

(Multimodal, Multimedia, Multigenre) Composition: Narratives on Teaching and Learning with New Media

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Writing classrooms have already seen shifts toward new media composition, as evidenced in individual-classroom instruction (see, e.g., Anderson et al, 2006; Shipka, 2005; Sorapure, 2006; Wysocki, Selfe, Johnson-Eilola, & Sirc, 2004) and programmatic-level instruction (see, e.g., DeWitt, McKain, Slevin, & Palmeri, forthcoming; Lovett, Lamanna, Gossett, Purdy, & Squier, forthcoming; Lynch & Wysocki, 2003). In this chapter, we overview an individual-classroom implementation (i.e., non-programmatic) of multimodal, multimedia, and multigenre composition, in which the distinctions between those terms will be discussed by the instructor–author. The second and third authors (who were students in the class) took on teacher-roles in class based on their histories of composing with multiple modes and media; they reflect on those histories and how prior experiences played a role in the designs of their final projects, which included a video documentary and several supplementary texts designed with different media and different rhetorical situations in mind. Our purpose in this chapter is threefold: (1) to outline and discuss problems with a new media composition syllabus with sequenced assignments that step students through composing in different modes, media, and genres; (2) provide narratives of students’ experiences composing texts in such a course, with a focus on their transferable critical literacies; and (3) offer lessons learned whereby teachers can help students produce more interesting, relevant, and powerful texts than the original syllabus inspires.

1. A multimodal composition syllabus

At Utah State University—the large, intermountain-West, state university where Cheryl was teaching in Fall 2006—the course catalog description for English 3040: Perspectives in Writing and Rhetoric sounded like advanced composition for non-majors, with the benefit that “Perspectives” allowed for a special-topics approach as long as the course covered fundamentals of rhetoric. Cheryl had taught it as a series of multimodal composition classes in which students produced a range of genres using a variety of media. Over the three years in which she taught this course, the juniors’ and seniors’ final projects included

- (a) websites such as personal/family history (i.e., a hypertextual/pictorial family tree), religious travelogue (i.e., documenting one student’s mission to Germany), commercial/promotional (i.e., a student’s computer-building business), commercial/intranet (i.e., a training web for a local veterinarian’s office), and non-profit (i.e., the student jazz club).
- (b) literary hypertexts including poetic, prosaic, and imagistic genres; and
- (c) videos whose genres drew on poems (both remediated from print and original texts), remediated research papers, and still-image slideshows in the fashion of music videos.

It is purposeful that the list of possible final projects seems expansive. With the exception of the semester spent studying literary hypertexts, in which students produced several texts that fell within the generic name of *electronic literature*, students were free to choose the genre (or sub-genres) of text they would produce. The difficulty that Cheryl encountered in teaching these courses, however, was that asking students to understand multimodal composition in the guise of an assignment as figuratively generic as “designing a website” wasn’t helping them understand the rhetorical purposes of composing in different media—more specifically of how and why to

choose one mode of communication, as the word *multimodal* would indicate, over (or in addition to) another in order to achieve the meaning they intended. At the end of each semester, students indicated their raised awareness of critical and rhetorical (as well as technological) literacies—exhibited in portfolio reflective letters, in-class feedback to the instructor, and narrative course evaluations as well as in the portfolio of work students submitted—but students also indicated in their numeric and narrative evaluations that despite Cheryl’s enthusiasm for the course material, the syllabus lacked organization and focus. *Ahem*. This is not an unusual critique for her teaching, and students don’t always mean it negatively. One dedicated student referred to Cheryl’s teaching style as “Controlled Chaos,” which she knew would not sound appropriate in the rhetorical situation of a tenure letter. So, in rethinking her teaching strategies, she reframed her pedagogy based on Geoffrey Sirc’s (2001) *English Composition as a Happening*. Turning what students perceived as *chaos* into what they could recognize as purposeful, if somewhat spontaneous, *series of events*—events that could be read in the same fashion as Rosenblatt’s (1994) text-turned-poem events—is useful to help students and teachers open the spaces of writing classes to multimodal, multimedia, multigenre thinking and composing. In the section that follows, Cheryl explains her Happenings pedagogy and discusses how it informed her teaching the 3040 course.

1.1 Cheryl’s course narrative

The first line of Sirc’s (2002) book reads: “I suppose the reason none of us burn incense in our writing classes any more is because of the disk drives” (p. 1). To me, that line encapsulates the multiple, conflicting pedagogies¹ I use in my writing classes, from expressive to critical and technological all the way. As a new faculty member, I worried that a Happenings pedagogy—

one filled with wow and wonder and a want to write, to make meaning—was a thing more easily left to (or abandoned in) the 60s avant-garde art and writing movements. But what I take away from Sirc’s pedagogical manifesto, as I call it, and what I find sustainable in a Happenings pedagogy is a focus on teaching-as-process as much as writing-as-process. Because I want students to compose texts other than those typically found in first-year and other writing classrooms, I need to teach in a way so that students can re-learn how to compose in *media* that is new to them-as-composers using *modes of communication* that are new to them-as-composers.

Students often initially resist a Happenings pedagogy. Their resistance reminds me that not all is consensual in academia. Nor should it be. Difference of thought can engender critical reasoning. And difference in teaching modes of communication that students have never “written in” before requires them to rethink their basic literacies. (Michael Wesch, in his popular, yet academic, 2007 YouTube video, “The Machine is Us/ing Us,” makes the same argument. Stuart Selber [2004], in another medium, also makes this argument.) This rethinking of basic literacies must occur before instructors and students can build on critical, rhetorical, and functional literacies. That is not to say that writing instructors need to limit how they define basic literacies as only surface-level features of writing, such as traditional grammars, syntax, punctuation, and so on; instead, basic literacies might be remediated for multimodal composition to include visual, aural, and database grammars as one set of examples (see Ball & Moeller, 2007, for an extended discussion of new media literacies). This move from basic literacies in linguistic modes of communication (i.e., “old media”) to basic literacies in multimodal communication (i.e., “new media”) is the same one made by Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin’s *Remediation* (2000), in which they offered ways of conceptualizing what was happening in the digital, textual world with what had come before and would come after—remixed, recontextualized, remediated. They

defined the terms; now we teachers continue to define its implications in praxis, especially since the immediacy of new media production continues to make producing look easier and easier (a la Wesch's argument about Web 2.0) when the hypermediacy of multiple, conjoined modes make production all the more difficult for readers (and students) to parse.

