Reflections on Community Future Casting:

Digital Storytelling to Inspire Urban Solutions

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& Amy Youngs, Ohio State The authors have provided, here, a brief introduction to their digital article, which can be found online at http://go.osu.edu/cfc-reflections.

the leadership Catherine Girves, Lorrie McAllister, Dickie Selfe, and Amy Youngs began a grant-supported community-media project, Community Future-Casting (CFC), meant to create change in the neighborhoods around The Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio. This introduction aims to give the reader an overview of the project, its theoretical framework, and reflections of project participants. The leadership team invites readers to visit the media-rich web http://go.osu.edu/cfc-reflections, linked from the *Reflections* web site < http:// reflectionsjournal.net/> where they have assembled text, audio, and video clips that tell the story of the project in more detail and give voice to this community work.



Hudson Street Corridor Brainstorming Meeting

The CFC Project: Overview

Community Future-Casting is an interdisciplinary, institutional, community-led media project that relies primarily on a specific community organization—The University Area Enrichment Association. Units and departments at The Ohio State University are also contributing by supplying technology support, helping with project management, and encouraging video production approaches like brainstorming, storytelling, and storyboarding. The most important results of the project will come out of the communityled, future-casting media projects produced for and by local citizens. In the near future (Fall, 2012), each community team will present their projects to community members, city planners, grant agencies, corporate representatives and government officials in an effort to improve the quality of life in the University District. Adding another level of complexity, as we describe in more detail later, the CFC leadership team members are also conducting a literacy research project that allows the community team members individually to

speak about their CFC experiences: some of those voices are exciting and some very challenging. Readers/Listeners of the online article will hear those voices at http://go.osu.edu/cfc-reflections. They will also find more information about the project's research approach in Appendix A of the online article. Largely because of our on- and off-campus collaborations, including the research component, the CFC leadership team received a two-year, approximately \$30,000 Research and Creative Activities (RCA) grant from the Division of Arts and Humanities at OSU. The project is now in its second year.

Starting in earnest during the Summer of 2011, the CFC leadership team's goal was to address digital divide concerns by encouraging University District community members (youth and adults) to identify problems and opportunities in a community space important to them: parks and open spaces, corridors, bridges, ravines, schools and schooling spaces, businesses, houses, housing projects, and the like. In our initial plans, outlined in the grant, these teams would work in and receive support from the Community Computer Lab (CCL) run by the University Area Enrichment Association (UAEA). Catherine Girves directs both the UAEA and the CCL and was instrumental in initiating both. Each CFC team will be supported by OSU faculty, graduate, and undergraduate students as they create digital media products that represent the past, present, and *one potential future (future-casting)* of their self-selected community space.

Our initial pilot video, the Hudson Corridor project, is about three minutes in length, took a year to produce, and is meant for audiences such as local community members and groups such as the Columbus City Council, where any citizen can request to speak for three minutes without prior arrangements; the Columbus Foundation, a centralized community grants organization; OSU's off-campus planning group; or, in this case, the Ohio Department of Transportation. The Hudson Corridor group wanted to draw attention to a busy and seemingly neglected segment of Hudson Avenue in Columbus that borders several pocket neighborhoods. The group aimed to improve this area through advocacy for greener, cleaner, and safer treatment of this avenue. The final video was the result of many hours of neighborhood meetings, storytelling, planning, and composing. The first future-casting video about the Hudson Corridor in the Glen

Echo neighborhood, has been completed and is viewable on the Vimeo.com website http://go.osu.edu/HudsonSt.

