Converging the ASS[umptions] between U and ME; or How new media can bridge a scholarly/creative split in English studies

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Abstract

Authors of new media texts regularly draw on both scholarly and creative genres to construct their arguments. In so doing, they bridge disciplinary boundaries that have split English departments in the past. These boundaries are discussed in our text using the following binaries: high :: low, literature :: composition, and popular :: academic discourse. In this article, we examine, then complicate, the binary form :: content through a popular *and* academic YouTube video (Wesch, 2007). We then situate new media texts within the historical split between rhetoric and literature using Berlin's social epistemic rhetoric as a bridge. Our argument concludes by showing that new media texts can provide a convergence between binaries in English studies, particularly the one found in tenure guidelines suggesting that research is either scholarly or creative. New media is both/and.

Keywords: *aesthetic; content; creative; form; new media; social epistemic rhetoric; scholarly; soundtracks*

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Despite its quirky title, which we hope will find its way into many reference lists and conference presentations, the design of this webtext is purposefully reminiscent of a paper-based article so as to provide a conducive reading experience for those who may assume they are secondary audiences of webtexts like this one (i.e., tenure and promotion stakeholders who may not be primary readers of this journal).

Web 2.0: Converging or creating binaries?

It is not uncommon in digital writing studies to assume that texts can embrace scholarly and creative purposes at once, as a good portion of multimodal and new media scholarship already suggests (e.g., Ball, 2004; Ball & Moeller, 2007; Walker, 2006; Sorapure, 2006; Wysocki, 2001, 2002, 2004). However, because these binaries still exist in and outside of English studies (e.g., as evidenced by the many tenure guidelines that label research as either creative *or* scholarly), we have chosen the scholarly/creative trope here in order to demonstrate how new media texts are neither one nor the other. Rather, they can and often do converge scholarly *and* creative purposes. Based upon a demonstration of this convergence, we hope to offer a way of bridging the slash (/) in traditional English studies assumptions about what is valued in regards to tenure and promotion for one, and pedagogy for another. In this text, we attempt to build the new media bridge between rhetoric and aesthetics, between the scholarly and the creative, between low art culture and high art culture, and between academic texts and popular texts. New media texts can help authors speak to their readers in vibrant ways, helping us understand the potential role new media can play in converging English studies.

One text that attempts to bridge the binaries of form and content (as well as rhetoric and aesthetics, scholarly and creative, low art culture and high art culture, and academic and popular texts) is Michael Wesch's (2007) YouTube-distributed video, "The Machine is Us/ing Us." (Note the binary in its title!) The purpose of this 4:30-minute video is to answer the question “What is Web 2.0?” Wesch, himself a cultural anthropologist, explored technological, social, and cultural changes that have occurred in relation to the development of World Wide Web technologies. He compared the highly static and alphabetic beginnings of the Web, when form and content were presented together via HTML tags, to its current XML instantiation, which is touted as being more collaborative, database-driven, and dynamic—as seen in sites and programs like Flickr or iTunes. Thus, as Wesch argues, XML separates form and content because content can be database-driven, and a user—who no longer needs to know programming code, HTML, or a web-editing program—can contribute dynamic content (i.e., writing or static pictures or single videos, etc.) through blogs, wikis, and other pre-coded interfaces. **He suggested that Web 2.0 technologies allow users to think separately about form and content as discrete communicative practices**, and he concluded the video by suggesting that viewers should rethink commonplaces in our society including copyright, commerce, ethics, rhetoric, and aesthetics.

