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Where Does Writing End?

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WHERE DOES WRITING END?

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This dissertation applies a mixed-methods approach to the question "Where does writing end?" in an academic context, specifically that of college composition classrooms on the developmental and freshman composition levels at a U.S. community college. In this dissertation, I define what an "academic" essay is, and then I use both post-process composition theory and reader-response theory to explore multiple ways to answer the question "Where does writing end?" in a college composition classroom by introducing metaphors such as "writing is an artifact." I challenge compositionists to consider all academic writing as an "artifact," both in the material sense and as a metaphor for writing. I also suggest that any artifact is an unfinished communicative act; this unlimited meaning is a conversation that has potentially unlimited opportunities to continue on in expanded or even new texts. These dual concepts, of academic writing as an artifact and of an artifact's infinite dialogic potential, can work together to allow for compositionists to move the focus back to writing in the composition classroom.

Within two differing composition classes I show the proposed application of two different theoretical positionings in a composition classroom: that of post-process composition theory and reader-response theory, as reflected in the potential interactions between professor and student writers. I also test out the metaphor of "writing is an artifact" within both theories in two distinct levels of English

composition: Preparing for College Writing 2 and Second Semester College Composition.

Finally, I provide suggestions on how the broader composition community might incorporate and support where writing ends and the metaphor of writing as an artifact in the teaching of composition, as well as in the literature and dialogues of our field. I suggest that academic conceptions of "composition" can be understood through a variety of metaphors, and that diversity supports composition much more strongly than a homogenized attempt at creating "one-way" or singular composition content. I finish this dissertation by taking a look at new processes being implemented at Northern Virginia Community College, which will have a drastic and potentially negative effect on the teaching of composition "by committee."

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CHAPTER 1

WHERE DOES WRITING END? THEORY-WORK IN THE ANALYSES OF STUDENT TEXTS

In this first chapter of my dissertation, I introduce and explore the question "Where does writing end?" in an academic context. I describe how the idea of a mixed-methods dissertation came about, and acknowledge compositionists, such as Michael Carter, who instigated my dissertation question with their own queries into writing's possible beginnings and endings. I also provide a context for exploring where writing ends in a postsecondary composition classroom through evaluation of composition faculty considerations of where writing ends, and through the uses of multiple methods and theoretical lenses with which to attempt to better understand where writing ends, including post-process composition theory, and reader-response theory.

This dissertation's main audience is professors who teach all levels of postsecondary composition, including developmental composition, freshman compositions, and other related composition courses. I write with my own peers in mind and ask questions of them regarding how well we know where writing ends for our students in the post-process location of a college composition classroom. Compositionists are teachers, of course, but we are, first and foremost, readers of our students' writing. We need to acknowledge how we influence student writing and how students potentially end or stop their writing assignments in our classrooms through professorial commentary and grading. As readers of drafts/unfinished texts, we have a lot of influence over the direction our students take in the writing of their work in our classrooms.

Introduction: Borrowed Ideas

Jay Bolter, author of the text *Writing Space* (1991), suggests that "all forms of writing are spatial, for we can only see and understand written signs as extended in a space of *at least* two dimensions" (11, emphasis mine). That space can be on a hard copy or even as a file stored on a computer. The academic essay, a text that compositionists interact with on an almost daily basis, is an example of this. It would seem, then, that writing could potentially end if there are specific, recognizable boundaries (two dimensions) to the physical space that texts occupy. Does writing end because the text has a final printed word? If we consider only two dimensions, then the physical space of the writing is indeed limited to the boundaries of the physical artifact of the page. But if writing begins not on a page, but, rather, in the writer's mind, it is not two dimensions that a text occupies but three. As Bolter discusses in his book about electronic writing spaces (which now form the majority of places students input their words to create academic texts), "the writer's memory then forms a continuum with the electronic writing space, as it previously formed a continuum with the printed or written page" (57). If we expand our concept of where writing begins, then we can also expand our conceptions of where writing potentially ends or stops. Writing space continues to be constructed and reconstructed in the minds of writers, as the texts they write are influenced by other texts, and in the minds of their readers, who can also borrow these ideas and take them to the page, expanding the very conception of what a text actually is. Thus, writing's boundaries seem quite arbitrary if they infinitely expand beyond the physical limitations of a page or electronic document into our minds and, through dialogic interaction, into others' texts.

My dissertation makes two main arguments: the first argument I make is that while written text occupies physical space, it has not concluded. As John Trimbur has noted, we need to imagine "writing as more than just the moment when meaning gets made" (196). As Trimbur states, these moments extend both much earlier than text on a page (as in the two-dimensional space that Bolter suggests), they also project forward in time to how a text circulates in the world. How these texts circulate (by interacting and inspiring other writers and other texts) is part of an ongoing cycle of intertextuality (Kristeva).

Writing is a part of the human dialogic, like an utterance that is part of a chain of verbal communications. A text's boundaries are temporary or artificial, if at all, because, as Mikhail Bakhtin suggests, all written utterances (texts included) are responses to previous utterances and are designed to be responded to in return. This is the very idea that Bolton and Trimbur suggest above, intertextual moments that are captured in a two-dimensional snapshot of what they could be in that version in that moment in time.

If texts do not end, how do I then use this information, this theory, to inform my knowledge of writing and my writing pedagogy? How can I conceptualize this information for my students to better help them write their own texts? In this dissertation document, I realize that the idea that writing does not end needs to be theorized via metaphor to make it more accessible to students. My second argument is that I have chosen the metaphor of "writing is an artifact" because humans find resemblance (according to Ricoeur) in both objects that are similar and different. I see resemblance between a physical artifact commonly discussed in archaeology and the texts created in a college classroom.

The metaphors that make sense to me are ones of anthropology. I owe this to initially majoring in anthropology and also working for the last 11 years as an editor for peer-reviewed anthropology journals. My experiences allow me to see truth in this metaphor, and I hope to use the metaphor of "writing as an artifact" to explain to students that writing does not end, and when writing does not end, that writing has value. It also helps that in the main theories that I explore here in this dissertation, post-process theory and reader-response theory, that "writing as artifact" works as a common metaphor.

How does this discussion of writing as unending artifacts benefit the composition field? My dissertation adds to the field because there is a paucity of texts on "where writing ends" in composition research and publication, whether in academic journals like *College English, Pedagogy, College Composition and Communication, Teaching English in the Two-Year College*, or even the *Journal of Advanced Composition* or in the materials we use in classroom instruction.

I want this dissertation to be a text that jumps right into this gap in composition studies. Through this dissertation, I do not expect to change the field entirely, but I do want to make connections with other compositionists in my department, and potentially through publishing and presentation of the materials here. Creating discussions on where writing might end (if it does at all) will benefit those teaching composition, who can both (1) clearly identify the theories they use to enhance their interaction with their students and who can (2) infuse their classroom pedagogies with new metaphors to emphasize writing's value as they reconsider what types of materials/artifacts we use to support the teaching of composition.

Inspiration: Where Does Writing Begin?

For me, the question "Where does writing end?" has come across my academic path in two separate but related ways. First, this question appeared in my work as a doctoral candidate studying composition theory at the Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP). For inspiration regarding choosing a dissertation topic, Dr. Claude Hurlbert (my director) suggested that I read Michael Carter's *Where Writing Begins: A Postmodern Reconstruction* (2001).

In *Where Writing Begins,* Carter remarks that, instead of writers making assumptions regarding where writing begins (as we can do, whether it is that a text begins with an idea, or with a topic chosen by a professor, in a dissonance, etc.), that beginning "is not a discrete aspect of writing, separable somehow from other aspects" (xv). Basically, writing is not a neat, compartmentalized practice but, rather, a messy and complicated communicative act. It is in the postface of *Where Writing Begins* that the germ of my dissertation topic is mentioned. Carter recommends a new theoretical research question for the composition community. After his attempts at discovering writing's beginnings, the time is upon us to discern the question "Where does writing end?" (209). Carter's ingenious conundrum, "Where does writing end?" is the question that remains unanswered for me, and one that I believe fills a gap in composition studies.

I have built upon many ideas that have started with Carter's text *Where Writing Begins.* In chapter 3, "In the Beginning," Carter points out that "all starting points are ultimately arbitrary, temporal boundaries of convenience that allow us to make sense of a process, though at the inevitable cost of misrepresenting it" (40). Thus, when Carter suggests that starting points are ultimately arbitrary and dependent on the context of the

writer and writing situation, I not only agree with Carter about beginnings to writing but also extrapolate this idea to writings' very many endings. Thus, if starting points are arbitrary, then ending points within any text are just as thoroughly arbitrary, depending on the variables that encompass the writing. Just as Carter notes that making sense of a process can misrepresent it, making clearly demarcated boundaries of an academic text, for example, can also misrepresent the many opportunities and directions students could go in the writing of their texts.

As Carter notes, as difficult as beginning a piece of writing can be, ending writing itself can also be flummoxing. I have probably rewritten this first dissertation chapter a dozen times. This is no exaggeration. Each time I think I have completed it, I perform what I promise myself is "one *final* read through." As a student writer, this academic text (a Ph.D. dissertation) will officially end when my dissertation director and committee approve it, or, alternately, when the seven-year timeframe to complete the doctoral program and dissertation runs out. Because the philosophical and composition community of voices is intellectually compelling to me, and because conversations with my director and committee continue to lead me in ever new directions on the writing of this text, I find it hard to end particular trains of thought, to limit sources, and even sometimes to stay focused on my main idea. If I had no time frame or pressure from other parts of my life, like my teaching or home life, I could continue to work on this dissertation indefinitely, thinking about fresh chapter approaches, even proofreading to get the "perfect phrasing" (which, of course, changes entirely depending on the day) in place. My writing of this dissertation might stop, but I believe it will never truly end.

My daily interactions with students and their writing have kept the question of where writing ends in the forefront of my thoughts. College students are generally required to write multiple texts for composition classes (not to mention all of their writing outside of a composition classroom in text-driven courses such as history, psychology, or business), and each student writer goes through individual processes to complete his or her pieces of work. Like myself, most students sometimes even apply different writing processes for different pieces of work (e.g., they will take time to work on a large essay but might procrastinate on a weekly homework assignment).

"Where does writing end?" turns out to be an exciting theoretical dissertation question because there is not just one answer to this question, but multiple responses even for individual students, making for hundreds, if not thousands of possible endings to this dissertation question. The answers will be contextual and depend on the cultural experiences of the author, the assignment (topic, length, research options), the comfort level of writing for each student, the amount of time given for each writing assignment, the style of the classroom (lecture-oriented, discussion-oriented, lab), the amount of interactive opportunities (like peer review and group work), what is going on in a student's personal life, and so on. Acknowledging all of these varying contexts indicates the overarching theoretical position I use in my teaching, my post-process positioning.

Mixed-Methods Research

In this dissertation I use multiple methods to discover where writing ends for composition students in two distinct levels of composition, that of developmental composition and second-semester composition at a community college in Northern Virginia. I perform empirical research on college composition textbooks to better

understand what content is currently being provided through supported textbooks in Northern Virginia Community College's many composition classrooms. Next, I apply two differing theories in the composition classroom, theories that come from significantly different ends of the English studies continuum: post-process composition theory and reader-response theory, to the texts and interactions I have with my college writing students.

I use the term *mixed-methods research* (Bryman; Creswell, "Mixed-Method Research: Introduction and Application," *Designing and Conducting Mixed-Methods Research*; Greene et al.; Tashakkori and Teddlie) to indicate that, in this dissertation, I perform both empirical research on local textbook choices of NOVA faculty (by reviewing the campus bookstores' required books lists for "Preparation for College Writing 2," ENG 3) as well as reviewing the published literature of the composition field (specifically, composition-oriented peer-reviewed academic journals) to find out how prevalent the concept of "where writing ends" appears or is discussed either in the textbooks used for a majority of composition classes at my college or in the research created and disseminated by professional compositionists. This empirical research informs my theoretical turn. As stated by Creswell (2006), "methods research involves both collecting and analyzing quantitative and qualitative data … The analysis consists of statistically analyzing scores collected on instruments, checklists, or public documents to answer research questions or to test hypotheses" (6). In the case of this dissertation, I review the public documents that represent the work of compositionists both inside the classroom (via the textbooks faculty choose and use) as well as the published articles that represent work both inside and outside the classroom space.

As Patrick Bizzaro suggest in his text *Responding to Student Poems: Application of Critical Theory,* "to read student texts differently, we must first determine how individual teachers, including well-known expert practitioners, use their experiences as writers in teaching students" (xiv). I have often heard the names "Emig" in conjunction with process, "Murray" and "Elbow" in conjunction with expressivism (although I always felt Murray could go either way), or "Said" as representative of "post-colonial studies," but what that actually means for classroom theory and pedagogy shifts depending on who mentions one of these English studies "greats." In Bizzaro's case, he focuses on poetry and applies a variety of theories, including deconstruction, reader-response theory, new criticism, and feminist criticism to support his goals in showing creative writing professors of poetry how to work with students through understanding professors' own sometimes disparate teaching positions and processes. In that way, writing professors "empower [students and even ourselves] to see texts—their own and others—differently, to devise a plan for their own writing not just from the perspective of author, but also from the point of view of a first reader who can see the text better by having been shown how to view it through various critical lenses" (7). In my case, my use of the two theoretical positions (reader-response theory and post-process composition theory in my proposed interactions with student texts) are the various critical lenses that will allow me to understand how the varying positions I could take as a writing professor affect students during the writing of their texts in my courses. Once I have this understanding, I can not only apply these theories (if they fit my epistemological understanding of what it means to write well academically), but I can also share my newfound knowledge with my departmental and field colleagues.

All the Contextualized Places Where Writing Might End

The second place the question "Where does writing end?" has come up for me is in my work as an English composition professor at Northern Virginia Community College (NOVA).[1] Nowhere is the question of where writing ends more relevant than for college writing professors, such as myself, whose job it is to provide adequate academic writing opportunities and guidance to my students each semester. Writers are not alone in their writing. Texts are usually written for an audience, and in academia that audience can be thought of us (1) the professor, (2) the writer's peers, and (3) "other" (possibly the "mock reader" of Gibson). First, the main objective for a written text is to display knowledge, and students do that in written form, displaying adequate knowledge to their professors. Students do this largely within the discourse conventions of postsecondary academia.

Cerebral Stopping Points

One way to conceptualize a place to stop writing is when the writer (or the reader, if in conference/feedback with the writer) signals that the content is complete. Either the writer or writer and audience (possibly in feedback or during a conference with a professor) feels that the writer has said all there is to say on the topic of the academic

[1] NOVA is made up of over 60,000 degree-seeking students in the Northern Virginia–Metro D.C. area. The college is broken down into six main campuses (Annandale, Alexandria, Manassas, Loudoun, Woodbridge, and Medical Education–Springfield); the main campuses also have four satellite campuses. In addition to these campuses, NOVA also operates the Extended Learning Institute, a distance and online learning component whose professors are affiliated with each individual campus.

essay. For example, there might be a multitude of possible content stopping points to any written text (say, on a topic such as the current U.S. Health Care debate), including:

- Having a student position themselves amongst (acknowledging) a problem (taking a side on an issue, such as arguing points "in support of health care reform").
- Addressing potential solutions to the health care crisis, acknowledging that an academic essay cannot cover every potential solution to such a dynamic and difficult issue, or
- Narrowing a topic from the bigger issue of U.S. health care reform to focusing on smaller issues of personal wellness and disease prevention, etc.

Content stopping points can be quite difficult to decipher for a student writer, especially if this writer writes without draft feedback or exhibits a lack of understanding of who their readers are (either real or mock).

Physical Stopping Points

Many writers might only acknowledge one end in writing, away from the content and with a physical act: that of the text's final character's strike on a computer keyboard. Technically, this might be the place where the physical text stops (as no more words by this author will be written on this document printout or in an electronic submission). However, this does not stop a teacher or commenter in their actions of leaving final comments and a grade on the text, another place the physical writing of this essay could end. This cycle of back-and-forth can go on ad infinitum. The student writer might take another pass at it; the teacher might recommend the work with the writing center and turn in another draft; the student might temporarily stop the paper here, but pick it up again in another class. This might be one rarely-spoken-about understanding of where writing

ends. Others might consider not the final strike of the keyboard to be the final physical act of this piece of writing, but the printing out of the file, or of turning in the text, or even of the professor's submission of a grade for the text. I never had a discussion with my own writing professors regarding where my writing stopped or ended; the assumption I made as a student was that my writing ended in multiple places: with the final grade of the course, with the last word typed on the page, and even with my professor's comments on returned papers. When I was an undergraduate and graduate student, there were many places writing ended as a student in academia; so much depends on the will or whim of my professors and dissertation committee. As a student writer, I have taken and continue to take my cues from my readers' interaction (and, somewhat, satisfaction) with my work as evidenced by both feedback and grades or "passes" from one stage of this dissertation project to the next.

For students in my composition classes, we skirt the direct issue of where writing might end with a discussion of "continuing" what seems like unfinished writing without explicitly regarding the discussion as one focusing on "ending" a text. Sometimes I am afraid to tell my writing students that they are done: that there is nothing left to do, even when it is a good text. I do not want to halt their creative processes when they seem like they are on a roll. Other times, I loathe telling students that their writing is not complete because, for the assignment and based on the student's current and previous work, they might never give me the type of text I am looking for. As much as I have seen exemplary texts in developmental classes, I have also seen underdeveloped or lethargic texts; texts of students who either cannot or will not perform at a level considered adequate for a passing grade. Whatever the reason, in my courses, I find that it is difficult to tell a

student when to stop their writing other than to make clear the course schedule, opportunities for conference, and the always approaching end-of-semester assignment deadlines.

What happens if writing does not end? It is important to acknowledge the two main forces in academic writing: the writer and the reader. While writing (esp. academic writing) does not happen in a vacuum, owing to a collaborative community spirit associated with borrowed ideas from sources, commentary through peer and professorial review, group assignments, study groups, and tutoring centers, authors take final responsibility for work done in their name. If a writer does not believe that their writing is finished, they have options. They can ask for more time from their professor; they can meet with peers or tutors; they can even turn in work they are dissatisfied with. They even have, on occasion, dropped a class to avoid submission. It seems fairly straightforward from the writer's point of view, even though each decision the writer makes is influenced by his or her academic discourse community. However, when a reader believes the writer's text is not complete, there are even more options but somewhat less power to influence *the writer's* text. The reader, a professor, for example, can request a new draft, conferences during office hours, work with peers or tutors, or a reflection with borrowed sources. Yet the reader generally cannot impose any text upon the writer that the writer does not want to incorporate in their own writing. So many students read professorial feedback on drafts, yet turn in a new version of an essay that has changed only slightly from the original and not in the way a professor, like me, recommended (Lakey et al.).

Post-Process Theory and Reader-Response Theory: How to Conceptualize Writing that Does Not End

Response via Post-Process Theory

A composition professor who supports post-process composition theory in his or her classroom has a wide variety of responses to helping students consider whether or not they have completed an academic text. Post-process theory is quite fluid, and compositionists who use this theory in a composition classroom note that there are "multiple, overlapping layers of context that constitute scenes of writing" (Vandenburg, Hum, and Clary-Lemon 5). For Peter Vandenberg, Sue Hum, and Jennifer Clary-Lemon, they break post-process theory into three functioning "convictions" or theories about how writing occurs. They suggest that "writing occurs through conversations and negotiations (relations) ... is shaped by material places (locations) ... and reflects the contingency of our beliefs and values ... thus compos[ing] identity (positions)" (9). Writing in my composition classroom is certainly a means of conversations and negotiations; is affected by the classroom space and the participants who must meet in that space; and also reflects the background, knowledge, and beliefs of all writers who interact in those spaces. Thus, for me, I do not specifically highlight one subcomponent of post-process theory to follow but believe that the understanding that writing is a highly contextualized space, and within that context there are competing and interlocking situations, personalities, timelines, and demands that are in constant flux. It is the writer's job to navigate these competing, interlocking, and sometimes incongruous conditions to find the best way to communicate on the page. And it is the writing professor's job to best support the writer

in this endeavor. Post-process theory acknowledges that these conditions exist in the hope of narrowing down or focusing the writer on elements within their control.

Response via Reader-Response Theory

Another way to interact with a writer on where a writer's text possibly ends is through reader-response theory. In reader-response theory, a composition professor, as a "real" reader, would not impose their traditional professorial feedback (grammar, syntax, demands for change of X or Y) on a student writer, but would, instead, turn into what Walker Gibson calls a "mock reader," a reader who "embark[s] on a new adventure in which we become a new person—a person as controlled and definable and as remote from the chaotic set of daily life" (1) by virtue of engaging in the writer's text. Separating ourselves from our professional credentials and experiences requires that we "assume, for the sake of experience, that set of attitudes and qualities which the language [of the text] asks us to assume, and if we cannot assume them, we throw the book [text] away" (1). What is so interesting about reader-response theory is the way in which professors can interact within students' texts in new, profound ways.[2] However long reader-response theory has been around, it is a concept that modern compositionists could try in their classrooms through feedback on growing drafts of texts, and it is a place where writing ends can be explored in a creative way.

Gibson also suggests that the idea of the mock reader is "an artifact, controlled, simplified, abstracted out of the chaos of day-to-day interaction" (2). It is the very idea of the artifact as a metaphor within the writing space that fuels this dissertation. The idea of reader-response theory creating artifacts within the writing and reading experience (in

[2] Reader-response theory is not a new theory, Gibson having published this article in *College English* in 1950, and the heyday of reader response criticism taking place in the 1980s.

this case, on the reading end of the spectrum) is appealing in how wide a scope we can find archaeological metaphors in the work of a composition classroom, and it allows the idea of "artifacts" to work in a variety of ways to help push the student writer toward a greater understanding of what an artifact can encapsulate—the transfer of ideas across both space and time in tangible, physical objects and in the abstract spaces of our thoughts and memories.

Where Does Writing End in the Composition Field?

Compositionists rarely acknowledge the question "Where does writing end?," instead, we tend to focus on issues of more importance to us, such as asking questions like: "How many drafts are important for writers to work with?" or even "What is the best approach to teaching argument?" It is not that compositionists do not believe in endings; it is that they rarely publish research, textbooks, or promote their individual ideas regarding the subject so that discussion on the topic can continue within our professional ranks. Composition textbooks highlight a myriad of ways to help students brainstorm and begin texts, but rarely do they offer discussions on ending texts. In addition, academic literature in our field has not, over the last seven years, published very many (if at all) articles on ending writing (as can be documented in a quick search through the Educational Resources Information Center [ERIC database] and JSTOR, including a search through journals such as *College Composition and Communication, Pedagogy*, and *Teaching English in the Two-Year College*. Thus, "Where does writing end?" becomes a question appropriate to explore further in the context of this mixed-methods composition dissertation.

An inherent belief in progressive phases to writing (brainstorming, drafting, revising, and proofreading, to name a few) in composition classrooms (often recognized as "process" instruction; see esp. Perl 1980; Kiniry and Strenski) offers compositionists plenty of observable opportunities to watch student writing as it develops. Yet it is not only within a process paradigm that phases of writing can be observed. In process classrooms, students have general, compartmentalized heuristics that guide them from one task to the next, building an academic essay or other collegiate text along the way. The end to writing would theoretically fit into the final "revision" and "proofreading" sections prescribed in the process setup.

In a post-process composition classroom, however, a student's writing structure is much less rigid. Post-process professors acknowledge that processes are certainly involved in writing; the difference is that for each writer, the process can and does change at any given time (even on similar assignments) because of a variety of factors, including student preparation, knowledge of the subject, time to complete the assignment, levels of feedback, and so forth. But for both types of instructors, a composition classroom will offer plenty of opportunities for observing how students write and where they might end their writing, thus providing ample opportunities for writing professors to come to a greater understanding of the variances and problematics of honing in on an absolute "end" to an academic text.

In the case of reader-response theory, writing might ends when a reader cannot put on the mask of the mock reader: "There is a great variation ... with which one can describe the mock reader, but he is always present, and sometimes is so clearly and rigorously defined as to suggest serious limitations on the audience" (Gibson 4). When it

becomes impossible for a real reader to even consider putting on the mask of the mock reader, the text, for the reader, at least, has stopped. For the writer, perhaps it can go on with help from other real readers' feedback.

Over the course of a semester in a college composition classroom, most students, as instructed by their professors, use multivariate processes in their academic writing: they choose a topic for an academic assignment if one is not already chosen for them, they perform research, they write drafts, they possibly obtain feedback from a professor or in peer review, and at some point along this continuum of start-to-finish, they submit their work for a grade. Thus, the calculations of observable opportunities to witness the processes of writing in motion seem nothing short of innumerable. I have hundreds of opportunities to research and observe where writing ends in my writing classes over any given semester, including within in-class writing assignments, during professorial and peer review, with students in conferences and office hours, and in the commentary students provide during in-class discussions of their academic writing assignments. And I have students at varying levels of "academic" writing competency (i.e., I currently teach both "developmental" writing classes and advanced freshman composition classes each semester). The opportunities to discover where writing ends for my dissertation have emerged through unique writing situations with writing at different academic levels over and over again as my students (and myself as their professor) became more aware of our disparate writing processes, strengths, and, as the case may be, weaknesses. By investigating where writing ends through post-process theory and reader-response theory, I hope to come up with a multitude of ways to address difficulties students have with

ending their texts by looking at the texts from both the position of the writer and the reader.

Where Does Writing End in Classroom Material Artifacts?

One of the ways we in composition can explore where writing potentially ends is with the material artifacts that professors use in composition classrooms. One of the most common classroom artifacts is textbooks, which exude an authority (i.e., this books represents what "I" know as a composition professor and what knowledge I want to impart on my students), and they are used in the vast majority of composition classes at NOVA.

With Textbooks?

Across all six NOVA campuses, there are currently 44 sections of ENG 3 being taught (and just as many sections of ENG 112) as of fall 2011. For ENG 3, there is a wide variety of textbooks that are used in the composition classroom. But, like the current sections of ENG 3 that I teach, not all professors use textbooks, yet many do. The table below highlights the composition books that are currently being used by NOVA composition faculty at our six campuses and online through the Extended Learning Institute (Table 1).

Table 1
Composition Texts for Fall 2010 in ENG 3 at Northern Virginia Community College.

Text Title	**Essay or Process-Oriented**	**Content-Specific**	**Handbook/reference**
GiG: Americans Talk about Their Jobs		Careers	
Glenn/Gray's Harbrace Essentials (1st			*Glenn/Gray's Harbrace Essentials* (1st edition)

edition)			
Mosaics: Writing Essays in Context	Different essays in context presented/modes		
Hacker: Rules for Writers			*Hacker: Rules for Writers*
Langan: College Writing Skills	Writing scenarios/avatars/ "the traditional essay" is emphasized/modeling		
Mosaics: Writing Paragraphs in Context (4th)	Different paragraph-writing support		
At a Glance Essays; Grammar to Go: How It Works			*At a Glance Essays; Grammar to Go: How It Works*
Successful College Writing	Purposes in writing in college/preparation/process		
Freedom Writers' Diary; Successful College Writing	Purposes in writing in college/preparation/process	Stories from the classroom—students' writing	
English Brushup Writer's Reference (6th)			*English Brushup Writer's Reference* (6th)
Learning Outside the Lines; Guide to MLA Documentation		*Learning Outside the Lines: Students with Disabilities* (stories)	*Guide to MLA documentation*

As you can see in Table 1, of the 14 books listed on the NOVA bookstore website as required texts in ENG 3, four of them are sample-essay based and predominantly process-pedagogy styled textbooks: these types of texts range from *Mosaics: Writing Paragraphs in Context* to *Mosaics: Reading and Writing Essays* (both by Kim Flachmann) to *Successful College Writing* (Kathleen T. McWhorter). Only three of the texts are not specifically "how-to" textbooks. Those include books about students with

learning disabilities, *Learning outside the Lines* (Jonathan Mooney and David Cole), *The Freedom Writers Diary* (The Freedom Writers and Erin Gruwell) and *GiG: Americans Talk about Their Jobs* (John Bowe, Marisa Bowe, and Sabin Streeter), a text about career opportunities. The other five texts required in NOVA college classrooms are predominantly grammar or mechanics reference tomes.

What do these books say about where writing ends in NOVA ENG 3 classrooms? The answer is: not much. In my face-to-face and hybrid ENG 3 classes, I do not use books and have not for at least seven years. Before that, when I was an adjunct, I was co-opted into ordering for my students Donald Murray's *Write to Learn.* I found the book helpful but at times too expressivist (e.g., Elbow 1968, Macrorie, Murray) or for the contexts of the classes I was teaching. My work as a compositionist, like the expressivists, focuses primarily on the writer/author of a written text; but at times I diverge from expressivism when considering the value or power of outside audiences (readers, intended audiences) on the modification or continued growth of a text. Thus, once I was hired as a full-time English professor, I eschewed textbooks entirely for any class in which I meet with students personally as I found that there was no textbook that sufficiently matched my theoretical positions in a composition classroom.[3] So it is that I do have experience with many of these composition textbooks, from exposure as a supplement or in the textbook packages that so often get delivered to me from book publishers.

[3] Full disclosure: while I have full academic freedom to use or not use books in my face-to-face and hybrid ENG 3 classes, I have been forced into providing "any textbook" for my purely online ENG 3 by the administration of the Extended Learning Institute. It seems that students cling to texts when they do not have constant face-to-face interaction with their professors, and administration are loathe to give up the "old ways." This is obviously one problem with online course delivery.

Here is what I have found within them with regard to the question: "Where does writing end?" Flachmann's book *Mosaics* is organized with the following sections: Part 1 "Reading and Writing: An Overview," which includes sections on "The Writing Process," "Preparing to Write." Flachmann states that "Thinking is the best way to start a writing project" (41), which would quite possibly align her in Carter's "Choosing and/or Narrowing a Subject" category for where writing begins because Flachmann expands on "thinking" by stating that "thinking means exploring your topic and letting your mind run freely over the ideas you generate" (41). I wonder: is there no thinking for Flachmann before the subject is assigned? Yet there is a clear place for Flachmann on writing's beginnings. Where does Flachmann suggest that writing ends? Well, for Flachmann it is in the conclusion of a text: "The concluding paragraph is the final paragraph of an essay. It draws your essay to a close, giving readers a sense of closure. That is, readers feel that all the loose ends are wrapped up and the point of the essay is clear....The conclusion is where you finish your essay, leaving your readers with a sense of closure or completeness" (80).

So Flachmann's text does mention endings, but it is hard to surmise what type of ending this actually is. Extrapolating from this short paragraph, the end to a piece of writing is within the organization of an essay, in the main section of text and before any supplemental sections like works cited or appendices. Clearly Flachmann suggests that writing ends within the content or message emanating from the student writer, one that provides "closure." The trouble is, she does not go any further with suggesting how this can be done. Her instructions after this paragraph state: "Now that you have learned what makes up a complete essay, go to mywritinglab.com and click on **Essay Introductions,**

Conclusions, and Titles. ... When you understand these concepts, check your level of competence by completing the **Recall, Apply, and Write** activity in mywritinglab" (80). Flachmann relies on the book and her authority as teacher-author to state, basically, "writing ends in X location." Then she expects students to be able to immediately display knowledge of how all writers end texts by practicing on sample essays.

For Flachmann, beginning writing happens in a black-and-white space for writers: those who *think* about their topic. These students generally already have one assigned to them. But what if a student is given free reign on choosing a topic? Where would writing begin for them? In Sondra Perl's narrative essay "Facing the Other: The Emergence of Ethics and Selfhood in a Cross-Cultural Writing Classroom," Max, one of the other English teachers in a graduate course Perl taught in Austria, suggests frustratingly, "there is no point in writing if the teacher does not give you a topic. I do not mean to be rude, but this activity seems like a waste of time" (173). For Max, writing would not begin without a prompt. This would, of course, influence how he teaches composition and how his students start and stop their academic texts. This interest in how my English-teaching colleagues see the boundaries of writings beginnings and ends makes me reflect even more seriously on how *I* see where writing might begin and end. This question is important for two main reasons. First, how I understand how students choose to stop writing tasks informs my own teaching and the support and advice I provide to students who are desperately trying write successful academic essays. Second, the information I get from students about the sheer variety of their writing experiences can only modify and evolve how I engage students in developmental and freshman composition classes. The more experiences I can recognize as issues or examples surrounding how students

stop (and revive) writing tasks can then be passed from me back to my students. Both the students and I benefit from this knowledge and interaction, shared through narrative.

Flachmann has drawn her line in the sand beyond free topics and with *the topic* itself. Not so surprisingly, her specific discussion of where writing ends entails one short paragraph on page 80 of an 800-plus page text. *Mosaics: Reading and Writing Essays*, from my research on developmental English composition textbooks, is representative of texts that faculty use to support their teaching and their students' writing. It "places" teachers into particular theoretical camps, even if their teaching style contradicts the message Flachmann provides.

Mosaics: Reading and Writing Essays is representative of the other process-oriented textbooks used in NOVA classrooms. None have distinct "ending" discussions, but, rather, statements that imply "this is where it ends. Now do it." And it should not seem so surprising. The composition (and textbook) community is great at beginning discussions on writing. Generating ideas and "prewriting" exercises abound. But as Carter suggests, we have not really and in any satisfying way discussed where writing ends simply because it is not considered a necessary topic to explore in composition classrooms or in the literature of the field.

Without Textbooks?

Without textbooks, how do we as compositionists help students stop or end their pieces of academic writing? Another approach to take in the teaching of composition, somewhat regardless of a professor's theoretical positioning, is to enter into a classroom with no assigned textbooks. There are many reasons for doing this: not finding a textbook that is theoretically aligned with what a professor wants to teach; the costs of textbooks;

the "everything and the kitchen sink" approach to textbook production, whereas even if the text was aligned with a professor's theoretical and pedagogical principles, there is just too much wasted text to justify the text's purchase for the course.

Many compositionists (see Bleich, "In Case of Fire, Throw in [What to Do with Textbooks Once You Switch to Sourcebooks]"; Gale and Gale; Rose, "Speculations on Process Knowledge and the Textbook's Static Page"; Spellmeyer; Winterowd, "Composition Textbooks: Publisher-Author Relationships") approach the teaching of composition by critiquing and/or not using composition textbooks but, rather, by focusing on the interactions between professor and students that one can find opportunities to discuss where writing might end.[4] By not using textbooks in the class and paying close attention to my interactions with students, I was able to hear one particular student ask me how to help him end one of his essays. John (a pseudonym), a student from one of my ENG 3 (a developmental composition class, labeled as "Preparing for College Writing 2") courses, and I were working on a draft of his first chapter (a narrative text that explained his writing project goal—to choose the right major) within a three-chapter writing project. He had created a list of three questions at the bottom of his growing draft. His third question asked, "How can I get together an ending?" John and I had been working together on his "80 percent draft," a phrase that I coined to suggest to students that I would like to see a student's writing underway, but writing that was by no means perfect when each student presented his or her draft during our frequent writing conferences. I have used the "80 percent" figure over the last few years because I find that it takes away the stress of page requests (e.g., "What do you mean, you want me to

[4] This does not mean that the professor eschews using materials in the course. Many "bookless" professors I know create materials for their students and link to useful, free texts on the web as additional resources.

have five pages by now?") and lets the students determine how far they think they have come without making a prematurely "finished" declaration.