Past Projects and Theory

Community Future-Casting is one of several community media projects that Dickie Selfe has worked on over the past four years. Each was an attempt to set up spaces, events, and the technical/ human support systems in order to encourage community members to participate in some type of digital storytelling. He and his colleague, Aaron Knochel, now a faculty member in Art Education at SUNY New Paltz, made a case for community-centered media work in another publication based on a project started back in 2009. In that online article called "Spaces of the Hilltop: A case study of community academic interaction" the authors followed the lead of other scholars of digital rhetoric who had built community programs of their own: Jeff Grabill (2007), Adam Banks (2011), and the collaborative team of H. Louis Ulman, Scott DeWitt, and Cindy Selfe (forthcoming). In addition, they incorporated the concerns of important scholars in composition like Beverly Moss (2010) and Ellen Cushman (1998), both of whom address practical, ethical approaches to interacting with community groups. In their article about community academic interaction, Dickie Selfe and Aaron Knochel also explored the formulations of social theorists like Michel de Certeau (1988), Arturo Escobar (2008), and Bruno Latour (2005), applying those theorists' approaches to the digital community literacy work they conducted in the Hilltop area of West Columbus, Ohio. Interested readers can read the more "theoretical interludes" (as they were called in that article) in the Spaces of the Hilltop article http://kairos.technorhetoric.net/16.3/praxis/selfe_knochel/index. html. Those concepts, motivations, and challenging goals are well reflected in the CFC project. For Selfe in particular, the changing digital literacies reported by CFC video team members keep the project fresh and exciting. But for the leadership team, this project is centered on the thoughts and feelings of people in the communities, with a particular focus on how they work to effect change, and what they want for their communities. The collective goal of this project, as it was with the scholars and theorists listed above, is to keep the futures that community members imagine in front of us

and subsequently find ways to involve academics and OSU students productively in support of these emerging community futures.

The CFC Leadership Team

Neither the RCA grant mentioned above nor the beginning stages of the project would have been completed without the involvement of all members of the leadership team. Building off of Catherine Girves' strong commitments and connections to the University Area community, were two other community members who also happened to be working at Ohio State University across the street: Amy Youngs and Lorrie McAllister. Amy Youngs is currently a faculty member of the Art and Technology division in the Department of Art at OSU. Youngs has expertise in creating experimental moving image art and in mentoring students who are creating artworks that involve technology. She has had extensive national and international experience creating and exhibiting interactive new media art objects, videos and installations. Her current research interests include community art projects that create experimental interfaces between urban nature and human inhabitants (see her artwork at: http:// hypernatural.com/). In addition, Youngs also motivated the rest of us to look beyond the typical digital storytelling genre—most often composed of an important personal story reflecting on the past as we designed this project. As powerful as those stories can be, her leadership convinced us to look forward as well, to encourage community members to imagine a better future in each of their place-based videos.

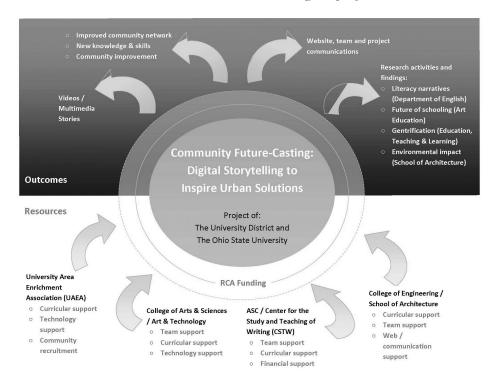
Lorrie McAllister is a former Digital Media Curator for the Knowlton School of Architecture who has worked with digital media and educational web applications for over ten years. Among other skill sets, she brought her experience in digital media management and preservation, intellectual property, video editing, and community work to this project. McAllister also connected Selfe and Girves, which seeded this project team. McAllister spent the first year of this project helping to organize leadership team activities and co-lead the Glen Echo Neighbors Civic Association video project. She has since accepted a position at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) as a Digital Collections Strategist and Architecture Librarian, although she continues to be involved and committed to the completion

of this project. It was McAllister who noted in her audio interview that while the leadership team set out to learn about changing digital literacies, instead, they learned more about community literacy (how to navigate and be a part of a community).

Dickie Selfe does not live in the University Area near OSU but brings to this project about fifteen years of media-based outreach and engagement work in K-12 and community settings. He is the Director of the Center for the Study and Teaching of Writing at Ohio State University and, in that center, coordinates the Communication Technology Consultants. Some of those undergraduate technology consultants end up working with CFC video teams. He is also the primary grant writer for the project.

Project Schematic (for the RCA grant)

The complexity of our project became apparent as the leadership team talked it up among community members and colleagues. As a result, we asked Lorrie McAllister to design a project schematic to



illustrate our workflow visually. We think it helped and hope readers will as well.