Wesch argued that Web 2.0 changes how we present information—where presentation means a separation of form and content (see "Blogs")—and he argued this position by posting an academically minded genre (informational video) in a decidedly nonacademic location (YouTube) using a medium (video) in which form and content are intimately connected. That is, Wesch's argument regarding Web 2.0's ability to split form and content is presented in a medium—a video—that converges the two. Although Wesch didn't comment on his own combinations of words and images and video and other aesthetic modes of communication, such as sound, he successfully used the dynamism of the Web to distribute his message. And yet while Wesch used what might be considered aesthetic elements of communication such as animations, images, and a soundtrack, the logic of his argument is still embedded in words, words that he recorded himself typing on screen–yes–but words, and thus traditional, academic structures, nonetheless. Worded, linear arguments are what we expect to find in traditional, linear scholarship (like this article, for example). When readers are not able to make sense of the too-quickly flashing images of websites that Wesch provided, the written content points out his argument in an established, academic mode ofliteracy. The message this video (perhaps unintentionally) sends is: When all else fails, use words. Why? Because when academics are neither trained to teach or read aesthetic modes of communication in the pursuit of scholarship, **we fall back on the assumption that writing** *does not also* **merge form and content**. And it most certainly does. We just often fail to see it that way.

Blogs: An example of a form/content split

We can observe a shift happening when we move from designing form *and* content together in HTML (albeit with little grace in early websites) to designing form and content separately (and sometimes not at all) in dynamically coded database applications such as blogs, content-management systems, and social networking sites. As an example of this shift in new media technologies—a shift which allows for the separation of form and content, arguably making online communication that much easier for n00bs—consider that even our most technologically illiterate students can be taught to create and post to a blog. Wesch pointed this out. Blogs are an excellent example of the split between form and content. As teachers of print and new media design, for us to focus on posting written content to the Web via someone else's pre-designed template seems counterintuitive at times. Posting to a blog doesn't require specialized knowledge; it doesn't require, say, an understanding of the grammars of HTML. (It can draw on such knowledge, but does not require it.) In this way, Web 2.0 represents a monumental technological, social, and cultural shift as well as a scholarly and creative one, and yet it returns us to the old argument of form versus content.

Rethinking binaries in a postmodern condition

Anne Wysocki (2001) pointed out the problems of conceptualizing writing as content and multimedia elements as form in her article "Impossibly Distinct: On Form/Content and Word/Image in Two Pieces of Computer-Based Interactive Multimedia." She noted that we *see* a split between form and content because of the transparency we as readers have learned to accept through our familiarity with the

forms, or the designs, of written text. Many others have argued this point, encouraging us to remember that written text—as stuck as it sometimes feels within academic modes of discourse—is often composed with aesthetic intentions. In English departments, poets and novelists know this, as do teachers of literature and style and editing. To refer back to Wesch's reconsideration of form and content in relation to new media: Aesthetic and rhetorical choices, or (as we call it) creative and scholarly choices must be made in *every* text. Moreover, the meaning that those creative and scholarly choices engender should be made available for interpretation in every reading of every text. In this section, we examine several theoretical perspectives on this creative/scholarly split in order to interrogate our own assumptions (as well as our readers' assumptions) regarding what we value (or can value) in English studies and related fields. Because new media texts typically converge these binaries in their presentation, we believe it is important to examine historical understandings of these binaries, which will allow us to show that new media texts can have a welcome place in our departments.

James Berlin (1991) struggled to locate rhetoric within the rhetoric/poetic split he saw manifested in contemporary English departments. He explained how "English" came to be associated more firmly along the poetic side of the divide—the side that places superiority with the poet who somehow stands outside the dominant power structures—and relegated rhetoric to first-year composition studies in an attempt to redress the lack of writing preparation students received at the high school level. Berlin argued that changes in the economic and social structures during the 18th and 19th centuries led to a conception of the poetic as pure aestheticism, isolated from other spheres of human activity, especially politics and science. Using the work of Raymond Williams (i.e., *Marxism and Literature*), Berlin located an important shift in the conceptualization of (l/L)iterature: "[literature] lost its early sense of reading ability and reading experience, and became an apparently objective category of printed works of a certain quality" (25). This shift engendered three tendencies:

- a shift from "learning" to "taste" or "sensibility," which focused attention on the consumption of works rather than on their production, and delimited a bourgeois reading public (English teachers, publishers, and highly literate folk)with control of general social practices (pp. 25–26).
- an increased specialization in literature toward "creative" or imaginary works, which relegated rhetoric to the mundane and the mechanical. "Art" became associated with the beautiful, mythic, and aesthetic ("high art") and ordinary experience became ugly, dull, and tainted with corruption (pp. 25–27).
- the development of a national literature which soon replaced itself as a tradition rather than a history (p. 27).