I thought for a while about a worthy response that I could give John that would help him in his quandary, but that would also, selfishly, show that I "knew" exactly what to do to help a student who is struggling with completing a writing assignment. This is what I eventually came up with: "I think once you have most of your data here, you can probably find a great analogy, detail, or story to tie it all together. That is how I'd do it, but everybody's different." I realize now how woefully inadequate this response is simply because I could not articulate a better answer, one that would have clarified John's subject matter in more detail.

Before exploring where writing ends through a more specific focus on post-process theory and reader-response theory, the questions I feel I would ask him go somewhat like this: "Do you feel you have introduced another point on how tough it is to find a job in today's job market? Do you have any undiscussed motivations regarding your quest for finding a career purpose?" or "Where should readers go from here?" I would want John to both be comfortable with the content he provided his readers, and I would also want him to think about what his readers should do with the information he presented. Yet I hope that by digging into post-process theory and reader-response theory, my answers to students' questions regarding their writing become even more thoughtful and less defeatist that my actual interactions with John had been, or even what I now think I would ask. I know that I struggle with wanting to be the absolute authority in my writing classes, primarily so that students feel that they are getting their money's worth in my course, that they will learn from my experience, and that they develop trust

in the work they do in my class. It is not altogether entirely for them that I want to know how to better respond to students' writing queries. I also want to feel successful in the job that I do and know that my place is in a writing classroom.

Until now, I have run my composition classrooms without a focus on where writing ends. Thinking in a post-process way, there are many contexts to consider when thinking about where writing might stop. The first context would be student comfort with a text. Do they feel it is ready to submit? The second could be professorial and peer feedback: has the student answered the important questions that might have been asked by readers? The third question could be logistical: what are the time constraints placed on the writer? Did they have enough time and space to complete the text to their satisfaction? Other ways of interpreting whether a text is complete depend on how one "sees" a text's finale: is it in the mind of the writer (or reader), or is it on the page of the document submitted?

The approach to the question of "where does writing end?" in an academic space will vary according to the theoretical positioning of the professor teaching the class *and* of the students doing the writing. How do they see writing? Where are the boundaries of texts to them? For if we do not know the answers to these questions, we will not know how to approach both composition professors regarding how they envision (or teach) where writing ends, and we surely will not be able to help writers approach an end or stoppage to writing if we do not know where their boundaries are for a text.

It is probably a great benefit for students to have professors who can bring to their composition classes different conceptions of writing's beginnings and endings. However, I noticed in the somewhat puzzled responses I received that this type of theoretical

question is not asked often (or often enough) to composition faculty. There are many reasons for that: some might not have had that much composition theory preparation in their masters programs (I know I did not in my literature MA program), and some are not active in reading the professional literature in composition because they are quite active in literary theory, with literature degrees, while they teach a majority of composition classes. The reasons are varied, but I sense a need to expand this conversation further (to create these ongoing conversations) to infuse interest in composition theory and what it has to offer in the department where I teach.

Thus, compositionists need to use available theories when working with their students to discover where writing might end for them. To find these theories, we should theorize the classroom, test out certain ways to interact with students, much like Patrick Bizzaro did when he tested out multiple critical theories on his poetry students. That is what this dissertation attempts to do: explore the opportunities that composition (even literary, if it can be a benefit) theories provide in our writing classrooms.

Composition as a field has been nothing short of "borrowing" or interdisciplinary in the way we take ideas and theories from disparate other fields (such as anthropology, sociology, philosophy, and psychology; see Klein). This is in part because we are a somewhat young field within the academy (unless you count "rhetoric" to be our beginnings, which I do, although at first rhetoric was an oral practice). Composition arose as a collegiate concern in the 1800s (see Connors, Crowley, Howard, Trimbur), and, as it grows, it continues to develop and change, mostly in part because of the work of compositionists theorizing about the work they do within their classrooms, in addition to being active in the composition community by attending conferences, reading field

publications, and encouraging discussion and debate within our departments. “Where Does Writing End?” is a question that can get these discussions rolling within classrooms, within departments and across all interdisciplinary academic spaces, and it is the focus of this dissertation.

Reflections on Writing Chapter 1

While I freely acknowledge that I will never be done with Chapter 1 of this dissertation, I feel somewhat like I am coming full-circle with this chapter, as contradictory as that might seem. (In my mind, coming “full-circle” suggests repetition and also completion.)

About a dozen drafts ago, I attempted to follow Carter when he reviewed many composition textbooks on the market, looking to find a unifying theory regarding how one should teach where writing begins in composition. Of course, there is no unifying theory. I then found myself concerned about the usefulness of this topic in the “real” world where I work: my department. Nobody seems to be discussing it (therefore, I found a “gap,” one of those really important aspects to a dissertation). But, still, nobody’s talking about it enough to generate a “oh, you mean, what so-and-so said in the last issue of College Composition and Communication *or* The Journal of Advanced Composition”*), so that I also feel left out in the gray space of composition theory. Until I started my dissertation work, honestly, no one in my department seemed to be interested in discussing composition theories. Many faculty were/are literati; many are quite into pedagogy (without much of a theoretical focus other than “I believe in the writing process,” as if that is the magic phrase that establishes enough credibility to teach composition); many adjunct faculty I have spoken to are so enamored with process*

instruction that they consider writing beginning with a topic and ending when the last word is typed on the page or when it is printed out. (At least there was some variety in the "completed responses.") I do not feel that I have had many people in my division, or even at my extremely large college (with six English departments), to talk to about this project that were as interested in composition theory as I am.

Now I think that is the point. I am inspired because I can ask theoretical questions that make my colleagues wonder, and even if my peers would not have thought to discuss it originally, they quickly responded to my query, inviting debate and response. What I am learning is that even though my peers and I do not have the same research interests, we do have composition in common. We desire to write and help others write. And, once engaged, the discussion flows. This is what theory needs for those of us in composition studies; those who are willing to draw the discussions in the direction of our peers and hope the discussions do not end, at least not for a long while. I cannot expect that these discussions will spur a plethora of conference presentations and multiple articles from my department colleagues any more than they can expect me to be as passionate as they are about their diverse interests in our shared field. Perhaps it is my job to go farther afield (to publications and conferences) to find those who will sustain these topics with me. However, these discussions can certainly invigorate a department that likes to compartmentalize one's work under the heading of "academic freedom."

CHAPTER 2

INVESTIGATING *WHERE WRITING ENDS*

Introduction

My dissertation investigates the question "Where does writing end?" in an academic context, most specifically in composition classrooms at a community college in Northern Virginia. I was first introduced to this theoretical question by the compositionist Michael Carter as he explored writing's beginnings and endings in his text *Where Writing Begins.* Carter's question in the postscript of his book asks "where does writing end?" (211). In attempting to address Carter's challenge, there have been two major concerns for me thus far in this dissertation: (1) How do I evaluate whether writing ends for college composition students and for the professors who guide them in their writing? and (2) How do I more clearly emphasize the potential longevity of texts to college writers without creating more distraction or confusion in their writing? For my first question, I will apply two quite different theoretical approaches in the teaching of where writing might end: post-process composition theory and reader-response theory. These theoretical approach asks compositionists to consider different criteria in the evaluation of student writing and their texts and, thus, should give me varying perspectives on how theories can be used to support student writers. For my second question, I will use a new concepts and metaphors in the composition classroom: "writing is an artifact" and "artifacts are unfinished communicative acts" seem like intriguing heuristic strategies, just as long as these concepts do not confuse students or dissuade students from continued introspection in their writing. Creating functional metaphors that adequately explain where writing might end (or might not end) has been one of the most difficult tasks of this dissertation.

The chapter that follows highlights my experiences as both a composition professor and a doctoral student in theorizing whether writing ends. I realize that how I would answer the question of where writing ends is different from that of other professors whose horizons allow them to see writing through differing lenses of writer, reader, community, and agency. My early college experiences as an anthropology student and, over the last dozen years, anthropology journals editor guide my use of metaphors, just as similarly unique metaphors come to student writers with backgrounds in the military, in rural or urban life, and so on. It is the same for me with anthropology.

Two theories will be explored in-depth in this dissertation: that of post-process composition theory and reader-response theory. I acknowledge up front that I am much more familiar and view my work in composition classrooms as somewhat "post-process." In post-process theory, both agency and context inform our writing, and my contexts as a composition teacher, composition student, enthusiastic anthropology editor, and science geek inform my acts of agency (the actions I take as I apply these labels to myself) and suggest to me that these particular contexts are exhibited according to my past and present as an academic writer, as surely as my students' writing is influenced by both what they are interested in, what they wrote about in the past, their current life experiences and how they use their own agency to display their myriad contexts. As Deborah Journet states, "Whatever else we know about the composing process, we know that it is complex, and we know that it is multiple. Research has helped us see that composing has both cognitive and social dimensions and that composing processes differ according to both individual ability or experience and rhetorical situation or context" (96). Journet highlights the sheer complicatedness of writing situations, and this has made

me reflect on my own. My dissertation is a complex writing situation that would be attempted in a different way if written by a different compositionist who might not be interested in anthropology but, instead, by physics, modern warfare, or even the sociology of poker. Certainly, I would write this dissertation differently if I was inspired or influenced by Bourdeau or Marx instead of Carter, by other composition texts that I have not yet read, by classroom experiences I have yet to have, or through doctoral interactions with classes and committees taken with different professors at another university. Thus, this dissertation comes about through both my own cognitive dimensions (what I know about writing, how I see the world of writing, how I interpret the act of writing, and how I have use this knowledge to teach writing) as well as through continued scholarly research. There are social aspects of reading and interacting with others in the field of composition and beyond in English studies and even the social sciences (through varied literature/publications, conference presentations, etc.) as I read, discuss, and write on topics that expand "where writing ends" beyond my own initial composition considerations.

However, post-process theory is not the only one that I will use in an exploration of where writing ends for college composition students. Following the practice of Patrick Bizzaro, I then employ differing theoretical frameworks toward student writing by considering reader-response theory as a second theoretical positioning so, as Bizzaro states, "to empower them [students] to see texts—their own and others'—*differently*" (7, emphasis added). I would like to extrapolate from this idea that compositionists challenge ourselves to see texts differently by considering and applying differing theoretical positionings to how we view student writing, even if those theories go counter to our

instincts. Getting out of a composition comfort zone and borrowing beyond (and into) literature has been something that I have resisted for many years. If, as Bizzaro states, "the chief purpose for a class of writing, poetry or otherwise, is to enable students to determine meaning as readers and writers (including readers of their own writing) in various ways" (13), then this is the approach I take with this dissertation through the exploration of multiple theories to discover where writing might end for students, one that I find fits me comfortably (post-process composition theory), and another that I have never considered before (reader-response theory). Maybe testing reader-response theory in my composition classroom can put to rest whether borrowing or using literature materials in composition classrooms is more helpful than hurtful to composition students.

Where Does Writing End?

In my experience teaching community college composition courses, writing does not end, even if it temporarily stops. If "stopping" a text means that the student will not work on their text any further in that version, then, for the student at least, that text might temporarily stop with the last word he or she typed. The physical or electronic text is just one location of a text's "pause." For example: texts can also temporarily stop when a student prints out, e-mails, or posts the text file for submission: that version has certainly stopped. Sometimes a text's "stopping" happens repeatedly, even when writers think they had already finished the assignment, such as when the writer happens to see an error on the page: the writer then might attempt to fix the error, preparing the text for submission a second (or third, or forth) time. The reworked file is a newer version of the growing text.

Sometimes, students who see these errors in their supposed "ready" texts shrug their shoulders, or let out an exasperated sigh, or one of many other common acts of frustration, but they let the sleeping dog lie and stop the text in its latest paper or file version (for now). Students might want to change the text (so that it grows and evolves in their minds), but some will not bother printing it out or submitting it again, letting the "error" or modifications go as just one more thing that they could have changed had they had more time, more energy, more help, more focus. One student of mine defined "ending" writing as the place where the writer's energy was sapped dry, and where the writer was unwilling to engage further in the interplay between herself, her peer reviewers, or myself as her professor. Yet the student only stopped the writing at one point along a continuum of places from which to start and stop, gauging that this stoppage was sufficient for what she needed to do with the essay based on the parameters of the assignment and what type of grade she was looking for. Sondra Perl (1980) describes this process as the recursiveness of writing: "throughout the process of writing, writers return to substrands of the overall process, or subroutines (short successions of steps that yield results on which the writer draws in taking the next set of steps); writers use these to keep the process moving forward" (364). In chapters 4 and 5 I will ask students about these pauses, to find out if there is a way forward through the many roadblocks that tend to crop up during the writing of academic texts.

Other factors influence when a student might stop writing an essay. This might mean that the student submitted the essay, got back a grade he or she did not like or was not expecting, and either the student writer (or sometimes a professor) then asked for a rewrite, starting the physical text back up again. I have had many students in composition

courses over the years ask me repeatedly for more time or for another consideration of a text. Depending on the professor, this might be allowed. A lot of it depends on the writing situation (Did the student put in sufficient effort? Did an emergency get in the way of a good text? Is there a real opportunity for a student to learn from another round? Did they plagiarize?). All of these factors influence the decision for a professor regarding whether or not they will let the student keep working on the text in the context of resubmission and a new potential grade. Students who are allowed to keep working on a text are conscious that their text has not ended. But it many cases the text, while it has stopped because a student got a grade they accepted, still exists in their subconscious, ready to be referred to in a myriad of other writing contexts: other upcoming papers for the same professor; a reminder to "spell-check" a resume because of previous negative feedback, even the creation of an e-mail or a bad review on "Rate My Professor" all pull from the same conscious or unconscious writing situations that surrounds one of the academic essays in question.

The potential longevity of an academic text can often be found in the groundwork that writers, their peers, and their professors put into these academic relationships within the classes in which the texts are written. As mentioned above, negotiation of a grade is a tactic that students take that potentially extends the text's lifespan, but this negotiation does not start with the final grade if the professor provides commentary and feedback on multiple drafts of the growing text. In draft work, the student writer and professor become partners in the longevity and success of a piece of academic writing. In my classroom, the student has "author's choice": that is, anything I say to them is, in the end, a suggestion (of course, some suggestions are much stronger than others), but the student

has the right of refusal to make changes (although refusing to make a particular change that would affect meaning or clarity would negatively affect the student's grade).

Of course, the texts that students construct with others like professors would be very different texts than the ones they would construct without those interactions. And students can negotiate with professors successfully. It has happened in my courses before if a student has a compelling reason for going in a different direction on a draft or in requesting a resubmission. For example, in one of my ENG 3 classes I had a student, Kevin, spend 11 weeks out of 16 writing about his academic plan for a career in architecture. As we began the final few weeks of class, Kevin decided to completely drop his semester-long topic and, instead, write about his gambling addiction. He negotiated this change in topics (and distancing himself from our previous months of work together on a different writing project) by explaining that he realized what he *should* be writing about, and how writing about his addictions might change his life more than his somewhat indifferent (his description) writing on his career plans. In this case, I not only allowed Kevin to switch topics but I also met with him weekly to provide what support I could so that he could have some audience interactions with this new topic. But, barring that, students have taken the negotiation tactic further (toward actual dispute) in the event that drafting and final submission do not get them the final result they wish for: they might protest their grade (e.g., on a paper, or in a class) with English department administration in the hopes of keeping the physical text active long enough for a better grade.

Once the decision is made to expend no further energy on the essay, a student text could stop because they are disappointed (or, alternately, elated) at the outcome of what

they have generated on the page, and so they do not go back to the current printed or electronic file of text at hand. If the student writer were allowed to modify the text further, the text is consciously resuscitated and, thus, lives on during the modification and new grading process because there is always potential in the commentary and feedback for further interaction between writer (student) and reader (professor, peers, etc.) to create new meanings and continued dialogue. Realistically, however, once a student gets his or her essay back, most quickly flip to the grade and, at least in my experience, discard the rest of the commentary. I have questioned many classes of students to find out whether feedback on essays does any good. Do they read it? Do they want to talk about it (letting the text continue to establish a dialogue between writer and reader)? Generally, no. Feedback, then, is not a guarantee for continued material growth of an academic text. But that feedback can have a subconscious effect on future texts that have been inspired in part from the current text.

My students have stated that their sheer anxiety over grades inhibits many of them from absorbing marginal feedback, which causes them to prematurely stop their writing on a text, and I completely understand this emotion. Fairly recently I have had the same experience in a course on Second Language Literacy that I took at IUP in the summer of 2007. I could barely contain my dread as I went to pick up my semester-long journal, and I did exactly what the others students did above: I skimmed lightly over the marginal feedback I received to find out my final journal and course grade. That was a few years ago and I have yet to do what I promised myself: take the time to sit and really absorb my professor's thoughtful commentary. While the writing I did for that class is still in the back of my mind (and while I still have my professor's comments in a folder in my filing

cabinet at home), this journal–text is part of the proof that texts do not necessarily die—even if that one for Second Language Literacy is on life support.

While it might seem as if there are places where writing can end, especially if the writing is stopped by the student and not readdressed in text form, the reality is that those pieces of writing inhabit our subconscious and can come back at any time to re-influence their writers. For example, if I never go back to my literacy journal, the contexts surrounding the writing of that text remain in my subconscious, either tapped without my awareness or tapped into not for the content itself but for the situations surrounding the writing, which certainly influence texts like this dissertation. It is hard to imagine how deeply texts affect our lives (and some more than others), but it remains that texts I wrote as a child, as a freshman in college, and as a doctoral candidate influence, in differing ways, the ways I imagine writing's potential to live on indefinitely in the mind of each writer *and* reader of each text that is created.

Writing can live on both through the content of the text as well as the thoughts and actions we have when thinking about writing a text, actually writing a text, or reading another's text. While I cannot remember the topics of most of the writing I did in college, the circumstances surrounding those writing texts are fresh to me to this day and influence how I envision writing "living on" beyond the words and into the form, the frame, even the outcome of a writing situation. For example, there was one incident with my Brother word processor when I was a freshman at Florida State University. At one point in the writing process, the text I had been working on was 11 pages long. I remember being quite proud of that essay, both in the sheer length of the academic text and by what I wrote about. During a marathon writing session on that essay, the word

processor shut down, and I lost the draft. When I got the processor working again, there was no indication of the essay that I had been working on for a week or more. In frustration, I stomped around my dorm room, cried for a few minutes, did about 10 seconds of half-hearted hair pulling, then took a deep breath and re-started, letting the ideas of the previous iterations inform my newest version. Some of the passages from the original text must have made their way into the newer version, and new ways of framing similar ideas would have appeared as well. The text was not lost, but it was modified based on my circumstances. This experience has not left me, 19 years after the fact. Unfortunately, I have no recollection at all regarding what that paper was actually about or even the final grade I received on it. I have combed my folders of old FSU papers to no avail. And no disks I have are compatible with the software the Brother word processors used in 1990 and 1991. Odds are great that I will never be able to retrieve this text in either electronic or hard-copy formats, and so the potential of that essay to live on *in that version* has most likely extinguished; yet the writing situation surrounding this text is still alive and well, and it influences me both in the writing of this dissertation and in how I see myself as a writer (getting back on the horse after a fall, not losing my passion for writing, etc.).

Writing does not end when particular variables—interest in continued dialogue, requests for a resubmission, the borrowing of the text by others, even tapping into our subconscious—are present. As William Covino suggests, "writing [is] a mode of *avoiding* rather than *intending* closure" (9). Each time we write, we present our texts either to readers in the world, or, at the very least, acknowledge the texts within ourselves. We strive for dialogue, and with dialogue the writing does not end. Any text

can reappear when we make connections and borrow from our work or see in the work of others ideas and images that bring us back to previous texts. We avoid closure, as Covino suggests, by the very act of writing and sharing our writing with others, even if it is a more mature version of ourselves at a later point in time.

As Carter suggests in *Where Writing Begins*, there is no clear, finite beginning to a text. But he does emphasize that there are beginnings, which are different places to consider where texts overlap and continue. A text or an idea will not come from out of nowhere; experiences, influences, and context all provide opportunities for a many textual beginnings. Within all of these beginnings are communicative interactions. As Dobrin states, "every moment of communicative interaction is unique" ("Paralogic Hermeutic Theories" 140; see also Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*). These moments are unique because each reader and writer brings with them a set of experiences and contexts that shape their interaction with each text, providing new interpretations and commentary that might not otherwise have been suggested had another participant been part of the dialogic. The uniqueness of these communicative moments allows for the potential in new paths that the writing can take at any one place in time. So not only does a piece of writing have the potential for different beginnings, it also has the potential for many potential stoppages and restarts depending on the contexts of the writer and readers.

Why is there a potential longevity to writing (academic or otherwise)? If there is any opportunity for continued work, discussion, and negotiation, the process of this dialogue between writer and readers creates great potential to modify a text, thus making it morph into ever-new communications. In the academic sphere, these communications are part of the dialogic chain that continues classroom conversations, which can appear in

the form of an academic essay. Just like beginnings, stoppages in academic writing have everything to do with the context of the myriad players in the composition classroom. For example, how a professor conceptualizes different processes of writing for his or her students can have an effect on how or when students decide to pause and stop a piece of writing, just as the actual student writer's own writing actions determines any temporary break in the continued life of a text.

While academic writing has the unlimited potential to continue to communicate, composition classes have a finite structure. They begin on a certain date: At NOVA, classes last 16 weeks in a typical semester, or 12 or 8 weeks in accelerated semesters. Their frames are much less porous than that of an academic essay. Instructors give deadlines and at some point in the process, grade papers. For the majority of students in this situation, the grade is the "final word" on the text. Realistically, then, the life of an academic text is much like that of a worker bee. The material lifespan of a worker bee is just a few months, the same as the length of an academic semester. Students work on concepts and ideas that come to fruition in the academic papers that they create in those classes. There is potential for writing to continue to exist if the writing is in a form to be understood (legible and coherent), has content that appeals or repels a reader into response, and is accessible.

Generally, once students finish a class or get a paper grade back, they stop working on a text. There are cases, however, when the essay is not a worker bee but a queen bee, with a much longer and more exotic lifespan. The essay can be a queen (continue to materially thrive, that is) when an instructor interacts with the student paper in a new setting. For example, I have used previous student texts from many semesters

ago in current classes, allowing those students from 2004 and 2005 to have their work continue to take part in the grander dialogic of my course and to influence the work of my current students. The student essay can also be a queen bee if the student takes the ideas out of my writing classroom and into another venue, like a new writing class or a job task. If the student continues to work on the ideas and the content from the text worked on in my class, its physical text continues to thrive. Finally, there are times (not so much for undergraduate students, but certainly for graduate students and others in academia) when one's writing influences others enough for it to be "cited" or borrowed and kept alive in the scholarly texts of other readers. These connections change the ubiquitous academic essay into something more, something alive that has the power to create even new texts with its content. In this chapter I have "kept alive" the work of Carter, for example, so that he and I together speak to my audience.

Concepts in Describing Academic Writing: The "Utterance"

I look to Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the "utterance" to support my view that writing is a complicated, interactive, and easily influenced process of thoughts and translations. As Bakhtin states, "where there is no text, there is neither object of inquiry nor thought" ("Toward a Methodology for the Human Sciences" 281). And in these thoughts are unique moments; while the cacophony of influential voices surrounds a writer, the writer creates unique writing situations by the sheer variety of layers to this dialogic. The thoughts of the writer mingle with the ideas the writer has gleaned from other sources, as well as from reflections and commentary by readers of the text in question. These layers create "a new link in the historical chain of verbal communication" ("Toward a Methodology for the Human Sciences" 284). Academic

writing is certainly part of this ongoing chain of communication. In my own experiences, I hear the echoes of passages from bell hooks (*Teaching to Transgress*) and Rosemary Joyce (*The Languages of Archaeology*), among others, not just within this dissertation, and I carry over these ideas into my composition teaching. I absorb Joyce's ideas, and her voice blends and merges, adding to Bakhtin's "new links in the historical chain of verbal communication." At some point our own academic influences become part of what we know about the world and how we pass that epistemological knowledge down to our students.

Bakhtin states that "any monologic utterance, the written monument included, is an inseverable element of verbal communication. Any utterance—the finished, *written utterance not excepted,* makes response to something and is calculated to be responded to in return" (Volosinov 72, emphasis added). Students write academic essays (as I write this dissertation) because they are often required for a passing a class or for a degree once classes themselves are complete as part of a thesis or dissertation. Student writing assignments are generally a response to professorial prompts; for example, I have asked my students to respond, at some point in either ENG 3 or ENG 112, to a variety of prompts, which include the following: "Write an essay in which you debate the validity of twin testing"; "For today's pop quiz, answer the 5 questions that are listed on the white board"; "Go to the testing center and write a short essay on a hot topic in medicine"; "Prepare a 1-page handout to go with your final class presentation on your goal-setting project"; and so on. Student academic artifacts are part of the academic writing experience, especially in college composition classrooms. Students are expected to respond to professorial prompts (the "something and is calculated to be responded to in

return"), and they must perform writing at a particular "academic level" to pass from one assignment or class to the next. These student text responses are what Bakhtin describes as a "chain of speech performances" that are calculated for interaction by readers.

Using Metaphor as a Heuristic

I have used many metaphors in this dissertation thus far: I describe writing as an artifact, artifacts as unfinished communicative acts, even academic texts as worker or queen bees. The possibilities of metaphor use in theory making seem limitless. This limitlessness is what makes the open-endedness of metaphors a great fit for a dissertation that suggests that writing does not end but extends indefinitely through the potential of each writer and reader. Metaphors are especially powerful in knowledge-making and sharing, considering that we all see the world in different ways and would use metaphors contextually, create unique meanings. As Ricoeur asks,

> Are not newly invented metaphors just those metaphors that add to this storehouse of commonplaces, this range of connotations? It is really not good enough to say that the properties of a word at a given moment in its history have perhaps not yet all been used, and that there are unrecognized connotations of words. We ought to say that there may be connotations that "wait, so to speak, luring in the nature of things, for actualization—wait to be captured by the word ... as part of its meaning in some future context" [97; cf. Beardsley 300]

Both metaphors, on a smaller scale, and texts (which can be filled with metaphors) represent spaces of potential meaning that extend beyond the writer to

anyone who has come into contact with them. All one has to do is interact with the world to make connections (and create new metaphors) or interact with a text to build and expand on the ideas therein. Both metaphor on a smaller scale and texts on a larger scale are unfinished communicative acts, of possibilities inherent in present and future communication.

Ricoeur poses an important question for any study that uses metaphor so blatantly: "What effect does the use of metaphor achieve?" (84). In this dissertation, I use a metaphor to replace students' general conceptions of writing as just "documents" and, instead, to see writing as "artifacts," something embedded with an inherent message, identity, and value. Ricoeur suggests that "to 'metaphorize' is to see *resemblance*" (23), such that one item or idea resembles another. That resemblance creates a natural mental connection between the two objects or concepts. In making this connection, my goal is to establish a value to an academic artifact such that an archaeologist would an artifact found at an excavation, full of the promise of potentially lost communication newly found, of glimpses into the lives of the writer/inscriber. In this way, I hope to connect academic essays and archaeological artifacts for a few reasons. First, artifacts connect one culture to another, and they intrigue humans immensely. It is no surprise that movies like *Alien* or *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, or even popular fiction like Dan Brown's *The Lost Symbol* play into a collective subconscious that is interested in lost, forgotten, or alien/foreign cultures via the artifacts that they leave behind. Entertainment and education are derived from learning about these other peoples through the things they created.

As a composition professor, I see value in having students study all kinds of artifact-writings, especially those of the scholarly kind. I also want my students to see that their writing is important enough to "live on" to become part of a grander dialogic with not just academic communities of the classroom but also in the wider world, the way that artifacts do. Many of my students complain that their writing in composition classes is useless, that they "won't do this sort of writing" after the class is over. While I know this is not the case with most of them (in that they will do more academic writing in future classes), I know the frustrations with struggling with what seems like alien writing concepts. This is where the artifact came into my consciousness. For most of us artifacts *are* alien objects; they are rare and they are sometimes strange, and they belong to a group and time that can be very different from our own, not unlike a student who steps into a developmental English composition classroom and tries to master the art of academic writing after years away from school or bad writing experiences in high school. Adapting to these strange experiences and learning about new cultures (be it one from a thousand years ago or a cultural institution that one has not had a part of) mimics how an archaeologist uncovers, deciphers, and shares knowledge of the artifacts they discover. Thus, my choice of metaphor "writing is an artifact" is used both to show resemblance between items in a culture and between humans spanning both time and cultural or physical distance.

Of course academic essays and artifacts have quite a bit in common: they are both material objects that are inscribed and encapsulated with meanings meant from writer/inscriber to audience. They also communicate primarily through symbols that

represent spoken language. Metaphors can and do allow connections to be made from both similar objects and dissimilar ones, supporting the idea that we can communicate more effectively and creatively by showing these connections to our students in the hopes that metaphors inspire them to see the world with fresh eyes and to more dynamically infuse the resemblances they find in their worlds right into their writing.

Academic Writing as an Artifact

Both students and compositionists can be beneficiaries of metaphors in a composition classroom. The metaphor that I explore in this dissertation is that "academic writing is an artifact with great potential longevity." Depending on the student writer's word choices and specific terminologies, the framing of the topic, how they understand their audience and how they use research (Where do they go to get it? Who is a "credible" source to them?), compositionists are in a convenient place to view students in academically contextually dependant writing situations. By thinking of academic texts as artifacts, compositionists can delve into student-written artifacts to find out who influenced the writer (Who are their sources? their parents? their friends? a professor or even a sports figure?); what the writer meant to say (Do they have a thesis, stated or inferred?); and whether or not they convinced their audience (What grades and feedback on the hard copy or e-file can support the "success" of reaching their audiences? As readers, were we convinced of what they were saying?).[5] Student voices can speak long

[5] I consider a physical definition of the term *artifact* on physical and electronic documents (which take up physical space on hard or flash drives or in the cloud), instead of Michel Foucault's definition of *artifact,* which is an examination of all physical texts of the past in order to clarify present actions and processes. One of Foucault's terms that would be more applicable to this dissertation is *archive,* "the collection of all material traces left behind by a particular historical period and culture" (O'Farrell). Compositionists can then examine the academic *archive* to understand the conditions within academia at earlier points in time, which I will discuss further in chapter 3 of this dissertation.

after their texts are graded, which is a benefit to both the students and the compositionists who work alongside them; this is the power of the academic artifact. Even if these texts are not read, for some of these students they will remember either the text itself or the writing situation and build upon that experience in new texts, in additional thoughts, or in new actions inspired by that text.

Artifacts represent a place and time the work at hand was created. For an academic artifact's creator (such as myself), these documents bring up memories of not just the content but also of the actual writing of the text—what it was like to "slog" or "fly" through the creation (one of many potential, temporary versions) of a text. For example, I have an archaeological record of my own academic writing. I have found many of my old academic papers buried in the bottom of boxes in the back of my spare closet, and these texts immediately bring me back to a scholastic setting, reminding me of what I was required to write on the date provided at the top left margin of the paper. With this archaeological record of my own writing, I can "dig back up" texts for inspiration on a new text or simply to provide a trip down memory lane. The significance of this to my dissertation is that my own archaeologically "dug up" academic texts influence the writing of this text—parts of those conversations, whether through the content displayed or through the processes of writing them, are now borrowed and considered, allowing those old texts to take part in the dialogic of this current text.

Using the metaphor of "writing as an artifact" enhances how I see student struggles and successes within college writing classrooms, and this metaphor of writing as an artifact might make my future work with student writers more successful, especially if I can use it to recognize how to anticipate particular writing issues that my students

display. For example, here is feedback that I gave a student recently regarding a piece of writing he did on the implications of domestic violence in health care. This feedback represents a portion of a written artifact that a student, Jesse, and I created together as part of an assignment he wrote within one of my ENG 3 (Preparing for College Writing 2) classes a few semesters ago. In response to his text (which is itself a response to an assigned reading, Claire Burke Draucker's "Domestic Violence: The Challenge for Nursing"), I said to Jesse:

> As you finish your response, you might want to consider how you can restate the main problem of domestic violence as you see it: that even those who are tasked on to help a victim, such as nurses and doctors, also do not report their own victimization within domestic violence at levels close to their patients. The real problem, it seems, is an overarching fear of reporting, no matter a person's knowledge and education on the subject of domestic violence. *How can we hit on your excellent point in closing*?" [emphasis added]

The emphasis added above highlights an issue I noted in the student's text, that I felt he had left the ending of his essay unfinished. The significance of this quote is that I continue the dialogic with the student through feedback in the margins of his text, which represent a dialogic that spans beyond the student and myself to the article we were reading. This would not be as much a model response as a place to delve into my understanding of how I interact with students' academic artifacts. This can also be seen in Draucker's original text as she expands on the dialogic created by her informants in the article, both nurses and victims of domestic violence.

My interactions with student's texts vary (within similar drafts and across differing assignments), and my comments to students will vary depending on whether I am giving written or verbal feedback (see further Ferris; Graves; Haswell). My written feedback appears in electronic and hard-copy drafts, depending on the parameters of the assignment. And the types of feedback, certainly, can affect students in different ways. I have observed that in verbal feedback situations, students have an immediate opportunity to expand on my comments or questions, and they can ask follow-up or clarifying questions, helping their writing develop. Written feedback, however, can leave a longer-lasting impression on the student writer by signaling very specific places (esp. in the margins) in which the writer should direct their attention to their texts, and there is also a clarity in a written comment that potentially could be lost in the dialogue of verbal conversations. With both types of feedback, suggests Shelley Peterson, "Students feel a greater commitment to improving their writing when they have the autonomy to decide whether or not to incorporate the feedback in subsequent drafts. … Students should always feel that they may use the feedback in their own way—that the feedback is suggestive, rather than prescriptive" (3). Students then have to make informed choices on how to interact with the feedback that an instructor provides them, and it is in these choices that we see their writing grow.

Within academic artifacts, borrowed conversations between writers in composition classes are formed along a continuum of borrowed or shared conversations, representing acts of intertextuality (Kristeva). In this case, my comments reflect back my student's text within the dialogue of the response itself: In my response to Jesse I suggest that fear is perhaps what drives people away from reporting on issues of personal

violence. Not only are the student and I conversing about the topic itself (domestic violence), but we are also dealing with issues close to an academic writer, that of making a clear thesis, and of being convincing through our use of details. Specifically, in this case I focused on how this student could potentially end his text. The main action of this dissertation, then, will expand on my own conceptions of where writing might end for academic writers, and I build on discussions that I have joined by reading Michael Carter (*Where Writing Begins*), Sondra Perl ("Understanding Composing" and "The Composing Processes of Unskilled College Writers"), Mikhail Bakhtin (many pieces related to "the utterance"), Barbara Gleason ("Self-Reflection as a Way of Knowing"), Susan Miller ("Composition as a Cultural Artifact"), and Derek Owens (*Composition and Sustainability*), and many others.

Archaeologist Rosemary Joyce states that "artifacts—as past utterances—were not monologically authored by their crafter, but rather were shaped and dialogically constituted by the assumption of the active understanding and participation of the addressee (for example, those who would interact with them)" (71). Joyce also suggests that archaeologists can learn quite a bit by using an interdisciplinary approach to the study of archaeology, quoting Roland Barthes that "[a] text's unity lies not in its origin, but in its destination" (Barthes 148, qtd. in Joyce 71). As this concept applies to fields as wide-ranging as archaeology and literary studies, it also applies to compositionists who can conceptualize the idea that a text's value is not just in the mind of the writer but also in how a reader's audience reacts and interacts with the text in question. For college composition students, writing has to transcend just satisfying the self so it makes an impact on others (in the most obvious case, to the professor evaluating the text).