Please join us online

With this brief overview of the program, the theories and people, as well as a link to the Hudson Corridor pilot project, the leadership team hopes to encourage readers to visit the media-rich website http://go.osu.edu/cfc-reflections where we try to answer questions like the following:

- 1. How will Community Future-Casting activities change, in any way, participants' technological literacy practices?
- 2. Will community members find community future-casting an effective way to initiate change in their community? What are the complexities of that change, if any? What are the relative successes and failures that they see in their future-casting efforts?
- 3. Will the CFC process change team members' willingness to become local community activists? If so, how?
- 4. Will the CFC process actually help build community? If so, what sort and how does this type of community building work?
- 5. In what ways is the CFC process valuable to team members?

Catherine Girves is the Executive Director of the University Area Enrichment Association, a neighborhood based community operated organization that works to improve quality of life in the neighborhoods surrounding Ohio State University. Catherine has worked as a community organizer and activist for over 30 years, working and volunteering in the area since 1982.

Reflections on Community Future Casting

Richard (Dickie) Selfe is currently the Director of the Center for the Study and Teaching of Writing (CSTW) at The Ohio State University. His scholarly interests cluster around the issues of communication pedagogies, community media, and the social/institutional influences of digital systems.

Lorrie McAllister has a MLIS and was the Digital Media Curator, Knowlton School of Architecture (KSA) where she was responsible for management and support for educational digital media collections and web applications supporting the KSA's educational mission. She is now at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) as a Digital Collections Strategist and Architecture Librarian.

Amy Youngs creates biological art, interactive sculptures and digital media works that explore the complex relationship between technology and our changing concept of nature and self (see http://hypernatural.com). Youngs' work is shown internationally. She received her MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and is currently an Associate Professor of Art at the Ohio State University.

Review:

Dir. Alex Luster (Director). Tony Reyes (Writer). *Stick 'Em Up*. (Shoot, Edit, Sleep and Stone Kanyon Productions, 2011) http://stickemupmovie.com

Jennifer Wingard, University of Houston

o call Stick 'Em Up a quintessential documentary is both a compliment and a critique. It represents praise because the film does what it sets out to do very well: document and celebrate the thriving wheatpaste street art movement in Houston, TX. On the other hand, it is a criticism because unlike its more popular predecessor Exit Through the Gift Shop (Paranoid Pictures 2010), Stick 'Em Up makes no attempt to connect the Houston street art scene to anything outside itself - commerce, politics, or the larger global street art movement. Instead, the film focuses so exclusively on the local that it obfuscates much of the revolutionary history and potential of street art, boiling it down to a series of choices made by individuals, apparently driven only by their craft.

And it is that individualizing of the process, product, and event of pasting that makes the film so indicative of the Houstonian mindset. Houston is a major oil city. It has

not suffered in the wake of our current recession to nearly the extent of the rest of the nation. On the surface, it seems as if there is no logic to Houston's largess, but I would argue that individualism and its hegemony is the underlying logic. It has both the most evangelical churches and the most strip clubs per square mile of any major U.S. city. It has a large diversity of immigrants, ethnicities, and languages. It has the first openly lesbian mayor, as well as the most powerful right-wing State School-board actively legislating today. There are eclectic neighborhoods, wealthy cultural elites, and areas of poverty that do not discriminate. Part of living in the city of Houston and the outlying areas is living and negotiating these contradictions daily.

In certain respects, the artists profiled in *Stick 'Em Up* become representative of those logics. For example, Eyesore, one of the film's most prolific artists, talks about his commitment to wheatpasting and stickers as a form of "pure self expression," one that does not require the recognition of others. However, his work is shown circulating throughout the upper class of Houston as fine art. And one collector who is interviewed discusses how Eyesore produced several limited-edition pieces to sell to high-end galleries and collectors. This contradiction between "art for art's sake" (albeit in a decidedly populist form) and the production of art for sale is one that has been engaged by many artists, operating within various historical formations. However, Eyesore does not comment on or engage with these contradictions. Instead, throughout the film, he maintains that his art is "pure."

Another artist profiled in the film is Give Up. According to one collector, Give Up is the one artist who is "angry and has a message." But throughout the film, that message is not clarified. Instead, we see him pasting up either text only, or sexually explicit images with his tag — 'Give Up.' While working, he discusses how he continues to paste in public even though he knows his images will often get torn down because, as an artist, that is his job. We also see him in his home preparing his images, mixing wheatpaste, and preparing several pieces to mail to buyers. He is the only artist who discusses his lack of money because of his chosen line of work, but he chalks it up to his carelessness with cash. He says, "Once I get money, I just spend it. I don't really care to have it around."