As an example of what I mean about rethinking basic literacies in terms of new media composition, here's a scene: A graduate student in my multimodal composition pedagogy course produced a video-argument in which he was filmed walking along a railroad track, discussing (to his audience) whether composition studies' needed to derail itself in order to appreciate multimodality. Then, he stopped (in his tracks, lol), picked up a fist-sized rock, showed it to the camera, and asked, "How do I show visual punctuation? Is this a period?" (Watkins, 2008, *mccloud.mov*, 5:43–5:58). For a student who admittedly had never read composition theory before that class nor used iMovie before producing this film, the basic immediacy of his question is striking. What *does* constitute a period in the medium of video? Without asking students (or teachers) to become experts in art, sound design, cinematography, and so on, how can we teach analysis and composition of new media texts that blend modes of communication, media, and also genres? New media texts often blur the lines between these compositional "tools," which means that teachers need to break down the hypermediacy of new media without having the course syllabus turn formulaic around discussions of separate modes, media, and genres. It was with concerns about retaining the wow of a Happenings pedagogy amidst the need to demystify (un-wow) new media that I revised my 3040 syllabus for the fall of 2006.

I have learned to tell students repeatedly in classes like this: "Composing a new media text is like learning to write for the first time. And it is *hard*." To prepare students for the 3040 course, I spent a good portion of the first day(s) convincing students that a course with a subtitle of

“Digital Narratives” in which they’re going to compose a range of mediated texts (voiceovers, video blogs, storyboards, and research proposals) leading up to a multimedia documentary (as opposed to an audio documentary) actually fulfills their English requirement. In that talk, I don’t usually refer to the theoretical support for this work, such as the New London Group’s *Multiliteracies: Literacy Learning and the Design of Social Futures* (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000) or Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen’s (2001) *Multimodal Discourse: The Modes and Media of Contemporary Communication*, but that foundation is clearly evident in how I introduce students to the idea that none of us communicate *only* through writing and that written text itself is multimodal in that it carries visual, spatial, and sonic properties every time we type a new letter-character on the page. The students nodded and seemed, compared to other semesters of the class, more excited than usual, the reason for which I will address later. We launched into a sequence of textual analysis and production, each week covering a different medium. In relation to the English 3040 class, here are some examples of modes, media, and genresⁱⁱ we used:

- **modes of communication:** linguistic, aural, visual, spatial, gestural, and combinations thereof (see Cope & Kalantzis, 2000, p. 26)
- **media:** written text, static image, audio, video with only diagenic sound of the shot location, video with additional soundtracks and writing
- **genres:** blogged reading response, analog photograph, digital illustration, voiceover, soundtrack, vogs, video documentaries

The course subtitle that term—Digital Narratives—was purposefully vague because I did not want students to have to choose from a narrow set of genres as they had done for the e-literature version of the course. Narrative left the generic option somewhat open, because my hope was that students would produce a range of genres or multigenre texts. But in order to choose which

genre would suit the students' projects, I wanted them to compose multiple genres using different modes of communication in media that they weren't typically using in other English (or any) classes. The class met once a week, so we moved to a new mode and new medium each week, combining modes and media when needed. We started by creating written, iMix-like lists of their favorite songs, which they had to post to their individual blogs. I asked that their mixes introduce some aspect about themselves. The next week, they recorded 30-second voiceovers prompted by a question that required a narrative answer. They used Audacity, a free audio-editing program, to capture, edit, and compress the audio files for uploading to their blogs. Following that, they brought in photographs that told a particular narrative about their lives and learned how to scan and upload those (or transport digitally) to their blogs. Finally, using four video cameras I provided, they filmed in groups a 30-second video that was meant to express an emotion instead of a narrative, as vogs—originally short for video blogs (see Miles, 2005)—should do. The students edited their vogs using Windows MovieMaker and uploaded the final version to their blogs. Posting all of their media assignments to the blog served several functions, including allowing the class to discuss the differences between telling a story to one person or to a small group in a face-to-face classroom space, and telling that same story online where anyone can read it.ⁱⁱⁱ

I had several goals in setting up the syllabus to step students through these progressively more multimodal and multimedia assignments. Although this metaphor may be dated to my own process of learning to write prior to computers, I liken the shift from linguistic to aural to visual modes of communication in these assignments to how students at an early age first learn to write with crayons, then pencils, then pens, (and now computers). This progression gave students hands-on practice with the increasingly complicated technologies they would need for their

major projects. Once we got to the final project, students could readily see how the added, mediated components were sequenced to prepare them. But the main reason I used this assignment sequence was so that we could spend a week discussing how each medium (writing, audio, video) helped readers understand the text.

For instance, in the iMix assignment, some students were frustrated by the limitations of writing *about* songs that held meaning for them. So some of them chose to post a playlist of those songs on their blogs. They remarked either in their blog posts or in the class discussion that *hearing* the songs (the lyrics, the music, the tone of the singer's voice, the genre of the song, etc.) would help their classmates connect with them better. We were able to capitalize on that discussion the following week when they recorded their voiceovers. It was the 5th anniversary of 9-11, and so I asked students to narrate in an unedited voiceover where they were and what they were doing that day five years before. The narratives ranged in genre from news report to tearful memoir to rap. In the discussion about how those particular voiceovers impacted the meaning their classmates made from listening, the students raised what I thought were surprisingly complicated issues of gender, identity, and authorial intent (we had not specifically discussed any of those issues in class by that point). They pointed to examples within the voiceovers regarding tone, pitch, vibrato, and other sonic elements that helped them argue for their sophisticated interpretations of a seemingly simple assignment. (It should be noted that musical training was a large part of nearly all of these students' cultural backgrounds, a fact that did not occur to me during this class. The rumor goes that piano sales in Utah are higher than in any state in the nation, so I can only guess that their knowledge of sound, tone, pitch, etc., was reflective of their musical training.)

