being (Johnson). Similarly, as his
committing crimes barefoot provoked popular media's coining of the Barefoot
Bandit moniker, Harris-Moore later seemed to own the identity as an artist's
pseudonym via play-filled acts in drawing or leaving footprints at crime scenes
(Johnson, par. 6). Though "[w]ithout the Internet, Colton Harris-Moore might have
just been another small-town kid who got into trouble and stayed local," it is
through online navigation that Harris-Moore capably upgraded his identity for a
couple of years (Lacitis, "Barefoot," par. 1). I consider this identity to fall in line with
Rice's "new media being" or Ulmer's "avatar." For Rice, the new media being "sees
the dominance of the mix in her sense of selfhood, one that contextualizes digital
identity as a series of appropriations" (*The Rhetoric of Cool* 69). Stretching past a
base connection with profile pictures or second life representations, Ulmer claims

the method of avatars "is to draw upon a sampling of elements, representing something of what the Western tradition knows about 'flash reason,' sudden thought, or thinking at the speed of light, associated with the archive of image practices" ("Introduction: Electracy" 12). In either case, an electrate individual's identity seems a fluid and ever-protean mashup of collections, influences, and *what feels right at the moment*. It is not so much that an avatar (new media being) represents some idealized image of self, but more so a visceral representation across space, time, and media. Thus new empowerment certainly exists for those Web users who recognize that the life they have helped construct online is far more favorable than the roles society subjects them to off-line. The electrate self reckons a socially conscious and perpetually ephemeral persona defined by prudence.

Looking at Harris-Moore's thoughtfulness for the future post Barefoot Bandit, we find a life driven more by flash reason than conventional reason. If prudence is "a time-wisdom, a capacity to make an appropriate decision in an instant by taking the measure of a particular situation in its temporal context," the Barefoot Bandit's repeated success suggests he acted with eyes fixed solely on the perceivable future (Ulmer, *Avatar Emergency* 12). After all, a person whose prudence finds strength in conventional reason likely presumes the costs of copying the Barefoot Bandit's lifestyle (inevitable incarceration over multiple decades) to far outweigh the benefits (a two-year joy ride under self-sponsored education). Of course, an overabundance of flash reasoning describes the online activities of many millennial authors, who post blogs, vlogs, comments, tweets, and relationship statuses before reasoning the lasting consequence. The online decision making

process, when informed by collections and motivated by emotions, is a flash. Considering Ulmer's reasoning that "the path to the invention of general electracy (a fully electrate society) passes through an updating of the virtue of prudence," it is not only that these flash decisions sponsor millenial conceptions of prudence–and the rhetorics attached–but that they also promote this generation of flash reasoners as (probably for the first time in human history) a broadly electrate society whose concept of prudence is far more fleeting and socially contingent than that of earlier generations (*Avatar Emergency* 12). Because they are determined in a flash, however, does not mean that the decisions and identities funded by flash reason compete with more conventionally sluggish conceptions of prudence. Instead, the resulting being is something uniquely electrate: an avatar.

Ulmer likens the relevancy of flash reason to avatar with that of argumentation to literacy. It is "the skill-set native to new media" (Ulmer, *Avatar Emergency* 15). A foreseeable criticism of flash reason is that making choices (no matter how important) will negatively impact the thoughtfulness behind a decision, and therefore the meaning and value that results. But Ulmer reasons, "The flash reason associated with avatar is a synthesis made from parts of historical practices," and, also, "for it to function as the general skill set of electracy assumes that it is taught in some form institutionally, augmented by the power of digital prosthesis" (*Avatar Emergency* 12). In other words, flash reason backs critical thinking skills (institutional products) with technological prowess (digitized skill-sets). Harris-Moore casts the role of institutions in a new light, though, with his seeming opposition to traditional ones. To effectively challenge something, it seems

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necessary to have a workable idea of what that thing is and how it works. The Democrats and Republicans of this country exhibit this regularly, as representatives actively identify what they represent by criticizing the opposing party's practices. By actively running counter to the law, reform, education, and employment institutions, Harris-Moore located himself in the institutions of banditry–a counter culture of sorts. Therefore, the image of self brought forth by the electrate avatar shares many influences with more traditional notions of self-prescribed identity, they just form more quickly through immersion in digital structures. The avatar image "is not some external support that we perceive as an object, but is a field of information that we experience as a participant" (*Avatar Emergency* 15). Like any text of electrate design, an avatar's form is ultimately as visceral as it is cognitive– with archived meanings and memories honing the development of either perception.