The film juxtaposes Give Up's practice with the filming of the art collector who lives in a well-appointed urban loft in Houston. Yet, the film does not comment, and neither do the wheatpaste artists, on the drastic difference between their living conditions and those of their collectors. Instead, the film chooses to follow the artists while they work and create. Each artist profiled discusses the artistic process as an individual drive that they cannot avoid, not as an attempt to change or disrupt prevailing notions of art, the cityscape, or dominant history.

The final section of the film shifts from the perspective of the artists to that of one individual woman who has been deeply affected by the work of Give Up. Yet her engagement with his art only occurs after his art has been "poached" by another artist (who is not featured in the film). The secondary artist finds Give Up's work and writes "Never" in flowery writing over his prints. The woman, a cancer survivor, describes how seeing "Never Give Up" on an abandoned building after a particularly devastating doctor's appointment changed her view on her treatment and her life. From then on, she was a convert and believer in street art. Not to belittle this Houstonian's experience, but the grounded example offered by *Stick 'Em Up* is one of individual rather than collective engagement. Just like the art collector, who claims he's not an expert, this woman is not an expert either – but she is a real woman who is engaged with the work of the street artists from an individual perspective. Again, individualism reigns.

The film's adherence to individual artistic inspiration is particularly confounding in *Stick 'Em Up* because it engages with wheatpasting and sticker art without ever delving into the aggressively *public* nature of its subject. As an art form, street art and graffiti are often posed as public forms of resistance to not only local city planning, but also to the history of art as an elitist and highbrow endeavor. In the case of street art in Houston, it could be said that the very impermanence of wheatpasting and sticker art engage with Houston's lack of commitment to historic preservation and its continual renewal through gentrification. Old buildings are razed so that new, modern ones can be put up in their place. Instead of holding onto history through restoration, Houston pushes forward to the future through demolition. It could be said that the art form of wheatpasting does

much the same. But this line of reasoning – quite different than the philosophy of street art that Banksy and company propose in *Exit Through the Gift Shop* – remains implicit in *Stick 'Em Up*.

I taught this film in an introductory writing course with a focus on Houston. And although it is flawed in the many ways I describe, it was a valuable film in a course where students were writing about the very city featured in the film. When placed against essays and other films which engage Houston's neoliberal and anti-historic commitments, the students were able to easily analyze the film in much the same way I have in this review. The students not only saw the film as a product of Houston, but they were left with many questions about the history of street art, the political nature of the work, and the economic disparities presented in the film. These questions led to productive discussions about how and why filmmakers choose their subjects, and what filmmakers might not even recognize as bias because of their own located experiences (the filmmaker is a Houston native).

So I return to my opening remark that *Stick 'Em Up* is a Houstonian film in every sense. It celebrates the individual, it occludes issues of inequality, and it fetishizes the new. Each artist and supporter within the film sees Houston's street art, not as a product of a larger global artistic movement, but instead as a means of individual inspiration and identification. The art on the street can inspire cancer patients, fund local graffiti galleries and summer camps, and be washed away just as soon as it is put in place only for the cycle to begin anew. As Give Up says, "Once [the art is taken down] you can just put up something new." In this regard, street art is the ideal medium for the zoning-free, neoliberal city.

Jennifer Wingard is an Assistant Professor of Rhetoric, Composition, and Pedagogy at the University of Houston. Her manuscript *Branding Bodies: Rhetoric and the Neoliberal Nation State* will be released in early 2013. Her current research and teaching focuses on Houston, TX, as a critical site of inquiry within global economic and neoliberal rhetoric.

Review:

Banksy (Director). *Exit Through the Gift Shop.* (Paranoid Pictures 2010)

Lauren Goldstein.

New Mexico State University

lone elephant, awash in red paint and stenciled with gold fleur-de-lis, lumbers through the loading deck of a warehouse on Skid Row in L.A. matches the wallpaper background of a freestanding living room, designed to be the centerpiece of an art exhibition by newlyminted street artist Mr. Brainwash (MBW). The impressive, gentle animal is meant to symbolize the proverbial "elephant in the room," but the joke seems to be on hip Hollywood attendees and Los Angeles press, who don't realize they are the elephant. Through the extensive use of irony, Exit Through the Gift Shop (2010) provokes questions of authenticity and voice in the street art movement—an underground, secretive counterculture that has gone mainstream. The documentary is meant to identify questions and ignite dialogue about free expression, the ownership of public space and definitions of public art. In combination with texts such as Daphne Spain's Gendered Spaces, the documentary

provides a wealth of discussion and assignment topics from which to create conditions for engaged pedagogy in a first-year or upper-level composition classroom.