Gerald Graff's (1987) characterizations of contemporary English departments in *Professing Literature* mirrored the binary oppositions that Berlin explored: Literary

texts were associated with the imaginary, the aesthetic, and the disinterested appeal to taste and sensibility while rhetorical texts were associated with the scientific, the practical, and the interested appeals to the public intellect and reason (p. 28). While Graff claimed that such distinctions do not represent class distinctions, Pierre Bourdieu suggested that "art has meaning and interest only for someone who possesses the cultural competence [or has the cultural capital], that is, the code into which it is encoded" (qtd. in Berlin, 1991, p. 30). In this light, English department privileging of those texts determined to be literary ultimately serves the managerial class, thus devaluing other texts and excluding those who have not been trained in the proper aesthetic responses to texts. Then, they further reify those distinctions by "precluding reading and writing practices that might address inequalities in the existing social order" (p. 33).

Joe Marshall Hardin (2001) also described the English studies split between creative and scholarly texts in relation to the high, aesthetic culture of literature versus the low, popular, and service-oriented (i.e., grammar-oriented) culture of composition. Hardin remarked, on the one side, that composition studies is generally considered the “low form” of English studies, concerned as it tends to be with the rhetorical content of academic arguments. Literary studies, on the other side, are generally oriented toward art to a greater degree and they are concerned with the aesthetic form and reception of creative texts. Hardin claimed that this comp–lit split mimicked an unhealthy art-culture system of high (or valued) art versus low (or kitschy, nonvaluable) art within English departments. He compared literature to high art worthy of academic pursuit while composition and rhetoric was comparable to low forms such as pop art (the subtext being that pop art/culture is not worthy of academic pursuit). His purpose in making this comparison was not to say that composition studies, or its connection to rhetorical studies, was indeed a low form of art, but to suggest that English studies needed a bridge between low and high forms—one that would satisfy, or rather rectify, the traditional high/low, literature/composition, aesthetics/rhetorical-as-mechanical split but also one that would allow for students to take advantage of the *both/and* in their writing practices. Specifically, Hardin called for a change in the way student writing is taught, suggesting that students should be allowed to work against and challenge “the binary of 'high' and 'low' culture" by producing "texts that might be acceptable within the culture of the academy and within the culture at-large" (p. 212). That is, to bridge the high/low textual split in English studies, we should ask students to produce texts that are acceptable in both academic and popular settings—utilizing *both* rhetorical *and* aesthetic modes of discourse.

Berlin (1991) argued that education has always been a disciplinary endeavor—a cultural attempt to teach students the *acceptable* forms of reading, writing, speaking, and thinking. All of these educational objectives have been subsumed at one time or another under the guise of rhetoric and English studies. Berlin associated rhetoric with the production of texts and poetic with the interpretation of texts. But Berlin also offered an alternative approach to English studies: **Under social epistemic rhetoric, distinctions such as poetic/rhetoric and public/private disappear since all language enters into a relationship between writer, reader, text, and the material conditions that influence their interactions** (p. 35). Quoting Williams, Berlin said criticism became a "conscious exercise" of "taste," "sensibility," and "discrimination" (p. 25). The technological advancements in the printing press of the late nineteenth century allowed editors to "move [toward] the consumption of

A binary is born

Robert Connors (1996) argued that the need for composition arose out of a "reformist" period, one that culminated in an "inflammatory article" by E.L. Godkin in 1897 (pp. 47-48). Disturbed by the new influx of lower class college students, Godkin worried that the growing daily newspapers, their reliance on images rather than words, and their sensationalistic nature would destroy any sense of "Literature" that the universities were trying desperately to maintain. He was afraid that, due to its huge distribution, the newspaper would become the lowest standard in American reading, dictating political and social principles to otherwise uneducated masses.

