CHAPTER 24.

"BECAUSE YOUR HEART BREAKS AND IT MOVES TO ACTION": DIGITAL STORYTELLING BEYOND THE GATE

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I describe an upper-division composition course my colleague John Murray and I have developed that explores new means and ends of activism. Our course opens up the gates, literally and figuratively, to create collaborations with community groups premised upon digital storytelling, a vehicle that equalizes the footing between town and gown and shifts cultural and material capital from the university to the community. Drawing upon feminist methodologies that seek to disrupt hierarchies of knowledge, we invoke a more explicitly activist framework by producing and disseminating alternative stories from groups usually stereotyped or ignored. Activism in our view takes on different possibilities when we move students into the community, the community into the campus, and ultimately the voices of the marginalized and the powerless into the public sphere.

A little more than forty years ago, Adrienne Rich characterized the university as a "hierarchy built on exploitation," "a breeding ground not of humanism but of masculine privilege." She wondered whether such a "man-centered" institution could "become a force and magnet for a 'female counter-force,'" whether "this male-created, male-dominated structure is really capable of serving the humanism and freedom it professes." And she suggested how the university might transform itself to accomplish those goals through a radical reorientation of its purpose and practice. In her ideal reckoning, even the boundaries of the university become porous, so that "instead of the familiar city on-a-hill frowning down on its neighbors, or the wrought-iron gates by which town and gown have traditionally defined their relationship," the university "would serve the needs of

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the human, visible community in which it sits," organizing its "resources around problems specific to the community."

Now, forty years later, those goals seem both closer at hand and as elusive as ever. Due in no small part to the institutionalization of feminism and service learning within the academy, universities increasingly offer courses and programs that have shifted focus to the communities outside their gates. Too often, however, such programs reify the hierarchies Rich sought to undo. Feminist scholars, for example, have critiqued how the discourse of civic engagement is "rooted in a neutral and universalizing language that reinscribes forms of democracy and citizenship that erase difference, conceal power, and perpetuate social injustice" (Costa & Leong, 2013, p. 171). The university's ability to do good while doing well contributes to the skepticism about the way service-learning programs have become embedded within the neo-liberal corporatization of higher education (Mathieu, 2005).

In this essay, I describe an upper-division composition course my colleague John Murray and I have developed that draws inspiration from Rich's imagined reorientation of the university's relationship with its neighbors. Our course opens up the gates, literally and figuratively, to create collaborations with community groups premised upon digital storytelling, a vehicle that equalizes the footing between town and gown and shifts cultural and material capital from the university to the community. Drawing upon feminist rhetorical practices that seek to disrupt hierarchies of knowledge, we invoke a more explicitly activist framework by producing and disseminating alternative stories from groups usually stereotyped or ignored (Royster & Kirsch, 2012). After eight years of teaching the course, we have found the results both more and less than we originally intended: less dependent on the material resources of the university with the evolution of DIY technology; and more dependent on the simple yet transformative acts of listening. Activism in our view takes on different possibilities when we move students into the community, the community into the campus, and ultimately the voices of the marginalized and the invisible into the public sphere.

Nine years ago, when we first proposed introducing a service-learning component into an upper-division composition course, we drew inspiration from scholars and teachers in composition and feminist studies who recognized that many service learning programs continued to be permeated with assumptions of unexamined privilege. With this recognition emerged a shift in focus from inside the gates to out as projects took shape from relationships formed with community groups, moving from a model of service to one of engagement and reciprocity. What matters for scholars such as Parks (2010), Goldblatt (2007), Matheiu (2005), Bickford and Reynolds (2002) and Cushman (2010) is not

raised consciousness or some vague rhetoric of empowerment, but reshaping our collective notion of "common sense" and using this revised understanding to bring about action in the interests of a more just social order. Similarly, the feminist rhetorical practices delineated by Royster and Kirsch provide tools of inquiry to help us conceptualize both the processes and the products of our collaborations, particularly their definition of "critical imagination" as a "mechanism for seeing the noticed and the unnoticed, rethinking what is there and not there, and speculating about what could be there instead" (p. 20) as well as an attention to an "ethics of hope and care" (p. 145) that permeates every component of our course. Royster and Kirsch also point to the possibilities contained within "the intersection of genre, technology, and rhetorical agency" (p. 65) that can "invite democracy quite boldly into the public sphere" (p. 67) by using multimodal texts to give disenfranchised communities a voice.