Although the many meanings and memories harbored by an individual might differ greatly from one another, Rice recommends these differences are important since "[t]he ability to link information, manipulate information easily, morph information, and so on leads itself to choral practices" (*The Rhetoric of Cool* 34). Leveraged from Plato, Ulmer describes an electrate take on chora (memory, at its simplest) as "neither intelligible nor sensible, but 'generative,' a space or region that functions as a receptacle within which Being and Becoming (ideal forms and material embodiments) interact" (*Avatar Emergency* 17). Therefore, electrate identity (avatar), like any concept of self, may be observed in the conflict and congruence of influences in an individual and their expressions. Rice argues that

"the key" to unlocking the choral qualities of a composition lies in "identifying patterns, moments of overlap among the original definition and those other definitions that appear throughout" (*The Rhetoric of Cool* 44). Hyperlinks and images are two mediums through which Rice claims students may (and probably do) explore for amalgamating, and therefore continually renewing, meanings. He claims, these environments "replicate a hyper-rhetorical expression that is more participatory (readers and writers must actively engage with the conflicting meanings; they must assemble the meaning in both expected and unexpected ways) and associative" (Rice, *The Rhetoric of Cool* 45). Because the *digital native* label denotes young people who experience these environments at increasingly younger ages, the variable level and kinds of literacy such users harbor stand to conflate meaning well beyond the regulations set forth by alphabetic reading and writing. For those who developmentally matured alongside interactive new media, image, sound, and gesture have all upgraded to textual status alongside the alphabet's choral significance.

Though hypertextual and primarily visual online environments may pose an abstract challenge to those of more traditional personal literacies, shared or recurring patterns define the structure of a new media expression just like the use and reuse of any literary neologism. And just like in any study of literature, the value of the application links to its appropriation in a new text. Appropriation, the act of upgrading another's text for new expression, is a distinction of bandit writers–media pirates would have found satisfaction enough in the acquisition of the previous, valuable text. My intention however, like that found in Rice's chapter on

"Appropriation," is not that we better recognize appropriations "in order to condemn them as unfair or unjust . . . but that we identify them in order to learn how appropriations create new types of meaning in general" (54). In the hand of an electrate bandit, the appropriation of a text markets meaning for new audiences; that they might upgrade the text for others. In turn, appropriation serves as both a meaning maker for individuals and a shared value for electrate networks. In considering the peak count of roughly 56,000 members of the Barefoot Bandit Facebook fan page, Harris-Moore's appropriation of what it looks like to be a troubled teen obviously resonated with others; especially young people (Lacitis, "Barefoot," par. 3). As Rice suggests, "The rhetorical value of appropriations is cool for its recontextualization of previous forms and meanings, but also for the ways specific groups respond to the appropriation itself" (*The Rhetoric of Cool* 54). As I have found with my own writing students, when appropriation underlines so much of what they author or encounter online, the romantic notion of a purely creative authorial voice seems ludicrous. For many of them, justification comes by way of something as simple as the thrill in tracking down the source melody from another decade that the chorus of a popular hip hop track samples. For these students, to write valuably is to deviously appropriate.