Godkin delivered his complaint most completely in an article written for the *North American Review*, "Newspapers Here and Abroad" (1890):

> The news-gathering function, which the American press was the first to bring into prominence, has become the most important one, and the critical function has relatively declined. . . . Contemporaneously with this has been the improvement in the means of travel and of transmitting intelligence, thus literally making news-gathering and [sic] important calling. (p. 197-198)

Godkin favored the critical role that newspapers had enjoyed in the public sphere and he did not want to see that role denigrated into a service for disseminating information without critique or commentary. Habermas (1962/1998) described a similar shift in the state of U.S. literacy and polity this way: "Editorial opinions recede behind information from press agencies and reports from correspondents; critical debate disappears behind the veil of internal decisions concerning the selection and presentation of the material" (p. 169). Habermas referred to the blurring distinction between "facts" and "literature" and how the once differentiated traditions of *belles lettres* and journalism collapsed into the "ready-made convenience, patterned and predigested" (p. 169) format of the daily newspaper of the late nineteenth century. In fact, this is precisely where Godkin took his argument in "Newspapers Here and Abroad." He found it disturbing that newspapers, seen as the *popular* form of literature, destroyed the attention spans of the country's youth and had a degenerative effect on the book reading, or scholarly, public: "nothing can be more damaging to the habit of continuous attention than newspaper reading . . . it never requires the mind to be fixed on any topic more than three or four minutes and that every topic furnishes a complete change of scene" (p. 202). Godkin saw the literary tradition, and the critical role the editorial papers had in that tradition, slipping into a dumbed-down assimilation of stories and facts: "Even books of far-reaching sociological interest, like Darwin's, or Spencer's, or Mill's, have to undergo a prolonged filtration through the newspaper press before they begin to affect popular thought or action" (p. 203). Newspapers exert, he argued, "more influence on the popular mind and the popular morals than either the pulpit or the book press has exerted in five hundred years" (p. 202).

(cont'd on p. 7)

printed works and away from their production" (p. 26). Printed work, free from the class and social encumbrances involved in its publication, shifted the notion of literary criticism toward a "mechanical discourse" removed from any political realm and relegated to the "mythic and aesthetic" in order to uphold notions of "taste and sensibility" (p. 26). As early as 1894, prominent editorialist and publisher E.L. Godkin (1974) had already noticed this trend (see "A binary"), noting that education served to standardize "the intellectual outlook . . . in relation to [its] duties to the community at large" (p. 198). Moreover, education typically meant a decrease in political activity:

> It is a very rare thing for an educated man to say anything publicly about the questions of the day. He is absorbed in science, art, or literature, in the practice of his profession, or in the conduct of his business; and if he has any interest at all in public affairs, it is a languid one. He is silent because he does not much care, or because he does not wish to embarrass the administration or "hurt the party," or because he does not feel that anything he could say would make much difference (p. 211).

Political and social apathy is not necessarily a condition of the postmodern condition, and it certainly does not have to be a condition of what we would label our "digital native" students nor of the Web 2.0 lives we lead. Writing as we are, in the midst of the 2008 Presidential primaries, we feel optomistic in saying that political apathy

A binary is born (cont'd)

