

Teaching with Vision, Teaching Social Action:

An Interview with Dr. Kristie Fleckenstein

Lauri B. Goodling,
Georgia State University

Activists and change agents have long used all of the tools and resources available to them to accomplish their goals: they've used their voices (rallies, canvassing, lobbying politicians, even talking with friends about causes near to their heart); the written word (letters to the editor, posters, flyers, and community newspapers/zines); their bodies (strikes, marches, sit-ins, die-ins, even riots); images (charts and diagrams, hopeful and graphic photos—from aborted fetuses to photos of the young, black, brutally murdered Emmett Till lying in his coffin—memes, and graffiti); and they've used technology in whatever ways it has been available to help further their cause.

Since much of the work we do in higher education is preparing the next generation of leaders and change makers, it is important that we are teaching the many literacies (civic, sonic, visual, gestural, digital) that will aid in student-citizens' ability to harness tools for change. Scholarship and praxis in

feminist pedagogy, public rhetoric, civic writing, multimodality, and even classroom activities designed to increase agency and empower our individual students are working toward social and political change.

It therefore becomes necessary to better acquaint ourselves with the people behind the pedagogy, which is exactly what I set out to do in the course of writing my own dissertation, “Civic Engagement 2.0: A Blended Pedagogy of Multiliteracies and Activism.” In her 2010 book *Vision, Rhetoric, and Social Action in the Composition Classroom*, Kristie Fleckenstein focuses on the work of exploring and expanding “behavior designed to increase individual and collective human dignity, value, and quality of life” (i.e., social action) through activities in her writing classes. She acknowledges—as have other scholars (hooks, Gee, Hocks, Kress)—that this requires our discipline to move beyond simply studying language. We must become proficient in using the visual and corporeal as means to communicate and cause social and political change.

So, when a dissertation grant funded an opportunity to meet with Dr. Fleckenstein and discuss her ideas on visuality and social action, how they came to be, how they manifest in the classroom, and how they are impacted by digital tools and technologies, I eagerly embraced it. Recognizing the shift in “action” that has occurred through the proliferation of digital technology, I wanted to understand how Dr. Fleckenstein might perceive the changes in pedagogy or how these new methods might complicate our role in the classroom.

In our conversation, we explored the roots of her interest in teaching social action, as well as the constraints that those of us who do this kind of work must be prepared to face. More importantly, though, we discussed how we might best create a “lively classroom” where we educate our students around multiple literacies and encourage them to become change agents without pushing a particular agenda and while modeling the kind of intellectual and academic freedom so many of us advocate for in higher education.

With a shared goal of disrupting power dynamics in the classroom and beyond and a sincere desire to improve student agency and self-

efficacy, ultimately hoping to increase student engagement with the world around them, Kristie and I sat down over coffee in the hotel during CCCCs and began this lovely conversation.

Lauri Goodling: As scholars, we usually draw from personal experience in the work we do. What experiences in life led you to doing this kind of work?

Kristie Fleckenstein: I was raised in a blue-collar household, where my dad worked on a factory line, so some of my earliest memories were of my parents' low-voiced conversations in the kitchen during periods of strikes. That was my first taste of collective action, both the anxiety of the strike itself and the euphoria with its resolution. Threaded throughout those memories is my unconscious training in politics (even in rhetoric) because my dad was a political junkie, and he wanted to talk politics around the dinner table, in the middle of my homework, and on the way to the Old Depot in Charlotte, Michigan, for ice cream on a Sunday afternoon. So thinking about political action—even if that action only involved informed voting—and engaging in collective action were integral to my childhood. That influenced my own behavior, especially my own entry into civic action during my late teens in the wake of Second-wave feminism and Vietnam War protests. I do remember my parents petrified that I would lose my undergraduate scholarship because of what they saw as my excessive participation in campus protests (it was not excessive at all; if anything, it was overly cautious).

To a large extent, then, I entered my formative years just as the culture around me was seething with social action, from civil rights activism, to peace protests, to gender equity battles. The whole idea of change—radical change—permeated the classroom, especially in college as we advocated for curricular change, for an education more relevant for our needs and for a culture in transition.

