Beyond 'Further': Collaboration, Community and Compassion in the Digital Age

By

Margaux DeRoux

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Chairperson Dr. Amy Devitt

Dr. Frank Farmer

Dr. Sonya Lancaster

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The Thesis Committee for Author Margaux DeRoux

certifies that this is the approved version of the following thesis:

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Chairperson Dr. Amy Devitt

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Abstract:

In this paper, I outline specific approaches that may be taken to bring the Composition classroom into the digital, collaborative present, and close by questioning what further practices might be explored to more deeply mine the rich soil of this mandatory Humanities course. The first approach takes its cue from Jeff Rice's fine article *The 1963 Hip-Hop Machine*, and explores ways in which students might begin the process of critical data synthesis (sampling), to ultimately create a deeply intertextual final product. The skills introduced through the utilization of Rice's sampling techniques are compounded by the construction of a collaborative product; another layer is added to this matrix as assessment tactics become an additional site to further develop collaboration in an effort to transform the classroom into a Freirian community of learners. The dual approach suggested will ideally result in a student who is not only better equipped to navigate an increasingly digitized reality, but also more able to work in collaboration with his or her peers. The thesis thus concludes with an exploration of notions of collaboration, community, and compassion. While the intertext assignment illuminates the connections inherent to dialogic discourse, and the collaborative online project strengthens peer-to-peer relationships, is it also tenable to imagine a digital pedagogical practice that fosters connectivity and collaboration with the student's literal community: with the 'real' world around them. The thesis ultimately argues that the Composition classroom might be revised as a site where students learn the critical skill-sets relevant to the digital era and their professional futures, as well as a deeper understanding of social inter-dependence and connectivity (what Mo Tse deemed in the fifth century BCE *jian ai*: concern for all).

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Introduction: The Lay of the [Virtual] Land

In his most recent State of the Union address, President Obama markedly made no mention of the humanities. Rather, his indication to prepare 100,000 teachers only in "science, technology, engineering and math," led Stanley Fish to posit that "the only way humanist educators and their students are going to get to the top is by hanging on to the coattails of their scientist and engineering friends" (Fish 1). These 'friends' are racing to the top by aligning with the goal of technological superiority: these are the ones whose innovations ostensibly allow us to compete in the global economy. Yet the emphasis on the market value of education has led (as Richard Arum and Josipa Roksa note in their new book *Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses*) to limited increases in "critical thinking, complex reasoning, and writing" (as qtd. in Fish 1). And, as Fish observes (via Martha Nussbaum), the skills that are being elided on University campuses are the same skills found to be "essential to the health of democracy" (Fish 1).

The Humanities classroom, furthermore, is often identified as the site where "individuals…learn how to interpret, understand, and revise their…outlooks" on life, and it is in the Humanities classroom where we are allowed, "to take up the Socratic task of knowing ourselves and other persons…exploring this thickness of experience" (Anderson 137). If our University system is wavering in teaching the critical thinking and complex reasoning necessary for democracy, while simultaneously and efficiently cutting in broad nation-wide swaths the courses where students learn to develop themselves and their understandings of others, it is not overly difficult to sense impending danger.

Yet as we emphasize the fields of math and science in our race for technological innovation, are we properly acknowledging how our engagement with the digital realm literally changes the way we think—and could this cognitive shift signal a way in which the Humanities might find new validity and worth within the University structure? Gary Small and Gigi Vorgan's extensive research on brain function during Internet sessions reveal that those familiar and accustomed to using technology experience concentrated activity in the dorolateral prefrontal cortex, an area that, "specializes in integration of disparate pieces of data" (Badke 2). As William Badke puts it (in his excellent article "How Stupid is Google Making Us?"), "the result of digital experience is preference for a brain capacity that enhances rapid processing of large amounts of data…sythesize(d) into some kind of meaning" (3). This preference, however, comes at a cost: deep reasoning functions are not accessed with the same intensity, and while "the ability to handle multiple pieces of data and synthesize them into something that makes sense is not something to disparage," concerns may be raised regarding the level of critical thought that informs this process (Badke 4). The element of critical thought is ultimately what "ibrainers (need) to optimize for…information literacy skills" (Badke 4).

In addition to this complex shift in mental processes (and its accompanying concerns), work in the global economy has become increasingly collaborative and interactive, so much so that Finnish psychologists have determined that "an active social approach and a sense of community and involvement" is now necessary for students to productively make "the transition to everyday work" (Nauert *PCNOnline*). Taking into account the importance of the ability to consciously synthesize data, as well as the primacy of developing collaborative abilities, a singular question emerges: is it possible for the Humanities to engage in an innovative way with technology, to not only integrate this important tool into our pedagogy (and thus re-establish legitimacy within the university structure), but to better serve our students in this new digital era?

Can our Composition classrooms become a site where students not only strengthen the cognitive skills demanded of them by the digital era (learning to be both consciously and critically engaged with the process of synthesis), but also simultaneously enhance the now-necessary ability to work collectively and collaboratively, constructing the bonds that form community? I propose that this vision of the Composition classroom 2.0 is not only possible, but also utterly tenable.

In this paper, I outline specific approaches that may be taken to bring the Composition classroom into the digital, collaborative present, and close by questioning what further practices might be explored to more deeply mine the rich soil of this mandatory Humanities course. The first approach I explore is perhaps the most practical, and builds itself from this simple question: what can we do *now*? What options are available to *every* instructor in *every* composition course: from the fully digitized, media-friendly (possibly private) classroom, to the (predictably, often urban and public) classroom, where students may have limited or no access to computers? The first approach takes its cue from Jeff Rice's fine article *The 1963 Hip-Hop Machine*, and explores ways in which students might begin the process of critical data synthesis (sampling), to ultimately create a deeply intertextual final product. A carefully constructed intertext assignment mimics the way in which data is presented in the digital age, and allows the student to strengthen the data-synthesis skills and critical reasoning necessary to navigate and engage with digital spaces. Simultaneously, this project helps students realize the polyphonic nature of intellectual thought, and the manner in which ideas are not composed in a vacuum, but are in quiet dialogue with one another.[i] As intellectual thought is revealed to be interactive, hierarchies of authority become disrupted, and the student is encouraged to enter the academic dialogue with confidence, and to rethink notions of collaboration (and community).

While this first approach is ostensibly meant to help circumnavigate the pitiful fact that not all classrooms are equally equipped with media (and not all students are equally critically

engaged with digitech), it also functions as an excellent foundation upon which another approach might be layered. This second method deals directly with the digital realm, as students are asked to consciously engage with and construct digital spaces, and develop collaborative abilities. The student is assigned an online group task: a task that directly develops the threads (introduced by the intertext) of critical engagement with data and the inherently collaborative nature of discourse. This task, however, also asks students to enhance their ability to work collectively, and explores how digital programs both facilitate and mediate the production of a collaborative product. The skills introduced through the utilization of Rice's sampling techniques are compounded by the construction of a collaborative product; another layer is added to this matrix as we explore how assessment tactics might become an additional site to further develop collaboration in an effort to transform the classroom into a Freirian community of learners.

It must be noted that while I present two specific methods that serve to illustrate how the composition classroom may be brought into engagement with digital space, many options exist. Furthermore, while the approaches I present work best in collusion, they are independently effective. The dual approach I suggest will ideally result in a student who is not only better equipped to navigate an increasingly digitized reality, but also more able to work in collaboration with his or her peers. Finally, the flickering hope threaded through these words is that the student may walk away from such activities with a greater willingness to listen to and value the ideas of those around them: that some of the "fiercely independent and competitive nature of contemporary academia" might be replaced with a more comprehensive and compassionate conception of what it means to construct knowledge, and what it means to learn.

Thus, my thesis concludes with an exploration of notions of collaboration, community, and compassion. If the humanities are so often described as the place where we learn not just critical thinking and complex reasoning, but to more deeply understand ourselves, our peers, and

the world around us, is it possible to meet this description with explicit practice? If the first two

approaches I offer build an awareness not only of how to synthesize data and navigate digital

spaces, but also of the deep-rooted seed of collaboration and social community that is buried in

any knowledge construction, is it possible to expand such an awareness beyond the classroom

and into the students' *actual* community? While the intertext assignment illuminates the

connections inherent to dialogic discourse, and the collaborative online project strengthens peer-

to-peer relationships, is it tenable to imagine a digital pedagogical practice that fosters

connectivity and collaboration with the students literal community: with the 'real' world around

them? Could the Composition classroom be revised as a site where students learn the critical

skill-sets relevant to our digital era and their professional futures, as well as a deeper

understanding of social inter-dependence and connectivity (what Mo Tse deemed in the fifth

century BCE *jian ai*: concern for all)? Though this final chapter lives exclusively in the realm of

postulation, I'd like to think the answer is 'yes.'

Chapter One: Beyond the Linear// Sampling Music from the Hip-Hop Machine

The first portion of this thesis addresses techniques suited for any classroom, and all

students: these techniques might easily be utilized in addition to other (more traditional)

curriculum choices. Stuart Selber perhaps puts it best when he notes that, "students need

[experience with] both functional and critical literacies (as well as other types of literacies

[utilized by technology]:" the techniques I outline must not be represented "as a replacement of

other methods of writing or designing but as one valid practice among many. [The] intent is…to

augment practices by enriching repertoires" (Selber 472; Johnson-Eilola *Plagiarism* 382).

However, it must also be acknowledged that practices similar to those that follow are also a

means of navigating around larger systemic issues present within the educational environment. These issues have been clearly mapped by Carmen Kynard. As she states in her excellent essay *Wanted: Some Black Long Distance [Writers],* the majority of students who have at-home computer access are wealthy and white; urban composition classes often have little or no access to computers, and just as "schooling itself has maintained racial hierarchies…[in terms of technology] old inequalities simply get mapped onto and reinforce new ones" (332). By implementing techniques that mimic online engagement, students will be allowed to gain the skills necessary for a digital era. They become familiarized with "the move from a focus on representation (what things mean) to action (how things function, and to what effect) [which] is at one with the ways readers become positioned as users in online environments" (Johnson-Eilola *Plagiarism* 387). Exploring this move is where students will begin to gain the critical thinking skills they need as ibrainers, and where they may begin to understand the depth of dialogue present in any text.

Jeff Rice (with Marcel O'Gorman), in his book *New Media/New Methods*, helps us understand the complexities of working within the digital realm. He enters the conversation by identifying "newness' as the process (one might even say, the continual state) of invention, which is the essence of contemporary technological being" (4). Rice and O'Gorman argue that this process of invention must be incorporated into curriculum, and that new methodologies are needed "for the purpose of rendering scholarly research [and practices] more suitable to an age of digital media"(Rice and O'Gorman, 4). Johndan Johnson-Eilola seconds this argument when he notes that,

> Our existing models of…work tend to support relatively linear, orderly, modernistic
> [models]. Work in the information age, however, increasingly requires a different
> approach. To expand the…powerful new ways of understanding and working within

information, we need to reconstruct—rearticulate---what we mean when we talk about

communicating and working. In an information age, these activities are not about order or

production, but about manipulation, contingency, semirandom movement, and

reinterpretation. (*Datacloud* 10).

We must endow our students with the ability to process a world increasingly littered with

experiences of rapid-fire data output, information that is fragmented, reconstructed, overlapping,

engaged in multiple simultaneous conversations. Within this context, the capacity of the

Composition classroom should not be overlooked or diminished. After all, "language

shapes…our ways of working, and more…our development and uses of…technologies are

intimately bound up with how language is used and changed" (Johnson-Eilola, *Datacloud* 17).

The composition class may be the ideal space within which to begin learning how to 'participate

fully' in the digital age. I argue specifically that by incorporating sampling techniques (in the

creation of intertexts), the composition classroom may not only function to better prepare *all*

students for a digital era, but these techniques may also promote a sense of collectivity and a

degree of comfort in collaboration.

Rice describes sampling within the composition classroom as the moment when "the

student writer looks at the various distinct [texts] she has collected and figures out how these

moments together produce knowledge" (*1963,* 465). This process mimics the act of synthesis

outlined by Badke, and works to strengthen the Composition class by forming a neat bridge

between our digitized reality and the space of the classroom. As Johnson-Eilola notices,

The environments in which [symbolic-analytic] work takes place has not…been matched

by the development of an educational system designed for teaching these skills. For

example, although students frequently learn generalized research skills, too little attention

is paid to working with masses of information (*Datacloud* 97).