Godkin's objections to the disappearance of the critical voice did not only rest in his editorial pages. John Brereton (1995) refers to three separate reports on which Godkin's name appears as a member of the Committee on Composition and Rhetoric at Harvard University. According to Brereton, Charles Francis Adams, a friend of Godkin's, authored all three reports. However, in order to make a stronger impact, Adams added Godkin's name: "Between 1892 and 1897, the Committee on Composition and Rhetoric published its four highly charged reports. Combining as it did some of the most eminent names in Harvard's and Boston's history with the prestige of highly influential journals and law firms" (Brereton, 1995, p. 74). Godkin's name carried significant weight with the audience for those reports, the Board of Overseers at Harvard, who "stood between the faculty and the trustees" (p. 74). There is no record of any correspondence between Godkin and Adams regarding this committee; however, Harvard did extend many honors to Godkin including a Master of Arts degree, a token lectureship in free trade for the years 1884-1885, and even offered him a professorship in 1870 (Armstrong, 1974, passim). He turned down the position in favor of his more influential prestige as the editor of the *Nation*. He wrote to Charles Eliot: "a professor is looked on as sort of a bookish monk, of whose opinions on the affairs of the world, nobody need take any account. My friends advise me not to accept your offer, because it will be the loss of all my influence, and power, and relegation to a sort of comfortable obscurity" (Godkin, 1974, p. 153). Although Godkin lamented the loss of literature and academic influence represented by the growth of the daily newspaper, he recognized that the real power in the emerging market economy was centralized within the cultural capital of information distribution. Choosing to remain within the editorial realm of the public sphere, he held on to the critical commentary in the press as long as he could.

may soon be displaced by a striking rise in political inter/action as seen through YouTube debates; higher-than-average voter turn-out, especially among younger populations; and blogs kept by candidates and voters. Yet, 2004 presidential candidate Howard Dean and 2008 candidate Ron Paul have both used the internet to raise significant funds in support of their campaigns. But, like the newpapers of 100 years ago, this new type of communication is messy and difficult to control. Not like literature that comes neatly packaged between hardcovers with already internalized instructions for consumption.

François Lyotard (1997) suggested that

> universities and the institutions of higher learning are called upon to create skills, and no longer ideals. . . . The transmission of knowledge is no longer designed to train an elite capable of guiding the nation towards its emancipation [as liberal pedagogues and Habermas might have argued], but to supply the system with players capable of acceptably fulfilling their roles at the pragmatic posts required by its institutions. (p. 48)

He painted a depressing picture of adult education "a la carte," whereby a student can pick up the skills she needs while bypassing the critical thinking bar in the university buffet (or production) line (p. 49). He did leave us an important rhetorical out, if you will: "What is of utmost importance is the capacity to actualize the relevant data for solving a problem 'here and now,' and to organize that data into an efficient strategy" (p. 51). We can teach our students how to obtain the most effective information for a particular argument, formulate arguments with that information, and learn new strategies for analyzing and arranging. **We can teach students to use rhetoric *and* aesthetics, which, we argue, "allows one either to make a new move or change the rules of the game"** (p. 52).

Changing the rules of the game: New media on a creative <---> scholarly spectrum

In the vein of composition and digital writing studies, Goeffrey Sirc (2001) and Christopher Schroeder (2001) have both suggested examples of teaching students to produce texts that combine creative and scholarly purposes (e.g., collages and skits). Jody Shipka (2005, 2006) has also written about students producing popular forms of texts such as original music CDs and museum tours in order to learn critical and rhetorical skills associated with traditional academic literacies. Also extending the possibilities of academic literacies into multimedia projects, in *Writing New Media*, Anne Wysocki, Cynthia Selfe, Johndan Johnson-Eilola, and Geoffrey Sirc (2004) discussed texts as varied as video literacy narratives, soundscapes, websites, and collections of objects a la Walter Benjamin's *Arcades* project. Inherent in each of these assignments is an acknowledgement that students should approach learning academic literacies through ways of composing with which they are already familiar. In other words, students should—as Sirc (2001) and Schroeder (2001) and Hardin (1999) all insisted—be able to start their composition process through their own

topoi and commonplaces (Ball & Moeller, 2007): with what they already know. (We talk about students here because the example we use later started as a student project, but this argument serves faculty members equally well, as Wesch's example shows.)