From a cultural standpoint, A Digital Generation does not observe the foundational values of earlier generations. Instead, the communicative capacities (processing and networking speeds, connectivity, and usability) of a device will both inform purchases, and modify one's capacity to alter the world digitally. As Rice observes (and I continue to advocate), "[A]ll writing involves some degree of theft,

particularly when writing is introduced into the digital, an area that relies to a great extent on the 'borrowing' logic associated with appropriation" (*The Rhetoric of Cool* 57). Studying how and why Millennials appropriate new technology and media helps us better understand the conditions that warrant what I deem an upgrade–a change derived from reflective value-the critically reflective nature of successful appropriation (rather via flash or more sluggish forms of reasoning) when authoring appropriations. As Rice recommends, "It's not enough to simply cut and rearrange words or images. Writers also must re-imagine the logic of structure as well; they must appropriate structure itself so as to discover how digital culture engages more than one kind of structuring principle" (*The Rhetoric of Cool* 58). It is for these reasons Rice exemplifies the "new media writer" as a DJ (*The Rhetoric of Cool* 66). As the acts of a bandit writer closely resembles DJ performances in sampling, scratching, and [re]mixing meaning, the modern DJ appears a bandit; and the bandit, a new media writer. Therefore, while not every new media writer is a DJ, every one of them can and does commit acts of compositional banditry. Rice reasons:

> As a media being, the contemporary writer is always attune to sound, imagery, words, ideas; she appropriates these items and mixes them for innovative purposes, either on a Web site, as a podcast, for a Flash presentation, or for another kind of digitally motivated project (*The Rhetoric of Cool* 64).

It is in recognizing such student capacities for digitally fine-tuning their technologies, appropriations, remixes, and performances, that even the fluencies of

my students in rural South Carolina make it seem necessary that educators

acknowledge their capacity as institutional game changers, yesterday.

The (Re)Mixed Media Playground's Gameplay

Sometimes you have to find out for yourself
Sometimes you need to be told
Sometimes you never find the answer
And so the story goes
– The Streets "Puzzled by People"

Over the course of two years, Harris-Moore allegedly committed 50 acts of

burglary in Washington State alone. Often hiding in heavily wooded areas, the

Barefoot Bandit made regular habit of stealing cars, boats, and identities. He robbed

ATMs and he even took multiple private planes for joyrides, despite having no

formal training (Oppmann, par. 5). While he did not land any of these planes in a

manner that might provide future use, news coverage throughout his escapades

seems to suggest that Harris-Moore became a more skilled and daring pilot over

time. While such daring practice sessions ultimately paved his way to the Bahamas,

this behavior shares similarity with the trial-and-error efforts any person might

assume while navigating new media spaces. If active searching, collecting, and

upgrading–either in online materials or within himself–instigated Harris-Moore's

work as the Barefoot Bandit, his relatively successful day-to-day play is what kept

him going. But, in order to find success in play or any other terminology suggesting

"freedom," certain predetermined measures must recommend what goals, progress,

defeat, and practice, looked like. To maintain values is to engineer gameplay for

play-filled situations. In the particular case of Harris-Moore, breaking into a

Raymond, Washington, veterinary clinic with no further intention than donating some "extra cash" to help care for the animals, play may only matter if it honors the values of an individual (Oppmann, par. 1). Of course, to identify and to maintain values is to also harbor self-imposed limitations. No matter how anti-foundational or lacking in clear intention play may seem, its value–social existence–will always bind it to discursive gaming structures.

Though he (reportedly) performed alone off-line, the Wi-Fi enabled aspects of the Barefoot Bandit's gameplay sprang from reflecting (imagining, hypothesizing, and classifying) for better playing (exploring, experimenting, and sharing) within particular social networks. As membership in and defiance of social networks takes place both on- and off-line, to compose for such environments is to toggling between material and digital resources available. This is a distinctly different writing environment from those of general classrooms, where testing procedures often constrain a student's toolset to bare the *essentials* practitioners in the discourse seem to need when solving particular problems. Timed test taking, calculator-free math finals, and bluebook-bound essay exams all contribute to a far different game than what students encounter outside of class and notably online–where problem solving is resource heavy and network reliant. Literacy scholar James Paul Gee observes, "In school we test people apart from their thinking tools, which include people as well as texts and various sorts of tools and technologies. We want to know what they can do all by themselves. But in the modern world–and this is certainly true for many modern high-tech workplaces–it is equally or more important to know what people can think and do with others and with various tools and