In short: the academy has not kept pace with the digital era. And "if educators hope to prepare citizens who can 'participate fully' in new forms [of communication,] we must teach them to design communications using [multiple] modes of representation" (Selfe, 55). The introduction of sampling techniques (which require a sensitivity to text and textuality as the student engineers a cohesive polyphonic assemblage composed of fragments) provides a way in which students may learn to navigate multiple forms of communication and data-masses, and a means for the composition classroom to better prepare *all* students to productively encounter and engage with their digital realities, undercutting the traditions of systemic discrimination addressed by Kynard.

Before delving into the act of sampling as it is conceived of in a contemporary, digitized sense, it must be acknowledged that these methods have a historic precedence in Surrealism. As the student sampler interweaves fragments of diverse data to create a coherent composition, he or she is engaging in some small manner with the fundamental belief of Surrealism. Both Surrealism and sampling necessitate that notions of order must be open to transformation and imagination, and that inherent power is embedded in the establishment of relationships between disparate elements (and important psychological understandings might be formed when the mind is willing to engage with unusual intersections and unions). The notion of juxtaposition is central to both Surrealism and sampling: for a better understanding of this fundamental act, we might turn to pioneering DJ Paul Miller.

Miller understands sampling as a technique that stems from the conditions of our digital era, wherein information is rapidly constructed and disseminated. This condition leads to a "sense of disassociation [provoked by] always having information coming at you" from every direction (Miller, *Impressions*). Miller believes that the creator who interacts "with this floating world of information" becomes "someone who is an engineer just as much as an artist," underscoring the connections between diverse methodologies that work to layer and intersect

data (*Impressions*). The sampler creates "by using sequence…the idea is that you're looking at [information as] something that can easily be reconfigured and transformed" (Miller, *Spectrum* 11). Through this selection process, "editing actually [becomes] the art," and the act of sampling becomes "a tool for interpreting reality" (Miller, *Spectrum*12). The sampler-editor plays with elements of the familiar: he or she must be able "to dig into a text, take out fragments and create a sequence…and that [new] material becomes [another] artform" (Miller, *Rhythmscience* 36). This process becomes one of encoding, an act wherein "systems of thought, procedures of extrapolation, syntax and structure…all point to a strange game [played] in an ever-shifting field of meaning, a place where text and textuality" intersect (Miller, *Rhythmscience* 33). Creativity now rests in "how you recontextualize…[and] there is no such thing as 'an immaculate perception" (Miller, *Rhythmscience* 33). Meaning develops from dialogic relationships, and perception and interpretation are now shaped by the context of discourse.

In essence, what Miller is pointing towards is the way in which the sampler attunes their attention to connections not only between the content of disparate fragments of information, but to the form in which this information is presented, learning to interweave 'text and textuality' into a unique construction translated into a unique perceptional experience. Miller echoes R. Reich in his acknowledgment that the digital age requires different ways of synthesizing and responding to information: as Reich states, "Reality must be…understood and manipulated in new ways…in order to create possibilities for reinterpreting, and then rearranging, the chaos of data that are already swirling around us" (101). What the sampler does is more than reproduce: he or she replicates, "replication as it stands derived from reply" (Miller, *Rhythmscience* 36). The sampler responds to their own encounters with information in the digital data swirl by constructing a product that allows further 'replies,' and dialogues to form between the fragments utilized, all of which is then uniquely interpreted. As Miller states, "you can think of sampling as

a story you are telling…one made of the world as you [understand] it, and [the art] you invoke

with those fragments is all one story made of many" (*Sound* 12). We hear an echo of the Socratic

task in such a statement (the struggle to understand this 'thickness of experience'), as well as a

nod to the puissance of polyphonic discourse.

Sampling, then, fits not only within the frame of expression and symbolic analysis, but

with our later discussion of collaboration and community: the sampled intertext mirrors the way

the world itself is composed of interwoven moments of articulation and interpretation.

Articulation, as Jennifer Slack conceives of it, "is…not just a thing (not just a connection) but a

process of creating connections" (114). Symbolic analysis, meanwhile, requires "collecting,

rearranging, filtering, and connecting bits of information for particular contexts and needs"

within a digital environment (Johnson-Eilola*, Datacloud* 29). The student-sampler is learning

thus to critically engage with floating fragments, mimicking the ways in which knowledge is

constructed in digital spaces.

While the utilization of sampling techniques in the classroom to create intertexts is a

practice that is arguably valid, it is infrequently utilized, as Johnson-Eilola notes:

> assemblage as a writing practice in academic courses is only beginning to appear on our
>
> collective radar screen despite the fact that remixed artifacts are everywhere…we want
>
> teachers to start seeing assemblages as a valid and valued form of student writing—and
>
> of writing in general." (*Plagiarism* 380)

Johnson-Eilola calls the sampled text an 'assemblage,' James Porter dubs it an 'intertext,'

(Patricia Bizzell has formed a lengthy argument against the use of the term 'hybrid,' in view that

a sampled text is not simply a "discourse from two distinct 'parents"), and Rebeccah Moore

Howard interestingly names the activity 'patchwriting' (Bizzell 3). Patchwriting "involves

copying from a source text and then deleting some words, altering grammatical structures, or

plugging in one-for–one synonym-substitutes" (Howard 233). It must be noted at this juncture

that Moore Howard initially introduced the term patchwriting within a larger dialogue on the

subject of plagiarism. Certainly plagiarism is an important issue to address in any classroom (and

most particularly in a course that utilizes exercises such as the intertext). However, because the

issue of plagiarism has been thoroughly investigated by multiple scholars, I will not focus overt

attention to the topic in this thesis.[ii] Ultimately, my primary concern is not the potentially

problematic nature of citation but the *function* of patchwriting: it must be stressed that such an

activity not only involves practicing how to synthesize information, but "learning to write like an

expert" (Johnson-Eilola *Plagiarism* 381). It involves realizing that "what a text means and does

is influenced by other texts it draws on and is put in contact with" (Johnson-Eilola *Plagiarism*

382). Clay Spinuzzi deems this act 'compound mediation,' as the student-samplers "bring

together texts from multiple sources and often from completely different genres in order to create

new texts, a process often involving breakdown, reallocation of resources, creation of new hybrid

genres, and shifts in power" (as qtd. in Johnson-Eilola *Plagiarism* 382). This power shift, I

argue, is one that mentally moves the student from engaging in the re-inscription of hierarchies

of dominance to encouraging conceptions of collusion and collaboration.

Pulling on this thread of 'compound mediation,' it is possible to see sampling as more

than a means of understanding the world through the interpretation and composition of

fragments; concepts of 'textuality' as explored through sampling allow multiple narrative

techniques and forms to interact and engage with one another. The idea that polyphonic

productions are inherently powerful by virtue of this engagement is not a new one: Mikhail

Bakhtin famously proposed that ideas only find meaning in dialogue. As we explore more deeply

the ways in which sampling techniques might be used to construct a polyphonic product, it is

possible to observe how independent narratives engage in "continual and mutual development

[as] the interleaving of practices [produces] new forms even as older forms continue to exist"
(Aschcroft et. al 138). James Porter builds upon this concept when he advocates for entertaining
the idea of intertextuality: "the principle that all writing and speech—indeed, all signs---arise
from a single network: what Vygotsky called 'the web of meaning" (34).

For Porter, engaging in intertextuality means looking for 'traces,' and identifying the
ways in which texts form relationships with one another. Perhaps Porter puts it best in his oft-
repeated passage:

> writing is an attempt to exercise the will, to identify the self within the constraints of
> some discourse community. We are constrained insofar as we must inevitably borrow the
> traces, codes, and signs which we inherit and which our discourse community imposes.
> We are free insofar as we do what we can to…intertwine codes in new ways…with our
> goal being to effect change and establish our identities within the discourse communities
> we choose to enter (41).

While the ideas of innovative techniques and affecting change within a community will resurface
most powerfully in Chapter 3, at this moment we might interpret Porter's statement as a way to
perceive of intertextuality as a lens through which to read texts. Intertextuality is a lens insofar as
it enables us to understand that "every discourse is composed of 'traces,' inherited pieces of
other texts that help constitute its meaning," but it is also a methodology by which to produce
textual products: using fragments and 'samples' from various sources to construct a unified
artifact that communicates meaning through the interaction of its parts (Porter 41). A sampled
product might resemble the last chapter of Johnson-Eilola's *Datacloud* (which is composed of
splinters of texts found and composed into a new 'remix'), or Marshall McLuhan and Quentin
Fiore's *The Medium is the Massage*, a fragmented interpretation of McLuhan's earlier work, *The
Gutenberg Galaxy*. As Johnson-Eilola himself notes, "such activities offer important new ways

for thinking critically and productively about what it means to write, about what it means to read, and about what we value as texts in rhetoric and composition" (*Plagiarism* 376).

Ultimately, what is important to note is the way in which the sampled text reveals the meaning-making process of language, and the manner in which the production of a sampled text illuminates through its act of juxtaposition the ways in which form and content interact: the malleability of meaning, and its adaptability to and usability by various genres and narrative structures. The student might be aided in going 'further' by a teacher who supplies them with a wide textual array of literacies and marginalized voices (alongside standardized selections), all of which might be fragmented, sampled, and remixed into a unique intertext. The process of sampling myriad diverse texts allows for "a constructivist, collective kind of knowledge-making process that is faithful to and takes advantage of a…understanding of how we 'create' knowledge" (Yancey and Spooner 47). Furthermore, the weaving together of 'diverse' or disparate voices functions to foster a compassionate vision of the ways in which lived experience is similarly polyphonic and multiple.

Furthermore, a diverse archive prods the student-sampler into identifying the ways in which language has been the tool for a certain group to access "systems of power, control, privilege, entitlement, and authority"… to represent history, to form conceptions of otherness, and to silence alternate narratives (Royster 25). As Bizzell notes, the "most standard…features [of academic discourse] reflect the cultural preferences of the most powerful people in the community….these people…have usually been male, European American, and middle or upper class" (1). By disrupting the standard features of this discourse, the sampler may begin to see how "dominant narratives only attain dominance through imagining themselves whole in contrast to other [and that] we must imagine those narratives differently [in order to] believe differently" (Powell 18). Essentially, integrating an intertextual exercise into the Composition

classroom nudges students into developing a heightened sensitivity to relationships of power (fostering 'compassionate vision'), and thus constructs a foundation upon which the collaborative practices of Chapter 2 might be structured.

The creation of an intertext composed of diverse fragments challenges such notions of 'wholeness,' inviting a measure of skepticism toward any ostensibly 'comprehensive' text or discourse by providing the space for difference, and allowing the student to enter into the messy and fraught process of creation. Finally, in the same way that sampled discourse is able to illuminate and disrupt the hierarchy and authority of narratives while provoking an understanding of dialogic collusion, the required attunement to the connections between fragments simultaneously elicits attention to the cohesion and totality of the artwork constructed. Miller notes that, "the idea of composing [is] looking at the entire environment…[in both] micro [and] macro scale" (Miller, *Spectrum* 19). In looking at information environments, "you have to think about choreography and repetition…and the movement of the landscape" (*Spectrum* 33). The act of sampling involves acute attention to the sum of the product's parts, yet it requires something more from the student-composer as well: "anything involving text has to be interpreted…there's this interpretive layer" that engages not only the 'engineer' synthesizing and replying to fragments, but the interpretive reception of the reader (Miller, *Impressions*). In this way, "the inherent contingency and possibility of fragmentation requires…active participants who are able to work for both stability and change," finding meaning in the way fragments have been shifted and altered to form a unified, stable product (Johnson-Eilola, *Datacloud* 28). Thus, sampling becomes a methodology that fuses both heuretics and hermeneutics (invention and interpretation), and attention to the entire environment is necessary when assessing a sampled product. Students are asked to understand not only the ways in which sampled fragments engage with one another, and with the product as a whole, but also to consider the multiple ways such

fragments might be interpreted, heightening sensitivity to the relationship between the student and other viewers.