Next was the vog assignment. Vogs are often low-quality, very brief videos, compressed for streaming on one's blog, and typically fall toward the lyric end of the narrative–lyric spectrum in subject matter. We had been telling stories about all our modes and media examples in class so far, and we had just completed the audio assignment in which students focused on the emotional, aesthetic power of sound, so the purpose of the vog assignment was to figure out how to show an emotion only using video. For one student's vog, s/he solicited all the other students in class to lie at the top of "Old Main Hill" and roll down simultaneously. Students often sledded down this hill, as it was very steep and always covered in snow in the winter; but the vogs were shot in late September, with no snow, and I distinctly remember the excitement (and teacherly panic) I felt watching that vog, followed by dread when it appeared that one student would roll, quite fast, into the trunk of one of the huge trees that dotted the hill. The vog ended before we saw any crash. (No students were harmed in the making! But the exercise certainly allowed for an important, albeit humorous, discussion on consent and the ethical treatment of subjects.)

By the time the vogs were completed I noticed that for many students in the class, composing in different modes seemed to come more naturally than it had for other students in previous semesters. For instance, co-author Tia had told me that she made video projects all the time for her friends, so I had asked her to bring a sample that the class could analyze. I wanted students—especially those who were still leery of the narrative-documentary assignment—to see what I knew they were capable of completing and to reassure them that I wasn't expecting a professional History Channel documentary. A Happenings pedagogy allowed me to use Tia's video spontaneously (without prior viewing; although I should have warned my tenure chair, who was observing class that day, what I was about to do and why). Tia's homemade video was about a group of friends re-enacting a practical joke with another group of friends. It was a little

crude in the storyline and editing (in both senses: coarse and awkward), but fun, fast-paced, and full of subject-matter that the students could relate to—a good example with which to draw students into the assignment. The students adroitly analyzed Tia’s video, and I realized as we mapped the sequence of scenes onto the dry-erase board that the students had picked up on the video’s five-paragraph-like-theme—it had an introductory scene, three supporting scenes, and a conclusion scene. It was an easy connection, but I was surprised that the students grasped it so quickly, so I asked how many of them had produced homemade videos (or similar projects) prior to this class. Nearly half of them raised their hands. I was shocked, and not a little dumbfounded that I had waited until mid-term to ask about their new media literacies. But in the previous three semesters of teaching video-based projects, only one or two of the students had produced similar texts, so my expectations of the students hadn’t changed from that. I learned from this class that the adage—‘Students are immersed these days in new media texts, but don’t often know how to analyze them’—can be misleading. (Although, as I discuss more in the conclusion, I have learned that basic new-media literacies continue to vary dramatically—between classes and, of course, individual students, and, still, prowess in multimedia analysis doesn’t always translate into prowess in production.)

I want to conclude this section on the course by briefly describing the major project. When the semester started, my intention with the major project was to have students choose which genres, or combinations of genres, they wanted to use. But the students and I discovered about four weeks into class that the experimental design of the syllabus was, perhaps, too grand in the making. Keeping in mind that only half the class came with basic new media literacies, the other half needed to spend more time on those fundamentals. The original syllabus had two major assignments: The first one was purposefully vague because I wanted students to choose which

combinations of media and genres they would use because I knew from previous iterations of the class that this vagueness would allow them to be creative and flexible. As Julie Jung (2005) noted, asking students to produce multigenre texts would, I hoped, disrupt “expectations [and] result in expanded and revised points of view” helping students “develop the epistemological pliancy one needs to negotiate responsibly in an ever-changing world” (p. xi).

The second project was an inquiry-based video. I had been speaking of this second assignment as a narrative-documentary, in which I wanted students to use the storytelling techniques they’d learned in the sequenced assignments as a way to frame their documentaries. In negotiating a revised syllabus/schedule, students voted to remove the vague assignment in favor of the documentary. There were several reasons for their choice, including that I swayed them toward that option since the vague assignment was supposed to be composed in a software program that we didn’t yet have installed on the lab machines. That, and I knew it would be easier for the students and I to come to an understanding of the genre conventions of a documentary project. Since time was an issue, choosing a specific genre made sense. I reasoned that they would still be able to use what they had learned regarding modes and media in fulfilling the video documentary assignment.

With that assignment revision in mind, I asked students to consider the goals of the documentary assignment, which, in part, included focusing on a purpose, using appropriate rhetorical conventions, working with sources that were both culturally and scholarly pertinent, and learning functional literacies through technological experimentation, among many others. Following their work on the documentaries, students completed three additional texts, which I modeled on Jody Shipka’s (2005) framework for multimodal composition. The point of these “supplementary materials” was to ask students to re-consider the original rhetorical situation of

their documentary and then to compose a different set of texts that would accomplish a related purpose for a different audience and through different media and genres. For all of these texts, I asked the students to answer basic questions in a design-justification document, such as “what is the purpose of your documentary?” and “what audience is your documentary meant for?” as well as to answer the following sample questions, relating their answers back to the text’s purpose:

- what major editorial decisions did you make (scenes left out, changing of research question, etc.)?
- what do you want audiences to take away from your texts (and what was the impact of the public nature of this class on your projects/ideas/audience, if any)?
- what you would change about your final projects (if you had more time...)?
- what learning outcomes (*which were listed in the syllabus*) did these texts help you achieve and how?

Students turned in a total of 20 double-spaced pages for all four of their final projects (i.e., the documentary plus three supporting materials).

In the sections below, my co-authors discuss their literacy narratives composing multimodal, multimedia, and multigenre texts and how that experience impacted their design processes during the documentary and supplemental projects assignments. In the first example, Ty discusses his process for composing a digital video documentary on how and why eastern versions of martial arts made their way to the w/Western culture of Logan, Utah. Tia discusses her video in which she documented how stories about supernatural beings (like ghosts) affect college students. Her reflection also focuses on her composing process for a supplementary text: a homemade, candy-like snack composed of marshmallows, chocolate, caramel, and pretzels. In both of these examples, the authors draw on the design justification documents they composed as

part of their final assignment, which are supplemented by narratives of their prior (to this class) multimodal composition experience. We turn to these narratives to reinforce the depth of some students' historical engagement with modes, media, and genres; these student–authors, after all, came to the class with the basic, functional, and technological literacies that the syllabus was set up to teach students. But what their design justifications showed me was the depth of critical and rhetorical awareness about new media composition that this class—and all classes that hope to teach students multimodal and new media literacies—need to cover, regardless of students' prior new media composition experience.

