POETIC COMPOSITION IN A DIGITAL AGE

By

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation explores the composing practices of contemporary American poets in the digital landscapes of the twenty-first century. Specifically, I attend to poets' production, publication, and distribution practices across networked spaces, looking at how these poets negotiate the shift from print to digital paradigms. This attention to poetry is focused on four working, active American poets: Geoffrey Gatza, Jessica Poli, Hannah Stephenson, and Johnathon Williams. The methods used in this study include oral history interviews with said poets, and rhetorical analysis of a number of digital materials including issues of electronic poetry journals, blogged histories of digital publication, and videos of poets' writing processes. My analysis has led to numerous insights that illuminate the nature of producing, publishing, and distributing writing in a digital age: how rich, networked composing environments contrast with Romantic notions of poetic composition and poetic identity as solitary and austere; how digital and cooperative publication models complicate understandings of authorial legitimacy; and how poetry journals speak to changing demands on and demands of delivery in networked spaces.

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A Poet and a Geek: My Story

I am a poet.

I vividly remember writing my first poem when I was in fourth grade, a series of rhymed couplets about raking autumn leaves, and about how very frustrating this activity can be when the leaves blow around and the tines of the rake get caught in overgrown grasses. My middle school and high school teachers encouraged my interest in poetry, and when I was seventeen I earned a spot in a prestigious summer arts academy, which cemented my desire to be a poet and formally introduced me to the professional life of the writer: the balance of composing, publishing, and distributing poetic work.

I enrolled in college as an English major and took creative writing classes. I became the editor for the college's literary journal and the organizer of the annual campus poetry slam. As a senior I designed an independent study aimed at producing a polished body of work that could serve as a chapbook manuscript. I extended my involvement with poetry into the surrounding community, too, attending a regional writer's conference and networking with experienced poets. When I graduated from college, I began working full time and spent my evenings immersed in the poetry scene in my hometown of Pittsburgh, attending readings and workshops. I still felt, however, that I needed more advanced training and mentoring. I also wanted to learn to teach—in short, I wanted to try my hand at being an academic. A year after I graduated from college, I applied to and was accepted into an MA program in English with a creative writing concentration.

As an MA student, I honed my craft in graduate writing workshops and worked as a submissions reader and editor for two national literary journals. I helped organize writer residences and readings and coordinated the university's annual literary festival. I produced a significant amount of writing—a manuscript-length thesis of my own poetry—but I was unsatisfied with what I had done. I was also hungry for publication, something I hadn't been able to achieve in any significant way since I was an undergraduate. I decided that a studio MFA in poetry would be my next goal. As an MFA student, I became ever more focused on professionalization. I sent my work out to literary journals, and I began receiving acceptances. I also served on the staff of another national literary journal, reading submissions of essays and poems and helping with the journal's design, promotion, and distribution. I gave community workshops on poetry writing. I taught poetry writing to undergraduates. I immersed myself in what my classmates called "po-biz"—the business of being a poet. I produced another manuscript that, a few years later, I finally succeeded in publishing as a chapbook.

I am a poet; my history is clear. But in addition to being a poet—and perhaps in the eyes of some, *in spite of* being a poet—I am also an enthusiastic user of digital technologies. Computers fascinated me ever since I first became aware of them. My family didn't own a personal computer until I was a teenager, so as a young child I looked for other opportunities. I knocked on the neighbor boy's door nearly every day asking to "play on the computer," and I stayed holed up in his den by myself for hours until his mother kicked me out. My favorite program allowed me to create an animated story by choosing little sprites and graphics, changing their colors, and placing them into

settings, then selecting music and adding text. My first multimedia work was a story about my baby sister's birth.

My family finally purchased a computer when I was sixteen, and I immediately began exploring the machine and seeing what I could do with it. With the help of a web design program provided by AOL, I made a personal website, learning how to do the HTML coding by checking out the code on other websites whose design I admired. As a college student without a computer of my own, I sat in the computer lab for hours, working on my website, posting (and sometimes flaming) on bulletin boards, and sampling music. I was always thrilled when my schoolwork required that I integrate work with digital technologies; I paid careful attention to the design of my projects, often making my own graphics using applications that I begged, borrowed or stole from my professors. However, once I got into the upper-level classes in my English major, I found myself with fewer and fewer opportunities to bring technology into my studies. Still, I continued using technology for more or less personal projects—becoming a DJ at my campus radio station, making music videos in an elective class on video production, and continuing to upgrade my personal website and participate in online communities.

In my MA program, I found myself using digital technologies frequently, but mostly in pedagogical contexts. I taught writing in computer labs and used software like Blackboard to help manage my teaching. In my own coursework, digital technologies were hardly mentioned. No one even brought laptops to the literature classes and poetry workshops I was enrolled in. This contrasted sharply with my out-of-class life, where I was becoming involved in blogging, podcasting, and more sophisticated graphic design via a pirated copy of Adobe Photoshop. When I became an MFA student, my

pedagogical engagement with technology increased. I also had an opportunity to take a course in computer-mediated composition theory with students from the rhetoric and writing program, and the possibilities that this course opened for me were fascinating. I designed my first professional scholarly website, and began taking a more critical look at the technologies I was using in my personal and teaching lives. I noticed that my poet colleagues in the MFA program were starting to use digital technologies to enhance their professional lives, most notably maintaining blogs, networking with other writers on Facebook, and investigating online literary journals. However, they seemed to find such engagement with technology unremarkable, or else seemed to regard work with technology as a necessary evil for being a poet in the twenty-first century. I, on the other hand, was eager to question poetry in all of the critical and rhetorical ways I had recently been introduced to, and that included applying those critical and rhetorical lenses to the way poetry was beginning to intersect with digital technologies. It seemed that at the same time I was writing poetry, I had become dissatisfied with the ways that I had been *studying* poetry. I was frustrated that, even in graduate programs in creative writing, my colleagues, instructors, and administrators weren't talking about creative writing as a discipline. They weren't talking enough about the theories and pedagogies of creative writing, or about the history of creative writing. And they especially weren't talking about how new digital technologies were affecting the ways that creative writing happened.

I am a poet. I am user of digital technologies. And now, I am also a rhetoric and composition scholar. My choice to pursue a Ph.D. in rhetoric and composition with a concentration in digital rhetoric was not a turning away from poetry, although it seemed

so at the time (especially to some of my creative writing colleagues, who expressed dismay at and outright disdain for my decision). It was, in fact, a turning toward poetry, albeit a different kind of turning. I effectively repositioned myself in relationship to poetry. In each of my master's degree programs, I had had the opportunity to start to make this turn, whether it was in teaching composition, learning about composition pedagogies, working with new writing technologies, or learning some of the disciplinary basics of rhetoric and composition. When I began the Ph.D. in rhetoric and writing at Michigan State University, I began to make this turn in earnest, deciding on a research question—what does it mean to be an American poet in the twenty-first century?—that I would investigate in various ways throughout my doctoral work.

I sought out ways to focus my coursework in my digital rhetoric and professional writing concentration on my research question. Thus, in each course I took, I asked myself how my work in each class could be used to further understanding of what it means to be a poet in the twenty-first century. Some of the most interesting results came from my courses in visual and digital rhetorics. In my visual rhetoric course, I designed a research project to investigate the book design of full-length collections of contemporary American poetry in order to determine the nature of the poets' roles in those design processes. I also explored the affordances of Microsoft Word to create a visual text treatment for my poem "Pod." By using digital tools, I was able to represent chaos and containment, and to evoke a sense of the visceral, the organic, and the sinister that was already present in the poem. Both of these visual rhetoric projects helped me to focus my attention on poetry as a material artifact, a text profoundly affected by changes in medium and circulation. In my digital rhetoric course, I

completed a user experience analysis of the Academy of American Poets' Michigan poetry webpage, learning in the process about how well (or how poorly) information about poetry can be rhetorically delivered. I also designed a viral video campaign aimed at promoting National Poetry Month, which highlighted the rhetorical roots of how poetry is positioned in American culture, and explored how poetry's identity can be rhetorically shifted when combined with contemporary digital media. All of this work brought me as a poet closer to interesting encounters with technology, but I increasingly wanted to know about other poets—what they thought of digital technologies, what they were doing with digital technologies, how their identities as poets had been impacted by digital technologies.

As I neared the completion of my comprehensive examinations—which focused on the relationship between rhetoric and poetry, the implementation of multimodal projects in composition curricula, and contemporary studies of the rhetorical canon of delivery—it occurred to me that little scholarly work had been done linking contemporary American poets and poetry to expanding digital technologies[1] in what Jay David Bolter (2001) calls "the late age of print" (p. 3). Bolter (2001) states that this late age of print is "a transformation of our social and cultural attitudes toward, and uses of" print (p. 3). What are poets' "social and cultural attitudes" about their traditionally print-based poetry, and how have those attitudes changed? Also, how have uses of print-based poetry

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[1] There exists, of course, a significant body of work devoted to digital poetry. Digital poetry could be defined as poetry that is heavily dependent on electronic media for establishing and conveying its meaning. Digital poetry includes hypertextual, visual-kinetic, and interactive media forms. I will briefly discuss digital poetry later in the literature review, focusing on a few major scholarly works, and how those works differ from the kind of poetry—and poets—I am studying.

changed? I wanted to open up scholarly discussion about just these kinds of questions. I wanted to know how poets used digital technologies in their work, work that had once been so adamantly print-based and print-bound. I wanted to know how poets—contemporary American poets—composed, published, and distributed their poetic work in electronic spaces. This dissertation is an exploration of this question.

What follows in this chapter is a brief review of literature that situates poetry within rhetoric and composition studies, followed by additional literature that looks to the scholarly connections between poetry and digital technologies. After these literature reviews, I frame my study and discuss its significance. Next, I attend to my position as a researcher who makes visible her insider/outsider story. Finally, I summarize the upcoming chapters of this dissertation.

Situating Poetry: Some Literature

Poetry has long been approached as a relatively transparent text; that is, we are familiar with looking *through* poetry to interpret it, but have tended not to look *at* poetry—as circulated text, as mediated material, as rhetorical artifact. This holds true, somewhat, in rhetoric and composition studies, where poetry has been situated in very specific ways. In the fifteen years before this dissertation was produced, it was most common to see poetry examined under the umbrella of "creative writing" as a discipline. Much scholarship, in fact, examines creative writing by taking up concerns about disciplinarity, looking to the ever-shifting relationship between rhetoric and writing and creative writing and determining what must be done in order for creative writing to evolve and thrive. The other most prominent strand of scholarship approaches creative

writing through a pedagogical lens, critiquing creative writing pedagogy as it has been

practiced and theorizing new ways to teach imaginative writing. What follows here is a

review of some of this literature, aimed at illustrating these two strands of scholarship on

creative writing in the discipline of rhetoric and writing. I will first attend to the

"disciplinary" strand and then transition into discussing the "pedagogical" strand. (I

should note that this literature review is not exhaustive by any means; the pieces I have

selected form a more or less representative narrative of how creative writing has been

situated in rhetoric and composition studies thus far.)

Creative Writing and Disciplinarity

In the September 1999 issue of *College Composition and Communication*,

scholars Mary Ann Cain, Ted Lardner, George Kalamaras, and Tim Mayers published a

multivocal exchange titled "Inquiring Into the Nexus of Composition Studies and

Creative Writing." Cain (1999) begins the exchange by noting that composition's

treatment of creative writing has "been limited to expressivist rhetoric" (p. 70), but that

this limited understanding of the field "stands in clear contradiction to creative writers'

ongoing concern with form, technique, genre, and what has become known as 'craft'"

(p. 71). This sets the stage for the other voices in the exchange to present new ways for

rhetoric and writing to situate and understand creative writing. Lardner (1999) continues

the conversation, arguing that creative writing's axiology—"what defines a goal for, and

measures the success of, writing and teaching" (p. 72)—is more expansive than

composition's mostly institutional, curricular axiology, and that creative writing's

experimentation and inventiveness can encourage ways of thinking found outside the

dominant culture (p. 77). The next voice in this conversation belongs to Kalamaras (1999), who asserts that a creative writing course with a social-epistemic pedagogical philosophy has the potential to create multiple genres of writing that resist the idea of a "finished" poem or story (p. 81). The next voice in the exchange is that of Mayers (1999), who argues that composition could benefit significantly from studying "craft criticism" in creative writing. For Mayers, craft criticism is an attempt "to question and challenge the conventional wisdom about creative writing" (p. 83), specifically the disenfranchising traps of dominant mythologies and ideologies about writing and genius. Cain returns to close the discussion, noting that many teaching creative writers believe that one can only be taught to be a writer in terms of craft. Cain contrasts this with the attitudes of composition teachers, who believe that anyone may become a writer, and argues that we need not create these kinds of false dichotomies. The whole of the exchange between these four scholars highlights a number of ways that creative writing has moved and continues to move beyond charges of expressivism and Romanticism and into cultural and disciplinary critique, moves that are fundamentally necessary for the growth of the discipline, it seems.

Discipline-building and disciplinary critique are key to Patrick Bizzaro's 2004 *College English* piece, "Research and Reflection in English Studies: The Special Case of Creative Writing." Bizzaro's (2004) essay is "a discussion of why some subjects associated with English studies achieve disciplinary status and what such status means in English departments" (p. 294) and he begins by highlighting the narrative that creative writing's difficulty in emerging as a discipline had much to do with its perceived anti-intellectualism and resistance to critical inquiry. Bizzaro reminds the reader that this

is a centuries-old narrative and that creative writers are increasingly thought to have skills valued by writing researchers. Yet, Bizzaro notes, "academic independence for creative writing requires an assertion of its epistemological differences from other subjects in English studies" (p. 296). He suggests that, "by teaching skills unique to the research creative writers do, teachers of creative writing will function independently in the English departments that house them" (Bizzaro, p. 297). The consequences of not becoming independent are many; for example, there is the "economic" consequence of "non-creative writers" teaching required classes for creative writers and thus profoundly influencing what and how fundamental research and pedagogical skills are taught. Bizzaro points to some scholars who have contributed to the continuing emergence of creative writing as a discipline, most notably Kelly Ritter, David Starkey, and Wendy Bishop, but notes that these scholars "have not asserted the epistemological differences between creative writing and other disciplines" (p. 300), which, according to Bizzaro, is a necessary requirement for discplinarity. Bizzaro begins taking up this challenge by trying to define research in creative writing, listing six skills—a unique way of reading, an understanding of people, an understanding if the importance of history, a belief in the writing process, an understanding of audience, and a deftness at employing a variety of genres—that represent the unique epistemological approaches of creative writers. Bizzaro also suggests that creative writers employ a variety of established methodological approaches to their research, including personal narratives, ethnographic inquiries, and historical research. Bizzaro closes the article by reflecting on what disciplinary status for creative writing might mean; in addition to codifying and teaching the specialized research skills creative writers employ, creative writers would

need to begin researching methodologies, pedagogies, and disciplinary practices in the emergent field.

In a special 2009 issue of *College English* dedicated to "Creative Writing in the Twenty-First Century," Tim Mayers proposes a solution to the problem presented in Bizzaro's piece by arguing for the importance of "One Simple Word: From Creative Writing to Creative Writing Studies." Mayers (2009) posits that, in the United States, "creative writing and creative writing studies are two distinct enterprises—although they do overlap at some significant points—and should be recognized as such" (p. 218). According to Mayers, creative writing is the practice of training writers to be successful in the literary marketplace, and is also a "*de facto* employment program for writers who are unable to earn a living simply by writing" (p. 218). Creative writing studies is something quite different; Mayers asserts that creative writing studies is a scholarly enterprise concerned with professional, disciplinary, and pedagogical issues, and that creative writing studies "embraces its own identity as a kind of scholarship, even as it may challenge some of scholarship's traditional bounds" (p. 219). As such, Mayers (2009) identifies and defines three distinct strands of inquiry in creative writing studies: pedagogical, historical, and advocacy-oriented (p. 220). Mayers argues that the shift from creative writing to creative writing studies could have profound implications, not the least among them a new conception of what it means to be a creative writer in the academy: "rather than simply producing writers, creative writing courses and programs would be conceived as part of a more expansive project, incorporating practical knowledge of (and facility with) the composition of fiction, poetry, and other so-called creative genres into a more general intellectual framework concerning literacy itself" (p.

225). In fact, Mayers muses that creative writing studies "might be the spark for the long sought-after unity among the several strands of English studies" (p. 227). Unity aside, Mayers' plea for a disciplinary move toward creative writing studies reflects a desire for a strongly critical (and perhaps rhetorical) perspective in the discipline.

In this same January 2009 issue of *College English*, Kimberly Andrews offers the provocatively-titled "A House Divided: On the Future of Creative Writing." Taking as her fundamental argument that "reading for creative writers must be viewed as a critical practice" (Andrews, 2009, p. 242), she points to her own disciplinary "splitting," where she was forced to decide whether to be a literary scholar, or a creative writer who is expected to abandon, or even regard with contempt, any interest in critical scholarly work. Andrews traces the origins of this split to New Criticism, claiming that it allowed creative writers to indulge in "autonomism, even isolationism" when it comes to critical perspectives on literature, and inadvertently led to the perpetuation of the so-called genius myth, which posits that writers are born and not made (p. 246). Continuing her critique of creative writing's isolationist attitude, Andrews points to the workshop model, noting that the proliferation of lore in creative writing pedagogy and the lack of attention to research in creative writers' practice. Andrews traces this back to reading, calling for a "different kind of workshop setting, one that puts critical reading before the reproduction of mystical genius" (p. 249). She claims that critical reading would help creative writing students move toward professionalization by providing them hybrid identities that would enable them to develop an academic discourse, and enter into discourses apart from their own.

Despite the numerous pleas for creative writing to evolve past its presumably anti-critical disciplinary identity, Doug Hesse (2010) believes that creative writing still has much to offer rhetoric and composition studies. In "The Place of Creative Writing in Composition Studies," Hesse, himself both a creative writer and a former chair of the Conference on College Composition and Communication, reflects on the somewhat acrimonious relationship composition studies and creative writing have had over the years and offers a significant reason for these disciplines to come together: for the sake of students' learning. Hesse begins by tracing the way composition studies has approached and examined creative writing, noting the dearth of theoretical and pedagogical writing on creative writing and concluding that "with important exceptions, our field has turned away from the imaginative and toward argument, civic discourse, academic genres, and rhetorical moves" (p. 37). He states that creative writing has been mentioned in *CCC* in two contexts: in one, creative writing is positioned as a practice that "develops basic personal, human qualities" (Hesse, p. 38). In the other, creative writing is positioned as something that helps develop "artistic" qualities (broadly imagined as style) in students' prose. Hesse continues by suggesting that creative writing and composition should open their borders for the sake of intellectual exchange and, as mentioned above, for the sake of students' learning: "Both fields are better served by a richer view of writing that articulates the values of a creative, productive art, 'practical' in much wider terms than would be imagined" (p. 45). Hesse concludes that creative writing can help composition studies understand "the drive to matter in the world" (p. 47), noting that "the aesthetic has a rhetorical force even as the belletristic can carry information and idea" (p. 48) and that the invitation to compose creatively is

one of the most significant contributions creative writing can make to composition studies.

Creative Writing and Pedagogy

The second strand of scholarship on creative writing in rhetoric and composition is firmly pedagogical, but again, like the scholarship in the disciplinary strand, it seeks a reform of sorts. Two key articles exemplify this call for reform, and each attends to one of the major components of established creative writing pedagogy: the celebrated writing teacher, and the tried-and-true workshop model. Kelly Ritter, a major voice in the scholarship of creative writing, published "Ethos Interrupted: Diffusing 'Star' Pedagogy in Creative Writing Programs" in *College English* in 2007. In it, she notes the persistence of a pedagogical model that privileges "public over academic capital" (Ritter, 2007, p. 283), meaning that the "star" writers in creative writing programs are valued for their celebrity, publications, and ability to attract students and money (and students with money), rather than their teaching ability. Ritter argues that this "star pedagogy" has a detrimental affect on students, who are "taught to believe [. . .] that teaching is an instinctive act: not based in any history, theory, curricular planning, or discipline-specific pedagogical training, but instead on the experiences and predilections of the faculty member leading the course" (p. 283). Ritter argues that diffusing this star pedagogy is fraught because of university hierarchies that valorize star writers, but that an ideal solution would be to require a creative writing pedagogy course of all MFA and creative writing Ph.D. students, and also to establish team-teaching experiences wherein a

graduate student is paired with a "star" teaching writer to facilitate undergraduate creative writing courses.

In a tone of critique similar to Ritter's, Rosalie Morales Kearns calls for change in the workshop model in her 2009 *CCC* essay "Voice of Authority: Theorizing Creative Writing Pedagogy." In this piece, Kearns (2009) identifies ways that the typical creative writing workshop model constitutes "an unmarked norm" (p. 791) which creates a potentially destructive dynamic that disenfranchises students, particularly students of difference. Kearns states that the "normative" workshop model positions the author as faulty and not as an authority on his/her text (p. 793), enforces a destructive "gag rule" (silence from the writer while the work is being critiqued), and reinscribes a "fault-finding" ideology that directs criticism at writing that does not conform to an ostensibly white, middle-class, male, ableist, and heterosexist norm. Kearns offers a number of remedies for the normative workshop model, including studying diverse published works, engaging in writing exercises which encourage students to go beyond their aesthetic comfort zones, and positioning work as "in process" and neither inherently good nor bad.

As mentioned earlier, neither of these strands of scholarship on creative writing addresses poetry directly. What they do reveal, however, is a desire for creative writing as a discipline to critically and rhetorically examine itself beyond aesthetic perspectives and concerns. Consequently, this scholarship implies a call for the varied genres of creative writing—poetry included—to be situated in those same kinds of critical and rhetorical contexts (and, according to Hesse, this move would benefit rhetoric and composition as much as it would benefit creative writing). However, what the above

scholarship has overlooked is the changing shape of those critical and rhetorical contexts. This change can be traced to the rapid shift from print-based composition, publication, and distribution of creative writing to a new model that foregrounds the digital.

Poetry and Digital Technologies: Some Literature

Contemporary American poetry exists in a space that has shifted radically with the emergence of the digital. Still, most studies of poetry and technology tend to focus on one particular genre of contemporary poetry: digital poetry. Digital poetry differs from print-based poetry in that it relies on digital technologies to establish and convey its meaning. The digital context is integral to the existence of the poem and without it, the poem simply does not function. By contrast, print-based poetry is not specifically reliant on technological contexts for meaning, although it might frequently be produced, distributed, and consumed in digital spaces[2].

A great deal of scholarly work has been written about digital poetry, most of it seeking to define and to historicize the genre. Loss Pequeño Glazier's 2001 book *Digital Poetics: The Making of E-Poetries* is one of the most visible studies. While noting that "electronic technology offers unprecedented opportunities for the production, archiving, distribution, and promotion of poetry texts" (Glazier, 2001, p. 2-3), Glazier limits digital poetry to hypertextual work, visual/kinetic work, and programmable media work (p. 6).

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[2] Of course, one could argue that all poetry produced in electronic environments (even environments as basic as word-processing programs) qualifies as digital poetry. However, it is generally agreed that the term "digital poetry" applies mostly to works with a significant level of digital interactivity, as in hypertextual, visual/kinetic, or programmable works.

One of the most active scholars of digital poetry is Christopher Funkhouser, whose two most recent books attend to the ways that digital poetry has been defined and experienced in literary culture. His 2007 study, *Prehistoric Digital Poetry: An Archaeology of Forms, 1959-1995* works to map the landscape of digital poetry from the period when the first "computer poems" arrived until the advent of the World Wide Web. By defining the major forms of digital poetry, examining their technological methods of production, and performing detailed analyses of example works, Funkhouser exposes the foundations of contemporary digital poetry and narrates a journey from a few relatively simple programs to the radically open space that the WWW provides. Funkhouser's 2012 book, *New Directions in Digital Poetry,* takes as its subject contemporary digital poems available on the WWW at the time of the book's release. Funkhouser's central thesis is that digital poems are perpetually in a state of plasticity; they are "synthetic in essence, and brittle in terms of longevity" (p. 5). Thus, Funkhouser argues, "engaging with digital poetry requires more from readers, who face multimodal, human-to-machine transcreations where texts initially presented in one state transform into others" (p. 6). Still, Funkhouser argues, digital poetry has the capacity to please and move the reader as much as print-based poetry (p. 22).

It would appear that I have given short shrift to digital poetry here; it is true that I have only briefly glossed over a few key texts. This is simply because digital poetry is an extremely specific genre of electronic literature whose connection to creative writing as an academic discipline is not well established. Digital poetry is rarely composed, taught, or even mentioned in most creative writing programs in the United States. While some new, cutting-edge electronic literature and integrated media arts programs are

beginning to emerge, digital poetry remains a relatively marginal genre, at least in North America. This is not to say that digital poetry is unworthy of consideration; it is simply that the vast body of contemporary American poetry is not "digital poetry." Yet, this work still interfaces with digital technologies despite not being primarily hypertextual, visual/kinetic, or programmable.