The documentary introduces us to Los Angeles vintage clothing shop owner Thierry Guetta, who becomes both subject of *Exit* and the director of his own documentary. Guetta obsessively records his family's daily life and follows street artists in a way that makes the viewer (and the other speakers in the documentary) question his sanity and integrity. He explains the root of the obsession lies in his family's decision to never mention his mother's terminal illness until her death. In turn, he tries to capture all waking moments because they will never happen the same way again. It is a strange balance of curated and uncontrolled – private and public displays of messages that director Banksy critiques in *Exit*. This kairotic notion helps Banksy identify the impermanent temporal context of street art that continues to permeate the dialogue of artists in the film (and a productive opportunity for composition students to consider the temporal nature of their own writing).

Early in the documentary, we are introduced to Guetta's street art inspiration — his French cousin, artist Space Invader, who pastes small tile replicas of 8-bit video game aliens above the alleyways and thoroughfares of Paris. Space Invader introduces Guetta to a second artist, Shepard Fairey, who created the iconic red and blue Obama "HOPE" poster of the 2008 presidential election — another example of kairos at the intersection of art and politics. Here, narrator Rhys Ifans situates street art as a "movement" through a range of styles and materials, and piques viewer interest by outlining the danger, rush, and stealth needed to express oneself in a public space. Eventually, *Exit* brings Banksy and Guetta together for collaboration, and Banksy urges Guetta to edit his thousands of hours of valuable footage of street artists (a hodge-podge stored in plastic bins and shoeboxes) into a documentary — a vehicle for his message.

Ultimately, Banksy is horrified at Guetta's resulting 90 minute-mashup trainwreck, *Life Remote Control*. Banksy explains through voice-changer and pixilated black hoodie, "Thierry had all this amazing footage...and it would never happen again." So Banksy

turns the camera on Guetta, and transforms him from hapless director into rhetorically crafted street art persona "Mr. Brainwash." So begins Guetta's egotistical journey as he drains his bank accounts, refinances his business, and hires a staff of 100 collaborators to go into full-swing production on his ironically titled installation "Life is Beautiful." Mr. Brainwash is a rhetorically orchestrated persona, sprung from Banksy's mind like the fully-formed Athena from Zeus. However, there are so many layers of irony and critique, considering Banksy's notoriety as an anarchic artist, even Banksy's own broker admits, "I don't know who the joke is on. I don't know if there is a joke."

Yet Banksy remains Thierry Guetta's Holy Grail. Banksy's allure is evident through his popular anti-war, anti-consumerism messages that scaffold his signature art. For example, Exit highlights his piece, "Balloon Girl," which he composed on the wall of the West Bank. In silhouette, a pony-tailed girl is lifted skyward by balloons, presumably over the barrier. Besides Guetta's obvious interest in Banksy's art, however, the relationship between Banksy and Guetta remains complicated from the viewer's perspective. There is some speculation that Banksy, perhaps along with other street artists, orchestrated the embedded documentary as one direct social critique of mass media, consumerism, and the adverse effects of institutionalized art. This criticism recognizes Guetta's buffoonish tendencies as a product of Banksy's puppeteering. To introduce this layer of consideration in the classroom, it would be productive to utilize Peter Elbow's "doubting and believing" game for students to consider why Banksy might make such rhetorical choices. Officially, however, Banksy denies such claims and insists on his film's authenticity.

Banksy's criticism of mainstream ideologies (orchestrated or not) is evident as Guetta/MBW continues to skyrocket to success despite his inability to actually create art. His team uses Photoshop to digitally manipulate images and employs props builders to execute ideas, while MBW busies himself with hype and promotion. Regardless of the lack of artistic integrity, his "work" is a successful imitation of the styles he'd captured from Fairey and others, and the exhibit, complete with elephant, drew an appropriately hyped crowd. Banksy's social critique, "building" an artist with no real artistic talent, raises

a number of important questions regarding authenticity and voice that prove interesting fodder for the composition classroom. He ultimately concludes, "I used to encourage everyone to make art, I used to think everyone should do it. But I don't do that so much anymore."