In many cases, students' compositional commonplaces will be texts they encounter daily, which often means popular new media texts. By design, many new media texts like YouTube videos or Facebook pages combine different forms of scholarly and creative presentations. Here we are defining a scholarly presentation as one that employs the logic of linear arguments to persuade an audience. The most common association of a scholarly presentation would be the academic article or essay. In contrast (as is often the case) is the aesthetic presentation, which we define as the use of persuasive and emotional appeals made through multimedia. A common example of an aesthetic presentation would be a photograph, an animation, or a video with a soundtrack, for instance.

In another instance, we have pointed to Wesch's argument regarding Web 2.0 as made through words. But let us turn to the soundtrack for a moment. It is an instrumental piece with futuristic tones that matched the feel of cautious optimism in the piece. That's a persuasive use of an aesthetic element, the song. But we might also ask whether the sonic mode complements the linguistic, spatial, gestural, and visual modes in the video (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000)? Or, similar to how Allison Brovey Warner (2007b) argued in assessing the value of digital scholarship whether the form enacts the content (or is it vice versa?), we can ask whether Wesch's use of that particular soundtrack promoted or enacted his argument as effectively as it could have. Did Wesch, as Bump Halbritter (2006) argued in "Musical Rhetoric in Integrated Media Composition," use the soundtrack in ways that reflect the text's purpose, its thesis? We would argue not (see "A sidetrack").

A sidetrack about rhetorical effectiveness and peer-review of new media scholarship

The use of peer-review systems, in which feedback might have been provided about the soundtrack's lack of rhetorical effectiveness, is one of the critical elements that distinguishes scholarly work from popular work. We fully recognize the role that editors of literary journals play in shaping the work produced in those venues; but our understanding of the editorial process causes us to say that the process is not the same as peer-review. We are not assigning a negative quality to that process; in fact, we might posit that that process should be adopted more often for online journals that want to publish more new media work since such work, as we argue in this webtext, converges scholarly and creative purposes. We label Wesch's piece scholarly because of its obvious academic (linear argument) qualities and suggest that it is equivalent to the kinds of texts that students might produce in our classes (as the student example we discuss later will show). We will not digress further to discuss the impact of peer review on digital scholarship and only wish to bring it up here to remark on the popular nature of Wesch's text, which indicates that the lines between our assumptions of "what counts" blur with Web 2.0 work.

One cannot argue with the popularity—scholarly (as *this* text indicates in its extensive use of Wesch's piece) or otherwise—of Wesch's video. **Viewer hits for**

the video reached over 2.5 million less than a month after it was published. Writing now, a year after its initial publication, hits on "The Machine is Us/ing Us" have reached 4.6 million and, anecdotally, has circulated on every listserv we know of, which would never happen to an article or even a book. (Of course, the video doesn't make the top 100 all-time viewed videos list, nearly all of which are music videos, ripped copies of High School Musical, or advertisements for porn sites; Wesch would need to triple his hits to make the list.) Such rapid change in compositional possibilities—including the option for any of us to post videos (home or work related) on YouTube and receive 2 million hits in a month—indicates that academic literacies made public in a format that invites popular and scholarly critiques (as Wesch's video has) should be valued by the academy. McKenzie Wark's (2007) *GAM3R 7H30RY* (i.e., Gamer Theory), Mitchell Steven's (n.d.) *Without Gods*, and Noah Wardrip-Fruin's (in progress) *Expressive Processing* are similar examples of scholarship-gone-popular, by having been composed (to varying degrees) in the network of a blog-like interface complete with user comments on in-progress drafts. (In Wark's case, the comments, written by experts and non-experts alike, were used to revise the new media version of his book into a print publication for Harvard University Press. The same will be done for Wardrip-Fruin's piece and The MIT Press.) So as not to get distracted from our point: We mention these examples by respected humanities scholars to suggest that there are multiple possibilities of what can count as knowledge in our field. That is, if we propose to change our assumptions—by embracing the scholarly *and* creative, high *and* low culture, pop *and* academic texts—then new media can help us expand our understanding of and function in the world.