Influenced by these scholars, we wondered how the tools of digital storytelling might work as a form of alternative literacy, one that would offer a more equal platform for students and community partners. The Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives provides one touchstone for this type of project, since it too uses digital media to disseminate stories that would otherwise not find an audience. Another inspiration comes from the principles of "participant produced media," and in particular, its intersection with feminist epistemologies, to realize the activist praxis that generated the course itself (McIntyre and Lykes, 2004). What distinguishes this approach is a commitment for those in the university to step out of the way, to speak "alongside" rather than "for" or "about." For feminist filmmakers and scholars committed to social justice, this model renders "relevant forms of local, subjugated knowledge that are typically discounted and drowned out by authoritative and erudite forms of knowledge" (Gubrium, Krause, & Jernigan, 2014, p. 320). As Orr notes in the influential white paper, "Women's Studies as Civic Engagement: Research and Recommendations," "Women's Studies strives to tell alternate stories" through a "simultaneity of foci," wide-angle and close up, personal and institutional; so too our approach uses personal images, voices and stories to challenge the meaning-making conventions within dominant discourses.

Our course capitalizes on these points of connection by introducing a participant-produced methodology to a digital storytelling project, itself integrated into a sequence of linked written assignments. Writing 340 is a required upper-division writing course intended to build on the foundations of critical thinking, reading, and writing established in the university's first-year composition course. It is run on disciplinary lines, with sections in "Arts and Humanities," "Social Sciences," etc., designed to give students practice writing in professional, personal and academic contexts. Students typically produce 35 pages

of writing, with a portfolio collected at the end of the semester. When we first started the course, almost a decade ago, we created our own section, "Writing in the Community," with the same underlying objectives as other versions, but with an additional emphasis on the way writing can be a powerful tool of social change, not the "busy work" students sometimes associate with the academic writing they've done in previous classes [see Appendix A for the course syllabus]. By partnering students with community groups and giving them real issues and real audiences, we hoped that we would reinvigorate their sense that writing matters and that these texts can make a difference beyond the confines of the classroom. Not coincidentally, our class tends to be more diverse than the typical 340 classroom, with students from the mostly low-income neighborhood surrounding our campus mixing with students from wealthier Orange County and also international students, now a large percentage of USC's student body. Most are traditional students, although because our class offers more autonomy and creativity than other offerings, we also attract returning students.

Inspired by the resurgence of storytelling in venues such as *This American Life* and *The Moth* as well as by Rich's vision of a university open to its neighbors, our course integrates a multimedia assignment where students take the tools of digital and visual literacy beyond the gate to record the stories of community partners—schools, non-profits, advocacy groups and other organizations in the neighborhood around our campus. This final assignment is supported by more traditional assignments designed both to scaffold and to complement the project: a blog giving students the chance to reflect on their experiences beyond the gate; a film review intended to train students in the visual literacy that helps them construct their own videos; a research paper that helps students investigate the broader historical and political context for the issues that emerged within these partnerships; and the final assignment, an op-ed piece that encourages students to take action on the issues explored in their videos and their research papers.

We have found that community partnerships work best when they have time to grow. Like any relationship, trust takes time. Of course, this isn't always possible—community groups often have schedules that make such sustained partnerships difficult if not impossible. But we do our best to arrange students in groups quickly, and then encourage students to reach out to their partners to begin the process together. The first task for these collaborations is to decide upon the purpose and audience of the video. Many groups want to promote the work of their agency; some want to highlight a particular issue relevant to their lives; others simply want to tell their stories to USC students. Working with their partners, students fill out a video planning document that encourages them to think about not just the components of their video (interviews, b-roll,

sound) but also the overall purpose and its corresponding ethical and aesthetic challenges [see Appendix B for our video planning document].