The sampled intertext reveals that "knowledge is constructed communally," and through such an activity the student may gain a different appreciation for the value of the voices of others: through the creation of a product that is composed of 'collaborating' texts, the student may apply such a line of thought to the idea of 'community.' Building upon Miller's concept of 'one story made of many,' intertexts composed from diverse sources prompt a visual and visceral understanding of how "each text [has] many distinct sources all influencing one another," and perhaps "despite division the root is…humanity" (Behling 423). The 'interpretive layer' required of active participants in the sampling process only compounds this awareness of connectivity. In a composition classroom that values alternate methods of production, "critical literacy and vernacular traditions can meet and shape students sense of themselves as writers, thinkers, and social agents" (Kynard 332). The act of sampling and the creation of polyphonic products provoke a comprehension of a unified collectivity composed of connected disparate elements, a type of interdependence that might begin to "recreate the world in the image of a…village," a specific concept of community that will re-emerge in Chapter 3 (McLuhan *Gutenberg* 31). The text becomes an intertext, and the ibrain student becomes increasingly skilled at synthesizing data with a critical awareness of its connectivity and meaning. Yet, as we progress, perhaps the more important move is the way in which through such activities the isolated student becomes an individual working with a conscious consideration of engagement (how his creation might be interpreted and received by his peers): just as the data fragments are part of a whole, so too does she begin to see herself as part of a larger, interactive classroom community.

Chapter Two: Beyond the Paper//The Multimodal Digital Production

The techniques of sampling and the creation of intertexts allow students to understand the ways in which written texts are dialogic representations of larger communities; as students begin to collaboratively construct digital multimodal productions, this understanding is only enhanced. As Kenneth Bruffee states (in his insightful *Collaborative Learning and the 'Conversation of Mankind'*):

> If we accept the premise that knowledge is an artifact created by a community of knowledgeable peers constituted by the language of that community, and that learning is a social and not an individual process, then to learn is not to assimilate information and improve our mental eyesight. To learn is to work collaboratively to establish and maintain knowledge among a community of knowledgeable peers (646).

The initial process of sampling helps enable students to navigate the way in which data is presented in the digital era, while revealing the manner in which language functions as a means to both create and represent continuous social dialogues. Furthermore, the intertext exercise helps prepare students for the necessary mental shift into the critical (digital) thought processes required of collaborative multimodal composing.

The task of multimodal composing, however, is complex and complicated (and not merely due to the nature of the ibrain). The student may experience tension from various causes: they may be unfamiliar with the programs used, anxious about teacher expectations, hesitant to deviate from anticipated print-based exercises, etc (and in all honesty, these same tensions might be experienced by the teacher herself). However, the importance of consciously engaging with digital multimodal and collaborative exercises cannot be minimized. Not only have teachers found students "to be highly motivated when confronted with a multimodal assignment," students find multimodal composing to be "relevant for future jobs:" students understand that digital media will only increasingly saturate each aspect of their lives (Powell et al., *Kairos*

Wiki). Furthermore, the way in which digital multimodal and collaborative productions encourage understandings of community builds upon their consequence in the professional arena: recent studies performed at the University of Helsinki found that "good interpersonal skills, an active social approach and a sense of community and involvement can equip students with the personal resources necessary in making the transition to everyday work and the…world of career-making" (Nauert 1).

Yet the argument for introducing digital media into the Composition classroom goes beyond the simple fact that such a move will provide relevance to the 'real world,' and therefore validate the curriculum. It is necessary to make a "distinction between a world that is simply full of more technology and a mindset that encourages participation and collaboration in many new ways:" not only do we need to engage with technology, we need to engage with our own engagement (questioning, critiquing, and becoming conscious of how and for what purpose we are using our new tools…and how these uses might build stronger communities) (Kittle and Hicks, 526). We may begin to address this need by beginning to pay attention to our own mindsets. As Peter Kittle and Troy Hicks note (in their excellent article "Transforming the Group Paper with Collaborative Online Writing"), self-awareness, "becomes increasingly important as we think about collaborative writing" and as we navigate our interpersonal interactions (526). Writing, after all, is a social practice, and the digital spaces wherein collaborative writing occurs become social ones. As instructors, we can help students become conscious of their own engagement with digitech by purposefully creating and shaping the contexts (digital spaces) wherein *productive* collaboration can occur: in this way, technology becomes a tool that benefits and guides the social practice of writing (a notion I will develop in Chapter 3). As it stands, instructors typically "keep trying to force collaborative innovations into a structure…that

supports individual work," often out of a fear of and unfamiliarity with the tools of technology (Magdola 606).

Yet if we are to serve our students well, we must recognize and respond to the basic fact that "today's young people…are digital natives who grew up in a world of computers…[and] they seek an education that's active…interactive… and collaborative" (Levine 20). Arthur Levine uses the term 'digital native' (coined by Marc Prensky in his 2001 article "Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants"), yet it is safe to say this term is contested: in my thesis I will refer exclusively to 'ibrainers' in reference to individuals familiar with digital encounters. However, the content of Levine's statement is valid, and Karen Bromley concurs that as educators,

> it is important that we are sensitive to the kinds of reading and writing students use in their out-of-school worlds...understanding students' use of electronic reading and writing and the collaboration and knowledge sharing they do outside school can better help teachers connect the in-school literacies students need to learn with the out-of-school literacies in which they engage (Bromley 5).

As Cynthia Selfe (with Pamela Takayoshi) notes, the hesitation between constructing this connection stems from the primary question that "rests at the heart of many teachers' concerns about multimodal composing:" by teaching multimodal composing, are we really teaching composition? (Selfe et al. 6). Selfe responds to this concern by reminding us that, "the classical basis of composition instruction involves teaching students how to use all available rhetorical means of communicating effectively" (Selfe et al. 6). Furthermore, Selfe validates the role of the Composition instructor in teaching multimodal composing when she asserts that:

> a central goal of contemporary education within U.S. colleges or universities is the preparation of literate graduates—intelligent citizens who can both create meaning in texts and interpret meaning from texts within a dynamic and increasingly technological

world. No collegiate unit bears the responsibility for achieving this goal more directly

than do composition programs (Selfe et al. 8).

To put it even more explicitly: "the responsibility of introducing students to *all available means* of communicating… including words, images, sound—remains the purview of composition teachers" (Selfe et al. 9). By incorporating critical online collaborative tasks, educators are able to not only facilitate students' mastery of the skills 'traditionally' taught in the Composition classroom (critical thinking, complex reasoning, and writing), but simultaneously enhance critical understandings of the way knowledge is constructed in the contemporary digital realms encountered daily. Yet as we will establish, there is an even greater (social) benefit to the incorporation of collaborative digital programs in the classroom.

Before beginning to explore digital collaboration in detail, perhaps we may first define collaboration itself, beyond any previous discussions of polyphonic discourse. As Lynn M. Thomson notes,

Often invoked, collaboration is a word threatened with a depleted meaning through overuse, and now tends only to be a well-intentioned reference that vaguely intimates a generous and modern spirit…true collaboration is a verb not a noun, a process of engagement, a map more than a destination. The process fosters a community of makers, who engender a shared vision, which in turn fuels individual creation (118).

Many argue that the kind of learning that occurs within a collaborative process is at once specific, necessary, and positive. G. Trentin supports this notion when he states that, "the idea of fostering collaborative learning strategies presents itself as a means of…creating the conditions for individual cognitive development as a result of group interaction," and that furthermore, "collaborative development of a written text transforms the student's ordinary, solitary written work into a collective process, yielding strong benefits on a social and cognitive level" (44). In

other words, in a well-constructed collaborative assignment, the student learns not only to navigate the dynamics of a (social) group, but is also able to develop as an independent critical thinker (in a way reflecting the manner in which fragments of an intertext gain unique significance through juxtaposition, and simultaneously interact to form a coherent, cohesive composition).

There are multiple kinds of collaborative exercises that might work to transform the isolated student into a productive collaborator and a significant individual member of a larger dialogic community. Kittle and Hicks intimate as to the multiplicity of methods available to encourage collaboration within digital classroom spaces:

> genuine collaboration involves a number of tasks beyond simply getting along and adding one part: giving ideas and feedback, creating content, debating the merits of an overall argument for the paper, writing and revising a particular section, researching …editing…encouraging (527).

Students might come together to construct a co-written text, they might collectively research a paper topic, they might form a collaborative community of editors using the online program CommentPress…the options are nearly limitless.[iii] What is important to note, however, is the way in which the tasks involved in a deeply collaborative project draw students into a complex web of critical thought and social engagement. Just as the intertext assignment allows students to conceive of texts as both products of and active members in shifting dialogues, so too can collaborative online activities "amplify the students' sense that there may be multiple interpretations of the same topic of study or discussion point" (Trentin 44).

Furthermore, the use of digital spaces for acts of collaboration may even serve to assuage concerns regarding collaborative activities. While collaborative writing is often hailed as a method that reveals, "the fact that interpretations may converge or diverge, highlighting the

natural complexity of interrelations within the realms of knowledge," traditional collaborative

methods are not without challenges (Trentin 44). Often, traditional collaboration is hindered by

individuals who may "not respect the work of other[s]," groups becoming stymied by a single

member who "wishes to dominate and control rather than negotiate an equal partnership" (Stein

et. al 420). In traditional collaborative practices, instructors may be able to neither fully

understand nor address the subtleties of each group's dynamic, and learning may be inhibited in

individuals whose voices are elided by the interpersonal interactions of the group. Yet digital

spaces, as we will explore further, preserve the polyphonic nature of collaborative discourse,

allowing for the kind of "negotiation of space [that] can lead to a better understanding of the

social processes that underlie any collaborative activity" (Garza and Hern, *WikiArticle*). While

this negotiation mirrors the activities students will undoubtedly be asked to perform in their

careers, its performance within digital landscapes also offers itself as a realm in possession of

larger social implications.

Susan Garza and Tommy Hern perhaps articulate best the relationship between co-

writing, technology and society when they state (in their powerful article "Using Wikis as

Collaborative Writing Tools: Something Wiki This Way Comes--Or Not!") that, "collaborative

writing is a complex process that requires collaborators to negotiate social relationships of

authority, power, responsibility and conflict" (Garza and Hern *WikiArticle*). We see in this

statement echoes of Bizell and Kynard: collaborative writing is a direct extension of the intertext

assignment in that it highlights the interplay of dominance present in polyphonic discourse,

perhaps provoking a deeper awareness of the systems of hierarchy and control inscribed onto

social relationships. Yet when used judiciously, "technology can have positive effects on this

process…the technology chosen for collaboration essentially becomes a shared space," inviting

the kind of necessary social negotiation G. Trentin describes (Garza and Hern, *WikiArticle*).

When chosen wisely, technology can function to facilitate and mediate the social discussions and acts of cooperation that occur during the collaborative process.

Ede and Lunsford argue that "one of the characteristics of effective collaborative assignments are that 'they allow for the evolution of group norms and the negotiation of authority and responsibility' and 'allow for and encourage creative conflict and protect minority views" (as qtd. in Garza and Hern, *WikiArticle*). In realizing the ways in which digital spaces of collaboration emphasize "active participation, connectivity, collaboration, and the sharing of knowledge and ideas among users," we begin to see how a well-structured digital space might function to preserve the polyphonic nature of true collaboration (protecting and allowing multi-vocal dialogues), thereby facilitating instruction and assuaging common concerns regarding collaborative practices (Lai and Ng 15). Thus, it is not without merit to question whether the digital realm might not be the ideal site for truly effective collaboration to occur.

Many options exist for creating online collaborative spaces: just as Kittle and Hicks illustrated the multiple *forms* collaboration might take, so too are myriad digital *spaces* available within which collaboration might occur. However, the best-documented program by far is the wiki. Not only has the wiki been heralded as a program that builds "constructive communities of writers," it also "accommodate[s] differences among members of these communities, which in turn can allow all voices to contribute to the conversation" (Garza and Hern *WikiArticle*). This mirrors and supports the claim made by Ede and Lunsford regarding the ways in which digital programs might function to protect and preserve minority views. Most importantly, however, is the simple fact that wikis are also one of few programs supported by universities that typically "discourage collaboration because of their entangled bureaucracies, antiquated reward structures, isolation practices, and deep-seated allegiance to rugged individualism" (Magdola 606). While I must note that I personally prefer programs such as Sophie or Storybook (please see Appendix

C), the benefits of the wiki structure (so nicely addressed in existent scholarship) also apply to other programs available to facilitate collaborative multimodal composing.