For writers, even for myself in the multiple drafts that I have put together for each chapter of this dissertation, there is always another time to stop, another thought to add, another revision to attempt and another reader to consider. These distinctions suggest that writing only ends arbitrarily and temporarily (Fraiberg; see also Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*; Barthes; Joyce; Kristeva) and exists infinitely in a state of intertertextuality, highly dependent on the interaction of both the text that influences writers and the impressions and feedback we writers get from our audience.

Community interaction (such as the feedback I get in the margins of my dissertation text drafts, in e-mails, and through phone conversations with my dissertation director) influences what a text might morph into in upcoming versions. This dissertation might be a work with my name in it, but it is not wholly my own, not written in a vacuum. Following Joyce, I have to consider and reconsider my destinations as I write through this journey. A thoroughly different version would appear if I had no draft feedback or if feedback provided in different locations in the text. Thus, in the case of this dissertation, and as is the case with my composition students, who write drafts yet get feedback from peers, family, and professors in process, "writing is always social" (Fraiberg 172), fraught with interruptions and collaborative additions, modifications, and deletions when writers react to previous text as they create new texts. For example, the feedback I have received throughout the writing of this dissertation has been eye-opening in that I continue to want to diverge from much of the comments I initially receive. I struggle with asserting my own pathways of exploring where writing ends (see the end-of-chapter 2 reflection for an example of this with regard to Bakhtin and "borrowing") while operating within the knowledge that directors have the knowledge to get us Ph.D.

candidates through this process while at the same time lamenting the text that gets deleted from the newer versions. It is a constant struggle to anticipate professorial comments. I continue to imagine what it is like for my students if I struggle this much.

Examples of Written Artifacts in the Community College Classroom

By deconstructing academic texts, below I highlight six main types of written artifacts that appear in college composition classrooms (while there can be more types, these are the most common that have come across my desk, my computer, my classroom, my professional mailbox, and/or in our academic division's office. These artifacts appear in both hard copy and electronic copy formats (as many of my own classes are taught through a wide variety of delivery systems, including face-to-face, hybrid, and fully online environments). At times, these materials will overlap and some can appear in more than one category. Any piece of text is an academic document, from notes written in three-ring binders to exam essays. The most common classroom artifacts include (1) the ubiquitous academic essay, but any hard-copy textual work done within the purview of an academic environment has the power and potential to be an academic artifact; (2) electronic texts that are not only generated (i.e., saved as files on one's home computer or flash drive) but also submitted in electronic portals like Blackboard, WebCT, or even via e-mail; (3) research that makes it into both student papers and classroom discussions as borrowed sources; (4) any material created or obtained for classroom use by a professor, including syllabi and schedules, handouts, PowerPoint presentations, books, and other reading materials required; (5) out-of-class communication between professors and students, including e-mail, texts, or questions posted in a message section in a classroom web portal or even a comment left on a professor's blog; and (6) college materials that

support or inform classroom activities, including course content summaries, library MLA handouts, writing center feedback, the college catalog, etc. Each of these artifacts can be found in college classrooms, and they represent the people and times of that actual location, even after years of disuse.

Student writing is the most prevalent form of academic artifact. Of course, teachers and college administrators also do "academic-style" writing, but the most important writing with regard to this dissertation study is that done by students in composition classrooms. This is a value judgment, of course, a judgment constructed out of both my experiences as a student writer and as a compositionist at a college that is already redefining what composition courses are based on a predetermined set of essays, including exit essays. Of the myriad types of student writing that can be found on college campuses, the academic essay is a very common textual academic artifact (esp. in a composition classroom), but any work done for an academic grade has the power and potential to be an academic artifact. Academic essays come in all shapes, sizes, and with varying purposes. The Center for Writing at the University of Minnesota defines *academic writing* as a "standard American argumentative essay" with "standard fonts, margins, and indentations," the importance here being both frame (an essay) and structure (which looks exactly like the Modern Language Association style) (n.d.). While this is a fairly limited definition of what academic writing is, in my experience, especially working with both new and experienced writing faculty, approximately 50 percent of my discussions about the "academic essay" involve the standard research/thesis construction.

And W. Ross Winterowd states in the opening sentence of his article "Rediscovering the Essay" that "The essay is—and, for reasons that the following

discussion will advance--should be--the central genre in composition instruction" (121). Winterowd's argument in his article is not that the academic essay has become a ubiquitous symbol of composition (and collegiate) studies; rather, he suggests that the formality of the academic essay is problematic. What seems to be the common denominators in what "academic essays" are have to do with purpose (a text that argues a point, defines an issue, or explores "themselves and their worlds" [Winterowd 121]) and form (MLA style, academic documentation, etc.).

The following is a detailed list I have compiled of many different types of hard-copy academic artifacts that can be found in a college composition classroom that include, but go beyond, the standard academic essay:

1. Hard copies of generated classroom texts from students include:
    a. Drafts of student essays submitted to instructors are very common academic artifacts; in addition, other artifacts are my own writing as both a professor and graduate student, written when I was an undergraduate and graduate student, housed in boxes in a spare closet; student essays left in both of my ENG 3 classrooms this semester, cast-off texts on a long shelf at he back of our department hallway, dustily awaiting pickup from students and that have professorial feedback (some have actual grades, and others appear to be drafts that have been aggressively red-lined for grammatical and mechanical issues by a very frustrated instructor).
    b. Borrowed texts in a current student essay include the following: Sometimes students want to continue a thought or a topic that they

started in a previous class (e.g., “this was an idea I started discussing in a paper in another class that I want to continue…”); more common types of borrowed text come in the form of citation and reference of outside (secondary) sources that students use to support their argument. For example, in my own academic writing I use Michael Carter, Deborah Journet, Mikhail Bakhtin, Rosemary Joyce, and others in the beginning of this chapter as borrowed sources.

c. Student annotation can be seen as an academic artifact. Sometimes these notes appear in the form of writing journals; other times, I assign “note taking” as a way to teach annotation and intertextuality within assigned readings to students.

d. Quizzes and tests taken are written artifacts, but especially so if the quizzes or tests require more than a short-answer response. Other, related written artifacts include: cheat-sheets or index cards for presentations.

e. In-class writing exercises are yet another form of hard-copy academic artifact. These can be done in group form or individually, and they can be graded or just performative in-class work or preparatory out-of-class work.

2. Electronic copies of student work on in online class portals: Electronic portals such as Blackboard (web software that acts as a portal to student work) or in saved Word/.doc files are academic artifacts; in addition,

electronic artifacts encompass Web 2.0 tools generated for or discussing the course, including: blogs; wikis; Twitter responses; HTML-coded websites; iTune U or Wimba recordings; YouTube videos (e.g., NOVA has a YouTube Channel), and so on. are all material artifacts. Examples below include:

   a. Archived copies of all electronically submitted work, which readers can access months and years after initial submission.
   b. Current work (the plagiarism of copying one accessible student/web file and appropriating it as one's own) can be retrieved through archived course content websites or off of servers.
   c. Writing over one's old papers to save time on naming, format, and reference styles.

3. Research appears in both student papers and classroom discussions and includes:
   a. References (which can include images such as photographs, charts, tables, text translations, etc.) and in-text citations in a student paper.
   b. Hyperlinks embedded in electronic texts.
   c. Embedded video/audio or images borrowed from other sources.
   d. Discussions/notes regarding real world writing/books/materials from outside sources either required as readings in the course or as supplemental sources of data that have informed the instructor or student and that come up in classroom conversations.

4. Faculty syllabi and course handouts: Syllabi and course handouts are reusable text (reprinted/recopied) and are often used across semesters and modified when needs arise. All materials that professors present to the classroom represent work done in that class context, including feedback provided by a professor on a hard copy of a text gives a classroom artifact a multilayered dialogue. Writing on a chalk or white board is a final common classroom textual artifact that is shared by both professors and students. While professors do the majority of on-board writing, there are plenty of examples of in-class exercises in which professors “hand over” the board to their students. This is especially interesting as an academic artifact because while it can be erased and potentially lost, remnants and versions of this can be saved in the notes taken by students and the daily class outlines created by professors in preparation of class. What is even more interesting is that if the notes were written on a Smartboard, these texts can actually be saved electronically in Smartboard Notebook software or printed out for hard-copy use. The improvisations of professorial and student chalkboard writing can now be preserved as academic artifacts.
5. Professorial/Student communication through e-mail, message boards, and instant messaging/texting are academic artifacts.
6. 6. College handbooks, catalogs, course content summaries, counselor or advisor materials, and writing center handouts are all supplemental

> materials supported by a college that can appear and influence work done in a college composition classroom.

In academia, both students and professors are inundated with academic artifacts. The goal for students (and faculty) has to be, then, to decipher which artifacts hold the most value for students and to emphasize these artifacts in the composition classroom. For example: in academia, an academic essay is much more valuable than, say, a text message or an e-mail. Thus, students should prioritize their academic essay writing so that they get the most value for the work they do, especially in a grading and promotions context.

Compositionists should reinforce that what students write is valued and can continue to benefit them in both conscious and unconscious ways as they grow as writers. These academic artifacts have power; they can enhance a community's understanding of the history of people and places, and they can continue to speak especially if discussed, questioned, and responded to. In this way, I hope to share these ideas with students that their artifacts are tangible evidence of the work they did at a time and place (e.g., Northern Virginia Community College, ENG 112, fall 2010), and that these artifacts are a commodity in the academic sphere. Academic artifacts represent student writers as inhabitants of the world of academia, attempting (and quite often succeeding) to communicate in what sometimes seems like an alien landscape of required formats, strange phrasing, and academic polyphony (the act of blending and incorporating the many voices, positions, and opinions of others into one coherent document).

Student writers attempt to modify their academic writing into something distinct from their everyday real-world communications; more often than not, what they create

for us in composition classes are academic essays, which are a swift departure from their lives surrounded by Facebook updates, text and instant messaging, e-mailing, and the text scroll that inevitably appears at the bottom of nightly television newscasts. Certainly, instructors need to come up with a way of instilling more value on an academic text than on the other texts that students create on a daily (or hourly) basis. This prioritization of the academic (if only in an academic context) will not only support academic writing in general—students who see value in their academic work will treat it differently than they treat a text message from a friend)—but adding this value (in which I attempt to do in chapters 4 and 5 as I acknowledge that students' artifacts are never-ending texts) will also differentiate it from "fast food" written communication that surround students on a seemingly never-ending basis.

Conclusion

I have spent the last few years debating with my dissertation director, Dr. Claude Hurlbert, that I had never been asked about endings in classes, and that this was why I felt the need to write this dissertation. At those times in class or in Dr. Hurlbert's office, I can distinctly remember him subtly suggesting, "but haven't you? I certainly have." Had I been asked by a student where their writing ended? Maybe it was not in the phrasing that I expected but nonetheless, was the question asked? And for a while I refused to see what I thought did not exist. Then I received the clarity that Dr. Hurlbert speaks about as student after student came to me with questions regarding stopping their texts. Each student might not have called it "ending," specifically, but the issue was there all along. Dr. Hurlbert was right: I was just wearing blinders. Instead of students asking, "where does my writing end?" they would ask:

"There is nothing else for me to do in this, is there?"

"Can I have more time? I just got stuck and this part of the paper is throwing me off."

"Does this part of the text even fit in with the rest? I was reading it and it doesn't seem to flow, and I can't turn it in like this."

"It's done, but I don't want to give it to you."

And, then, finally, "How do I end this essay?" and all of the previous questions came into focus, like somebody who finally gets the right eyeglass prescription—the feeling is that the world is crisp and new and that there is much that has not been seen that is finally visible. Those "ending" requests and questions had been there all along, just not packaged in the form that I would readily recognize or expect. Through the exploration of my experiences as a composition professor, I hope to recognize, examine, and evaluate my own understandings (and, hence, my teachings) regarding such an important part of a writer's journey.

As I reflect on previous semesters and approximately 11 years of teaching college composition courses, I can readily see that I have not had a clear position on my dissertation question. "Where does writing end?" had never readily occurred to me until fairly recently in my teaching career, until students like John (from chapter 1) asked obvious questions regarding how to end their academic texts. I am surprised at my prior lack of curiosity, or lack of intuiting the disconnect, regarding where writing might end. This dissertation is a text that attempts to rectify the problems inherent in assuming there is one way to teach composition, or that a college English department can impose a

pedagogy wholesale on all composition classes under its purview without consideration to the subjective experiences of all writers in that classroom.

Reflections on the Writing of Chapter 2

A year or two (or three) ago I was asked by my dissertation director, Dr. Claude Hurlbert, to remove a significant section of this chapter. The section dealt with Mikhail Bakhtin and the idea that utterances/texts/ideas are borrowed from the conversations we have with others, both in spoken form and in written form. I was really getting into the idea that Bakhtin was borrowing much more than just a text: many scholars argue that he even borrowed the names of his peers/followers, at times writing under the pseudonyms of V. N. Volosinov and P. N. Medvedev. All this borrowing, from ideas to identities, is fascinating to me: these ideas were written down in their current text forms from one man but obviously so inspired by discussions and debates with his peers that he would even consider writing as them *(could there be another reason to take a pseudonym of one's contemporaries/compatriots instead of a completely fictional one?).*

This makes me wonder: whose texts these anyway, the ones that are attributed to Medvedev and Volosinov? Are any texts really our own, or was Bakhtin on to something? My dissertation has my name at the top, but it is quickly followed by that of my dissertation director and committee, and this dissertation ends with a lengthy works cited section, acknowledging the long list of participants in this dissertation dialogue. The vast majority of these participants will have no idea that they ever took part in this text, but I suspect that they understand that once they provide their ideas and thoughts into a public arena (via publication), that this is an expected result. Many parts of this dissertation are certainly inspired by my borrowed sources, my discussions on versions of this document

and before my three-chapter defense, during the three-chapter defense in January of 2011, and the interactions I have had with my director and borrowed sources over the last year.

Should all texts be considered community property? If I use textual artifacts when I borrow ideas from Joyce or Bakhtin or Barthes, should their names appear on the title page? Ok, that might be a bit excessive. In academic writing, anything not considered "common knowledge" is to be attributed to an original author with both in-text citations and a full works cited entry. But what if the ideas from Joyce or Bakhtin start to bleed through and merge with the ideas I have absorbed elsewhere? Where are my original thoughts? Do I have any agency in separating out their ideas from the ones I build through them? That is, is there a point in time where I will be able to distinguish where my sources' thoughts end and my own begin? Probably not, especially if I start to agree with my sources and tackle these older ideas in new ways, such as in this dissertation. The devil's advocate in me would say there are no original thoughts, but I don't think that is true. We learn from one another, and the ideas we share are affected certainly by our own disparate life experiences. What comes from this mix can be original text if we consider that these ideas are sustained *from constantly changing contexts, that we provide ever new contexts to share ideas that are supported, but change, over time.*

I do not know what I can do with this information. This is not an original thought, but for me it is a new, grand idea. Maybe there is something I can work on with this thought in a future text. So while my grand, seven-page section on Bakhtin and "borrowing" has been discarded from the main section of chapter 2 of this dissertation,

it is not truly done, as it appears in abbreviated form in this reflection (not to mention continuing to take up important space in my thoughts about writing).

CHAPTER 3

TEXTS AS ARTIFACTS AND UNFINISHED COMMUNICATIVE EVENTS

Introduction

One way to envision writing is to see it as an artifact, a piece of socially constructed culture that can "live on" when found and interpreted by others. In chapter 2 of this dissertation I examined the metaphor of "writing as an artifact" in more depth. In chapter 3 of my dissertation, I expand this idea further by stating that writing is an artifact and that artifacts (and, in this case, academic essays) are potentially unfinished communicative acts.

First, in this third chapter, I discuss artifacts in context, providing samples of written artifacts to show the wide variety of writing-as-artifact that appears in many cultures. Second, I move on to highlight artifacts from across historical time periods, moving from generalized examples of material artifacts to the academic essay, which came about in its ever evolving state some time in mid-1800s. Third, I locate the "academic essay"[6] in a current composition classroom, making a connection between written artifacts and academic texts that students put together in postsecondary composition classrooms. Finally, I discuss the connection between writing and the potential ending of a text if writing is indeed considered an artifact.

[6] In this dissertation I do not judge the overall "validity" or communicative benefit of the academic essay (see further Grimm, Wysocki, and Cooper) in comparison to other academic or real-world texts. However, I do acknowledge the ubiquitousness of the academic essay by choosing it as a representative text for postsecondary writing. An "academic essay" as such (with predesigned content areas, formatting requirements, and academic discourse conventions such as a thesis statement or stated warrant, among others) displays its bearing as a hegemonic communication device that can silence student writers in certain contexts.

My main assumption in chapter 3 of this dissertation is that if a piece of writing continues to speak to readers (e.g., as it does when I remember or react in new ways to the texts I have created), then its dialogue is not complete—the writing's potential to communicate persists. A written artifact is a product of a culture that occupies a "linguistically articulated free space" (Gadamer 211), which suggests that in language, the meaning we derive from a written artifact happens on multiple levels within the linguistic structure of our language, both in how we interpret a text and in how we respond to it. Gadamer's quote above can also be interpreted in additional ways, in that a text has been spoken of, it has been heard (or read), and the spaces around this text are pregnant with possible future communications. As readers have varying life experiences, they will react to it in different ways to a text, thus operating within this "free space" by creating ever new meanings and texts out of interactions writers/readers have had with previous texts. As Bakhtin suggests, "There is neither a first nor a last word and there are no limits to the dialogic context (it extends into the boundless past and the boundless future). ... Nothing is absolutely dead" ("Toward a Methodology for the Human Sciences" 170), including any draft of an academic essay. To this I would include any written artifact, academic artifacts included.

Artifacts are material objects that are discovered, studied, and held up as representative objects of a particular human culture (and all part of Foucault's *archive*—those physical objects from any particular historical time period that represent the "historical order" and contexts of that period in time, say the "college theme" of academic writing representative of a selection of texts within 19th-century composition, or, at NOVA, English composition at a 21st-century community

college; see Foucault; O'Fallon). Academic writing is also a material object, as both documents representative of students within academic systems and also of human beings within particular cultures. This third chapter of my dissertation explores both the prescribed, rigid structures and, at the same time, the flexibility of an academic essay, showing that its potential to end is infinite in two ways: (1) because of the endless variables present in its creation (i.e., the writer, the writing situation, the subject of the text, the time allotted to research and write the essay, a vast array of potential sources, the opportunities to edit and proofread drafts, professorial or peer feedback, etc.); and (2) because future opportunities for continued dialogue with readers perpetuates from any established text.

Artifacts in Context

Artifact Samples

There are many common written artifacts that have shaped our perceptions of cultures around the world. The Gnostic Gospels, the Rosetta Stone, Egyptian hieroglyphics, even the Dead Sea Scrolls are all examples of written artifacts whose main quality (or value) is in the textual portion of the material artifact. Of course, not all artifacts are linguistic in nature (consider Stonehenge or a Clovis point), but, as with the examples above, many are. Without the text, each artifact in the above example would lose the inherent value of the message provided within it. Each written artifact has a singular difference from other types of artifacts; the texts within are all meant for an audience of readers, and each only shares its full message as an artifact if the artifact itself is both found *and* understood for the message contained within.

The vast majority of human civilization's material objects have been lost to time, and only recently (within the last few thousand years) has human culture evolved to include written material, which gives us greater glimpses into the contexts of past peoples. Of course, only a small amount of those materials have survived to our current era because of erosion, decomposition, fire, temperature extremes, or a host of other culprits, including acts of human aggression. During times of conflict, many dominant cultures' acts of war on their enemies included a stamping out or a rewriting of history (see Aztec and other New World conquests; the Inquisition, Mongol invasions, etc.). One of the potential violent acts during war is the erasing of a cultural history; a fast way to do that is to burn or otherwise destroy documentation that described the previous culture's belief systems, from religious objects to government records.

Written artifacts hold a wealth of information; they display meaning through written language (or characters that represent particular ideas or sounds in a language without a phonetic alphabet) associated with the culture at hand; they provide tangible links to the past; and they highlight knowledge of a past culture (see Foucault; O'Fallon; Joyce). It is in these written documents that a culture can get a partial view of both past and current beliefs and practices. Of course, some documents hold a greater significance than others, and artifacts of an academic nature, while not on the whole documents that affect a great many people (like governmental or religious documents), still have a connection to people of periods past and present and provide windows into a unique environment and subculture. Losing academic documents to time, environment, or acts of aggression is still a great casualty to those of us in academia who can and do learn much about our own academic culture through reviewing academic artifacts.

Yet even written artifacts are not always what they seem to be. Issues of translation, hoaxes, even the context of particular words or ideograms can alter or completely subvert the meaning of an original document. While the quickest way to an interpretation of a text is to ask the author to explain the context of the artifact, in the cases of general written artifacts, this option is usually an impossibility because the eras of the writer and archaeologist/researcher are separated by generations, sometimes even millennia. Getting interpretative help from the writer of a written artifact is almost always impossible when working with antiquities, as archeologists analyze items found from previous eras that are rarely ever left for far-future interaction (although one could argue that monuments with inscriptions are intended to be read by future generations), and they must interpret findings based on a variety of data at hand. But see Bakhtin ("Toward a Methodology for the Human Sciences"), who states that even attempting to decipher an artifact's intended "meaning" is futile: "*past* meanings, that is, those born in the dialogue of past centuries, can never be stable (finalized, ended once and for all)" (Bakhtin, qtd. in Joyce 7); yet Gadamer suggests that while there is one true meaning of a text, on the whole there are also varying levels of significance that can alter the power of any text.

Criteria for an artifact's interpretation include the depth or level of item found at a certain cite (debris levels can be determined based on climate patterns and shifts, extreme weather, and other human-caused events); other artifacts found in tandem with the artifact at hand; the potential for interference or looting at a site; even the possibility of ancient interference between more than one cultural player can change the interpretation of the artifact found (i.e., the "rewriting" of history or the appearance of an item at the intersection of a popular trade route). Artifacts are given more or less value based on how

all these variables work to tell the story of a pottery shard, or a written letter, or even the Rosetta Stone. As Gavin Lucas suggests, even finding what seems like a cultural fit might not be the final resting place for an artifact: “cultural change can be much more non-linear and exhibit periodicities and cycles with change occurring at different rates at different periods” (Lucas 95), so accurately identifying an artifact within its actual cultural contexts can be a difficult endeavor.

Archaeologists tend to look at artifacts as the keys to the past, but they can also be clues to the present. Artifacts catalog what humans left behind, designed with their own hands, and used within a community context. These artifacts help determine potential cultural meanings about human life in past and current times. It would be interesting to look back and see what our own academic writing has shown of not only our work but our students’ work. We can learn what professors in particular classes required of their students. We can see whether that goal was attained (Were we convinced of what the writer discussed? Do academic records or grades on the page show that students passed their courses?). More importantly, we can watch the interesting changes that continue to take place in academia with regard to writing. For example, once upon a time the 19th-century English theme was designed so that a new wave of freshman writers would learn to sound “academic” and articulate (Howard; see also Lindemann). A hundred and forty years later, academic essays are assigned to teach students a form and a process that they are told enables them the keys to further academic advancement.

How Archaeological Metaphors Benefit English Studies, Especially Composition

The field of archaeology is a fascinating and abundant source of material for academia, including those of us in English studies. Not only can linguists learn much

about ancient speakers with the help of written texts, but compositionists can also learn about how writers learned the art of academic writing in the 19th century, just as literature professors can compare versions of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* that have been found in different library caches. Each practitioner within English studies can and does use artifacts in their work, whether in a literal way or in a more abstract context (such as the context of this dissertation). Even compositionists can employ the term *artifact* in the classroom if they believe it can give a tangibility and permanence to the texts that students create.

Another way to support the use of metaphor of "writing as artifact" is to consider an interdisciplinary borrowing as a supported research focus. Artifacts are pieces of the past, and archaeologists spend much time (and in interdisciplinary concert with historians, anthropologists, sociologists, geologists, etc.) interpreting them by understanding not only the piece in question but also the pieces and environment surrounding each artifact. For example, a Clovis point found in the Delmarva Peninsula before 10,000 BCE is not surprising to archaeologists. Many arrowheads or other material artifacts have been found that relate to Clovis culture in the region at similar sites. However, because of a few potentially worldwide catastrophic events (glacier advancement, extreme weather events like droughts, possible meteor strike), Clovis settlements disappear out of the archaeological record approximately 12,900 years ago (Bamforth). Thus, finding a Clovis point on the Delmarva Peninsula 5,000 B.C.E. would be a spectacular and surprising find. To compare this to an academic writing situation, reading and grading a wide variety of student papers are normal practices for compositionists; however, when I find a struggling student who has stepped completely

out of his or her comfort zone and has put together a complicated and challenging final essay submission, that is also a spectacular turn of events and a surprising find, given previous evidence of the student's work.

Rarity provides both context and value for an object both in an archaeological sense and as a piece of academic writing. Without the context of its surroundings, an artifact is out of its time and place and its meaning would be impossible to completely decipher or to value. Even with all available clues of an artifact's surroundings, much about the times and circumstances surrounding the humans who left the artifact can still be up for debate. So not only is rarity a valuable asset to an artifact, but an understanding of the piece in the larger context is also of great value for both the scientists and also for the communities who place value on the artifacts in question.[7] On its own the student's final essay above would not be as surprising and rare if they had performed at that level all semester. All of their texts become artifacts in their academic archaeological record, highlighting the transitional moves a student makes in preparation of his or her final submission. A writing professor who reviews these texts as a portfolio submission or as they review the overall set of grades for a student can come to an even greater understanding of the larger context of the student writer during that class that semester, which proves just how valuable the successful final text is for a once-struggling student.

Thus, considering interdisciplinary borrowing of a term such as *artifact* allows for a unique perspective on compositionists' understandings of the products of their fields and classrooms: in this case, the artifact in question would be academic essays. The

[7]In support of this, think of "audience reception" theory (a form of reader-response criticism, as used in Chapters 4 and 5 of this dissertation), in which meaning grows from the interaction with a reader/audience and the text; the run-ins with a multitude of readers create divergent and multilayered meanings for each reader independently. Without a reader who can comprehend such a text, there would be no meaning. Thus, context and comprehension help a reader with understanding any text (Art and Culture).

essay/artifact can be assessed as to its "academic" quality by how well it situates a student in location and time, in addition to the context of the discussion the student has through their writing. The "value" of an academic essay, for the sake of this dissertation, would not be in its age or rarity (academic essays certainly are not rare documents, and they have been churned out by the dozens by individual college students since the end of the 19th century [see Connors; Crowley; Howard; Lindemann]) but, rather, in understanding their function and usefulness to both the writer and to the composition community.

If one looks to an academic essay as an artifact, there are many "clues" that highlight the type of student, the course the essay is written for, and the parameters of the assignment. These clues help a reader identify the writer's language skills and possibly whether the writer is a native speaker of the language the text is prepared in, depending on the writer's ease with that language's written rules (i.e., compositionists can generally tell when a student is a native English speaker or an ESL or EFL speaker depending on their written English skills, esp. in lower-level college composition courses). All of the following stylistic clues can also be deciphered by reviewing an academic artifact: the preferred academic style of the institution or class, such as MLA or APA style; the level of scholarly borrowing in terms of research, quoting, paraphrasing, or statistical use. Finally, the identity of the creator and institution are generally located in the document, as particular academic styles require the listing of institutional data such as student name, college name, course, professor's name, and date of production. These locators accurately identify the writer, the audience written for (the institution), even the approximate time around which a text is written (courtesy of the date listed on the text or even the types of

words used in the writing of the text). These locators are gifts when deciphering the basic parameters of an artifact's academic environment.

The writing work that postsecondary students do is important in an immediate sense but for most only temporary (in that most students do not continue to write "academic" texts after they finish or leave college, unless they continue in a graduate program and/or lean toward an academic career). Many students complain that learning a particular document style (MLA, for example) for writing academic essays is a waste of time because they will not use it after they leave college. And in this they might be right. Academic style can be a temporal thing for students (certainly not for scholars) when used only in academic circles, and most of our students do not follow in our footsteps into scholarly writing and publishing. However, another possibility can be that compositionists can not only help students survive through the work that they do writing academic essays/artifacts, but that compositionists can also teach students the value of context so that the work they do is not temporal but transactional.

In my own experience, I cannot recollect the majority of academic essays I wrote in college. The handful of academic artifacts I do have of my own collegiate work is thanks to random moments of hoarding interspersed with other moments of spartan-ness. Looking through those few essays I saved has jogged my memory a bit, reminding me of how I put together texts in my undergraduate years. I commonly stayed up late into the night, writing and rewriting text. I often printed and marked up drafts and discarded quite a bit of text along the way. As an undergraduate I used a typewriter through 1990 and then I advanced to a Brother word processor, which had such a small screen that I could only see about a full paragraph of text at any given time, and this forced me to print quite

a bit of text out for hard-copy review. The worst of it was that I was a creative writing major; I had to print up multiple copies of 20-plus page texts on a regular basis. With my word processor the printing became rather labor intensive because it took each page about two and a half minutes to print, without any feeder mechanism but myself, and I often had to stand by for an hour just to print one copy. When I would find typos or want to make editorial changes, it seemed to me at the time that my writing would never end. By 1995 I had graduated to a PC, but PCs were still new to me and caused me much writing anxiety; to this day I can remember taking my master's exam in 1998 on a PC and panicking about issues of formatting within the text.

The archaeological record of my written doctoral work is in better shape thanks to my growing interesting technology and my habit of keeping electronic copies of multiple versions of each text I have written on both hard drives and flash drives, as well as in cloud storage (which have greater storage limits and more writing bells and whistles in its PC-oriented software programs to keep me sufficiently busy archiving academic texts). The biggest change in the archaeological trail of academic writing has definitely been the advent of more user-friendly personal computers. Now, records of those academic pieces of writing exist in multiple forms: on flash drives or hard drives; on hard copy, in the back of a closet in a plastic storage bin labeled "Florida State University 1991–95"; and, possibly, in a professor's filing cabinet or in a department storage room.

Students write dozens of academic essays; they are a big currency on college campuses, and they hold many keys to future opportunities. For example, this dissertation document is the difference between an ABD and a Ph.D. Academic essays are quite valuable for many students in the short term, and some are valuable for a lifetime. All are

tangible written records of a student's work during their collegiate career. Some become more important documents if the conversations continue: that is, if they are found and become artifacts of the time, conversation, context, or "horizon" (Gadamer) of a particular writer and subject at a particular place in time. The life of an academic artifact extends (perhaps indefinitely) if the academic writer publishes the dissertation in parts as articles or in the whole as a book, presents texts at academic conferences, or even transfers the ideas from written text into a lecture or classroom discussion.

Artifacts and the Academic Essay

The Oxford English Dictionary (2nd ed.) defines the term *artifact* as "an object made by a human being, typically one of cultural or historical interest." This definition is important because it does not qualify just any object (such as an untouched stone or unmanipulated tree trunk) found within or near a human settlement site; artifacts are objects that have been manipulated in some way by humans for human use. Artifacts can be objects like knives or clay bricks that form the foundation of a dwelling. They can also be pottery shards or Indian-head nickels. They can especially be tablets, such as those which held the earliest known cuneiform writing, which have provided humans with epic poetry, such as the *Epic of Gilgamesh*.

Written text-artifacts have a multitude of properties. They display both concrete ideas and abstract thoughts. They have an audience and purpose, either from communication with others, to documentation of data for record keeping, to creation of art in poetry or prose, all held within a basic two-dimensional text within a three-dimensional material artifact. They might have a high value, that is, an artifact can be rare, such as an object owned by a famous personage; a document that clarifies an

unknown or unclear situation, such as a Civil War battle strategy; or an artifact might be of a lesser value if it is a common item, indecipherable, or in a bad physical condition.

The focus of the term *artifact* for this dissertation is on written artifacts. Written artifacts can sometimes be the most informative pieces within the archaeological record, in that the artifact's text provides additional content that a pottery shard or building foundation might not (such as the name of the writer/designer/creator, approximate dates of creation, and so forth). Even more, written artifacts are multidimensional simply because the content of the text expands beyond the physical materials: written documents are rarely about the actual tablet or parchment they are written on; there is an abstract connection with ideas outside of the format or material used. Data found within written artifacts can give researchers clues regarding the rise or fall of civilizations on a grand scale; on a smaller scale, written artifacts can inform communities about the past lives and day-to-day interactions of earlier peoples. Written artifacts have included recipes on how to make beer, how taxes are distributed, records of court proceedings and judgments, religious prayers and practices, even fictional stories have been documented as written artifacts both from millennia past and from fairly recent history up to and including the present.

The real challenge is placing the artifact in the right context. Ancient documents are not the only documents of importance in understanding a community's history, processes, or modes of communication. Through our understanding of how artifacts are created and used in communication, we compositionists can see that our writing students are in the process of creating academic artifacts in any course in which they submit written text. Currently, academic artifacts are being created by students and established

professional academicians whose purpose is to document their ideas and to share those ideas with others. It is important to note that the *Oxford English Dictionary* definition clearly states that an *artifact* is simply "an object made by a human being, typically one of cultural or historical interest." This can and does include artifacts that come from the academic sphere. *The Oxford English Dictionary* does suggest that the term *artifact* is especially important as it represents a particular period in history owing to an artifact being of "historical interest." Academic documents are no different; an academic document created in past decades still represents that particular context of writer, situation, environment, purpose, and so forth. Thus, the variety of current academic documents (e.g., at NOVA) represents early-21st-century academic writing at an American community college.

I suggest in this chapter that the ubiquitous academic essay is an artifact because it fulfills both portions of the first definition within *Oxford English Dictionary.* Academic essays are both objects created by humans (i.e., to fulfill an academic requirement in a university setting) and also they can be representative of a particular period in history that signifies a specific cultural activity. For example: an academic theme (essay) created during the first wave of academic essays (some would suggest the traditional composition at Harvard University in the mid-to-late 19th century to be one such beginning; see Connors; Crowley; Vandenberg) are distinct from academic essays created by English composition students in 2010.

The differences between college writers' academic essays written approximately 140 years apart are stark: In the mid-to-late-19th-century Harvard texts, essays were predominantly hand-written, and current college essays are typed, predominantly on

computers. Word choice would be an obvious indicator of each writer's "particular period." For example, in the article "How to Speak 19th Century," by Eric Ferguson, Common terms and phrases (which would be familiar to American historians, but not to many 21st-century freshman at my college) included *palaver*, meaning "useless talking," and *something in train*, meaning "something to be considered or planned." Current terms that would certainly confuse 19th-century collegiate writers would include *carbon footprint*, meaning "the environmental impact of carbon emissions; the magnitude of this for a particular individual, organization, or community" (*Oxford English Dictionary*); the *Internet*, meaning an electronic portal for information gathering and dissemination; and *to Google*, once a strange-sounding verb but which is now ubiquitous in the English vernacular, which means to use a search engine such as "Google" to find information on the Internet.

The content of academic essays would also show marked differences between academic writers writing approximately 140 years apart. One of the biggest distinctions between mid-to-late-19th-century student writers and 21st-century student writers can be found in the content of each essay. Writers of Harvard themes were expected to generate/textually recitate lecture material provided to them from their professors; they were also expected to write on subjects based on personal observation. As cited by Robert Connors, these written themes began with observations such as "A Pleasant Evening" and branched off to include "When My Ship Comes In" and "An Incident from School Life" (64). Connors states that "personal observation writing assignments grew out of teachers' frustrations with the paucity of traditional abstract knowledge noted in college students after 1870, as an ever larger percentage of Americans attempted college"

(65). These personal topics forced composition students to overtly focus on what they knew, or to externalize what was previously internal (thoughts, feelings, beliefs). Sources outside the realm of class or professor were rarely (if at all) used in writing composition themes, owing to their supposed inability to clearly display a command of "abstract knowledge."