2. Students Reflect on Their Multimodal Processes

2.1. Tyrell's multimodal literacy narrative and reflection on his "East Meets West" documentary

When I was a child, I was fascinated by technology. I had an 8-bit Nintendo, built my own computer, and generally geeked out when it came to science and technology. But I wasn't always interested in this stuff. Personally, I blame Ender. I don't know who introduced me to the science fiction novel *Ender's Game*, but whoever it was inadvertently sparked my love for books, science, and technology. Working on the documentary in English 3040 reminded me of my early school years and my love of technology as a form of expression. As a kid I had a wild imagination, and as a senior in college [when I took 3040] I had a lot of ideas to express. Technology, writing, and good teachers gave me a way to do it.

During my first year of high school a new neighbor moved into town; his name was Tim Miller. I found out that he would be teaching at the Uintah Basin Applied Technology Center, and that he would be teaching a Multimedia class. I knew this would be a chance to learn something about the ways in which my favorite types of media were produced. Ok, maybe that's

a little too adult. I probably just thought he would teach me how to make my own video games. So I gathered a coalition of friends and petitioned “Mr. Tim,” the teasing-turned-respectful nickname we’d given him, to teach us in an after-school class. He agreed, even though he wasn’t on contract with the school until the next semester. In that environment we gained a little bit of knowledge about photo manipulation, 3D design and animation, sound and video, and storyboarding. We also gained a lot of knowledge, to his dismay, about PC gaming.

The second year in Multimedia 2 we were charged with creating a piece of educational software. My two best friends and I formed a group and set out on the task. Mr. Tim trusted us (although we weren’t sure why), and let us manage our own production schedule. Mondays through Thursdays, our team would work (Fridays were reserved for Quake tournaments). After the initial planning and storyboard phases, Tim approved our project—a 4th-grade-level educational program called “Tour of Our Solar System.” The team decided that we needed to split the responsibilities, so I took lead on graphic design. My best friend Joel took the programming role, and David managed the written text. Those lines got blurred, and other important aspects like sound design were managed by all three of us. [It’s funny to note that Joel is now a graduate student in Computer Science, Dave graduated in Anthropology from an Ivy League college, and I got my degree in Liberal Arts and Sciences and am about to start a master’s in Instructional Design.] In the end, we somehow got a working program together and presented it at the Utah Multimedia competition, where we earned some design awards.

In college I continued to play video games, soak up episodes of *Star Trek*, and read books. Like most students I went through several majors: graphic design, then Earth science, and finally liberal arts and sciences. I settled on a liberal-arts degree because it afforded me the opportunity to express my thoughts, mostly through writing. I had no idea that when I signed up for English

3040: Writing and Rhetoric that I would be producing multimedia again. But I remembered how much I loved it. One of the major assignments was the creation of a documentary-style video that needed to be 5 minutes in length. (My enthusiasm was evident: I collected eight hours of source material, and my first cut was 30 minutes—a long way off from the required 5-minute final product! Mine ended up around ten minutes.) Part of the preparation for the documentary was choosing a topic that had an interesting human and local element as well as a relevant research question. I chose to look at martial arts in Logan, Utah. I've always had a love for the eastern martial arts and also teach a martial arts class at the university. I wrote my documentary proposal to answer the question "Why are eastern martial arts practiced in Logan?" and went to work.

I had a general outline of the movie's structure, which I had written for the documentary proposal, so the next important step for me was the creation of the storyboard. Needing to make decisions about length of shots, camera angles, and music put the design of the documentary into a different perspective. Because I was able to choose my own subject matter I knew that the documentary had to be more than technically good; I wanted to do more than meet the requirements provided by the instructor. As the storyboard came together I began creating a documentary that could be viewed and enjoyed by any town resident.

The first piece of the story was the introduction and presentation of the research question. I chose to begin with a shot of a martial arts class warming up and a voiceover explaining the path martial arts traveled to make it to Logan. The voiceover ponders why eastern martial arts are so prevalent in the United States, and then as the screen goes dark, the narrator says "Maybe it has something to do with this!" Viewers immediately see the flashy visuals and fast moves of Bruce Lee from his movie *Enter the Dragon* (Clouse & Allin, 1973). At the same time, the 1974 Carl Douglas song "Kung Fu Fighting" blasts, reinforcing two texts that are widely known in North

America in relation to martial arts. Connecting these two media clips might be cliché, but when it comes to introducing the west to eastern martial arts, these clichés show just how far those traditions have permeated American culture. With this intro, I was going for the slow build to dramatic pause just before I cut into the action; I felt that regardless of the audience, this set-up would grab their attention, especially as the scene fades to black before the movie clips are played since there would be no distraction from music or unneeded visuals. Also, at one minute or less, the intro moved at a steady pace so that the research question came quickly and was clear to the audience.

In the second scene, a voiceover explains the influx of martial arts into the United States while showing more Bruce Lee scenes as well as martial arts scenes from the video game, *Enter The Matrix* (Perry, 2003). The voiceover ends as the camera zooms to the iconic “A” (for our school mascot, the Aggies) atop the Old Main building, a recognizable location marker for a local audience. So now the documentary has brought the topic, eastern martial arts, to a local setting.

The next part of building the documentary constituted the real challenge. I had to gather stories from ‘real people’ to support the technical and script work of my voiceovers, movie, and audio clips. I was worried that the interviews represented a potential loss of control over the project. Interview subjects would, of course, say what they wanted. I needed to find a way to place their comments into my film to support the overall narrative without misrepresenting them. In a way, I didn’t want to do interviews at all. Sitting in a room with your computer you can type out a text or create a video without paying much attention to misrepresentation, since the ideas you’re expressing are your own. With this project, however, I needed to let others express their ideas and weave them into my story. Luckily it didn’t turn out as difficult as I thought. People

told fantastic stories and built on the cultural ideas that I had represented in the opening parts of my documentary. Framed by traditional Japanese and Chinese music, the interviews helped represent the meeting of eastern and western cultures. After the interviews conclude, the documentary comes full circle to show the closing moments of the same martial arts class that was shown at the beginning of the film. The voiceover resumes, giving context to what the viewer has just seen. It then fades to credits as the traditional Chinese music increases in volume.