Wikis allow students and teachers to move beyond a de Tocquevillian individualism, nurturing well-mediated conversations and encouraging conceptions of mutuality. Furthermore, as Garza and Hern state, the "Wiki takes teachers a step further in understanding writing as process, and in making it a reality in our pedagogical practices and our students experiences" (Garza and Hern *WikiArticle*). Not only are Wikis, "easy to set up and maintain, and have a relatively short learning curve," but Michelle Tepper argues that their dynamic nature encourages "writers to become more involved in the messiness of writing, to better understand the social nature of writing, to more easily and comfortably engage in the act of collaboration, and to produce better documents as a result." (as qtd. in Garza and Hern, *WikiArticle*). Indeed, the way in which the wiki reveals the 'messiness' of the writing process is one of its greatest advantages. As early as 1972, Donald Murray advised that, "instead of teaching finished writing, we should teach unfinished writing, and glory in its unfinishedness. We work with language in action," and as many notice, the open-source design of the wiki allows for students to engage directly with the 'messy' process of writing (Murray 4).

Interestingly enough, just as the wiki reveals the messiness of writing as a process, it also allows students to work through the messiness of co-existence by making visible the conflict navigation required to co-create. As Ede and Lunsford put it, "conflict is an inherent part of the collaborative process, and while it can be destructive, it can also be extremely productive" (as qtd. in Garza and Hern *WikiArticle*). The Wiki may encourage productivity by providing a structure within which conflict might be mediated. In writing and working collaboratively with wikis, "users must create and agree on the structures, forms, and methods that are necessary to accomplish their collaborative task. [Wikis cause users] to work together as a team early in the

process" (Garza and Hern *WikiArticle*). Yet the mediation the wiki provides must be met with sensitivity on the part of the instructor toward group dynamics and interpersonal relations: not all students are equally equipped to engage in collaboration in a fundamentally healthy and positive manner (leading to the concerns earlier addressed regarding collaboration). However, this hurdle is capable of being surmounted (as Mark Sutton argues in his article "Avoiding the Black Dot: Toward a Model of Fair Grading for Collaborative Writing"): "teachers who require collaborative assignments must train students in group dynamics" (159). There are multiple routes to provide such training:

> class discussion, assigned readings, or modeling---would allow students to gain [group dynamic] skills. They can be reinforced through ungraded assignments, where working together matters as much as, or more than, creating a perfect document…students can see what skills each member of their group possesses and experiment with using different methods (Sutton159).

Wikis marry the ever-shifting flux and constant conciliation required by the process of writing and the nature of co-existing as a society of learners—the result of a well-formulated digital assignment is that the student may feel encouraged to become not only a better scholar but more a co-operative community member.

No piece of writing is truly isolated or inert, but rather representative of merely one moment in an ongoing, ever-active and altering dialogue, and we would do well to reflect this in our pedagogy. As Lynn Thomson puts it, the conversation between ideas is "a never-ending process of incessantly changing, shifting partnerships—not static but 'living, breathing, moving," and when teaching the act of creation, this should be reflected (127). However, though it is important to teach with an acknowledgment of the active 'messiness' of writing, and an awareness of the influences and partnerships between ideas and texts, collaborative learning

"cannot be confirmed merely by offering a set of communication tools and a set of collaborative tasks to students in these environments" (Anaya and Boticario 1171). Johnson and Johnson, (in their excellent 2004 *Handbook of research on educational communications and technology*) outline five central conditions that make collaborative learning more advantageous to the student than individual or competitive learning, and their social implications are self-evident:

> (1) positive interdependence (everyone shares the goals), (2) individual accountability/personal responsibility (everyone is in charge of oneself), (3) promote interaction, (4) interpersonal and small group skills (everyone works effectively with each other and functions as part of a group), and (5) frequent and regular processing of the group's functioning to improve its effectiveness in the future (785-812).

As potential projects and processes are outlined, it will become clear that using digitech in the process of collaboration facilitates the achievement of these five conditions, and these conditions might also inform our assessment of collaborative products.

Myriad types of projects might be assigned by using the wiki: as Garza and Hern comment, "in a wiki system we can connect and build in ways that are as numerous as our ideas" (*WikiArticle*). (For two examples of wiki assignment prompts, please see Appendix A). Though it easily adapts to a range of projects (from a traditional book report to a co-written and mediated group essay, to an abstract multi-media presentation) it must be reiterated that the fundamental advantage of the wiki is in its ability to create a space where multiple voices might engage without drowning one another out, allowing the group to construct a product while simultaneously preserving individual voices (explicitly linking to the conditions outlined by Johnson). While in a more traditional setting, the group might be "expected to present a unified and coherent perspective through one final essay, even if they had widely divergent responses to the text," the wiki allows for the presentation of "these diverse points of view," and this

diversity, which might have inhibited "collaboration in a more traditional project, become[s a] strength in a cooperative [wiki] project" (Kittle and Hicks 534).

The wiki thus may be seen as a clear progression from the assignment of Chapter 1, in that the polyphonic nature of the text is not only supported, it is clearly illuminated by the program. That the wiki encourages a multiplicity of viewpoints means that writers are allowed "to make their own connections and coordinate in unpredictable ways…wikis allow writers to build their own scaffolding systems for this meaning making" (Garza and Hern *WikiArticle*). In the surprising connection and coordination that occurs in digital space, we again might put our ear to the ground, and hear the aims of Surrealism. Often, instructors incite this process of scaffolding by "assigning a group of students with the task of collaboratively discovering the solution to a given problem, or developing a written text…based on a given argument" (Trentin 43). This might be as simple as asking students to brainstorm solutions to local campus-related issues (how can campus recycling be encouraged, for example), to asking groups to collaborate on a response to a complex political issue.

The goal of assigning a solution-based/argument response task is to challenge students to see that a collaborative assignment is not an "exercise in finding a bunch of sources to synthesize in a slap-dash manner. It is a means to engage the deeper brain function that involves thinking through a problem and evaluating a variety of evidence," thus explicitly building upon the synthesis work done in the inter-textual initial exercises (Badke 52). The benefits of using a wiki program to create a collaborative exercise (with a direct emphasis on finding solutions or agreements) are heightened in that "co-writing… conducted online is almost always done so asynchronously, and is mediated and indirect. Therefore, students have greater opportunities to reflect deeply on what they read and write" (Trentin 44). In fact, this process "offer[s] an excellent opportunity not only to practice reading and writing skills, but also [stimulates]

reflection, knowledge sharing and critical thinking" (Trentin 44). Furthermore, it has been argued that in nudging students into finding collaborative solutions or developing group responses, we are allowing the composition classroom to mimic the professional arena, where "in many professions, documents, reports, guidelines, project proposals and the like are written collaboratively using network technologies" (Trentin 44). In this way, the program functions to support real-world skill-building, and it isn't a stretch to add that in posing a well-considered problem, the educator might quickly add a dimension of social awareness to the assignment.

The wiki plays easy host to solution-based tasks (and assignments that develop group responses) through its ability to represent multiplicities of voices, and this ability is heightened by the way the wiki enables multi-modal constructions. Multimodal projects "invite students to write about a topic from a variety of perspectives *using many genres*," or in other words ask "students to combine various features of audio, video, and print, as well as many different communicative modes (aural, oral, visual, et cetera)" (Kittle and Hicks 534). In a multi-modal project, journal entries offering multiple viewpoints may accompany formal academic texts, for example, and visual images can be juxtaposed with audio tracks. (To see examples of multimodal assignment prompts, please reference Appendix A).

A multimodal product takes into account the manner in which "the meanings we make arise from the interdependence of words, images and other elements in the wider context," yet it also functions as a response to the changing landscape of literacy: as Guy Merchant notes, "electronic communication leads to a major shift in the ways in which literacy is used—a change of paradigm that invites new methods of description and requires new pedagogies" (Kittle and Hicks 534; Merchant 119). As Merchant articulates so well, "other modes of linguistic and non-linguistic systems, most notably speech and visual image, are vitally important in many literacy practices, and must not be ignored," especially as "the move from page to screen [results] in a

turn to the visual, and the development of multi-media technologies clearly allows for new possibilities of combination in the creation of multimodal texts" (Merchant 120). The Wiki steps into this space of possibility, and it seems to educate students in what Merchant calls a 'key characteristic of digital literacy:' the ability to combine "modes of communication" (Merchant 120).

Indeed, a multimodal project allows educators to "pay serious attention to the ways in which we might help children and young people develop a fluency in digital literacy in the wider context of digital communication" (Merchant 118). Thus, not only might a well-crafted multimodal project help students learn the skills they might need in their profession, it also develops students abilities to navigate their data-saturated reality, working to bridge the by-now-familiar gap that Merchant notices "between everyday literacy practices and schooled literacy" (118). Yet perhaps more importantly, multimodal wiki projects allow students to understand the ways in which meaning depends upon relationships not only between individuals and social communities, but between texts, images, and sounds: the key notion that our world of meaning (and being) is composed of networks, webs, ties and bonds is only heightened in a collaborative multimodal project.

Perhaps the most difficult aspect, however, of multimodal collaborative productions is not how to construct assignments (a simple google search will yield myriad examples of successful classroom projects) but how to assess such projects. If we toss out the staid and static single-authored paper, we must also rid ourselves of the dry and dusty grading procedures that accompany such assignments. Not only does "collaboration raise issues about authorship, especially in our 'remix culture,'" where the synergy of the group "produces a new text that no one could have produced alone," but "because digital literacy involves different ways of

producing and distributing text, it creates new possibilities of how we [must] operate in and construct the educational environment" (Kittle and Hicks 527; Merchant 126).

Although it has been remarked that "the area regarding evaluation of the collaborative process carried out by students has not yet been fully dealt with," many may find it helpful to visit the website of Southern California's Institute for Multimedia Literacy, where instructors have compiled parameters for evaluating multimedia scholarship (please see Appendix B for details) (Trentin 44). Yet though it makes logical sense to establish parameters and rubrics (and though there is certainly precedent for such a move), I wonder if it might be more beneficial to consider the ways in which assessment might be perceived of as another opportunity to deepen collaborative practices within the classroom. In the same way that a wiki or multimodal project allows students to "redistribute responsibility for editing the overall document to all group members, spur[ring] each participant…to collaborate in the various stages in producing the overall work," could students become equally engaged in the establishment of "an evaluation mechanism" (Trentin 45)? In their excellent article "Using wikis to develop student teachers' learning, teaching, and assessment capabilities," Lai and Ng argue that:

> Assessment should be designed to support learning, rather than to select learners; assessment should also be embedded in the learning process with formative feedback, explicit guidelines, and with learners acting as co-evaluators. Peer assessment not only sharpens content learning, but also provides opportunities for students to learn the metacognitive processes of self-monitoring (16).

This idea: that by inviting the student into the assessment process, a new layer may be added to the collaborative process (teaching the student new cognitive skills) is seconded by Kittle and Hicks. They state that, "discussing…issues [including personality differences, deadlines, classroom structure, etc] openly with students as we plan collaborative work is a first step to

having true collaboration" (529). Furthermore, "new technologies now allow us to enact the types of collaborative pedagogy that most teachers have always wanted…these technologies can make the process more streamlined, transparent, and ultimately collaborative" (Kittle and Hicks, 529). In fact, online programs offer solutions to teachers who experience difficulty in evaluating collaborative products. Often, the problem "lies not only in evaluating the level of learning produced by the process itself, but also in gauging the actual degree to which the individual has actively participated in and contributed to the shared written work." (Trentin 44). Perhaps the best example of the ways in which resources are being developed to meet the challenges of digital (multimodal) evaluation is the Learning Record program (available in Appendix C).