For the digital storytelling project, we worked with Edward O'Neill, then a specialist at our campus's Center for Scholarly Technology, to take advantage of how smart phones and editing software have significantly downscaled the level of expertise and equipment needed to make videos. With digital cameras now embedded in most smart phones and iMovie available on many laptops, students already carry around the technology they need for the course. At the beginning of the semester students complete a technology survey about access to and familiarity with a sliding scale of documentary tools, from the very high end video equipment and editing software down to the minimal movie apps available on most smartphones. This information enables us to try to distribute expertise across groups, ensuring that most groups have at least one or two people who have some experience making movies.

Students tend to approach this component of the course with some degree of anxiety—what's video doing in a composition course?—so with O'Neill's guidance, we have embedded the skills needed to complete the final project within the curriculum. We have found that the skills tend to be mutually reinforcing, so the time spent teaching visual literacy and developing assessment criteria for the documentary transfers quite well and naturally to the work students do in more traditional written assignments. In fact, students often are able to understand more clearly the moves involved in writing when they are exposed to them in another genre. For example, a short workshop on creating order within documentaries through patterns of visual images perfectly encapsulates strategies for activating familiar organizational patterns to link ideas together in essays. The evaluative criteria that emerges within these discussions also transfers across genres and privileges from the beginning not just aesthetic criteria—in fact, since students don't have the technical training or equipment, we don't weigh high production values as part of our criteria—but more importantly the ethical and social justice questions that factor into every discussion [see Appendix C for our evaluative rubric]. The democratization of video-making tools has meant too that our community partners now have access to the same technologies, increasing our opportunities to better realize a participant-produced methodology.

The work of the partnerships happens mostly outside the classroom, in living rooms and schools, offices and city streets, prisons and community centers, wherever our students meet their community partners. Within the classroom, we embed video in many of our activities to enhance students' familiarity and ease with the technology, reinforce the evaluative criteria we use to assess these videos, and prepare them for the other written assignments in the class. In the first of several low-stakes multimedia assignments, we ask students to experi-

ment with lighting and sound choices while interviewing partners and gathering ideas for video and research questions. Students practice workflow issues by capturing video, transferring it to their computers, and uploading these short clips to YouTube, and we take a class session to discuss both the ideas that emerge from these clips and the ways that technical choices (lighting, camera angle, shot composition, editing, etc.) inform our understanding of these ideas. By training students to look at their videos through the eyes of their viewers, we alert them to the importance of audience in both visual and textual mediums. Similarly, for the last multimedia assignment we ask them to remix their videos using different arrangements of visual material so that they see how the order of shots determines the meanings available, a lesson that also of course applies to organizational choices within written texts [see Appendix D for the multimedia assignments].

By building partnerships based on reciprocity rather than hierarchy, we embed a feminist methodology within even more traditional composition assignments. For example, our students disrupt the "banking" model of education that grants authority only to those with degrees by using what they learn from their community partners as the source and support for their research paper (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1988; Webb, Cole, and Skeen, 2007). Students derive research questions from their collaborations with community partners—after school programs, non-profits that serve Latina women and children, transitional housing facilities for former prisoners, etc. By "'starting off thought' from the lives of marginalized peoples," our students begin to expose the assumptions that normalize the status quo (Harding, 1993, p. 445). What happens, for example, when we look at sexual harassment policies through the eyes of the middle-schoolers they affect? How does our understanding of domestic violence change when we hear the voices of Latinas rather than middle-class white women? What do communities think about city-wide injunctions against fast-food restaurants? Students learn to reckon with multiple perspectives on complicated issues, and navigate conflicting ideas of what's wrong and how to fix it. And they learn that the personal can never be detached from the political, that claims to "objectivity" are disingenuous at best since they pretend to an understanding somehow detached from the lives necessarily entangled within histories and ideologies. Once freed from the bogus objectivity they associate with academic discourse, their own voices emerge loud and clear (hooks, 1989).