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technologies" (196-7). Because the depth of Gee's (or anybody else's) knowledge corresponds with the breadth of his social networking, he maintains, "You need to assess me as a node in a network and see how I function as such a node." In receiving and expressing as part of a greater network of networks, Gee (or anybody) does not draw new information from thin air, nor do networked influences package their knowledge in predictable ways. Gee remains a discursive snowflake with the reasoning that, "knowledge flows to me, making me better than your original estimate would have assumed" (202). As long as assignments and tests frequently discourage or govern networked performances in class, is it unreasonable to believe students might prefer the malleable lessons learned from playing in information networks? Certainly, some educators might argue imposing time and formatting constraints on student composing serve an important role in cultivating a student's critical ability to discern differences across writing genres. But I argue the gameplay wedded to exploring and defining a network's utility also begs for critical engagement when a user's capacity to find new and further knowledge demands she continually recognize, recall, and remix a plethora of information avenues.

Because a new media being's networked existence pairs mobility with the critical pursuit of valuable information lines, compositional performances share striking similarity with video games in that they "operate by a principle of performance between competence" (Gee 218). Rather than frontload online experience with tutorials and formal lessons, the average new media user's skills stem importantly from individualized efforts in trial and error. These learning methods, like those found in "good" video games, "allow players to not just be

passive consumers but also active producers who can customize their own learning experiences" (208). In video games, such experiences may presumably arise in user level creation utilities or even as players unlock, create, mix, and match character wardrobes or in-game artifacts–all of which have existed in video games, to some degree, throughout the life of the medium. The same may be read from the performances documenting and authoring the 2010 documentary *Catfish*. The film follows, Yaniv, a New York Photographer, as he builds a relationship over Facebook and other social media with family in Michigan's upper peninsula. Though relationship building is common via social media, the "game" created by three artists in their mid twenties to both explore and document the relationship via technological resources is distinct. Sparked by the family's fandom for Yaniv's published photographs, the new media networking the filmmakers record eventually leads to art exchanges, Facebook chats, phone conversations, text messages, romance, travel, and finally, a face-to-face confrontation between all involved parties. By spontaneously combining and remixing the role of various recording and networking technologies, Yaniv and his colleagues rewrite the game so often attached to networking with strangers online: users don't expect to meet or be held accountable for online actions, off-line.

While the decision to thoroughly document Yaniv's online relationship is what makes *Catfish* a striking text, the choice only seems natural for a group of young people whose early education in photography and filmmaking likely asked them to notice and document everything. Gee suggests that the education afforded by "good" video games functions in similar ways as the games opening offers "ample

number of the most fundamental or basic artifacts, skills, and tools the player needs to learn" (139). And composition classrooms, too, employ this structure to some degree, as tutorials in "this is how you write a thesis" or "these are MLA citation formats" or "this is what a good transition looks like" surely constitute much of the opening weeks' in-class curricula. Where "good" video games begin to differ from in-class lectures on basic composition, however, is in how the basic artifacts, skills, and tools of language games are introduced. Often, they serve as the means (formats, processes, grammars) to an eventual end (thesis statements, essays, reports, and so on). In the end, what could seem more dull for a writer than developing skills and resources in favor of writing academic essays the *right* way? In video games, Gee recalls:

> Many times, the early parts of the games are replete with things to find, places and situations to explore, and things to do that teach players the range or types of artifacts to be discovered, places and spaces to be encountered, and actions to be expected (140).