Precious little scholarly work has attended to the relationship between print-based poetry and digital contexts, some of it pedagogical. One of the few pieces that has emerged in the last fifteen years is Priscilla Orr's 1998 *Computers and Composition* article "HOWL: An On-line Conference for an Off-line Poetry Seminary." In this piece, Orr describes implementing an "on-line conference" (asynchronous chat via message board) in the traditional, non-networked classroom of a graduate poetry seminar. Orr (1998) begins by discussing a pedagogical need that was not sufficiently served by her "traditional," non-networked classroom: she recognizes that her students "need to have an opportunity to talk about and to discover something about themselves as writers, something that goes beyond the product—the poem, the short story, the novel" (p. 97). The original purpose of the conference was to allow for more space and time to engage in annotations of the poems brought to workshop. However, Orr discovered that her students were "hungry" for space to discuss their lives as writers, and begins opening up conference topics for them to discuss their struggles and thoughts about being poets; a rich discussion emerges. Orr notices how digital technologies like the online conference "provide a space for dialogue that would deepen the sense of a community of writers" (p. 98)—she recognizes that the space created using digital tools is different than the traditional, non-networked classroom spaces and thus has different

affordances. This radically changes the way the course is delivered, as it creates a separate space for craft analysis and for the discussion of "the writing life." Orr concludes that her experience using the online conference "has convinced me that technology does have a place in the creative processes of writers, in helping us to extend our community into the wee hours of the morning when those most poignant images haunt us" (p. 104). Beyond extending community, though, how else can digital technologies enhance poetry instruction?

In "Let Stones Speak: New Media Remediation in the Poetry Writing Classroom," Jake Adam York (2008) takes up the pedagogical problem of communicating "lexical materiality"—"that words are materials with resistant properties apart from their meanings rather than transparent or merely instrumental operators" (p. 22)—to his poetry students. The solution, York proposes, is audio and video work in a computer lab to help to provide students with a phenomenological experience of language. York claims that new media software helps to "encourage students to place their own senses, all of them, in the service of reading and in the service of writing" (p. 24). York takes the reader through a series of audio recording and editing exercises designed to build poems where "the material dimension and the semantic dimension interact and inform each other in some way" (p. 31). The audio sculpting exercises that York takes his students through help him to teach a "non-linear approach to writing poems" (p. 34), a lesson that would be far more difficult without the aid of the audio editing software.

These pieces by Orr and York offer some perspective on what might be gained—and what must be examined—when poetry interfaces with digital technologies in the

creative writing classroom. A more expansive survey of the critical work that must be done regarding the intersection of creative writing and digital technologies appears in a (very) recent essay by Adam Koehler (2013), who calls for an examination of "the ways in which creative writing, or creative writing studies, engages with, understands, responds to, and thrives in an age of digital writing" (380). In this March 2013 *College English* essay, entitled "Digitizing Craft: Creative Writing Studies and New Media: A Proposal," Koehler poses the question "how does writing 'creatively' in digital spaces alter the act of composing 'creatively' and help teachers, writers, and scholars of creative writing (and composition studies) better theorize our current methods and practices?" (p. 380) Taking up Tim Mayers' argument for craft criticism, a kind of criticism that "uses methods of production to examine the ways imaginative literature operates" (p.382), Koehler argues for a kind of digital craft criticism that looks to how the digital intersects with questions of process, genre, authorship, and institutionality in creative writing.

In the field of English studies, Koehler's essay is the most comprehensive piece to date on the relationship between creative writing and the digital. Concluding the piece, Koehler (2013) argues that "to build a kind of criticism that foregrounds textual production as it engages with digital environments requires the attention to and complication of print-based ways of understanding imaginative texts *as well as* the development of how the digital environs of an imaginative text affect the process of constructing that text" (p. 395). While I will not specifically take up the digital craft criticism heuristic, I would like to, in some small way, take up Koehler's charge and look to the production of poetry in digital contexts. In this dissertation, I will be attending to

the ways that poets use digital technologies in the composition, publication, and distribution of their texts.

Poetic Composition in a Digital Age: Framing the Study

The works summarized above open up a discussion of contemporary American poetry as it is situated against the complex and ever-shifting boundaries of print and digital culture in the twenty-first century. Works from the field of rhetoric and composition that engage poetry do so by engaging creative writing writ large, and do so by limiting their engagement to disciplinary and pedagogical reform. That is, these studies are mainly concerned with reimagining creative writing in terms of its identity within the academy, and, as such, in terms of its pedagogical practices. Works that engage poetry in digital contexts are limited in similar ways, and often focus solely on digital poetry while neglecting the ways that print-based poetry is impacted by changing technologies. Yet, print-based poetry and the poets who work on and with it are now and will be affected by digital composition, publication, and distribution paradigms.

As the scholarly literature reflects, the discipline of creative writing is primed for change. In order to survive and thrive, creative writing must turn a critical and rhetorical gaze upon itself in terms of its disciplinary boundaries and pedagogical concerns. Creative writing must do all of this while attending to ubiquitous technological contexts and the expanding digital frontier. By taking up contemporary American poetry as a subgenre of creative writing, and by looking to contemporary American poetry as it lives in the working lives of poets who engage with digital technologies, I hope to contribute to this project in a continued move toward change.

There exists very little work in any subgenre of writing studies that attends to the ways that poets use digital technologies. Yet, poets are a vibrant and diverse group of writers whose composing practices are being significantly affected by the shift from print to digital composing paradigms. This study seeks to illuminate some of the ways that this is happening, and to raise new questions about composition, publication, and distribution of poetic work in a digital age.

A Story About My Story: My Researcher Identity

In each chapter of this dissertation, I include a portion of my own story as a poet. This is a deliberate choice that calls to a specifically feminist methodological stance, and I feel it is important that I discuss this choice early in this study. As mentioned in the chapter that follows, I drew upon my social media network when searching for participants, and completed all work with my participants in networked environments. I also foregrounded my identity as a fellow poet in all of my communications with my research participants. These practices are reminiscent of the technofeminist research stance introduced by Jen Almjeld and Kristine Blair (2012) in "Multimodal Methods for Multimodal Literacies: Establishing a Technofeminist Research Identity." Almjeld and Blair (2012) note that "researcher identity construction is an inherent part of the technological spaces we study, and we must be able to function in such spaces in order to understand communication processes and establish credibility with subjects" (p. 103). To function, as Almjeld and Blair point out, researchers must interrogate identity in ways that trouble traditional constructions of researcher objectivity. Ultimately, objectivity "can best be obtained by admitting that it is impossible—by situating oneself as a researcher

who is by definition biased in some way" (Almjeld and Blair, p. 107). By making visible my identity as a researcher through stories of my own poetic practice, I am taking a deliberate position against unrealistic conceptions of researcher objectivity as well as against "the false insider/outsider dichotomy" (Almjeld and Blair, p. 104). In this study I am both insider and outsider, storyteller and story-collector, researcher and writer, poet and geek.

Chapter Summaries

In Chapter Two, "Researching Poetic Composition: Methods and Tools," I explain the methods utilized within this study, including explanations of the data gathering protocol and tools used: oral history interviews and rhetorical analyses of digitally composed materials. I position myself as a member of the community of poets that I study, I introduce my study participants, and I introduce their projects as poetic artifacts.

In Chapter Three, "Poets Composing Spaces: Poetic Composition in a Digital Age," I focus on poets Jessica Poli and Hannah Stephenson, whose poetry writing processes are mediated by multiple digital tools and applications. I discuss how these poets build rich, networked composing environments that contrast with the Romantic notion of poetic composition as solitary and austere, and I show that these composing environments are compositions in and of themselves.

In Chapter Four, "The Case of BlazeVOX: Poetic Publication in a Digital Age," I focus on poet Geoffrey Gatza and his press BlazeVOX Books, and the highly-visible fallout from the choice Gatza made to resist traditional, accepted print publication

models. In my analysis of the situation, I look specifically at how digital and cooperative publication models complicate understandings of authorial legitimacy.

In Chapter Five, "*Birdfeast* Versus *Linebreak*: Poetic Distribution in a Digital Age," I focus on two poetry journals--Jessica Poli's *Birdfeast* and Johnathon Williams' *Linebreak*--discussing how one poet's decision to build an homage to print publication conventions contrasts with the other poet's decision to resist these same print publication conventions. In analyzing these poets' choices, I look to the ways that these journals speak to changing demands on and demands of delivery in networked spaces.

In Chapter Six, "Poetry and Poets Now: Implications and Conclusions," I pull from across the previous three chapters to illustrate how what I have uncovered and analyzed illuminates the nature of composing, publishing, and distributing poetry in a digital age. I also point to places my own research will go next, and highlight places where more study would serve rhetoric and composition, Computers and Writing, and Creative Writing Studies.

CHAPTER 2: RESEARCHING POETIC COMPOSITION: METHODS AND TOOLS

Finding My Way Into Research: My Story

I began interviewing people when I was a very small child. The first person I ever interviewed was my nanny when I was seven years old, asking her questions about her life in Japan as a military wife. I interviewed my parents' life insurance agent when he came to our house to discuss their policies. I interviewed my neighbors. I interviewed my father's dentist. I liked collecting stories. I would report them, word-for-word, in the handmade newsletters that I carefully typed up on my toy typewriter and distributed to my family, and throughout my neighborhood.

I started gathering people's stories in a more formal way when I entered college and began working at the Saint Vincent College Center for Northern Appalachian Studies. At this oral history center, I transcribed and edited interviews from aviation pioneers, prominent community members, and veterans, among others. Over the course of transcribing so many conversations, I learned how to structure an oral history interview, starting from questions of birth and upbringing, and moving to questions that connected the interviewee's personal experiences to particular historical events. Eventually, I was tasked with turning a few aviators' oral histories into a story that captured some of the rich history of the Arnold Palmer Regional Airport (home of one of the nation's first continuous airmail pickup systems). I focused on a few key events that seemed to repeat themselves in the oral histories, and structured my edited story around them, reaching back into the texts of the oral histories to flesh out and clarify the turning points. All the while, I was striving for an accurate but lively story of the airport

and those who were involved with it.

The work that I did with the Center for Northern Appalachian Studies was distinctly involved with uncovering the past. Whether it be through the story of a place (the airport mentioned above), an event (World War II), or a community (Italian-Americans in Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania), the oral histories conducted by the Center's researchers were engaged with what came before, what was in the rear distance. What engaged me most, however, were the people themselves—their childhoods, their families, their everydays. I was fascinated by the past, but most fascinated by the presence of the people in the past.

Later, as a graduate student in rhetoric and writing focusing on digital writing technologies, one of the first studies that captured my imagination was Cynthia Selfe and Gail Hawisher's 2004 work *Literate Lives in the Information Age.* This study—my reading of which coincided with my teaching of technology autobiography assignments—revealed insights into what drove individuals to become literate with digital technologies, into the ways they used those technologies, and into what kinds of negotiations those individuals had to engage in (for example, issues of access) in order to become literate with digital technologies. I realized that it was precisely these kinds of insights that I was interested in gathering myself, but from a very specific group of individuals. As my previous chapter points out, there is little work in the field of computers and writing that looks at the digital composing practices and digital literacies of creative writers. I wanted to investigate the ways that creative writers use digital technologies, and I wanted to look specifically at poets, the creative writers closest to my own experience. With my experience in oral history, and with my focus on digital

writing practices, the work of Cynthia Selfe and Gail Hawisher promised an interesting

methodological fit.

As I began my study, I placed the greatest importance on the meaning of the

digital environment—and thus, the meaning of changing composing practices—for

poets. In this point in time, during the dramatic shift from print to electronic composing

and composing environments, I was fundamentally interested in what poets do, in all

realms of digital composing, whether it be composing poems, publishing poems, or

distributing poems. My research questions were as follows:

1. What does "the digital" mean to poets?

2. What does it mean to "go digital" as a poet?

3. What composing practices are necessary to "go digital" as a poet?

4. What infrastructures must a poet navigate in order to "go digital"?

In this chapter, then, I will discuss the methodology that frames my study,

summarizing Selfe and Hawisher's methodological framework, critiques of this

framework, and how I incorporated their framework into my own methodology. I will then

detail my methods, discussing how I selected my participants, how I conducted my

interviews, and how and why I collected additional data to supplement the interviews. I

will then discuss the techniques and processes I used for analyzing the data I gathered.

I will conclude with a summary of the data chapters that follow.

Learning to Capture Poets' Stories: Methodology

As mentioned above, I chose to model my interview protocol after the ones used

in Selfe and Hawisher's *Literate Lives in the Information Age*. In that study, Selfe and

Hawisher (2004) began with the goal to collect "technology literacy autobiographies" (p. 7), using a method "grounded in oral-history and life-history research" (p. 6). This method included "a standard set of interview questions that participants respond to orally, in face-to-face interviews, or in writing, via some digital context (e.g., on a disk, on the Web, or in a word-processing file residing on a computer network)" (Selfe & Hawisher, pp. 6-7). The "standard set of interview questions" included demographic questions, and questions about participants' encounters with various technologies throughout their lives (Selfe & Hawisher, p. 7). Selfe and Hawisher's purpose was to document how and why individuals developed or did not develop various technology literacies in a specific period of time—a period of time that coincided with the rapid proliferation of consumer-accessible computing technologies in the United States (p. 6). It is this period of time that provides the historical lens through which to read these stories of technological literacy. Even though my project is much smaller in scope than Selfe and Hawisher's (I interviewed only seven individuals while they interviewed over 350), I found that Selfe and Hawisher's interview protocol was an effective model for my own protocol.

It is important to note that Selfe and Hawisher's study is not above critique. One of the most significant critiques leveled at this study is that it is not representative of a diverse cross-section of "literate lives." As Bethany E. Gray (2006) states in her review of the book, "most participants come from academic environments, either as instructors or students, and a great majority of them come from language-based fields" (p. 22). Another criticism of the study has been that Selfe and Hawisher interject their own experiences too frequently into the testimony of their research participants, disrupting

the oral histories. I tried to be cognizant of these criticisms in developing my own methodology, but this was somewhat of a struggle. While I found it more or less easy to keep myself out of my participants' testimonies during the interview process, it was difficult for me to locate poets whose educational backgrounds and training are diverse. A great number of poets in the United States identify as such due to traditional academic training of some kind. Many poets "professionalize," or become initiated into American academic poetry culture, in the pursuit of a graduate degree. While it did turn out that only three of the poets I spoke to chose academic careers, the majority of the poets I talked to had some connection to graduate education, usually in the form of present or past MA or MFA training in creative writing. This leaves me, again, with the question: how representative is my own study? How well did I represent the diversity of educational backgrounds that comprise contemporary American poetry? The answer, of course, is not very well. This is due to my own researcher bias as a graduate-trained professional poet who tends to know and interact with poets who have similar backgrounds. I would not say that this makes my study null and void, however. I would argue that this sample places restrictions and qualifiers on what I am able to discuss. As I mentioned above, a great many poets in the United States have some background in higher education. I wish to make clear that my study is best representative of this demographic.

My study uses a qualitative mixed-methods approach, combining oral history-style participant interviews with rhetorical analyses and a case study. My methods of interviewing participants for this particular study draw upon *methods* of oral history, but do not qualify as oral history proper. This is because, according to theorist Lynn Abrams

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(2010), oral history proper is "the process of conducting and recording interviews with people in order to elicit information from them about the past" (p. 2). Abrams (2010) goes on to warn that not every interview-based qualitative research methodology may correctly be called oral history, because "it may not have the distinctive character of specifically engaging with the past" (p. 2). While the interviews I conducted engaged questions of participants' pasts—for example, I asked them about their early experiences writing poetry and using digital technologies—I found that I was more interested in their present work with poetry and technology. As such, my methodology contrasts with that of Selfe and Hawisher. As mentioned above, Selfe and Hawisher were interested in how Americans developed digital literacies during the specific period of time when computing technologies became more accessible to consumers; these researchers used oral history to engage with specific questions about the past. I, however, developed a methodology that used the stories of the past to develop and engage questions of the present.

At the Center for Northern Appalachian Studies, oral history was employed largely for the purposes of preservation, to record the memories of rapidly-aging populations of veterans, aviation pioneers, and community leaders. The raw transcripts from the Center's participant interviews were edited, sparingly, into first-person narrative accounts and published without the application of any kind of analysis. I used my experience writing these kinds of narrative accounts for the Center into writing what I thought would be basic biographical narratives of my study participants. However, writing these kinds of narratives is deceptively simple. I wanted to accurately represent the words and evidence of my participants without bringing myself into their stories. Yet

I found myself relying on the sensibilities of my training as a creative nonfiction writer,

wherein the process of raising, pondering, and resolving questions through writing is

valued (I recalled asking my students to do such things themselves when I asked them

to write technology autobiographies). The biographical narratives that I wrote for each

participant began to take shape around key incidents and themes. These narrative

explorations of my participants' pasts were tremendously valuable to me; my oral

history-style interviews, in this case, became a means for discovering the themes that

would eventually come to define my study. In the next section, I will explain my process

for recruiting participants, detail my interview methods, and give brief biographical

sketches of my participants.

Preparing for Research, Seeking Participants: Methods, Part One

As discussed in the previous chapter, I am an active, working American poet,

and I remain immersed in the American poetry community. I have connections and

contacts in that community, many of which have been initiated and maintained through

email, websites, blogs, and social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter. As such,

when I began to form this study, I decided to take advantage of my digital connectivity. I

began by making a list of individuals and organizations that I knew were connecting

poetry and digital technologies in some interesting way. My criteria for selection were

very loose, as I did not want to limit my initial participant pool; instead, I wanted to get a

sense, however small, of the landscape of American poets working with digital

technologies. I made a list of about thirty individuals and organizations, and these

ranged from blogging poets to online journal editors to e-book poetry publishers to

visual-kinetic digital poets to audio poetry curators.

My research participants are writers engaged in public writing, editing, and publishing, and there is no material in the study that would be particularly harmful to them, so I chose to refer to my participants by their actual names. I developed a consent form that allowed participants to choose specifically whether or not they wanted to restrict their interviews in any way—namely the use of recordings and transcripts. I made the decision to include on the consent form the option of donating the literacy narratives to the Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives (DALN) once the study was finished. All of these parameters were disclosed to the Michigan State University Institutional Review Board (IRB), and I obtained "exempt" status for my study.

The initial solicitations for the project were handled via email or Twitter. Once the participant expressed interest in the project, I forwarded consent forms to him or her, which the participant electronically signed and returned to me. I then scheduled an initial interview with the participant, and conducted this interview via Skype. I recorded the interviews with eCamm Call Recorder software. Each interview took approximately one hour, with the exception of Geoffrey Gatza's interview, which took approximately two hours. All of the initial interviews occurred between March and May of 2012. I also conducted follow-up interviews with two participants in August of 2012.

While I initially made contact with thirty-one individuals, only twelve responded. Of those twelve, seven participants were willing to set aside a portion of their time to be interviewed. In total, then, I interviewed seven participants, but Chapters Three, Four, and Five focus on four participants: Hannah Stephenson, Jessica Poli, Geoffrey Gatza, and Johnathon Williams. Michael Cherry, Susan Slaviero, and Amaranth Borsuk do not

appear in this study because their interviews revealed that they are outliers. For example, when interviewing Cherry, I discovered that his work as a poet was not as involved with digital technologies as I had originally suspected; the same was true for Slaviero. Borsuk's interview revealed that her work with technology was very different from the work of my other participants; she worked with a programmer to design augmented-reality books.

Because of the literacy narrative/case study methods that I have used to analyze and organize the data in this study, each of the data chapters contains a fairly extensive participant biography. In Chapter Three, I write about Hannah Stephenson and Jessica Poli; in Chapter Four, I write about Geoffrey Gatza, and in Chapter Five, I write about Johnathon Williams. So as not to be redundant and repeat information that comes later in this project, what follows are very brief biographical notes on the four poets discussed in this study.

Hannah Stephenson is a 29-year-old poet living with her husband in Columbus, Ohio. Since 2008, Stephenson has maintained the blog The Storialist, a space where she posts her new poetry four times weekly. Stephenson created The Storialist to encourage herself to write poetry; at The Storialist, she often writes poems that respond to images and works of art. Stephenson identifies writing with a computer as an essential part of her process, and she has shared this on The Storialist in the form of video screen captures, wherein she records her writing process from beginning to end. Stephenson, who holds an MA in creative writing from the Ohio State University, is the author of the forthcoming book *In the Kettle, the Shriek*, her debut collection of poetry.

Jessica Poli, a 24-year-old poet living in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, is the creator

and editor of the online poetry journal *Birdfeast*, founded in 2011. Poli maintains *Birdfeast* herself, doing all of the coding and designing of the website as well as the day-to-day journal tasks of soliciting, reading, selecting, editing, and publishing submissions. Like Stephenson, Poli also asserts that writing with a computer is essential to her process, which she describes as "scattered," and "almost more like collaging than writing." Poli is currently a student in Syracuse University's MFA program in creative writing, and her debut collection of poetry is the chapbook *The Egg Mistress*.

Geoffrey Gatza is a 43-year-old poet living in Buffalo, New York. Gatza is the founder of BlazeVOX Books, and its companion journal, *BlazeVOX*, and for the last five years he has dedicated himself to being an editor and publisher. Gatza began his publishing career as a student at Amherst, New York's Daemen College, where he taught himself web design and transformed the college's print literary journal into a sustainable online magazine. Gatza has written a number of books of poetry and prose, the most recent of which is *House of Forgetting*.

Johnathon Williams is 33-year old poet living with his wife and three small children in Fayetteville, Arkansas. Williams earned an MFA in poetry at the University of Arkansas and works as a web developer and designer for educational institutions and businesses. He learned some basic programming as a child, and eventually developed his computer skills working as a web journalist for several newspapers. He is also the co-creator and editor of the poetry journal *Linebreak*, which publishes a poem and an accompanying audio recording of that poem once per week. Williams' debut poetry collection is titled *The Road to Happiness*.

With these poets offering me generous portions of their time, it was vital that I

create interview questions that would be pointed enough to gather the specific kinds of information that I wanted, and yet open-ended enough to encourage my participants talk freely and honestly about their writing. I also knew that I wanted to examine examples of the digital-poetic compositions that my participants had made, and ask my participants about them. With all of these things in mind, I began crafting an interview protocol that would not only attend to my participants' composing history, but would attend to present examples of my participants' writing as well.

Developing Questions, Gathering Data: Methods, Part Two

I wanted to know quite a bit about my participants and their lives as poets who worked with digital technologies. While demographic information (such as age, gender, location, et cetera) could easily be solicited via a survey sent with the study's consent form, other information would have to be teased out with careful and extensive interviewing. As mentioned previously, I developed my interview questions as variations on the interview questions used by Selfe and Hawisher in *Literate Lives in the Information Age*; however, my questions were constructed so as to gather information about the participants' experiences combining work with poetry and digital technologies.

I initially divided my interview protocol into two sections. The first section contained questions aimed at gathering general information about each participant's history as a poet, and as a user of digital technologies. The first section also contained questions aimed at gathering information about when, where, how, and why poetry and digital technologies intersected in the participant's experience. The questions were as follows:

- Tell me a bit about your history as a poet: how you first learned to write poetry, when you first learned, where you first learned, who taught you?

- Tell me a bit about your history with computers/digital technologies: how you first learned to use them, when you first learned, where you first learned, who taught you?

- Can you tell me about when you first began using computers/digital technologies to do work with poetry?

- What is doing poetic work with digital technologies like?

- Can you walk me through a typical instance of doing work with poetry and computers/digital technologies?

The second section of the interview protocol was aimed at discussing a particular "poetic/digital text/artifact" created by the participant. The questions in this section were more pointed, and asked the participant to talk about a specific artifact—a public creation, it should be noted—that I had identified and accessed previous to the interview. I asked Hannah Stephenson to comment specifically on her blog The Storialist; I asked Jessica Poli to comment on the website for *Birdfeast*; I asked Geoffrey Gatza to comment on the BlazeVOX website; and I asked Johnathon Williams to comment on *Linebreak*. The questions in this second section were as follows:

- Tell me about how you created _____ [digital/poetic text/artifact].

- What is important to you about poetry in general?

- What is important to you about computers/digital technologies in general?

- Why do you use computers to work with poetry?

- Tell me about how you see the relationship between computers/digital technologies and poetry.

- Is there anything else you wish to share about yourself at this point? This would be anything you want me as a researcher to know or anything you feel adds to, clarifies, or should be considered as important as the questions above.

- What would you like to do with computers/digital technologies and poetry that you can't or won't do right now?