From such methodology emerges an activist praxis also aligned with feminist pedagogy (Orr, 2011). What we have noticed is that students' understanding of activism shifts during the course of the semester. Similar to the types of student resistance Julie Barger and Katherine Fredlund identify in their course designs (this collection), our students too initially describe activism as "scary," some-

thing distant from their own lives, associated with protests and sit-ins located elsewhere, far from their own pursuits. Even the students who self-identify as activists question the value of having activism located within the classroom or within their own everyday passions and paths. As one student put it in an initial blog entry, "perhaps the radical needs to stay radical." By the end of the semester, after partnering with groups committed to the work of bettering their communities, our students have a more complex and nuanced formulation. Some of them locate activism on a continuum with volunteering, with each serving a necessary and important purpose, complementary rather than antithetical. Many describe activism in terms of relationships: spending time with the people affected by otherwise abstract issues gives a deeper understanding of these issues and offers multiple perspectives on its origins and also potential solutions. And relationships build both trust and an emotional investment that generates an intrinsic call to action (Noel, 2011). As one student puts it: "and you are not motivated to act simply on principle, but because your heart breaks, and it moves to action." Activism for many is now woven into their local spaces and activities, simply part of how they live in the world. Michael, a student who worked with a veteran's group, put it this way: "I have gone from someone who wouldn't dare stand out with those 'crazy' guys to being one of the 'crazy' guys standing out there with a sign on Sunday afternoon. They need young guys to carry on the torch of their cause. Bob thinks it should be me. I think it might be."

Towards the end of the semester we invite our community partners to campus, first to give their input on the rough cuts and later for a reception and screening of the final videos, followed by a forum where our partners speak about the videos and the issues they raise. Many of our partners—groups of immigrant women and their children, former prisoners recently released from their prison, former gang members, parent activists, volunteers—have never been inside the gates of the university even though many live within blocks of the campus. Some of the children turn the campus into their playground, skating on the paths and sliding down balustrades. At a recent screening, one of the former prisoners talked about being afraid to enter before he was invited to speak to our students. Opening up the campus to outsiders seems a simple gesture, yet it has profound if subtle implications once we recall the cultural capital symbolically and materially accrued within its gates. Walking inside opens up new possibilities for these marginalized groups, who may not have previously ever envisioned themselves on college campuses, and transforms too the experiences of those accustomed to these spaces by creating a more inclusive community that shifts our vision of who belongs and who does not.

Over the seven years we have offered the course, students have created over two dozen videos which have collectively received over 30,000 views on You-

Tube. And though it's true that for students and community partners the process is far more impactful than the product, it's also true that the videos themselves are transformative in their aesthetics and their ability to imagine and promote social change. Unlike mainstream productions, which often ignore or stereotype marginalized groups, the videos that emerge from these partnerships use a feminist ethos that interrupts and interrogates familiar scripts, calling attention to the silences and disruptions that remind us of the limits of our knowledge. Further, rather than smoothing over the differences between our students and their partners, the videos make these power differentials part of their story and use these moments of discomfort to generate new ways of imagining each other and the world we live in. With their deliberately low-tech production values and with YouTube as a platform for distribution, the videos move outside the university to open up conversations far beyond their original creation [see Appendix E for links to videos from the course and also a short interview with students about its value].

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APPENDIX A: COURSE SYLLABUS

Writing 340: Writing in the Community

Course Description

This Writing 340 class builds on the foundations of critical thinking, reading, and writing established in Writing 140, polishing these skills and augmenting them with an emphasis on the professional, public, and academic aspects of majors and career fields.

This particular course places writing in a real-world context by partnering USC students with community groups to identify local problems and to use rhetorical tools for solving these problems. It is aimed for students interested in writing with and about the community surrounding USC, developing research projects based on community issues and partnering with community organizations to produce multimedia projects designed to reach a public audience.