In other words, this tutorial structure encourages users to play with resources, and through positive and negative experience devise some fluid concept of the strengths and limitations of each. Because the game inevitably reserves certain resources for particular applications at different points in a game's narratives or levels, this play never threatens the overall game itself. Even when the whole toolbox of a video game character is unlocked, situations and locations within the game will determine which tool is used, when, and in what way. Language use differs little from this, when its end goal to communicate with others will always cast some moves and

methods as more effective in packaging an utterance for a particular rhetorical situation. In turn, the tutorials of a composition classroom might easily resemble those of a "good video game" if instead of lecturing students on the acceptable identities and uses of English composition's basic elements, educators let students do what they already have so regularly: determine through trial-and-error what the basics of English composition do and how they might be used. If students wish to communicate (and well), the acceptable practices educators hope to instill will surely arise in student expressions.

For Gee, video gaming is "multimodal literacy par excellence" (18). Through video games, "the gamer designer is not an insider and the player an outsider, as in school in so many instances where the teacher is the insider and the learners are outsiders who must take what they are given as mere consumers," the player too, may act as a designer if she so chooses (208-9). The performances of the Barefoot Bandit, the young D.I.Y. communities of Detroit, *Catfish*'s producers, and the various circuit benders and chip tuners of the world all share a rhetoric of "playing to game and gaming to play." Their *searches* have oriented them toward *collecting* resources that might prove helpful in appropriating the past for *upgradeable* future *gameplay* in an otherwise stale and oppressive reality. While some may question the non-institutional development and therefore the social value of these performances, they all exhibit the influence of social networks and, thus, the ethical and discursive expectations that accompany. A new media existence in opposition to institutional values indeed presents a challenge to conventional ethics, but Gee recommends all of us "can learn evil things as easily as we can learn moral ones" (216). Because the

breadth and value of online networks may rival the more local institutions a new media being belongs to, it seems reasonable that students might increasingly ask those of us in education to justify the academic games we wish them to play. While I, like other educators in composition studies, seek to recruit student favor via pop-culture and new media, many educators continue to find great anxiety in adopting technologies that students may be (and often are) far more proficient in using. It is in these moments of digital distraction and new media malaise that the pursuit of valuable, critical in-class thinking falls on the disinterested ears of students who recognize that even their simplest multimodal-expression might amaze their digitally insecure instructor. It is at this future juncture–if we educators have not observed it already–that we might know students find far more valuable composition instruction elsewhere. The time has come to regard Composition Studies as the game it is, for we educators must become active referees, dungeon masters, and guild leaders if we wish to hook the interests of electrate students who prefer writing @play.

IV. ACTIVE LISTENING'S (EXTRA)ORDINARY REFRAINS

I had a funny dream and I came to screaming
That I was in a funny house but it was kind of mine
And I was with you only it wasn't you
It happened in the past but it was somehow now
It put it into focus, things became clear
I had to plan something I handed in my notice
Even though to most it looked random
My heart had left I was just going in tandem
– The Streets, "Lock the Locks"

Potential threats to higher education surely arise as recreational composing practices allow students to (at the very least digitally) sponsor their own open-source education in learning and composing anything they please. For composition educators, when the vitality of our work hinges on teaching students to communicate effectively, what tools do we have in educating a generation whose multifaceted literacies seem best nourished not by formal essays but by the informal banditry of texts? To some degree, this problem has always existed for writing instructors. Only now the stakes seem high enough to rattle the foundation of formal education itself. Though I have consulted a plethora of cases regarding recreational play in composing, I do so without intention of engineering better–more hybridized–forums where students may play with new technology. Students already live in such an environment. Rather I have hoped to raise curiosity regarding the ways digital exploration influences material reality for those who frequently oscillate between writing technologies both on- and off-line. I argue the alternative gaze– one moving solely from physical to digital writing structures–has begun distracting the composition field from finding new potential in the multiple mediums and applications afforded writing technology. Just because we can plug-in

our writing, it does not mean the resulting digital expressions hold greater lasting value for either student or instructor. This is especially true when the digital literacies and electrate banditry of a growing number of students may foreseeably cast the rational classroom as ineffectual.