In the end, weaving a meaningful narrative using music, images, video, text, and voice really made the assignment worthwhile. The video editing and text creation were important aspects of that process, but it is the people who watch the film—those who may not already love martial arts or understand why or how it came to the States—whom I kept in the forefront of my mind during the composition process. The struggle to accurately represent the views of others forced me to think critically about the way the film would be received and, therefore, I had to think critically about the various media I was collecting and composing for the documentary. As part of being able to choose my own topic and interview people I knew (and some I didn't know that well), I learned that it's important to frame others comments in ways that are fair to them while still choosing clips that are interesting to read or see. Ethics became a bigger concern when I knew the people who's words were being represented in my documentary. That's something that may be more difficult to relay (to students, to audiences) when you're dealing with impersonal texts. The creation of a research proposal for the documentary—while not a lot of people's idea of a good time—was a great learning experience that helped me foresee the ethical choices I had to make in the media I used. The proposal allowed me to put what were *just* ideas down on paper in a way that could be systematically useful to both my professor and me. Even in a narrative text, the research you do can and should change the direction of that text. If I had

been unflinching in my drive to sell my message, it is likely that the significance of the message itself would be lost.

One of the biggest lessons I took away from this project was that being given more power over my education (i.e., choosing the genre, focus, and media for my assignments) gives me more motivation to perform. It's something that I knew before but that was emphasized by this assignment. I liked all the other classes I took that semester, but I found myself worrying and working on the documentary in preference to other classes. Also, the assignments that led up to the documentary work focused on one aspect of the documentary process and were great preparation for the final project. For me, the introduction to technologies (such as the audio-editing software) was unnecessary because I've worked with them my whole life, but I can see how it was important to other members of the class, and I was able to help others who needed it if I already knew how to do a particular assignment or task. In the end, the sequence of individual media assignments leading up to our documentary research proposal, storyboard, interviews, and choices in editing the media clips provided me with a process in which I could understand how to ethically compose a multimedia text for a specific audience and purpose.

2.2. Tia's design process for the supplementary materials to her documentary, The Supernatural

I am wildly attracted to creating things. Growing up I was determined to be an inventor, and food seemed the easiest way. I would combine my favorite things that I thought would taste good together and came up with some enjoyable items. Either that or no one wanted to squash my dreams of being the next Betty Crocker while also being a sports star, professional fisherman, experienced golf-ball hunter, and a successful entrepreneur of anything I could get my hands on. I've never understood too much about business, but from a young age I did understand that in

order to sell something, I had to have something people needed or wanted. Besides my families' lemonade collection or baking ingredients I could get my mom to buy for me, I had to fend for myself as far as things to sell. That was just fine with me, because I didn't care about selling things other people made. What I wanted was for people to crowd my little cul-de-sac just to get their hands on the only "decorative mud-ball" in town. I realized molding regular 'ol street mud into a ball, throwing it into the air so that it hits the concrete and lands in a random splatter of black and brown is not useful or attractive, but I could walk door to door honestly claiming that I was selling something I created. Maybe it was the desire to get my name out there, or a way to feel like I was special or unique, but since nothing I created had a significant impact on society, I quit the idea and my inventor dreams seemed to be doomed for good, until this class came along, giving me the option to dabble for a grade.

My perspective of inventing has grown and changed to a point where I am more lenient with what I see as inventing. I used to only consider tangible things such as a new dessert, flavor of Gatorade, defense system for a fort, board games, and candy machines as inventions. There is also a connection between them—those inventions were items that were important to me at that time in my life. Now my idea of invention is still tied to what's important to me right now, but how I invent something to fill that need has changed. For instance, my older sister has entire shelves containing journals that have been filled up with everything that has gone on in her life. I have a harder time keeping up with her ability to write and write and write. When I do write in my journal, it feels like I have to catch up on the people I'm talking about and every situation that's gone on over the time that's passed, which is sometimes years, and I get overwhelmed. At the same time, I love to reminisce and hold onto memories, so camcorders and pictures became my journals.

Before I learned how to use programs that made slideshows, I would line pictures up next to each other on the floor, turn on a song in the background, make sure cell phones and pagers were turned down, turn on my parent's oversized camcorder, and record each picture manually. Watching them now, it's comical, but then, I thought it was brilliant. The footage I take documents my life. It vividly captures the people I'm with, the activities we do, along with our personalities and memories. With editing programs, I learned to manipulate the footage even more to capture a mood or more personality behind the film. I started off with editing slideshows. I wanted to document the first year of college for a specific group of my closest friends. Pictures had to be scanned, because digital cameras weren't as common. I chose a few songs that best represented our year through lyrics, inside jokes, or feelings, and connected them with matching transitions and titles. I had found my new favorite hobby.

The slideshows became more advanced with the time I took to learn different features and the programs improved. I got a digital camera, which could record tiny video clips, and I began putting those into the slideshows. These became the most exciting part to me as the pictures came to life and I learned how to work with sound and do cropping. I was working in baby steps. The videos were getting better, but quality of the film was low, and the editing program was limited to more advanced things. Every year of college, I made a new slideshow. My videos consisted of still frames, random tidbits of video clips, songs, and titles including jokes and quotes that went along with the year. My final products were ending up over forty minutes, but I watched them over and over. I didn't realize at the time, but these videos were my journal.

When, for class, we had a blog assignment to upload a video clip, I uploaded one from my digital camera. I was excited to do this because I had been able to learn iMovie, and doing a small clip was exactly along the lines of what I had already done. For the documentary, I had

never worked with that much video (I had used still clips juxtaposed to look like video, or very short video clips), so I had to learn the basics of transferring from camera to computer, but I was confident I could do this larger project. The documentary was not expected to be professional. It required a good amount of time, patience, and resources, but the options to utilize anything I could rhetorically justify meant that the skills I already had with editing technology combined with the possibility of creation made the project exciting for me. I felt confident that I could produce what was expected from me.

I have always found it easy to express myself through more abstract means than writing. I've often wondered why because so much of what I do, especially in studying English, is focused on words. I have interests all over the place and have a perpetual list of projects that loom for the free time I never have. My combination of impatience and perfectionism frustrates my progress, but my mind can kick into an abstract mode that pulls connections and deeper meanings from ordinary things. With the assignment to create three supplemental texts, separate from the documentary, I can honestly say I was excited. Here was an opportunity to force myself into my passions and talents—yet another way to express myself through means besides writing. My documentary project was on why people believe in the supernatural, and so in keeping with that theme while producing three texts (two of which had to use different media than the documentary), I decided to compose a song, a dramatization of one of my documentary's scary stories, and a batch of creepy candy with advertising suggesting its supernatural power. For the sake of space, I'm going to focus on the 'sweetest thing': I chose to invent a candy because the other texts I had produced (a creepy song and a dramatization of a scary story) were fairly intense. The enjoyment of candy is light and can portray a commercialized version of the supernatural. This was the comic relief to my project.