The Learning Record program is incredibly detailed and not designed specifically for collaborative activities, yet within its program are tools easily adapted to facilitate the act of assessment: the primary reason I include it here is to demonstrate the degree to which this online program relies on reflection and peer-review (exemplifying trends in online assessment programs). Both techniques work together to assuage typical student anxieties when anticipating a grade for a collaborative project. As Sutton notes, "theories of fairness developed by social psychologists…build a model for assessing collaborative writing" and this model is one that "composition can adapt in order to fairly assess collaborative writing" (152). One vitally important factor social psychologists note when analyzing conceptions of 'evaluation' and 'fairness' is that "most [students feel a] sense of betrayal and danger when they think about grades. To these students, 'just' treatment…is an important concept" (Sutton 152). What has traditionally made 'just treatment' difficult in collaborative exercises is the tricky issue of navigating the act of evaluating both a students contribution to a group project, his or her commitment to the process, as well as the finished product. Simultaneously, teachers often

realize that, "individual effort as part of the group [is] the most common element in the student's definition of fairness" (Sutton, 155).

The question becomes how to construct an assessment procedure that is regarded as 'fair,' and that also works to underscore and strengthen the notions of community and collaboration developed by the assignment. Fortunately, social scientists note that student's definitions "of fairness include the use of assessment methods besides just evaluating a finished product. Mostly, the students want some form of peer evaluation" (Sutton 157). In addition, "by helping, students become invested in the procedure and can add their own ideas to it. This involvement should create the sense of control models of procedural fairness posit that people need" (Sutton 159). A trend emerges wherein studies of student needs within the context of assessment *and* the program trends of digital spaces point toward the power of self-reflection and peer evaluation, both of which might function to support and sustain bonds of community within the classroom.

While a good place to start such a process is by discussing "differences between students' definitions of fair and instructors," technology can also function as a mediator between students and instructors during the evaluation process, in no small part because it often enables instructors to track and assess the process of the product's creation (Sutton 159). Wikis in particular allow instructors to monitor the contributions of each student, providing tangible (visual) evidence of the student's role within the group. Furthermore, because wikis expand to accommodate multiplicities of voices, they are capable of providing the space needed for individual and peer assessment. Peer assessment helps instructors grapple with the fact that "procedures are flexible and open to change" in "collaborative practices involving distributed participation and collaboration" (Kittle and Hicks 526). Methods for peer assessment are multiple, and may include individual reflections, group summaries of the experience, and the inimitable tool of the

process log: "process logs require students to record their work on the project and, in some cases, to reflect on how the members of their group have worked together" (Sutton 156). (For an example of questions that may be posed during a peer review, please see Appendix B). Though specific digital reflection log programs are available, by using a wiki teachers might incorporate such logs into the project itself (while the collaborative and transparent nature of the program might push the student into an honest assessment of their work).[iv] Through the openness of the wiki program and the decision to build in assessment methods, students can meet the instructor halfway to collaborate on their own evaluation (and perhaps feel more confident in the 'fairness' of the eventual evaluation).

Another way the wiki program might aid in assessment and encourage contribution is that it allows instructors to invite the class as a whole into the evaluation project. The multimodal, collaborative wiki assignment often culminates with a presentation to the student's peers, and this presentation provides a distinct goal toward which the group might work. The effectiveness of this structure has not gone unnoticed: Tim Barlow found that when "students directed their own learning and presented their work to the class," they experienced heightened enthusiasm and interest in the project (46). Ultimately, "giving students a [degree of] ownership of their learning…motivated them to achieve," and this ownership is in part endowed by using the wiki to give students the power of individual and peer assessment, and the goal of a final presentation that might be evaluated by the class at large (Barlow 47). The wiki is able to become not only a space of student-to student collaborative production, but a realm in which the student might collaborate and commiserate with the role of the instructor by taking on a degree of responsibility for the evaluation and presentation of the product. Giving students control not only points toward a Freirian classroom, but it also affects the process of learning: studies have found that when students are endowed with a measure of authority, "students [are motivated] to learn

intrinsically. Students are engaged in the content," because they have assumed responsibility for the creation and presentation of their piece (Barlow 48).

Ultimately, granting students a role in the process of assessment and evaluation functions as a means to layer onto and deepen the collaborative nature of the classroom. While the intertext exercise asks students to understand the relationships between text, meaning and form (prompting a consideration of the interactive qualities of language and the interpretive layer that accompanies any finished product, linking texts and individuals together), the multimodal collaborative exercise functions to transfer this understanding of connection into the physical world of the classroom as students engage in a multi-vocal, multimodal collaborative process. Asking students to step into the role of evaluator while guiding them in an experience of peer-to-peer collaboration only further heightens a sense of community within the classroom. Students become aware and active participants in forging constructive relationships between themselves and others, and may grow to understand the classroom as a place inhabited not by learners in competition, but by community members in co-operation.

Chapter Three: Beyond the Classroom// Broadening Community and Collaboration

John Dewey proclaimed in his pedagogic creed, "I believe that education, therefore, is a process of living," and if the Humanities wish to serve this fundamental principle, they must return to the essential nature implied by the very word 'humanity:' they must encourage kindness, benevolence, and an understanding of "the condition of being human" and what it means to be a member of the human race (Dewey1897; OED online). In descriptions of Humanities courses, "commonly cited goals include: character building [and] critical thinking," certainly, but one observes as well a repeated emphasis on the primacy of developing "a more socially just world" (Breunig 106). Many agree that educators "have a responsibility to

understand the power of purposeful discourse---and the ways it can…be used for democratic, socially responsible ends," even if (as Nussbaum articulated on page one of this thesis) these ends are currently being elided (digirhet 241). As Laura Breunig notes (in her excellent article, "Turning Experiential Education and Critical Pedagogy Theory into Practice"), critical pedagogy "is a way of thinking about, negotiating, and transforming the relationship among classroom teaching, the productions of knowledge…and the social and material relation of the wider community and society" (109). It would seem that the general consensus among many scholars is that a University education (in particular the education provided by Humanities courses), has the particular power and responsibility to inform and incite positive social development.

Yet although scholars do not hesitate to notice this particular power nor infrequently remark that the larger purpose of higher education is "to participate in the building of a more just society," the fact remains that "minimal attention is paid" to just *how* exactly higher education might accomplish this aim (Laird et al. 448). As Henry Miller observed, there is often "a discrepancy…between ideas and living," and these two must be wedded for any conceptual vitality to exist (Miller 242). I agree with Breunig in her re-assertion that, "the purpose of schools is to develop peoples' critical thinking skills as a means to develop a more socially just world," yet I argue that not only must this notion must be coupled with direct pedagogical practice, these practices must function within a modern, digital age (Breunig 112). Thus, in Chapter 3 I seek to build upon the work done in Chapters 1 and 2 by asking the following: how can developing a critical understanding of not only digitech, but specifically the collaborative relationships between data fragments (or individuals) and larger constructions (or communities) enable schools to prepare students not only "for future work in the world 'that is,'" but simultaneously encourage "vision[s] of what 'could be:" a more compassionate and peaceful society (Breunig112). If, as Breunig articulates, "schools do more than provide

instruction…schools provide the norms and principles of conduct…in society," how can our pedagogical practices provide norms and principles that actively encourage conduct that constructs a 'socially just world?' (112).

Perhaps a key to understanding the kind of pedagogy that might bridge the vision of a more socially just world and the actual development of such a world lies in what the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AACU) says college students "must learn, in every part of their educational experience: to live …with the multiplicity, ambiguity, and irreducible differences that are the defining conditions of the contemporary world" (Laird et al. 448). Though we may have to listen closely, I believe in this statement lay echoes of the fundamental principles of Surrealism, in that both the aesthetic movement and educational experience achieve cognitive development through exposure to and understanding of surprising and unusual juxtapositions (simultaneously intersecting with the way the assignments of Chapters 1 and 2 seek to engage students in making meaning by synthesizing disparate mediums and discourses to create unique dialogic interactions). Yet can we not do more than simply 'live with' multiplicity? In Chapter 1, I explored ways in which students might discover how knowledge is not constructed in a vacuum, but is engaged in constant polyphonic conversation; furthermore, I proposed how students might consciously engage with the way in which data fragments are woven together, thus becoming familiar with the manner in which knowledge is constructed in digital spaces. Chapter 2 engages with digital space itself, probing how the collaborative aspects of digital programs might facilitate the development of community and dialogue within the classroom. Chapter 3 builds upon these notions to develop a direct inquiry into the potential of digital space to fundamentally deepen social understandings and to forge the compassionate bonds of community beyond the bounds of the classroom walls.

While much text has been written and much light has been shed on ways in which the classroom might nurture social engagement, the incorporation of a digital lens takes this chapter into a twilight realm: an arena where scholarship is most sorely needed. As "certain journals reflect a space being crafted [through absence]…to actually resist digital technologies and to avoid theorizing and researching their uses," it cannot be refused that their role in our classrooms must inevitably "shape our practices" (digirhet 233). While the presence of technology in our classrooms provokes undeniable and understandable insecurity, we must challenge ourselves to see the ways in which digitech offers itself as an ally to learning (as Dewey conceived of the process). Digital space is not neutral (as Kynard notes in Chapter 1, traditional hierarchies and inequalities are quickly mapped onto contemporary technologies), but it is new, and I believe it still holds the potential to become a space wherein we might consciously integrate practices some might define as a pursuit of the bodhisattva ideal: at its most basic, these practices mean "working on ourselves…and cultivating our capacity to love and care about other people" (Chodrun 48).

Bill Gates himself "acknowledges the power and potential of machines that speak to one another seamlessly, creating a world in which all of our tools and gadgets are 'smart' and all of them are interconnected" (digirhet 235). Is it possible for our humanities courses to not only utilize but mirror the ways in which our technologies have become increasingly interconnected and dialogic: can the humanities course integrate digital spaces to become a site of powerful connection, not just between classroom peers but between students and the citizens who comprise their existent community? I argue that the answer to these questions is a "certainly, yes!" due in no small part to the ways in which "networked devices create a new kind of writing space [and] digital writing tools and techniques allow for deeper and often more collaborative and interactive means of…writing" (digirhet 235). Although it is daunting to realize that our

"teaching must be rethought to better address [such] interconnectivity and interactivity," it is simultaneously exciting and challenging (digirhet 235). It is also prescient. While technology continues to develop at a break-neck speed, dissolving boundaries between the physical and digital, Mandarano et. al notice that "[using] digital technologies to facilitate direct civic engagement…[is] still in its infancy," and "assessments of the impacts of digital public participation on [communities] are scarce" (125). The time has come to draw attention to and fully explore this impact.

As we move into the somewhat uncharted waters of using digital spaces to cultivate caring connections with others, we still may draw upon the excellent work already done on how to construct links between students and their local communities. Most notably, Linda Flower influences this portion of my thesis as she introduces the concept of transforming education by introducing the notion that all participants are "partners in inquiry…responsible for understanding…others in order to build…negotiated meaning" (*Community* 40). Todd Campbell supports this when he states that "collaborative projects….open the door…to build working partnerships and to create…learning projects that draw on and nurture community expertise" (Campbell 10). If the first two chapters of this thesis delineate and underscore the way in which "writing is no longer a purely text-driven practice, [but] requires carefully and critically [utilizing] multiple media elements…[that] are no longer separate but instead are woven and interconnected," my third chapter functions as a development of this conscious conception: that by understanding the way mediums are interwoven and dialogic, we might begin to see the manner in which we too are mere fragments within larger community compositions, our voice just one of myriad, generating the white-noise clamor of human experience (digirhet 241).

Exploring ways in which the use of digital spaces might compassionately engage with broader community is then both a development and a return-to-the-source for a Humanities

course, steeped in the technologic future as well as the "principle of compassion [that] lies at the

heart of all religious, ethical, and spiritual traditions," in the heart of us all (Armstrong,

Shambala, 58). Oddly enough, though this principle ostensibly appears linked to the

'humanitarian' humanities, it is also embedded in science: "not in the modern sense, but from the

point of view of the Latin *sciencia,* the form of knowledge that is acquired through

compassion…[when] you 'make place' for the other in your mind" (Armstrong, Shambala 54).

Digital assignments that search to develop such conceptual 'places' for compassionate

communal connection are then both centripetal and centrifugal, compelling students outward into

their communities, and inward into the heart of human development.