I cannot say I am advocating lawlessness any more than I am advocating real change in my work here. A writing class without institutional goals and rewards is just as trivial for modern students as one exhibiting strict adherence to alphabetic forms. Furthermore, what is "real" change anyway? Rather, I believe composition instructors, regardless of age or background, should maintain the skill sets needed for reading and evaluating new media writing–regardless of medium or technology. While the good intentions found in conflict-, process-, and computer-based pedagogy offer steps in the right (humanistic) direction, our future success with a millennial generation of writers will surely depend on our willingness to set aside what *has been* composing for what *could be* (and in some cases already is). Students stand to bring increasingly dynamic and multifaceted literacies into the composition classroom, but they may never be entirely unintelligible if we actively listen for the rhetorical harmonies at play in each student. Thoughts of these future exchanges with individuals students again positions me alongside Haynes as she proposes," We must break with a system in which teachers are the sole possessors of abstract thinking, and students are taught as if they are nascent teachers" ("Writing Offshore" 5). When both educator and student composing practices exhibit a certain banditry over discourse, every member of an actively listening classroom stands to learn something. The mashups, juxtapositions, appropriations, and remixes that

accompany bandit writing may continually fashion the most ordinary texts as extraordinary for receptive auditors who wish to better learn and challenge their authors.

Toward a Banditry Model of Writing

A hole is not defined by what it is, but by what is around it.
But what is around it is not it.
– The Streets, "***the making of hell***"

Early in *Avatar Emergency,* Ulmer claims that Brittany Spears serves as the best example of "a leading example of a practice in a new institution that exemplifies the coming civilization, that puts in question the values of literate culture." "What counts," He claims, "is not the actual Britney, but her image, and not just her work as an entertainer, but her reputation as one of the 'girls gone wild'" ("Introduction: Electracy" 10). Certainly, the Brittany Spears brand–with its collection of artists, technicians, producers, designers, and other talented contributors embellishing the otherwise forgettable form she brings to the table–offers a brilliant example of the "the site of emergence of electrate identity formation, both individual and collective" ("Introduction: Electracy" 17). However, I am also reluctant to associate the forms of electracy and avatar I advocate in this thesis with a leading agent who is so passive in her own construction. Rather, like my positioning new media writing as synonymous with banditry, I see the @play identity as something a bit more "monstrous." If Spears provides the poster image of strictly digital media's influence on existence, Lady Gaga is surely a contemporary whose avatar dabbles as much in compositional banditry as it does in juxtaposing material and digital expression.

Through her countless wardrobe, persona, and set changes over the last few years, Gaga's Avatar emerges as the conscious marriage between institutions of genre art, pop-music, and classical musicianship. Regularly citing the importance of her "little monsters" (fans) and the Haus of Gaga (production artists) in facilitating her work, Gaga represents a pop-culture representation of the writer @play–resisting convention, embracing social construction, exploring discourses, appropriating texts, and composing life equally across digital and material reality. Because Gaga's avatar is one of equal parts consumption and production, the writer @play practices critical listening skills on par with her critical performing. For the new media bandit, practices in searching, collecting, upgrading, and gaming, market the consumption and production of literate texts as an integral motivational pairing. Therefore, a "banditry model of writing" (figure 3) is a structure of balanced being.
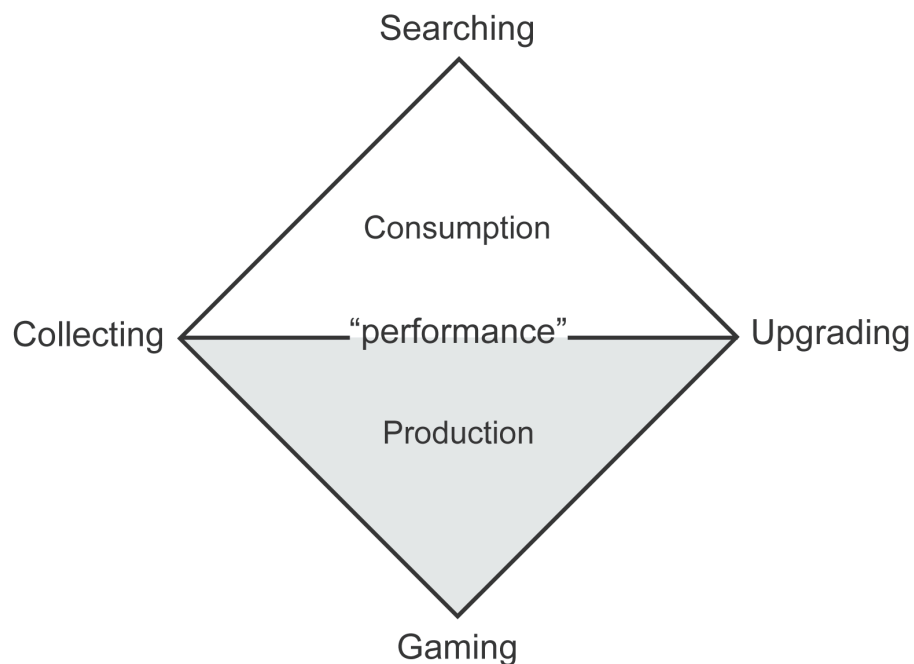
Searching