Reading the creative <---> scholarly spectrum: A new media example

To build on Wesch's argument for rethinking aesthetics and rhetorics in relation to new media technologies, we want to discuss a text that was designed by a graduate student in Cheryl's multimodal pedagogy class in Fall 2006. Robert Watkins' 10-minute movie, "Words are the Ultimate Abstraction: Toward Using Scott McCloud to Teach Visual Rhetoric" [80 megs] represents the kind of classroom-based composition that Hardin and others called for in order to bridge the academic and popular split in English studies. Quite literally, Watkins seeks to move new media production out from the underground of composition studies (quoting Sirc's work on punk) and into the larger department of English studies. His aim is to revolutionize the field of English; to, as Lyotard said, "make a new move and change the rules of the game" (p. 52). Watkins argued for the teaching of new media critical literacies by composing *with* new media. Form as content. In this particular movie (which is an early version; he later revised the piece as a peer-reviewed publication for *Kairos*' special issue on manifestos, forthcoming May 2008), Watkins started with an idea from Scott McCloud's book, *Understanding Comics*, and remediated it using all the

modes in which he deemed necessary to communicate his argument. Movie 1 shows a 50-second portion of McCloud's text as a visual and aural citation, on which Watkins expands to apply McCloud's semiotic lessons using new media.

Watkins' video succeeds as a bridge between high and low art-cultures, between scholarly and creative intentions, in part, through his soundtrack. It has three major movements, which use pop-punk songs, and a bridge, which Watkins authored himself. The first song, by the punk band Refused, is called "New Noise" and the lyrics, like the movie itself, set up a situation where the singer reflects on a stale music scene by singing, "How can we expect anyone to listen / If we're using the same old voice?" The loudness of the opening song catches readers' attention and proceeds to enact, as Halbritter (2006) would say, the video's thesis. That is, Watkins' use of "New Noise" drives the argument laid out in the first scene of the video, which sets up the subsequent scenes. Although the lyrics are unrecognizable to most readers, they were easily googled after seeing the album cover in the video. Reading the lyrics added a layer of meaning made through words that reinforced the sonic qualities of the music itself. This is not to suggest that knowing the lyrics is a prerequisite to understanding the author's argument. In fact, Cheryl had watched and appreciated the video about 20 times before googling the lyrics, only to discover the deep, rhetorical care that the author had put into each of the songs' inclusion, all of which enact his argument in addition to the other creative and scholarly moves he made in the video.

For instance, the opening song by Refused ends by lamenting, "we're not leading/ the new beat." During this part of the video, the soundtrack was laid under Watkins' voiceover. At one point during the opening scene, he argued that composition needs a revolution. Watkins quoted Geoffrey Sirc's (1997) article "Nevermind the Tagememics, Where's the Sex Pistols?" in which he argued that writing teachers should revolutionize their teaching by using punk rock lyrics as texts in their writing classes so that students can be more invested in their writing practices (n.b., the high/low convergence again). Watkins is then seen walking from a tunnel saying, "revolution comes from the underground." Thus, the following elements coincide:

1. the video of Watkins emerging "from the underground" to initiate the revolution,
2. the Refused punk-rock soundtrack-as-thesis (which calls for "a new beat," a new game in composition studies), and
3. Watkins' voiceover citing the person most recognized in digital writing studies for discussing the scholarly applications of punk rock (i.e., Sirc).

In the lead-up to that moment, the sequence and juxtaposition of these creative and scholarly elements converge in order for Watkins to argue for *and* represent the

need for rethinking the divisions between creative and scholarly texts in English studies. His argument is an elegant enactment of that need.