But, in retrospect, I see my own personal experiences as less an active participation in political action and more a nagging conviction that our society (as manifested in the mid-20th century) created a set of constraints that systematically limited both the enactment of agency and the critical awareness of the potential of agency among marginalized populations, particularly women and particularly women of color. This was reinforced when I began teaching high school in 1973 in a small rural community in northeast Indiana, where the options and opportunities for my (predominantly white) female students were so limited. (I remember a neighbor once saying in the late 80s that she and her husband did not plan to send their daughter to college because all she was going to do was get married eventually, so why waste an education? However, their son they planned to send—even though he, too, they expected to get married!).

Teaching high school was also a landmark moment for me because I discovered the value of extra-curricular activities. Here I discovered that I could do what I could not always do in the classroom: provide school-sanctioned opportunities for civic engagement. I was lucky enough to sponsor a high school (and later a community college) newspaper, which I loved. That experience provided long-term associations with students, and those associations immersed student-journalists in the political life of the school, the community, and the larger region. The writing they did, the decisions they made about circulating their writing, their discussion of the impact of that writing—all served to foster their sense of and belief in their agency.

LG: The “lively classroom,” for you, is linked to multimodal composition and also seems very effective at disrupting power dynamics in the classroom. How do you see this “boundary blurring” in the classroom environment translating to challenging power and boundaries outside the classroom? Are there particularly effective assignments or activities that you do with students that contribute to student success in this area?

KF: This is a frustrating move to make because, as long as I am working with students in the classroom, everything I invite them to do is

colored by that classroom context, by what Stanley Fish might call its “system of intelligibility.” My students and I jointly “read” through the lens of the classroom. As you and I both know, many of our students want to please us, so, if we point them to ways that they can challenge (what we or they identify as) an entrenched injustice outside of the classroom—large or small—many of them engage because we ask, not because of any intrinsic commitment to civic action. In a way, they respond to the inevitable power dynamic in the classroom: this is what the teacher sees as desirable behavior, so I’ll do it, perform it, produce it.

However, given that, there are some activities I use regularly that I hope might provide a bit of a bridge from the confines of the classroom to a more public sphere. For instance, a common topic in classes I teach consists of a critical examination of space as an open-ended event, as something both creating and created, so that students can see the ways in which spaces inside and outside the academy bring both freedom and constraints, a kind of limited agency. Yes, we can choose and we can act, but always within parameters. In the process of exploring space, and the multiple configurations of place within spaces, students become more aware of both the ideology of space and the ways in which they as agents can intervene to alter space and thus challenge its latent ideology.

To illustrate, in one class discussion concerning campus spaces and activism, my students wrestled with the concept of “free speech zones” at Florida State University, and the controversies that such zones inspire. For example, FSU has been designated by the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE) as a red-light (dangerous) campus because of what this organization perceived as limitations on students’ freedom of expression and, therefore, student agency and civic engagement. However, my students did not find the ideology of space so clear cut.

On the one hand, some students agreed with the red-light label, arguing that free speech zones threatened agency and activism by curtailing—even sanitizing—both. They pointed to the effort by two FSU students from different campus organizations

(FSU College Libertarians and FSU's civil rights student group Dream Defenders) to abolish zones and open the campus up to unregulated free speech in an effort to promote student agency. Similarly, in the aftermath of the Richard Spencer incident at University of Florida, two Florida Republicans filed legislation (the Campus Free Expression Act) in December 2017 designed to guarantee free speech for anyone anywhere in the outdoor areas of the campus of a public university. In each instance, the restriction of free speech to just specific open-air campus spaces (three such spaces at FSU) was perceived as a restriction on agency and civic engagement. Abolishing the restrictions, then, would encourage more students to become civic actors.

On the other hand, students in class pushed back on this position, arguing for a different ideology of space. While the concept of an open campus seems to offer all people the right to speak, they contended, it also ignores two realities: an unequal playing field and the prevalence of hate speech. To elaborate, one student—a woman of color—pointed out that not everyone in our culture is encouraged to speak in open, unscripted forums; in fact, many, she claimed, were actively discouraged from doing so because of fear of audience response. Too many people in an audience, she explained, are trained to actively silence some voices. Thus, she concluded, perhaps the idea of free speech spaces needs to be approached cautiously in order to ensure that the spaces were “free” in more than just name. While this student was concerned with the troubling idea that free speech doesn't necessary mean free speakers, another set of students was concerned that free speech doesn't necessary mean good speech. In particular, they were concerned with the power of hate speech in its myriad forms. If free speech is protected, would that protection extend to verbal micro-aggressions, discrimination, and harassment? How do we balance free speech with its potential abuse, they asked? Teun van Dijk in “The Violence of Text and Talk,” an editorial that opens a special issue of *Discourse & Society* on “The Discourse of Violence” makes this very point, underscoring the necessity of grappling with free speech and the potential of such “free” speech to intimidate, subordinate, or coerce. My students' critical exploration of the ideology of space and its role in their agency as civic participants articulated this very conundrum.