- How/when/where/why do you see yourself using computers/digital technologies with poetry in the future?

- Is there anything more you wish to share about your relationship with computers/digital technologies and poetry?

I split the interview protocol into two sections because I was anticipating doing two one-hour interview sessions with each participant; however, when I began conducting the actual interviews, they did not take as long as I had anticipated, and my participants were willing to continue with the interview through the second set of questions.

As I mentioned above, several months after the initial interviews, I conducted follow-up interviews with two participants, Hannah Stephenson and Jessica Poli. The reason for these follow-up interviews was that, once I began analyzing and coding the data, I discovered that both Stephenson and Poli discussed the arrangement of their digital composing spaces, and I wanted to explore that particular subject in more depth. Each of the follow-up interviews lasted approximately thirty minutes; as per the initial interviews, I conducted the follow-up interviews via Skype, and transcribed those interviews myself, again sending the transcriptions to the interviewees for their approval.

I gathered a number of other materials for this study: the text of a number of blog posts and articles commenting on the controversy with BlazeVOX; screenshots of *Birdfeast* and of *Linebreak*; screenshots of Jessica Poli's composing spaces; and screenshots from videos of Hannah Stephenson's writing processes. I gathered these materials at around the same time I was conducting my interviews, between March of 2012 and August of 2012.

In preparing my analysis of Hannah Stephenson and Jessica Poli's composing spaces, I gathered detailed narrations of how Stephenson and Poli composed their poems on their computers. However, I knew that I needed to provide visual evidence of those spaces, how they were constructed, and how they changed over time. I wanted to see—and I wanted my readers to see—the digital spaces in which these poets composed. This led me to watch Stephenson's publically available "process videos" in which she screen-recorded her process of composing a poem from beginning to end. I found these process videos so intriguing and illustrative of the writing process that I asked Jessica Poli to make one as well; she politely declined, but did offer to take some screenshots of her computer screen when she was engaged in composing poetry. I wanted to make sure that I was using similar data for the purposes of comparison, so I created still screenshots from one of Stephenson's videos.

In preparing the case study of BlazeVOX, I realized that I needed additional materials to supplement Gatza's narrative account of what happened; I knew that BlazeVOX had been both criticized and praised widely in various media, so I went directly to those sources, quoting blog posts and articles from *The Huffington Post*, *HTML Giant, Bark, We Who Are About To Die*, poet Shanna Compton's personal blog,

and the online version of *The Buffalo Daily News*. I obtained all of these sources by conducting some simple Internet searches.

In preparing my comparative rhetorical analysis of *Birdfeast* and *Linebreak*, I accessed the journal sites through my web browser and took screenshots of a number of different pages, making sure to gather representative samples. As mentioned above, I accessed these pages between May 2012 and August 2012. As such, my analysis of the journals is based upon the samples that I took in that period of time. Accessing the pages now may reveal very different designs and content.

Finding the Stories: Data Analysis

As I began to analyze the transcribed interviews, I returned to my research questions: what does the digital mean? What would make a poet go digital? What composing practices are necessary to go digital? What infrastructures must one navigate in order to go digital? With these questions in mind, I tried to develop codes with which I could sort the data that I had gathered. My first attempt at coding reflected Selfe and Hawisher's work (and also the work of Deborah Brandt) in that I was initially trying to identify literacies and sponsors of literacies. However, this first attempt at coding, wherein I was looking at my data from the perspective of literacy acquisition, failed to yield anything but dead ends. Upon reflection, I believe this failure was due to my own confusion about what I really wanted from the study. I think that I could have told literacy acquisition stories of my participants; I do possess that data, at least in part. However, I believe that, in this study, my data was leading me somewhere else, somewhere closer to the present time. I wanted to know how poets work with

technology *now.*

My second attempt at coding my data was significantly looser. I made a list of "themes" that much more closely resembled specific stories of composing, as opposed to stories of literacy. The most successful codes I developed identified different kinds of composing processes that my participants engaged in, and the kinds of writing that they produced. Even after this second attempt at coding, however, I continued to struggle with identifying significant points of cohesion in my participants' accounts. I was struggling to make meaning from the coded transcripts. I decided to shift my approach. At this point I began, as I mentioned earlier, to compose biographical stories about each of my participants. I wrote seven biographies, one for each of my participants, filling them out with the rich, concrete detail that my participants provided in their interviews. I began with each participant's early life and early experiences with digital technologies and poetry, then transitioned to discussing the participant's current experiences with poetry and technology. I then wove in details and anecdotes about the chosen artifact the participant talked about. I concluded each biography with the participant's reflective commentary.

At this point, three things began to emerge from the biographies. I discovered that my participants had concerns with three specific aspects of poetry writing: composition, publication, and distribution. I also noticed that these aspects of poetry writing emerged most clearly in the accounts of four specific participants: Stephenson, Poli, Gatza, and Williams.

When examining the biographies of Hannah Stephenson and Jessica Poli, I noticed that both poets conceptualized and used their digital writing spaces in similar

ways when composing poetry. This was even more apparent after I conducted follow-up interviews with Stephenson and Poli and asked them specific questions about their composing processes. The similarities I saw and the ways that these two poets spoke about their composing processes led me to structure the chapter as a comparative rhetorical analysis. I wrote thick descriptions of their composing processes (supplemented with screenshots) and laid these descriptions side by side. I then drew conclusions from the comparisons. This became the makeup of the first data chapter, Chapter Three.

Chapter Four, the second data chapter, emerged in a quite different way from Chapter Three. As before, I began by writing a biography of Geoffrey Gatza as a poet and as a user of digital technologies. However, I soon realized that Gatza's biography was intimately connected to another complex story, that of the BlazeVOX publication controversy. I realized that telling the story of this controversy would be key to understanding Gatza's choices as a publisher, as a poet, and as a user of digital technologies. I decided to shift and expand Gatza's biography into an in-depth case study about the BlazeVOX controversy. While this case study takes Gatza's interview as a primary source, I also researched and incorporated the testimony of other writers, editors, and publishers whose public commentary on BlazeVOX's publication decisions was key to understanding how the controversy unfolded. I was left with a narrative that engaged numerous questions about the consequences of resisting traditional publication paradigms, and about the shift from print to digital publication in general.

The third data chapter, Chapter Five, emerged from a significant contrast that I noticed when I was composing the biographies of Johnathon Williams and Jessica Poli.

In her interview, Poli explicitly stated that she designed the online poetry journal *Birdfeast* in homage to a print poetry journal. Johnathon Williams, however, stated the opposite about his journal, *Linebreak*: he had designed it specifically in opposition to print journals and their conventions and limitations. These specific design philosophies struck me as highly rhetorical and emblematic of differing approaches to a common problem: how to distribute poetry in digital spaces. I rhetorically analyzed three aspects of *Birdfeast's* and *Linebreak*'s designs in an effort to understand how the editors responded to this space. I recognized that each design choice made by each editor represented a specific argument about the way that poetry editors could and should distribute poetry in a digital age.

Composition, Publication, Distribution: Conclusions

In this chapter, I have recounted my personal history as an interviewer and an oral historian, and I have introduced the methodological approaches that guided my research history. I have situated my methodological approaches for this study, grounding them in the work of Selfe and Hawisher while attending to critiques of these authors' studies. I have described my methods and data-gathering procedures thoroughly, and introduced my research participants. I have, finally, discussed my data-analysis approaches, detailing how I constructed each chapter in response to themes that emerged from the raw data.

Each of the data chapters that follow attend to one of the themes introduced earlier: Chapter Three attends to composition, Chapter Four attends to publication, and Chapter Five attends to distribution. These three themes emerge from questions about

what it means to be a contemporary American poet in the digital, networked landscapes of the twenty-first century. It is my hope that the methods I have used explore this subject coherently and provocatively; I believe that that the chapters I describe below engage the themes of poetic composition, poetic publication, and poetic distribution in ways that, while not exhaustive by any means, offer compelling insights.

CHAPTER 3: POETS COMPOSING SPACES: POETIC COMPOSITION IN A DIGITAL

AGE

In the previous chapter, I discussed my methods and methodology for this study.

In this chapter, I introduce the poetry writing processes of Hannah Stephenson and

Jessica Poli, whose composing spaces are mediated by multiple digital tools and

applications. I discuss how these two poets build rich, networked composing spaces

that contrast sharply with the Romantic notion of the poet's workspace as solitary,

austere, and reliant on the conventions and restrictions of print-based spaces.

Beyond Quill and Parchment: An Introduction

Writing poetry has long been thought of as a solitary, print-based pursuit. The

stereotypical conception of the poet—alone, impoverished, scribbling on paper in the

unheated garrets of history—is a potent image. This image of the poet—created, at

least in Western culture, as a result of the Romantic tradition in poetry that was made

most prominent through the work of Rousseau, Keats, and others—reveals that the

poet's writing process, and especially the poet's writing space, was and is thought of as

austere, solitary, and singular. The poet's studio was thought to consist simply of a quill

pen and parchment, and perhaps a few hardbound books. While writing processes and

spaces have changed dramatically since the Romantic era, conceptions of how poets

work have changed little: the poet is still thought of as solitary, composing at her desk

with little more than pen and paper. Yet the poet's studio or workshop is rich

environment filled with multiple media arranged carefully and deliberately as a

composed space, and this composition becomes ever more apparent when the space is

mediated by digital technologies. In this chapter, I begin by telling my own story of my evolving poetic writing spaces. I then address the ways that scholars have attended to composing spaces in digital contexts, paying special attention to the work of scholars who focus on the ways writers engage with the artifacts and situations of their composing spaces. I follow this by introducing poets Hannah Stephenson and Jessica Poli, and I describe each poet's digital writing space. I discuss how each poet's configurations of windows and applications constitute a deliberate act of composition—a composition that occurs before and during what is now recognized as composition. I conclude by discussing the implications of my analysis with regard to the spaces writers compose—deliberately, rhetorically.

Composing My Space: My Story

I started writing poetry when I was ten or eleven. Flopped on my bed, surrounded by notebooks, I would slowly put one word in front of the other, then double back and scratch out letters, words, and phrases, only to rewrite them again. When I was satisfied with what had taken me several pages to craft, I would select a different notebook—my "portfolio" notebook—and carefully copy out the poem line by line in my best handwriting. I would then illustrate the poem; for example, a poem about autumn received a little cartoon of myself surrounded by leaves blowing in the wind. I was very careful to keep my portfolio notebook separate from my other, "sketchbook" notebooks, the notebooks I did my drafting work in. My writing environment was a bed strewn with notebooks, scattered with pens and pencils, with a summer breeze blowing through the window, ruffling the thin white curtains.

My writing spaces evolved, though, as I gained access to more media. As soon as I developed an interest in popular music, I was writing with a tape playing on my white and aqua boom box, or staying up far past my bedtime to listen to the "Edge of the X" alternative rock radio program on my clock radio. When I was around thirteen, my parents bought me a word processor, a kind of glorified electric typewriter that allowed me to type and edit my prose and poetry on a tiny LCD screen, and print poems in clean block letters. I found myself writing with pen in a notebook first and then using the LCD screen of my word processor to type out the poem.

When my family purchased a computer for the first time, I found myself brainstorming and freewriting using pen and paper, and then, at a certain point in my drafting process, turning to the computer screen. I needed the visuality of the screen; I needed to see the way the letters and words and lines lined up together. It was similar to my portfolio notebook, where I could see the poem come together as a polished text. When I wrote at the computer, I used music applications and instant messaging, shifting from one space to another, cycling through screens. And this is how I write now: I use pen and paper until I feel an internal click, an urge for the visual, and then I immediately go to my laptop. All the while, music is playing, apps are pinging, chat windows are open, and screens are cycling and circling.

I now realize that this—the way I write now—is nothing new. From the first times I was writing poetry as a pre-adolescent, I was using multiple media. I surrounded myself with multiple composing spaces—my many notebooks, each one representing a specific activity. I also now recall some of the other items that were strewn about my bed and across my floor: a set of encyclopedias and almanacs, art books, novels, and other

books of poetry. I was always running from my writing space to look something up, and to explore, browse, dream. My writing spaces were multiple and multifaceted. The writing environment I found myself in was hardly solitary, singular, and austere; it was networked, multiple, and rich. The introduction of digital technologies and digital composing spaces to my writing process seemed only to make this more visible by allowing me more direct access to the writing environment that I worked in already.

Poets have always composed in rich, networked, and multiple environments. Interviews with, and analysis of composing environments used by, two poets—Hannah Stephenson and Jessica Poli—reveal poetic writing spaces that are rich, networked, and multiple. Not only this, but these poetic writing spaces are shown to be compositions themselves, revealing a kind of composition that exists *before* and *during* what we traditionally consider the writing process to be.

Attending to Spaces: Some Literature

Across disciplines and fields, we recognize that composing has changed shape. However, composing spaces are often discussed in terms of their products; the emphasis is on the writing that is being produced, rather than the form and content of the space in which that writing is being produced. For example, in the field of computers and writing, many scholars have attended to multimodal products, including: Cynthia Selfe's (2007) edited collection of resources for instructors interested in having their students compose multimodal works; Jody Shipka's (2005, 2009, 2011) many works on inquiry-based multimodal composing assignments; and Debra Journet, Tabetha Adkins, Chris Alexander, Patrick Corbett, and Ryan Trauman's (2008) discussion of the affordances of multimodal reflective writing. However, a few scholars have begun to

examine and analyze the composing spaces in which writing is created. Jay David

Bolter, in his landmark 2001 text *Writing Space*, asserts that, "just as new digital media

refashion the material conditions of print and handwriting, so the computer's virtuality

refashions the writing space of the printed book and the manuscript" (p. 18). Bolter

(2001) points to a shift not just how writing happens, but also in how we understand

what writing can be and is becoming: "Our literate culture is simply using the new tools

provided by digital technology to reconfigure the relationship between the material

practices of writing and the ideal of writing that these practices express" (p. 18). James

E. Porter (2002) agrees, pointing out that, "teaching writing with computers matters in

significant ways to the act of composing; that computers are not merely instrumental

tools of writing, but rather influence the nature of composing and our rhetorical

understanding of the composing situation" (p. 384). Porter (2002) points out that

composing in digital contexts does not simply affect products, but the myriad

components of literate activity:

> Writing is not only the words on the page, but it also concerns mechanisms for
>
> production (for example, the writing process, understood cognitively, socially, and
>
> technologically); mechanisms for distribution or delivery (for example, media);
>
> invention, exploration, research, methodology, and inquiry procedures; and
>
> questions of audience, persuasiveness, and impact. (p. 386)

The components of literate activity include such things as composing infrastructures,

something that Dànielle Nicole DeVoss, Ellen Cushman, and Jeffrey Grabill (2005) take

up. Defining infrastructures as the "often invisible structures make possible and limit,

shape and constrain, influence and penetrate all acts of composing" (p. 16), DeVoss,

Cushman, and Grabill discuss the ways that, among other aspects of composing, writing spaces become visible and valuable ways to understand literate activity: "It is no longer possible for us to look at a product of new media without wondering what kinds of material and social realities made it possible. We also have become aware of the need to reach beyond the frameworks that we typically rely upon to understand composing processes and spaces of composing" (p. 36). These material and social realities are "the layers and patterns behind the products of new-media composing—patterns that directly affect contemporary writing, writing pedagogy, and writing classrooms" (DeVoss et. al., p. 37). The infrastructural contexts in which writers compose are key to understanding literate activity.

But what do these "layers and patterns" look like, especially when we think about writing spaces? They could look like the writer who includes in her composing process, and thus her composing space, a particular domestic task. Paul Prior and Jody Shipka (2003) discuss this in their piece "Chronotopic Lamination: Tracing the Contours of Literate Activity." In describing a study participant who integrated doing her family's laundry into her composing process, Prior and Shipka asserted that "the whole sequence of actions—the disengagement from focal action at the site of the text and the reengagement in the domestic chore—become[s] a space for productive reflection on the text, a place where new ideas emerge and older plans are recalled" (p. 181). Prior and Shipka refer to these as ESSPs, environment selecting and structuring practices. According to them, "ESSP's include the goal-oriented searches of already structured environments that are made during inquiry, the structured reading, observing, and making that people engage in, sometimes with serendipitous results" (Prior & Shipka, p.

221). ESSPs are "the ways writers tune their environments and get in tune with them, the ways they work to build durable and fleeting contexts for their work" (Prior & Shipka, p. 228). Further illustration of this phenomenon comes in the work of Shaun Slattery (2007), who calls it "textual coordination" and describes it as the "selection of texts from a larger information environment and staging and manipulating them toward the production of a new text" (p. 318). "Staging," as Slattery (2005) calls it, is "the strategic placement of texts and programs" (p. 356) in a composing environment to better facilitate writers' production of texts. For Slattery (2005), staging might include engaging with a number of texts and programs in the composing environment, perhaps in a recurring pattern that "constellates" a particular repeated literate activity (p. 356). While Slattery focuses mainly on technical writers and their ability to effectively use a wide variety of information technologies, his attention to the literate activity of his participants suggests that their "textual coordination" and "staging" are generative and highly rhetorical moves. So what do we make of them? What exactly do we discover when we look to the spaces in which writers compose? What kinds of literate and rhetorical activity is embedded in the ways writers engage the texts, applications and windows that make up writers' composing spaces? And what can poets, whose composing spaces are stereotyped as austere and barren, contribute to this discussion?

Poets' Composing Spaces: Introducing Hannah Stephenson and Jessica Poli

Hannah Stephenson is a 29-year-old Caucasian female poet living with her husband in Columbus, Ohio. Stephenson works as a university instructor and as a freelance communications consultant. She holds an MA in English and creative writing

from the Ohio State University. Her writing has been featured at *The Huffington Post* and in numerous national poetry journals, and she frequently performs her work at festivals and other venues. Since 2008, Stephenson has maintained the blog The Storialist[3], a space where she posts her new poetry four times weekly. Her first full-length collection of poetry, *In the Kettle, the Shriek*, is forthcoming from Gold Wake Press.

In July of 2008, after finishing her Master's degree and with her career in flux, Stephenson found herself reading a number of daily blogs, one of which was the fashion blog The Sartorialist[4]. The Sartorialist, with its visually striking images of stylish people in urban settings, fascinated Stephenson: "I'm an obsessive people-watcher, and I would just be thinking about who they were, and what they were doing. We had no backstory about them, sometimes we had their name, but they were always so interesting looking, so I couldn't help but start to invent stories for them" (personal communication, May 10, 2012). Using The Sartorialist as a model—down to its Blogger template—Stephenson created The Storialist to encourage herself to write poetry. She initially made daily poem posts to correspond with the images posted to The Sartorialist, but she eventually branched out and started responding to other images and to works of art. While she did not immediately reveal her identity on the blog, she now is publicly associated with it. Stephenson has been consistently posting at The Storialist for four years.

Stephenson identifies writing with a computer as an essential part of her process;

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[3] http://thestorialist.blogspot.com
[4] http://thesartorialist.com

while she wrote poems longhand in the past, she thinks of the screen as a transformative space, where she "could suddenly get this clearer, more distant version, vision, vision and version of what they [the poems] looked like" (personal communication, May 10, 2012). She has shared her writing process on The Storialist in the form of video screen captures, wherein she records her writing process from beginning to end, from locating the images she responds to, to choosing the music she listens to while composing, to sharing the composing action that happens in her Microsoft Word documents. Stephenson's inspiration for these videos were the process videos of visual artists, where "it's interesting to see a person's brain work, and by looking at someone's desktop while the work, it really is like looking over their shoulder or through their eyes" (personal communication, May 10, 2012). Stephenson has found that these videos have given her some insight into her own process and she feels other poets could benefit: "I would love for almost everyone to make one of these, just to sort of get an awareness around how we do what we do, because there's that whole magical element of poetry where a lot of it is unknown and subconscious, so it's nice to try to observe ourselves doing it" (personal communication, May 10, 2012). Stephenson's documentation of her own writing process reveals much about how her writing space is created, as will be discussed later in this chapter.

Jessica Poli is a 25-year-old white female poet living in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. She is a graduate of the University of Pittsburgh, and is currently a student in Syracuse University's MFA in creative writing program. Poli is the creator and editor of the poetry

journal *Birdfeast*[5], founded in 2011. Her poetry chapbook, *The Egg Mistress*, won Gold

Line Press's 2012 contest and was published in 2013.

Poli states that she became fascinated and "obsessed" with computers at an early

age; computers were present in Poli's childhood home due in part to the work of her

graphic designer mother. Poli became aware of the arrival of the Internet when she was

in fifth grade, when she visited a friend her age who was, surprisingly to her, making

her/his own webpage. Shortly after and with her mother's permission, Poli began to

create webpages of her own, and also began working with applications such as Adobe

Photoshop. Poli states that her mother initially taught her how to use the computer, but

Poli "leapt ahead of her because [she] was so obsessed with it" (personal

communication, April 14, 2012). Mostly, however, Poli's literacies developed from her

own determined web searching, and trial-and-error attempts at digital creation.

Poli's own writing processes are another shifting space; she describes her writing

process as "scattered," and "almost more like collaging than writing":

> I have a few different documents open at one time and most of them are just
>
> random sentences or just fragments of lines, just all jumbled together, nothing
>
> makes sense. And then I usually have one fresh page open where I'll sift through
>
> all of the other documents and I'll connect stuff, because stuff will just come to
>
> me, all throughout the day, and I'll just collect all these lines and everything, and
>
> then eventually they'll start to make sense together. (personal communication,
>
> April 14, 2012)

She sees this as "a generational thing," a young writer's penchant for multitasking and

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[5] http://birdfeastmagazine.com

for multimodal composing spaces. Poli admires writers who draft with pencil and paper—"because they seem so much more awesome for some reason" (personal communication, April 14, 2012)—but finds that her method, while "crazy" to think about, works. Poli is confident that she will continue to make digital technologies a large part of her life as a poet even while in her MFA program: "I'm still going to continue to support online journals and definitely encourage everyone up at that school to do the same thing. And other than that, I mean, I always find a way to bring out my inner nerd and get technology involved. I'm not sure exactly what it will be, but I'm sure technology will be involved" (personal communication, April 14, 2012). Poli's composing process reflects how intimately digital technology is involved with building a composing space, as will be evidenced later in this chapter.

A Different Kind of Workshop: Hannah Stephenson's Composing Space

For Hannah Stephenson, inspiration may be found in print contexts—lines and words handwritten in notebooks and on pieces of paper are frequently the seeds for her poetry—but writing "really begins" for her when she gets to her computer. Stephenson characterizes her primary composing space, her MacBook laptop computer running some iteration of the OSX operating system, as a "workshop" with multiple "tools" that she can use: "It feels like a space I'm entering into, and I have all these projects that I can work on simultaneously" (personal communication, May 10, 2012). Stephenson's poetry writing sessions—in which she composes a single poem—typically take between 45 to 60 minutes to complete, and she has made a number of screen-capture

recordings of her writing sessions[6]. She said that she was inspired by the process

videos of visual artists, "time-lapse [videos] of paintings that they make, where it goes

from a blank canvas to a finished painting" (H. Stephenson, personal communication,

May 10, 2012). After making a process video herself, Stephenson admits that to her,

her writing process looks "frantic," but finds it interesting that "the way that I wrote is

very uneven. It's not that I sit down with an idea and out it comes. It's so stop/start"

(personal communication, May 10, 2012). The process videos that Stephenson makes

give her a reflective window on "the sloppiness and messiness" (personal

communication, May 10, 2012) of writing. The process video recording for Stephenson's

poem "A Brain, A Heart, A Home, The Nerve,"[7] represents a typical composing session

for Stephenson.

One feature of Stephenson's composing space is its visuality, where she can

"see it [the poem] being processed on the screen truthfully" (personal communication,

May 10, 2012). What this means is that Stephenson values seeing the poem's textual,

visual product—how it might look delivered as text on the page—over what the poem

might look like in her handwriting. The presentation of the poem in uniform text, against

the white space of the word processor's "page" is a key component of Stephenson's

writing space because it allows her a place to design the poem visually.

Another key part of Stephenson's writing space is network connectivity. She

states that she prefers to be constantly connected to the Internet while writing because

she loves "being able to research things instantly as they come to me. If I want to look

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[6] The recorded hour-long sessions are sped up into 7- to 11-minute videos.