Current college students might also write personally and without outside source work, especially in narrative essays or possibly in a creative writing course. But this is only a small smattering of writing college students do during their years as undergraduates. A majority of students' work in freshman-level composition classes focuses on the dreaded "argumentative" or "research" essay. Sources are required (e.g., in-text citations with accompanying references), as well as articulated documentation that shows that each current academic writer's contexts for coming up with their arguments have been well thought out and that a variety of sources have been considered. Current "student writers need to have views and give accounts of things, a mastery that evokes the cultural authorization of the professional managerial classes, whose capital resides in their ability to have opinions, make judgments, present views, and offer compelling accounts and explanations of their own and *other people's experience*" (Trimbur 193, emphasis added), a marked difference in context from a 19th-century theme.

Writers in the 21st century have fairly unimpeded access to documents in hard copy and electronic form (via the Internet through sources like Project Gutenberg and local college library databases, even through "Google books" and search engine responses).[8] This allows current student writers a much broader reference field from which to refer. In the 19th century, writers had access only to texts provided by family,

[8] Whether students thoroughly use these options in a "scholarly way" is a matter of current debate.

professors, or campus or local libraries, which were much less diverse than what current students have access to. And, as can be noted in Connors, those external sources were rarely referenced in such a way that the student writer noted other voices as part of the written conversation; what was more important for composition professors of themes was the articulation of ideas clearly in written form on a page, not the variety of sources or the multilayered textual argument that comes from current academic texts. Interestingly enough, a common complaint from both 19th-century Harvard professors and from current professors (sometimes including myself) is that student writers (in the Western academic tradition, at least) have a lot to learn about writing (see esp. Connors; Crowley; Howard; Lindemann; Trimbur). This would be one main reason composition continues to be a required course at most colleges.

Because of a continued tradition in the postsecondary teaching of composition, a succession of writing and writing styles, and clearly transitional writing tools and other implements all allow for a fairly unbroken historical, linear map of academic writing to be observed. And, as such, academic texts are artifacts that appear within the continuum of writing in the scholarly sphere. These texts have changed in style, in word choice, in audience considerations, and in research requirements and options as the decades have passed, but their main, overarching goal has always been the same: to allow a student to demonstrate appropriate knowledge (in written form) to gain credit for the assignment and, thus, to successfully pass that course in which writing is required.

Locating the Academic Artifact

In postsecondary education, the academic essay has a wide variety of uses. Among many, I have come up with these main uses: (1) To display knowledge; (2) To

highlight a writer's ability to follow directions; (3) To connect with others (readers, academics, etc.) via information dissemination; (4) To continue dialogue with previous texts via interaction through quoting, paraphrasing, and noting borrowed ideas and thoughts with in-text citations; (5) To show membership or to request membership within a particular community (e.g., academic community of composition scholars); and (6) To fulfill partial requirements for successful completion of classes or post-course assigned work, such as in partial fulfillment of a thesis or dissertation. Of course, academic essays are only one of a variety of ways college students can fulfill the academic uses listed above. Academic essays are ubiquitous yet sometimes harrowing rites of passage that the vast majority of college students partake in during their collegiate careers.

Writers of academic essays participate in the first point listed above, "to display knowledge," by allowing readers an outlet for written expression on subjects and ideas brought forth within their collegiate coursework. Classes in core subjects including English, history, business, psychology, anthropology, sociology, religion/theology, law, and education, among many others, all have a significant amount of written requirements that college students must submit. While I was an undergraduate at FSU, I was subject to the "Gordon Rule," which has focused requirements on academic writing for any student who is looking to obtain an associates' degree. The Gordon Rule's written requirements are thus: "In accordance with Florida Department of Education Administrative Rule Number 6A-10.030, all students are mandated to complete satisfactorily 12 semester hours of courses which include written assignments demonstrating college-level writing skills" (Manatee Community College). In the case of "displaying knowledge" with a particular volume of written assignments, these assignments were expected to show a

variety of information for each grading professor (although not all professors assess the same criteria): Does the student show an understanding of course content? Does the student display it clearly in written form? Does the student understand the types of forms required for written work in this type of content area (such as clear lab report or an accurately cited MLA argumentative paper)? Does the student provide an understanding of research methods, the scientific method, audience considerations, and others' opinions? All of these questions that professors ask delve into whether a student successfully displays knowledge (in written form) within the course at hand.

"To highlight a writer's ability to follow directions," the second point listed at the beginning of this section, is an extension of the first point, "to display knowledge," although the first point is more about showing content within a subject area, and the second is about following a prescribed process within academic structures. As an example of following direction, I provide one my own written essay experiences: I distinctly remember a creative writing course I took as an undergraduate at FSU. The assignment was to create a text from "found" items; students in the course wrote fictional stories on luggage tags, the back of a weight-lifting poster, or read aloud their texts on an answering machine tape as dialogue of a one-way conversation. The objective of this assignment was to use alternative mediums to add texture or depth to a piece of creative writing. I, however, might have been absent (or daydreaming) on the day my professor provided detailed descriptions of the assignment. While others in the class presented their myriad creative writing projects, I realized early on during the day's course that my text, a story of missed opportunity due to a comedy of errors, and submitted in perfect (but in this case unacceptable) MLA format, did not follow the directions provided by the

professor. I had forgotten to attend to a major point regarding the assignment: the context of the materials of the creative piece were to display and enhance the texts. Needless to say, I did not receive comparable grades to my fellow students on that assignment, but I did learn valuable lessons in both listening to a professor's requirements regarding submitted work and also by asking questions when those directions might have been confusing. Written assignments certainly show a student's ability "to follow directions," which is a skill sometimes absent in the brand new freshmen that I teach at NOVA (and a skill I am still honing to this day).

"To connect with others (readers, academics, etc.) via information dissemination," the third point listed at the beginning of this section, is a subtle, but necessary, component to academic essay writing. Academic documents are designed not just for the writer, as a diary or personal journal or list or notes would be. Academic essays are meant to have an audience, and on the whole they encourage additional future writing, be that from marginal feedback from a professor (which comes alongside a grade) to that of previous conversation extensions (via quoting or paraphrasing borrowed text from a cited source), to the future potential to become a borrowed source for other writers. Connecting with others via peer review, a professor, a letter to the editor, or a committee review, means that conversations are begun (again) in the context of the student writers' submission of their academic essay for a grade, or for honor society membership, or even to obtain a position on a college newspaper (as I did during my time at FSU). Conversations on the page and in the margins of an academic essay open many portals for student writers: "The critical reading and writing that students do are not intended as an end in

themselves that might result, say, in an interpretive essay on some aspect of the topic" (Trimbur 214; see also Gadamer; Joyce).

It is unfortunate that a large minority of my own students (and those of my colleagues) do not choose to participate in the ongoing conversations presented on the page, in which academic writing assignments are but a beginning of a larger and more multimodal knowledge-making experience that asks students to write in combination with speaking, studying, and developing "socially useful knowledge" (Trimbur 214). Continued conversations are there, on the page, in the classroom, and in the minds of those who participate in each academic discussion. The potential for them to continue is evident.

"To continue dialogue with previous texts via interaction through quoting, paraphrasing, and noting borrowed ideas and thoughts with in-text citations," the fourth point listed at the beginning of this section, expands on points 1 and 3. Academic essays are clear tools of continued dialogue with others who are participating (or who have participated, or who might in the future participate) in discussions of the topics (such as the very common argumentative position paper either for or against abortion) students tackle in their own academic writing. Some of my own students find it surprising when I tell them that some topics (without careful consideration) can be overused or dull. For example, I strongly suggest students pick topics of personal interest when they write in my classes, so that they can highlight how their lives interconnect with these current issues. But I grow fatigued with 12 versions of "Legalizing Medicinal Marijuana" if the text does not show a personal connection to issues of medicinal (or general) use and an ability to provide a contextual understanding of these issues that is outside the norms of a

basic academic essay. An example would be that of a superficial “compare and contrast” essay that applies general examples of legalizing marijuana without much interaction or depth from the writer’s experiences or knowledge base.

At one low point in my teaching career (owing to distress over how to manage controversial topics in my writing class in which I felt that students had trouble differentiating their worldviews from realistic and in-depth collegiate-level research and discussion), I was on the verge of not allowing students to write on overly personal topics (such as proving religion/God, abortion, or capital punishment) because I had come to the conclusion that some of these topics made providing constructive criticism, where necessary, quite difficult. Yet one semester I received a few project proposals from different students with differing perspectives on the topic surrounding pregnancy, abortion, and religion. One student was older and wanted to write about being a teen mother, about the realities of having a child so young, and about resources girls can find if they choose to finish their pregnancies. Her point was that while she did not choose to have an abortion, there are options for others, and those options included family planning, termination, and education on what to do if a pregnant woman were to see her pregnancy through. Other students have written about their mother’s abortion because of health issues, discussions about when choice should be an option, and so forth. The nuances of each student’s approach (some appear more clearly than others), and the personal connection in most of them to the issue at hand, made the topics work for the most part. These students borrowed from sources ranging from family interviews, court proceedings, literature found on Planned Parenthood and other prochoice organization websites, literature found through religious and antiabortion organizations, and their

physicians/midwives. When the written text moved away from the political talking points and into personal experiences supplemented by the larger community conversations, students' writing seemed to mature into an interactive text taking a conversational turn, and I am relieved that I broke my own archaic topic rules so that students could connect with controversial and challenging issues, rather than just reacting to a political or a controversial issue that they do not agree with but do not have an immediate personal stake in.

"To show membership or to request membership within a particular community (e.g., academic community of composition scholars)," the fifth point listed at the beginning of this section, means that pieces of academic writing are used as tools or resumes that allow writers to partake in continued conversations with their peers. Conference papers or articles submitted to academic journals are clear examples of this point. As part of consideration for promotion at NOVA, professors are strongly encouraged to not only submit papers to local, regional, and national conferences (e.g., New Horizons or the National Council of Teachers of English conferences) but also to academic journals such as *College English*, *Teaching English in the Two-Year College*, *The Journal of Advanced Composition*, or *College Composition and Communication*.

These academic conferences and journal publications are outlets for continued conversations with composition peers, and they are a clear signal of acceptance into an elite group, as being accepted into a journal is often more difficult than it seems (see Vandenberg, 1998, on issues surrounding research/publishing faculty vs. teaching composition faculty). I have been the copy editor for the anthropology journal *American Ethnologist* (*AE*) for approximately 10 years, and I remember a conversation I had with

Dr. Virginia Dominguez, one of our previous editors-in-chief. She relayed some sobering statistics on how difficult it is getting published in scholarly journals. Her estimate was, during her 6 years at the helm of *AE*, she and the editorial board accepted for publication between 8 and 12 percent of all submitted articles. And competition continues to grow. Academic writing for classes, for acceptance in academic journals, or for presentation at community/peer conferences allows writers to become a bigger voice in the content community that they are participating in. Seasoned academic writers are not the only writers who become part of a specialized community if they publish or present. Even first-semester students join a fraternity of undergraduate scholars with their first successful academic essay.

Finally, "to fulfill partial requirements for successful completion of classes or post-course assigned work, such as in partial fulfillment of a thesis or dissertation," the sixth point listed above, shows that academic texts are currencies within postsecondary education (Downing, Hurlbert, and Mathieu; Peluso). Certainly, some frazzled or procrastinating students turn to online paper mills and purchase papers so that they do not have to write essays themselves. Friends "borrow" texts submitted in other classes. And students in ever larger numbers plagiarize in order to "say it right," cut research time, or because of an inability to differentiate what are their original thoughts and what are the thoughts of the community around them (for an intriguing discussion about appropriating voice through citation/plagiarism in a composition classroom, see Howard). There is also a subset of students who, when switching from writing in a non-Western tradition to the writing to writing at the college level in a Western university struggle with issues of attribution and borrowing (Abasi, Akbari, and Graves). The pressure to pass students is

often so high that students opt for alternative ways to obtain successful texts that will grant them passage from one academic stage or class to the next. I see plagiarism every semester and attempt to combat it by creating unique assignments that require the writer to insert themselves into the text's action. Yet deciphering student voices from those that they borrow (or appropriate) is still a very common issue in the evaluation of academic essays.

Because academic essays are such powerful and important elements in a postsecondary student's academic career (in that they can make or break a student's passing a class or even graduating), academic writing becomes a skill that most students must learn, even if it is a requirement that for many seems only of temporary use. For example, many of my students who are pre-nursing ask me, "When will I ever write an argumentative essay when in working as a surgical nurse?" and I try to explain that the format might not be the same, but my mother, a nurse for 40 years now, still has to write understandable (mechanically and syntactically clear) and persuasive data on patient charts so that there is a clear indication of symptoms, evaluations, treatments given, and so forth. Formats and goals of a particular piece of writing might change, but the ability to be clear and persuasive is a skill that hopefully compositionists help nursing students obtain and expand in our classes.

Does Academic Writing "End" If It Is Considered an Artifact?

I present two main premises within this dissertation. The first premise is that academic writing can be considered an artifact. As situated in this third chapter of my dissertation, I used *Oxford English Dictionary*'s main definition of an *artifact* "an object made by a human being, typically one of cultural or historical interest." Based on this

definition alone, postsecondary student writing can indeed be considered artifactual. Writing as an artifact can also be supported by Jay David Bolter, Lester Faigley, Michel Foucault, and Rosemary Joyce, whose scholarship has stated it explicitly. My second premise is that if academic writing can be construed as an artifact (which is what it seems to be), then the writing within these artifacts does not end because artifacts themselves hold the potential for continued dialogue.

Many theorists, from Hans-Georg Gadamer to Mikhail Bakhtin to Roland Barthes, have suggested in one way or another that it is important to view a text in light of communication as an ongoing event. Gadamer postulated that there is one right interpretation to a text, but within that interpretation there is varying significance for individual readers. For Gadamer, "every conversation has an inner infinity and no end" (xxxiii). Bakhtin states that "any concrete discourse (utterance) finds the object at which it was directed already as it were overlain with qualifications, open to dispute, charged with value, already enveloped in obscuring mist—or, on the contrary, by the 'light' of alien words that have already been spoken about it. It is entangled, shot through with shared thoughts, points of view, alien value judgments, and accents" (Joyce 71). As Barthes suggests, "We know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash" (146). In each text, the writing situation is "charged" with the potential to continue on indefinitely, to include new participants, to expand texts, and to create new texts.[9]

[9]But see Lyotard, in which Faigley states that "Lyotard argues that the result of discourse is not consensus but paralogy and a 'multiplicity of finite meta-arguments' " (Faigley 42; Lyotard, 65) so that while writing is a community endeavor meant to continue, that continuation does eventually peter out.

When writing is considered an artifact, it does not end because the textual conversation has the potential to continue on (see, esp., Bakhtin; Gadamer). This does not mean that each and every artifact has a further conversation with its audiences, far from it. During a text's creation in the classroom, conversations might have flourished: in feedback from a professor, during a peer review conference, even in workshops held within writing centers. But once the academic text is submitted to a professor, the conversations tend to flow down a "one-way street," that is, from the student to the professor grading it. It has been my experience that students rarely read the feedback that I provide in the margins of their texts with a final grade, and I have been known to do the same myself as a doctoral student. Instead, students usually skip the continued conversations on every page but the final one where the official grade can be found. Those conversations stemming from the student's submitted academic essay have then been abruptly halted. Yet just because most academic essay conversations end prematurely, this does not mean that the potential for that text is lost. It is still there, housed within the frame of the submitted artifact and also in the minds of writer and his or her readers.

There are multiple ways these conversations could continue. Perhaps the student who ignored or initially bypassed professor commentary and, instead, only searched for their final grade has another class with a similar writing topic; the student might then revisit their research, sources, even the essay that they wrote and come again into the conversation. In this way, the student writer becomes an audience member regarding their own work and the conversations from their professors if feedback appeared on the copy (and again the work of those they borrowed). Second, there is potential in a text not

ending if a student does the hard work of reading peer and professorial commentary on receipt of the graded essay. These essays are texts that might stand out to the student or professor; they might be reviewed in future classes, they might even be modified and submitted as an article to a local paper or in a writing contest. While these texts are in the minority, these academic essays represent the very idea that academic writing artifacts do not end because there is future potential or conversations that might flourish from them.

As Gadamer states, "understanding is only 'underway'; it never comes entirely to an end. And yet a whole of meaning is present in the free achievement of saying what is meant—even in what the interpreter means" (212). In this sense, the understanding, or the written expression of the writing, is underway: it has not ended as long as readers and writer interact with it. Gadamer continues, "understanding that is linguistically articulated has free space around it which it fills in constant response to the word addressing it, without filling it completely" (211). The potential to continue to fill that free space is there, waiting. Every act of writing or response to the academic text attempts to fill those spaces, or gaps. Yet they never completely end (as displayed by Hacker[10]), as long as the potential for communication derived from the text continues. Faigley, Joyce, Gadamer, Bolton, Barthes, Bakhtin, and many others believe these acts of communication do not end, as do I. There is no specific location where one can find a final, concretized completion of a text in a student essay or other written document because the potential in all of these essays still exists right under the surface of the current version.

In academic writing, especially in the composition classrooms in which I teach, Gadamer's quote that "understanding is only 'underway'; it never comes entirely to an

[10] In her *A Writer's Reference* handbook, what are passed off as student papers are texts that are actually written by Hacker and a team of compositionists/editors.

end" (211) is an apt description of what goes on in inside freshman composition classrooms. I know of no situation in which a student is expected to incorporate in their academic texts every known English grammar rule, skill set, or writing style, or persuasive method by the end of their forth month in the course. Rather, freshman composition students are expected to build on the discussions, feedback, and interactions that they have participated in during their semesters in freshman composition. This is the very embodiment of Gadamer's idea that understanding is *only* underway. It would be a difficult enough endeavor to enforce wholesale learning requirements on students with the short timelines of one semester of a college composition course. Rather, students will learn along a continuum, one that allows them fits and spurts of engagement and activity related to their writing, but one hopefully supported by a freshman composition environment that highlights peer review, feedback, commentary, idea borrowing, drafting, revision, and so on. Not only do students learn to build on single ideas in composition classrooms (as they surely do in other disciplines), but they also take these ideas and morph them into grander discussions, which can not only grow one text but also build on the multiple texts that these students create during their academic careers.

By the time freshman writers are senior writers, or graduate student writers, or doctoral candidates, an understandable expectation is that their writing has moved along the academic writing continuum such that one text from a freshman can generally be differentiated from the text of a senior writer, that the years that these students have been studying and writing in an environment of higher learning have provided them opportunities for growth. Thus, Gadamer's quote that "understanding is only 'underway' " (211) would still be applicable. Yet this growth still does not signify perfection; rather,

"a whole of meaning is present in the free achievement of saying what is meant," even if this senior student would say what they mean in a drastically different way than they would as a freshman. And as long as these senior writers keep writing in an academic environment, they are sure to continue to change as writers, just as their audience changes with them. The potential to fill this free space is unlimited with the changing of the author and the ever-changing audiences that come into contact with each text that is generated.

Conclusion

By considering academic writing as an artifact, compositionists can come to better understand our students; our own assignments (e.g., Why do we assign a particular topic semester after semester? Why do students respond to particular assignments by writing in "this way" or with particular sets of strategies or formats that makes their writing feel or look "academic," or conversational, or individualized?); the technologies and forms we are familiar with (should we allow students to submit papers electronically? Should we move away from the basic 2-D formats of the basic APA or MLA essay to 3-D electronic writing with hyperlinking for major academic essay submissions?); the concerns we have teaching writing (plagiarism, ability to communicate, writing contexts); composition's connections to other writing in an academic continuum (Can composition professors really teach students how to be successful in the writing portion of an economics class? What is our responsibility to the writing contexts of other disciplines?); and, last but not least, how our work affects students once they enter the "real world" from the "fantasy" (temporal, temporary) world of academia.

Theoretical propositions that suggest that “writing is an artifact” or “artifacts themselves have the potential to continue conversations” come down to attempting to theorize writing in a way that both acknowledges and extends each writer’s voice within the larger academic dialogic. The arguments I make here have two premises. The first premise is that academic texts can be artifacts. The second premise I make is that artifacts have the potential to continue conversations; thus, academic texts do not end but arbitrarily or temporarily, pausing while the text’s current audience ponders and prepares responses, or halting if no response comes. The webs and interconnections displayed here in one text emphasize the very “potential” of any text (incl. the academic essay) and any conversation to continue on, perhaps indefinitely.

And while an arbitrary stopping point might be a lost opportunity at further discussion of that one contextualized thought at that moment in time, academic artifacts are texts whose purpose is to offer postsecondary students chances to partake in the knowledge offered within an academic environment. The conversation could pick up again, with another thought inspired by the previous text, at another time. Writing professors have opportunities to create intriguing, potentially long-lasting, transitional (even artifactual) bases of dialogue with students, and one way to promote this should be introducing the idea of “writing as an artifact” as one conceivable way of understanding academic writing.

If compositionists can highlight the possibility that texts “live on” for readers after a writer has finished their initial text (and this is not to say that this text will not live on with the writer in some other version at a later date) just as artifacts live on from previous cultures, then the value and temporality of academic texts can be reconsidered by the

composition community, the administration that require composition classes of all students at most liberal arts institutions, and the students required to take these classes. I would like to see composition turn from a "Jack of all trades" course that postsecondary administration believes is responsible for training students to produce every type of academic text that might be required in the scholarly community in the space of 16 weeks and, instead, become a discipline that focuses on the power of context, writing situations, and continued communicative acts. The passing on of writing from writer to reader (and back again) means that while students submit academic texts for grades in the classroom, those texts themselves continue in a community context through audience/reader reaction, and, like a virus, the potential of the text spreads.

Through these main points, I hope to reinforce the belief that student writing takes place in particular contexts that cannot be recreated exactly as they were, even for the same student in a similar classroom. Composition professors can hope to support and enhance student writing through feedback, commentary (highlighting the value of community, borrowing, and continued conversations), and, above all, honesty. No writer is perfect, nor is any writing situation. It would be an error to suggest to students that there are situations in which an academic text covers *every* issue or data point relevant to a particular topic, includes every pertinent community voice, or even concludes, that is, that there is such as thing as a "perfect" academic essay. I hope to disrupt this "ideal" of a perfect academic essay and, instead, create a dialogue that suggests that using the metaphor "writing is an artifact" expands our field's conceptions of how we help student writers see their textual products, learn to anticipate writing's myriad contexts, and trust their own voices as they blend and

merge with the larger audiences and communities around them. This metaphor can expand into a natural discussion of how writing does not necessarily end, and through this, compositionists can help persuade students of the power of their own writing legacies.

Reflections on the Writing of Chapter 3

I am fascinated with the idea of artifacts, especially ones that I have created. Every once in a while I go through old boxes and find texts I thought were long discarded. These texts can bring me right back to the time I wrote them; I can imagine the room I was sitting in, the typewriter or word processor or computer I had at that time, what music inspired me when in my creative writing program, even the feelings or frustrations that came along with the texts in question.

For me, my academic artifacts are time-travel machines, capable of bringing me back in time (rarely ever forward) to the place where I was generally successful in school: with my writing. It is now getting harder for me to write. From teaching composition and participating in IUP's Composition and TESOL program, I have become more aware of my writing flaws the more I teach and, especially, through the interactions I have had with my dissertation director on different iterations of each chapter of this dissertation. This dissertation seems to have sucked the life out of me and, at times, while I have been excited about the discussions, I dread another iteration of another chapter of this project. In the very far future I'll look back at this dissertation artifact and read in wonder the ideas that are presented here. I am doing this now, a year after my last physical edit of this material. Sometimes I wonder if it was me saying all of this, or if I have had an out-of-body experience in that someone else came in and wrote

some of this while I was daydreaming about more sleep or the academic essays I have to grade for ENG 3 or ENG 112.

I know this text is mine: the turns of convoluted phrases are my signature, although I have been working on being more clear. I keep wondering: what if I had changed this *idea or* that *paragraph? What sort of snowball effect would that have on this dissertation? How different would it be? How much better (or worse)? Would I be done?*

I think I will well and truly appreciate this experience when I can look on this document as an artifact of a successful doctoral experience. Right now, it is less of an artifact and more of an anchor that ties me to what feels like everlasting "student-ness."

CHAPTER 4

THE NEVER-ENDING ARTIFACT IN ENG 3

Introduction

In this chapter I highlight the first of the two English courses that I use as bases for the incorporation of post-process composition theory and reader-response theory in the discussions and feedback given to students throughout a regular, 16-week semester at Northern Virginia Community College (NOVA). The course I discuss below is ENG 3, "Preparing for College Writing 2," a five-hour, not-for-credit, pre–freshman composition class that students are placed into depending on their COMPASS placement test scores. After successful completion of ENG 3, students who have no other outstanding developmental reading requirements (reading and writing are currently taught separately at the developmental level at NOVA) will move into ENG 111/ENG 9, "Freshman Composition" and "Individualized Instruction in Writing," a combined set of courses that are designed to ease a developmental student from preparatory classes into for-credit freshman composition.

While some readers of this dissertation might be surprised to see a reliance on reader-response theory in the 21st century, I use reader-response theory paired with post-process composition theory for two reasons. First, both post-process theory and reader-response theory are, at their heart, hermeneutical theories. Second, I take a chance here in attempting to discover "where writing ends" through the use of theories housed in separate disciplines (post-process as a representative of composition and reader-response theory as a representative of literature). Literature quite often makes its way into

composition courses, and use of reader-response theory in this dissertation tests the measure of success to which theories of literature can successfully and smoothly cross-over into a composition classroom. As Patricia Harkin notes, “In the 1980s, reader-response was popular amongst compositionists, even as it began to lose currency among theorists. Later, however, compositionists professionalized themselves by deemphasizing, or even ignoring, reading. Now, as the profession again considers including explicit instruction in reading in the introductory writing course, the thinkers who could help us most have faded from the discussion” (410). Harkens acknowledges that in the 1970s and 1980s, “what happens when human beings encounter written texts was on everyone’s mind. And tentative answers to that question, collectively known as reader-response theory, were energetically debated” (411). In this dissertation, then, I use reader-response theory to expand on how human beings not just engage with written texts, but indentify the endings, or boundaries, of those texts.

ENG 3, “Preparing for College Writing 2”

In ENG 3, each semester is organized around a main writing project. The themes of this project change each semester (e.g., I have asked students to write about what they are burning to tell the world; about the politics and laws or policies that affect their lives; and about goal setting, or getting “in between” places in their lives where they challenge themselves to try something daring and document the attempt), but the style and main organizational structure of the course projects remain the same.

In this class I do not suggest or require official composition textbooks. Students create their own research agendas during the semester instead of relying on prompts or composition textbooks to guide the way. Of course, I suggest free websites, such as the

one that accompanies Diana Hacker's *A Writer's Reference* as well as the Purdue Online Writing Lab, to help students learn how to accurately cite a source or create a reference, but the rest of the materials students use for their individualized projects come directly from the research students do on the topics they choose to write about.

The main writing project for ENG 3 is typically broken into three sections, or what I call "chapters" (this term appeals to students; they have told me after the semester is over that "chapters" sounds to them like they are doing real writer's work, and I have recognized subtle, positive shifts in student participation after I started calling each part of the project a "chapter" rather than the ubiquitous "essay"[11]). Project writing takes place over a full semester, in which students perform multiple rounds of draft work and receive feedback from myself and peers while also giving feedback to myself and their peers in an ongoing dialogue about their academic writing. Eventually, students submit the final writing project as a packaged product, or "book," which is designed, formatted, and bound during the second-to-last week of class. In addition, sometimes smaller writing assignments are given, and classroom discussion revolves around student projects, writing concerns, substantive feedback, academic documentation, and so forth. Smaller assignments over the course of a semester usually have tangential themes to the main project and support a student's overall writing needs.

While I consider the structure of my class as largely post-process, I do have quite a bit of carry-over from process instruction within my class. I mimic what Deborah Coxwell Teague (2000) highlights as common in a "process" classroom, especially in the consideration of multiple drafts and feedback review in the classroom. Students get to

[11] However, to keep from confusing my ENG 3 students' "chapters" with my dissertation chapters, I will refer to students' texts in this chapter as "essays."

choose the topics within the parameters of the theme I have provided for their writing projects. The three essays of the book project that my ENG 3 composition students put together for final submittal generally highlight their personal interests. Within the "What Am I Burning to Tell the World" section of this composition class, writing projects have ranged from "I Don't Want to Marry My Father," "Be an Example for the Children: I Wish My Parents Were," "I Was a Teenage Mother," and "Walk a Mile in My Shoes" (projects about abuse, parental drug use, teenage pregnancy, and parental abandonment, respectively) to "How to Survive a Bear Attack" (a narrative and nature survival guide from a student who had been there).

Within the "Laws or Policies That Affect My Life," section of ENG 3, student writing projects have ranged from "A Better America," "Understanding Why Obama Has Won My Heart, and Why He Should Win Yours," and "Because *My* Opinions Matter! (subtitled: No War in Iraq, Ok with Same-Sex Marriage, No Abortions)." Within the "Getting In-Between/Goal-Setting"[12] section, students have written about "My Family Tree" (genealogical research done by a writer who was estranged from the family she

[12] I go into further depth about my theoretical positions on "getting in-between" in an unpublished paper, "A Vision Quest: Writing as Boundary Challenge," presented during my IUP "Theories of Composition" course with Dr. Claude Hurlbert. The gist of "getting in-between" in a composition classroom means dropping traditional modes and other types of common academic writing assignments and, instead, encouraging students to explore issues in their lives that they rarely acknowledge. To find these issues, students attempt to get "in-between," in which they list things they would absolutely do and not do. These, then, are off-limits topics. Their new topics would come from a list of "what I might do," giving students an opportunity to challenge themselves in the gray spaces of their lives. This type of topic allows students to move away from issues that are instant yes/no propositions for them and, instead, encourages them to explore more fully issues that they might never have tackled.

was researching), “Teaching Bosque” (the art of raising and training a hyperactive border collie), and “Learning the Cello” (in which a marine begins private cello lessons, learns the history of the cello, and performs a selection of music for the class, all within 16 weeks).

Each book project is a unique projection of a student’s post-process location, highlighting their understanding of the book assignment, their classroom environment(s), and a subject that is passionate and timely for them to write about. Within each writing project, individual chapters have slightly different foci: the first chapter might be a narrative giving history or background on their subject. The second chapter might be set up as personal interviews of those affected by the main issue (such as cancer, obesity, or drug use), or a historical–research chapter in which the student further explores the social context of the subject of gay marriage. The third chapter might be a research chapter on the issues in a more global context (e.g., how local poverty affects the larger population) and provides what suggestions might be made to a local community to begin to affect change. For students, creation of these books involves research, persuasive writing, drafting (although how many drafts are necessary is in part a negotiation between myself and the student), and the ability to provide necessary context to carefully situate the reader in the middle of the action.

For a further example, a student might write about bulimia, providing a first essay narrative of her life as an binge eater; she might then, in her second essay, provide anorexia and bulimia research and discuss health issues that have come her way, or she might go in a different direction and interview her friends and family about how her eating issues have indirectly affected them. Finally, this student might write a final essay

in which she analyzes her "before and after" food journal, highlighting risky behaviors and tying them to a psychological component, such as eating and purging while depressed, nervous, or angry. In this example, the student has performed sustained writing on a main topic, but she has explored it in three different (but interrelated) essays or "chapters." Hopefully, if all goes well, she has done writing that will positively affect her life. As bell hooks states, "true speaking is not solely an expression of creative power; it is an act of resistance, a political gesture that challenges politics of domination that would render us nameless and faceless. As such, it is a courageous act—as such, it represents a threat" (*Talking Back. Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black* 8). It is courageous for students who have medical or mental health issues or who have been victims of violence to not just write about them for review with an instructor but also to share intimate aspects of their lives with their peers. Students who struggle with eating disorders, or domestic violence, or teen pregnancy and write about it resist a society's dual desire to keep distasteful information in the closet while at the same time one that promotes these issues on MTV by putting music videos by Chris Brown in constant rotation or by constantly airing shows like *16 and Pregnant* or *Teen Mom.* Students who write about these issues as they affect their lives attempt to provide new narratives not for financial gain but, rather, for both personal growth and academic writing experience.

Over the course of the many semesters in which I have reviewed student writing projects, I have seen multiple examples of students' fights with anorexia, fitting in, cliques, obesity, and so on. These are the topics that students bring with them that emphasize their post-process locations. Depressing as it may be, these topics, in addition to issues of class struggle (poverty, drug use, prostitution, homelessness, domestic

violence, divorce, alcoholism, etc.) are a painful but constant reminder of the struggles of marginalized students across the nation (see further Blitz and Hurlbert, 1998; Friere; hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*; O'Reilly; Owens; Rose, *Lives on the Boundary*). When students write about such patently painful (and personal) subjects, it becomes even more important for professors to be able to acknowledge a student writer's struggles with creating conversations on the page while still being able to provide constructive and sometimes critical commentary about their texts, including how they end these texts.

One of the hardest parts for students, I find, is "finishing" an essay on their topics when they are still "in the middle" of the crisis or event. How do students end these texts when the issue cannot be resolved in the neat frame of a 16-week semester? Through building working relationships with students during and after a semester is over, I have understood that the issues that student writers struggle with are not over once they submit their texts to me. The bulimic student still struggles with her body issues; the student who watched her parents violently fight struggles with current relationships. The texts these students create acknowledge important issues in their lives, and some would tell me that writing everything down is cathartic. Just as the issue does not completely solve itself in an academic essay, the essay itself is a continuation of their conversations on the subject, in hopes that potential future resolutions (such as potential dialogue; see Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*; Volosinov) have the opportunity to appear and benefit the writer in the future. In this case, the content is broached and open for future discussion depending on the variables between writer and reader. In ENG 3 we can continue or recreate conversations in the frame of an academic text, but we should not

have the expectation that these events can be thoroughly resolved by the time our semesters are over.

The ENG 3 class that I highlight in this fourth chapter of my dissertation covers a particular type of book writing project that focuses on "goal setting," an idea that I came up with that blends longer-than-one-essay writing projects that I have come across as a doctoral student at IUP (both through professors like Dr. Claude Hurlbert and through the works of my doctoral student colleagues). I have come across other book writing projects at NOVA, but these types of composition courses are in the minority. Faculty at NOVA tend to favor multiple-essay oriented classes, with a focus on preset, varied themes and/or portfolio submissions.

Goal setting in ENG 3 is designed to allow students to address issues in their lives that need to be tackled, sometimes just acknowledged, hopefully to allow a conversation that was previously internal to become external and part of a greater academic (and personal) dialogic. Once these conversations are committed to the page, students can (and do) continue to explore them both inside and outside the classroom space.