One of the things that Edward Soja says is that human spatiality has both positive and negative effects, but humans can change space in ways that increase positive effects. The tricky part is determining what change will yield a positive result and how we are defining positive.

Along with this critical examination, I have used an assignment that asks students to “design” an image event (a la Kevin DeLuca, *Image*). So they have to determine what they see as an injustice, plan an event (usually involving bodies) that brings attention to that injustice, and select a space for the performance of that event, one germane to the injustice as well as one available to the media, for media coverage is an essential aspect of image event.

Students’ projects have run the gamut in terms of causes and actions. For instance, one student, tapping into FSU controversies, designed a Take Back the Night march in the wake of allegations accusing, first, FSU football quarterback Jameis Winston of rape and, second, administrators of covering up that accusation. The project required the student to investigate the specific steps and permissions (from city and university) required to conduct such a march on campus and through the Tallahassee streets to the state capital. It required her as well to design a campaign to elicit participants and organize the march, culminating in a specific outcome with concrete goals. Another student, one who voiced trepidation for speaking out in any of the campus’s free speech zones, tackled the issue of racism at FSU—specifically the controversy stemming from students protesting the presence of a statue of Frances Eppes, a slave owner and white militia leader who contributed to the university’s birth in 1851. This student designed a sandwich-board poster that covered her front and back, but left her face uncovered, as an embodied rhetoric highlighting the erasure of her body and her perspective as a woman of color in the veneration of Eppes by the FSU community.

While neither of these projects guarantees that students will transform classroom insights into public actions, they both provide the foundation for such a transformation.

LG: You say that “agency relies on an act of imagination, one in which the individual envisions himself or herself as being heard and being seen.” How do you see civic pedagogy contributing to our students’ sense of agency?

KF: Civic pedagogy holds at its heart agency, but a thoughtful, informed, compassionate agency. So, yes, I do see it fostering students’ sense of agency. But I also think that agency is a multilayered phenomenon (as the literature on agency emphasizes over and over again). It is less a “thing” that we possess than a contingent process—an emergent identity, if you will—of an assemblage of co-constitutive elements. Agency is, quite simply, distributed. We “possess” agency only to the extent that we participate in the “process” of agency. So, at the same time that agency is powerful, it is also fragile, dependent as it is on so many transacting factors. In addition, agency is not without its consequences, some negative. For instance, I remember Todd DeStigter’s story of Tammi, a counselor in a Chicago alternative high school, who helped her Latinx students successfully enter into the public sphere to enact agency by influencing local Chicago politics. But I also remember DeStigter mourning Tammi’s death through suicide, a loss that calls us to a fierce commitment to agency and also an equally fierce commitment to supporting agency as a performance that is not without its costs. (Nancy Welch is likewise troubled by agency’s consequences when one of her students is almost arrested for tacking up posters in what the student erroneously thought was a public space.)

So, yes, civic pedagogy is important for fostering agency because it helps our students see the ways in which they can act (perhaps even must act) to change inequities in their lives and environments. But civic pedagogy can also—perhaps even should also?—help students sustain that contingent agency in the face of failures as well as successes, in the face of anxiety as well as confidence.

Even as I affirm the value of civic pedagogy, I am struck by the limitations of our teaching situations. We have our students for such a brief moment. I just wish we could develop more

ways to extend—and thus support the agency process—beyond a single semester. Such strategies could take various forms. For instance, as we foster activism within the classroom, we might also work to connect our students to activism within the local community. Where might they find a sympathetic cohort with whom to make common cause that will support them beyond the constraints of our 16-week course? Another obvious tactic is to help students find that sympathetic cohort within the FSU community, which is blessed with myriad student organizations dedicated to different social justice agendas. A third option is to encourage students to create their own cohorts, even their own student organizations. This option also provides a role for teachers in that they could serve as mentors or sponsors for such a group, especially if that group mirrors their own commitments. Finally, perhaps reflecting my own academic orientation, I can't help but wonder if an ongoing reading group on civic action and social movements—open to undergraduates, graduates, and community members—might provide not only impetus for civic action but also ongoing sustenance for civic action. One semester is better than no semester, but I think fostering and sustaining agency requires more, a kind of long-term support system through either the academy or through the community. The various configurations of that support system would vary from locale to locale, from goal to goal, individual to individual.