[7] http://vimeo.com/25832220

up a particular tree that is in a park near my house, I might kind of Google…oh, I think it's a cottonwood tree, so, okay, cottonwood trees, where do they grow, and so my research—just quick research, surface—that usually brings up new ideas for me" (H. Stephenson, personal communication, May 10, 2012). She also uses the Internet "to freshen [her] diction" (H. Stephenson, personal communication, May 10, 2012) by navigating to such pages as Thesaurus.com and the rhyming dictionary RhymeZone. These websites and others like them (Wikipedia, for instance) function rhetorically as resources for Stephenson, resources from which she can fact-check and draw inspiration. Another affordance of constant connectivity is the ability to customize the aural components of the composing space. Stephenson creates playlists using the social music service Grooveshark, or listens to the customizable Internet radio application Pandora. Stephenson relates that she has noticed moments of convergence when using so many applications at once:

> I was writing a poem about wolves, there was an image, a painting of a wolf in this room, [. . .] and all the sudden on Pandora a song came on about wolves. [. . .] I don't mean something mystical is going on, necessarily, but it's easier to notice these sorts of synchronicities when you have everything going at once on your laptop. (personal communication, May 10, 2012)

It seems that the richness of Stephenson's writing-scape calls her attention to connections between multiple media.

A third key feature of Stephenson's composing space, and one that is closely related to the networked nature of the space, is the presence of multiple tools and Stephenson's ability to customize those tools to build the contents and shape of her

space. In the composing session for "A Brain, A Heart, A Home, The Nerve," she begins

by opening a web browser and browsing through a list of bookmarked sites under the

heading "Artists To Check Out." In this particular session, Stephenson chooses the work

of artist Tim Gough, and navigates to his official website, searching for an image that

she finds interesting. She navigates back and forth between half a dozen or more

images before choosing "Settlers of Catan." After selecting this image, she opens a new

tab in her web browser and navigates to Grooveshark to compose a playlist, as can be

seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Screenshot of Grooveshark window in Stephenson's process video. Textual

content unimportant; screen shot provided to show user's workspace. For interpretation

of the references to color in this and all other figures, the reader is referred to the

electronic version of this dissertation.

Stephenson next opens a document in her word processing program, and arranges the windows on her computer screen so that the painting in her browser window and the word processing window are side by side, as seen in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Screenshot of artwork and text windows in Stephenson's process video. Textual content unimportant; screen shot provided to show user's workspace.

She then begins typing text, making the typical moves of writing, deleting, cutting, pasting, and moving text around in the word processor window, while the browser window remains stationary. After a period of time, Stephenson opens up another tab in the browser—visually replacing the tab of Gough's image—and searches for the lyrics to a song from the film *The Wizard of Oz*, as can be seen in Figure 3.
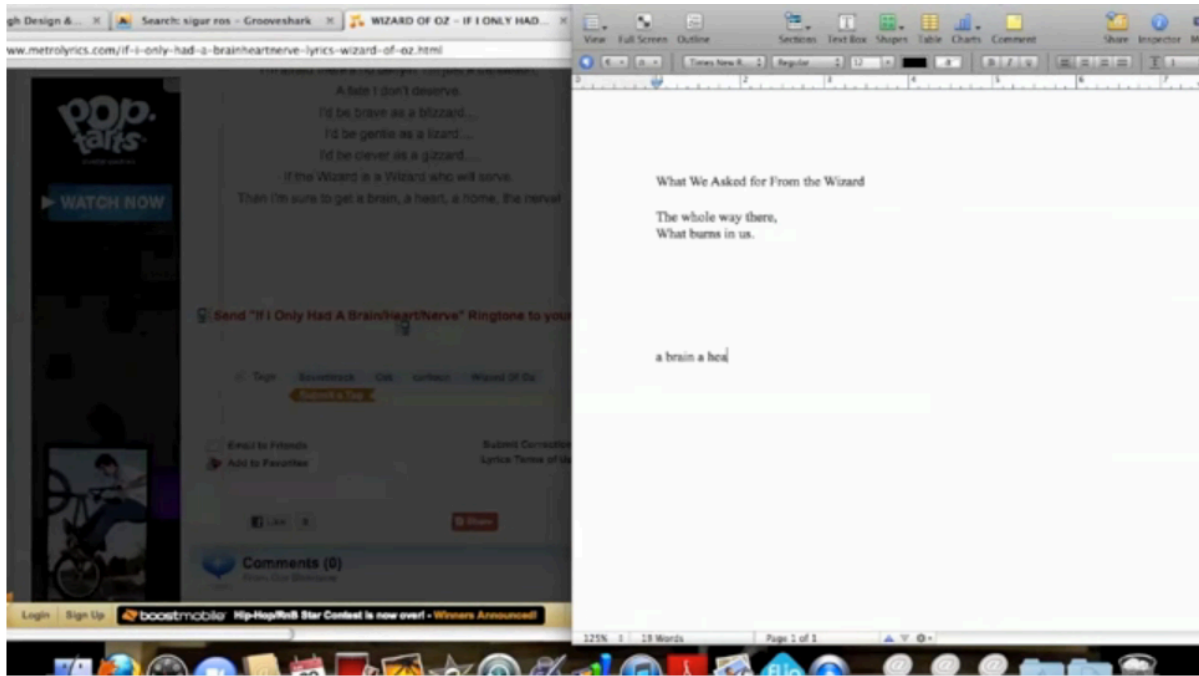
Figure 3: Screenshot of lyrics and text windows in Stephenson's process video. Textual

content unimportant; screen shot provided to show user's workspace.

After retrieving information using this tool, Stephenson then returns to the original

configuration of Gough's image and the word processing window side-by-side, and

continues to add and manipulate text in the word processor window. After still more time

elapses, she opens up a browser tab for the website Thesaurus.com—again, replacing

Gough's image—and searches for synonyms to several words, as can be seen in
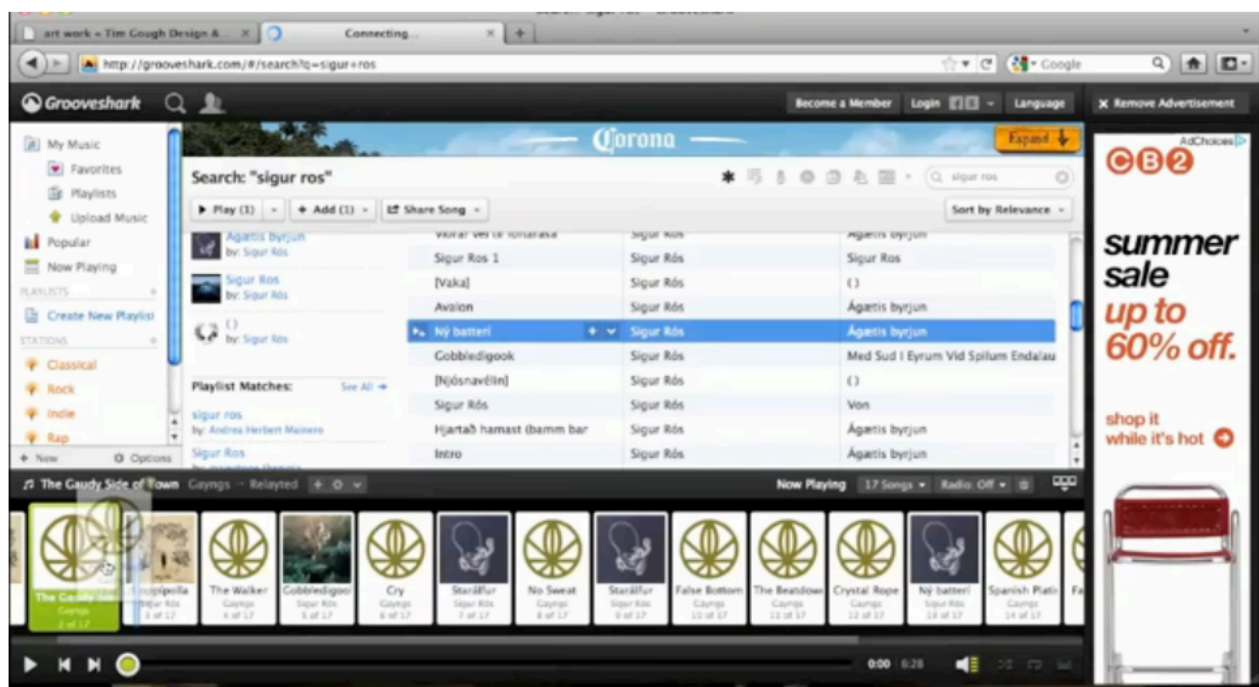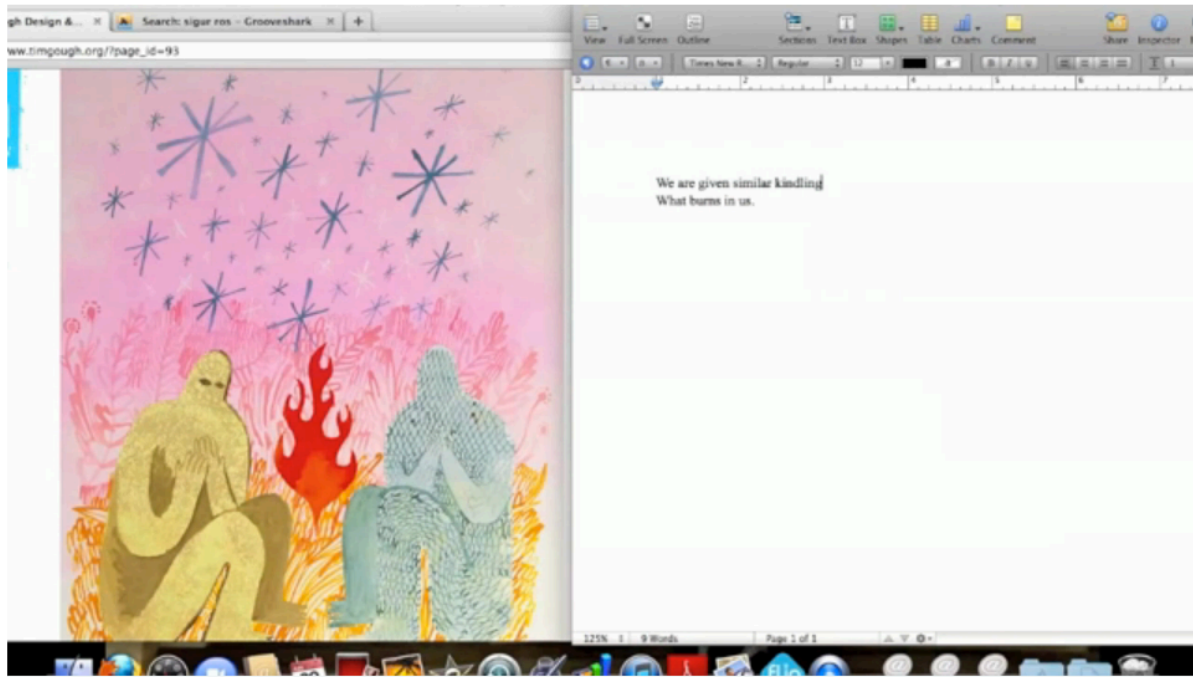
Figure 4.
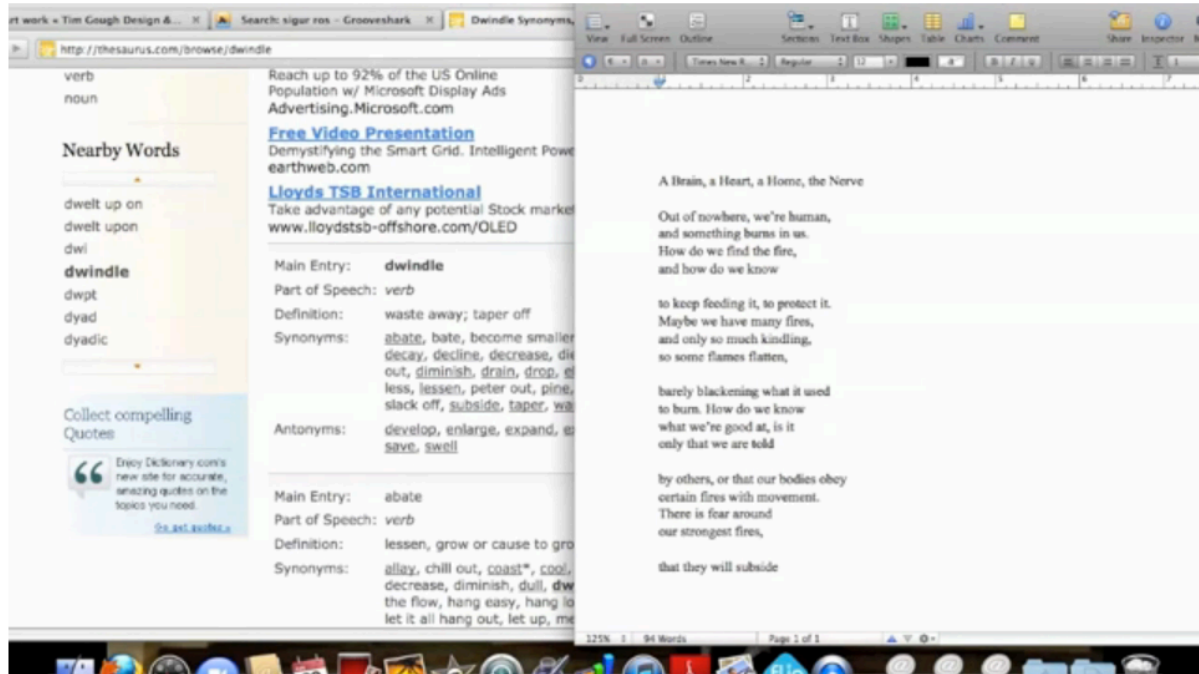
Figure 4: Screenshot of thesaurus and text windows in Stephenson's process video.

Textual content unimportant; screen shot provided to show user's workspace.

Stephenson again returns to the original composing configuration of her word processing window alongside the browser window opened to the artwork by Gough. She continues composing in this way—shaping and reshaping her space according to her needs—until she has finished with a draft of her poem[8].

There are three key points to be highlighted here. The first is that Stephenson thinks of her computer as a very particular kind of space: a workshop. Workshops are rhetorically rich spaces dedicated to the acts of creating, crafting, and repairing. As such, they are deliberately constructed to enable these acts to happen by providing space and by containing raw materials and tools. For Stephenson's writing sessions,

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[8] At the end of the video, Stephenson lists the time that has elapsed, the music that she listened to, and the artwork that she responded to.

her computer provides the space to compose (a word processing window; a selection of music), raw materials (research from the Internet; inspirational artwork), and tools (the multiplicity of functions in the word processing program; the applications that make up her networked environment).

The second point is that Stephenson is constantly composing, even when she is not actively putting words in the word processing window on the screen. The actions that Stephenson engages in outside of that word processing window—arranging a soundtrack, browsing artwork, researching song lyrics, digging through synonyms—are as integral to Stephenson's composing process as the actions that happen within the word processing window. These "outside" actions interact directly with the writing that is happening in the "inside" space of the word processing window and, as such, enable that writing to happen. Without these deliberate, calculated, "outside" actions, Stephenson's composing space—and thus her process—would be significantly reduced in size and scope.

The third point—a point that synthesizes the first and second—is that Stephenson's creation of her writing space constitutes a deliberate act of composing. What this means is that there is another kind of composing that happens *before* and *during* the time that what we recognize as composing happens. Before she began writing "A Brain, A Heart, A Home, The Nerve," Stephenson carefully crafted a very particular kind of space. This crafting took the form of choosing elements and arranging and rearranging them in specific configurations to create a rich, dynamic, and constantly shifting space; this crafting of space continued throughout the writing of the poem.

"More Like Collaging Than Writing": Jessica Poli's Composing Space

Jessica Poli is a collector—of words, of texts, of inspiration. To keep vigilant for this inspiration, she normally carries a few small print notebooks with her, but she often uses an archiving application on her smartphone to record texts she collects: interesting snatches of conversation, phrases, or words that she thinks of, speaks, or hears. Poli then turns to her computer, a MacBook running some iteration of the Apple OSX operating system, and transcribes or transfers the texts she has collected into a number of text files—files which hold "random sentences or just fragments of lines, all jumbled together" (personal communication, April 12, 2012). Poli states that she has "dozens" of these files on her computer.

A key feature of Poli's composing space is its simultaneity. Poli's composing process, which she states is "more like collaging than writing," requires that she work in a number different of windows at the same time. When Poli begins to lie out and peruse her collected texts, her composing process begins in earnest. Poli opens up a number of her text files and combs through them, looking for anything that "strikes her":

> I'll maybe pick a phrase and use that as the first line, or just as inspiration for an entire piece. Or I'll just read through the whole file and see if anything makes sense together to me, and sometimes, you know, narratives come out in that big file. It's a jumble of things, but it's all things that come to me throughout my daily life, so a lot of times they relate to one another. (personal communication, April 12, 2012)

The affordances of using these seemingly sparse text files lies in their length and uniformity; when searching for inspiration, Poli must scan through a continuous "roll" of

all of the writing she has done before, resulting in discoveries and new connections. At a certain point in her process, Poli opens up a "fresh" window—an empty text file—and begins to insert, arrange, and revise sentences from her many text files into to a poem draft. Figure 5 shows a typical composing space for Poli:
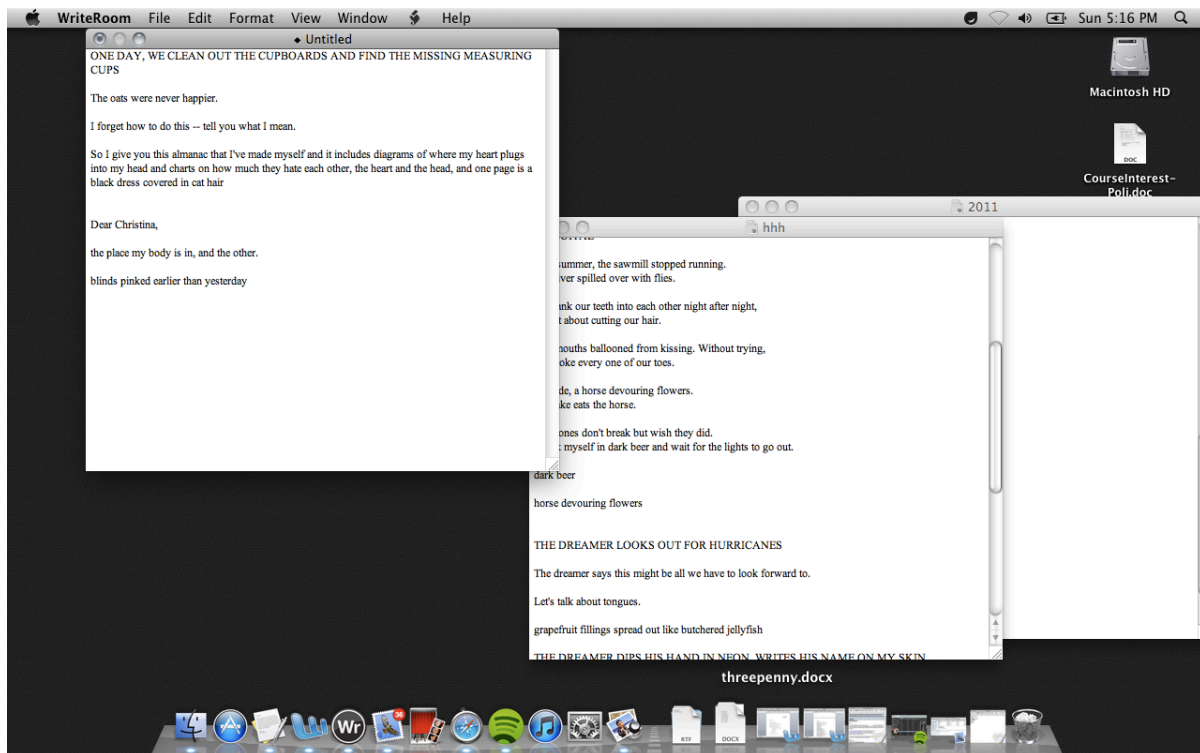
Figure 5: Screenshot of Poli's workspace. Textual content unimportant; screen shot provided to show user's workspace.

In this particular iteration, Poli is working with three active text files, while two additional text files are open and waiting in her taskbar. Poli often works in a number of files simultaneously, but sometimes uses the application WriteRoom. WriteRoom is a "distraction-free writing environment" that works by transforming the active window of a text file into a full-screen space on command. The user can customize the full-screen environment with any number of fonts or colors by manual control or by downloading

"themes" from the software company's website. Poli uses WriteRoom to isolate one particular composing window to the exclusion of all others, as seen in Figure 6.

DEAR MORGAN

Here are my basil hands. I've been sitting in this place you'll never see, counting all my windows. I've been growing my hair and it hurts. The clouds here aren't the right clouds. The rooftops remind me that I never felt your skin between my teeth. The beer tastes like blood. Something is dripping from the telephone lines and I want it to be you, materializing drip by drip and when you're whole you come to me. I'm simmering rosemary and lemon and vanilla and a slice of your lips. The only thing I know is that the foam pouring out of the dishwasher is my fault, and so is the lack of your body in this room.

At night, I dream rows of yellow beach houses.

Turn me like a wind-up toy and let me clatter across the floor. Then mark where I land with salt. Repeat until the salt hills form

the place where I land will be salt. mark it with blood. cupped my lungs like breasts. like melons. ripped the shingles from their roof. I cannot gape at losing, only at loss.

I smoke when the mountain troubles me.
You can tell my preacher;

tell him about
my lungs cupped like breasts.
Tell him about ripping the shingles from
their roof. I cannot gape at the act of losing,
only loss.

The place where I land will be salt.
Mark it with blood.
Tell my lover where I fell out of my body.
Tell her how the frost ate up all of my air.

Figure 6: Screenshot of Poli's workspace with WriteRoom software. Textual content unimportant; screen shot provided to show user's workspace.

Poli uses WriteRoom to collapse her work environment, but, as will be discussed next, Poli does not stay in the WriteRoom environment for the entire work session.

A second key feature of Poli's composing space is its multiplicity. In addition to the active composing windows, she also has a number of other windows and applications open. As in Figure 5, the networked components of her composing environment include Spotify, a social music service, and Mail, Apple's email client. She also is shown to have the web browser Safari open, although the windows are not visible in in this screenshot. Poli states that "when [her] mind feels like it's wandering a little bit" (personal

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communication, April 14, 2012) she will leave the composing windows and engage in other activities online: researching, reading poems, chatting, playing solitaire, emailing, or changing and customizing her music. She eventually returns to the composing windows, and then the process of cycling through windows and applications begins again. This cycling, this access to networked information, is a very important part of Poli's composing process:

> I like to be doing a lot of things at once. I like to be constantly finding inspiration while I'm writing. I think that's why I like to multitask while I'm doing it, because a lot of times I'll be writing a poem and I'll take a break from it and start reading an article somewhere on the Internet and it will somehow vaguely relate in my head to the poem I'm writing, and it'll inspire me to go in a completely different direction, which I never would have, and if I hadn't gone in that direction, I might not have finished that poem. (personal communication, April 12, 2012)

Poli's composing environment is a multiply mediated space, and Poli is actively engaged in its composition through the acts of opening and closing, minimizing and maximizing, shifting and cycling. Her composing space never remains the same for very long.

Two key points emerge from this observation of Poli's composing process. The first is that, much like Stephenson, Poli is always engaged in the act of composing while in this space. In one of my interviews with Poli, she told me: "I'm never really constantly writing. I'm always writing a few lines and then leaving it and doing something completely different" (personal communication, April 12, 2012). Yet, ironically, Poli *is* constantly writing when she enters into this networked environment. As mentioned

before, Poll is a collector of inspiration and she thinks of her writing process as collage. Therefore, she must create a writing space that works for this particular process. Her "random Internetting" as she calls it is hugely important to her composition process and enables the production of any final text that she creates. Composition includes all of these networked activities distributed across so many different applications and windows, contained in one rich environment, even if the act of "putting text on a screen" isn't prominent or even distinctly visible in the composing space. The networked space of the computer allows for faster, easier access to resources that perhaps have traditionally composed the writer's studio before the advent of the digital—tools, materials, and room to assemble her product.

The second key point is that, again, like Stephenson, Poli is engaged in an act of composing when she shapes her writing environment. This act of composing takes the shape of opening and closing applications, arranging windows, and shifting attention through all of these applications and windows to create a simultaneous and multiplicitous space. This is a space she constantly composes, and a space *in which* she is constantly composing.

Poets Composing Spaces: Implications and Conclusions

Although perhaps we have thought of them as simple spaces adorned with little more than scrolls of parchment and a scattering of quill pens, poets' composing environments are much more rich and complex than this. The two poets I have introduced showcase writing spaces that are multiplicitous and simultaneous, and, most importantly, deliberately composed. Hannah Stephenson's process videos reveal a

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multimodal, networked space that she is constantly composing: inventing, arranging, and revising the presence and configuration of these windows and applications. Screenshots of Jessica Poli's writing space show a highly distributed environment that she composes simultaneously along with her own poetry. Both of these poets actively engage with their spaces in ways that suggest they are doing much more than simply putting words on the screen—they are creating and customizing the environments in which they write.