There are many moments in this movie that come together in similar creative and scholarly ways, including, for instance, the use of his second song, "Anything," by a band called MAE—an acronym for Multisensory Aesthetic Experience, which is indeed the feeling one gets from viewing Watkins' video. MAE's music and lyrics provide a scene filled with possibilities, which matches the purpose of the middle scene in Watkins' video. In that section, he offered opportunities for broadening readers' thinking about what composition studies can teach students. (Movie 1 is from this scene.) The third song—"Arc of Time (Time Code)" on the album *Digital Ash in a Digital Urn* by Bright Eyes—introduces the third and final scene of the video and asked readers in its lyrics to rethink their assumptions about life (e.g., "You can choose the high / Or the lower road"). In a continuation of his argument from the first and second scenes, Watkins underscores (literally!) that composition studies can reconsider what it emphasizes, which is much in the same vein that Wesch's video asks us to rethink aesthetics and rhetoric in a Web 2.0 world. Watkins' concludes the movie by allowing the Bright Eyes song to play out as readers stare at a blank screen, the credits done. The final lyrics we hear are, "On a circuit board/ We'll soon be born/ Again." Um, yeah, that's what *we* say.

All of the modes of communication he uses—academically styled voiceover, punk- and pop-rock soundtrack, original video and audio, and written text—fulfill his purpose to persuade us that visual rhetoric and multimodal composition (produced with digital technologies) is a worthwhile, academic pursuit. Moreover, Watkins' is able to demonstrate that multimodal composition afforded him topoi and commonplaces (the materialities of his argument) that tradtional, alphabetic textual choices would not have. Watkins' uses a popular medium to convey his academic purpose—often considered a contradiction in English studies—and he manages to entertain *and* persuade us.

Conclusion

Allison Warner (2007a), in her dissertation assessing webtexts as a form of digital scholarship for tenure and promotion purposes, remarked that "the ability to engage with the content of a text depends on the accessibility of the form" (p. 145). (Although it can encompass a wider range of meanings, *accessibility* here refers to the varying levels of ease<-->difficulty readers demonstrate when entering into or engaging with a text.) That readers have to navigate the form of a text, which must be accessible in order for them to engage with the text's meaning, highlights the fact that **form and content cannot be split**—even when the form seems transparent—because readers use both form and content to make meaning. When form and content converge and require readers to attend to both aspects of a text—what Wysocki (2004) would call an *overt design* in a new media text—accessibility issues often translate into issues about the assumptions we make as readers regarding *how* that

text should make meaning. New media texts make meaning with both form and content, as the example of Watkins' soundtrack indicated. But because he mixed creative and scholarly elements to convey his point, readers—especially those with print-based assumptions regarding scholarship—often react against the piece-as-scholarship, with the soundtrack being the biggest objection. As Warner said so succinctly, "Readers often do not value what they do not understand" (p. 145).

It is not surprising to us that the Modern Language Association's (2006) Report on Evaluating Scholarship for Tenure and Promotion indicated that in doctoral-granting institutions, 40% of departments, while saying that they count digital scholarship toward tenure, also say that they have "no experience" reading digital scholarship (pp. 45–46). In her dissertation, Catherine Braun (2006) recorded a narrative example of this paradox—in a department that accepts digital scholarship, Braun presented the department chairperson with a peer-reviewed, published webtext to evaluate (for the purposes of the dissertation, not for an actual tenure case), and the chairperson showed difficulty reading it, to the point of being stymied by the text's presentation because of its mix of creative and scholarly elements (pp. 182–183). It's not that the department chairperson would never be able to read such a text, we argue, but that s/he—like many readers in digital writing studies as well as those on tenure committees—bring a set of scholarly, print-based assumptions to reading new media, which masks (via the very same belletristic traditions that E.L. Godkin rallied for over 100 years ago) their ability to draw on phenomenological understandings of creative elements during that process. So the question becomes: Is it possible to change the assumptions readers have about what counts as scholarship to attend to the scholarly <---> creative spectrum that new media texts afford? Although we have offered a few ways that readers might span that spectrum when reading new media texts, like Watkins' (or Wesch's), we also know that much more research is needed to address, as Warner (2007a) said, the "trends in online scholarship...toward new media studies" in ways that allow readers to shift their assumptions from strictly print-based, or even webtextual-based work such as this piece, to "account for texts that make meaning in non-textual ways" (p. 148).

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