LG: How do you address concepts such as privilege and reciprocity in social action, particularly when this work is required for credit? Along those lines, how do you assess/weigh this kind of work in your classes? Is there a particular model for heuristics or rubrics that you'd point others interested in this work toward?

KF: As I alluded to in an answer above, the classroom is a troubled and troubling space for fostering agency, especially through civic engagement because everything a teacher asks a student to do is loaded with "assignment for a grade." I don't think that we can escape that power dynamic. In addition, I am not comfortable "assessing" students' civic engagement, their acts of agency, if you will. However, I am comfortable in assessing their success in designing a campaign or event aimed at supporting change. And I

am comfortable assessing their success in composing the multifaceted (and frequently multimodal) documents intrinsic to that campaign or event . . . all within the parameters of the course outcomes.

That assessment process, however, is inevitably situational, so any heuristic I use starts with the student's description of what he or she hoped to achieve with the campaign/event as well as the student's explanation of the logic behind the action documents. I then assess their projects by balancing their goals and design rationale with assignment-specific requirements.

Finally, I remind them (and myself) of what Aristotle said about rhetoric. In many ways, it's like the practice of medicine, in that a doctor can be successful—can be a good doctor—even if the patient dies (Garver). So we can be good rhetors even if we do not always achieve our persuasive aims.

LG: When considering public sphere theory and the role of “place” in social action, where do you think social media fits in? You call this “cyberplace” in *Vision, Rhetoric, and Social Action*. How is new and social media changing the role of the visual in social action? How can we better teach to this reality?

KF: Given the role that social media played in the Arab Spring, I don't think that anyone can say that social media is not an integral part of social action and civic protest in the twenty-first century. The live streaming of events as they happened, the live tweeting of participants—either directed to on-the-street activists or to a more transnational audience (or both)—had immense influence on local, national, and international support for this social action across different national boundaries. Katie Bridgman in her dissertation (and in various articles) has explored exactly this phenomenon by examining Gigi Ibrahim's use of Twitter in the Egyptian Revolution. So social media has become increasing influential, warranting close scholarly attention.

That insight has only been reaffirmed by the recent protests in Iran—called the largest since 2009—that seemingly emerged

spontaneously in late December. Various media reports on the protests have noted the important role played by social networking services (SNS) media in an era when more than 48 million Iranians, especially young people, have smartphones. The move of the government to close down or limit internet access, such as the app Telegram, underscores the power of SNS.

But even as I say this, even as I praise the potential of SNS to affect social justice activism, I can't help but worry about the flip side: the potential of SNS to promulgate social injustice. For example, I have recently become concerned with transphobia in SNS, particularly Tumblr. With more than 359 million microblogs, Tumblr has become an increasingly popular platform for the LGBTQ+ community, a source of comfort, support, affirmation, and information for users. But it has also become a site of hate speech and hate imagery aimed at transgender individuals, especially transgender women. The vitriol is dismaying, the exchanges (such as "you deserve to get hit by a bus") enacting what Jeremy Engels calls a "rhetoric of resentment," a form of uncivil discourse that divides participants into "hostile camps," sets individual against individual, and erodes the possibility of deliberative discourse between combatants. So, in terms of social justice activism, SNS are definitely double-edged swords. In addition, it is both the verbal and the visual that constitute the cutting edge of this sword.

One outcome of social media has been, as you point out, the renewed emphasis on the visual, which, as Katie affirms in her current scholarship, requires a consideration of the interface as well as a consideration of the cultural lenses that international audiences bring with them to images of social action circulated via social media. So the issue of the visual—its content, materiality, and the social practices within which it is embedded—grows increasingly exigent as a result of social media.