Accepting that a kind of composition occurs before and during the activity that we normally think of as "writing" has a number of implications. The first is that we can recognize the writing space—in this case, the computer screen with its applications and windows—as a composed product, created with a distinct and unique rhetorical purpose in mind. The second is that we can recognize writers as sophisticated composers of this environment; we can begin to recognize the deliberate rhetorical choices made by composers as they select and arrange the elements that will make up their spaces. Both Stephenson and Poli build their spaces with particular compositional goals in mind; Stephenson shapes her space to correspond to her "workshop" metaphor for her composing environment, and Poli arranges her space to facilitate her process of collecting and collaging.

The third implication of this analysis is that, through an examination of poets' composing spaces and their active participation in building those spaces, we may come to an expanded understanding of the concept of "workshop." According to Wendy Bishop and David Starkey (2006), the workshop has a fairly specific meaning in the context of creative writing in America (p. 197). It refers to the practice of writers sharing

their creative work with fellow writers, while the other writers read and comment on the work and discuss it. Generally the writer will remain silent while this is happening, as per the so-called "Iowa method" that developed at the Iowa Writer's Workshop and was adapted for classroom use (Bishop & Starkey, pp. 197-198). Bishop and Starkey point out one important subtext of the workshop: it implies that writing is, in fact, a craft—a process of making, of building (p. 198). But however ubiquitous the writing workshop is, there is little attention paid to that other meaning of workshop, the *space* where the craft of writing happens. What would happen if we attended to this meaning of workshop? What would happen if we paid as much attention to the spaces of writing as we did to the writing itself? If we were to workshop (in the creative writing sense) our writing spaces—our workshops—what would we discover about the connections between our creative products, our processes, and the way we build our spaces?

If, as DeVoss, Cushman, and Grabill suggest, we are to fully understand a text, we must attend to the contexts, the infrastructures, the *spaces* in which that text is composed. We should begin to document, make visible, and question the spaces in which writers compose in order to understand the literate and rhetorical activity that happens in these spaces. In this chapter I have discussed how two poets' choices in arranging their composing spaces. In the chapter that follows, I will focus on another kind of choice. I will introduce the poet Geoffrey Gatza and his press, BlazeVOX, and I will discuss Gatza's deliberate choice to resist traditional publishing models, resulting in a very public chain of events that highlighted the ambiguous nature of poetry publication in the digital age.

CHAPTER 4: THE CASE OF BLAZEVOX: POETIC PUBLICATION IN A DIGITAL

AGE

In Search of Legitimacy: Poetry Publishing in a Digital Age

The shift from print to digital publication models has had enormous impact on all genres of writing. Poetry publication is no exception. Digital poetry publication surfaces questions of legitimacy, authorship, and textuality. In this chapter, I begin by telling my own story of my struggle with legitimacy with regards to poetry publication. I then problematize digital publication by introducing the vanity press as a complex artifact defined by self-publishing practices that are shunned by traditional print publication models, but embraced by digital publishing models. I follow this by introducing publisher Geoffrey Gatza and his press BlazeVOX Books, and discuss the controversy that arose from two distinct choices made by Gatza: the choice to publish poetry using a cooperative model, and the choice to publish poetry electronically. I trace the fallout from these decisions in the blogosphere and beyond, including a controversial 2011 ruling by the National Endowment for the Arts. I conclude by discussing the implications of this situation--for poets, for computers and writing scholars, and for digital humanists.

Legitimacy Lost?: My Story

In mid-2008, I was in the throes of submitting my poetry chapbook manuscript, which I had developed out of my MFA thesis (completed in 2007). I sent the manuscript to contest after contest, press after press—and received rejection after rejection. As I was about to give up hope, I noticed a call for submissions from a relatively new press, Tilt, out of North Carolina. Their mission statement said that they were interested in

work from poets who had not yet published a chapbook or a full-length book, which described my status. I submitted, and within a few weeks received the good news that my chapbook manuscript was chosen for publication. *In the Kingdom of My Familiar* was released around November of 2008. I had worked with the editor of the press to choose cover art, fonts, and other design elements for the paper chapbook, and I received ten copies of the finished product as payment. I quickly distributed these copies to friends, family, and colleagues, and ordered more, which Tilt promptly printed.

Unfortunately, not long after the publication of my chapbook, Tilt Press began to dissolve. When I asked Tilt for help with promotion—a postcard or a flyer to advertise my chapbook at an upcoming writer's conference I was attending—I was told that they did not have the means or the interest, and that I should put such a thing together myself. A few months later, the editor of the press was no longer responding to emails, and her Facebook statuses indicated that she had become seriously ill. The press's website was scarcely updated, and by 2011 it seemed that the press had ceased publication altogether, leaving several authors' accepted manuscripts unpublished and unreleased. Neither I nor anyone else was able to obtain copies of my chapbook. My work was, essentially, dead—out of print and out of circulation—within three years of its initial publication.

I found myself in a difficult situation as a poet. I had published a chapbook—no easy task, considering how many thousands of chapbook manuscripts are rejected each year by various presses and contests—but said chapbook was now unavailable to anyone who might want to read it, including all-important populations of reviewers, academic hiring committees, and tenure committees. I had not signed a copyright

agreement or assignment of rights with Tilt, but as far as I could understand, the poems in my chapbook were no longer eligible for additional publication, whether by themselves or as part of a manuscript. I puzzled over my situation. Did I really "have a chapbook" anymore? Had I lost the poetic legitimacy that I had once gained by having such a publication? I needed to get other writers to weigh in, so I took to my blog with these questions, asking *what is the life that we intend for our work, and what happens when that life is made impossible?* I soon got a response from a friend, the essayist Karen Babine. She suggested that I find a way to make a digital version of the chapbook that I could offer on my website for anyone interested—that way, the poems would be available somehow, somewhere.

This idea appealed to me, but it brought with it another set of difficult questions. What would the status of my work be if I offered it electronically? Would it be considered self-published in that form, even if it had already been published in print form? Would it be considered published at all? Further, what would my status as a poet be if I offered my work electronically? Would such an act make me seem less than legitimate, perhaps not a "real poet" after all?

Questions like these are growing more and more common as poets are confronted by twenty-first century shifts in production and publication of writing. These questions aren't faced by poets alone, of course, but have been wrestled with in literary studies and digital humanities work more broadly. In what follows, I will trace two specific ways in which scholars have addressed issues of authorial legitimacy and changes in textuality. Then, I will turn back to poetry and introduce Geoffrey Gatza, his press BlazeVOX, and the controversy that followed Gatza's choice to resist traditional,

print-centric publication models.

Uncovering Legitimacy: Some Literature

Authorial legitimacy, or legitimacy in publishing in general, is complicated and challenged by the variety of alternative publishing models that exist beyond print-based commercial and scholarly publishing. In scholarly, print-based publishing models, such as those that exemplify scholarship in rhetoric and composition studies, authorial legitimacy as well as intellectual value is derived from the peer review process (Peterson, 2002). In online publishing models, however, it is suspected that because "the Internet frees publishing from the traditional gate-keeping systems that the quality of online work will not match that of print" (Peterson). This popular opinion does not necessarily hold true to the facts; while it may be the case that "anyone can publish anything on the Internet" (Peterson), most online scholarly journals have rigorous peer review systems in place to continue the intellectual gate-keeping and thus provide legitimacy to authors (e.g. *Kairos: A Journal of Rhetoric, Technology, and Pedagogy*; *Computers and Composition Online*; *College Composition and Communication Online*). However, when scholarly publication models are complicated by practices such as self-publishing, authorial legitimacy is called into question. Krause (2007) points out that scholarly self-publishing allows authors to "[skip] much of the traditional, so-called 'gate-keeping' apparatus to reach readers quickly and directly." And yet, Krause continues, "given the high value that most institutions put on scholarship that appears in refereed journals or in books produced by well-respected presses," self-publication can be looked upon as less than legitimate.

A similar dilemma exists in commercial publishing. The editorial structures in

place in commercial publishing function in more or less the same way that peer review does in scholarly publishing, but the commercial model is problematized even more by the attendance of the subsidy or vanity press, a model that is less prominent but still present in the conversation of scholarly publishing. The subsidy or vanity press can be defined as a press that publishes an author's work for a fee, regardless of the work's quality, and generally does not engage in any kind of promotional work for the author, resulting in such works not being "reviewed in reputable publications or acquired by reputable libraries" (Kameny, 1998). Subsidy or vanity publication is usually considered a type of self-publishing since the author covers most if not all publication costs, and is generally thought of as less than reputable (Dilevko & Dali, 2006). The vanity press has persisted in the United States since the early twentieth century (Dilevko & Dali), but in the 1990s, print-on-demand (or POD) models—made possible by the emergence of digital publication—arrived. Print-on-demand models, often billing themselves as "author services" (Dilevko & Dali), provided publication, offered editorial services, assigned ISBN numbers, and made author's books available to online retailers—all for a fee (Dilevko & Dali). Print-on-demand publishers offering their books directly alongside "legitimate," traditionally-published commercial books through online retailers such as Amazon.com have begun to complicate self-publishing and thus authorial legitimacy.

Self-publication has become ever more complicated and controversial simply because it has gone digital. As Bolter (2001) reminds us, we are living in the late age of print, characterized by "a transformation of our social and cultural attitudes toward, and uses of, this familiar technology." One of these attitudes is a sense that, in networked spaces, text itself has become impermanent and changeable, as opposed to print's

stasis and stability (Lanham, 1993, Bolter, 2001). Because ideas of authorship are linked to text, this results in changes to the conceptualization of authorship as well (Landow, 2006). Recalling Foucault, Landow asserts that "lack of textual autonomy, like lack of textual centeredness, immediately reverberates through conceptions of authorship." Michael Heim (1987), perhaps echoing Walter Benjamin's conception of aura, points to a specific effect of digital textuality, one that significantly changes authorship:

> As the model of the integrated private self of the author fades, the rights of the author as a persistent self-identity also become more evanescent, more difficult to define. If the work of the author no longer carries with it definite physical properties as a unique original, as a book in definite form, then the author's rights grow more tenuous, more indistinct. The anonymity of continuous digital textuality reduces the felt sense of a definite physical original. (p. 221)

If, as Heim says, the "unique original" text is eroded by digital publication, what happens when the authority and legitimacy that define that "definite physical original" are further complicated by shifting practices of publication? If an electronic text is self-published or published through a subsidy model, who lends legitimacy and authority to that text, and where and how? What is legitimacy in an age of digital publication? What do existing publication models have to say to us about authorship? And what do new, or, in BlazeVOX's case, underrepresented publishing models have to tell us about legitimacy and authorship in poetry publishing?

The Beginnings of BlazeVOX: Introducing Geoffrey Gatza

Geoffrey Gatza is a 43-year-old white male poet living in Buffalo, New York, a

place he describes as "having the best socio-economic conditions in America to be a poet and eat on a regular basis" (personal communication, April 10, 2012). Gatza is a former Marine, Gulf War veteran, and a trained chef, and attended Amherst, New York's Daemen College for a period of time. After being downsized from his job as a chef, however, he has dedicated himself to his press, BlazeVOX Books, for the last five years.

Gatza states that he started taking himself seriously as a poet when he was 28, adding a literature minor to his accounting major at Daemen College. Gatza claims that he was "completely computer-illiterate" before coming to Daemen; upon gaining experience with some popular computer software programs, however, Gatza immediately began using them to work with poetry: "I found by using all these business documentation things, I used Excel to write long crazy poems at the time, I used PowerPoint as almost like what Flash was then. And taking these really interesting things that are normally used as the most boring of tools and able to use them" (personal communication, April 10, 2012). As a non-traditional student at Daemen, Gatza describes himself as "excited" and engaged with course topics, and his interests were greatly supported by his professors and by the poetry community in Buffalo, New York: "You know, this is everything you hope for. You write something, and then you would read, and it was a great give-and-take environment that I was really lacking in my life before, so I think that's why I fell headfirst into it, wanting to be an editor and a publisher" (personal communication, April 10, 2012). One of Gatza's formative experiences with computers and poetry occurred when he was put in charge of the campus literary magazine. With a budget of only $300, Gatza knew that a print journal

was out of the question. However, Gatza had access to university server space, and decided to use his limited budget to buy a copy of Macromedia Dreamweaver (now known as Adobe Dreamweaver), a popular WYSIWYG website-building software application. Gatza states that this decision, while also allowing him to learn HTML, brought the campus greater access to poetry: "All the people on campus were able to read the poems online, and we were able to save a whole bunch of money from just printing something that would be like a one-time thing that might be thrown away" (personal communication, April 10, 2012). The success of this online literary journal inspired Gatza to expand his writing and publishing ambitions; soon he was connecting with the thriving electronic poetry community at the University of Buffalo. While he was fascinated by the possibilities of electronic poetry, Gatza found that his particular digital skillset was suited more for publishing and editing than for composing electronic poetry:

> I realized that you had to be a really good Flash designer, or a really good poet, and then for me, my poetry—I could either write a really good poem and spend time on the poem, or spend a lot of time working on a Flash piece, and it was difficult to merge the two for me as an artist. And so I was doing a lot more digital stuff, and I found myself really good at being able to develop webpages, and that's how I developed BlazeVOX, just to give a platform for all these people who were on the computer using so many different forms of media. (personal communication, April 10, 2012)

As Geoffrey describes it, his identity as a poet is inextricably connected to his identity as a publisher and editor. He found that advocacy for the work of other writers sustained him just as much as his own writing; BlazeVOX became an outlet for that advocacy.

A Legitimate Press: Introducing BlazeVOX Books

Gatza founded BlazeVOX in 2000, initially as a literary journal, to expand his editorial work beyond his college journal. He soon found that the constraints of an HTML-formatted page often clashed with the visual styles of the poetry he was publishing and could not adequately represent the poet's vision for their work. Gatza chose Adobe PDF as an alternative format, and praises the PDF for its affordances:

> I found this is an exact photograph of what you printed, what the poet wanted to have, so in one sense it became a much better tool for the poet to put it in the exact font that they want their poem to be at, it opens up as any other hyperlink does online, and so you put the link right there, it opens up on your screen, and you can treat it as electronic text. You can print it, you can email it to somebody else, you can save it to your desktop for later use (personal communication, April 10, 2012).

The PDFs led to the creation of digital chapbooks, which led to the creation of full-length print-on-demand books and e-books. Gatza easily mastered the digital literacy requirements of these publication formats and found that a digital press was within his reach:

> I didn't have to leave my house, I didn't have to open up a shop somewhere, I didn't have to rent anywhere. It was on my computer that I was able to take these same files that I'd be creating, you know, just making PDF documents, and then taking the Photoshop things that I had learned from making e-poetry with [. . .] So I was able to take these files that were, that I had already been used to and

accustomed to working with and transfer them right on over, just upload those

little things, and then boom, we had a book. (personal communication, April 10,

2012)

Print-on-demand was clearly advantageous to a small press, because BlazeVOX was

"able to make these cool, new, interesting books, and have a one-click situation, click

the book, you could order it, authors could order their own copies, and then you could

also have a real live sales thing" (G. Gatza, personal communication, April 10, 2012).

BlazeVOX started with CafePress, then moved on to CreateSpace and finally

BookSurge, a print-on-demand imprint that allowed Gatza to sell BlazeVOX titles

through online retailer Amazon. Selling books through Amazon gave BlazeVOX and its

writers a boost in exposure. BlazeVOX would eventually go on to sell Kindle e-books

through Amazon as well.

Print-on-demand, recalls Gatza, was a fledgling format in the mid-2000s. Gatza

states that prior to 2004, "it was better to go to a Kinko's, just slap some staples in it and

we'll call it a book" (personal communication, April 10, 2012). Print-on-demand formats

subsequently became visually richer and more "professional" looking, closely

resembling their traditionally-printed counterparts. However, quality control wasn't the

only issue facing the print-on-demand format in the context of poetry publishing.

According to Gatza, "print-on-demand was the awfulest thing you could have done.

People didn't take it seriously, people didn't buy it, because what it originally started off

as, it's that big fear of that thing that doesn't happen anymore, the vanity press"

(personal communication, April 10, 2012). As mentioned above, the vanity press is

feared and disdained by "serious" and "professional" writers because of its very

nature—the format dictates that one trades money for guaranteed publication. Gatza's statement—that the vanity press "doesn't happen anymore"—is not entirely accurate. However, as discussed above, the vanity press, as it was defined in the past, is becoming much more difficult to find. What the vanity press has been replaced by are print-on-demand publishing services that serve a variety of authorial communities, including pay-to-publish authors and editor-selected authors (whose publishers use print-on-demand services to offset printing costs). These two groups of authors, however, are not so clearly delineated as they were before the print-on-demand model emerged. Gatza's choices for BlazeVOX deeply complicated the relationship between the two and allowed for the emergence of a cooperative, digital publication model that invited controversy into what it means to be a legitimate author of poetry.

Legitimacy Questioned: The Beginnings of Controversy

In the fall of 2011, BlazeVOX found itself at the center of a profound controversy over its publishing practices. BlazeVOX, which is only now in the process of acquiring nonprofit status, had been operating more or less on a cooperative model. After manuscripts had been chosen for publication by BlazeVOX, the press accepted donations—of around $250 per author—from a few of its authors to defray rising printing costs. According to Gatza, "it seemed like a very natural, new way to just raise donations as opposed to having a Kickstarter fund [an online fund-raising service] which wasn't available at the time, and so, and it worked out very well for us" (personal communication, April 10, 2012). This model allowed BlazeVOX to publish "broadly and prolifically," as BlazeVOX's official statement on the controversy affirms. However, this cooperative model is relatively uncommon in the independent publishing world, and

came under fire.

According to an April 2012 interview Gatza gave to Anis Shivani in *The Huffington Post*, a poster on *HTML Giant*[9] attacked Gatza and BlazeVOX, accusing them of preying on writers by following a pay-to-publish model. The charges originated in a blog post published at *Bark*[10]. In his post at *Bark*, poet Brett Ortler discussed his dealings with BlazeVOX, detailing an acceptance letter for his manuscript which he received from the press and which struck him as disappointing and fraudulent. Ortler posted the acceptance letter in full on the blog, highlighting BlazeVOX's request for monies to support the publication of Ortler's manuscript. The acceptance letter stated:

> In the spirit of cooperation, we are asking you to help fund the production of your book. We have done this for the past two years and it seems to be working out very positively. Over $2000 goes into the production of a book with BlazeVOX and we are hoping you will donate $250 to the press to help meet the costs of our budgeted year (Ortler, 2011).

The acceptance letter went on to say that BlazeVOX had lost a major donor and with the circumstances of the economic downturn in the United States, BlazeVOX was hoping to recoup some costs through author donations. BlazeVOX's letter indicated that only certain authors were being asked to donate to the press to fund the publication of their books. One thing that Ortler did *not* highlight in his breakdown of the acceptance letter was this sentence: "I will be happy to publish this as an e-book / Kindle book

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[9] Founded in 2008, *HTML Giant* (http://htmlgiant.com) comments on trends, reports on new releases, and publishes new work, in popular alternative literature.

[10] *Bark: A Blog of Literature, Culture, and Art* (http://thebarking.com) is attached to *Willow Springs*, a longstanding literary journal associated with the creative writing program at Eastern Washington University.

should you wish to skip the donation :-)".

In his commentary on the acceptance letter, Ortler (2011) stated:

It seemed that not all authors were being asked to contribute. That seemed

unfair, as it meant there were two classes of books he'd accepted; books he was

willing to publish for free—let's call them Freebies—and those he was willing to

publish if the authors contributed—let's call them Me-bies. And if that were the

case, I wanted to know how many Freebies and Me-bies existed, and I wanted to

know if publication was absolutely contingent on a donation.

Ortler wrote back to Gatza asking for specifics about BlazeVOX's publication; Gatza did

not speak directly to Ortler's queries, but justified his cooperative model by noting that

the print-on-demand service he employed allowed authors to pay a greatly reduced

price for copies of their own books. Ortler was unsatisfied with Gatza's response, stating

that he "couldn't shake the impression that the letters bore a superficial resemblance to

a 419 scam (the email confidence scams that are perpetually flying around). All that was

missing was a far-flung princess ready to wire me millions of Euros." Ortler claimed that

Gatza's/BlazeVOX's math didn't add up, but admitted that "there is nothing intrinsically

wrong with a business model based upon a cooperative, or even BlazeVOX's specific

($250 bucks for a book) policy." However, Ortler stated that he was not interested in

working with a press that operated under such a business model. BlazeVOX ultimately

decided not to publish Ortler's manuscript in print. There was no mention of e-

publication or Kindle books for Ortler's manuscript, either in the correspondence

between BlazeVOX and Ortler or in Ortler's blog commentary after the fact. And yet,

BlazeVOX's correspondence stated that an e-book would be possible even if Orlter did

not donate.

Ortler criticized BlazeVOX for not being transparent in its policies, and Ortler (2011) deduced that Gatza was withholding important information from authors "and he's doing it for one hell of a spurious reason: to get money from them." Ortler (2011) concluded by saying that he'd "like to make a public call for Mr. Gatza to amend his submission guidelines and website to include information about this policy, the amounts he'll expect of other authors, and the like."

There are two key points to be made here. One is that for Ortler, and perhaps for other authors like him, publication does not equal e-publication. There is no mention at all of the possibility of a Kindle e-book for Ortler's manuscript, even though correspondence from BlazeVOX clearly stated that such a publication was indeed possible without donation from the press. In his interview on *Huffington Post*, Gatza affirms that e-publication would be available to any selected writer without a donation:

> I would like to make it known that in our offer to publish books with a co-operative
> donation, if the author did not want to participate in this we also made an offer to
> publish their work as an e-book in Kindle and EPUB and PDF format and have it
> available on Amazon.com and iBooks. And if that was still not acceptable, we
> could wait until our financial outlook was stable and we would then publish their
> book without a donation. (Shivani, 2012)

It is clear here, and from BlazeVOX's initial correspondence, that donation was not required for e-publication, and that Ortler's book would be published in this form regardless had he chosen not to donate to the press. However, Ortler does not take up this issue. The absence of discussion here is telling; it is as if digital publication were out

of the question for Ortler. Compared to the phenomenon of e-book publication and

consumption, no doubt spurred by the availability of relatively inexpensive e-readers

such as the Kindle and the Nook, poetry e-books have been slow to take off. As Alizah

Salario (2010) writes on the Poetry Foundation's[11] blog, "electronically published

poems nearly hardly ever correlate with their print counterparts, and there's resounding

agreement among poets and publishers that poetry for e-readers leaves much to be

desired." Poetry poses a significant problem for e-reader formats like those used by the

Kindle and Nook, mainly because poetry's line breaks, white space, and other visual

elements are not well represented by the code that defines and presents text in ePub

formats (Salario). One could argue that this was perhaps the reason that Ortler and

other poets shunned e-publication, but as discussed above, Gatza circumvented the

document design problem by presenting all of his electronic poetry books as PDFs. If

BlazeVOX was equipped to preserve the visuality and original document designs of its

poets when bringing their work to an electronic format, what was to keep Ortler from

accepting e-publication?

The second point is that although Ortler states he does not see anything

inherently wrong in a cooperative model for print poetry publication, he outright rejects it

as being "not for him." Yet the nature of Ortler's accusations against BlazeVOX reveal

that Ortler conflated cooperative publishing with the pay-to-publish model employed by

vanity presses. Other authors felt the same way, it seemed: Evan Lavender-Smith, a

BlazeVOX author, wrote as a comment on Ortler's post that he no longer wanted his

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[11] The Poetry Foundation (http://poetryfoundation.org), publisher of the highly influential
journal *Poetry*, is an independent organization "committed to a vigorous presence for
poetry in our culture" (Poetry Foundation, 2012).

book of poems, *From Old Notebooks*, associated with BlazeVOX. Lavender-Smith also claimed that he wrote to Gatza asking for *From Old Notebooks* to be removed from BlazeVOX's catalog (Spears, 2011).

The most common model for publication of full-length poetry manuscripts in the United States is the contest model, where one is permitted to blind submit one's manuscript to a press's contest in exchange for an entry fee of some kind (entry fees tend to range from 15-30 dollars). The collection of entry fees from this model is frequently the unspoken funding behind such contests—resulting, frankly, in many poets funding the publication of a book that is not theirs (Shivani, 2011). This model has been criticized for many of the same reasons Ortler criticized BlazeVOX's model: it takes money from writers and sometimes fosters favoritism (if, for example, the winning manuscript has been chosen by a friend or student of the author. Most presses have safeguards in place to prevent such things from happening, but it has happened in some high-profile instances [Koeske & Cordle, 2007]). Gatza and BlazeVOX, in correspondence to Ortler, rejected the contest model, saying that what BlazeVOX's model does "is better than me holding a contest. I have been in that room before and I am not fond of people paying $40 to have a first year grad student pick through a box of manuscripts to find something they like" (Ortler, 2011). While Gatza rejects the contest model, it is the accepted model in poetry publishing today and is held up as being ethically sound. Ortler, in his blog post at *Bark*, details these "widely held principles" as being the ones he finds acceptable:

(1) Generally speaking, literary presses do not charge for reviewing submissions unless we're talking about a contest, in which case an entry fee is justifiable due

to the necessity to drum up prize money and pay for a judge's honorarium [. . .]