Let us begin to unpack what form such assignments might take, how they might function,

and (even if the postulation is abstract) what effects and transformations these assignments might

have on students and communities. It is acknowledged that, "teachers can develop pedagogical

theories and methods that link self-reflection and understanding with a commitment to change

the nature of the larger society," and we can develop this acknowledgment into an examination

of how theories and methods of compassionate community-building might be embraced and

enhanced by a digital age and a techno-savvy society. As Linda Flower notes, in exploring forms

of communal engagement, "perhaps the most significant aspiration and dilemma is how to relate

to others. For educators, the problem…means figuring out how to construct a…space that can

support transformative relationships (*Community* 2). In Chapter 2, I explored ways in which

digital spaces facilitate peer-to-peer relationships in the classroom; now let us take up the

problem posed by Flower in terms of community engagement in a broader sense. As we explore

this more expansive notion of community, it is important to remember that the space provided by

digitech for polyphonic discourse cultivates dialogue, and only members of a "community that

can support a sustained dialogue," are able to experience transformative relationships (Flower, *Community*10).

The scholars actively interrogating this line of inquiry have found success with digital models that build upon utilizing "encountered situations [to] enhance students' perceptions of how their role in society affects individuals and social systems," a model that is complimentary "with the New London Group's pedagogy…which suggests that instructors should engage students in situated practice (real-world examples and work that is relevant to their life), overt instruction, and critical framing" (Howell et al. 237; digirhet 249). At this stage, we might identify several fragments that begin to form a larger composition: it is clear that a space must be formed wherein compassionate, communal dialogue might occur (helping us 'relate to others'). It is also clear that students might benefit from integrating topics relevant to their lives (thereby perhaps provoking self-reflective perception), and real-world examples and experiences that encourage the learning process. These fragments connect to notions of experiential learning (defined most simply as using one's own experiences in the world to formulate meaning), which is also often described in terms of the 'encountered situation.'

In the article "Power, Privilege, and Learning," authors Lechuga, Clerc and Howell call upon the work of multiple researchers (Epstein, 1994; D. W. Johnson & Johnson, 2006; Lewin, 1935; Merta, Stringham, & Poterotto, 1988; Pope-Davis, Breaux, & Liu, 1997; Tyler & Guth, 1999) to argue that "learning is more effective when students engage in the active process of discovering new knowledge — as is the case during encountered situations— rather than passively receive the information that is presented to them" (233). Furthermore, their underlying conclusion that "an experiential…approach to social …[issues engages] students deeply with what they learn and contributes to their development as persons who demonstrate a commitment for the common good" echoes our earlier stated aim of developing compassion and community

(Howell et al 233). Flower argues that the classroom "needs a space…for negotiating a common life---one that accepts…differences," and the integration of digital tools with learning through encountered situations seems to offer itself as just such a space, as we will explore (Flower, *Community* 3).

Definitions of encountered learning certainly require that "knowledge is transferred to the learner…and holds significance in the learner's value system" but also acknowledge the notion that such a process might be particularly educational if the student "is changed through reacting to [this] encountered situation" (change here meaning shifts in attitudes, behaviors, and understandings) (Howell et al 234). Within the realm of experiential learning pedagogy, a situation that might provoke a transformative reaction "can be encountered deliberately…and [also] deliberately introduced" (Howell et al. 234). Todd Campbell defines this type of transformative collaboration as: "circumstances that partner teachers, students, and community members in an effort to better understand the natural world…[students] learn from and along with the community" (42). In this way, community collaborations might couple with encountered learning pedagogy in that both work to engage "participants in 'living' through experiences that push them," wherein students are allowed to "share their conclusions with wider audiences:" encounters and collaborations with larger communities allow students to draw on the expertise of others "in the pursuit of transformative understanding" (Campbell 45).

As we struggle to understand what community collaboration and the integration of encountered situations might look like in the digital age, our inquiry might be informed by the three distinct needs scholars observe to be required by students engaging with digital media: "the need for community, the need for critical engagements, and the need for application" (digirhet 243). While these needs seem merely to mirror the criteria for encountered learning, they also offer a key to understanding how to construct digital assignments that explicitly function to

critically develop conscious communal commitment (and in doing so perhaps also develop compassionate vision). The multiple authors that make up the communal digirhet.org state that:[v]

> Once students have found communities to which they can belong and relate, they need the opportunity to engage in genuine collaborative acts within those communities that incorporate the digital…principles and practices they are trying to master, which gives real purpose to course projects and allows students to connect to others inside and outside of the classroom. To make sense of communication in digital spaces, students need to engage in 'real' digital communication---not only can they connect with people who can support them in their learning process, but they also can begin to use the technology in a meaningful way, with a purpose beyond fulfilling class assignments. (243-44).

While it is indicated that the student needs to find a social group they can form some connection to, "this desire for a connection to community goes further than a desire to feel as though they are not alone," as the digirhet scholars are quick to point out (244). Connection certainly evokes feelings of kinship, yet it ultimately helps students understand that by becoming involved in a community dialogue, "they are entering into a conversation that extends beyond themselves and their own experiences, that has relevance to others and importance beyond the walls of their classroom" (digirhet 244). In this way, scholarship on digital communal engagement resonates with that of established tracts on encountered situation learning by emphasizing the importance of the student finding his or her studies relevant to lived experience, with impact that extends beyond the academic setting.

However, although digitech scholarship finds footholds in established realms of study, and though it is acknowledged that "digital technologies can change both the ways users approach tasks and the ways they see the world," practical examples of how this is performed---how digital spaces might meet and expand upon the socially transformative practices of

community collaboration and experience learning---are limited (digirhet 247). Is it enough to remark that, "Students may be asked to observe and report on particular discourse communities…groups they can actually join if joining supports their goals and needs" (digirhet 250)? Isn't it too large a leap to discuss introducing technology into classrooms then directly suggest that, "students should be encouraged to [design] Web sites and digital media for local or regional non profits" (digirhet 250). Can we find a middle ground, and construct specific examples for a pedagogical approach that develops critical compassion and community awareness while working with students' developing digitech skill-sets? I believe the answer (again) is "yes," and that the first step is to facilitate interactions between students and "diverse peers that are more open and meaningful," using the polyphonic nature of digital space (Laird et. al 468).

Howell, Lechuga, and Clerc remark that successful encountered situations allow students to both relate the situation to their own experiences as well as explore issues of interest (232). Furthermore, after an encountered activity, it is important that students have the opportunity to "then reflect upon their shared experience through group dialogue" (Howell et. al 232). As we translate these keys to success into digital realms, the first step is certainly a well agreed upon one: "facilitators should utilize pre-activity reflection that includes knowledge about a social…issue as well as discussion of that issue," such knowledge coming from academic sources as well as videos, online forums, etc (Howell et. al. 237). Next, we must turn again to Flower and realize that "dialogue with…others must start in inquiry. It takes an active search for diversely situated knowledge and experiential meanings to understand not only one another but also the social problems we face together" (*Community* 4).

The process delineated thus far then seems to follow a sort of order: the student must select a topic of inquiry that relates to a social issue or problem the student finds relevant. Next,

we understand that the activity itself might be book-ended with reflections: both a 'pre-activity reflection' (involving exploring and researching the chosen topic) as well as a post activity reflection (where-in collaboration might be enhanced by not only including an individualized student reflection, but incorporating a whole-class discussion of or response to the student's presentation). While we understand that the culmination of the collaboration might involve a multimodal production to be presented in the classroom, wherein students share their experiences as well as develop their fluency with digitech, what might encompass the step between: how might we use the "digital methods [that] are starting to be embraced and lauded as effective tools for citizen participation and other outreach approaches" (Mandarano 131)? The answers to this question (I believe) are myriad, yet I would like to offer a few concrete examples.

For our first example, we may imagine a student who decides to take up a line of inquiry addressing the social issue of domestic violence. Perhaps the student has a familial experience with this issue, or perhaps some other undisclosed reason provides the necessary personal relevance. Because this topic is a particularly sensitive one (included here because the very sensitivity of its nature serves to exemplify the transformative capacity of the exercise), the student would undertake extensive pre-activity reflection and research. He or she would research the ethical concerns of the topic (with special care paid to issues of documentation), and examine successful academic inquiries previously undertaken. Next, the student might take the experiential step of visiting local shelters for victims of domestic violence, and entering into 'interactive' and multimodal conversation with willing individuals (filming, photographing, or audio recording these interviews). The student then might engage in the project of developing a digital space (perhaps something similar to the extremely accessible wordpress.com blog-generator) that allows the media to be posted, and text, image and sound to be woven together in succession.

The program used by the student would undoubtedly allow for comments to be made by a range of individuals in response to the posts: the subjects might comment self-reflectively on their own contributions, students might engage in dialogue with one another (or with subjects) regarding the topic, subjects might begin conversations with one another to share knowledge, etc. At the very least, space would be made available for a conversation to develop in this digital realm among individuals experiencing a similar struggle, and those beginning to learn about this important social issue. Furthermore, the students in the class, through their online responses to the posts, begin to form an important dialogue between classroom peers and community members. At the final presentation of the students project, it would be safe to say that "critical reflections" were cultivated by a community wherein *all* members were allowed the opportunity to "interpret reality [and] speak for themselves" (Flower *Community* 35). The collaborative aspect of this critical reflection cannot be underscored strongly enough: the polyphonic dialogue occurring within the digital space layers and works with whole-class real-time discussions held in response to the students culminate presentation of their multimodal project. In this manner, even reflection is shifted from being conceived of as an isolated process into a productive collaborative effort.

Perhaps surprising realizations occurred during this digitized process of experiential social learning: perhaps an individual at the shelter included a dialogue regarding his or her distaste for being assigned the social role of 'victim.' If, as Flower argues, "from a social point of view, the outcome of…inquiry needs to be a shared understanding," we see how such a project might promote a greater understanding of not just specific community members, but of this particular social issue and those it affects (Flower, *Community* 67). This type of project is important "not because the specific knowledge one can transmit is so crucial but because the process of dialogue---which can affect individual understandings---is…change depends on

dialogue," and it must be emphasized the ways in which digital spaces allow for layers of dialogue to occur: even in this cursory example, we see how dialogue may form between the student and the interviewee, the subjects of the posts to one another, the students to one another (and the subject) through online commentary, and the teacher embedded throughout as facilitator (Flower, *Community* 67-68).

Furthermore, it must be noted that this dialogue was fostered by the practice of simply "learning to listen to and speak with" one's community, speaking with indicating a joining together in a search for knowledge, and a way to represent this knowledge (Flower *Community* 82). This example contains unresolved issues of course (the thorny questions earlier raised regarding ethics, permission factors, release forms, etc.), yet it serves its function in providing a concrete example of the ways in which digital realms are able to incorporate community and experiential learning to begin to transform social understandings and (hopefully) strengthen feelings of relation between all members involved. One can see how it might easily apply to other lines of inquiry which fundamentally search to better understand the experiences of (and 'make space for') other community members.

Another alternate example that offers itself up to our purposes: perhaps a student takes a specifically political line of inquiry, desiring to explore a social issue at the heart of an upcoming school election, for instance (an issue the student finds particularly relevant). Again, the student would do the pre-designed reflection and research so well explicated by multiple scholars. The student might then actively seek out peers with disparate opinions on the matter to engage in an online forum in real time. This discussion might be streamed on the University's online student journal website, using a program that allows (as youtube does) for a rolling commentary feed. As the students discussed the issue and their peers (ideally interested individuals from a broad spectrum of the student body, who perhaps were informed by the journal prior to the broadcast

event, or whose teachers collude with the course in making commentary a requirement) commented throughout, a kind of 'practical wisdom' might emerge: what Thomas Miller calls a 'holistic understanding…in the uncertain realm of human affairs" (as qtd. in Flower, *Community* 86).

The aim of this particular project would not be (as Flower so nicely re-iterates throughout her book *Community Literacy and the Rhetoric of Public Engagement)* to form consensus, but perhaps to build the kind of resolution that comes from engaging in a space "where differences are made visible and…assumptions…are called into question," in a manner that accommodates, "accepts, even highlights, rather than avoids differences (3). In other words, because the student draws together participants with diverse viewpoints (and because a larger audience must watch and comment upon the participants' dialogue), students will necessarily be exposed to ideas that are different from (even contrary to) their own. Student's assumptions about one another (Democrats assumptions about Republicans, for example) might be challenged by the kind of commentary that develops in response to the streaming dialogue. Furthermore, because such an online forum allows the statements of commentators to remain and be reviewed (sparking more commentary, sparking responses) differences are made visible. Yet simultaneously, such an online forum fosters a deeper sense of community, in that "the most significant feature of a community is…how it *functions,"* and (according to Flower), the primary function is to create a community "designed for talking with others" (*Community* 10). We see through these examples the ways in which digital spaces facilitate the dialogue that is at the heart of true community, and also understand these are merely two examples of myriad exercise options.