Course Expectations

This is an alternatively structured course in terms of contexts of learning and design of assignments. Working in teams of 3-5 students, you will be partnering with community groups to develop research proposals and to produce a collaborative multimedia documentary. This will entail multiple visits to these sites over the course of the semester, as well as a considerable amount of time both in class and out learning the basic theory and practice of visual storytelling.

This class takes as its subject and goal learning across difference; this kind of learning can't be simply memorized, regurgitated and forgotten. It involves intellectual honesty and a willingness to ask difficult questions, to recognize when

things aren't working, and to think creatively about solutions. We will need each student to take responsibility for the overall success of the course, to let us know if you encounter any difficulties, and to recognize that learning can take place in moments of confusion or frustration and not just in the results.

Because your active engagement is so crucial to your learning, we expect you to attend class regularly, to participate in class discussions, ask questions, share work in progress, and respond thoughtfully to the drafts of others. Note, in particular, that you will be collaborating with classmates and community partners during much of the semester. Others will be relying on you and therefore it is vital that you demonstrate motivation, respect, and accountability during the community projects.

Course Requirements

- Participation/Attendance
- Observation/Reflection Postings

Papers

- Documentary Analysis
- Research Paper
- Take Action Essay
- Final Project

Research Paper

Using input from your community partners, you will define a problem from the local community and use the tools of the academy as well as community perspectives to deepen our understanding of the problem and to map out potential solutions. This will entail: initial meetings with community groups to define relevant issues; developing research strategies to locate sources and generating an annotated bibliography; conducting interviews with community groups to get multiple perspectives on these issues; writing a 10-12 page paper reflecting your research and your conclusions. Although your community research will be conducted in groups, each student will write his or her own paper. (20%)

Take Action Essay

In this assignment you will use your expertise to get involved in a public debate on the issue. You will first identify where debate over the issue takes place (radio? Newspapers? Blogs? Editorials? Books? Public forums?), then use the tenets of good rhetoric to write a compelling argument that makes a call for social action regarding the community issue/s you have examined. (5%)

You will revise two of these essays for a final portfolio due on the last day of class. (25%)

Final Project

For the final project in this class, students will produce a five minute documentary-style multimedia presentation of a social issue relevant to their research projects. The goal here is to use innovative approaches to explore the unique perspectives and voices of community members to make the issues come alive for a broad public audience. Students will post these final projects on YouTube to invite comment from community groups. Final projects will be evaluated on three main criteria: 1) how well the design of the project incorporates community perspectives as agents rather than as subjects 2) how well the film addresses the relevant issue and 3) how the form of the film works to support the content. (20%)

These projects will be produced in teams of 4-5, working in collaboration with community groups. To give you the help, practice, tools, encouragement and advice in all the components of visual storytelling, we are integrating several multimedia assignments, workshops and labs into the class. (5%).

APPENDIX B: VIDEO PLANNING DOCUMENT

How might you plan, shoot, edit and organize your work to achieve a specific ethical and rhetorical goal?

(Created by Edward O'Neill)

Whose story are you trying to tell?	
What challenges & pitfalls reside in bringing this topic to an audience?	
What kinds of footage can you get? E.g., observation, interviews, b-roll, music?	

What formal strategies might you use? E.g., how can you weave together continuing actions, implied arguments, audiovisual patterns?	
What sound and lighting obstacles might you face? How might you adjust your shooting?	
What breakdown of labor or roles do you plan to use?	

APPENDIX C: EVALUATIVE RUBRICS

(Created by Edward O'Neill)

The course aims to enable students to move fluidly amongst three categories.

Argument Elements	**Essay Parts**	**Documentary Elements & Parts**
Provides a context, situation or problem. Makes a claim. Provides supporting evidence. Attributes all sources clearly. Presents or anticipates & refutes counter-claims. Tells relevant stories. Balances appeals by ethos, logos, pathos. Makes a call to action.	An introduction previews or hooks. A topic is clear to the reader. A body contains clear sub-topics, previews, transitions & recaps. A conclusion provides a new perspective rather than merely summarizing.	Elements: • interviews • observation • on-screen titles • b-roll Parts: • an intro & outro • segments • alternation/cross-cutting

Where am I in the process of producing a polished documentary from footage?