(2) If literary presses do charge a fee for anything (contests, reading submissions, etc.), they should be upfront about it and this information should be included in submission guidelines and FAQ pages so the reader knows what to expect and whether they still want to submit.

(3) Most importantly, when a writer sends their work along, they always operate on the assumption that presses choose the best work, and only the best work, to publish.

Does BlazeVOX conform to Ortler's principles? Yes and no. BlazeVOX does not charge for reviewing submissions and does not hold contests. As to Ortler's second point, though, circumstances become murky. BlazeVOX was not transparent about their cooperative model. Yet BlazeVOX's request for monies could hardly be construed as a fee of the kind collected by vanity presses. BlazeVOX was committed to publishing Ortler's manuscript and other "best works," but perhaps lacked the means to publish them in print. However, the specter of the vanity press model continued to hang over Gatza and BlazeVOX.

Legitimacy Lost: The NEA Steps In

Following the criticism from Ortler and others, Gatza shut BlazeVOX down— indefinitely, it seemed at the time. Reported on the blog *We Who Are About To Die*[12] (henceforth referred to as *WWAATD*), Gatza's statement was as follows:

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[12] *We Who Are About To Die* (http://wewhoareabouttodie.com/) is a blog dedicated to alternative literature, publishing reviews, interviews, essays. It is attached to the English department at the College of Saint Rose in Albany, New York.

I am very disappointed in how things have turned out. I am very sorry for the

troubles this has caused and we will close down the press. It has been a good

run but with the turning tide against us, and with no money coming in, what else

is there to do, but stop. Many have found our arrangement to co-operative in

spirit and a bold and decisive measure in these tough financial times, thus why I

chose to do this. There have only $200 [*sic*] donated through out the year to help

the press in printing and the total was less than $1000. It is very hard to run this

press and this method gathered up only a very small amount to help our

production costs. Our prices have gone up and book sales numbers are very

small (Allen, 2011).

Richard D. Allen (2011), blogger at *WWAATD*, weighed in:

In my eyes, Gatza's only real wrongdoing was trying to have it both ways. He

wanted to split costs with poets, but didn't want the publishing world to know, lest

BlazeVox [sic] become known as a vanity press. Similarly, he didn't provide

potential contributors with a full accounting of his production expenses (BlazeVox

is a POD press, so some found the stated publication cost of $2000 surprising).

And it appears that he may have wanted to reserve the right to publish some

books without a contribution from the author, arguably reducing the contributors

to second-class status among BlazeVox authors.

What should BlazeVOX have done? Certainly, as mentioned above, they should have

made their cooperative publication model more transparent. And certainly, they should

have made their publication expenses transparent as well. Yet the problem remains that

the distinctions between vanity press and cooperative press are not clearly drawn in the

world of poetry publication, which complicates authorial legitimacy. In the case of BlazeVOX, Gatza's editorial staff acted as gate-keeper, determining that Ortler's manuscript was worthy of publication, but the request for monies from authors to offset printing costs bears some resemblance to the pay-to-publish vanity press models for which little gate-keeping exists. So is authorial legitimacy conferred only with the presence of gate-keeping or with a certain kind of gate-keeping? According to Shanna Compton (a poet, blogger, and publisher associated with the independent literary press Bloof Books), BlazeVOX's gate-keeping practices are, in fact, legitimate. Says Compton (2011):

> Unless Geoffrey Gatza is offering a financially contingent acceptance to EVERY manuscript that is submitted to the press, BlazeVOX is not a "vanity publisher." Because he is exercising editorial judgment in selecting manuscripts for publication. He is (as reported by BlazeVOX authors) working in a collaborative fashion with each author to edit and prepare each book, actively involved in helping it achieve its final shape. He is (as Google will confirm) supporting the books via promotional activities, such as review solicitation and other media-related publicity, and via distribution activities, including direct to-the-public sales via the press website, buying into the SPD [Small Press Distribution] distribution network, the Amazon.com distribution network, etc. Unless the author is paying the full cost of all of these preparation, printing and distribution activities for her or his book (and the author can't possibly be, for $200! $250!), BlazeVox is not a "subsidy publisher."

Compton claims that the cooperative model has a long history in the United States, and

although it is not common in the current publishing climate for poetry, it is not to be demonized. The perceived legitimacy of the cooperative model, however, was further diminished by an incident subsequent to the controversy over Ortler's blog post. In a March 7, 2012 blog post on *HTML Giant*, Lily Hoang reported that an anonymous BlazeVOX author received a denial letter in response to his/her application for a National Endowment for the Arts Creative Writing Fellowship. The letter's key paragraphs read as follows:

> It has come to our attention that BlazeVOX books has asked authors to contribute to the cost of publishing their own books. The eligibility requirements for the NEA's Creative Writing Fellowships prohibit applicants from using publications from presses that require individual writers to pay for part or all of the publication costs [. . .] Therefore, you may not use a book published BlazeVOX book to establish your eligibility. (Hoang, 2012)

The NEA's guidelines, linked to the blog post, described ineligible publication thusly (2012):

> Publication in presses that require individual writers to pay for part or all of the publication costs; ask writers to buy or sell copies of the publication; publish the work of anyone who subscribes to the publication or joins the organization through membership fees; publish the work of anyone who buys an advertisement in the publication; publish work without competitive selection; or publish work without professional editing.

The NEA ruling on BlazeVOX does not account for cooperative funding models. It does, however, account for online/digital publication, albeit with some caveats. According to

the NEA guidelines, the online work's publication model must conform to the publication model that mirrors print:

> You may use digital, audio, or online publications to establish eligibility, provided that such publications have competitive selection processes and stated editorial policies. If the online publication or website no longer exists, you must provide, upon request, sufficient evidence that your work once appeared online. If sufficient evidence cannot be provided, the online publication will not be eligible. (National Endowment for the Arts, 2012).

According to Colin Dabkowski (2012) of the *Buffalo Daily News*, the ruling that disqualified BlazeVOX authors from NEA grants was established in 1983, many years before the proliferation of digital publication. Dabkowski weighed in, claiming that the NEA's ban was unfair:

> The NEA's blanket refusal to consider work from a press testing out new funding strategies—even when that work was traditionally funded and when the questionable funding practice has been discontinued—is myopic at best. But its adherence to the rule is, sadly, typical of an institution that is in many ways stuck in the past. The NEA's response to a request for information on the rule was merely to confirm that BlazeVOX did not meet its requirements and, tantalizingly, that it will "re-evaluate the guidelines for the next grant cycle."

As Dabkowski indicated, the NEA is currently in the process of reevaluating its requirements for individual artist grants, perhaps to accommodate new publishing models like the cooperative model BlazeVOX uses.

Following Gatza's announcement that BlazeVOX would be closing its doors,

Gatza claims that he received many letters of support, which encouraged him to rescind the closure of his press and continue publishing. According to Gatza (Shivani, 2012):

> In the end, we do not publish books for the NEA. We publish for those who want to read poetry and are a refuge for writers who want to be supported by their fellow writers. I am disappointed, but large agencies like the NEA have always turned away from small forward-looking organizations. I plan to keep on doing what I do and keep publishing. I have the support of a lot of wonderful friends and I am very thankful for a great deal.

Following its death and subsequent resurrection, BlazeVOX continues to publish prolifically, and the press is right now in the process of acquiring nonprofit status. The NEA is in the process of reviewing its 1983 ruling, ostensibly to reevaluate its position and take into account alternative publication models. And yet, the case of BlazeVOX continues to resound with poets and publishers in the blogosphere and beyond, as debates circulate around the press's decisions and the consequences of the NEA ruling.

Legitimacy Regained? Implications and Conclusions

Geoffrey Gatza and BlazeVOX's journey of legitimacy is complex. After BlazeVOX's founding in 2000, the press enjoyed a decade of steady growth as it established itself as a visible, important, independent poetry publisher. BlazeVOX's growth paralleled the proliferation of digital and print-on-demand publication services, which BlazeVOX made use of. Of course, involvement with digital publication, print-on-demand, and a cooperative model of publication is what led to BlazeVOX's temporary demise in the poetry community, and the ban from the National Endowment for the Arts

further contributed to BlazeVOX's loss of legitimacy in the poetry scene. However, on the strength of its importance to the poetry community as a whole, BlazeVOX was resurrected—with its legitimacy intact but perhaps still being questioned.

Gatza and BlazeVOX are a unique case in the current discussion of publication in the late age of print for three reasons. The first reason is the unusual status that BlazeVOX holds as a publisher whose financial model is neither traditional nor vanity, and one who has opted to cost-share with authors while still exhibiting editorial gate-keeping. This cooperative model shows us that authorial legitimacy does not reside within any particular publishing model, or at least it no longer does. The second reason is related to BlazeVOX's status as a print and digital press. When BlazeVOX offered Brett Ortler the option to have his manuscript published as an e-book, BlazeVOX was clearly adhering to editorial gate-keeping practices similar to those used by a host of legitimate, peer-reviewed online publications. Therefore, authorial legitimacy does not reside within any particular publication medium, whether that be print or digital. Ortler's rejection of BlazeVOX's offer to publish digitally was more or less arbitrary especially considering the NEA's statement that digital publication is sufficient to bestow eligibility for individual artist grants. Yet, the NEA's contradictory perspective on publishing models and electronic publication brings to light a third reason—that the agencies granting authorial legitimacy have shown that their rules are outdated and arbitrary, and levy the burden of publication proof on the author. The NEA's rules offer no consideration to cooperative publication models, though these models exhibit gate-keeping practices and have a long history in scholarly and commercial publishing. Additionally, the NEA, in response to issues of digital erasure, requires authors to

establish proof of electronic publication in some way. This is a reasonable request, but it problematically locates authorial legitimacy within a particular medium and distances legitimacy from editorial gate-keeping. All three of these reasons advance a case for reconsidering authorial legitimacy, and establish BlazeVOX's example as key in such reconsideration.

For all of Gatza and BlazeVOX's missteps, it is clear that both the cooperative model of publishing, and digital publishing, have little to do with authorial legitimacy. Where, then, does authorial legitimacy lie? Evidence seems to point to editorial gate-keeping practices, but are these practices enough for poets? For other writers? As new publication models and mediums emerge to complicate publishing in the late age of print, poets and writers will have to deeply consider what exactly constitutes legitimacy for themselves and for their careers, and decide what rules to follow before such rules are decided for them.

In the next chapter, I will compare the two online poetry journals *Birdfeast* and *Linebreak*, and discuss the choices made by their editors to either pay homage to print paradigms or reject them outright. I will also discuss what these choices mean for the delivery of poetry in digital contexts.

CHAPTER 5: *BIRDFEAST* VERSUS *LINEBREAK*: POETIC DISTRIBUTION IN A

DIGITAL AGE

In the previous chapter I examined an instance of resistance to traditional, print-centric publication models and took stock of the cultural fallout from this resistance. In this chapter I look at two online poetry journals, *Birdfeast* and *Linebreak*, and I specifically look at rhetorical delivery by examining the ways that these journals explore print logics versus digital logics. I begin by sharing my story of negotiating new digital spaces. Next, I describe literary journals as a genre, analyze rhetorical delivery in its guises of medium and circulation, and then situate delivery further in the context of literary journals. I then analyze the two specific online poetry journals mentioned above, paying special attention to print and digital logics expressed in these journals' splash pages, media offerings, and publication schedules. I conclude by discussing the implications of employing print versus digital logics in terms of understanding delivery in the twenty-first century.

From Zines to Homepages: My Story

As a high school student, I was constantly looking for outlets for creativity and expression. When I learned about zines, or independently produced, self-published magazines, I knew I had to make my own. My zine, *Mrs. Robinson*, was a cut-and-pasted, Xeroxed, folded-and-stapled creation filled with my poetry, prose, comics, and artwork and distributed to friends near and far. I wrote about everything from high school politics to my favorite music to my burgeoning feminism to my hopes and dreams for the future. All in all, *Mrs. Robinson* became a reflection of *me* at a very specific time

and place. It was a time and place that was bounded by material restrictions, too—at the time I was working on the zine, my family did not own a computer, and so I did all of the layout and production of the zine by hand, and produced it in print. And so, I tried to make *Mrs. Robinson* look as much like a "real" magazine as possible; I created a graphic cover featuring the title of the zine, included a table of contents, featured advertisements for other zines, et cetera. The production schedule of the zine was slow; I only brought out three issues in the course of two years. I was hampered by lack of time to do the painstaking work of putting the zine together, and also by lack of money to copy and distribute the zine. Still, I was proud of my work, and felt that *Mrs. Robinson* represented me, in some way.

Around the time that I was wrapping up what would be the final issue of *Mrs. Robinson*, my family purchased a computer and got Internet access. I was fascinated by the creative possibilities of the computer, and immediately began thinking about what its desktop publishing software could do for future issues of my zine. However, a different possibility made itself available. Using a rudimentary WYSIWYG web design program and the small amount of server space allotted to my family's AOL account, I had the means to create a website. I was initially thrilled by this opportunity, thinking that I would be able to bring *Mrs. Robinson* online, but soon realized that I wasn't sure how to negotiate this new medium. *How* would I bring *Mrs. Robinson* online? Without the familiar logics (and restrictions) of the folded 8 ½ by 11-inch pages, I was unsure of how to proceed with design. I was unsure, too, of whether or not to add color graphics and music, now that such things were available to me. And now that I could produce *Mrs. Robinson* whenever I wanted, for free, what would my new production schedule look

like?

It's true that *Mrs. Robinson* was never a literary magazine per se; my hand-made personal zine didn't much resemble the clean, professionally edited literary journals that I would come to work on as a graduate student. However, the questions I had about bringing my zine online were virtually the same kinds of questions that the editors of literary journals would have to ask when it came time for them to negotiate online spaces. How does one bring a journal online? How does one start an online literary journal when the prevailing models for the last hundred years or so have all been print-centric? These are the kinds of questions that Jessica Poli and Johnathon Williams have had to negotiate when creating their journals. Before exploring their choices, however, it is first necessary to introduce literary journals as a genre.

"Little Magazines": Literary Journals, Print and Digital

Literary journals, sometimes called "little magazines" to distinguish them from large-circulation commercial magazines, are periodicals dedicated to publishing poetry, fiction, and nonfiction as well as literary criticism, book reviews, and interviews. According to a foundational study and bibliography, literary journals are "designed to print artistic work which for reasons of commercial expediency is not acceptable to the money-minded periodicals or presses" (Hoffman, Allen, & Ulrich, 1946, p. 2). Information scientists Stephen Paling and Michael Nilan (2006) agree, asserting that literary magazines "have traditionally defined themselves as havens for unusual or economically marginal work aimed at a select community of readers who understand, and perhaps participate in, the forms of literature published in the magazines" (p. 863).

Many literary journals are supported by universities and are often affiliated with creative writing programs; some journals are funded by foundations and grants; still others are entirely independent publications with varied funding sources. The circulation of print literary journals is generally limited, as is the audience; Walter Cummins (2002), editor of *The Literary Journal* estimates that

> the average literary magazine prints one or two thousand copies. Divide the
>
> number by, say, fifty states, than (sic) means between only twenty to forty copies
>
> per state. Of course, actual distribution is skewed to the larger states with the
>
> greatest readership, so that New York or California might each get ten percent of
>
> the available copies [. . .] For most literary magazines, the great majority of
>
> copies go to subscribers, mainly libraries. A handful get to bookstore shelves (p.
>
> 57).

The circulation limitations of print literary journals are connected to their financial limitations as well; with typically small budgets, these journals cannot afford to distribute their printed product at intervals comparable with commercially produced magazines.

Online literary journals are those journals that publish literature electronically, at least in part; there are quite a few journals that publish in both online and print formats. While there is to date no published narrative detailing the history of online literary journals, there exist a number of websites that have archived some of the earliest examples of literary journals on the web. *Blue Print Review* lists *CrossConnect, Eclectica,* and *Mississippi Review Online* as three of the web's earliest literary journals, all founded around 1995 ("Lost, Found," n.d.). At the time of this writing, the literary

journal database Duotrope[13] listed 1154 poetry journals that publish in electronic form; likewise, the Council of Literary Magazines and Presses (CLMP)[14] listed hundreds of journals publishing online. While it must be noted that Duotrope and CLMP primarily catalog and list literary journals that publish in English, it is fair to say that online literary journals have become a widespread phenomenon in the world of independent literary publishing. The causes of this phenomenon may be related closely to differences in medium and circulation; to publish online typically requires a fraction of the cost of publishing in print, and online publishers are generally limited only by time and labor when it comes to online circulation.

So, what are the consequences of this phenomenon of online publication? It is clear that in the twenty-first century, major shifts are occurring, not the least among them shifts from print to digital media and print to digital circulation. It is here that independent literary publishing finds itself with an interesting problem. How do the publishers of independent literary journals respond to the phenomenon and possibility of online publication? How do they define their journals' identities? How do they shape their journals' designs and navigation? How, when the possibilities are seemingly endless, do they decide what kinds of media to offer? How, too, do they decide on publication schedules? Attending to these questions requires attention, fundamentally, to delivery, that canon of rhetoric that takes into account the materiality of language by considering the medium and the circulation of text. In order to begin to situate and

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[13] http://duotrope.com

[14] http://clmp.org

explore these questions, I turn to a number of rhetorical scholars whose work considers medium and circulation as integral parts of the theoretical definition of delivery.

Rhetorical Delivery as Medium and Circulation: Some Literature

Delivery is complex and multifaceted, and its scholastic visibility in the late age of print is very much reflective of its flexibility and applicability to questions that have come to prominence as texts begin to more frequently appear in networked spaces. Jeff Rice's 2006 piece "Networks and New Media" investigates the idea of the network and how it relates to delivery in rhetoric and composition. Rice defines the network as "spaces—literal or figurative—of connectivity," and reminds the reader that, "they are ideological as well as technological spaces" (p. 128). Relating the idea of networks to delivery, Rice (2006) affirms his concern with tracing and understanding movements: "The network, therefore, does not require learning the truths of ideas, but rather how ideas fluctuate in specific types of spaces and contexts" (p. 131). He argues that new media forms enable networks far more than print media ever did, because new media forms are not static or fixed. So, when texts appear in these networked spaces, we must attend not just to "the truths of ideas," but to how these ideas are affected by the media that house them and the patterns of circulation that move them.

How is delivery expressed as medium, that which houses the text? We might turn to ideas about materiality for illumination. Christina Haas's *Writing Technology: Studies on the Materiality of Literacy* takes up a fundamental question of delivery and medium, a question that Haas (1996) calls "The Technology Question": "What does it mean for language to become material? That is, what is the effect of writing and other material

literacy technologies on human culture?" (p. 3). Haas "examines how reading and rereading are changed when writers use computers" (p. 51) and notes that "any changes in literate behavior that computers facilitate or mandate are neither inevitable nor invisible. Rather, they are the result of actual features—in this case, visual and tactile—of the technology" (p. 72). Similarly, in his *Writing Space: Computers, Hypertext, and the Remediation of Print*, Jay David Bolter analyzes the rhetorical, critical, and cultural implications of writing in electronic environments. Drawing on the work of media scholars such as McLuhan, Havelock, and Eisenstein, Bolter (2001) aligns delivery with medium by ultimately arguing that "our literate culture is simply using the new tools provided by digital technology to reconfigure the relationship between the material practices of writing and the ideal of writing that these practices express" (p. 18). However, materializing writing in the twenty-first century is more complicated than "simply using the new tools;" it becomes important to turn to the way these tools facilitate the movement of writing through space and time. It is here that it is appropriate to look to delivery in its guise as circulation.

In "Composition and the Circulation of Writing," John Trimbur (2000) asserts that "We cannot understand what is entailed when people encounter written texts without taking into account how the labor power embodied in the commodity form articulates a mode of production and its prevailing social relations," (p. 210) meaning essentially that unlocking a text must take into account "the activities and abilities of publishers, editors, writers, photographers, graphic designers, production crews, and so on" (p. 210) because these activities and abilities "are themselves exchanged and in effect consumed in the process of production, and the commodity form will necessarily carry

traces of this productive activity" (p. 210). The way that this "productive activity" situates the text and moves it through time and space is echoed in the work of Dànielle DeVoss, Ellen Cushman, and Jeffrey Grabill (2005), whose "Infrastructure and Composing: The When of New-Media Writing" defines infrastructure not just as the material conditions of the writing environment, but also "the tasks and practices that occur within the room— how the material objects are used, to what end, and for what audiences" (p. 20). It is as important to pay attention to the "when"—"the conditions in and through which we interact, compose, and think"—of writing as it is the "what" (DeVoss et. al., p. 34) The authors conclude that "an infrastructural approach reveals the layers and patterns behind the products of new-media composing-patterns that directly affect contemporary writing" (DeVoss et. al., p. 37). Following Trimbur's discussion of circulation, these authors confirm that writing is constantly delivered and redelivered in the negotiations that occur in infrastructures of new media composition.

Kathleen Blake Yancey and James E. Porter envision delivery as a site of robust literate activity, inclusive of both circulation and of medium. Yancey's 2004 address to the Conference on College Composition and Communication, "Made Not Only in Words: Composition in a New Key," argues that literacy is in the midst of a "tectonic change" (p. 298), a change in delivery. She compares the contemporary literacy climate to 19th century Britain, where a newly-literate public gathered in reading circles to consume the newest media—serialized novels—printed on cheap, readily available paper. Yancey highlights that all of this happened outside of school, much like the multimodal, networked literate activity that characterizes the 21st century. It is important to note that at the 2004 CCCC, Yancey delivered a multimodal, polyvocal presentation that was

difficult to reproduce in print. Thus, her address not only engaged delivery as its subject, but also offered a compelling, complex rhetorical problem of medium and circulation.

James E. Porter's 2009 article "Recovering Delivery for Digital Rhetoric" outlines a new way of understanding delivery amidst the same shifting literacies that Yancey describes. Like Yancey, Porter (2009) asserts that digital environments have created a need for a reconceptualization of delivery, and he specifically makes the move to "position delivery as a *techne* or art" (p. 208) so that writers/rhetors can understand delivery as a robust and vital element of digital composition. Porter begins his study by tracing the origins of delivery back to the Western rhetorical traditions of Plato, Aristotle, Quintilian, and Cicero, pointing out that in oratorical contexts delivery pertained mostly to physical appearance, gestures, and vocal inflections. And again, like Yancey, Porter details the massive change to literacy brought about by the introduction of the printing press in the Western world, asserting that the printed word "*changed knowledge itself* [. . .] it changed who had the right to create, promote, and distribute knowledge, giving power to a wider range of voices" (p. 210). Because of the similar revolution in the nature of knowledge that is upon us with the advent of the digital age, it is necessary that delivery be thought of as more than procedural or rote knowledge. To this end, Porter suggests five "koinoi topoi" for delivery in a digital age: identity and the body, distribution and circulation, access and accessibility, interaction and interactivity, and economics. These topoi are by nature rhetorically rich and contextually situated, reinforcing Porter's central argument that delivery is a *techne*.

Porter envisions delivery as a robust and complex system of issues that particularly involve materiality and distribution/circulation. While Porter's topoi are each

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significant and useful on their own, understanding delivery as a *techne* is vitally

important because of the role delivery plays in the moment of print to digital migration in

media. It is precisely this moment of print to digital migration that I wish to illuminate by

examining the ways that online poetry journals have responded to it. First, however, I

will define the characteristics of these journals in terms of print and digital logics.

Print Logics/Digital Logics: Characteristics of Literary Journals

Print and digital literary journals share a number of characteristics—they publish

writing by new and established writers, they generally receive hundreds if not thousands

of submissions yearly, and they each have their own individual aesthetic preferences for

those submissions. However, print and digital journals differ greatly in terms of their

logics, or what I am defining as the ways they negotiate their media. Print logics refer to

the ways print constructs and situates content; digital logics refer to the ways that online

spaces construct and situate content.

An example of print logic is the way that the typical print journal is structured and

constructed. Print journals are typically comparable in size and shape to print books.