These examples reflect exercises capable of being performed in the classroom, yet they are not without precedence in the form of 'real-world' parallels. In fact, many individuals in the public sector have been and currently are working within digital spaces to construct bridges

between communities, to open forums for dialogue and exchange, and to harness technologies'

very real capacity to begin the process of social growth through the development of

compassionate consciousness of others. The presence of these individuals serves to illustrate the

power of digital space to foster caring bonds of community, yet it is also further motivation to

integrate digital community-building practices into our pedagogy: the world is moving in a

collaborative and digital direction, and we have the opportunity to not only join the movement,

but to help make it a compassionate one.

To find a powerful real-world example of an individual working within this movement to

ensure its empathy, we need look no further than Karen Armstrong (British author and former

Roman Catholic nun), who used a 100,000 TED Prize to construct the *Charter of Compassion*, a

text urging the citizens of the world to embrace the core values of compassion.[vi] Translated into

over 30 languages, the Charter is available online (the site allows for easy 'sharing' via

facebook, email etc), and users can affirm their commitment to the fundamental principle of

compassion by signing up. Moreover, various forums allow users to share their experiences with

acts of compassion, make specific commitments, swap resources, announce events, etc. Each

forum allows for comments to be made, layers of dialogue forming a polyphonic fabric exploring

and probing this fundamental concept. Both the intention of the content as well as the

construction of the digital space encourages users to connect as a multi-vocal community, where

in (to recall the work of Chapter 2), members have a positive interest in the development and

well-being of one another. Furthermore, the Charter seeks to influence and transform

relationships between users in their daily-lived experiences, echoing the aims of the pedagogical

exercises of Chapter 3 by linking multimodal digital productions with transformative

encountered situations and understandings of community. It also must be stated that this Charter

(while highly visible and well-organized), is not an isolated example: multiple communities use

digital space to influence and transform relationships and to build community bonds (my personal favorite is the 3HO organization, whose members have pledged to collectively log 108,000 hours of self-less service in their local communities).[vii]

However, just because some digital spaces espouse service and community (and just because some online forums foster transformative social dialogue by encouraging the sharing of positive and compassionate comments and experiences), does not mean that all digital space is equally elevating. In fact, it is actually often difficult to find a real-world comment forum wherein the dialogue is compassionate, transformative, and community enriching. Jay Smooth (neé John Randolph) is the celebrated creator of illdoctrine.com, a regular contributor to NPR, and host of New York's longest-running radio show 'The Underground Railroad' (as well as one of Salon.com's 'Sexiest Living Men'). However, he is perhaps best known for his online videos that address social issues and concerns through a hip-hop lens (his most well-recognized videos include 'How to Tell Someone they Sound Racist,' as well as segments critiquing contemporary politicians such as Christine O'Donnell and Bill O'Reilly). Occasionally, one of his video's will 'go viral:' it will be so popular viewers will share it and forward it to friends, the media fragment self-replicating and traversing social networks at break-neck speed (and the dialogue of viewer-commentary unwinding beneath the video at a similar pace). When contemplating the ways in which contemporary digital spaces are used as sites for dialogue, Mr. Randolph acknowledges the manner in which video comments often deteriorate to the 'lowest common denominator,' and users are quick to hurl insults or engage in divisive exchanges.

Yet simultaneously, Randolph recognizes that the comments on his own videos are often insightful, and that if a tone is established by the first voice of dialogue, the following comments assume a similar level of intellectual inquiry (Randolph refers to this as 'setting the bar'). And while he hadn't heard of the ibrain, when I interviewed him during his radio show in New York,

he mentioned concern about the manner in which digital space fragments data into increasingly smaller units (blogs lead to facebook status updates (with a limit of 420 characters) lead to Twitter updates (limited to 140 characters). Yet the trend toward brevity in digital spaces does not necessitate that all ideas must become more prolific than profound. By 'setting the bar,' and encouraging his discourse community to consider socially relevant subjects, Randolph engages their capacity to sustain meaningful discourse. His digital videos connect disparate users (from the hip-hop head to the University student) as they explore social ideas and concepts collaboratively, and his methodology is powerful inspiration for the potential in the comment-feature of digital spaces, and the possibilities lying dormant in our own pedagogical practices.

Andy Selsberg of the *New York Times* underscores the capacity of the comment-feed when he reminds us that "a lot can be said with a little---the mundane and the extraordinary…when you only have a sentence or two, there's nowhere to hide" (*NYT.com*). With a glance at this trend toward the succinct, it becomes clearer than ever that our students would benefit from a pedagogy that offers explicit practice in meaningful digital engagement. As Randolph notes, we can resist neither digitech nor digital trends, but must figure out how to make things of value that will function in the way that people relate to media *now*. Introducing critical digital practices into our educational pedagogy is one of the first steps we can take toward 'figuring this out.'

Further examples of individuals in the public sector using digital spaces in an effort to 'make things of value,' and encourage contemplation of structures of social inter-dependence and connectivity include Paul Miller, whom Chapter 1 references so explicitly. While Miller famously moves between multiple mediums and social groups (from artists to musicians to academics), the present moment finds him immersed in the Vanuatu Pacifica Project: an artist retreat set up on the remote island of Vanuatu in the province of Tafea. The explicit goals of the

project include building "dialogue between communities…blending 21 Century technology with the islanders' Traditional Ecological Knowledge."[viii] Though Miller was quick to note during our interview that the project has only just begun, he is fascinated by the way in which the connectivity of islands mirrors the spokes-and-hubs structure of Internet culture. He relates the social-network construct of digital space to the ways in which social connectivity functions in isolated or remote communities, where inter-dependence and communication become vitally essential. Miller sees Western culture utilizing digital media as a mechanism that allows modern life to approach traditional communication forms: popular digital spaces mimic the manner in which village aesthetics use social connectivity to 'navigate cultural landscapes.' In this ambitious undertaking, Miller ultimately seeks to link modern technology and aesthetics with more ancient forms of community connectivity and collective knowledge, creating a digital space that successfully blends both old and new forms. In this aim, we see direct parallels to the articulation at the beginning of Chapter 3: that conscious engagement with digital space is both a centripetal and centrifugal act (propelling us outward as well as within, towards the future and into our own communal past).

A final real-world example is that of Daniel Pinchbeck, whose books include *Breaking Open the Head, Notes from the Edge Times*, and *2012: Return of Quetzalcoatl.* In addition to writing for *The New York Times Magazine, The Village Voice, and Rolling Stone,* Mr. Pinchbeck also heads up the Evolver social movement.[ix] In my interview with Mr. Pinchbeck, he underscored the concerns raised by Mr. Randolph and Mr. Miller: while Pinchbeck was quick to note that engagement with digital spaces limits our abilities to deeply concentrate on linear narratives (he cites Nicholas Carr's *The Shallows*, though this statement certainly runs parallel to Vorgan's theory of the 'ibrain' referenced in Chapter 1), he simultaneously validates digitech's potential to unite technology with traditional (compassionate) social relationships based upon

trust. While Miller uses an island lens to articulate the ways in which communication through digital landscapes mirrors the community-based social-structures of traditional cultures, Pinchbeck points toward online communities where age-old trust-based connections are formed that significantly influence social interactions in contemporary lived experience (not least of these being the Evolver.net social network).

As a specific example of how digitech accomplishes this re-establishment of trust, Mr. Pinchbeck references the couch surfing movement (where Evolver users connect online, find compatible host/visitor matches, and open their homes to one another); the digital connection allows Evolver users to elide established hierarchical structures (hotels), and instead 'make a new friend.' The forums constructed by the Evolver site also function to connect users in their real-world communities, and co-ordinate activities and events in real time. This complex social network is fundamentally based on shared "values and creative collaboration," bringing users together to "share their gifts, wisdom, talents, resources and visions to manifest tangible changes in their communities," and links digital engagement with lived experience in a profoundly modern way (Evolver.net).

These four real-world examples (Armstrong, Randolph, Miller and Pinchbeck) intersect through the manner in which they seek to use digital spaces to establish and strengthen communities, and enrich the experience of the present (lived) moment by fostering caring, compassionate interpersonal interactions. In each individual's interaction with digitech, we see echoes of the definition of the Humanities course (offered on page 1): that our task is to know ourselves, others, and to contemplate our shared experiences—and in the process, understand and revise our outlook on life. Miller, Pinchbeck, Armstrong, and Randolph all indicate by the manner in which they use digital space a willingness to conceive of digitech as a tool in our cultural development---social technology itself seems a reflection of (as Pinchbeck notes) the

human instinct that wants to create a shared space and form real relationships. Indeed, while it cannot be naively assumed that the internet functions without substantial hierarchical organization or monetary funding, its presence is fundamentally based upon our very real need and desire to connect with one another, to share knowledge, and communicate experiences. There is a reason why the most popular function of digital spaces is social networking.

Yet in addition to the ways in which the exercises and examples offered in this thesis function to demonstrate opportunities for the Humanities course to fulfill its Socratic task (as well as 'keep up' with technological innovation), there is another, more serious thread linking the pedagogical exercises and real-world examples. The type of digital engagement outlined in this thesis functions to foster connectivity and compassion, yet it also explicitly engages with the preservation of true Democracy. While a Democratic system depends upon the critical thinking skills emphasized by Fish, the concept of community is fundamentally embedded in any definition of Democracy. A cursory glance at the Oxford English Dictionary will yield the repeated notion that Democratic power resides in the people *as a whole*. Certainly we are mobilizing "our institutions to envision formal, higher education as part of a continuum with…the collaborative, participatory, networked engagements that our students participate in online," and attempting to realistically address the probability that "remixed learning…may well be the model of the future" (Davidson et al. 40). Yet on a deeper level, we are also essentially attempting to remind our students that we are all in this *together*.

We all have a stake in the world we are *right now* creating. Our voices joined are louder than a single utterance (as so many recent events remind us), and it is up to us to decide what message this voice sends, and what actions and relationships it provokes. Miller, Randolph and Pinchbeck all make a similar observation: no one knows where technology is going, and media is in the process of rapid and unpredictable transformation (a glance at Pranav Mistry's most recent

TED talk should be enough to convince anyone of this fact). I hope in this thesis I have provided

sufficient evidence to argue that contemporary digital technologies provide new ways to make

meaning, and that digital spaces might help foster dialogue and nurture compassion between

individuals as they recognize themselves to be members of larger communities. As technology

transforms itself, my hope is that the pedagogical practices of our Humanities courses can do the

same, out of a fundamental belief that we *can* develop compassion as a practice, strengthen our

relationships with one another, and shape our changing world into a more just and loving vision

of Democracy.

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[i] An exercise whose function is to reveal influences and echoes between and within texts might be as simple as asking students to work with fragments of text from both Henry Miller and Jack Kerouac: sampling from each author might illuminate the influence of Miller's stream-of-consciousness style on Kerouac's seminal *On the Road,* for example. The same might be done with Tennyson and T.S. Eliot, etc (the options for such an exercise are myriad).

[ii] To better understand the problematic issue of plagiarism, please see the work of Rebecca Moore Howard (including "Sexuality, Textuality: The Cultural Work of Plagiarism" *College English*. 62: 37-55) as well as the work of Johndon Johnson-Eilola and Stuart A. Selber (including "Plagiarism, originality, assemblage." *Computers and Composition*. 24 (2007): 375-403), in addition to the many other scholars who have approached the topic.

[iii] For more information on CommentPress, please visit their website at: http://www.futureofthebook.org/commentpress/

[iv] It must be noted, however that the transparency of including the process log on the wiki might have problematic repercussions on the process itself (i.e. students might be inclined to 'play it safe,' etc.) Further studies must be done on this issue.

[v] For full author biographies, please visit the digirhet site at: <http://www.digitalwriting.org/digirhet/bio.html>.