A progressive roadmap

Starting Out	The students have edited the interview footage down to a manageable size. The students have intercut different types of footage or sequenced chunks to make a larger pattern.
Intermediate	The rough cut sets up a problem, situation or context for the viewer. The rough cut gives the viewer relevant information to make an informed judgment. The filmmakers have integrated b-roll footage somewhat.
Finalizing	The filmmakers have integrated b-roll footage artfully. The filmmakers have adjusted the color and sound with care.

Some Evaluative Criteria: Ethical Reflection, Argumentation, Form & Style

How does the video treat its subjects?	**How does the video treat the viewer?**
distorts their identities and views, exploits for emotional or other purposes, fails to capture them as rounded human beings, represents them fully but not indulgently.	provides little information, background or context pushes the viewer to a single point of view, provides the viewer with the information needed to make a judgment, provides multiple points of view and allows the viewer to decide.

How effective is the video as an argument?	How effective is the video as form and style?
topic/argument	message
lacks a clear focus,	no message
has a topic or focus more than an argument or claim,	unclear or mixed message
makes a clear argument	simple, clear message
offers multiple viewpoints and balances them gracefully	complex message
	unity
evidence	has extraneous parts
offers some evidence,	the parts don't clearly connect
does not identify sources clearly,	forms an integrated whole
supports its claims with evidence,	style
provides rich, contextualized evidence.	not coordinated, unclear purpose
	simple but effective
appeals	polished and stylish
does not use ethos, logos and pathos,	
emphasizes one to the detriment of the others,	
uses multiple sources of appeal in a sophisticated way.	

APPENDIX D: MULTIMEDIA ASSIGNMENTS

These exercises are designed as scaffolding for the skills you'll need to create your final documentary. By building these in early, we're hoping to accomplish three goals: 1) to build up a sense of familiarity with these tools early on so you won't panic the weekend before the documentary is due 2) to use the technology to enhance the other components of the course and 3) to develop a shared sense of evaluative criteria that we'll use to assess the final documentaries you'll create.

For every assignment, we ask that you use the available technology within your group, and that you post your clips to YouTube 24 hours before our course. (Fol-

low YouTube instructions for how to upload, then copy the link to our discussion board in Blackboard.) Most of these are group assignments, meaning that each group will post one clip. Please make time to view all the clips before class.

Remember, too, these are designed to get your hands wet with these tools so that you'll develop a sense of familiarity and expertise when you create your final documentary. The most important thing is to master all the steps, not create a masterpiece. Get them in on time and you'll have fulfilled the assignment. (5% of your grade for the class.)

1. Interview strategies. Due 2/19 (24 hours before class) on YouTube.

Goal: to experiment with different techniques for producing quality sound and image. Interview people at your site about possible research/documentary ideas by recording three short (under one minute) unedited video segments using available camera and/or audio equipment and manipulating the following variables:

- Position camera closer or farther depending on the subject's speaking voice
- If possible, experiment using a separate audio recording device rather than one inside your camera.
- Interview outside using direct sunlight
- Interview inside using florescent light

2. Short rough cuts. Due 3/12 (24 hours before class) on YouTube

Goal: to see how your footage plays for an audience so that you can learn how to internalize these responses. Post two minutes of footage from your documentary. What's interesting?

3. VERY rough cuts. Due 4/14 IN CLASS.

Goal: to get suggestions for revising your documentary to better meet your audience's expectations.

APPENDIX E: LINKS TO VIDEOS

Through Glass: https://vimeo.com/93339925

One Hundred Universes: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RJwgyd-VWYo&list=PLjhYGo2R1FpKXEaRTaABViVCZbqaWpdbg&index=7

Twenty Years Later: Commemorating the Gang Truce in Los Angeles: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kurb6r6MamQ&list=PLC7A89FDFA05DE3E5&index=5

Is USC a College with a Conscience? https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6B-KfHRxKM2g

Students Talk about the Course: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hvJTl-7t8RNk