The core concept within my fairly post-process composition writing project is also inspired by Dr. Claude Hurlbert's composition courses at IUP, in which he asks his students to write about what they are burning to tell the world (Blitz and Hurlbert, "An Uncomfortable State of Mind"; Hurlbert and Blitz). My concept of a main topic written throughout the semester in my composition classrooms revolves around the idea of broader-subject writing (expanding the topic into multiple chapters in both developmental composition and advanced composition courses; see further Owens) that reflects how "communicative interaction [is] the main vehicle of decision-making and a crucial factor

in composing" (Ewald 130). I have expanded on the idea of student essays into multiple "chapters" to show students that their topics can be addressed in a wide variety of ways and all under the umbrella of a "book"—in which three interconnected essays explore the same topic at length. For most of my students this type of project is unlike any others they have attempted in composition classrooms in the scope of the project and in the topic(s).

Students in ENG 3 have a lot of decisions to make in their writing for my class, from what topic to choose, which types of chapters to provide, which peers to work with in review, whether or not to attend my office hours, whether or not to make changes based on questions I (as professor) ask. As Helen Rothschild Ewald suggests, "issues of selection hold the key to post-process pedagogical developments" (117). It is in these three-chapter book projects that students have the opportunity to explore their desires and goals, as well as to have the final say in which words they apply to the academic page. There is no denying that professors have authority in the classroom, but my course design does allow for student agency in the ideas, formulation, and final submissions created by my students in ENG 3.

Post-Process Composition Theory in the Classroom: Dialogues in ENG 3

Locating Academic Writing Artifacts

I have set as my goal the combining of post-process composition theory with the metaphor of "writing as an artifact" to determine whether or not I can establish where writing ends for students in ENG 3. In this section of chapter 4, I consider whether the metaphor of "writing as an artifact" works in the post-process interactions I have with

students, and whether or not the blending of the concepts of “artifacts,” and writing’s “potential ends” creates opportunities for students to write more deeply and intuitively, or if the blending of their disparate concepts creates undue confusion for ENG 3 students.

An important metaphor of post-process composition theory is that of “location”: where is the student writing from? For many of my students they write from the places of single mothers who work two jobs and go to school or as retired Marines who are beginning college in their late thirties or early forties in preparation for a second career. They write as young, 17-year-old full-time college freshmen, and they can be excited, ambivalent, but mostly just frustrated at having tested into a developmental writing course. Thinking in a post-process manner, I already have begun to understand my students’ “contextualized locations” from the information they have provided to me during our classroom and office hours interactions. There are many other ways to describe my students, but because there are so many types of students, each new semester provides a new and interesting mix of personalities, motivations, and strengths and weaknesses related to how students see themselves as writers.

Knowing what type of student goal-setting project I would be responding to helps me as I consider the applications of post-process composition theory in ENG 3. Therefore, in this section I focus on working with students who are interested in planning their college and career trajectory, specifically those students who are preparing to apply to NOVA’s RN nursing program. Because NOVA has a well-known Medical Education campus and a strong nursing program, generally speaking, about 15–20 percent of the students I have in ENG 3 happen to be pre-nursing students. I approach my work with nursing students who want to write about their career goals in such a way that I locate

myself as a daughter, niece, and cousin of nurses, but not as an expert on nursing. Students in my class who research what the odds are for acceptance into NOVA's nursing program or where there are local-area healthcare jobs that offer tuition reimbursement will probably not be able to get the most up-to-date information from me; rather, these pre-nursing students use their research options to contact one of NOVA's Medical Education campus counselors or those nursing practitioners within the local health care community to find this specific information. However, I can and do use my experiences as a child who practically grew up in a hospital (where my mother was an assistant director of nursing for over 25 years) and as a frequent patient (owing to my multiple knee, shoulder, hip, hernia, and C-section surgeries) to provide context through my readings of pre-nursing students' texts.

I am located outside of the allied health community, but my connections within the community (via the faculty I know on the Medical Education campus or my own circle of family and friends) can help me orient student writers who request help as they write through their goal setting (which type of nursing degree to choose, which type of nursing to practice, etc.). I am no medical expert, and, thus, my abilities to comment on a student's choice career trajectory can at times be tricky, but this situation is quite common for all teaching faculty at NOVA who are expected to be both practitioners in their chosen fields and also faculty advisors to all students who are assigned to them in any given semester.

When teaching classes that have pre-nursing students (or any students, for that matter), I have specific post-process composition writing goals that I would address when I work with each of them in ENG 3. For their essays/chapters, I would

- Encourage them to provide details that have a lasting impact on their readers, ones that highlight their post-process "location" clearly (e.g., "where are you coming from?" or "What past experiences are related to this goal, the ones that have helped you set your mind to choosing a particular career?");
- Help students provide sound structural flow in their essays so that readers understand early on the motivations, steps, and analyses each writer uses to achieve and reflect on their goals (e.g., "Now are you sure this is the goal you want to tackle?," "Let's unpack this some more. How did your past experiences watching your father get his heart transplant inform your decision to become a nurse? Did it?," and "Is it clear to your readers that you have provided enough background on nursing opportunities that they are fully 'caught up' with the content and are ready to watch you tackle this goal?"). Not helping students clearly organize their goals keeps them from having successful interactions with their readers and, thus, would keep their locations hidden;
- Prioritize my comments so that I do not just comment on surface issues like word choice or phrasing, especially in the first rounds of feedback;
- Have my students think of their goal setting writing as an artifact, a package that provides its message as long as readers get actively caught up in the details; and, finally,
- As drafts continue to grow, remind ENG 3 students that issues with spelling, mechanics, or phrasing, for example, can take readers out of the

> locations of the text and, thus, their opportunity to impress and persuade can be lost.

As Thomas Kent suggests, "most post-process theorists hold three assumptions about the act of writing: (1) writing is public; (2) writing is interpretive; and (3) writing is situated" (1). The academic writing of ENG 3 is public in that it is performed in the semipublic space of a postsecondary composition classroom, and a composition student's writing is situated amongst their experiences coming into the classroom, how they relate to the comments I make on their drafts, as well as a myriad of other actions, such as peer feedback or the number of drafts we work on together in class. Not only is student writing situated amongst how others respond to their writing, these writers also gage how well they do on her academic texts based on how they interpret other students' writing. Thus, the many layers of interaction in a classroom can provide multiple opportunities for a student to situate themselves in an academic context: How do they compare their work to other students' work? How do they interpret peer comments or my comments on their work? There are many concurrent conversations happening in ENG 3 at any one time, and a writer's "location" as a student is individual, and it constantly reappears and readjusts to new circumstances in every discussion they have about writing.

My post-process approach to a student's text is to slow down my own commenting actions, to stop and not comment during my first read through of a student text. This is new to me in that, as a writing professor, in practice I generally do not have the luxury of "just reading" student texts. I often have so many student texts to review (25 students times 3 semesters, so approximately 75 unique assignments at any one time) that I have to jump right in, even before I am mentally prepared to do so. In working

post-processually, I should try to take myself out of the contexts of what I know as a professor (like my colleague Robert Bausch has often told me, “stop distracting yourself with the little things!” like student typos or fragments or content tangents) and become “just a reader,” to orient myself toward the myriad locations that the students present in their drafts. This can be a difficult, if not impossible, task. I would ask myself, “What can I *learn* about this student’s locations from their text?” And then, after that first interaction, if I have not already I become a post-process professor on the page, I ask myself, “What can I do to make their writing a success regardless of how those locations affect a student as a writer?”

First/Early Drafts

As ENG 3 students write first drafts of one of their essay/chapters, one of the most common (and, I would suggest, important) comments that they have for their work reflects a struggle to get the text “going.” Michael Carter broaches “beginnings” in his book *Where Writing Begins*. He states that

> when I first started looking into the beginnings of writing, my goal was to find effective methods for helping students begin to write. … I was making certain assumptions about beginnings: that a beginning was a discrete aspect of writing, separable somehow from other aspects of writing; that a beginning was a simple chronological necessity for any process and therefore also for writing; and that a beginning could be defined and categorized and judged for relative effectiveness. As I explored more deeply into beginnings, however, I discovered that all my

> assumptions were false, residing in a highly simplistic view of beginnings. [xv]

In the past, I, too, found the beginnings of writings simplistic. I believed that a writer's text began where the professor said it did. For example: if the professor wants a student to brainstorm, to "pre-write," this is where academic writing begins for that student. If the professor assigns an exercise that highlights a dissonance, and then the students can choose a topic based on that exercise, a past version of my professorial self would say, "Well, it's clear. For that professor, writing begins in that dissonance." But upon further reflection of Carter's treatise, I have to agree that there is no one beginning point but many beginnings, places in which students wade into conversations, growing discussions beyond the first feelings of dissonance or a prompt, which come before but do not reflect what a student might see as the start to a piece of academic writing. This is my post-process position on where writing begins: always in the middle. Now I must translate this into my work with ENG 3 students.

First or early drafts are generally not the place to discover "where writing ends" (my dissertation goal) in a composition classroom, but they are places in which writing professors have initial interaction with students' writing, and early drafts are places where composition professors can interact and lay groundwork toward the building of metaphors (such as "writing is an artifact") that can eventually lead to helping students temporarily stop their texts. As Thomas Kent suggests, "everyone starts writing from somewhere" (2), and that place might be, as Carter suggests, one of many beginnings, fits and starts, false starts, and then when there is text on a page, drafts can emerge. My students' attempts at beginning an essay will probably not be a full-fledged essay itself,

with crisp, clear content, MLA frame, or 1,000 gleaming words on the page. Rather, some students' topic writing emerges as they begin to get excited or motivated to write about a topic, as they put words to a page, or even when they get frustrated and delete a file that they have worked for three days on to no avail (I include myself in this action). Before I can get to the anxiety of endings with my students, I must, by necessity, help them with their beginnings. I can help students locate one of many beginnings when we focus as a class on a first or early drafts of one of their goal-setting essays.

How, then, do I help students who are writing early drafts but still struggle with their writing? Even though my goal is to focus on where writing ends, I cannot ignore the trouble developmental students face with beginnings and middles. In ENG 3 I contend not with direct questions of where writing begins but, rather, with questions "post-beginning." Many of my students tell me that they have something workable (they have written something down), but they do not quite know what to do with the first rounds of what they have put on paper and labeled "draft 1." For my nursing students, working on early drafts of an essay/chapter in ENG 3, questions and comments that I have recently fielded include: "I don't know how to write this. I know my goal is that I want to be a nurse anesthetist, but I can't think of how to say it right" and "I think this is my first draft. Can you tell me what's working?" and "Just ignore all my errors. Do I say what *you* want me to say?," and "How's this?" All of these are questions of value. These student writers want to know that they are making connections with their readers, that what they have to say amounts to something. The majority of my pre-nursing ENG 3 students have an almost obsessive desire to start well, to be on the "right track" early on. From what they have shared about their previous academic writing experiences, to start

off poorly for them makes it even harder to recover grades-wise, and if they cannot recover, they do not want to take the class at all. Sometimes starting off with a B or a C on an assignment means the difference between staying and withdrawing or dropping a class because of a fear of failure.

Using a post-process composition theory that considers writing an artifact, I would approach my students' questions about early drafts in a variety of ways. I would suggest to students who feel that they did not know what to write about to take "themselves and all their habits" (i.e., dealing with anxieties that revolve around many of their locations, those that obsess about spelling errors or how long a paragraph "should be" or what the student sitting next to them in computer lab "sees" of their essay as they type) out of initial writing experiences by turning off computer monitors and just "file dumping" all their ideas into a Word file without being able to see what they were doing. I know many writers, such as professor and novelist Bob Bausch, who do this and who have suggested that blank-screen writing is a great way to not get caught up in the minutiae of grammar mistakes or errors or the "but I think so much faster than I type" stress. I would suggest to students who cannot think of what to say to "Start with your monitor turned off. I don't want you to worry about what this will look like, just say what you need to say. We'll make it look gorgeous later."

For those students who ask me to determine whether the draft I am reviewing is their "first" draft, I tell them that I care less about the boundaries of first and second drafts. "Some of you," I would say to a large group, "might have to do five drafts to make this work. Others, three. There is no exact amount of perfect drafts. That's why they're drafts." I have also been asked, "but how do I know when to stop this draft and turn it in

for review?" and, lo and behold, I get an "ending" writing question while working on an early draft. I would reply,

> That's an excellent question. You have to determine whether or not you have said enough of what you want to say that you have provided enough detail so that your audience does not get lost in the action. Compare the work that you do in an early draft to that of creating a treasure map, where X marks the spot. That map is an artifact, a clue, a guide to get your readers from a starting point closer toward a conclusion. You want them to be able to follow your directions (via details and organization) smoothly to reach that destination. When you take this to peer review, you will also be able to tell how "complete" the text is by the types of comments you get from your readers.

Of course, general questions are not the only ones students ask when working on early drafts of the essays they write for their goal-setting projects. Many times, I am asked to interpret how the topic they choose, whether it be "losing weight," "buying a car," "choosing between nursing and being a medical assistant," or even "breaking up with my abusive husband," works in early drafts. This is particularly hard because the power of what I say (or what I do not say) can have an effect on a student's continuing the topic or with what direction they choose to go with that topic. I must consider these students' post-process locations as well. If my initial feedback comes off as too strong, will they drop their topic? Am I responsible for a student who stays with an abusive husband if the advice I give to her on the draft is critical and so she doesn't have the courage or will to continue writing with this topic? I have to keep balancing my locations

as the “professor” and the power of my feedback with students with the goals they choose to attempt and write about. Students’ post-process locations of mother, wife, Marine, teenager, laid-off construction worker, divorcee, or retiree (or a combination of locations) require that I address each situation, each question, as unique to that student’s location and navigate accordingly.

In the context of the classroom, by necessity I have become the choice reader for students. I then have to turn over some of my control/power/responsibility to their other readers, the other students in the class. In this way, “students, like all writers, need to find out what kind of readers best help them in the role of editor, how to work with co-writers, how to interpret criticism, how to enter into dialogue with their addressees” (Cooper 193). The actions described by Marilyn Cooper will turn students’ first, tentative drafts into part of the grander classroom and community dialogic. Somewhere, along the way, these drafts then grow and become secondary or continuing drafts.

Secondary Drafts

The one thing that I do universally at the beginning, middle, and end of a semester is to stress, “keep writing!” This is especially important in the middle of a semester when students can get fatigued and the momentum of early excitement about writing about a certain topic fades. Each week I set aside time for my ENG 3 students to work in a writing lab, and for 20 or sometimes 30 minutes we would stop discussions or research exercises and keep writing based on wherever the student was in his or her draft. I share with my students what I have learned from Carter and Kent: That their writing is joining a conversation, right in the middle, as if they turned on their car radio and stumbled upon a talk show in which their goal-setting topic *is* the topic. Their essay is the equivalent of

their call-in to participate in the discussion. Students join an already-running conversation with any writing they do because their text does not come out of nowhere; it builds on previous thoughts they had, previous discussions they took place in or eavesdropped on, the books they have read, the news they have watched, the lives they have lived: their locations. Student conversations continue beyond these early draft interactions; everyone, writers and their readers together, builds upon these discussions through the listening and borrowing of information found in conversations about writing and conversations about the topics we write about.

I would tell my students that conversations, especially written conversations, have a lot of give-and-take. Each writer has to support what they have written (or they would possibly need to change the text). Their readers need to stay absorbed enough in the material to continue reading. Then either the reader or the writer takes this message from the text and carries it forward into new thoughts, conversations, and pieces of writing. In this way, each student's particular location gets shared through potential repetition and publication.

At some point in the middle of a this essay, say weeks 3 through 4, most students in ENG 3 will be close to finishing this first essay/chapter. They have to, of course. They are graded on their writing, on their participation in peer-review conferences and, mostly, due dates for students help them by requiring draft work to be brought to class so that a particular volume of peer and professorial feedback is given on multiple versions of these essays. Students, then, are required to work with and among their audiences on their texts throughout the semester.

Many of my students can get quite down or negative about what they have created at this point in the semester, and it is during second/middle drafts that my job providing post-process commentary is its most important. This is the space, "in the middle," where I can still have influence on students' texts, where I can work with them in big (all-class) groups, in smaller work groups, and individually through more content-related questions both in class and during office hours. This is a good time during the semester to begin the discussion of writing artifacts and to find out where writing might end, especially once students have created a material artifact in the form of a draft or drafts of their essay.

For example, when one of my nursing students asks me, "how is my draft coming along?," if I were to use post-process commentary, I would review the draft for a few minutes, and then I would make a few notes in the margins of his or her text. This is generally the first time, at least in the classroom setting, that I would provide feedback on a draft beyond verbal commentary. I want my students to find themselves in their essays, to be confident about at least one detail, one sentence, or one idea. And I want them to interact with their peers during peer review before I comment or show my notes to the student so that they have addressed expectations with readers before they deal with the anxieties of the expectations of their professors (see Caspi and Blau; Cremin and Baker; Muldoon).

The actions I take here refuse to let a student be a "solitary author" (Cooper 193); instead, through the dialogue created by peers and then myself as I insert my comments on the page, I act out in post-process composition theory, what Cooper calls an "ecological model … of [an] infinitely extended group of people who interact through writing, who are connected by the various systems that constitute the activity of writing"

(193). The group of people in this context is other students in the class and the class's instructors, but a student's location/connections can extend further: to an appointment in the writing center, to text review work with friends or family members, and so on. Supporting these classroom connections is an important part of actively applying post-process composition theory. Feedback goes beyond talking to individual students about their drafts or making notes in the margins of these texts. Group discussions in the classroom can also generate connections amongst students who are taking my class, and it supports student writing when the topics broached supplement and expand the ideas students generate in their growing essays.

At this point in the semester, when using post-process composition theory in the classroom I would broach the subject of how writing can be an artifact. In a whole class discussion, I would ask students what artifacts are, whether they have any material artifacts that brought up memories for them (like an inscribed locket or an old photograph), and are those artifacts of value? Then, as a class, we discuss the concept of valuable, written artifacts by looking at a few in context: a 1st edition of Mark Twain's "Following the Equator, A Journey Around the World" which is currently offered for $1,249 (Cahill), Egyptian hieroglyphics, the Rosetta Stone, and letters from President Lincoln that were recently appraised for $75,000 ("Abraham Lincoln Letters…"). The idea I share with my students here is that their writing can be purposeful, that their essays are material objects that can help people now and in the future. I tell my students that their writing "can have lasting impact depending on who you are, what you say, and in the contexts of what you said."

For many, artifacts have more to do with Indiana Jones or Lara Croft than ENG 3. I take this note to heart and in upcoming classes I would highlight "American Slave Narratives: An Online Anthology" that is hosted online by the University of Virginia (see also Ratwick). These narratives, too, are artifacts of a time and a place from people whose stories bring about a different perspective of the American experience. These are not authors who made money on the texts that they presented, but the texts themselves are certainly artifacts of an earlier time that provide knowledge of the human condition within slavery to current readers.

Toward a Final Draft/Submission

As stated in chapters 2 and 3 of this dissertation, a student text can go on ad infinitum in the writing of academic essays depending on the variables of the assignment and the course. Recently, I worked with one student on seven distinct drafts of her first chapter/essay, helping her fine-tune her content at each round. Her product (the final submission) would have been a drastically different text had she not worked with her peers and myself, listening to our criticisms, concerns, and sometimes amazed bouts of agreement with what she had created in her essay. Her drafts might have been fewer had she not pushed to have meetings with me during office hours, waiting expectantly and holding her breath as I performed another read through of her text. These interactions form just a part of

> the system of ideas [that] is the means by which writers comprehend their world, to turn individual experiences and observations into knowledge. From this perspective, ideas result from contact, whether face-to-face or mediated through texts. Ideas are always continuations, as they arise

> within and modify particular fields of discourse. One does not begin to write about bird behavior, say, without observing birds, talking with other observers, and reading widely in the literature of animal behavior in general. One does not even begin to have ideas about a topic, even a relatively simple one, until a considerable body of already structured observations and experiences has been mastered. [Cooper 188]

The process that Cooper speaks about above is an everlasting one, without firm boundaries. Yet because composition courses are finite structures, students would have approximately five weeks to work on this particular essay from inception to submission for a grade (as there are other essays they will also have to write this semester). And, so while student writers continue to refresh their comprehension of their worlds through their writing by virtue of living in the world and interacting with their topics via discussions, research, and writing, at some point they are required to halt this process and submit the results of being a part of this system of ideas.

Questions asked of me (and questions I have overheard in peer review) form the basis of reflection on final essay submissions. These questions run the gamut from “Do I have enough on this page to submit?” and “Can I have more time to do this part? I’m stuck in my research and I cannot seem to find anybody who has experienced this goal the way I have…” My post-process responses to these students’ questions specifically about ending a text would be, “I don’t know. Do you have enough content to satisfy the goals of the assignment?” or “Have you read about or interviewed enough nurses or physician assistants to feel like you really know what a day-in-the-life with those careers really entails? Because then I think you will feel that you have answered the questions

you need to or have seen the goal you want through the experiences of someone else who has been there." Answering a question with a question often gets me dirty glares or "harumphh!"-exaggerated sighs from my students. But these questions are valid. Going back to Cooper's excerpt above, I would ask my students in a roundabout way whether they have spent enough time experiencing and observing the topic that they are writing about to feel ready to be judged on that content by their peer readers and their professor.

Final submissions are an important interactive space between myself and my ENG 3 students, but it is difficult to sustain both verbal and written feedback for multiple rounds of each student's essay. Fatigue always wear me down and I fight hard to keep my comments engaging at the end of a semester with full classes; I would force myself to try to interact in new ways on the page with students, and I try to not pay too much attention to surface issues. In fact, in considering the use of post-process composition feedback in ENG 3, in some cases I probably would have neglected to make *any* specific mechanical or syntactical comments on a student's previous drafts for fear of taking myself and the student out of our mutual location of co-conspirators in the goal-setting essay. At some point I know I must help students with their grammatical and syntactical tics, but I loathe leaving the content of an almost-submission in what generally feels like a soul-crushing move of telling students they might have said it wrong. I have heard countless stories from students of what their "bloody-red-penned" high school English teachers did to their essays, and I hear the cacophony of "I hate writing!" from these students each semester to prove it.

In addition, I am not fully sure that one or two partial class period devoted to a discussion of artifacts provides enough of a connection between the short discussions

regarding artifacts and how a student's text is one, too. Is an entire class period dedicated to the topic of written artifacts helpful, or does it just take students too far off track of the main assignments and their writing? I wonder if I would be focusing too much on the application of the metaphor of "writing as an artifact" in large group discussions instead just broaching the subject and asking my students how they end their essays. Conceptually, I know my students can handle these somewhat abstract metaphors and similes. I just do not know if a post-process application of "writing as an artifact" would work as I envision here. Should the whole semester be about artifacts and not goals? Should I structure the semester around discovering the artifacts within each student's texts? Should goals go out the window?

My students have very particular ideas regarding where their academic writing ends. When I have asked them, "Where do you end your essay?," one student told me that "my writing ends when I submit this to you" waving what he calls his "almost, almost" final draft my way. Another student remarks that "When you tell me it ends. Because you made me resubmit my last essay, remember?" I find that I would not overtly tell my students where their writing ends, other than reminding them of our class schedule with its due dates. Around week 4 I would signal that a stopping point to one's own writing should be in sight to particular students because they would continue to work on their current essays indefinitely if I do not highlight the submission due date. I would provide suggestions that would be labeled as "what to add" under questions that a reader in my post-process location would wonder. "Would your essay end if another class reads it? A textual artifact is a gift that keeps on giving as long as there are readers (or even past readers) engaging in the material you wrote. Even if you pack away your essays

from ENG 3 and put them in a box in the attic, or even if you shred the hard copy, your writing potentially lives on in the minds of every reader who read it. You could have inspired another classmate to quit smoking, or to tell their parents they are gay, or to try their goal again when they're really ready."

A final question I would ask my students refers back to our discussion of artifacts. When I ask my students to name important artifacts in their lives, they mention their homes, their cars, their children (are artifacts?), their high school diplomas, or the first love letter they received from a significant other. To a nursing student I would ask, "Do you see your academic work as an artifact? Can another nursing student in a class of mine, say next year, look to your chapter to find out how they should plan their academics for a nursing degree?" I would ask during work right before final project submissions. Generally, academic texts (and, esp., those performed in my early years as an ENG 3 professor) are not cherished items, and academic texts are not usually on display like wedding photos or a baby's first footprint printed on vellum and saved for posterity in a frame on the living room wall. Academic artifacts are a part of the scholarly landscape, one in which students in my ENG 3 course happen to partake in, but generally not out of desire to be in a writing class. ENG 3 is a means to an end for the vast majority of my students, and the texts they create in my course, try as I might, are currency (and, thus, valuable) during the semester that they take ENG 3. But because of the politics surrounding developmental writing and academic credit, the works performed in ENG 3 are generally not valuable once they have been promoted from this course and placed into freshman composition (ENG 111). For my ENG 3 students, ENG 111 (freshman

composition) is when the real work of academia begins, and the pride creating living, academic artifacts really comes into play.

Finally, I address the post-process goals I have for my responses to nursing students' texts. First I realize that I have very specific ideas about how academic essays are written, even when different topics or types of essays are taken into consideration. In working post-processually, many students do not always follow my ideas or suggestions. I wonder if in my imagination I try to respond to these students' locations, or, instead, try to have them fit into my own. Not only would this create an issue of final ownership of a text (if a student feels forced to change their content to align with what a professor wants, whose text does this become? See discussions in Caspi and Blau; Cremin and Baker; Muldoon; Ross). In addition, I would require details at every turn, and many requests for those details were met with thanks and relief. I would try to influence students by providing multiple opportunities to discuss how writing is an artifact and how artifacts can make texts live on (and, thus, not end). Do these discussions make a clear case about where students stop/end academic writing? Probably not (yet). I do not think there is a failure in the mechanism of using a metaphor like "writing is an artifact" to explain how writing does not end because the focus on readers and potential future variations through evolution and borrowing will keep each student's text alive in new locations, as long as these students or their readers continue to think about or use any ideas even remotely related to the text.

Reader-Response Theory in the Classroom: Dialogues in ENG 3

Reflecting Writers' Academic Artifacts

As Patrick Bizzaro states in his chapter "Interaction and Assessment" from *Responding to Student Poems: Applications of Critical Theory*, "If properly adapted to the classroom situation, reader-response methodologies will require that students determine who they want their texts to address and that teachers relinquish some power in examining those texts" (67). And David Bleich notes, "generally, response is a peremptory perceptual act that translates a sensory experience into consciousness" ("Epistemological Assumptions in the Study of Response" 134). While we teacher-readers translate the sensory experiences of our readings, students must then interpret these comments and determine whether or not that, though these comments, they have created a text that sufficiently communicates.

This has been one of the hardest aspects of exploring methodologies that I do not normally practice (or practice piecemeal) in my composition classrooms—that of giving power back to my student writers. To perform a legitimate "reader-response" action, I must "willingly relinquish at least some of the authority the traditional classroom environment confers upon [me]. Interaction and shared authority are at the center of any method of evaluation and reading founded upon reader-response theories" (Bizzaro 68–69). I have set up the goal of combining this reader-response theory with the metaphor of "writing as an artifact" to determine whether or not I can establish where writing ends for ENG 3 students via reader-response theory. I also will consider whether the metaphor of "writing as an artifact" works in the upcoming reader-response interactions I have with students, and I work under the assumption that I might jettison the "artifact" concept in classroom and in individual discussions if it becomes too unwieldy.

If "reader-response criticism is based on the belief that meaning is determined by the reader's re-creation of the text" (Bizzaro 67), then it is this reader I must reflect in my feedback to my ENG 3 students. But I am not the only one who becomes a reader of my students' essay writing; other students also perform as readers when they partake in-class peer review, a big component of ENG 3's classroom work. Peer review highlights what Hollis Summers suggests are critical actions in a writing class: "A class offers a variety of ears and eyes. If several readers disapprove of a word, a line, a concept, the writer is likely to reconsider that detail. Whether or not he changes his manuscript, he is strengthened in his approach to his own mind and *artifact*" (88, emphasis added). And while Summers highlights creative writers in a poetry class (as does Bizzaro), his advice for reader-response theory in early drafts fits nicely into the developmental composition context of my ENG 3 course: "Because I feel that [student] poems represent early drafts of possible poems, I refrain from item-picking customs of a classroom or a conference. Sensing that the next dish will be better, I refrain from sending deserved compliments to the chefs. I feel that the poems, as they stand now, are indulgent. The poets have not loved their poems enough" (Summers 88–89). I often feel this way, too, with my writing students' early drafts in that I must remind myself to "hold back" from my general forms of early support ("this was excellent!") for fear that some students might decide then that their initial draft submission is also "final." That first draft might be excellent, but it still might need continued work. I also would try to hold back my desire to comment on surface issues like spelling and fragments and attempt to work with the textual artifacts presented to me, each draft having the potential to "become" what the writer intended. As a reader using reader-response theory, I should be cautiously optimistic with my student

texts, detailed enough to make connections with them and reserved enough to elicit continued opportunities to fine-tune work toward a final submission.

While I feel a real need to provide support in the form of positive commentary even on difficult student texts, I have a tendency to be less critical than I sometimes should be; using reader. Holding back, slightly, as Summers suggests, might be a way to not confuse or inhibit my students' initial texts. Students should have their professor's support to truly open up and write effectively, especially if they have struggled in the past with their writing; yet sizing up how to give that support might just be that I should wait until more time has passed (say, into the during a middle or later stage of the development of an essay) so that students have had additional opportunities to read, reflect, and interact with peer and professorial commentary on the nuts and bolts of their text and to gain confidence in their text before obtaining any celebratory comments from a professor.

During early drafting stages, I most students have not found the *end* to their writing; instead, they generally signal for help continuing writing through requests for feedback and additional time for peer review. I can only know that a text is what the student writer intended when this writer signals to me (e.g., through feedback in class, in a conference, or in an e-mail) that they believe they are "done"—that the writer has reached that mythical place in which their text is ready, complete, *final.* Because this does not happen during first drafts (unless the question is: "when is *this* draft finished?," I have to attend to questions of beginnings and middles during the early stages of ENG 3 student writing.

While many of my students in ENG 3 are focusing on allied health majors (incl. respiratory therapy, nursing, and physical therapy), there is also a significant contingent who are interested in obtaining a degree in business administration. The essays that these students put together in my ENG 3 course have a lot to do with entrepreneurial goals: starting a business, marketing an already-created product, or even writing a how-to nature survival guide. My interactions with students through reader-response theory will be a departure for these students in that, from what they have shared with me, they are not used to having so much control over their texts. Reflection and interpretation of a text based on an imagined reader or ideal reader is a big departure from structured assignments and line-by-line grammatical feedback of other developmental writing classes and the high school English experiences they have stored in their long-term memory. My reader-response comments on these students' texts follow the style of Bizzaro, in which I would create a "parallel text" through bubble commentary in the margins of students' electronically submitted texts, even early on in drafts (much different than my post-process actions) and I would also aim to create alternative texts via dialogue in whole-group and individualized verbal discussions.

My goals for reading students' essays regarding business-oriented texts with reader-response theory are as follows, and they are quite similar to Bizzaro's four tenets in his application of reader-response theory to his students' poetry. I would strive to

- Become Gibson's "mock" reader (Gibson 1950) by reading student work and attempting to become the reader each writer imagined as they wrote their essays;

- Ask questions; the "querying method," as I often call it, attempts to clarify a writer's text without directly telling the writer what I want him or her to say. My questions can signal to these students whether or not I have become the reader he wrote his essay for. As Gibson suggests, "A bad book, then, is a book in whose mock reader we discover a person we refuse to become" (69);
- Reconstruct the text for each writer (i.e., reflect the interpretive community; Fish): When not asking questions, I would focus on recreating the text (stating how I, the teacher–reader, "saw" the text) in the margins; a writer might see a clear reflection of his content in my response if I take on the identity of their acknowledged reader through my comments. If not, this will signal to the student writer that they need to consider additional opportunities (in upcoming drafts) to continue to mold and create that reader through his or her own writing; and
- Include a discussion of writing as an artifact in such a way that these students see that they can create academic texts with the potential to continue to reach out to their future readers (thus, that their writing has the potential to live on).

First/Early Drafts

As mentioned in the post-process theory section earlier in this chapter, it is almost impossible to bring about a successful discussion regarding ending an academic text when a student has just immersed themselves in beginning a draft of an essay. At this point in student writing processes, not only is a discussion about where writing ends

distracting to students but this can also be premature. Students who are invested in "getting rolling" (as they tell me) on an assignment should not be distracted by being told how to end that text, regardless of the theory being used. Composition professors need to use their intuition and listen (in reader-response theory, to "reflect back") to students' discussions of their own texts. Once a professor hears that a student is approaching a middle place, a place in which they *might* be comfortable with a discussion of where the text stands as a whole, would it be ethical to bring about a discussion of where that text could stop. But not yet.

There are many actions that composition professors can take at early stages in a student's essay writing with the aim to approach a text via reader-response theory. These actions might include (1) brainstorming with students to come up with well-rounded details surrounding their chosen goals; (2) providing textual, reflective feedback that focuses on details already addressed or significant missing details that affect the persuasive ability of the text by a student; and, most importantly, (3) supplying the type of response, both verbally and in the margins of an essay, that suggests to a student writer that there is an imagined reader of that text who exists both now and in perpetuity. All students need to know that their writing does not appear in a vacuum, and that their academic work has a viable audience, even if that audience does not fully engage with a text until multiple drafts have fleshed them out. Initial activities involving professorial and peer review, reflection back of content to the writer, and multiple chances for each writer to continue to fine-tune their essay through these interactions support reader-response theory being used in an ENG 3 classroom.

For example, in the first activity above, when brainstorming with students, professors focusing on reader-response theory can ask students to create a stream of consciousness (an exercise in which a student spends five to six minutes listing any words that pop into their minds when thinking about the overall goal they have chosen) as they think about their chosen goals. This exercise is designed to tap into a student's subconscious and to "drill down" to see what a student might be thinking under the surface. I would then ask the whole class, "Now take a look at the list you created. Make a note or highlight any words or ideas that seem out of place for you. What do you think these words mean? Could they enhance your text? Could they help your readers see a fuller picture of your goal? If so, let's talk about where these ideas can be incorporated into your essay draft."

With consideration to the second action above regarding early-draft reader-response activities in writing classrooms, professors can and should take as many opportunities to review students' growing academic essays, even in early stages. An imagined or ideal reader might not emerge clearly at this point, but an instructor should signal to a writer places that a reader might expect expansion (supporting details, effective tangents, clearer points or arguments) so that, through a dialogic student texts can grow into a more mature text that can eventually support the demands of an ideal reader. Questions like "Did you mean to discuss getting a retail space for your hair salon and spa before you discuss how you plan on securing capital for that space?" can redirect student writers back toward their goal and on a route toward their ideal reader, who would want to see a pathway through significant fiscal issues that arise in starting a business. These questions would appear in electronic copies of submitted student texts

and delivered on those electronic copies (by saving the original file, making notations in the margins, then re-saving the new file and either posting that file in an approved open class space like Blackboard's "Discussion Board" or in a private space via e-mail).

Finally, I address the third point above, that in early drafts, reader-response theory should provide the type of response, both verbally and in the margins of an essay, which suggests to a writer that there is an imagined reader of that text who exists both now and in perpetuity. I believe that reader-response theory can successfully work with the metaphor that writing is an artifact. The idea that writing is an artifact could help students see the tangibility of a text in future interactions with readers. This metaphor can help students conceptualize that their work is not only meant for *an* (or one) audience, or one ideal reader but also that their ideal reader can continually change and grow with the text, and that there is more than one ideal reader of a successful text. For example, Shakespeare was a successful playwright in the late 16th and early 17th centuries, and so he had ideal readers both for his published quartos and ideal audience members for his plays. Shakespeare's work survives today and is not only performed via the original plays (e.g., by Shakespeare and Company) but his work is also adapted into different forms, including movies and television shows such as *O* (a reinterpretation of *Othello*) and *Ten Things I Hate about You* (a modern reinterpretation of *The Taming of the Shrew*). I would share with my students that Shakespeare's work existed for multiple audiences, and his texts are indeed artifacts that continue to address the human condition.