[vi] For more information, please visit Ms. Armstrong's website at: http://charterforcompassion.org/site/

[vii] For more information, or to get involved, please visit the 3HO website at: http://www.3ho.org/get-involved/global-seva/

[viii] For more information, please visit Mr. Miller's website at: http://www.djspooky.com/

[ix] For more information, please visit Mr. Pinchbeck's website at: http://www.evolver.net/

Appendix A:

<u>Examples of Wiki Assignment Prompts</u>

<u>1.) A sample Wiki assignment (posted on Wikispaces, run by Tangient LLC) asks
students to evaluate Wikipedia. The Wiki Project overview reads as follows:</u>

"Your group will create the following wiki pages:

•	A page describing your group's community rules

•	A page about your group topic

•	A page about Wikipedia – you'll have assignments about Wikipedia

The class will have the following communal pages:

•	A F.A.Q. page written by the class, about using the wiki. Posting and answering
queries will earn your group bonus points.

•	A writing hints page written by the class. This can be about the projects OR the
papers. Any one can post and edit, and contributions earn individual bonus points. All
these pages have a discussions tab. When you plan or make changes, you need to make
sure you discuss why. The discussion page is the "behinds the scene" work which does
need to be recorded. The collaborative process is part of your group grade. The history
page and discussion page let me gauge your individual participation levels."[ix]

<u>2.) Howard Rheingold (a Stanford Instructor leading a course on Virtual Communities
and Social Media) assigns the following collaborative wiki project, which he terms a
"Key Theme Team Teaching Project:"</u>

"Each student will use the wiki to sign up with two other students to be responsible for
co-teaching approximately a one hour segment of a specific class. This starts with the
syllabus: the teaching team must, at least one week before their teaching session, give the
remaining other students four hours worth of specific assigned readings and videos for
the week prior to the next class meeting. The instructor offers in advance an annotated list
of resources, including his own opinions about their value, but it is up to the teaching
team to select the specific texts from the instructor's list -- or relevant texts that are not
from the instructor's list. Teaching teams must sign up at least two weeks in advance of
their class session and, arrange to meet with instructor during office hours at least a week
before the presentation. Each team will be responsible for leading the entire class in
making meaning from the texts, face to face discussion, and online discourse -- not just
delivering a book report or identifying material likely to be on a final exam. In addition to
succinctly presenting the key arguments and important terms, issues, and ideas of each
reading or video, the teaching team formulates five questions for five different in-class
student groups, designed to initiate inquiries most likely to lead to deeper knowledge of
the text's subject. The teaching team leads the wiki-based process of capturing and

distilling collective knowledge from classroom and online discussions -- before, during, and after the class meeting."[ix]

Examples of Explicitly Multi-Modal Assignment Prompts

1.) Henry Jenkins at MIT's Comparative Media Studies Program asks students to retell the same story across a range of different media. As they do so, they are encouraged to think about what each new tool contributes to their overall experience of the story as well as what needs to remain the same for viewers to recognize the same characters and situations across these various media.[ix] A modification of this exercise involves asking students to present how a familiar fairy tale, myth, or legend and identify has already been retold across different media, different historical periods, and different national contexts. Students search for recurring elements as well as signs of the changes that occur as the story are retold in a new context

2.) Siyang Zhou (the instructor for ENGL 792E: Computers and Composition Pedagogy at Ohio University in Athens) assigns students (reading Oscar Wilde) the following prompt, entitled "Multimodal Assignment Artificial Sensation: Vision Remix of Moments in *The Picture of Dorian Gray."* Directions are as follows: "Compose a short video as a remade scene selected from *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. The moment does not need to be long, and it cab be as instantaneous as a glance at "the gleam of the honey-sweet and honey-colored blossoms of laburnum" as portrayed in the opening scene of the novel. Your goal is to re-present the aura of the depicted/perceived scene with corresponding lens of vision, using materials in your daily life. Present your vision remix in about 5 to 10 minutes with the help of PowerPoint."[ix]

3.) Jami Carlacio and Lance Heidig (co-instructors of Writing 142 at Cornell University) assign the following prompt: "Your task is to construct a short 'story' about your [chosen] subject, using still and moving visual images and audio. Some of the audio must be your own written material, some can be music, and some can be material you've recorded but are the words of people in your study."[ix]

Appendix B

Examples of Assessment Criteria

1.) Longwood Writing Instructor Kristen Welch (with Katherine Long) cites the following
criteria for peer-reviewing multimodal productions on her teaching blog:[ix]

- Rhetorical Context
  What is the purpose of this assignment? Where is it stated?
  Who is the intended audience? How can you tell?
  Was there a sponsor for this assignment? If so, who? What is their goal in doing so?
  Who did it reach? How was it circulated?
  Is it effective? Why?
  Does it appeal to reason? To emotion? To personal responsibility?

- Genre
  Was it created for the student or within expectations? If within expectations, did it
  follow/fulfill them successfully?
  What does this assignment have in common with others of the same kind? How does it
  differ?
  Does it use similar media (screen, page, radio) that would be expected for this
  genre?
  Does it employ similar modes of expression (still or moving images, words, sound
  and music, animation)?
  Does it tell a story? How is it told?

- Structure, Organization, Arrangement
  What elements make up this assignment (still or moving images, headlines,
  words, voiceover commentary, music, sound effects, information about the
  sponsor)?
  How are these elements arranged or organized? (Are they next to each other?
  Arranged in sequence? Layered on top of one another?)
  How does the assignment make its point? With facts or statistics? Humor?
  Surprise? Peer pressure?

- Design
  For a print text: What part of the communicative work is done by the alphabetic
  text? What work is done by photographic images? What work is done by the font
  choice? The size and placement of text? The placement and organization of other
  elements (images, logos, charts, graphs? Why might the author/designer have
  made these choices?
  For a video text: What work is accomplished by the video track and what work is
  accomplished by the audio track? What work is accomplished by the lighting?
  Music? Sound effects? By the pacing of shots? By the framing of shots? By
  camera perspective or movement? Why might the author/designer have made
  these choices?
  For an audio text: What work is accomplished by voiceover commentary? By dialogue?
  By Sound effects? By music? How are aural elements emphasized? (By volume? By
  pacing? By placement?) Why might the author/designer have made these choices?

2.) <u>Ms. Welch's above criteria reflect those developed by the Institute for Multimedia Literacy,</u>
<u>whose website states that "the following parameters were developed to offer all involved in</u>
<u>multimedia scholarship a set of guidelines with which to gauge the effectiveness of a student</u>
<u>project."^{ix}</u>

> • <u>Conceptual Core</u> - The project's controlling idea must be apparent. The project must be productively aligned with one or more multimedia genres. The project must effectively engage with the primary issue/s of the subject area into which it is intervening.

> • <u>Research Component</u> – The project must display evidence of substantive research and thoughtful engagement with its subject matter. The project must use a variety of credible sources and cite them appropriately. The project ought to deploy more than one approach to an issue.

> • <u>Form & Content</u> – The project's structural or formal elements must serve the conceptual core. The project's design decisions must be deliberate, controlled, and defensible. The project's efficacy must be unencumbered by technical problems.

> • <u>Creative Realization</u> – The project must approach the subject in a creative or innovative manner. The project must use media and design principles effectively. The project must achieve significant goals that could not be realized on paper.

> In addition to this grid of parameters, IML also offers a set of concrete guidelines developed by the IML for further considering scholarly multimedia projects. Indeed, while these projects may take many forms and involve many types of media, we have found that within the university context and with respect to our mandate to nurture multimedia scholars in the creation of critical, argumentative projects, there are certain characteristics common to successful examples of scholarly multimedia. Below, a synopsis of these characteristics:

> – <u>Coherence</u>**:** First and foremost, academic multimedia projects should be coherent, effectively spanning the gap between "tradition" (text) and "innovation" (multimedia) and ultimately balancing their components. A successful multimedia project, in other words, would clearly suffer if translated into a traditional essay, or, conversely, into a "purely" multimedia experience with little or no connection to the broader field within which it participates. The strong multimedia project is not merely a well-written paper with multimedia elements "pasted in"; neither is it merely a good multimedia project with more familiar textual elements "tacked on." Coherence, then, refers to the graceful balance of familiar scholarly gestures and multimedia expression which mobilizes the scholarship in new ways.

> – <u>Self-reflexivity</u>**:** A second quality accounts for the authorial understanding of the production choices made in constructing the project. Because these may be difficult or impossible to discern by engaging with the project, we advocate post-production reflection, offering students the opportunity to reflect on and to justify the choices and decisions made during the creation of the project. We also recognize that in many instances it may be more significant for students to reckon with the process of production

rather than an end product; again, reflexivity through reflection helps manifest the evolution, and gives instructors a means for gauging learning.

– Control**:** By control, we mean the extent to which a project demonstrates authorial intention by providing the user with a carefully planned structure, often made manifest through a navigation scheme and a design suited to the project's argument and content. Control has to do with authorial tone / voice / cuing as well as with the quality of the project's interactivity if it calls for user interaction. If, for example, it is the student's intention to confuse a user, it is perfectly appropriate to build that confusion into the project's navigation scheme; such choices, however, must always be justified in the project's self-reflexivity.

– Cogency**:** Cogency refers to the quality of the project's argument and its reflection of a conceptual core. Cogency is not a function of an argument's "rightness" or "wrongness." With most assignments, students are free to take any position they like; cogency is reflected in the way the argument is made, not in what the argument is.

– Evidence**:** What is the quality of the data used to support the project's argument? Is it suited to the argument? Further, the project should reflect fundamental research competency as understood and dictated by evolving standards of multimedia research and expression.

– Complexity**:** Multimedia projects often suffer in being considered somehow outside a larger discourse or context. Complexity refers to the ways in which the project acknowledges its broader context, contributes to a larger discussion and generally participates in an academic community.

– Technique**:** Strong scholarly multimedia projects should exhibit an understanding of the affordances of the tools used to create the project.

– Documentation**:** Finally, with a nod toward the dramatic technological shifts that characterize contemporary media practices and the fact that formats come and go with alarming rapidity, we advocate a documentation process that describes the project, its formal structure and thematic concerns, with attention to the project's attributes and the particular needs required for either the student's own archival process, or those of an instructor, program, or other entity. This, too, offers another stage for assessment, inviting students to consider their work within a larger context, and offering instructors a site for understanding the learning that has occurred.

Appendix C

<u>Additional (Miscellaneous) Helpful Links:</u>

1.) For an example of a relatively successful multimodal essay, please visit the following website, which features a video examination of an urban legend (the student uses a response criticism approach presented in her Urban Legend's class) at: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DLaa33HE6so&feature=related>>

2.) For an example of a multimodal composition course syllabus, please visit Dr. Cheryl E. Ball's blog (associated with Illinois State University) at: <<http://www.ceball.com/classes/239/spring09/?page_id=36>>

3.) To visit the Center for Digital Storytelling, please follow this link: <<http://www.storycenter.org/stories/>>

4.) To read the Digital Humanities Manifesto, please follow this link: <<http://manifesto.humanities.ucla.edu/2008/12/15/digital-humanities-manifesto/>>

5.) To review online assessment and reflection options, please visit the Learning Record website at: <<http://www.learningrecord.org/contents.html>>

5.) To visit and review the Storybook program, please visit: <<http://fossfor.us/software/name/Storybook>>

6.) To visit and review the Sophie program, please visit: <<http://iml.usc.edu/flashVideoPlayer/sophie/sophie_video_2.m4v>>

7.) For an excellent multi-modal essay featuring interviews with Instructors utilizing digitech in their classrooms, please visit the Media Scholarship Project at:<http://www.educause.edu/EDUCAUSE+Quarterly/EDUCAUSEQuarterlyMagazineV olum/TheMediaScholarshipProjectStra/213673>

8.) <u>Other programs of interest include</u>: Cinchcast.com (which is able to be embedded with facebook, Audacity (an audio-editing software), Typewith.me (which allows for instant video meeting), Moviemaker, Animoto (which offers free 30-second videos via creative commons), Extranormal, Pbworks (another alternative to wiki) The Gimp (an opensource alternative to photoshop), and Voicethread (which allows for photos and voice to be spliced together).

9.) For an excellent Service-Learning Rubric, please see: <http://www.uen.org/Rubric/rubric.cgi?rubric_id=359>

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