Consumption

Collecting — "performance" — Upgrading

Production

Gaming

Figure 3 A Banditry Model of Writing

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In order to better engage this model, educators must reconsider the production-centric instruction that has traditionally held our students as refugees. After all, modern students only have greater potential to establish socio-cultural amnesty for themselves via electracy. The needed change, Haynes offers, "starts from the position of the sound listener. It toggles the output off, the input on. It captures audio and bounces it back after scrambling the signal using a critical audacity" ("Post-Conflict" 5). Such a pedagogy conceivably counterbalances active criticism and argumentation with equally open discernment and consideration. Considering the range of back and forth commentary that saturates the base of most modern web posts, the prospect of a call and response form of classroom discourse is not unlike what students find (and often pursue online). Such venues find composing in constant flux between social accountability and gratification of simple, flash reasoned exchanges. In her upcoming essay, "Post-Conflict Pedagogy: Writing in the Stream of Hearing," Haynes advocates a post-conflict pedagogy as one that "audits in order to reckon/cite, and examine, barbaric texts" (5). It is a pedagogy of investigating in texts that may otherwise be taken for granted in socio-cultural debates and canons. This is, of course, something Millenials do daily via modes of sharing, critiquing, and defiling social media. However, the dialectical play found in post-conflict classrooms may also rise above the sort of polarized parley performed by YouTube users beneath any given Lady Gaga video. Without the historically informed and navel gazing investigation that a composition classroom facilitates in the rhetorical values of an expression, there is far more POP than culture funding short-lived commentary found in YouTube comment boxes.

There are Classrooms in the Computer, and It's OK

Puzzled by people, loving isn't easy
You can't Google the solution to people's feelings
– The Streets, "Puzzled by People"

On February 6th of this year, English recording artist Mike Skinner "closed" the posting practices of his social networking persona, thus signify the impending self-removal of his 10-year-old avatar–the Streets (skinner, skinnermike). At 32, Skinner's retirement after only five LPs provoked surprise internationally. Critically well regarded, many celebrate the Streets as a valuable player in carrying England's hip-hop scene to the rest of the world. By relinquishing the Streets name, Skinner seeks to move away from the connotations and genres associated with it, so that he may pursue more of the filmmaking practices he has increasingly practiced through vlogs on his official website (the-streets.co.uk). When asked about his career-ending passion for film in a BBC interview with Mark Lawson, Skinner coolly likens his approach to film with that which started his music career:

> "The way that I've made all my music, is that I've done it all myself. And this album now–more so than the first one–it was written by me, it was engineered by me, it was recorded by me, it was mixed by me, and it was also mastered by me. Which, as far as I'm aware, no one else in the world does that" (*Mike Skinner: Life*).