The covers of print journals are frequently glossy and colorful, often featuring original

artwork, as can be seen in Figures 7, 8, and 9, the covers of the print journal *Mid-

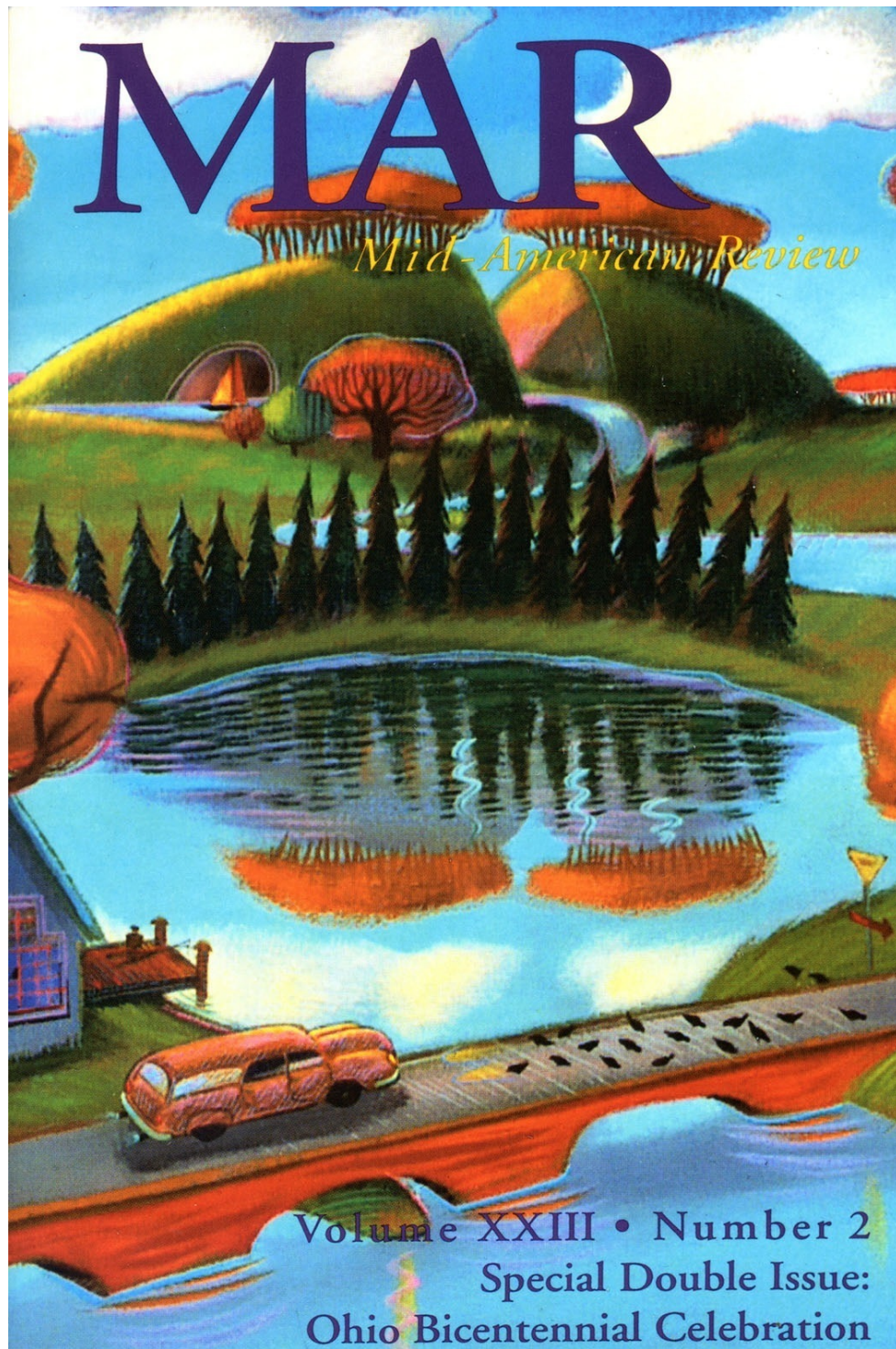American Review, Cream City Review*, and *Ninth Letter* respectively.

Figure 7: Cover of *Mid-American Review*

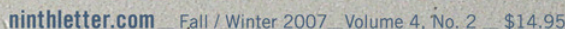Figure 8: Cover of *Cream City Review*

Figure 9: Cover of *Ninth Letter.* Text is part of page design; content is unimportant.

The layout and contents of a print literary journal remain typical of many print publications: there is often a title page; front matter containing copyright information; the masthead listing the editors and staff; a table of contents; the body of the journal; and back matter which often includes biographical statements from the authors featured in the journal. English-language literary journals are meant to be read from front to back, left to right, and so such contents appear in the order listed above. Literary journals are often printed on matte paper such as would be in a print book, and the alphabetic text that makes up the body of print journals may sometimes be punctuated with artwork printed in black and white, or in sections of color panels. Such color panels are usually limited due to the expense of printing, unless the journal is specifically devoted to printing large amounts of art. The publication schedules of print journals, as alluded to above, are highly dependent on the financial situations of the journals. Some journals, such as the long-running *Poetry*, publish a new, complete volume each month. Others, like *Virginia Quarterly Review*, publish quarterly; some, such as *Mid-American Review*, publish biannually, and still others, such as *Moon City Review*, publish only once per year.

Digital logics, by contrast, situate and construct online journals quite differently. It is difficult to characterize what a "typical" online journal looks and feels like. It could be said that these journals are limited only by what can be coded and programmed by their creators and editors. Their layouts vary widely and their designs are often determined by the content needs of the journals themselves. Because online environments can easily support multiple media, online journals often feature a range of textual, visual, audio, and video elements. Their publication schedules are highly varied; *Poetry*

Daily[15], for example, publishes one poem each day, while *blossombones*[16] publishes a full issue of authors once or twice a year. The two journals that I will look at in depth, *Birdfeast* and *Linebreak*, are both representative of the flourishing market of online journals.

Introducing Birdfeast *and* Linebreak

 Birdfeast (http://birdfeastmagazine.com) is an online poetry journal, created in late fall of 2011 by founder and editor Jessica Poli. *Birdfeast* is published quarterly and has featured between ten and twelve poems, from between eight to ten poets, per issue. Poli, aware of the vast number of online poetry journals in circulation, had a particular vision of what she wanted out of her project:

> I wanted it to be very eclectic. I didn't want…you know, there are a lot of journals
>
> that publish one kind of thing, you know, they're not very wide-ranging, and I
>
> wanted all different kinds of things jumbled up into one. And that made me kind
>
> of think of a feast, which is I think why I settled on that name, because you've got
>
> all of these different things at the table, and you can just kind of choose what you
>
> want. And that way, I thought, almost anyone who enjoys poetry can come here
>
> and find at least one poem that they like from any issue. (personal
>
> communication, April 14, 2012)

Since 2011, *Birdfeast* has published four issues. Poli continues to be the one-woman force behind *Birdfeast*, taking on all of the soliciting, designing, promoting and

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[15] http://poems.com

[16] http://www.blossombones.com/

distributing tasks herself. Still, *Birdfeast* continues to thrive, with its contributors going on to publish chapbooks and full-length books of poetry.

*Linebrea*k (http://linebreak.org) is an online journal of poetry and prose founded and edited by Johnathon Williams and Ash Bowen. Williams was shocked by what he saw as the unimpressive landscape of online poetry journals at the time: "[I] just immediately thought, jeez, I can do that way better. I can do that better in a weekend" (personal communication, April 7, 2012). Thus, Williams and his friend and colleague Ash Bowen set out to create an online poetry journal that they would be proud to have their work featured in. *Linebreak* is a weekly poetry publication that features a single poem in text and audio; the poem is performed by another poet who is not the author of the poem. This twist came about by accident, as the poets featured in the first issues of *Linebreak* did not have access to audio recording software, and thus other poets had to take over the task of reading and recording the poems. However, Williams believes that this was a fortuitous turn of events as it allowed twice as many poets to be featured on the site.

Linebreak was founded in January of 2008, and has as of this writing featured several hundred poets as writers and performers, many of whom are well-known in the world of contemporary American poetry. Williams and Bowen occasionally employ interns to help with the tasks of sorting through and responding to their large submission volume, but the coding and designing tasks belong to Williams. The staff of *Linebreak* has also produced an e-book poetry anthology, *Two Weeks*, featuring work from *Linebreak* authors and others, which is available in Amazon.com's Kindle store.

Birdfeast and *Linebreak* share many similarities—they are independent and

relatively young poetry journals thriving in online space—but they are fundamentally different. *Birdfeast* was designed, according to Poli, to pay homage to the logics of print journals; *Linebreak* was designed, fundamentally, *against* those print logics, instead following the emerging logics of the digital medium. As such, these two journals are ideal subjects for understanding the ways that literary journals respond to the shift from print to digital in the context of rhetorical delivery. In the next section, I will discuss how the splash pages of the journals *Birdfeast* and *Linebreak* reveal print and/or digital logics.

First Impressions: Splash Pages

A splash page, or splash screen, is an introduction page for a website. The content a splash page features is generally minimal; a splash page may feature an image, a logo, or a small amount of information about the website it serves as a gateway to. Not every website has a splash page, however; this feature is generally optional in web design. The two journals I will examine here use the splash page in very different ways, to reflect print and digital logics. *Birdfeast*'s use of the splash page mimics the look and functionality of the cover of a print journal; *Linebreak*'s lack of a splash page reflects the immediacy of the digital medium.

Upon arriving at Birdfeastmagazine.com, the reader meets a simple splash page with the journal's name and issue number superimposed over a black and white photo of a bird, as can be seen in Figure 10.
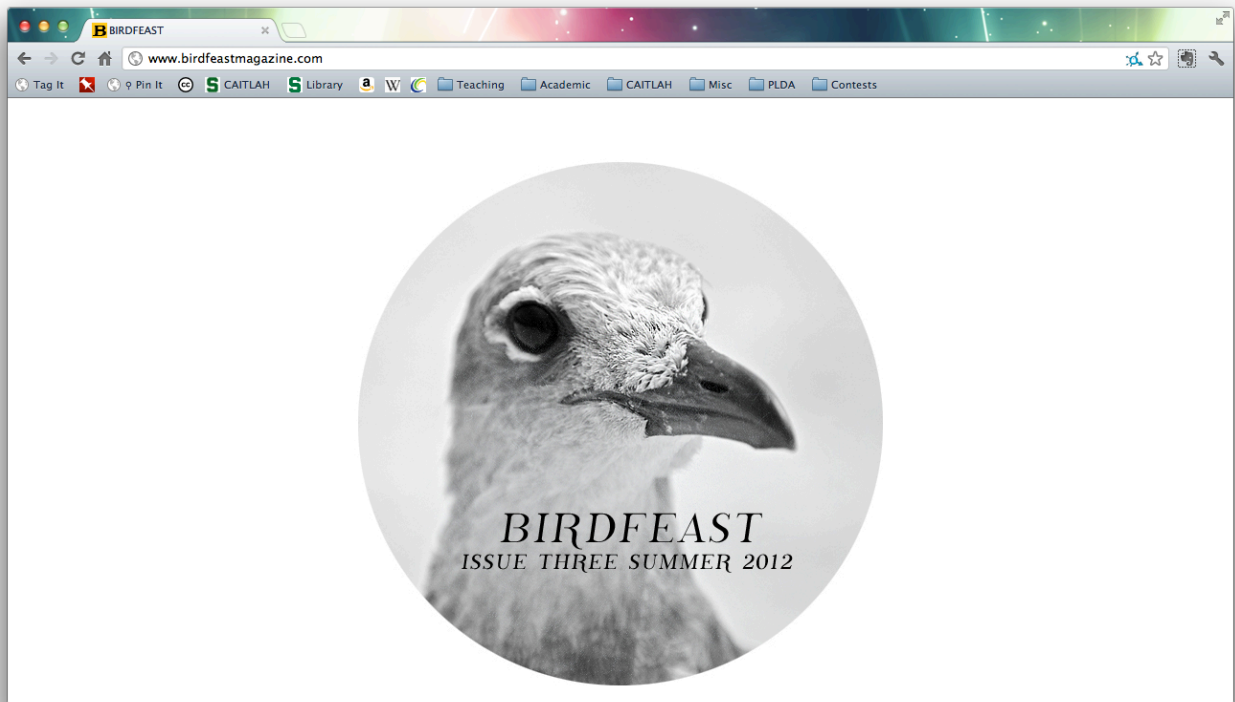
Figure 10: Splash page of birdfeastmagazine.com. Browser information unimportant.

When the viewer mouses over the bird photo, a swirl of vibrant colors appears over the
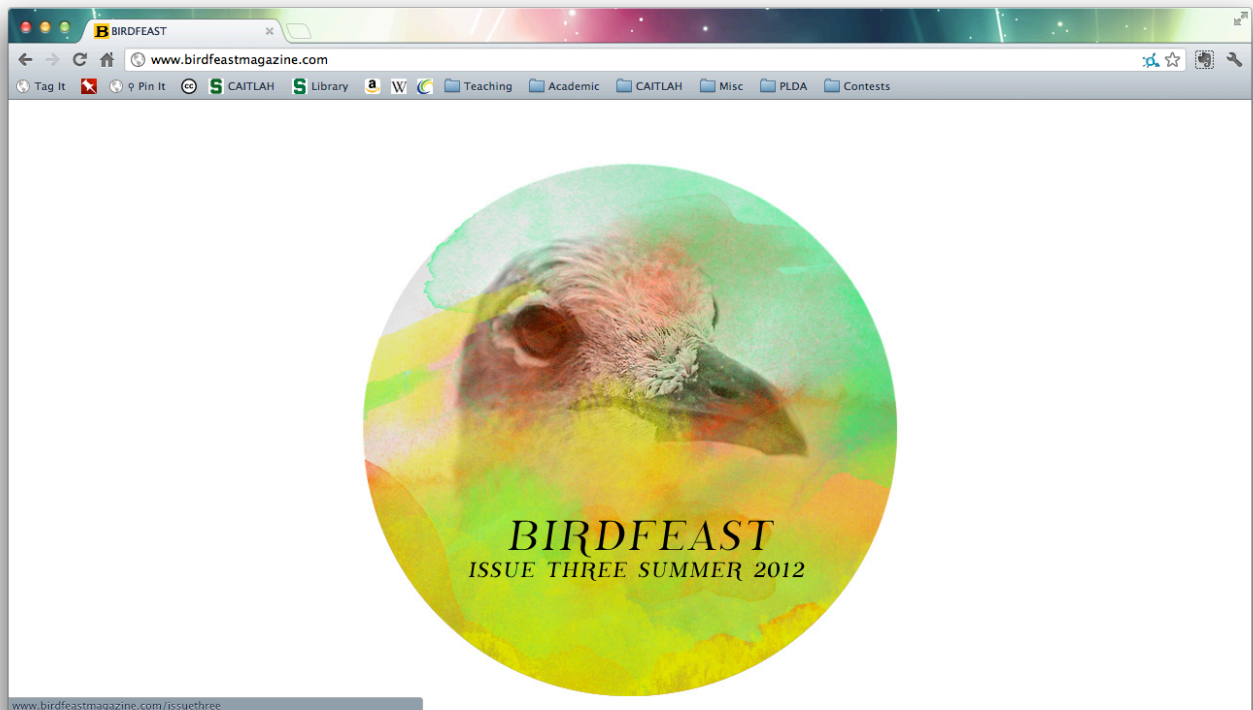
photo, as can be seen in Figure 11.

Figure 11: Splash page (2) of birdfeastmagazine.com. Browser information unimportant.

The colors of the splash page change quarterly; they mirror the colors used in each individual issue of *Birdfeast* and reflect Poli's design interpretation of the seasons. However, the combination of the colors and rollover image is very important to Poli and is a way that she makes meaning with her design:

> I think that splash image is very important to what *Birdfeast* is [. . .] At first it's just a picture of a bird, which I think is kind of how a lot of my friends think about poetry. This black and white thing that I don't really understand. And then when you roll it over there's all these colors and awesomeness, which I think if they would read this stuff, they would see. So then you go into the main page and I have a big graphic. So I'm hoping that that kind of hooks them in and makes

readers think, 'oh, this magazine is pretty cool, I should check out some of these poems and read them.' And then they'll see the poems are as awesome [as] the graphics [*laughs*]. Well, more awesome, definitely (personal communication, April 17, 2012).

The potential for resistance to poetry—what Poli describes metaphorically as "this black and white thing"—and the openness to poetry that stands in colorful contrast to the black and white image, is a key part of Poli's understanding of her audience. Poli states that many of her friends don't read poetry, and that when "you say the word 'poetry,' they kind of button up and they think, oh, stodgy English buildings and no fun. 'I don't understand poetry, it's not for me, it goes over my head.' They think huge English textbooks and they don't think about fun stuff" (personal communication, April 17, 2012). Poli sees *Birdfeast* as an antidote to that resistance, a space where she can feature work that represents the exciting edge of contemporary poetry: "If they [readers] would read this kind of poetry, if they would start reading contemporary, awesome poetry, I think they would change their minds" (personal communication, April 17, 2012). Poli's shaping of the splash page with its rollover image reflects the very print-centric concern of "hooking" a reader with a compelling cover. The splash page functions, essentially, as a kind of cover for *Birdfeast*; much like the cover of a print journal, it changes with each issue, and it gives important information about the journal such as its name and volume number. Thus, print logics begin to shape this particular online journal's identity.

Linebreak, by contrast, has no discernable splash page. When a reader navigates to Linebreak.org, they are immediately met with the week's featured poem, in audio format and as alphabetic text, as shown in Figure 12.
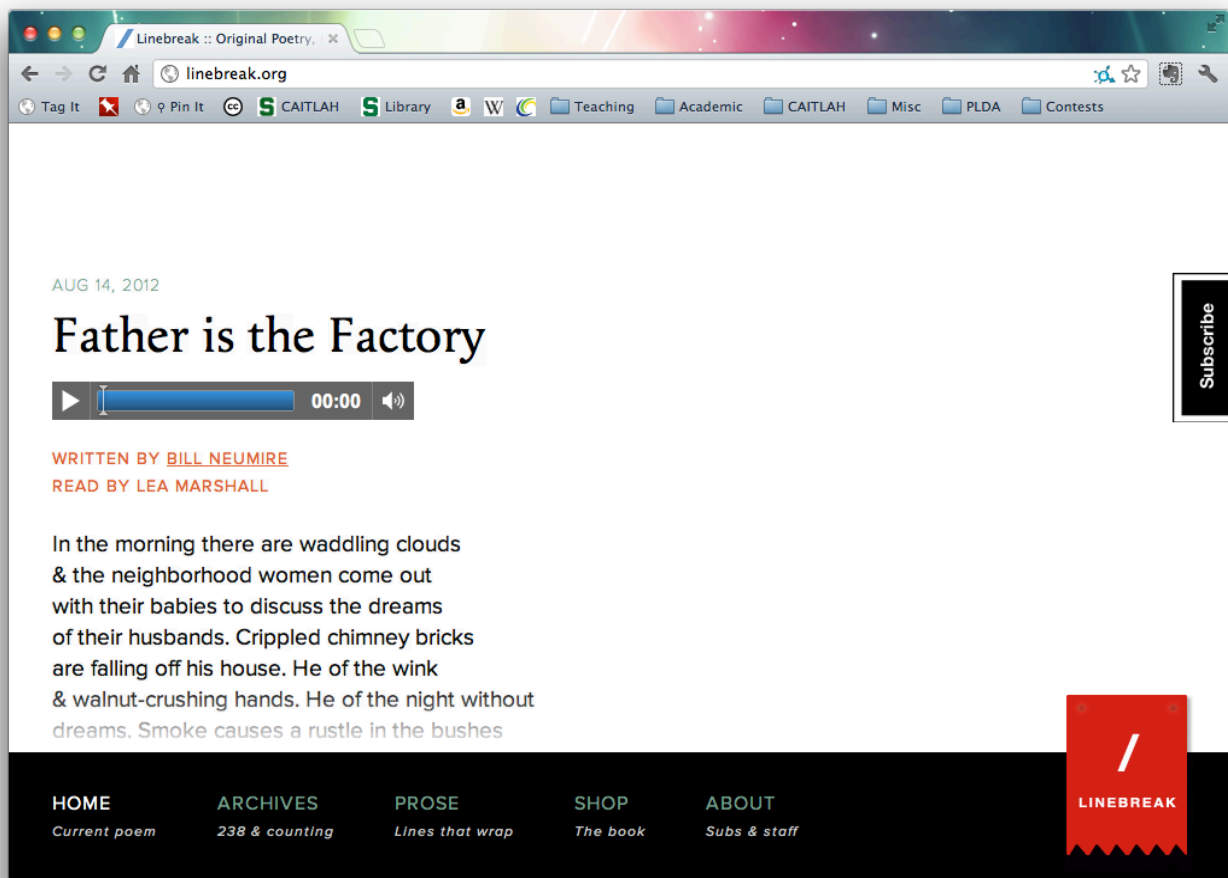
Figure 12: Home page of linebreak.org. Browser information and poem text unimportant. Bottom navigation bar reads "HOME – current poem – ARCHIVES – 238 & counting – PROSE – lines that wrap – SHOP – the book – ABOUT – subs & staff." Right bottom logo reads "LINEBREAK." Right navigation bar reads "Subscribe."

A navigation bar sits at the bottom of the page, and Linebreak's logo is positioned in the lower right corner of the screen. According to Williams, the lack of a splash page is very deliberate:

> *Linebreak*'s homepage is one poem. It's never going to be more than that, by the

way. It's a single poem, it's what it's always going to be. You come to the

homepage, you see one poem. Of course the archives are prominently linked. If

you want to click there, I've got different ways to browse the archives. Any of

those are fine, I hope they like them. But when they come to the homepage, I

hope the first sense they get is that we care about the reader's time and attention

and that we care about the author's time and attention that it takes to write these

things. (personal communication, April 7, 2012)

Williams' insistence on the prominence of a single poem, instead of a splash page

containing, perhaps, *Linebreak*'s logo or volume information, reflects a very different

kind of sensibility from that of *Birdfeast*. The immediacy of the poem's singular presence

signals concern for users' fast-paced browsing habits, as Williams states. This is a

characteristic of digital logic, wherein the perceived habits of digital audiences begin to

shape design choices. Williams has expressed a desire to move completely away from

all vestiges of print in favor of creating a truly born-digital journal. Thus, *Linebreak* has

no "journal cover" analog like *Birdfeast* has with its splash page; there is no introductory

page to take in and click through in order to get to the poetry. These digital logics create

a very specific identity for *Linebreak*: it is a journal that wants as little to do with print as

possible. In the next section, I will discuss how the media offerings of *Birdfeast* and

Linebreak reveal print and/or digital logics.

Sound and Vision: Media Offerings

As mentioned above, online journals are, in theory, limited only by bandwidth in

their capacity to house and showcase multiple media. Websites in the twenty-first

century feature a vast array of image, audio, and video elements as well as textual and hypertextual creations. *Birdfeast* and *Linebreak* make use of the digital medium's capacity for multimodality in different ways, and this again reflects print and digital logics. *Birdfeast*'s use of text and image reveals a propensity toward the look and feel of the print medium, while *Linebreak*'s use of audio capitalizes on the capacities of the digital medium.

As discussed above, *Birdfeast* features a splash page with a visually rich image that becomes more vibrant on mouseover and reflects the image that represents each quarterly issue of the journal. According to Poli, all of this was a deliberate choice, meant to bring the logics and aesthetics of print to her online journal:

I think there's just something very classic about print journals. And you know, with online journals there's so much you can do, but I think that my thought in doing that was sort of an homage to print journals. Not that they're going away, because they won't be going away, but online journals are definitely becoming more numerous and more popular, and yes, print journals are so classic and timeless and I just wanted to respect that a little, plus I just like the way they look, and you don't see a lot of those online journals that have that print journal style, so I also wanted to do that to have *Birdfeast* set apart a little bit from the other ones. I didn't want your standard white background, black text layout. I wanted something that would pop out a little, give it some art, and just give it that print journal style, you know (personal communication, August 2, 2012).

For Poli, "that print journal style" includes an essence of uniformity and consistency. Because computing devices and browsers differ in terms of their settings and

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specifications—screen size, resolution, color display, et cetera—no one website looks exactly the same when accessed online. Poli is aware of this, and strives to make her journal look as uniform as possible:

> What I really love about print, you pick it up anywhere and it's going to look the same to every person. With online, that is never going to be the case. It looks different on every browser you look at, especially when you consider that people are reading it on their phone [. . .] Yeah, I've looked at *Birdfeast* on as many browsers and as many different computers as I can get my hands on, and it looks different on every single one, and there are problems on every one, you know, that I can't see on my computer. So that's definitely a frustration. Because when you print something, it prints out, it looks the same. Every copy looks the same. The font's going to be the same exact size, all the colors are going to be the same exact colors, but when you're dealing with computers it's a completely different case. All the colors look different on every computer, the font looks different, the links look different, everything is different. And that is one very frustrating thing about working with an online publication. (personal communication, August 2, 2012)

With her concern for consistency and uniformity, it stands to reason, then, that Poli would avoid integrating any other types of media into *Birdfeast*. With the logics of print guiding her design, her focus is on replicating the capacities and advantages of the print medium in online space.