That means that the question of how we respond as teachers to this exigency likewise becomes increasingly urgent. I think that to address this visual proliferation—or, more accurately, to begin addressing it—we have to consider the phenomenon of

looking. We have to remain sensitive to the fact that what we see is inevitably inflected by how we see—and how we see is always poised at the intersection of culture, place, and bodies. This insight affects both what we do as producers of visual rhetoric, what we do as respondents to visual rhetoric, and what we do as teachers of visual rhetoric. Scott Gage, Katie Bridgman, and I have grappled with the issue of the visual in an article recently published in *College English*. In “A Pedagogy of Rhetorical Looking,” we advocate for rhetorical looking as a means to slow down perception so that we do more than glance at an image, especially an image of human-on-human violence. Kevin DeLuca says that a hallmark of our mediatized era is the speed with which we are bombarded with images—and that speed is especially true of a platform like Tumblr or Instagram or Pinterest (“Speed”). But such visual speed is dangerous because it encourages us to engage only superficially with that image. So rhetorical looking slows down perception and determines what we should and can do in response to that looking. Roland Barthes once said that photographs are inherently violent, regardless of content. Understanding that notion of the violence of the visual and of visibility is central to a consideration of social media as a site and tool of social action.

LG: You obviously advocate for teaching visibility and social action in composition studies, but do you feel like we privilege direct action in those lessons? How do you address the digital in your discussions of social action with students? Do you teach digital activism or social media rhetoric, for example?

KF: That’s a good question (or set of questions), especially since I don’t put digital media at the center of any of my courses. I do not consider myself sufficiently well-versed in either the technology itself or the scholarship of social media to organize a course entirely around new media (for instance, I just recently got my first smartphone, and I have no Twitter account!). However, I do address digital social action when I teach, especially when I teach visual rhetoric, focusing on such organizations as the Electronic Disturbance Theater and Anonymous. We also look at the intersection of digital protest with on-the-street protest,

exploring the value of coordinating direct action (on the streets) with virtual action in civic protest . . . as well as the challenges of doing so.

But I wonder if the rise of social media troubles the distinctions between direct action and indirect action, suggesting less a binary and more a continuum of action? For instance, how do we classify circulating a tweet or a YouTube video on Facebook or a blog? Is this direct action? Or “indirect”? After all, writing a letter to the editor is more indirect than marching in a protest parade. So how are we distinguishing between the two, and is that distinction useful? Perhaps sustained social action requires coordinating both. And maybe these are questions to consider as we witness (and ourselves employ) more social media tools in our civic engagement.

I wonder, too, if answering these questions might involve a recalibration of our understanding of social movements, require a new set of questions to ask. For instance, do we need to reconsider what we think we know about social movements as provided by something like John Bowers’s and Donovan Ochs 1971 *The Rhetoric of Agitation and Control*, a book growing out of the 60s’ interest in social movements but also one written before the digital revolution? Are their insights applicable to a different media moment? While the third edition of the book mentions SNS, it does not offer any sustained case studies of social movements conducted primarily via SNS. So it is difficult to determine the impact of particular platforms and circulation across platforms on the generation and sustainability of a social movement. In the same vein, I wonder if something like Laurie Gries’s work in *Still Life with Rhetoric* might provide a way to consider or assess the impact of direct and indirect social action via SNS. Although she does not explicitly address social movements or civic action per se, her book does offer some intriguing avenues for tracking the delivery, circulation, and transformations of visual messages via SNS. It also might offer ways to transform our understanding of social movements as a first step in transforming our practices.

LG: You talk about the “tools” activists use and the importance of those tools “fit[ting] with the vision of the world they are working toward.” Do you see digital/new/social media as disruptive to the existing power structures or mostly a reflection of them? If it’s only a microcosm of an existing hierarchy, how can we better harness its democratizing potential and, for our students, help them find their voice in that space?

KF: I don’t think that we can configure new media in either/or terms, as either inherently hegemonic or inherently democratizing. Do I think that interfaces and software reflect the prejudices and cultural assumptions of their designers? Yes. A great deal of scholarship has helped us see beyond the supposed neutrality of hardware, software, and interface. In addition, we carry with us, always, our own array of deeply ingrained beliefs and dispositions—that complicated tangle constituting what Pierre Bourdieu calls our “habitus.” So, yes, I can see the ways in which such baggage can lead us to replicate power inequities within the digital. But I also think (as de Certeau—and Bourdieu—points out) that we—users of digital technologies—improvise or play in such a way that we open up spaces (and identities) that resist and erode rather than replicate and reinforce entrenched inequities. So, yes, I do believe that we can encourage our students to improvise the democratizing potential of digital technologies, or, perhaps, more accurately, we can study how many of our students are leading the way in doing exactly that.