Sharing scary stories around a campfire is an excellent example of our interest in the supernatural in society. In such a setting, I can't help but think about marshmallows. The tasty little things are a stereotypical staple at campfires. I instantly made the connection between the texture of a marshmallow and a ghost. As cliché as it sounds, ghosts are portrayed as white; marshmallows are white. Ghosts are thin and airy; marshmallows are airy. The possibilities for advertisements for my invention crept into my mind. I couldn't just turn in marshmallows and claim them for my own. Not only was it plagiarism in a sense, but it was nowhere near exciting enough. So I asked myself: What was good with marshmallows? Well, caramel and chocolate are, naturally.

I had recently seen *The Skeleton Key* (Kruger & Softley, 2005), a suspenseful movie that takes place in the voodoo-rich culture of New Orleans. Kate Hudson's character, the protagonist in the story, figures out that something's off in the house in which she is providing home-care. Without giving the plot away, she injects a poisonous substance into sugar cubes (used for tea) in order to poison the woman she thinks is responsible for the problems in the house. When I saw that scene, I thought, "How clever!" With a needle you can inject something into a solid substance and no one can tell from the outside. I envisioned marshmallows injected with caramel, and if I felt crazy enough, covered in chocolate, too! This certainly seemed original to me, so I set out to the local grocery store and purchased the necessities: mini marshmallows, caramel squares, and hardening chocolate.

A few days later, when I felt motivated to start cooking, I unwrapped caramels and tried to figure out where I could get a syringe. Was caramel even going to fit into it? Instead, I decided to melt the caramel and throw in some marshmallows. I also tried coating a marshmallow in caramel then dipping it in the chocolate. It burned my finger so badly that I had to walk out of

the kitchen to calm down. I came back for Round Two with a new determination to conquer. The caramel had melted the marshmallows in the bowl. Light bulb: Just mix it all together. My new strategy took over and I put more marshmallows and caramel into the bowl and stuck it into the quick and easy heat of the microwave. I left it in too long and when I looked into the microwave, the marshmallows had formed a giant dome over the bowl and the caramel was bubbling over the sides. I opened the porch door to let out some of the stench and tried again. That was enough trial and error; this time was going to be it. I put a pan on the stove and layered it with butter to prevent sticking and added the caramels and marshmallow. But the goodness didn't stop there. I added the hardening chocolate to give it some structure, regular chocolate chips for their taste, and cream cheese frosting, melting and mixing it all together. My roommate, who was observing my inventing process, thought this design was a little random, but it certainly had characteristics of a ghost: white and airy. When everything had combined, I used the mixture to cover graham crackers and pretzels. The combination would provide a tasty sample to use in the wrappers I would make to advertise the treats.

The wrappers would be advertisements meant to verbally relate the candy to my documentary. I came up with slogans including "It's a RUSH for your taste buds." RUSH stood for "Really Unusual Stuff Happens," which would portray the idea of the thrill-seeking individual interested in the supernatural. Another slogan, which I also used for the title of my design justification was, "It's so good, it's creepy," which connects to the supernatural theme through a catchy phrase. One other slogan I composed did the most work for me. One of the definitions I found for supernatural was "describing abilities which appear to exceed possible bounds." I couldn't fit the definition within the documentary, so in the candy advertisement, I added a phrase to it, so it read, "Your mouth will feel like it is 'describing abilities which appear

to exceed possible bounds.” Morphing it into an advertisement gave the definition in a creative way that promoted my delicious treat. The best part was that at the end of the class open-house, in which we got to present out final projects to classmates and faculty members, I went to collect my plate of creepy treats, and they were gone. So good, they disappeared!

3. Conclusion

3.1. An Accidental Happening: Cheryl’s Reflection on Wow/lessness

Elements of this new media composition course worked extremely well. As reflected by the two narratives above, the design justification assignment (which formed the basis for these authors’ narratives) proved to be a good way for the students to assess their own compositional practices as well as to demonstrate to the instructor the *layered literacies* (Cargile Cook, 2002) that multiliterate students need to learn in technology rich writing classes (see also Selber, 2004). Tyrell and Tia, as well as other students in the course, drew from their basic, critical, rhetorical, functional, ethical, and technological literacies in relation to new media production, which they indicated by describing instances of compositional processes (including hurdles and revisions) within a particular phase of production. For instance, Tia foregrounded the social aspects of invention when describing her need to create mud balls so that she could become famous, at least within the cultural context of her cul-de-sac. The design justification allowed her to make critical connections between that youthful experience and her adult invention (and revision) process for the ghoulish, yet yummy, snacks she made for the final project. Tyrell explicitly discussed the basic, functional, and technological literacies he brought to the class, but the design justification allowed him to address a topic we had only briefly covered regarding ethnographic interviewing techniques—the ethical considerations that guided him through the video-composition process.

Seeing these students' sophisticated connections was made possible in the reflective document (see Shipka, 2005, for more about reflective documents).^{iv}

My co-authors, however, present only two particular examples in a class of 20 students. Although some assignments, like the design justification, were successful, others were not. The majority of students' indicated their increased level of basic new media literacies at the conclusion of the course, although those literacies were demonstrated better in the design justification than in the final videos. When I examined the documentaries (not the multigenre, supplementary texts), I was disappointed with how *safe*, as Patricia Sullivan (2001) would say, they were. Nearly every student was successful at fulfilling the requirements of the video and supplementary projects, but I had to ask: Would the documentaries have been more rhetorically powerful, more aesthetically interesting, more *wowful* had the triangulation of mode–media–genre assignments been different? Tentatively, I believe the wowlessness is connected to the genre limitations I implicitly imposed on the documentary form, a form I persuaded the students to implement in a course that was really intended to be an introduction to digital, multimodal composition (not a course about documentaries). As Jung (2005) remarked in her book, *Revisionary Rhetoric, Feminist Pedagogy, and Multigenre Texts*, using multigenre texts opens spaces for rhetorical listening and revision—not to correct or make students' texts perfect, but to “put the wrong words together” (pp. 56–78) so that texts take on new, and before unseen, layers of meaning. In this case, I substitute “the wrong words” with the wrong modes, media, and genres. When juxtaposed, the wrong mix (or even the right one) can create breaks and silences, which in turn requires authors and readers familiar with linear genres (like these students' documentaries) to shift their expectations, to become attuned to making meaning from the unexpected, to potentially embrace the wow. Instead of allowing for the unexpected, which

would have been a major benefit to my Happenings pedagogy, I was trying to make the students' texts' perfect by assigning them a specific genre I had set up in a formulaic way that they could fulfill.