Linebreak, by contrast, is a journal with a very distinct interpretation of what it means to be "born digital," that is, to be generated with materials and techniques that

originate entirely in digital space. According to Williams, this was paramount: "What we wanted from the start was to choose a format that A, honored poetry, and B, fit the web" (personal communication, April 7, 2012). One of the unique features of *Linebreak*, as mentioned above, is that each print poem is accompanied by an audio recording of that poem. Offering audio was one of the original goals of *Linebreak*, as Williams says:

> We wanted audio, and that was there from the start. You know, poetry began as an oral tradition. Hell, history and poetry, you know, used to be entwined in this oral tradition. This was how human beings passed on knowledge [. . .] So we wanted audio in there, just because, why not? Paper can't do audio, but you certainly can online. A web server doesn't care what kind of file it's serving. It'll serve audio, it'll serve video, it'll serve whatever you tell it to serve. Why not do audio? (personal communication, April 7, 2012).

"Paper can't do audio" (personal communication, April 7, 2012), as Williams asserts, so to offer the kinds of media that *Linebreak* wishes to offer, the journal must necessarily follow along with the emergent conventions and logics of digital space. Williams' "why not" attitude about featuring audio not only affirms the unique capacity of digital medium, but affirms his confidence in what constitutes the emergent logics of digital spaces. This is in stark contrast to *Birdfeast* and to Poli's reliance on print logics to guide her navigation of digital space. In the next section, I will discuss how the distinct publication schedules of *Birdfeast* and *Linebreak* continue to reflect these journals' print and digital logics.

Time Out: Publication Schedules

Literary journals' publication schedules are as varied as the journals themselves. As mentioned above, some print journals release a new issue only once per year, while some online journals publish a new poem every day. Generally, however, the publication schedules of print journals are limited by financial cost, time, and needed manpower, because the details of print circulation include printing, packaging, labeling, posting, mailing, and storing the substantial physical artifact of the journal. An online journal typically does not incur the same kinds of costs; in publishing and circulating the journal, publishers might incur the financial and temporal costs of domain hosting and advertising, but managing physical artifacts is not the same for an online journal. There are no heavy books to package, no postage to calculate and pay for, no spaces to clear in homes and offices for storage. All of this has the potential to, and often does, affect the publication schedules of literary journals, both in print and in digital mediums. In this section, I will show how *Birdfeast* and *Linebreak* respond to the potentials of digital circulation by employing print and digital logics.

Birdfeast is published quarterly, and Poli interprets this as being once per season. Each quarterly issue of the journal showcases the work of eight to ten authors. By contrast, *Linebreak* publishes a single new poem every week. Williams describes this weekly publication schedule as an integral part of the journal's origins, as he said the founders "knew from the start that [they] didn't want to be stupid and do a quarterly." Williams' opinions about the weekly schedule of *Linebreak* reflect a deeper philosophy on what constitutes a born-digital publication:

It just seemed like nobody else was doing that. In fact, it seemed nobody was

sort of interested in even asking themselves what works on the web, versus on

paper. I still think that's true to this day. Most people who start journals and put

them online, every decision they make is an apology that they're not in a printed

format. Every decision they make just screams, you know, we really wanted to do

a print journal but we didn't have the money but we knew this one guy who would

do us a website. So this is what we're doing. We wanted from the start to be

web-native. To choose format, frequency, everything that fit the web [. . .]The

weekly format was part of that. (personal communication, April 7, 2012)

While *Linebreak* strives to be born-digital with its weekly schedule, *Birdfeast* reproduces

print paradigms in digital space with its quarterly schedule. Both journals interpret the

emergence of the digital medium according to very specific logics, logics that reflect

expectations and possibilities about what it means to deliver poetry in online spaces.

Delivering Poetry at the Digital Frontier: Implications and Conclusions

In *The Economics of Attention*, Richard Lanham (2007) equates delivery with

what he calls style, that which we must look *at* instead of *through*. Says Lanham, "it is

stylistic self-consciousness that drives much of human invention. We condemn it at our

peril" (p. 159). Poetry has long been approached as a relatively transparent text; that is,

we are familiar with looking *through* poetry to interpret it, but have tended not to look *at*

poetry—as circulated text, as mediated material, as rhetorical artifact. Poetry is being

delivered, will be delivered, and has always been delivered. If delivery has moved from

a concept of minor importance to a rhetorical space of increasing study and debate,

then we must consider the delivery of all genres of text, including poetry**.**

The possibilities of online spaces are decidedly different from those of print. It is

reasonable, then, to look to how composers, publishers, and editors are interpreting and responding to those possibilities in order to better understand how delivery functions in digital spaces. In the case of poetry, looking to how online poetry journal publishers employ print and digital logics in online spaces is one way to catch a glimpse of how poetry is being delivered in the twenty-first century. The journal *Birdfeast* applies print logics to the online space, replicating the established aesthetics and sensibilities of a print journal in its visual design, its media offerings, and its publication schedule. By contrast, the journal *Linebreak* interprets and embraces the emergent possibilities of digital space, creating a born-digital publication that reflects digital logics through the above three facets.

What can we infer from this brief look at *Birdfeast* and *Linebreak*? One conclusion that emerges is the persistence of print paradigms, even in digital spaces. It's clear that digital spaces offer possibilities and challenges that print-based spaces do not. However, this does not mean that publication in digital spaces eschews the logics of print altogether. A close look at *Birdfeast*'s visual design, media offerings, and publication schedule reveal that the characteristics of print publication continue to be relevant in digital environments. Because print logics persist, it is vitally important that we understand how those logics shape and are shaped by the relatively new digital spaces that publishers encounter. A second implication is that digital spaces are changing how poetry is delivered. For many years before the advent of online publication, print paradigms, and their affordances and limits, were the rule, and poetry was delivered according to these affordances and limits. With the emergence of digital publication, there is suddenly a new frontier for how poetry can be represented and

circulated. *Linebreak* takes advantage of some of what this new frontier affords, delivering poetry with increased immediacy and multimodality. It stands to reason, however, that print and digital logics will continue to be relevant, even when tracing delivery in online spaces that grow ever more robust and complex.

In the next chapter, I will conclude this study by attending to the implications of the analysis that I have done, and tracing paths for future research.

CHAPTER 6: POETRY AND POETS NOW: IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The Path of a Poet, The Path of a Geek: My Story

Recently, I attended the 2013 Computers and Writing conference at Frostburg State University, where I presented some of the research from this study. Before I drove from Lansing to Pittsburgh and then to Frostburg, I logged on to the Computers and Writing conference website and scanned the schedule. I saw many interesting panels and presentations on topics that ranged from multimodal composing to data mining to online publication. However, I was disappointed. I was disappointed because, once again, I saw not a single presentation or panel that connected creative writing and digital technologies.

Perhaps my expectations are unrealistic and my disappointments are misplaced. Perhaps I am being unfair. After all, Computers and Writing is ostensibly a rhetoric and composition conference, and as such, they may have no additional room for the kind of research I do. Besides, if I wanted to hear about technology and creative writing, I might be better served by attending the Associated Writing Programs (AWP) conference. I think about the few times I have gone to AWP; how strange and out of place I felt there, being a geek.

I sense an old fear coming back to haunt me. It's the fear of not having a place, a home. It's the fear that perhaps I don't really belong in rhetoric and composition after all, despite my six years in the rhetoric and writing Ph.D. program at Michigan State. And it's the fear that I don't belong in creative writing either, despite my two Master's degrees and my decent handful of poetry publications. What business do I have calling

myself a poet without a full-length book? What business do I have calling myself a

compositionist with all of this poetry-focused research?

But, I have been down this path before.

I remind myself that the field of rhetoric and composition is much more forgiving

and inclusive than I am making it out to be. I remind myself that the subfield of

computers and writing is inclusive as well. And I remind myself creative writing as a field

is beginning to come around to a more critical, self-reflexive place. The literature I have

reviewed in this study attests to all of this. Perhaps there is a place for me after all—

someone who is a poet and a geek. And if there is a place for someone like me, then,

there has to be a space for me, too—a unique space for me to carve out and shape with

questions and reflections and critical research. The work that I have done in this study is

some of that carving and shaping, but it is only the beginning. In this chapter, then, I will

summarize the work that I have done so far, and I will discuss the implications for this

work. I will then discuss considerations for future research and outline where this work

could potentially lead me. I will conclude by circling back to my own story and

discussing how this work has changed the way I see poetry and digital technologies.

The Path So Far: A Summary of the Study

This study examined three particular aspects of poetic composition in the age of

digital communication: composition, publication, and distribution. In Chapter Three, I

attended to poetic composition by looking at the poetry writing spaces of two poets,

Hannah Stephenson and Jessica Poli, and how these poets use digital technologies to

shape these spaces. I began by describing traditional, Romantic conceptions of the

poet's studio, and I told my own story of building and shaping my writing space as an adolescent poet. I then reviewed literature that attended to how emerging digital technologies affected not only kinds of writing being done, but also the spaces in which that writing was being done, and the infrastructures that housed and contextualized that writing as well. I introduced Hannah Stephenson and Jessica Poli and their work as poets and as users of digital technologies. I then described Hannah Stephenson's digitally-mediated composing space, tracing the production of one of her poems and illustrating it with screenshots from one of the videos that Stephenson made to record her writing process. I did the same with Jessica Poli's composing space, describing it, illustrating it with screenshots, and discussing the ways that Poli uses multiple applications when constructing a single poem. I then turned to the implications of these poets' practices, drawing the conclusion that, by arranging and rearranging and customizing their composing spaces, they are engaging in deliberate and continuous acts of composition.

In Chapter Four, I attended to poetic publication by telling the story of the poet Geoffrey Gatza and his press, BlazeVOX, and the fallout from a distinct choice that Gatza made to resist traditional publication models, and how that shaped questions of authorial legitimacy. I began by telling my own story of authorial legitimacy in relationship to the dissolution of my chapbook's press. I then reviewed some literature which explored the concept of authorial legitimacy as it is understood in scholarly publishing and commercial publishing, and explored the complications of publishing in the digital age. I next introduced Gatza and BlazeVOX, tracing the press's founding as a unique digital-focused publishing venue for poets and other creative writers. I then

began to explore the controversy that surrounded BlazeVOX's cooperative publishing model, tracing the fallout in the literary blogosphere and certain authors' rejection of BlazeVOX publication, both print and digital. I also highlighted the 2012 National Endowment for the Arts ruling that disqualified BlazeVOX authors from Creative Writing Fellowships, a decision that was seen by some as unfair. I then pointed to the implications of BlazeVOX's case, concluding that authorial legitimacy, while still in flux in the late age of print, does not lie in any one particular medium of publication.

In Chapter Five, I attended to poetic distribution by comparing two online poetry journals, *Birdfeast* and *Linebreak,* in terms of the ways that they deliver their content on the web. I first shared my own story of using my high school writing projects to negotiate the shift from print to digital publishing. I then described literary journals as a genre, and reviewed some literature that defines rhetorical delivery as medium and as circulation. I then situated rhetorical delivery in relationship to literary journals, and defined print and digital logics as the ways that each publication medium constructs and situates content. I introduced *Birdfeast* and *Linebreak* and analyzed the print and digital logics expressed in their splash pages, media offerings, and publication schedules, noting that *Birdfeast* replicates print paradigms in online space while *Linebreak* rejects and defines itself against print. I attended to the implications of this analysis, noting that as that print paradigms persist even in digital environments it is fundamentally important to understand how print logics shape and are shaped by online spaces. I also noted that it is becoming vitally important to attend to how poetry is being represented and circulated in new media environments. The chapters of this study unfolded from varied explorations of a fundamental question about what it means to be a poet in the twenty-

first century. In the next section, I will discuss what this study means in terms of poetic composition, poetic publication, and poetic distribution.

New Paths for Poetry and Poets: Implications

The specific research questions that I attempted to answer with this study were as follows:

1. What does "the digital" mean to poets?

2. What does it mean to "go digital" as a poet?

3. What composing practices are necessary to "go digital" as a poet?

4. What infrastructures must a poet navigate in order to "go digital"?

What "the digital" means to poets, and what it means to "go digital" as a poet, is an important pair of questions because of the general lack of attention that has been paid to the relationship between poetry and digital technologies in general. In this study, I have uncovered some answers to these questions.

For poets, the digital, and going digital, means a new understanding of poets' composing spaces—and poets' workshops. As an examination of the composing spaces of Hannah Stephenson and Jessica Poli illustrates, poets are using multiple tools and applications to compose the kinds of environments that are conducive to their writing. This means going far beyond the sparse, spare, print-dominated environments that we are used to imagining for poets. This also speaks to a possible reimagining of what constitutes the writing workshop; once understood as simply a space where poets receive feedback on their work, the writing workshop could be receive a new definition,

a transformed space where poets compose by arranging the elements of writing environments as well as generating poetic texts.

For poets, the digital, and going digital, means recognizing and interpreting the shift from print to digital publication paradigms. The story of Geoffrey Gatza and BlazeVOX reveals that poets are at the forefront of interesting and exciting changes in publishing. The controversy that surrounds BlazeVOX shows how poets can and must engage with the ways that changing publication modes and models affect their practice.

For poets, the digital, and going digital, means not rejecting print outright, but instead reimagining the place of print. The online poetry journals *Birdfeast* and *Linebreak* engage print logics in vastly different ways—*Birdfeast* by paying homage to print, and *Linebreak* by defining itself against print. Yet, both journals understand that print does play a role in poetic distribution today. In their practice, poets who are also editors must be aware of how print works and how the digital works—with print and against it.

Because poets are composers, they are not exempt from the revolutionary changes in writing practices and processes that accompany the shift from print to digital. Poets must engage with the digital in ways that empower them to do innovative poetic work. What are those ways? prin

Poets must imagine, design, and compose new spaces in which to do poetic work. The spaces that Stephenson and Poli create are rich and layered, distributed and simultaneous. The proliferation of digital tools make these kinds of spaces possible. Stephenson and Poli engage these tools critically and use them to shape environments that allow for the creation of accomplished new poetic work.

Poets must make bold and potentially transgressive choices to ensure that poetry flourishes in moments and spaces of transition. Gatza's choice to pursue a cooperative, print-on-demand funding model for BlazeVOX was controversial; yet, it was a way for his press to survive and keep publishing prolifically in difficult economic times. This bold move earned him some ire but ultimately allowed him to continue his work as a publisher, maintaining a supportive space for the innovative work of BlazeVOX poets and writers.

Poets must design spaces that embrace the digital while still acknowledging the print tradition. Poli and Johnathon Williams, the editors of *Birdfeast* and *Linebreak* respectively, used the affordances of the World Wide Web to bring poetry to their readers in new and effective ways. However, print logics still persist, and these editors clearly understand how these logics shape and are shaped by digital environments, as evidenced in the ways they interpreted the visual design, media offerings, and publication schedules of their journals.

Infrastructural concerns are key to any kind of composition; the structures and hierarchies that surround writing can liberate, or they can oppress and constrain. Poetic composition certainly comes with its own set of infrastructural concerns, and those concerns have changed radically in the wake of electronic composition. What infrastructures must a poet navigate in order to "go digital"?

Poets must navigate a blended composing infrastructure, such as one that includes both print and digital elements. The composing spaces of Stephenson and Poli are marked by extensive use of digital applications and tools. However, these poets also acknowledge that they use print tools as well—notebooks, pens, pencils—in their

invention practices. These blended composing processes and environments echo the reality of composition in the twenty-first century: the transfer of handwritten work to the uniformity of computer-based alphabetic text. Stephenson and Poli acknowledging and embracing this kind of blended composing environment reveals that poets are well aware of the infrastructural challenges of composing, and can flexibly navigate their changes them at a moment's notice.

Poets must navigate publication infrastructures that are in a state of transition; they may be based on print-centric paradigms, but are challenged by digital possibilities. The 2012 NEA ruling that barred BlazeVOX authors from competing for creative writing fellowships was based on regulations that in some sense predated the digital publishing revolutions of the 2000s. The challenge that BlazeVOX posed caused the NEA to reexamine its understanding of what constitutes a legitimate press with adequate editorial gatekeeping measures. The story of BlazeVOX also made visible the burden of proof that the NEA levies upon authors who choose to publish electronically. In a way, BlazeVOX was a pioneer in navigating all of these issues, and paved the way for other poets to engage and challenge similar publishing infrastructures.

Poets must navigate print-centric distributive models and digitally-enhanced distribution channels. Historically, distribution of poetry journals, and delivery of poetry in general, has been through print-centric channels such as "snail mail." The introduction of the World Wide Web provided new ways for poetry to reach its readership. Yet, print journals persist, side by side with online journals. That both modes of delivery are vital to poetry's existence in the twenty-first century is something that the editors of *Birdfeast* and *Linebreak* are well aware of.

Poetic composition in the age of digital technology is fundamentally a navigation of transitions. Poetry has a long-held association with the material conditions of print, and the history of print remains vitally important to poetry's identity. However, new digital spaces are applying pressure to print, causing shifts in the composition, publication, and distribution of poetry in the United States. It is clear that print is not going away any time soon. And yet, the introduction of digital technologies means that poets must negotiate fluctuating spaces, where the established logics of print collide with the emergent logics of the digital. For poetry to survive and thrive in the twenty-first century, poets must take up the challenge to investigate and interrogate new media environments, and empower themselves to compose, publish, and distribute their work in ways that critically question the affordances of print *and* digital space.

Further Down the Path: Considerations for Future Research

This research began, as all research must, with a question. As mentioned previously, the question that moves me forward as a researcher is the question of what it means to be an American poet in the twenty-first century. As one of the first steps in exploring this question, I designed and implemented this study. However, as I mentioned earlier, this study is only the beginning of an exploration that may consume my entire scholarly career. As discussed in Chapter One, there is little work in any division of writing studies that attends to the ways that poets use digital technologies. I believe that the work I have done raises interesting new questions about a group of writers whose composing practices are being profoundly affected by the shift from print to digital paradigms in composition, publication, and distribution. In this section, I would

like to discuss the possibilities for future research afforded by this study, considering both methods and results.

Methodologically, this study was inspired by oral history research performed by Cynthia Selfe and Gail Hawisher and reported in their book *Literate Lives in the Information Age*. As detailed in Chapter Two of this dissertation, my research methods for this study consisted of oral history-style participant interviews. These methods allowed me to gather a rich narrative of each participant's history as a poet and as a user of digital technologies, which became important for contextualizing and grounding the data. Further research into the ways poets use digital technologies will vary methodologically, but methods that incorporate oral history are uniquely able to foreground the stories and experiences of participants. Replicating these methods could produce an interesting collection of poets' literacy stories—as vital a collection as any in this time of technological and cultural transition.

The sample size that I gathered was relatively small, and the group of poets I spoke to was relatively homogeneous. As I mentioned in Chapters One and Two, my study is most readily representative of a group of poets who produce relatively static, print-centric poetry (as opposed to hypertextual or visual/kinetic digital poetry). Nearly all of my participants have graduate academic training in creative writing, and several of them make their living in academia. In terms of other factors of difference, my participants were again homogeneous. While my participants are both male and female, they do not represent much diversity in terms of race, ethnicity, age, class, sexuality, or ability. Instead of seeing this homogeneity as a liability, however, I prefer to see it as an invitation for further study. The poetry community in the United States is huge; it is

populated by poets who represent an enormous variety of professional, educational, and social difference. Future studies would take into account the diversity of these populations and work with them to learn about the ways that digital technologies impact their poetic practice.

While this study has taken a close, limited look at the way a small group of poets use digital technologies, as of the time of this writing there have been no large-scale quantitative studies focused on the digital technology use of poets or creative writers writ large. Understanding the ways that large populations use writing or technology is always challenging, but I would like to undertake such a study. A study such as this could be useful in many ways. It could provide insights in issues of access, determining whether or not poets and creative writers who have more consistent connectivity to the World Wide Web are better positioned for publishing their work, or gaining other professional advantages. It could also be useful in terms of understanding how publishing in electronic versus print formats affects the publishing or teaching careers of poets and creative writers. Because digital writing and publication are fundamentally shaping the ways that poets and creative writers do their work, it is extremely important that we attend to the ways that the digital is shaping professionalization and professional activities of poets and creative writers.

Following that, an argument that I would like to make in the future is that poets are, in fact, professional writers. Key to my argument would be an examination of poets as highly sophisticated document designers. Poetry is as visually and typographically varied as it is stylistically varied. To realize their particular artistic visions, poets must be skillful in manipulating word processing and text design programs. I would like to

explore how these poets learn to create their work within these programs, and how they change these programs *with* their work. I believe that a study such as this would elevate the status of poets as writing professionals and contribute to a new way of understanding what constitutes "technical skill" in poetry.

The Path Goes On: My Story

I have a confession to make: it has been quite a long time since I wrote a poem.

I feel more than a little sheepish admitting this, since I have spent so much time and energy over the years building and maintaining—and sometimes defending—my own identity as a poet. After all, a poet is someone who writes poetry. But, after completing this study, I have learned that to call oneself a poet is to acknowledge one's participation in a hugely complex vocation.

To call oneself a poet in America in the twenty-first century requires attention to composition, publication, and distribution of poetry, among other things. One cannot focus on artistic creation to the exclusion of all else.

To call oneself a poet is to be a participant in a revolution—a revolution of advocacy for poetry in the face of a struggling economy and a burgeoning literary scene. A revolution for advocacy in the face of crumbling industrial infrastructures and soaring digital infrastructures.

To call oneself a poet is to write poetry, to read poetry, to publish and distribute poetry. To perform poetry, to share poetry, to send poetry across thousands of miles of singing cable and back. To call up a poem from the warm chrome of a MacBook. To tap a poem out through an ergonomic keyboard.

To call oneself a poet is to be a cyborg.

It is the twenty-first century and I am an American poet.

And now, gentle reader, it is time for me to go to my notebook, my desk, my laptop computer—and write a poem.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Oral History Interview Protocol I

INTRODUCTION
- Greet participant

- Introduce interview process: With your consent, this interview will be recorded using eCamm video recording software for Skype. The interviews will be transcribed, and files will be stored in a locked file cabinet/security enabled computer file, to be accessed for reference if needed (refer to consent form). You may also refuse to answer any question I ask you.

- Describe project goal for the interview: The purpose of this interview is to ask you to reflect upon your history as a poet and as a user of digital technologies. What we hope to understand is how you make meaning through the intersection of your poetic literacies and your digital literacies.

General Background

- Tell me a bit about your history as a poet: how you first learned to write poetry, when you first learned, where you first learned, who taught you?

- Tell me a bit about your history with computers/digital technologies: how you first learned to use them, when you first learned, where you first learned, who taught you?

- Can you tell me about when you first began using computers/digital technologies to do work with poetry?

The following is an example of the types of questions the researcher will ask during the interview. However, the specific language and content will be contingent on the data collected during the interviews. Depending on the interviewee's responses, some of the questions may have to be modified, removed or additional questions might have to be added during the interview itself.

- What is doing poetic work with digital technologies like?

- Can you walk me through a typical instance of doing work with poetry and computers/digital technologies?

Appendix B: Oral History Interview Protocol II

INTRODUCTION
- Greet participant

- Introduce interview process: Again, with your consent, this interview will be recorded using eCamm video recording software for Skype. The interviews will be transcribed, and files will be stored in a locked file cabinet/security enabled computer file, to be accessed for reference if needed (refer to consent form). You may also refuse to answer any question I ask you.

- Describe project goal for the interview: The purpose of this interview is to ask you to reflect on a particular poetic/digital text/artifact that you've created, which is _____ [specific digital/poetic text/artifact]. What we hope to understand is how you used your poetic and digital literacies to create this particular artifact, as well as what your poetic and digital literacies mean to you.

General Background

- Tell me about how you created _____ [digital/poetic text/artifact].

- What is important to you about poetry in general?

- What is important to you about computers/digital technologies in general?

- Why do you use computers to work with poetry?

- Tell me about how you see the relationship between computers/digital technologies and poetry.

- Is there anything else you wish to share about yourself at this point? This would be anything you want me as a researcher to know or anything you feel adds to, clarifies, or should be considered as important as the questions above.

The following is an example of the types of questions the researcher will ask during the interview. However, the specific language and content will be contingent on the data collected during the interviews and on the artifacts provided to the researcher. Depending on the interviewee's responses, some of the questions may have to be modified, removed or additional questions might have to be added during the interview itself.

- What would you like to do with computers/digital technologies and poetry that you can't or won't do right now?

- How/when/where/why do you see yourself using computers/digital technologies with poetry in the future?

- Is there anything more you wish to share about your relationship with computers/digital technologies and poetry?

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