At this point in the creation and sustenance of early drafts, I would tell students that if they were to create a successful written artifact, they would be imagining not *one* but *many* ideal readers. In this way I would hope that their texts would become flexible,

interactive spaces in which their messages would be carried on into an infinite future. It is a wildly successful text that imagines the needs of a multitude of readers, and reader-response theory can support the idea that "writing is an artifact" if students consider that the imagined readers they are writing for exist and have the potential to always exist. Like the examples provided in the post-process section of this chapter, I can use a variety of written artifacts to make this point more clear. Effective artifacts are texts that reach readers through compelling details, a clear flow, and accessible grammar and syntax such that it does not "distract" from a text's content.

Secondary Drafts

A successful written artifact in one of my ENG 3 classes that does not "distract" from a text's content was the business plan of a student who wanted to open her own catering company. After she wrote her three essays, she transferred all that information into a web blog to describe her catering activities to potential readers who searched for her topic: "Catering Caribbean Cuisine in the DC Metro Area," to provide menu and event pricing options, as well as images of recently catered events, a map of the DC areas covered by her business, and a historical section highlighting her background and knowledge of her specialty, Caribbean/Jamaican cooking. This electronic artifact is an effective example of how a student in ENG 3 conceptualizes a goal (making part-time catering for friends and family an actual business) and turns it into an engaging, interactive space that can continue to draw in many types of ideal readers: those interested in learning about Caribbean cuisine, those who want to find a caterer, and those who want to learn how to structure a small business that uses websites to capture potential clients. Examples like these, I imagine, would drive home the idea that goal

writing can be artifacts of a past academic experience, of a current consumer need, and of future business opportunities.

Hollis Summers suggests that it is "a reader's responsibility of saying 'This [text] works for me' or 'This text does not work for me' " (in Bizzaro 69; Summers 87). As Summers notes, a reader brings into their interactions with a text what they understand about the world and how it works; thus, I bring myself and my knowledge of tackling many goals like starting my own editorial business to goal setting "to the words and white spaces on a page that records somebody else's experiences" (87). Norman Holland, in "Unity Identity Text Self" (1980), suggests that "in the white spaces" between the words in his title lie "the mysterious openness and receptivity of literature" (118). Holland highlights the unendingness of a text through these spaces: "Somehow, all kinds of people from different eras and cultures can achieve and re-achieve a single literary work, replenishing it by infinitely various additions of subjective to objective" (118). It is in our actions as readers to define (in our recreation of a text) the text through both the words we read and how we fill up the blank spaces that surround the author's words, thus recreating it as potential ideal readers.

I become a mock or ideal reader for my ENG 3 students when I attempt to read their texts as each student writer intended (Bizzaro 71). I must draw on all my experiences as writer, reader, professor, and almost-forty-something woman to do this correctly. And if I do not have the experiences that my student writer expects, I have to reflect that back in the comments I provide to secondary drafts of their work so that they understand that the goals they write about might be unique to their imagined readers. This

can signal to these writers that they might need different types of details to adequately reach the readers they imagine.

By performing reader-response theory in my responses to business writers, I would take as much time as necessary in recreating the essence of the secondary draft back to the student writer. Not all students end up with successful small business websites or hard-copy business plans, but I would suggest to them that an end product was also at one point a draft that had good ideas but not fully realized content. I would suggest to my ENG 3 students that "As you take these steps toward showing us how you will reach your goal, think about what would help us (because I am a reader, too) 'see' this process more clearly." Individually, I might lean over the student who wants to own a salon/spa and, while pointing to his draft on his computer screen or in hard copy, and ask him his thoughts on a particular passage. Many times, students have responded with "I've gotten this far and now I'm stuck…" so I would say to him that "The more you know about your finances, such as 'how much money do I actually have to put into this business?' or 'What are the day-to-day costs for running a salon?,' the more you can give your readers the roadmap toward owning their own business one day." Another question I would ask them during secondary drafts would be: "Do you think your intended readers are students who hope to go into business? Will they use your text as a guide or artifact?"

Students have often said to me that "I wish there was some sort of checklist out there that could help people start a business!" and I would say back to them if I was considering the intersections of reader-response theory with "writing as artifact":

> But isn't there? Literature for starting businesses is everywhere from the Web to your local library or bank. Now those are tangible artifacts! Think

> of this chapter as a manual on how to organize all the things you need to march right into a bank with all your research done and ask for a loan. You still have a lot of decisions to make; there's nothing wrong with sharing those with us on the page. If you cannot find a checklist, can't you create one for us? I mean, many of the students in this class will one day want to be their own boss. Aren't you then writing this for them all?

In-class commentary extends the life of a student's essay beyond the text itself and into our classroom interactions. I want my initial feedback on the page to stop where a student stops his or her draft so that the "teacherly" comments that I generally provide do not overwhelm a student's control over their text. I feel the way Summers does about comments: "my comments are considerations, not edicts" (89). In this way, I want to show entrepreneurial students that, as a reader, here is the sense of what I get from their texts. I would look for nonverbal reactions, like body language, including a nod of their head, or a sigh, or a puzzled crinkle to their foreheads to gage whether these comments resonate with the idea they have for readers of their essays.

When working on secondary drafts, applying reader-response theory both verbally and in marginal comments can be extremely difficult. I would have to fight the instinct to "overcorrect" some issues in student drafts, like word repetition or spelling. Of course, it is my responsibility to point it out during work on secondary drafts, but at some point, like Bizzaro states, I have to leave the text in the hands of the original writer in the hopes that my message was received without distracting from the bigger issues of content delivery. Using reader-response theory, I feel I would find myself restating my comments/queries so that they reflected a more "reader-response" stance for many

students. For example, I might want to tell my hair salon/spa student to “watch for an overrepetition of ‘you’ in your texts. It certainly will apply to readers who want to create the exact same business you do, but not all will, even if they are ideal readers. Some will want to obtain business ideas from your text for a very different type of business, and some might just like your story and want to read more without wanting to open a business…” This feeling of holding back seems to affect writing teachers, as it did Summers: “hoping I do not harm the poets or the poems, realizing the dangers of my sounding pretentious, I make a few specific comments on the works in progress” (89). Bizzaro states similarly that “when I first placed pen to student text, however, I found myself reverting to previously used strategies of reading; only through concentrated effort did I manage to teach myself how to use reader-response methodologies” (70). I do not think I would be able to fully respond to a student in a reader-response way on my first try; it certainly takes practice. Note that my comments on a proposed secondary draft do not yet highlight movement toward addressing this student’s ideal reader but, rather, reflect my professorial tic against “ ‘you’ use.” These actions are what Bizzaro describes as “false starts” (72) in attempting feedback through reader-response theory.

Reader-response theory should not only be applied in textual interactions. Students involved in whole-class dialogue can also obtain information from group discussions that support the idea that their texts are artifacts that have ideal readers both current and potential. After a day in the middle of the semester introducing different types of written artifacts in a similar manner to how the discussion that appears earlier in a post-process oriented artifacts discussion, students might ask questions such as “what is the purpose of artifacts to our essay?” This question makes me wonder. Would I be trying

too hard to fit my idea of "writing as an artifact" into my teaching writing via reader-response theory? I find that I would reiterate in this chapter 4 discussion what I have told students individually when working on drafts of their essays: "Your current chapter could be an artifact for somebody else." As I have experienced when discussing artifacts with students in the past, blank stares can follow, and I realize I would need to verbalize the ideas that brought me to imagine student writing as artifacts. I would say, "Would you have an easier time of it if I gave you a step-by-step plan to create a workable business plan and budget? Remember, in our last class you stated that you wish there was just a one-size-fits all manual on what exactly to do. So what if *your* chapter was that manual that a future student of mine uses? Could your writing then be a valuable document for somebody in the future?" In this way, students who see new avenues in their texts are not ready to end them.

Interesting things can happen in students' secondary drafts. Classroom discussions supplement the work that instructors can do when they perform reader-response theory in the margins of a student's text. The students and I would negotiate their essay/chapters, and along the way there are parts of their essays that I find I would really respond to: the struggle of a college student to be independent and, yet, successfully negotiate rules with banks and potential business partners; the frustration that comes along with not having enough money or not being able to earn enough to get to the point where one can be completely free to pursue a dream unencumbered. As a reader I am invested in these parts of students' essays, and it is in these parts that I become a students' ideal reader. As a professor, however, I would struggle with becoming the ideal reader when my professorial instincts want to direct particular aspects

of students' essays. I think back to comments I routinely give that focus on homonym misuse or missing punctuation. Superficially, I can justify to myself that readers need the clarity that comes in a proofread. However, at first I might couch my proofreading instructions in what I think is a reader-response fashion because during secondary drafts many of my ENG 3 students are still thinking of details and less about phrasing.

Toward a Final Draft/Submission

Through the use of both post-process theory and reader-response theory, I realize that students are the final owners of their material in the sense that they "release" or publish their text to their readers in what they consider is "final" form. Using reader-response theory, I have to allow each student to make the decisions regarding which details fit as part of their goal-setting essays and which ones are superfluous. I can only hope that through my feedback on students' drafts, discussions with each student and those that they undertake in peer groups show them what different goals look like on the page, and that what they all have in common is the desire to reach readers (ideal or real) through persuasive details. There is no right way to write goal essays, but there are clear markers that students can use to organize an attempted goal for the benefit of their readers.

Student essays stop when they turn in final submissions to me. As I interact with these final submissions, a few thoughts might find their way into my comments: I am excited to see how much work each student has put into their essays. The depth of detailing usually grows, although in some cases it has not reached a level that in my mind I feel the students have the potential for, especially considering a challenging topic like starting a business and who they imagined as their ideal readers: individuals who are

ready to begin formalizing their own business plans. I realize that student writers can still struggle to make a connection between wanting a business and the steps it takes to make it a reality. These knowledge gaps are the same spaces between words in a text that Holland highlights. And in that frustration is a relationship to each student's goal. I can tell that this student has not "ended" this text, as I would state in my last marginal comment on the final copy: "your goal is still waiting for you, then."

When students write about personal experiences, they leave themselves vulnerable to criticism about their lives, and many of them are not quite ready for that (Blitz and Hurlbert, 1998; O'Reilly; Owens; Rose). I "see" this vulnerability as an open wound: performing reader-response theory on these texts is tricky because as much as I try, I would still the professor-reader and not a student's ideal reader, probably not yet. If I was his current ideal reader, I would not be bothered by missing ordinals that would signal a transition from one part of the text to the next, the grammar tics that I do not see addressed on the page, and the light details that show one particular student's somewhat lukewarm interest in the fine print of starting a business. This student's ideal reader (another student like him?) would likely be satisfied with the level of effort provided in the text; another student might find the level of detailing sufficient to spark an interest in retail business (I often see this discrepancy between student expectations of another student and my own with them); however, I might not find the levels of detail adequate to the goals of the assignment. This is the delicate business of performing reader-response theory in developmental English classes. I do not know if an ideal reader exists that wants business information in a non-business or academic-styled English. As I tell my students during proofreading sessions, one of the hallmarks of a business professional is in their

writing and editing skills: “The American Society of Training and Development determined that business writing and editing skills were the second most requested training topic by business professionals in the U.S.” (May 17).

Finally, I address the reader-response goals I have set in my responses to my anecdotes regarding business students’ actual essays. First, through reader-response theory, a writing professor like myself should become Gibson’s “mock” reader. I would attempt to become the reader these students imagine for their business essays. I might not be successful in this endeavor through reader-response theory unless, as Gibson suggests, there are bad texts, and students in ENG 3 can submit texts in which they ignore professorial commentary designed to highlight an ideal reader and, thus, they submit a “bad text” (or what I call a text whose author does not consider its ideal readers). It happens. And it also happens that students who are labeled “developmental” through archaic, multiple-choice tests are actually not developmental but, rather, quite advanced in their collegiate writing. These students would succeed with reader-response feedback after a period of adjustment if they are willing to work hard, to take notes, and to dig into feedback and commentary from their peer and professorial readerships.

In working with ENG 3 students via reader-response theory, I would create questions for my authors via the “querying method.” This is an important place to continue to explore the theory because taking on a new identity through reader-response theory takes time, practice, and precision to really “become” an ideal reader for 25 different writers per class. Additionally, I would include a discussion of writing as an artifact throughout the time spent on this essay in class both in full-class discussions and in one-on-one interactions, but to do this I might have leave the concept of “artifacts”

behind and, instead, use “business plans” or another term that fits the writing that my students do in ENG 3. I do not believe that this directly translates to my initial goal of helping students temporarily end their academic texts, but reader-response theory could surely help students reconsider what it means to meet their reader’s needs through clear details, relevant details, and an eye for a text’s smooth flow.

Conclusion

Through this exercise in providing feedback through post-process composition theory and reader-response theory, I have gained some insight on the two questions I was trying to discover the answers to in this dissertation: I want to know whether professors can help developmental writing students end their texts, and whether using metaphors like “writing is an artifact” can be helpful in that endeavor. To the first question, the answer has to be yes. Writing professors can certainly assist in the discovery of where students want their writing *to stop* by working within the contexts of a student’s post-process locations. We can trust our students’ instincts, and our own as readers and guides, that when something seems missing in a text, it probably is. If a text does not seem “complete” or as developed as we would like, a dual-use reader-response/post-process comment that can inspire more writing, like the one I would give my post-process students such as, “keep writing!” can suggest to a student that this text is not ready to be stopped.

If there never is a place to end a text, would students just throw up their hands in aggravation and say, “to hell with this!”? I already walk a tightrope with many of my developmental students in that they have to pay for ENG 3 yet they get no college credit or GPA for their efforts. I have tried to design writing projects that benefit their lives as

well as introduce them to the language and writing styles of academia. Yet a composition professor's commentary can get too abstract, for example, if I pushed the idea of "the never ending writing artifact" too far and lost sight of the actual writing struggles that my writing students have tackled, then the metaphor would have taken control and I would have lost my way in the classroom. If abstraction gets in the way of a goal, the abstraction should be tabled for another time, another class, or for consideration of theory but not in actual pedagogical application in a writing classroom, at least until such time as a writing professor can see real applications of said theory that would not possibly do harm to vulnerable students.

I struggle with trying to help my students stay afloat with the volume of writing they do, with answering questions about "how long does this really have to be?," comments like "I am *exhausted* and didn't do any more writing on it. Do you think I can pass with what I have?" and the like. Yes, these *are* students' questions regarding where writing ends (for them). But they never were in relation to my metaphor of "writing as an artifact," so in the future I would drop a discussion of academic texts as artifacts and respond, instead, with "your essay should be as long as it needs to be to really engage your audience" or "yes. You can *pass* with this draft. Is that all you're looking to do?"

Questions of where writing ends certainly arise from my past and present students. However, I do not think I was open to hearing them before acknowledging this concept during the course of writing this dissertation. I let the theory guide me as much as possible in my response to students regarding how they end their texts. I have found that 90 percent of students' actions in the writing and ending of their texts attest to their contexts that surround their lives, including how we interact together in the classroom.

And I find that I naturally shift more toward post-process composition theory and a consideration of a student's location than I do with reader-response theory.

The second element I was interested in evaluating was whether use of the term *artifact* could aid students in the full development of their texts. In this I think the metaphor has mixed results. I find that it would be much easier to bring the concept of "the artifact" into a post-process essay-writing discussion than to introduce it in a reader-response oriented classroom. Post-process locations tend to acknowledge artifacts much more readily than reader-response-directed composition classes. When looking at the writing of future business majors, I would continue to respond as an author's imagined reader. Yet, in reality that person would be me, the professor who assigned the writing; however, in reading these texts I get the impression that my students can get lost in their own thoughts on the page and become their own imagined readers: they would have an audience of just one. These ENG 3 student texts can highlight a clear struggle for the writer in achieving his or her goal, while my professorial directions around these concerns might not lead to success from a real, nonimagined reader's point of view.

In addition, there was a lot of myself as professor that got left on feedback's cutting-room floor within the commentary that happens on ENG 3 student drafts. In applying very specific content-related theories to student papers, I would not respond to many grammatical or mechanical issues in secondary mid-semester student drafts as much as I would normally do. I felt that this would not mesh or blend well with the theories in question. Not being able to address legitimate writing concerns I would have with these students makes me wonder whether a "pure" form of any theory can be used in responding to student work. Even in theory, I do not think it is reasonable. Our identities

are often hard to distance ourselves from; applying new composition theories to student writing has been difficult in that when instinct suggests one should do one thing but then do another, that conflict can appear as inconsistency in how professors react and respond to student texts.

I sense that a lot of student satisfaction in the final submissions (or in the final assignment of grades) of student essays has more to do with each author's agency in their goal-setting situations. I am hopeful that my comments would help students address particular issues in their writing, and that while acknowledging where writing stops is clear to me (it does not), it is more unclear the effect using a metaphor like "writing is an artifact" would have on student essays in these two theoretically different ENG 3s. What I think is beneficial is using metaphors in general in the classroom. Using differing terminology to describe what writing is or what it could be allows for other connections to be made for student writers and gives writers new opportunities to make more varied connections on the page for their future readers.

I find that I have not completely become the "reader-responder" or "post-process" professor that I set out to become. Partly I think that it is the nature of nonfiction academic writing. On the one hand I suggest that students have quite a bit of freedom to come up with ideas, to share and defend those ideas, and to support that content in their writing. Yet I have chosen a very specific topic (a "goal-setting" multiple-essay project) to experiment with these theories, and so I have boxed myself in. I created a very narrow writing field for which my students could be creative, and then I attempted to switch on/off a teacherly or readerly persona guided by two different feedback protocols. Performing different types of feedback for the same level course (ENG 3) at different

times during a semester would be disconcerting and problematic at best. So I would not suggest that professors try multiple theoretical approaches in the same semester. Students just learning the academic ropes in a college context can get overwhelmed when a professor continues to switch masks/roles and I am sure I would as post-process theory and reader-response theory bled from a 4 p.m. class to the 7 p.m. class, and vice versa. However, this was a great learning tool for me. I know now that if I were to use either theory in a more pure form, I would need to stick to it all semester, and the classroom conversations would have to follow the theory to be consistent.

Reflections on the Writing of Chapter 4

Layering in the concepts of "writing artifacts" and "where writing ends" was more difficult than I thought it would be. In addition, I feel that my comments in these samples are unrealistic of how I would be able to comment on all students' posts in my classes each semester. Here are some calculations that extrapolate what it would be like to perform this in-depth type of response with each of my students. I am required to teach 15 hours each semester. With three ENG 3s, for example, that would be 75 students (with a 25-student cap on each class). If each student writes just three chapters (essays) per semester, that's at least 9 rounds of comments (first draft, second draft, last submission, depending on how many drafts students want to review with me/peers) in-depth responses, and so forth, depending on which type of reading I perform for the students. This does not even take into consideration my attempt at a first read through without applying commentary with post-process theory in ENG 3.

This pace would be untenable. With the multiple readings also required to perform reader-response theory, that is a rate of about three–four students per hour on a

good day. In a perfect world, it would take me 192 hours just to give feedback on these essays without feedback on other assignments, additional emails, phone calls, or office hours visits. Realistically, it would take closer to 250 hours, or 25 weeks of straight office hours (10 hours per week) to perform this feedback. Our semesters end after 16 weeks, and so much of this commentary spills into extra work time.

As most of my faculty peers know, we often have to do our feedback outside of office hours. I have office hours dedicated to evaluating student writing, and I am used to providing feedback to students. However, in those office hours I must also perform academic advisement for students (who might or might not be in my class), and perform my committee assignments. Currently I am the co-chair of the college's English Cluster; I am the chair of the Adjunct Engagement Committee; I am a member of the Campus Council Adjunct Committee; I am a co-advisee of the LGBT club; I have been brought in to create a committee that clarifies ENG course suggestions to NOVA counselors; I am the Woodbridge Campus Technical Applications Center Faculty Mentor, and so on. It is a rare occasion that I can even provide feedback on three students during a four-hour window of office hours.

I am beginning to realize that I have bitten off more than I can chew. Application of new theories seems like a fantasy and not a reality. I am fascinated with how post-process instruction or reader-response theory fits into the teaching of developmental English. Other options include changing the type of assignments students perform in my class, performing fewer rounds of draft/feedback, and so forth. Do I give up layers of feedback for more in-depth feedback? Do I rely more on student peer review, as students

happen to inhabit each other's current class locations, and they happen to be each other's readers?

I am also concerned with time to work on my dissertation, time to devote to my family, and time to catch a breath or get more than six hours of sleep a night. I know my "outside teaching" life affects my teaching life. How I function in my outside world carries over into my classroom locations. I have often reviewed my comments to students and wondered if I have been too harsh, if I have gone too far in directing them. In these cases, these new theories could really be the balm in removing the residue of my baggage from my comments to students. Maybe.

Maybe the problem is that learning a new "process" or way of teaching writing includes a learning curve, and it also includes discomfort. I am still learning my way around the application of these theories; in that it will take me much more time to use them strategically and beneficially. I wonder if getting out of one's comfort zone, while creating potential for evolving as a writing professor, also creates the potential for fatigue and burnout? It is just easier to do it the way we were taught? When we are comfortable and feel like we know what we are doing? When students look at us like as if we are not full of it?

CHAPTER 5

THE NEVER-ENDING ARTIFACT IN ENG 112

Introduction

In this chapter I highlight the second of the two English courses that I use as bases for the incorporation of post-process composition theory and reader-response theory in the discussions and feedback given to students during an accelerated eight-week semester at Northern Virginia Community College (NOVA).

The course I discuss below is ENG 112, "College Composition 2," a three-hour, for-credit, second-semester freshman composition course that students take after successful completion of ENG 111, "College Composition 1," if their degree plans require it or if they choose to take it as an elective. After successful completion of ENG 112, students can take any 200-level literature or English course at NOVA, including courses in creative writing, journalism, technical writing, and education.

ENG 112, "College Composition 2"

In ENG 112, "College Composition 2," the writing situation for students is slightly different from earlier, more preparatory composition classes like ENG 3 (Preparing for College Writing 2). ENG 112 has more advanced students who have already taken college writing classes, such as ENG 111, or have a CLEP or AP score that gives them credit for ENG 111 and, thereby, places them into ENG 112. The majority of these students have spent time in other community college classes, and at least half have chosen a major. This is an important distinction because ENG 112 students are generally

liberal arts or general studies majors who are preparing for an associates' degree (versus a certificate or an applied associates' degree). ENG 112 students' overall success in earlier ENG courses allows me to consider providing more advanced types of writing assignments, which depart from traditional academic essays, not only in the types of writing assignments presented but also in the presentation, research options, and audience requirements of these academic texts. I have chosen to provide a mixture of writing assignments in this class: this version of ENG 112 focuses on sustained blog writing; however, electronic responses to other bloggers' posts, shorter biweekly assignments, and an analytical paper are also submitted during the eight weeks of the semester.

ENG 112 has some similarities to ENG 3 in structure: my students' main writing assignment is another semester-long project on a topic of their own choosing. This is where the similarity ends, however. Students take on the added burden of creating and sustaining an eight-week *blog* (defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as "A frequently updated web site consisting of personal observations, excerpts from other sources, etc., typically run by a single person, and usually with hyperlinks to other sites; an online journal or diary"). Instead of three interconnected chapters as in ENG 3, students in ENG 112 write shorter but more frequent blog writing "posts." Students post two times a week (each post is approx. 300–500 words) for seven of the eight weeks of the condensed course for a total of 14 blog entries. At the end of the semester, students also write an analysis essay that focuses on the blogging community they joined that semester (the blogging community is made up of similar blogs on their topic, not their peers in ENG 112). Students are graded on their blogs' "final" version. Editing is allowed and encouraged, and they get a "placeholder grade" for their initial post during the week

the posts are due; students can then edit and update each post and submit their favorite five posts for a final blog grade, or if they are satisfied with their placeholder grade, they can choose to not review or rewrite based on comments they receive from myself and their peers and/or any outside readers. In addition to their blogs, which generally make up about 50 percent of the course grade, students also write a related analysis paper and submit other writing assignments, including their commentary to other students' and professional blogs. All of these assignments are part of the students' final course grade.

Students in ENG 112 have written on subjects ranging from politics, the environment, cultural diversity, deployment to a war zone, the investigation of the health standards of returning marines to Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, immigration, superstition, the paranormal, relationships, tattoo culture, work culture, and finance and personal budgeting, among others. The topics students choose to blog about help highlight their post-process locations they present in ENG 112. Here is how one student described choosing a topic, which can be one of the most difficult parts to the class, as the students have less than one week to solidify a topic and to begin research and writing:

> On the first day of English 112, we (students) were told to come up with a "newsworthy" topic to talk about and discuss throughout the eight weeks of class. Well, the first thing that came into my mind was "Global Warming!" Then I became double-minded and thought that "Unemployment Rates" would be something that I could discuss as well. Then, when I tried to think about what I would need to write for "Unemployment Rates," it didn't seem as if it was such a big issue

> compared to global warming. When I compared the two topics, I actually came up with more information about “Global Warming” then I did about “Unemployment Rates.” But then again, the first topic seemed to interest me more and I thought that there could be more of a continuous discussion on global warming. Also, I wanted to pick a topic that would not bore me or my classmates.
>
> Now the main question, “Why does this specific topic interest me so much?” Well, Global warming does not only affect me or my family, but the entire world. This topic has always interested me because change is not taking place every day, but every second on this planet. There are major changes that are taking place today and I have always been curious to figure out how and why. Whenever I turn on any type of news channel, the greenhouse effect and global warming are issues that are talked about on and off.
>
> What people don’t realize is that they say that they know global warming is occurring, but yet they don’t realize why global warming is occurring and what that means. Global warming is really a matter of great concern and unfortunately, it is looked at as a very light problem. The attention to this issue is not drawn, but now I have a full opportunity to provide little or at least some knowledge about this topic and I will take the advantage fully. [KanwalY, 23 Oct. 2007; http://kanwaly.blogspot.com/]

After choosing their topics, most students stay within their choice subject, but a few times students have gotten irrevocably stuck on a topic and felt the great need to

expand or change topics; the need is great because students feel the pressure of an eight-week semester and know that they have a lot of writing to do; thus, they are under pressure to come up with a workable topic early on in the semester. When students struggle with a topic, there are times I recommend that they "stick it out" and write through the impasses that come with writer's block or overstimulation (sometimes the more students research, and the more information they have on a subject, the bigger the quagmire). Most notably, I once worked with a student who chose the topic of "psychological testing" after disagreeing with her results on a recently taken Myers-Briggs personality inventory. I told her that the topic of "personality testing" seemed undeniably limited, and eventually she came to week 5's blog writing with a serious case of writer's block. We worked this out by having her expand her topic from "psychological testing" to "current trends in psychology."

Another difference separating ENG 112 from ENG 3 is that I model blog writing with my students by participating in the course writing alongside them. I have kept up a blog each semester, and I have written on topics ranging from politics, finance, home improvement, my dissertation (a disaster of a topic in blog form—because I broke one of the cardinal rules, that is, to be "newsworthy" and to write on a topic of interest to my audience—primarily made up of my ENG 112 students), another round of politics, issues in post-secondary education, and currently in the spring of 2012, ultraendurance running.

For this dissertation, I have also chosen ENG 112 (in addition to ENG 3) to review "where writing ends" because this class is a place in which I feel the least constricted through the actual physical location where the course has been taught: this class usually takes place off the main NOVA Woodbridge campus at our Quantico

satellite location. In addition, ENG 112 is a hybrid class, in that half of the time we meet online through our blogs, and the other half in a classroom that doubles as a computer lab; our locations are both in-person amongst one another and out in the wider world of the World Wide Web. Finally, I run this course primarily in an accelerated format; ENG 112 meets only for eight weeks instead of the usual 16. Because of all these reasons, I find myself more comfortable in my somewhat radical "location" as I teach this class versus the classes I teach on the main NOVA Woodbridge campus. In this course the students do not use assigned textbooks or responses to literature (NOVA's traditional approach for the second semester of freshman composition) but, instead, choose their own research paths based on personal interest, class discussion, reviews of previous student blogs, and individual conferences with me to help create reading lists and research sources that reflect a sense of investigative journalism related to their topics for the semester.

My ENG 112 students use alternative writing venues (such as a blog) to display their academic/real-world writing and to capture dialogue with their audiences, most of which are outside the normal scope of the traditional academic essay (i.e., those written in MLA format and submitted in hard copy to a professor, those without "live" links for almost instant commentary and feedback from current readers). Student submissions are presented via their own online blogs, such as through Blogger or Live Journal, instead of writing in college-approved online portals (such as Blackboard or WebCT as a basic electronic course portal). These variables make finding where writing might end a unique endeavor for a college composition classroom that operates in alternative writing mediums, with unique standards for authority and authorship—no longer is a student

"just a student" writer—on the Web a student in my ENG 112 class can be a vocal and effective restaurant critic, an expert vintage car mechanic and estimator, an antiques researcher, or a collator and evaluator of entry-level nutrition and fitness websites via their blogs. I require hyperlinked documentation in addition a traditional works cited page, and as part of the dialogic, this course requires audience interaction through the comments that are left by student readers at the bottom of each online blog entry.

Through the study of popular international online bloggers, including Salam Pax (the pseudonym for the Iraqi blogger whose entries about the initial U.S. bombing in Iraq in 2003 made people wonder if he actually existed—he did, and was later identified as a translator for *Guardian* journalist Peter Maass; see Maass 2003), I attempt to show my College Composition 2 students the opportunities they have to gain a wide audience through the use of online writing portals such as blogs. Of course, not all students are going to be as famous as Salam Pax; they will not be writing about living in a city that, at the time of his writing, was being "bombed back to the Dark Ages" (a popular Internet and media meme) by the United States, yet Salam Pax's experiences are what make his blog so captivating. Initially started as a blog to find a friend who had gone missing ("Where Is Raed?"), Pax's entries describe war-torn Baghdad; the fear of being caught by Iraqi military for writing about what was happening in Baghdad; what it is like to be part-Sunni/part-Shi'a (deadly unless you have false papers to use in different parts of the city); and so on (see Pax 2009a, 2009b, 2009c).

I tell my students that Salam Pax was once just an Iraqi interpreter for a *Guardian* newspaper reporter, and that he was not famous until his blog found an international audience. He found his voice in describing through both fear and humor what was

happening *from the inside* of Iraq in 2003. Pax's "thick description" in his depictions of life in the middle of modern warfare are what has generated much interest and readership in his writing, and it eventually led to a book based on his blogs, entitled *Salam Pax: The Clandestine Diary of an Ordinary Iraqi* and work as a reporter and filmographer for the BBC. By using Pax as a touchstone to the individual within the blog, I hope to inspire my students to take a chance at blog writing. I tell my students, "You never know who might be able to find your text and become part of your audience. Did you ever think you would be able to read such an intense and empathetic 'from the trenches' blog written in the middle of a war zone? What if one day someone else describes your blog with such accolades?"

Many of my students (about 30 percent) are marines (this class is one of a few offered at Quantico Marine Base), and talk of Salam Pax is always intriguing to them as quite a few have served in Baghdad on multiple tours of duty during wartime. Salam Pax is not the only one to have witnessed war, but he does have a very interesting angle: that of a twenty-something Iraqi who witnessed the U.S. bombing of his own neighborhood. With Pax's Western education he was able to reach out to international readers via his academic and journalism experiences and his use of English for his blog.

I ask all my students, as Pax did, to find that *interesting angle* in the writing they do for their weekly blogs so that they have more opportunities to reach a greater audience than just their classmates, professors, and family/friends. I ask that they put themselves out there for an academic writing project that is unlike most they have written in the past. The opportunities for students to get comments not just from classmates but also from a wider readership on the web is always out there, and about two or three students each

semester are surprised to find those "strangers" who seriously comment on their topics. The contexts of our post-process locations in ENG 112 make students in my class at Quantico, Virginia, members of the wider, electronic writing world, a place that is potentially populated by anybody who has Internet access. These blogs can be found by either typing in the right Boolean search terms into a search engine (enough keywords to return a student blog high enough in a search engine to make the text found) or by taking hyperlinked trails that link one electronic text to the next.

Post-Process Theory in the Classroom: Dialogues in ENG 112

Locating Academic Writing Artifacts in Electronic Spaces

Following the examples I set in chapter 4, I will combine post-process composition theory with the metaphor of "writing is an artifact" in the theory-work that I do with students in ENG 112 to determine where writing ends for ENG 112 students. I feel I have had some success in determining that post-process composition theory works in my interactions with developmental (ENG 3) writing students. So in this fifth chapter, I am interested in also determining whether or not I can continue to carry on with a post-process focus of a student's "location" through large class discussions and individual feedback and commentary that I provide to students' blog writing, and whether or not "where writing ends" can be determined, taught, or supported in a composition class that focuses on blog writing as a legitimate academic writing space.

Through post-process composition theory's metaphor of "location," I attempt to locate the many places where individual students write from. While I agree with Jonathon Mauk when he suggests that "the average college student is impossible to profile" (199),

I have been given some indications of parts of my students' professional or personal locations based on what I can see when students walk into my classroom (like a military or police uniform), or from our early classroom, email, and office hour discussions. My classes at Quantico Military Base are made up of about 30 percent military personnel (mostly Marines, but a few Navy and Army personnel appear as well). Another 10–15 percent are local dependents of military personnel, including spouses, children, and grandchildren. The final half of the class is made up of "locals," those from Stafford, Dumfries, Triangle, or Quantico Town, who find that classes on base are more convenient than driving another 15 miles north to Woodbridge. Economics is not as much a factor for students who are taking classes at Quantico as it is for Woodbridge-specific students. Issues of "access" (i.e., computer access to the Internet), to transportation to the class on base, and so forth, has not seemed much of an issue. But these two parameters aside, my students range very far and wide with regard to ethnicity, age, religion, political persuasion, position in the household (wage-earner vs. dependent), amount of student loans, and so forth. So while the locations of many of my students seem, at first blush, quite similar, I find that students self-locate on sometimes the opposing sides of many continuums like political affiliation and even writing ability.

One location to make note of is the large subsection of adult learners in my Quantico base ENG 112 classes. Many of these students, as recently noted, are "adult learners" by virtue of their age (late 20s to early 60s) and by virtue of their professional careers/goals. Many of them are soon to retire from the military and do not have college degrees. They take the opportunity to use the post-9/11 GI Bill to obtain postsecondary education/training in preparation for second careers once their military commitment is

over. Depending on these students' military occupation specialties (MOSes), such as field artillery or ground ordinance maintenance, some ENG 112 students have not been required to perform consistent professional writing, and many of them are nervous because of their 20-year break between bouts of schooling. Issues of "what is academic writing" must be addressed for many of my ENG 112 students as early on as possible in such a condensed semester.