If I had to attribute the wowful breakdown to a particular moment, it would be the day I showed Tia's homemade video in class while my tenure chair was observing. But it wasn't Tia's video that was the cause; it was my reaction to a more complicated situation. That day was my tenure chair's second visit, the first having failed when my lesson plan turned into a technology troubleshooting session with my reacting like a pig on the way to slaughter (squealing and pink included). The day of her second observation, the projector broke, so I overcompensated with my newly thought-out Happenings pedagogy: I asked students to huddle around my computer to watch Tia's video, after which we discussed it in a call-and-response, with students shouting answers that I scribbled on the board. In an attempt to capitalize on the improvisational discussion and look smart in front of my tenure chair, I pointed out that the students had applied the generic structure and conventions of a five-paragraph essay to Tia's video. *Jackpot*. (In retrospect, I hope to Geoff Sirc that I didn't look as maniacal, and then triumphant, as the scene replays in my memory.)

So I had done it. I encouraged the students to map formulaic writing onto their new media texts, which the majority of their documentaries enacted to a T. There's not much unexpected or wowful about a traditional five-paragraph essay, whether it's composed in print or in multiple media. But it is relatively easy to complete, which is why I've seen this formulaic, expected writing happen even when undergraduate and graduate students are given open assignments to compose in any or multiple genres, modes, and media. Few students embrace the unexpected when fulfilling a project in which the only requirement I have given is to "produce a text that

uses multiple modes and media.”^v What is more typical is for students to map on, just like the majority of the 3040 students did, a familiar genre like the five-paragraph essay, or for graduate students the academic/research essay, onto a new medium such as video. The majority of those students do not engage in the critical and reflective revision strategies needed to understand the purposes and usefulness of new media composition; that lack of engagement is reflected in their design justifications, which often turn out thin and unsupported by effective rhetorical and aesthetic choices.

3.2. How to Avoid the 5-Paragraph Video

I’ve learned numerous lessons from this 3040 class and from repeated readings of Tia and Tyrell’s design justifications, although most of my lessons-learned took the writing of this chapter, over a year and up to two later, for me to recognize. Here are some samples:

- If I ask for 5-paragraph videos, I will get 5-paragraph videos. Focusing on a single, formulaic genre for the major project halts the critical progress of students who don’t already come with multimodal composition experience.
- Assigning the opposite of 5-paragraph videos—that is, offering students the opportunity to compose completely open-ended assignments—may not be the answer. In Fall 2007, I taught a similar class, English 239: Multimodal Composition, at a new school. To test out my “avoiding 5-paragraph videos” theory, I gave students an open assignment and their final videos included multigenre texts that were creative (poems, music videos, memoirs, etc.) and persuasive (documentaries, mockumentaries, sports-newscast features, visual arguments, etc.). The videos weren’t perfect, and they exhibited the kinds of breaks and silences that help foster critical thinking that Jung called for her in multigenre

scholarship. Overall, I was pleased with the students' engagement with the open-assignment texts, but I was not wowed enough^{vi} to be satisfied that the students were deeply engaging with the modes, media, and genres in a way that would be transferable to other learning situations. I felt the syllabus needed more depth.

- The syllabus outlined here which used assignment sequences that transitioned from linguistic to aural to visual to multiple modes of communication had two problems: (1) It assumed students came to my classes with zero basic literacies in multimodal composition and, thus, needed that step-by-step work; and (2) it was too hurried to allow them time to compose and revise the larger, multigenre texts in enough depth.
- Avoiding scholarship in multimodal theory in a class on multimodality (as I did in that 3040 class and also in my first Multimodal Composition class at Illinois State) is stupid.

All of these points, but especially that last one, are not wowful, eureka notions; they are *duhm* and embarrassing realizations for me. But the teaching-as-process portion of my Happenings pedagogy helps me realize my mistakes and moves me away from a naïve and chaotic interpretation of avant-garde pedagogy toward a critical, socio-epistemic pedagogy that still incorporates the expressivism inherent in new media composing.

So another year has passed, and the major assignment has changed again based on the lessons I have learned so far. As I write, my Fall 2008 class is focusing on the recent history and purpose of multimodal composition in the humanities, with a particular look at how students are portrayed or are given voice in new media scholarship.^{vii} The students will compose three group projects that are multi-voiced, multi-genre, multimodal, and multimedia (whew!), in whatever combinations they deem necessary, for submission to a digital, peer-reviewed publication.^{viii} Three weeks into class, after analyzing sample video calls-for-papers (CFPs) available on

YouTube, the students insisted on producing ones that could be used for the digital publication to which they were submitting. We spent less than an hour on how to complete this impromptu assignment, including grabbing video from YouTube, finding images, tips on analyzing the written CFP they'd pull content from, and using MovieMaker. They had five days to complete the 1-minute CFPs, and I was totally wowed by a majority of their first drafts. Those that didn't wow me still impressed me given the quickness of the project. Six weeks into class, I was wowed by their project pitches, which got at the heart of disciplinary conversations happening in digital writing studies. Although their final, collaborative project may not be accepted for the collection, the shifting nature of digital scholarship will push them to choose what modes, media, genres, and technologies they believe are needed to reach an audience of teacher-scholars invested in, but perhaps with much still to learn about, new media.

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Biographies

Tyrell Fenn works full time at New Dawn Technologies helping provide case management software to the justice community. In his spare time, he's pursuing a graduate degree in Instructional Technology at Utah State University.

Tia Scoffield Bowen is developing her video capturing and editing skills through classes, internships, and any practice she can get. She's been told she has a photo-journalistic style, which encourages her use of media to tell stories and keep a documentary of her life and other's. After learning to use a blog, she's made one using pictures, music, and text to update family and friends.