The assignments I've constructed in conjunction with Exit Through the Gift Shop ask students to think expressly about how their own bodies and others' move through spaces – to reflect on the complex interactions of public spaces, the written and unwritten rules of social engagement, and teaches them to identify gaps in the rhetoric and dialogue of public space. In first and second year composition classrooms, I've used the opening chapter of feminist scholar Daphne Spain's Gendered Spaces to provide a productive lens for examining this documentary. Though Spain's academic writing style might not be immediately accessible, my composition students were invested enough in examining Exit as well as their own "Create Your Own Space" projects that they made the extra effort to wrestle with Spain's heady theories. This pedagogical strategy creates the potential atmosphere for honest engagement that is so desired in ethos of writers and speakers; it encourages students to challenge notions of mainstream ideologies and critically examine intersections of politics and art.

One criticism of Exit, and an opportune time to invoke notions of power and gender via the Gendered Spaces chapter, is that it lacks female voices. Banksy's purpose as director was to point out holes in the dialog and rhetoric of street art, and so too can students identify gaps in the conversation. Exit introduces artists such as Dotmasters, Swoon, Sweet Toof, Borf (who explains, "Borf is the name of my best friend who killed himself when we were 16, so I do this to kind of commemorate his life"), and Buffmonster. Of these monikers – evidence of artists' underground status – Swoon is the only female artist. These omitted female voices are easily accessible in another documentary short Creative Violation: The Rebel Art of the Street Stencil, which is a mere 20 minutes and doesn't provide the same depth as Exit, but works well in a time-crunched 50-minute class, as well as Cedar Lewisohn's visually-stunning book, Street Art: The Graffiti Revolution which highlights street artists such as Jenny

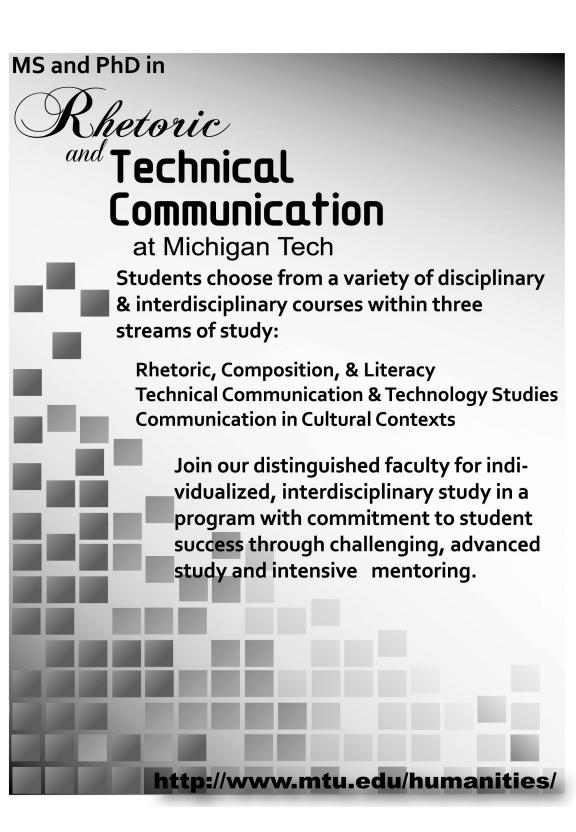
Holzer, Judith Sulpine, Martha Cooper, Miss Van, Lady Pink and others.

Exit Through the Gift Shop is not only an adventure in irony and politically and socially motivated art; it is a fascinating sojourn into the complexities of message, meaning, and public space. The documentary opens the composition classroom space as a forum for students to connect with their own and one another's shared spaces — neighborhoods, suburbs, bus stations and streets — to promote genuine, engaged dialogue and promote the critical and contextual understanding of multifaceted literacies and cultures.

Lauren Goldstein is a doctoral candidate at New Mexico State University. Her research interests include the rhetoric of gender and performance (last year she created Butler for Babies – A Judith Butler Children's Book as a semester project), as well as the impact of aesthetic choices on student engagement and retention rates in online composition classrooms. Assignments and materials from this public space unit, part of a conference project-in-progress, are available at laurengoldstein.weebly.com.

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