My job using post-process composition theory in my will be similar to the discussion I began in chapter 4 regarding how I work with students who create goal-writing texts in ENG 3. I have specific goals that I address as I work with each writing student in ENG 112. These goals reflect a concern for post-process composition theory because "a vast number of college students share a common trait: they are unsituated in academic space" (Mauk 199). Mauk suggests that "the value of academia for students depends upon their interpretation or creation of academic space" (198). I believe that my ENG 112 students' blogs are extensions beyond traditional academic writing spaces (e.g., the writing classroom into a hybrid classroom; the academic essay into an online blog), and I attempt to help situate my students into what seems like a strange new locations by

- Encouraging students to successfully communicate the real issues surrounding their chosen topics to his or her online audience through modeling, course discussions, and feedback/interactions in the classroom and online space;
- Recommending that students provide details that have a lasting impact on their readers, ones that highlight her post-process "location" as someone who might be new or inexperienced in understanding the complicatedness or interest surrounding their chosen blog topics, yet as someone who, through

their writing, can also educate others on the issues that affect readers and their communities of writers (potential and actual);

- Supporting class inclusion of a few traditional writing elements relevant to successful academic writing, including issues of documentation in academic and online texts;
- Encouraging to use of new ways to locate oneself online within larger dialogues via Hyperlinking, video and audio embedding, etc.; and
- Challenging my students to think of their electronic writing as an artifact, as texts that only provide their messages as long as the connections to these documents are "live" (through linking, search results, and/or in the thoughts of one's readers or oneself as author).

I base my theory and commentary on the Thomas Kent quote that "most post-process theorists hold three assumptions about the act of writing: (1) writing is public; (2) writing is interpretive; and (3) writing is situated" (1). First, I support the idea that online "blog" writing in my class is public when students use a popular, free, and public blogging site, "blogger.com," to create and sustain their eight-week blogs. In this case the term *public* reaches beyond the students and professors of a somewhat isolated classroom space and represents inclusion of any and all readers who have both Internet access and an interest in similar topic that my students are discussing in their blogs. Armed with those two criteria, there is potential in my students' blogs being found and read by a general public. Second, writing is interpretative. The messages I interpret from reading bloggers like Salam Pax are socially reconstructed by my own experiences as I interpret or "fill in the spaces" around Pax's texts with my own assumptions regarding what he

said, what he could have meant, and what might happen next. Third, Pax's writing is situated; as a half-Sunni, half-Shi'a Iraqi Muslim with access to Western journalists, his writing is important in that he was one of the first local voices out of Iraq during the 2003 bombings and invasion. Like Pax's writings, my students' public blog writing is interpretive and situated; their online texts can be read in many ways, and their writing is situated by their personal experiences and their own blogging activities within a second-semester college composition classroom.

The writing situation is complicated for my ENG 112 students who blog in that they have audience considerations that expand beyond the borders of a regular classroom and typical academic essays. Gone is a somewhat streamlined audience, filled only with classmates and professor. Now, students in ENG 112 have to contend with a potential general public reading their writing. The reality is that most students do not get feedback or comments from the general public, although it does happen on occasion, and with great success. I have had one student be contacted by a published author who wanted to include her blog about family relationships in an anthology about mothers and daughters, and another student has had more than 1,000 unique "hits" (or visits) to her site a mere three months after her semester of ENG 112 was over. In these cases, these students were able to reach out to a wider public than freshman composition writers generally have access to, and these contacts significantly change how students see the impact of their academic/blog coursework. This situatedness is added to the interactions students have in the classroom with their peers and their professor, creating layers of locations that infuse this ENG 112 class.

Where students write from (their locations) involves who they are, who they hope to be, who reads their writing, how they write, how their classroom is managed, how their writing professors envision the parameters of their writing assignments, and how all of this is supported by peer and professorial comments and support throughout a semester.

First/Early Posts

At the beginning of a semester, ENG 112 students spend the first two weeks reading a variety of blogs: educational blogs, business blogs, and local personality blogs. My goal is to get them comfortable with the range of opportunities and content available on the web, and for them to find their own writerly niche within the blogosphere. Students also start writing their blogs, but immersion into a new writing genre (that of online writing versus the traditional academic essay that most of my students submitted in ENG 111) requires much discussion and display of blog writing by active writers (the modeling I speak of above).

At the beginning of the semester I have my students read and evaluate "local" blogs and bloggers. A good place to start is *The Washington Post*'s "Local Blog Directory." An interesting first blog that I would recommend that my students read is Steve Gurney's "Everyone Is Aging Blog," created by a 43-year-old Virginia local who has experienced life in a DC-area retirement community. Another intriguing blog is LizRambles's "Life as List," in which the writer condenses her life experiences and observations into a series of bulleted lists. Both blogs, dedicated to different local experiences and with different goals and reader expectations, would be introduced, and students would see a variety of types of writing on the Web from nonfiction narrative to social commentary to finance how-to.

In setting up a post-process composition classroom that focuses on students' locations (be that geographical, intellectual, or emotional), I would first ask students to begin writing by unloading everything they know about their topic into a draft post; situating themselves within the issue is a good way for all of us (writer, readers/professor) to learn what writers absolutely know about their topic, what they think they know about their topic, and what they fell they need to discover through or research in upcoming weeks. In coming up with an understanding of what should/could be included in their blogs, students refer to both local Washington, D.C., blogs to review how some bloggers engage with their readers, as well as blogs that they have researched on their own that more closely discuss their chosen topic, such as political blogs like *Fire Dog Lake* or financial–political hybrid blogs like Paul Krugman's *The Conscience of a Liberal* (in 2011, this blog was named *Time* magazine's #1 financial blog).

Because ENG 112 meets in a computer lab, there are weekly opportunities for students to write during part of our class. As I describe above, I always suggest that students begin these initial blog posts by "writing what you know." A student has a good opportunity to learn the boundaries of their knowledge on a given subject by trying to create a list (similar to "Life as List") of pieces of knowledge on their topics. They can then explore those blank spaces that appear between items on the list. These spaces are the places that students get a real handle on the boundaries of what type of post they will write: summary of knowledge, exploratory, or even argumentative-themed posts emerge from these types of beginnings to a post.

As I remarked in my post-process discussions of ENG 3 students, the first few weeks of the semester I do not discuss endings so much as I motivate students to delve

into a variety of beginnings and middles (Carter). I receive many "beginning" questions regarding "How do I start my blog correctly?" or "Is this the right way to begin?" My post-process response is that

> There is no "one" way to start (or write) a blog, but you have to consider doing your topic justice by exploring it through research, by detailing it enough in an entry that your readers will be engaged and encouraged to create a dialogue with you on that topic when they leave comments. Through that dialogue, you position yourself within the ideas you write about. You have options then; to respond with your own comments or to engage further by editing your post or adding new posts that continue your topic's discussion. Hopefully, the more you write, the more you will gain confidence in your chosen topic and how you engage with your online audiences.

The second week of the class I would mention the idea of writing as an artifact, and we would discuss Jay David Bolter's concept in *Writing Space* that "A text that changes repeatedly to meet changing circumstances [electronic texts] may now be as compelling as one that insists on remaining the same through decades or centuries. Moreover, such a text reminds us of writing on the 'original' writing surface, human memory, where the inscribed text changes so quickly and easily that we are not aware of writing at all" (56). Of course, memories are not tangible artifacts, and so the class discussion moves to what Bolter described as written artifacts, including the graffiti of the Mormon Pioneers like Philo Dibble (Johnson), document translations like the Rosetta Stone, or the continual search for older biblical documents that archaeologists scour the

Middle East for. Students might ask questions such as, “I understand the idea of writing as an artifact, but what happens when writing goes electronic? There are things I *think* I have found on the net that I cannot find now when I do a Google search.” And, thus, the real meat of this discussion early in an semester can turn to what electronic documents are (bits of data stored on hard drives, on flash drives, on servers). Are those bits of data artifacts? Discussion of artifacts can go on for quite a while, as students decipher their new projects in the wake of the advent of electronic writing. These conversations generally continue into upcoming weeks, into the mid-point of a semester when discussion of artifacts grows as student blogs expand.

When it works out as designed, classroom discussions on bloggers, electronic writing spaces, and current events can fuel students’ blog writing. At the beginning of the semester, students should locate themselves in relation to what they know about their topic. They would write blogs that “dump” these ideas into one entry, and they save that entry as a draft to continue to work on before submission. Because students have weekly blog submissions, and because blogging is a new genre of writing for them, I have and would allow all posted blogs to be considered “drafts” until the final week of class. Students have the opportunity to make changes to their blogs based on the feedback they have received in class via their peers, myself as their professor, and any other audience member in the blogosphere that has found and responded to their posts. But students are still inexperienced bloggers early in the semester, and, thus, their posts are sometimes scattered in that they start with one idea, say by defining the term *global warming,* but they might end that post with a discussion of how taxes would be funneled toward the

global warming fight. It is in these early drafts that I see the most significant changes, or swings, in the focus of the content of a blog entry.

Blog writing gives students an opportunity to "say anything to anybody," while also helping limit students' instincts to write "tangentially." I say this because it becomes obvious in early peer response, especially, if a student goes "off track" as their discussions finds its way in a blog. I have seen students comment, "Wait! But I thought you were talking about global warming. What do taxes have to do with temperature?" My comments on students' early posts address this issue by asking the student blogger by suggesting "What is the real issue here?" "Where are you going with this?" and "How about another post about this to …", and I hope that my other ENG 112 students model the level of comment and criticism I give as they respond to each other, even if it is somewhat tentative.

Early in a semester of ENG 112, many students are unsure of how their classroom locations "cross over" into online spaces. Some are concerned that they sound "academic"; others are nervous about an unknown general public "seeing" their writing and being able to respond. A small minority are unaware of their online locations and continue to write as if they are posting on Facebook or Beebo. As Mauk notes,

> students need to conceive the space outside of the campus, outside of the classroom, as academic. And the academic space needs to be conceived as transportable and mutable—as something that is tied to being, rather than to exclusive material surroundings. … Academic space must extend itself, not merely outward, but in all the directions o being which constitute the lives of students. [214]

I support the post-process locations of my students by creating blogs alongside them, supporting spaces outside of a traditional college classroom in which students can extend their academic lives, in which the many locations of students can blend and merge, creating ever-new locations where students can communicate, where they can write and be heard, and where they can listen and learn. In the beginning of this post-process journey it can be difficult for students to interpret what and how to write in which spaces (the classroom, the home, the blog, etc.), but through time this process of blog writing does become easier for most students in ENG 112.

Mid-Semester Posts

What is so interesting about the discussions of mid-semester blog posts is that students settle into their topics. For the most part, they leave behind their struggles with narrowing their topic in a blog space, and by exploring what they know (their current post-process locations) earlier in the semester, this leaves students room at the middle of a semester to do continued research and expansion on ideas that continue to leave them slightly uncomfortable (see Bloom), whether through a lack of final knowledge, or an unsettling reader comment, or an impasse between what they think they might know about a topic and the reality of that topic around them. This cognitive dissonance is what Carter describes as a suitable place for writers to invest time exploring, that writing *through* an impasse can fuel significant, creative, and engaging texts that support dialogue from readers' comments back to writers and into the cycle of ongoing dialogue.

For example: I have students who wish to become vegetarians and to lead a much healthier lifestyle. Their blogs involve their histories as omnivores based on family practices, food preferences and palates, budgets, and their knowledge or uncertainty of

animal-for-food processing standards. As students move into the mid-semester space, they have approximately 6–8 blog posts and about 25 reader comments under their belts, and so they might be building an idea of what their readers are looking for in their blogs. Through their own research they know that slaughterhouses exist, and they also know that their favorite food is fillet mignon. They have to work within the boundaries of their locations and perform extensive research to address their dueling positions: wanting to be healthier, acknowledging slaughter houses, and, yet, craving red meat. Through the dialogues that these students create both with their readers and with the research that they can "live" link (hyperlink) to, students create new locations and understandings of their behaviors and desires and how those affect their longer-term health or environmental goals. They connect themselves and their readers to other documents on the web; with one click a reader of a blog can "access" the referenced material, a much faster show-and-tell than a reader having to hunt the stacks at the library for the book or journal article.

Mid-semester required blog reading now includes Salam Pax's multiple blogs and crossover *Guardian* newspaper articles, as well as multiple-author newsblogs, like *FireDogLake* and *The Guardian News Blog*, in which topics are switched depending on the news of the nation (or world).

By about week 5 students would continue to write both new blog entries at edit older entries for preparation of end-of-semester submission. I notice at this point in the semester that in the dialogue that appears in the comments section of these students' blogs, some students address their readers' comments as well as my own in newer posts,

making a “dialogic” stream into an easily followed path through sequential blog entries or series of comments.

In addition, as students in the past have done, future students might also include friends and family in their online discussions or have “unique” users appear to comment from a readership outside of familiar class, friends, or family. These audiences spread wider than the typical composition class readership and offer opportunities for students to reinforce their post-process locations in a way that might have gotten stifled if they would have continued with a more limited readership of only their professor and classroom peers. Any wider set of audience members provides more potential opportunities for varying textual reads, and having a wider audience can give an ENG 112 blog writer additional cues that a writer’s location provides, through different types of critical commentary. The wider the audience, the wider the potential for dialogic interaction between writer and readers or even between multiple readers, as can be seen in the comments section of any online newspaper (such as the *Washington Post* or CNN online, in which a “reader comments” function has been installed at the end of each article, blending the static “news article” with the functionality of a blog-like interactive reader comment section. Comments on current events topics can range into the thousands within hours), and the more opportunities for texts to not end when they germinate in the minds of an unlimited readership.

As I tell my students in ENG 3 when they do their goal-setting projects, it is not enough to want a goal, or to highlight how that goal would actually benefit one’s life. A goal-setter has to actually immerse themselves into the goal (just as a student who locates herself within environmental causes needs to step out of her comfort zone and embrace

the actions of that cause; see Dobrin and Weisser; Owens) to really change their horizons and create new environments for themselves. I suggest to my ENG 112 students that a similar immersion is necessary to begin to understand the boundaries that they have broken and reset further away from themselves through a reengagement with each of their topics in their blogs and blog comments.

At this point in the semester I would I bring students back to the discussion about written artifacts, especially when students would have an electronic "archive" of multiple posts to consider. I would ask my students, "Can artifacts be online texts, like your blogs?" Hopefully like I do, students might wonder what the boundaries are to electronic artifacts. It has been suggested to me in response to my question above that "If my blog is just a Word document that I saved on my flash drive, I can see that [it is an artifact]. I have the drive in my hands to prove it." The student comment above means that physical artifact can then be found in the bytes of data, located through the "Word" icon, and stored onto a hard or flash drive. And proof of this artifact could be the file open on a computer screen (or seen as a text on the web), and the actions of highlighting text and selecting "print" can make the text the most recognizable as a material artifact.[13]

I would then ask my students, "But what about a hyperlinks? Does the artifact end with the hyperlink or extend into the next text? Where do artifacts end if they are electronic texts?" I would suggest to my ENG 112 students that electronic artifacts might not end at all. The boundaries of an electronic artifact are fuzzy—they go beyond and encroach into another text (through Hyperlinking or referencing or even when they

[13] For example, during the continued writing and editing of this article on October 11, 2011, this fifth chapter currently is called "New Chapter 5.docx" and is 58 kilobytes, and it is stored, or archived, in five places: on two flash drives, on my laptop desktop, through my home network on the main computer hard drive, and in cloud storage in "My Files" on my faculty link on Blackboard.

appear together on a search results page by virtue of having similar keywords). These boundaries extend as far as our thoughts can, and the thoughts of our readers, and their readers, and so on (see Bakhtin; Bolter; Carter; Joyce; Volosinov). These artifacts exist in multiple forms, or phases. The first form is the electronic text and all its hyperlinks. The other forms exist in the mind of both writer and readers, and these forms diverge from the original as they mix with the writer's and reader's locations, and they blend with other ideas, forming new ideas and texts, or as Mikhail Bakhtin would describe it, all "utterances." These texts are both borrowed and, yet, constantly mutate, never staying in their original form even through various readings and re-readings of the initial text.

Using the concept of electronic writing as an "artifact" actually helps me in ENG 112 define a text's lack of boundaries. Actual boundaries do not even matter if the ideas move from text to text, or from a text to a verbal conversation or vice versa. The ideas are what is shared, regardless of the form. At this point in the semester I would tell my students to

> Think about it this way: you might be able to take a hyperlinked trail from one website to another to another, opening ever new conversations at each turn. The possibilities are potentially endless. Some websites have 15 links on one page alone, and then the next page, and the next. There is an *almost* infinite amount of books and articles and newsgroups and documentaries and letters and conversations to have on any one subject. The web grows and mutates at any given moment. When you make these conversations tangible in an academic essay, or in a blog, or in a global warming documentary, you make them accessible to others. You create artifacts.

> But those artifacts aren't done communicating with their readers. Every source you borrow, from a website to a song, is an artifact you integrate into your own conversation. You've successfully continued that conversation and branched it out. Your artifacts are living as long as someone thinks about them, and they grow especially when they are shared. For example, you might only have one comment on your blog post from last week, but say your ideas about *hypermiling*—when you try to get the best gas mileage possible out of a car by following very specific rules on acceleration, drafting, using neutral—really become popular. Somebody finds your blog post, and they share it. Others read; many respond. That's how Salam Pax became known as the Iraqi blogger. That's how Heather Armstrong built her parenting blog empire. It's how modern-day writers can potentially connect to the hundreds of millions who have Internet access. Your written artifacts stay alive as long as at least one person is thinking about that text or even if that text is an artifact that can be found; there is always the potential for response and reengagement.

At this point in the semester I know the class has not finished discussing the boundaries of their blogs. I would reiterate that

> In my opinion, of course, there are no boundaries. A post on hypermiling continues a conversation; it's a artifact, a snapshot of the middle of a conversation, but all these conversations are *always only* in the middle. You may see a frame in the first word of the post and the last bit of

> punctuation, but if there are hyperlinks, or if there are comments, or if readers think about responding, or if you decide to edit the post, that conversation has not ended, not yet. At the very least, the potential exists for the text to continue on in new writings from any reader. Think about what Jay David Bolter suggested 20 years ago, when most of us had no idea what the Internet was, and those of us doing academic writing were writing on typewriters or Brother Word Processors and the Internet was in its infancy. He said that "there are ways of orienting the reader in an electronic document, but in any true hypertext the ending must remain tentative. An electronic text never needs to end." [Bolter 87]

Midway through a semester I would remind my students to orient their readers in their electronic texts by what they say, how they emphasize it (bold, hyperlinked, all caps, small fonts, with attached images or sound files, quoting another text, etc.), when they say it, if they change it, if they allow comments, and so on. Students need time to let abstract concepts such as "electronic writing artifacts don't end" sink in, and I would need time to review whether or not any of these concepts affect the final weeks of student blog posts and their final analysis essay the reflects on the blog writing community each student joined. In this post-process setting I will have set up the terms: electronic writing can be artifacts, and those artifacts have the potential for unlimited future communication that resides in the potential of discovery. Now I have to consider whether this is an effective set of metaphors for an ENG 112 classroom.

Final Blog Submissions

At the end of ENG 112's condensed semester, around weeks 7 and 8, students review the approximately 14–15 blog posts they have created for submission in the course, and they review their midterm grades (which are progress reports on their blogs based on their writing, my feedback to them within the comment section on their blogs, and our class discussions). I would comment on students' final submissions very specifically now, and I would try to reflect both their own locations and my own to qualify my comments.

For example, a student writing about global warming and its effects on the environment without providing two or three sturdy examples of local effects of a global phenomenon like climate change would receive comments from me requesting elaboration on their main points. I would say, "Ok, now that you have mentioned how sea levels are rising and the potential for catastrophic damage in the South Pacific island of Tuvalu, what about closer to home? How would rising sea levels affect the United States? New York City? The Chesapeake, which is in our own backyard?" I want my students to see how the issue of "global" climate change affects them locally, and I want my students to superimpose, as much as possible, the discussion of the topic from their location (physical, geographical) into their electronic locations so that the sum of their locations blends and merges and constantly "refreshes" with the changing world of their post and potential edits and responses. This action would show that textual artifacts continue to change.

At the end of a semester I also address the post-process goals I had for my response to ENG 112 student blog posts. First I realize that I have very specific ideas about how blogs are written, even when different topics or types of essays are taken into

consideration. In working post-processually, many students do not always follow my ideas or suggestions. For example, I would notice that some students write as if they had received no comments, or previous comments, to their blogs. I know I mix "locations" in this class for my students, interpreting theirs and addressing my own as a reader. As it did in ENG 3, I believe that this creates an issue of final ownership of a text (not only in the aligning of text to fit a professor's need but also in the borrowing and Hyperlinking of texts, such that a blog becomes part of a symbiotic electronic "network" of blending texts on a constantly changing topic; see Caspi and Blau; Cremin and Baker; Muldoon; Ross). In addition, I still require a fair to heavy amount of details that support students' main points.

At the end of the accelerated semester I also answer any questions students have about writing artifacts, and I remind them that they can continue to keep their texts "live" artifacts if they continue to write in their blogs, if they keep their blogs "open" (versus shutting them down), and if they continue to research their chosen topics and participate in the online writing of others in the content communities they have joined (and which they have evaluated as part of their analysis paper). Continued activity and exploration of these challenging and mostly impressive topics are what keeps their artifacts alive and what keeps them engaged in creating multilocational space on the Internet. Students can be from Stafford, Virginia, and they can connect to readers in Cape Town, South Africa. They can represent their locations all the while creating ever new ones that build on the knowledge they share in an electronic space such as a blog.

As far as the goals I set out using a post-process theoretical positioning with my ENG 112 students' blog posts, I can be successful in helping students communicate real

and complicated issues surrounding global warming, issues of immigration, race relations, and how all these topics intersect in the locations found within writers and their readers. What I worry about more is I whether providing multiple opportunities to discuss how writing is an artifact and how artifacts can make texts live on (and, thus, not end) affects their actual course writing. Did these discussions make a clear case about where students stop/end academic writing? It is possible, but I can never know for sure until this theory is actually applied in a classroom space.

After the eight weeks are over and all student work is submitted, graded, and the course "finishes," I wonder what effect a post-process discussion of writing as a "never-ending" artifact has on my students. Is it measurable? Not so much. I cannot tell in the final blog submissions that I grade whether students were concentrating hard on making their texts "artifacts," or whether thinking of their texts (or any text) as an artifact supported their academic writing endeavors. I would ask, of course, but sometimes students just tell professors what they want to hear. It is a very interesting concept (that of using post-process composition theory to assess where writing ends for students though the metaphor of "writing is an artifact," and one that added depth to our classroom discussions about writing, electronic writing, online presence, audience considerations, and textual boundaries (or lack thereof). The question remains, however, will students carry this concept forward? To what end (or no end)?

Reader-Response Theory in the Classroom: Dialogues in ENG 112

Reflecting Academic Writing Artifacts in Electronic Spaces

Reader-response theory is interesting in that it requires professors to "step back" from their traditional roles as classroom and content leaders when providing feedback on student writing and, instead, to read students' texts in a unique way. As Jane Tompkins states, "it is the already-written text that stands at the center of the contemporary critical enterprise" (205). Reader-response theory asks writing professors to consider who a student writer's "ideal" or "mock" reader is, and to attempt to become that reader. In all interactions with student texts, then, a composition professor must take on the role of "ideal" reader and provide the types of comments that can guide a student toward this potential entity. Directives such as "Have you considered instead A, B, or C?" or "How about some transitions here like Z?" are left behind in a traditional composition's text's margins, and are replaced with comments such as "what is your goal here in paragraph 1?" "Who are you writing this for?" to reflect back to the author questions that, once answered, might satisfy these students' ideal readers.

As composition professors, we have to ask ourselves constantly when performing reader-response theory: "If I were to become the reader that Jennifer or Carlos imagines, what would need to be presented in this text to satisfy me?" If these students do not imagine a professor as their ideal reader, how then do I grade their writing if I cannot become their ideal reader? It is entirely possible that writing professors cannot transform themselves entirely into 25 different versions of ideal readers, because, as explored in the post-process composition theory section of chapters 4 and 5, each student's "locations" are different and are constantly changing, and, thus, no two students would have the exact same ideal reader in the same way that we all have constantly changing DNA in response to our environment. Attempting reader-response theory on freshman composition writers

could prepare compositionists to better anticipate what students want out of their audiences, which can do nothing but help writing professors better engage with students in the classroom space.

As Patrick Bizzaro states, “if properly adapted to the classroom situation, reader-response methodologies will require that students determine who they want their texts to address and that teachers relinquish some power in examining those texts” (67). If I am going to be successful in creating a reader-response environment with my students, I have to acknowledge this point during the first week of classes. My job using reader-response theory would be similar to the discussion I began in chapter 4 regarding reader-response theory in ENG 3. I attempt here to navigate the contexts of the topics my students with me through his blog writing, and I hope to help them

- Successfully communicate their topics to their ideal reader (me) as well as to any potential readers that find/engage with their blog;
- Provide details that have a lasting impact on his or her reader, ones that fit White’s “ideal” reader or Gibson’s “mock” reader;
- Consider appropriate use of grammar and syntax so as not to distract an ideal reader; ideal readers want to interact with the content and will likely be unmoved by a lack of a clear proofread text; and
- Think of writing as an artifact that can live on in the mind of his ideal reader; any successful text, says Edward White, is one that writers accept; in that acceptance is longevity.

Students in a reader-response section of ENG 112 would write on a variety of topics, from issues of race relations and immigration reform and intercultural

communication to family dynamics and even foodways. I have to consciously change how I interact with student blog posts from previous post-process-heavy "locational" foci and turn, instead, into a reader who reinterprets each student text back to them in the hopes that these student texts can become *more* of what the writer initially intended.

As Bizzaro noted in his chapter "Interaction and Assessment: Some Applications of Reader-Response Criticism," it is very difficult for both professors and students to "revise the roles they traditionally play in the unfolding drama of classroom relations" (68). Students can be in the habit of asking "What do you want from me?" or "What do you want me to say in this first assignment?" and they might be frustrated with a professor who uses reader-response theory to guide them to more clearly distinguish and write for whom they interpret as their ideal audience. Through necessity, this situation creates a partnership between the student-writer and the professor-reader in the understanding of whom an ideal reader actually is. And this ideal reader will not always be the ideal reader that the professor imagined. In giving up some control, Bizzaro claims that these interactions between student-writers and their professor-reader can become a negotiation that moves beyond the text itself as it reflects the growing relationship between writers and readers (69).

It is important to note that reader-response theory is also an interesting place to explore whether the metaphor of "writing is an artifact" can help students end texts. To be quite honest, I do not know if the two concepts can interact successfully in the same space. I have already removed other general goals I would have with student texts (incl. e.g., supporting academic writing documentation style) as I am yet unaware of how to blend this within a reader-response theory paradigm. Reader-response theory encourages

professor-readers to give up some of the control of writers' texts, and very few of my students put a priority on "academic" style. Initiating discussions of "writing is an artifact" is one thing that professors can (and should) do in a classroom space to make students see how powerful their writing is and can be. But can this metaphor be carried over into the reader-response actions within textual feedback? Would the action of discussing "writing/artifact" insinuate the very same control that a professor professes to step back from when working with students' online writing? I am in good company. Summers suggests that "whether or not [the writer] changes his mind [regarding the feedback he receives from his readers], he is strengthened in his approach to his own mind and *artifact*" (88, emphasis added) when working with readers' comments. Summers continues, "As a teacher I would want to engage in a word-by-word consideration of the poem with its author. My concern, I like to think, is finding the author's voice, not my own. I hope the meeting will result in our finding finally where the words live, and why" (88). In this way Summers performs a creative use of reader-response theory in a poetry writing classroom, much like Bizzaro. And, for Summers, writing is indeed an artifact.

Will reader-response theory transfer to a nonfiction composition classroom, and in a classroom that also focuses on helping students stop their texts temporarily? This is a question I have yet to answer. Looked at individually, all the concepts seem appropriate for a freshman composition classroom. Added together, would these multiple goals of reader-response theory, writing as an artifact, and the never-ending text create friction, confusion, or an explosion of new learning and writing opportunities?

First/Early Posts

At the beginning of an accelerated semester of ENG 112, I would introduce blog writing in general and differentiate differences between traditional academic writing and writing in electronic spaces such as blogs. Many of my students are comfortable writing in electronic spaces; they have taken classes through Blackboard or WebCT at NOVA or other colleges (and even in their high schools), and so the concept of writing in an online space is not alien to them. What is new, however, is the idea of academic writing in general web spaces such as blogs or wikis. The first week of class would be spent introducing both the idea of the blending of professional/personal/academic writing spaces and the feedback concept of reader-response theory. For this section of ENG 112, I would create "models" or samples of student texts with applied reader-response commentary and ask students to differentiate the types of new comments they see via reader-response theory and the types of comments they have gotten from professors in previous writing classes. Situating students into two new arenas, that of writing in conflicted electronic spaces and that of a professor providing reader-response theory to their work in public spaces, should be tackled before any actual course writing begins.

I would tell my ENG 112 writing students that I would like each of them to describe their chosen topic in as much detail as possible. To do this, I would ask them to "unpack" everything they think they know about their topic in an initial, and "draft," blog post so that they can go back to this first post once it is written and look for gaps in their knowledge and, as if in revision, to write through those gaps, to "learn as we write, [using] successive drafts [to] bring us closer and closer not to some predetermined coding of the known but to an understanding of the previously unknown" (White 94). This exercise is the same initial exercise as in my post-process composition course design.

Asking students to start with what they know is one way of helping them find a place to dive into their ENG 112 blog writing without worrying about style or format or the anxiety of having a potential general audience be able to respond and interact with their texts. They might not be ready, in the first week, for reader-response theory from any reader until they have confidence in the topic they have chosen and have an ideal reader in mind for their online texts.

For example, a student who is writing about personal finance and budgeting must list all things they know about how to budget, but for this first post they should not (yet) look up terms like dollar cost averaging—the things they do not immediately know can then spur ideas for upcoming individual posts. I ask each student to keep a running tally of items that they are curious about with regard to their topic, or of issues or concepts that they have never had time to address. Ideal readers might be interested in these subtopics. In part, their blogs will be a space to branch out and write about these new concepts as they learn about them. Students' unpacking what they know about their topic will clue in readers to the author's location regarding the topic, of course, and it will reflect what type of reader each student blog author desires; in the unloading, this places a reader at the epicenter of what the author initially recognizes about his or her chosen topic. As White suggests, with reader-response theory the reader has "a much heavier responsibility to actually create meanings that may or may not be present on the page for other readers" (92), in this way, at least, readers (like me) know where a writer is initially coming from with regard to their blog topics. I ask students to understand that I will be the implied or ideal reader, so as I respond to their texts I will very specifically be "keeping in mind the 'implied reader' designed by the text and to see this reader as an active partner in

creation. Bad prose or ineffective writing often asks us to be people—or readers—that we refuse to accept" (White 94).

The second post I would ask students to perform during the first few weeks of class specifically requires that they consider who their "perfect reader" is. I would ask them to describe in as much detail as possible this ideal reader. To warm students up to this concept, as a class we would perform a class exercise on different types of readerly audiences. The class would break into groups of about four–five students, and I would tell each group they are now working for the advertising arm of a famous publisher, and their goal is to market their books to the right audience. Some students would get Steven King's *Under the Dome*; a second group students would have George Stuart Fullerton's *An Introduction to Philosophy*; a third group would receive Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are*; the final group would get *Source: Journey through the Unexplained* by Art Bell and Brad Steiger. In this exercise, each group would be tasked to find out what they can about the book and the authors, and then to research likely audiences for that book. If they were then to create a tag line or a back-jacket blurb that would promote the book, what would they say?

I think of this exercise to specifically introduce considerations of audience for my reader-response themed ENG 112 students. I want them to think of who an author is, and what kinds of texts they create. I would also want them to think about who their perfect audience member is. After the class exercise on highlighting audiences of different types of texts, I would ask my students if they could describe a likely audience member for their own blogs? Some might immediately say yes (without thinking too long). But then I would tell them, "Maybe only if you've already chosen a topic, right? You might not

know who your audience is, yet, until you start to write, until you know what you want to talk about at length for this semester. As you write your first posts on your topic, think about making real connections online. Visualize who you're writing to, and I'll attempt to become that type of reader when I respond to your weekly blog posts."

As with my post-process composition class, at the beginning of the semester I would provide blog examples for my students in the class. A reader-response classroom would also review the same local blog samples early in the semester, such as "Life as List" and "Everyone Is Aging," and our focus at the beginning of this course becomes: who are the audiences for these blogs? How can we as a class and as individual writers determine an "audience" by virtue of the content of a text? Does word choice create a specific audience? Does elaboration of particular details identify an ideal reader? How about blog design? Who are these local authors and who are the audiences they imagine as they write and interact with their audiences? I would ask my students: "Can an ideal audience member be determined by reading these texts and reflecting back what we see?"

A significant struggle I imagine that would go with applying reader-response theory in ENG 112 is whether or not I ask my students in the class to comment on each other's posts via reader-response, as I do. And I do not think I would. It is relatively easy for me to have post-process students think about their "locations" when responding and providing commentary and feedback to one another. This is a natural action and a concept that I have used for years, and I find that students constantly compare and reevaluate who they are in relation to who they speak to, who they write for, who they work with, and so forth. It is a concept that I can effectively use in classroom spaces from ENG 3 to ENG 112. However, reader-response theory is a different animal altogether,

and I would make the decision to not have students overly focused in engaging each other *only* about audience, although "audience considerations" is one of the main themes of an ENG 112 in which I provide this type of commentary. Students' absorption of professorial reader-response comments will be difficult enough (as evidenced by Bizzaro's contention that it is difficult to apply a new theory into a writing classroom without slipping back into our preprogrammed professorial identities and corresponding theoretical positionings), especially at first. Composition professors have enough to contend with when applying new theories in the classroom in their feedback to students' work. I would not think to ask or request that students in a freshman composition course mimic a professor's experimental feedback in reader-response theory. Rather, I would ask that students consider "audience" as one way they can engage with each other, but I would rely on having my students focus on the content and organization of each others' texts and, at this stage of theory work, leave the reader-response theory firmly at my door.

Early in the semester of ENG 112 I would also introduce the concept of "electronic writing spaces as artifacts" to my reader-response-oriented ENG 112 classroom. In the first few weeks of the semester, as I did with my post-process ENG 112 classroom, I would highlight Bolter's concept in *Writing Space* that "A text that changes repeatedly to meet changing circumstances [electronic texts] may now be as compelling as one that insists on remaining the same through decades or centuries. Moreover, such a text reminds us of writing on the 'original' writing surface, human memory, where the inscribed text changes so quickly and easily that we are not aware of writing at all" (56). I would then ask students, "Who is the audience for a text that continuously changes?" and

"Do we change as participants in discussions? Does dialogue, either through verbal interactions of interactions in the commentary on a blog, change who our audience is or can be?"

Mid-Semester Posts

At the mid-point in the semester, I would lead a whole-class discussion about my becoming an "ideal reader" to my students' online blog posts. I would ask my students to consider how I give them feedback during the previous weeks and whether or not my feedback fits their idea of the "ideal reader" they created in their first week's posts. I would also ask them, "How was my feedback to you different than feedback you've gotten in previous classes, or from your peers in this class?" I would want to hold a large-group class discussion on the benefits of reader-response theory on their blogs. There are always differences in how readers respond to texts: some of their readers might just say "agreed" or "I know what you mean … " without really engaging in the material that the author created. So the question becomes: Did the teacher-reader agree with everything? What did the teacher-reader agree to? (It is important to differentiate the teacher-reader, who performs reader-response commentary, from a peer who will be responding without the reader-response restriction). Then there are responses that my students get that "go off in a different direction": these are the responses that focus on one point to the detriment (or the benefit, possibly) of the rest of the entry.