Cheryl E. Ball taught at Utah State University from 2004–2007 and now teaches at Illinois State University, where she continues to learn from her students. In her spare time, she edits *Kairos: A Journal of Rhetoric, Technology, and Pedagogy*.

ⁱ I teach graduate students when they write Teaching Philosophies: read all the pedagogical approaches out there, reconcile their differences, take what's useful, and make it your own. So, although it may seem antithetical at first glance, my Happenings pedagogy is infused with a socio-epistemic critical lens (Sirc+Berlin, if you will). I think Sirc (2002) would approve despite his criticism of composition's epistemic turn and its formation of, in his words, "a compositional canon" where material *restraints*—that is, what we can and should be producing in writing classes and writing scholarship—are born (p. 7–8). I don't, as Berlin (2008/1998) argued, think that a happenings pedagogy—as Sirc dreams it—is focused solely on "liberating students from the shackles of a corrupt society" (p. 127). It was Sirc's goal to examine and disrupt the space and materials of composition studies after its epistemic turn, and it is *one* of my pedagogical goals to examine the material, rhetorical conditions in which we compose, while also asking students to produce texts that break out of the traditional material restraints. Thus, I combine socio-epistemic and Happenings pedagogies, with a little critical, cultural, feminist, multimodal, and other pedagogies thrown in as needed.

ⁱⁱ **Definitions of some terms.** I am drawing on the New London Group's (NLG; Cope & Kalantzis, 2000) definition of *mode*, which they refer to as *modes of meaning* but which I more often refer to as *modes of communication* because it makes sense more quickly to those not familiar with this area of scholarship. The modes that the NLG discuss include linguistic, visual, aural, spatial, and gestural, with multimodal including combinations of the other five modes. Next is *medium* or *media*, in which I draw on Kress and van Leeuwen's (2001) *Multimodal Discourse*. Although I am generalizing their complicated distinctions between modes and media, I use *media* to indicate how modes of communication are produced and distributed for public consumption/reading. For example, a linguistic mode of communication might be enacted through the medium of writing, which can also be a visual mode and could be transformed into an aural mode when writing is spoken instead of read on a page or screen. *Text* refers to any possible combination of modes or media used to communicate to an audience and is recognized through specific *genres*, which are texts that use flexible, social conventions in response to a particular rhetorical situation. Genres use multiple modes and may use multiple media (e.g., a research paper that includes a graph or illustration; a documentary that uses textual overlay and voiceovers, etc.). Media, however, are genre-independent. The previous example of a linguistic mode of communication, writing, needs a generic container to hold it; otherwise, the writing remains a virtual text. The virtuality of the text thus requires an interface technology to display the medium, making it materially available to users/readers. Here's a breakdown: The medium of writing, which is an example of the linguistic mode, can be placed into a genre such as a letter to the editor, and published on interface technologies, or materials, including newsprint or a webpage.

A question I will pose but leave mostly for another time: When does a technology change from being a medium of production or distribution to a convention of the genre, and thus (in some cases) a genre itself? An example: When a student uses blogging software to host a personal website in which she is posting personal pictures, writing daily entries for her family, and posting course assignments (including written reading responses and multimedia elements such as mp3s created for class), I cannot accurately assign a specific genre to her blog because it covers so many topics for different audiences; she is blogging, which seems to be a production method here, but it is one, like word-processing, that can encompass several genres (class posts, family posts) and media (writing, pictures, mp3s) at once. Although blogs tend to impose specific conventions on the texts they contain (including the design of the blog itself), blogs are also a technological distribution method. So maybe the better question is: What is the impact on meaning-making of the layered genre conventions of distribution methods? And does the meaning of the contained text change when the interface changes?

ⁱⁱⁱ I could have asked students to create private blogs where only certain readers are given permission to view the posts, but for the college setting, I thought the open blog was appropriate because I explicitly wanted to discuss the public/private distinction with students and how that knowledge impacted their compositional process. In-class discussions indicated that the public nature of the blog did impact what and how students would write in that space, but due to space, I will save the discussion on that issue.

^{iv} In future classes, however, I plan to move away from written reflections and borrow an assignment I learned about from Louie Ulman and Dickie Selfe: director's commentaries. Whereas I've done this reflection in the past, in the form of *my* commentaries on my students' work [see RiceBall, 2006], students should have the option of reflecting on *their own* video texts through voiceover commentary. In retrospect, it seems like a 'duh' move to make in my pedagogy.

^v Two examples of successful multigenre texts that I have discussed elsewhere include the "visual period" video I mentioned earlier in this text (see Ball & Moeller, 2008, for the discussion of this video; see Watkins, 2008, for the video itself) and a video composed by another graduate student in which structures of literary hypertext are applied to the narrative plot of a linear video to define/show what closure means in literary hypertext (see Ball & Moeller, 2007, for further discussion of this complicated example).

^{vi} One or two, sure—and in ways I wasn't expecting to be wowed: There was one student who, instead of following instructions to film and edit similar visual elements (based on an earlier version of the video motif assignment posted at the WritingWithVideo.net website; see <http://writingwithvideo.net/module01.htm>), created a motif in which he filmed different scenes through dirty windows—a high level of critical thinking from a student who already had video-production experience. (This student is assisting me with the course for independent study

credit in Fall 2008. His motif, called “Most Epic Battle,” is available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ks8HLskwbJY>) Or, the student who I thought had dropped the course but showed up with a completed, and beautifully done, anti-war music video two weeks before the semester ended. The other students insisted that I allow his video into the showcase even though he’d missed the class-wide voting.

- vii The topic of digital scholarship was, in part, gifted to me through my work with the hosts of the Thomas R. Watson Conference on Rhetoric and Composition. As co-editors for the digital book that will come out of the conference theme, “The New Work of Composing,” we wanted a video response to the conference itself. The students will attend the conference, conduct research and collect digital assets, and compose several pieces of digital scholarship to be submitted to the collection. Their submissions will be reviewed by the other editors and, if accepted into the collection, peer-reviewed by the press’s external review board.
- viii The syllabus for this class is available at <http://www.ceball.com/classes/239>. Although conceived more in relation to my work with *Kairos*, this project is similar to what Ohio State University’s first-year writing program is doing in their Commonplace project (see <http://www.commonplaceuniversity.com/>). The major difference is that the peer-reviewers in my case are digital media scholars, not other students.