This D.I.Y attitude toward both process and work raises certain challenges to formal education's familiar drive for students to conform to and specialize in a particular discipline. Skinner also serves another example of the shifts prudence has and will

find in a living recreationally conducted by flash reason. His choice to passionately jump ship from a successful career certainly reflects on his lifestyle as a formerly prolific new media writer–often adopting new technologies and formats early as they developed both on- and off-line over the last decade. With regard to a bandit model of writing, his consumer practices surely rearticulated the Streets as a game he no longer wished to play. Because emotion funds so much of electrate being, the writer @play who loses sight of the *kokoro* in a performance also surely loses interest in the act's economy. A banditry model of writing requires educators to not only admit that students practice dynamic-literate behavior on their own, but also that juxtaposing these behaviors with more traditional institutional practices of critically analyzing conflict, process, and argumentation will continually empower compositions studies in new and unpredictable ways–ways that in some way relate to every member of a given classroom. Though the importance of such writing instruction may not lie in its ability to recreate genre practices, further conventional designs, or simulate workplace conditions, an educator's capacity to both channel and challenge the banditry inherently wedded to new media compositions will at least stimulate the minds of young writers.

Each year, educators prepare fewer and fewer students for many of the careers certain fields and discourses sprang from. It has little to do with university attendance numbers falling, since quite the contrary is often true. In a plugged-in and digitally globalized world, many of those jobs–as educators know them–have simply ceased to exist. Internet users author, influence, and destroy the professional notions of production, consumption, and industry daily. As any educator's career

depends on its being economically viable in order to survive, I am led to this troubling final question: When a self-sponsored education through peer-to-peer networking and online searches seems comparable to–and sometimes more fulfilling than–an undergraduate education in preparing students for their professional futures, why should Urbanski's "Digital Generation" still care about higher education? The answer I have hoped to illustrate through my research here begins with regarding the study of rhetoric and composition as integral components of formal education and of educating. Because discussions of rhetoric are ultimately discussions of value, a preoccupation with rhetorical expressions is a preoccupation with valuable gestures. When rhetorical analysis describes the structural values informing and motivating each person's communicative utterances, our ability as humans to share our values with other humans inevitably depends on the effectiveness of our messages. If there is one thing that educators–from first-year teaching assistants to tenured professors–know, it is how to challenge and deconstruct and discern the ethos of writers alongside the logos or pathos of their text.

An educator's prowess over new technology need not (and likely will not) trump a student's in order for that educator to be an authority in asking bold questions, repackaging complex problems, and marketing new perspectives for students. None of these services should seem unfamiliar to educators. Actively listening educators have the distinct capacity to continually recommend some different or competing–but always more broadly acceptable–means of communicating. When encountering such a contingency-mindful and rhetorically-

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analytical instructor, even the most tech savvy and electrate student stand to gain something from attending composition class: an open-source forum for socializing abstractions into forms they may have never otherwise known. Treading the seas of antifoundationalism and mere relativism, a rhetor's ability to actively construct and then later deconstruct arguments will always petition such a scholar as valuable via her immutable influence on a conversation. Since maintaining this role means actively identifying and listening to the electrate capacities of students, educators must optimistically seek significance in a student's transient and recreational play with writing. Those who tire or fail in doing so will likely hold little influence over a student's definitions of literacy, communication, and value. In the end though, this outcome only hurts those of us who have chosen professions as educators. Students will still learn what they care to know and write what they want to write, just not what we need to teach. While popular media still claims that individuals with college degrees stand to earn more and hold better careers, it is impossible to ignore the simple and immediate pleasure afforded by some of the cases I have mentioned over the last few chapters. Even if job security or regular employment is not ensured to those whose electrate banditry plays with foundational social discourses and conventions, their regular [re]composing of their own realities will surely position many of them as the most intelligent and self-fulfilled generation of penniless writers the world has known.

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