For example, say Jennifer was writing her blog on how politics has become dirty, and Molly's (another student) response to Jennifer's blog post was that there can be no politics without lobbying, political intrigue, and subterfuge, and, thus, that the "dirty" is just more "obvious" through more media access. Does the blog writer continue to provide

examples of dirty politics, or does she respond or contend with the viewpoint from one of her audience members that politics has not become dirty, is has always been dirty? In this example I think both students have points to make, and while they are interrelated, the Molly's point does expand mightily on the topic from the Jennifer's original text. Now Jennifer must decide: is this the type of response she was looking for? As Norman Holland notes, "as readers, each of us will bring different kinds of external information to bear. Each will seek out the particular themes that concern him. Each will have different ways of making the text into an experience with a coherence and significance that satisfies" (123). What Jennifer has to determine now is whether Molly received her message and whether she needs to continue to write on this subtopic of a political-oriented blog, or whether she needs to move on to a new issue. Personally, I would hope that Jennifer would further engage with her reader, because what both Jennifer and Molly argue here are definitions about what *politics* is, and this gets to the heart of Jennifer's blog entry.

In each of my comments to my students' blog entries, at the midway point in the semester I would try to reflect back to them what I see in their texts through reader-response. While I do not expect my students to create responses to each other's texts via reader-response theory (although in the example above they can respond to a comment in a reader-response way), I would prepare them to read my commentary in a different way than the comments they give and receive from their peers or the general public. Students writing about dirty politics might take a position that "one side" (e.g., the Democrats or the Republicans) creates a more dangerous political and situational climate through the "tricks" they use, be it through forcing cloture or by filibuster, holding impromptu press

conferences, making appearances on particular talk shows, or other actions regarding attempts at redistricting or voter intimidation. Using reader-response theory, I would try to reflect back my understanding (via Holland) of one of Jennifer's posts to show her what message I received from her text so that she understands whether the point she made was successful. In a post on voter intimidation I would say, "The points you make here are valid, and voter intimidation has been happening right here in Virginia, most recently in the news with students from Virginia Tech who were told they could risk their in-state tuition if they voted. Do you mean to reflect a general 'one side does it more' than the other in this post, or are you just using examples of conservative subterfuge?" In my response I would ask Jennifer if she has an underlying motivation or position that she does not outwardly state. An ideal reader of Jennifer's would probably want to know her position, stated clearly and early on in her blog.

During weeks 5 and 6 of an eight-week semester, I would also continue our discussions on the boundaries of written artifacts. I wonder: if texts like hard copies of early editions of Mark Twain's books can be artifacts, and so can electronic versions of texts, then if those electronic texts change, what are the boundaries of that text? I would ask my students: "Where are the boundaries of this text [on an overhead projector I would show an example of my blog]? Is it the writer? The reader? If the text keeps changing, for example, if a blog post is engaging and readers keep responding, then the blog writer responds back, and a tangible dialogue is created, where does this artifact end?" I have asked this question in classes in the past, and students fall on all sides of the issue. Some do not know if texts end. Some believe that texts do end, unequivocally, with the last typed word. And for these students I would ask them,

> Well, I see what you mean, especially in hard-copy versions of texts. But aren't online texts another style of writing altogether, just words waiting in cyberspace for a response? If someone stumbles upon a political blog looking up "voter intimidation," then that text is still communicating, isn't it? The boundaries blur with electronic texts and sometimes the information fails to disappear, even if you delete a blog or website. This makes me wonder: can you ever end a text if there is potential for continued conversation? Does this help or hurt your ability to "finalize" any of your posts for submission for a class grade? And if a text does not end, can we write for our ideal readers when there are potential readers in perpetuity?

Blending reader-response theory with the concept that writing is a never-ending artifact has been both interesting in theory but inconsistent in my approach. As I perform reader-response theory on specific blog posts for each of my students, my job through reader-response is to "reflect back" my understanding of the texts that students supply. In individual responses, I cannot jump back to the metaphor of "writing is an artifact" if that does not seem to be the focus of the writer's text. And, of course, it most likely would not be. It is an outside metaphor superimposed on a class whose professor just also happens to be trying to provide reader-response theory. While the discussion of artifacts might work in the large-group discussions, it does not necessarily apply to individual reader-response interactions between student-writer and professor-reader.

Midway through the semester, my ENG 112 students would continue to write their weekly posts, but now they would also focus on the end to the semester and,

hopefully, ask questions regarding how to "tie up" their blogs and prepare their analysis papers. One student might acknowledge that he still struggles with staying focused in his topic, and that through the reading of different blogs and academic texts like peer-reviewed journals on his topic, he could go off on a tangent regarding his blog. In this case I would suggest that he go where the muse takes him—like hyperlinking, this writer should follow the trails of the discussions that he is most passionate about. I would then recommend to him to "see what you can write about that makes the discussions fluid, timely, and coherent as parts of the whole of your blog." Sometimes a blog topic expands based on the many new links and conversations that students "research" or stumble upon as they make their way through cyberspace. These conversations that they join are always ongoing, I would tell my students, and they constantly reshape and recreate how readers envision the texts they read and how they should interact with your texts. As we writers change, so would our ideal readers.

Final Blog Submissions

Because I lead the classroom discussions as professor, I feel I have a responsibility to bring up issues that might linger in the class. As a reader of my students' blogs, there are always intersections where their topics meet both on the page in their academic writing and in their personal lives. Performing reader-response theory would require me to be a reader for each student regardless of the topics they choose each semester, and it also requires me to provide reflection of what I see in the hope that this can enhance the student's text. If I reflect clearly, I can show my understanding of their texts based on my experiences (Holland) and I also try to show my students what they have said and how it comes across (Bizzaro).

I have always felt that commentary on a student text is only part of the interaction between student and professor in a writing course. In-class commentary in large or small groups, personal discussions during office hours, or even responses to e-mail queries are all part of the theoretical and pedagogical positioning that composition professors take. It would be hard to toggle a discussion of writing being an unending artifact with reader-response theory, as the two positions necessitate different actions in different spaces; one, a discussion of metaphor, in large-group discussions to set a tone or an understanding for how to envision what writing is, where it is, and where it might or might not end. The other, response protocols in the margins (or comments) attached to student texts, set to mirror or reflect the whole of a student text. These two ideas do not necessarily *not* work together, but it would take a very nimble and theoretically astute professor to move away from the "power" of close readings and professorial decision-making (e.g., "Why haven't you considered A?" or "Don't forget to resolve X, Y, and Z") and give more reflection of content agreement back to the student writer. This is the overarching goal of reader-response theory, and it requires that composition professors inherently "believe" that it is possible for a student it imagine their ideal audience, and that faculty giving up the power to say "There is a better way to say that … " can do the trick.

At the end of the eight-week semester of ENG 112, I would ask students, "So did you get the responses you were looking for in my comments?" I would wonder if each student felt that they had captured their ideal reader in the response from me. Could I accurately reflect their conditions and issues from how I digested their posts? Could I help them end their texts via my reader-response commentary? I have had a student in the past suggest to me that

> I don't think it's *you* I'm writing for specifically, even though you grade my work. I think I want to reach my fellow students in the class more; I value their comments in a way because they're not required, like yours are. Yours are helpful, but I know you're my professor in the end. If they comment, it means I've said something that matters, even if they don't agree with me.

So this student can describe his "ideal" reader, and it is somebody who is not forced to read their text, but, rather, somebody who stumbled upon their writing and kept reading because the content engaged them. Even if I attempt to operate under the assumption of the "ideal" reader, in his mind I will never be that person. The metaphors I use in a classroom, for this student, would not have the same effect on when he would stop his text as would the comments of a student who took the time to respond even when they did not have to.

This makes me wonder about Peter Elbow's "Believing Game." Can we as faculty read our students without letting our own suppositions or personal positions to get in the way of our responses? Holland thinks that we do superimpose our beliefs in our reactions to the texts we read: "Whenever, as a critic, I engage a writer or his work, I do so through my own identity theme. My act of perception is also an act of creation in which I partake of the artist's gift" (130). So, even in reader-response theory, our own positions "bleed through": the main change, Bizzaro suggests, is that students' responses to reader-response theory are much less predictable than close reading or "New Critical" or current-traditional responses would provoke (83). Reader-response can be "more participatory and, therefore, sympathetic" (85). In this way, composition professors

should believe what our readers say; we would just reinterpret it based on our own understandings of the world as we "reflect back" the ideas we see on the page back to our student writers. Writing may not end with endless opportunities for new ideal readers and new versions of texts; but in the case of reader-response theory, metaphors of writing's ends and artifacts would have less of an effect on the writer as a focus on where the writing could end for a student: in communion with their ideal reader.

Conclusion

After considering two different theoretical approaches to the teaching of College Composition 2 (ENG 112), I remind myself that it is beyond difficult to bring new composition theories in the classroom, and to use them as effectively as one who truly *believes* in the concepts behind the theories. This is the Catch-22 of theory building. It takes time to understand a theory and to have a full buy-in of that theory, but we compositionists must practice with our students to build up our knowledge of new theories to even have a chance to obtain that buy-in. In the meantime, when we risk struggling with theories we risk inconsistency in the classroom, especially when a theory does not fully fit a teacher's locations or epistemological knowledge of writing.

The confidence I feel when working with post-process composition theory does not translate to working with reader-response theory for a variety of reasons. First, I acknowledge that I find post-process composition theory (and the focus on "locations") is a more natural fit to my teaching style. It makes epistemological sense to me, and I can move among student locations more comfortably within that theoretical structure than I can with reader-response theory. I like the *idea* that reflecting back to a student their "ideal" reader can help them become better writers, and that I should help a student writer

"see their [implied] reader as an active partner in creation [of texts]" (White 94). Yet the application of this concept sometimes had me at a loss; that is, can I remove my professorial identity enough from reader-response commentary enough that I leave final decisions up to my student writers? Do I change other aspects of the classroom space to create a more negotiated composition classroom? What if I neglect to address issues that affect the power of students' persuasion, like punctuation use or confusing phrasing? It would be enough to say that I can "reflect back" notes on a confusing reading, but what if the student does not understand or agree that his run-on sentence takes away from the power of his prose? Can reader-response commentary work in a composition classroom? That is something I have yet to know for sure, at least in my own experience. I cannot know this unless I "try it out" on students. And "trying it out" runs the risks mentioned above, that I confuse students, or that I do not have full "buy-in" theoretically, and, thus, I create an inconsistent atmosphere in the classroom.

Reader-response theory is a long way away from post-process composition theory both in conception and in practice: thus, expanding out of my own comfort zone as a compositionist means that getting uncomfortable through using unfamiliar theories might in and of itself be beneficial to my teaching writing. But I have also realized that, again, my post-process location of who I am and how I was brought up affects my understandings of both using post-process "locations" as an overarching theoretical positioning when teaching ENG 112. Composition professors need to be able to work within the theories that through research, understanding, and application fit their locations, not just apply theories or pedagogies that come from textbooks they are required to use or from the way their professors taught them. Trying to force a particular

theoretical positioning like reader-response theory on professorial commentary and feedback (and, thus, on part of the environment in a composition classroom) can lead to confused teaching, frustration, and inconsistency with the goals a writing professor has for his or her student writers.

My main goal for this writing project was to see how I could focus on where students "stop" their writing, and whether or not writing as an artifact could be a useful metaphor in that endeavor. I think that it can in certain circumstances, as long as the theory the writing professor uses does not interfere with really hearing what students have to say about their writing. Also, it must be noted that professors bring a lot of baggage into our classrooms; our lives are not unmessy, and our experiences are not always clear. An understanding of where we come from as writers helps us shape where we want to take our composition classes.

Reflections on the Writing of Chapter 5

This was a hard chapter for me to write. First, I broke my right arm and, thus, I have spent quite a bit of time writing this chapter with my left hand only. I cannot say enough how not being able to "keep up" with one's thoughts when typing changes what I was going to say about where writing ends in ENG 112.

The panic that set in with me wondering whether I would get to "the heart of the issue" and force writing's ends/artifacts affected how I saw this chapter progress. But I then realized that teaching writing is never about "forcing" a theory on anyone. I have never been able to teach in ways that do not agree with my sensibilities and experiences; I recall being given Murray's Write to Learn *when I first started adjuncting at NOVA, and within an hour of trying to blend Murray with the course content summaries and the*

goals I have for teaching ENG 3, I found the book was just not compatible with my goals for this particular developmental composition course. Writing within two differing English studies theories was a challenge for me (as was trying to use an assigned book that did not suit my teaching style), and trying to apply metaphors within those theories has been one of the most difficult actions I have taken in my work as a doctoral student.

I am reminded of a toy that I bought for my 9-month-old daughter; it is a wood box with multiple shapes carved out of each side. Within the box comes 12 wooden blocks representing those shapes. The child is supposed to be able, at some point, to match the appropriate block (say the hexagon) with the hexagon cut-out on the box and push it through. This chapter in particular felt a lot like I was trying to push the octagonal shape through the hexagonal cut-out. The successes I felt while working with post-process "locations" do not seem to extend to working with reader-response theory. I cannot put the full blame on reader-response theory, but I do know now that the theory does not fit me as a writing professor. I think I might always struggle with how to handle issues of authority in a thoughtful and meaningful way with my students, to not come across as oblivious to dynamics of power in the classroom. These dynamics do not change simply because we have changed classroom locations (we work offsite), nor do they completely change because student work is presented in a blog form versus the traditional academic essay.

I recognize through my post-process locations that I have to contend with two issues in the classroom: one, I have significant power through my position as the professor (see Blitz and Hurlbert, "An Uncomfortable State of Mind"*; Delpit; hooks,* Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*); two, I have had to*

struggle with how I can successfully present difficult issues in the classroom. I have to acknowledge my locations early on to my students; maybe this means that I have to tell them how I envision writing and how writing will benefit their lives.

CHAPTER 6

VALUING THE DIVERSITY OF "ARTIFACTS" AND THOSE WHO CREATE THEM

The Story of My Academic Journey

There are many stories related to my academic journey, but I will limit this story to the growth and development of my dissertation question, "Where does writing end?" This question arose from my dissertation director's suggestion that I read Michael Carter's *Where Writing Begins.* While reading Carter, my interest in borders or boundaries of writing grew beyond that of any particular assignment I had completed as a doctoral student (such as "A Vision Quest: Boundary Writing as Challenge" for my Theories of Composition course). While I thought that testing a particular boundary was revolutionary, when reading Carter I learned that he goes much further: in *Where Writing Begins*, Carter denies that there are *any* borders to texts themselves. This was an exciting and radical notion; reading Carter was a revelation, and I wanted to take his closing argument/question, "Where does writing end?" and run with it as the basis of my dissertation.

Early in chapter 1 of this dissertation, I quote Jay David Bolter, who suggests that "all forms of writing are spatial, for we can only see and understand written signs as extended in a space of *at least* two dimensions" (11, emphasis mine). Bolter makes a clear distinction between what is writing (or what is written) by the appearance of physical proof (a material artifact) of that text. Michael Carter, on the other hand, speaks of writing's borders by describing abstract, multiple, and never static "beginnings" for writing. If I were to extrapolate from his argument, and if there are many beginnings to

writing, surely there are many endings as well? These endings would be "bound," as it were, to the same rules as beginnings. And the boundaries of these texts would stretch far beyond the limits of a two-dimensional text embedded within a physical artifact.

Compositionists like Bolter and Carter have their own very compelling ideas about what it means to write, including where writing might begin and what the boundaries to a text are. In this dissertation I attempt to fill a "gap" in composition studies by trying to make a determination regarding where writing ends. The gap exists because no compositionist that I have read has made this topic a research focus, nor has anyone in the composition field created a dissertation-length manuscript on the topic, let alone present at conferences or write in alternative spaces about where writing ends. I jumped into the middle of this project (I cannot clearly state when this started … maybe it was with my first coherent understanding of language, or maybe it was at the point when I was challenged to read Carter? Both options are not only possible but probable, according to Carter) with an idea only, a feeling that I could not yet determine where writing ends. It has taken me the length of this dissertation (four years and counting) to know for sure—writing does not end. But we do stop writing, many times, and sometimes we begin again. Always there is potential for future extensions of this text or any other in both physical and electronic formats, and in our minds as well.

In chapter 2 of this dissertation, I discuss that while writing might not end, it certainly can temporarily stop in many places, all context dependant, and all always changing. I highlight my own experiences in my doctoral program, for example, showing that my literacies journal is still a work in progress, even if I never actually get to it again. The idea is that one day I might, and that potential is enough to keep a text alive, at least

in the minds of those who have read it, including myself and, possibly, my student peers or my literacies professor. The writing of this literacy journal also keep alive the ideas and quotes borrowed from my sources, so that not only have I added to the growing conversations in second language literacy, but I have also supported and extended the conversations of scholars such as Ali R. Abasi et al. and Sharon Myers (discourse appropriation and texts on plagiarism for ESL students, respectively—issues that certainly have current repercussions in my current composition classes that I teach). I know at some point in my teaching career information from these texts that made it into my literacy journal could be brought back into play in classroom discussion, in feedback I give a student, or maybe even in department hallway conversations that I have with ESL faculty.

In addition to the discussion surrounding a text's borders, in chapter 2 I discuss the benefits of using metaphors in a theoretical dissertation and in composition classrooms: "In this dissertation, I use a metaphor to replace students' general conceptions of writing as just 'documents' and, instead, to see writing as 'artifacts,' something embedded with an inherent message, identity, and value" (page 43). The metaphor I have chosen to focus on throughout this dissertation is that of the written "artifact," a metaphor that locates me as a previous anthropology student, one that reflects how easily a writer's life contexts bleed into both subconscious and conscious understandings of the world.

Chapter 3 of this dissertation expands on the idea of artifacts, defining an artifact by locating an artifact in the world: what processes make an artifact? A written artifact? How do humans give artifacts value? And how can we inscribe some of this value in

academic texts-as-artifacts? I argue here that by giving students a metaphor that is brimming with value, compositionists might be able to transfer the idea of value to students for their texts. The idea of writing as an artifact can be expanded, as well, to the statement that "artifacts do not end" as long as there is potential to continue a dialogue—part of the great value of a text. I state in chapter 3 that "In each text, the writing situation is 'charged' with the potential to continue on indefinitely, to include new participants, to expand texts, and to create new texts" (page 84). In this chapter I also provide a lengthy discussion of what makes up an academic artifact, such as to put the "academic essay" to the test in chapters 4 and 5.

Chapters 4 and 5 of this dissertation show the proposed application of two different theoretical positionings: that of post-process composition theory and that of reader-response theory on the idea that academic writing can be an artifact. I test my metaphors out in two classes: ENG 3 (Preparing for College Writing 2) and ENG 112 (College Composition 2). Understandably, my results were mixed. I would have more success, I believe, by sticking to a theory that has had a major effect on the whole of this dissertation: post-process composition theory. I also tested out reader response criticism for a few reasons: to apply competing theories from within English studies and, thus, to test interdisciplinary borrowing of theories; to get out of my comfort zone; to learn by application; and to go back to my roots: that of literature (my master's degree was in English literature [with a focus on the Victorians], a location from which many compositionists arise).

I might not have realized until very late in this dissertation experience, but part of my reason for choosing reader-response theory as one of the theories to explore "where

writing ends" with my composition students was to discover if literary theories have a place in composition classrooms. I think I subconsciously chose reader-response theory to see whether the interdisciplinarity of composition studies expands far enough into the realm of literary studies, as it does for so many of my NOVA colleagues. I recognize that my strengths lie in post-process composition theory, in new ways of interpreting and accessing the constantly varying contexts with which my writing students operate. Composition, by nature, is interdisciplinary. We take much from philosophy—our roots in rhetoric can have no other origin—but we make great use of concepts and theories from psychology, anthropology, sociology, and, yes, from literary studies. Composition is an intersection of the best of academia in that we focus on explaining the human condition through writing, through articulating clear arguments and abstract concepts, using the social sciences to find newer and even more interactive ways to keep dialogues going. And even literature can have a place in composition studies. Through my experiences in superimposing a literary theory onto a composition course, I have learned that literature might be able to play a supporting role in a composition classroom (esp. if a particular literary text highlights an ongoing discussion: perhaps a composition professor uses Edward P. Jones's *The Known World* in relation to a current discussion about race relations in the United States, about cultural appropriation, or about the crafting of a nonlinear text), but an entire class devoted to literature would certainly contextually remove the "composition" and student-writer focus away from a composition classroom.

Calls for Future Research

It is within post-process composition theory that I believe that continuing research can provide great benefits for us compositionists and, ultimately, to the students who take our writing classes. There are a number of traditional composition texts, from journal articles to books and collections of edited articles, especially, on post-process composition (see Dobrin, "Paralogic Hermeneutic Theories, Power, and the Possibility for Liberating Pedagogies"; Ewald; Fraiberg; Journet; Kent, ed.; Teague, "From Product to Process to Post Process: A Convert Questions Her Convictions"; Vandenberg, Hum, and Clary-Lemon; etc.) that have informed and influenced my dissertation on where writing ends, and I believe post-process composition theory can support other compositionists who are joining the multitudes of conversations that can branch from a discussion of where writing ends. The possibilities are limitless.

The next place compositionists can focus their energies in relation to "where writing ends" is in the electronic sphere. There is a cornucopia of writing onto the web through course delivery sites like Blackboard or WebCT, business websites and professional social networking, even personal use of online venues like blogs or Facebook with which to research where writing might end, or, more broadly, support discussions concerning the very porous borders of a written text. There are "gaps" galore in exploring where writing ends in cyberspace, including important questions such as:

- When is an academic document not an academic document anymore?
- Can artifacts stretch beyond physical text?
- What is the value of electronic dialogues in composition instruction?
- How can we teach writing in an electronic space? What are the boundaries of student texts in standard course delivery portals versus open-access venues?

- What does post-process composition in a post-classroom (electronic) space look like? and even
- How we create present-day artifacts: students reinterpreting academic texts for nonacademic use…

In all of these options, I envision a future where some academics in the composition community hear my clarion call about the neverending academic text, and, interested, they expand on this discussion of mine (which was certainly built upon by many other theoreticians) by tracing the paths or evolutions of an academic document in as much as they can capture. Research questions that build from my dissertation also include: What was a text before it was an academic document? How did this text fare in academic sphere as it evolved? What happens to it (how was it used) after its academic phase? These questions reflect my historical and current locations intertwining, my pre-career as an anthropology student blending with my current career as a post-process compositionist. These questions might inspire other compositionists to address the question of where writing ends from the purview of their experiences as high school English teachers, creative writers, or even from the perspective of how one might successfully superimpose their literature background in a composition classroom. All possibilities *are* possible. There are possible trajectories for all of us in composition to use the question "Where does writing end?" to help inspire our students to write well and to value their academic texts-artifacts. Teachers of composition (like myself) at NOVA have been trained in a variety of disciplines, including creative writing, literature, composition, and journalism. We can use our varying contexts and apply this dissertation question in the composition classroom with inspired results. Surely, moving beyond a

dissertation with the theoretical topic of “Where does writing end?” involves the actions of historians, archaeologists, compositionists, and, hopefully, very many members of the greater English studies community.

There are also a growing number of nontraditional texts, including blogs, websites, and even Twitter feeds, that come from composition faculty breaking down barriers of what is expected “academic” writing and where and how we compositionists can expand our discussions of what composition can do for our writing students. Excitingly, this discussion very often takes place through the use of electronic technologies that bring conversants into the discussion asynchronously but successfully. We might have our greatest luck in creating a grander dialogic community that might discuss “where writing ends” if we turn to electronic portals for community information dissemination and debate. Writers and compositionists inhabit the web, and our student writing is moving online via hybrid and online course delivery methods. If compositionists take the conversation to online portals like blogs, listservs, or wikis, continued “live” writing and interaction can be had across time and space (location) with compositionists around the globe in real and asynchronous time. Thus, my biggest recommendation is that compositionists study the growing use of technology in composition classrooms, coupled with composition theories like post-process. This is fertile ground, and there are so many new “gaps” in our compositional knowledge to explore and to expand on.

Alex Reid, Associate Professor of English at the University of Buffalo, and a compositionist who focuses on “composition and new media,” suggests in his blog

"(post) post-process composition" the very turn this dissertation has taken during my focus on electronic writing:

> What changed for me was the real emergence of the web in the late nineties and my introduction to the field of new media studies that accompanied it. Working in hypertext and web design led me slowly to realize that writing wasn't what I had assumed it to be. New media studies helped me to think about the technological-material dimensions of writing. So for the past five or so years, I've been thinking about writing as a material-technological process, which includes thinking about thought as material and technological. [26 July 2007]

Here, Reid (like Carter) discusses a paradigmatic shift toward the idea of writing beyond the common boundaries of paper, of kilobytes, or of final grades, and into the gray spaces of our thoughts. Thus, thought becomes material and material (text) becomes an extension of thought—a Möbius strip of potentially never-ending thought-text-potential that, I would argue, is comprised of artifacts—both concrete and abstract, both material and potential. Reid's text highlights the diversity of artifacts in composition if we consider the abstract as part of a text—and, thus, part of the "artifact." Compositionists should value, support, and create alternative texts as scholarship. In this way, the academic text's borders are broadened; student creativity can be fostered; and discussions regarding where writing ends will become even more blurred with the blurring of the horizons of what a text is and what text can be.

As I do in this dissertation, I strive to see writing in new ways, to use an interdisciplinary borrowing from metaphors within the social sciences. Following Reid,

compositionists should “think about writing in a way that’s not even in a category of composition theory”—and in this action composition as a distinctive field can continue to grow. Why do I not include literature in this interdisciplinary borrowing above? It is not that literature does not belong … but the use of literature in composition classes can be a crutch for compositionists; many of us were trained in literature, and for many of us, our professors used literature to teach us composition. Composition studies is a fertile ground, and we have an opportunity to in composition to work with writers who are live, present, and engaged in our composition classrooms. Literature classrooms, to be sure, do not always have that same luxury. And, thus, I recommend that, for the time being, until compositionists (esp. compositionists new to the field) can shake the habit of overreliance on literary theories from our repertoire, we should engage more fully with the student writers who appear before us, creating current, nonfiction academic artifacts, and using composition-inspired theories (such as post-process composition theory) that directly ask our student writers to consider their contexts when trying to relay what they want, what they need, and what they mean when writing academically.

One way to reinvent the composition classroom is to theorize, to practice with theories that are amenable (for me, this was post-process composition theory), and even to get out of our comfort zones and move into theories that seem problematic (for me, I used reader-response theory) so that we can know what we should then take theoretically and use pedagogically in our classrooms. My use of reader-response theory—a significant literary theory—in a theoretical composition dissertation was risky. I have opened myself up to the hazards of readers who might, at first glance, wonder why a postmillennial composition dissertation uses a popular 20th-century literary theory. Yet I

would argue that I take on this precarious tactic for purposes of both composition research and blatant curiosity. I had to know, for myself, once and for all: with a good-faith effort, can composition and literature combine theoretically in the composition courses *I* teach? To a very small extent. But I can also think of so many opportunities to take a hermeneutical/post-process approach to the composition classroom that does not use literature. In my mind, there is plenty of time (and need!) for literature in literature, humanities, and cultural studies courses.

I call on other compositionists in the field to step out of their comfort zones and to test the waters of the arguments we make in support of our discipline. For me, reader-response theory did not fit the type of work my students do in developmental or freshman composition courses, but I know that for myself through not just study and research on reader-response theory, but through an application of that theory superimposed on the two main classes I teach. I also argue that my colleagues in composition should participate in interdisciplinary exploration, dialogue, and borrowing to better understand how we can create active and engaging metaphors for the act of writing, and to understand the interdisciplinary borrowing already underway. Sidney Dobrin who suggests that we should see "writing as *writing*": well, yes, of course. But it is so much more that that, too. Writing can be *anything.* Where would "beyond composition" research end? Well, I have learned through exploration of where writing ends that there is no ending with potential.

The Composition Profession's Future

It is hard to say where composition is headed in the future. With potential, there is an almost unlimited variety in our options. However, within those options are

possibilities of a future without autonomy for composition studies if colleges move closer toward a modes-model for the teaching of developmental English (as NOVA has already done with our developmental Math courses). I say this because just recently, my composition peers and I at NOVA received documents on the "developmental English" redesign for our developmental writing and reading offerings. Inspired by a modular redesign of some of NOVA's developmental math offerings, a "working team" from the Virginia Community Colleges System has decided to rewrite developmental composition at our college. They suggest on the one hand that we have done remarkable work in developmental English instruction; on the other hand, they tell us that what is not working is the time it takes to "remediate" students. Thus, they request a redesign that incorporates fewer hours but a much broader teaching scope. And they intend to raise the bar on the placement tests so that fewer students "get through" to developmental English courses than before. Those who are spearheading these changes do not teach English composition at the college level (or at any level).

The future of our profession lies in committees like the Developmental English Redesign Committee as much as it does within the community of compositionists, who have to balance academic freedom, their epistemological knowledge of writing, their student's writing needs, and their teaching strengths and weaknesses, against a very corporatized "English, Inc." (see Downing, Hurlbert, and Mathieu). The English Redesign Committee gets to decide the very goals and concepts that frame out our composition classes. I might sound like I am overly concerned when I say that corporatizing composition at NOVA starts with developmental composition, and then it can go anywhere. Sharon Crowley has argued in *Composition in the University* that there

are some reasons for getting rid of the freshman composition requirement. And I am left to wonder: if composition offerings at open-enrollment colleges like mine continue to be diluted, "Frankensteined" beyond the purpose to teach these classes (i.e., the purpose of developmental composition, I believe, is to provide writing opportunities to new college students to prepare them to *be heard well,* in new and challenging ways, predominantly on the page), or, as it now stands, designed to teach a more limited developmental base so as to artificially inflate the success rates of these students, are there legitimate developmental composition classes left to teach at NOVA? Will I ever have an opportunity to apply my theoretical ideas of where writing ends and using metaphors of "artifact" in a developmental writing classroom if this is the case? English faculty at NOVA are trying to fight the developmental English redesign, but the committees and working groups coordinating the design changes have from the Virginia Community College System (VCCS), the collective of all community colleges in Virginia. Administratively, we have been told that there is no negotiation, and these new course designs will be implemented in the spring of 2013, with pilot courses running in the fall of 2012. Some English faculty have decided to go ahead and teach the courses. Others are refusing to teach developmental English if the new placement measures deny access to a greater number of students than before (and these professors are also considering legal options by focusing on the civil rights of native English speakers have equal access to higher education that their ESL peers currently have; ESL courses are not being affected by this redesign). Unfortunately, Virginia is an "at-will" hiring state, and English professors cannot legally unionize.

Readers, you and I might debate what I mean by "be heard well," and I could go into detail by highlighting experiences in a composition classroom that help students be heard well on the page: supporting their needs to take a position on a confusing issue or dilemma; to help them investigate problems, issues, or dissonances that they feel; to demonstrate in-depth research and ways to show them how to back up their arguments in clear and powerful writing; to have them be able to admit that they cannot clearly verbalize or write how they *feel* about an issue, at least not at first, and that sometimes, just writing through their feelings might illuminate subconscious or layered issues that will need to be addressed; to let them discover their passion about a topic within their writing experiences, and a myriad of other actions students can take in a writing class, developmental or not. My hope is that this dissertation expresses a potential way to approach the composition classroom (through metaphor), so that our students can be heard well.

Our profession's future relies on our community's ability to create and sustain dialogue not only with one another but also with our student writers and with writers in all of academia's specialized communities. Our future depends on continued publication of peer-reviewed journals; activity and presentation at academic conferences on the local, regional, and national levels; discussion with our peers in our department about composition theory and pedagogy; and, for me most importantly, our future necessitates taking writing *beyond* the barriers of the traditional academic essay or journal submission or presentation paper. Our community needs to grow through the use of new technologies, including open-access options like blogs or wikis. I have been as inspired by Reid's blog posts on composition as I have been by many "traditional route"

composition texts. And the ability to communicate with each other in non-refereed arenas allows for an even greater potential of connections to be made in our conversations about the profession. If only 8-12 percent of articles are accepted in refereed academic journals, what are we losing out on when the other approximately 90 percent of articles are not shared with readers willing to listen and respond?

The discipline of composition needs to get radical and to get electronic. If we do this, our future, while always tenuous in the perceptions of those on the outside of composition studies (the arguments I often hear is that either composition must do *more* with each student, or that composition should be taught via WAC offerings, and, thus, do *much less* for any student outside of English studies). But as I have learned in the writing of this dissertation, being in an uncomfortable places is not always the worst place to be. Stressful conditions can create powerful dialogue and shared knowledge not just about the conditions of composition classes but also about how our discipline will survive.

I would like to end this final chapter of my dissertation with a quote from my dissertation director, Claude Hurlbert, who suggests that "Every day, it is a struggle to develop teaching that is responsive to the contexts in which we work. … Composition teachers remain united in our search for meaningful interpretations for figuring out what and how to teach. Maybe there is some hope in that fact" (357). Discovering that writing does not end is just one avenue in that search.

(In)Conclusive Thoughts/Reflections of This Dissertation

One of the main positions I have taken in the writing of this dissertation is that writing does not end. I can say with surety that this dissertation will never end; not for myself in the new patterns of life I have set up for myself, thinking, writing, even fleeing

the house to the local library on a daily basis; these aspects of my life will not disappear anytime soon, and when I hear the dogs barking or my daughter, who is now walking, crying at my side and pulling on my chair's armrest to get me to stop writing, I know that I might stop writing at that moment, but in the back of my mind I have split into two, three, or even 12 separate individuals, our thoughts colliding and merging with the circumstances of what I witnessed in a composition class, what I heard on the news, or even what funny joke I remember from middle school.

All of my experiences, from my first memories to now, form a different version of this dissertation. Many factors, including time, opportunity, current knowledge, questions, concerns, and frustrations, change what I have written here, and I think of the "many worlds" interpretation of quantum mechanics that suggests that at any time, any choice or deviation creates a parallel universe. These parallel universes just continue to divide, and, thus, anything that ever had potential to be said or done or seen or thought about is potentially (probably?) somewhere being said, done, seen, and thought about.

I think of the "many worlds" theory when I think of this dissertation, especially whenever I discuss writing's "potential." In another time and space, I can only imagine what I would have been able to write. In one parallel universe, maybe I went metaphysical in this dissertation. In another, I know I was encouraged to keep those mocked-up student samples that inhabited earlier versions of chapters 4 and 5. In another, I became passionate about superimposing literature theories on composition classrooms when I find some connection that can successfully, and without confusion, bridge the current gap between our disciplines. Every future is possible. Writing does not end, especially if, as Einstein states, "Since there exists in this four dimensional structure

[space-time] no longer any sections which represent 'now' objectively, the concepts of happening and becoming are indeed not completely suspended, but yet complicated. It appears therefore more natural to think of physical reality as a four dimensional existence, instead of, as hitherto, the evolution of a three dimensional existence."

Now, even after I die, if Einstein is correct, and everyone who ever read or discussed this dissertation with me, or knew or discussed with anybody who ever knew me, then this dissertation, this text, is still alive because time has no beginning or end. In another reality, within another vibration on the string, the artifacts of my dissertation, both in concrete (physical) and abstract (memory) form still exist somewhere and are interacted with in the minds of my students, my composition peers, or even my daughter, who at some point in the distant future, might decide to see what all the fuss was about.

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