To illustrate, in a chapter I contributed to Wilkey and Mauriello’s collection *Texts of Consequences*, I talked about Christina, one of my students in an upper division composition theory and practice class I taught. Her final project consisted of the creation of a webzine, *Everyday Adrenaline*. Moderated by a group of friends with similar concern for civic activism, the zine was designed to provide a forum for poetic, artistic, rhetorical, and activist work. Christina posted a message to *Everyday Adrenaline* that she labeled her “call to action”; here she delineated her vision for this space, noting that the problems facing everyone—abuse, genocide, starvation, human trafficking—are all problems that everyone must solve. Therefore, the goal of the zine is to provide

a platform for everyone to do exactly that in their own way. It is students like Christina—generating the site, moderating the site, and maintaining the site for more than five years—who can offer insight into the ways in which the current generation is conceiving of social action and enacting it via SNS. Its birth, its maturation, and its demise can enhance our understanding of what the current generation is doing with SNS to redress social injustice. Study of such sites can also enhance our understanding of what the current generation is not doing.

LG: There are many levels of action; for example, Bill Moyer's MAP model counts four roles in social movements: citizen, rebel, change agent, reformer. Where do you begin with students? Where do you invite them to start, understanding that not all temperaments, personalities, and skill sets are suited for all roles in a movement?

KF: Inviting students to engage in social action is a complicated (and even ethically fraught) endeavor because there is no social action if it is coerced social action. And required assignments bring with them a sense of coercion. So I struggle with how to craft assignments that invite some level of social action without requiring overt (or what you call "direct") social action.

One of the ways in which I diverge from conventional approaches to social action is that I conceive of it operating on three levels (that I borrow from Johan Galtung's work with violence): direct, structural, and cultural (see Galtung "Cultural"; "Violence"). This means that, for me, social action can emerge from a student grappling with and transforming a painful family relationship, taking agency by altering a destructive behavior ensuing from that relationship. To me, this is a species of social action, for in changing the relationship and changing the identity construed by that relationship, the student exercises agency and opens herself up to further agentic actions.

In all honesty, then, I probably approach my students (to use Moyer's categories) as "change agents" first: by identifying areas in their own lives that require change and by then acting

to change those areas, students gain confidence in expanding the scope of change. However, this pedagogical tactic can elicit some extremely sensitive material for both student and teacher. For instance, recently a student's final project took a complete about face. She began with what she perceived as the injustice of punishing men for accusations of sexual harassment without due process. Then, in conference with her about the impetus for her paper and her goals for change, she confessed that she had been sexually assaulted on campus at the beginning of the semester; the assault, she shared, was painful enough but the aftermath was excruciating because so many of her friends blamed her, implicitly if not explicitly. This, then, became the focus of her final project: the myriad ways in which victimization is replicated in friends' everyday actions and the mechanisms that can be put in place to support victims through not just the legal system but also the social system. Situating change within the individual's life underscores the levels of change in play in any social change, from our mundane activities to our engagement with large-scale social activism. It seems as if this realization is at the heart of everyone's participation in social action as citizens; after all, choosing to vote means that you believe you can be a change agent through voting. All is predicated on that belief in one's identity as a change agent and then maintaining that identity in the face of inevitable setbacks.

LG: In what ways do you see notions of "spectacle," "participatory citizenship," and "visual tableau" enacted in activism today? How are these concepts impacted by digital media?

KF: Even a cursory examination of the history of social action (and I'm thinking particularly of the nineteenth-century in the United States) underscores the relationship between visual technologies and civic participation. For instance, I think of the ways in which Josiah Wedgwood harnessed the affordances of the cameo to craft the kneeling slave medallion that became the icon for the British Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade in 1787. I think, too, of the impact of the circulation of an illustration depicting the stowage area of the British slave ship *Brookes*, where more than 600 men, women, and children were so tightly

crammed that they had little-to-no mobility. These instances of visual rhetoric took advantage of the visual technology of the day to perform social action. We can leap forward to the twentieth-century to see the ways in which Martin Luther King, Jr., used television and print photojournalism to document brutal repression of peaceful marches (and I'm thinking specifically of Birmingham here in 1963). We can see similar examples in the use of social media in the Arab Spring and Black Lives Matter.

But even as we see evidence of the USE of visual technologies for social action, I also think that there is a reciprocal relationship between technology and strategies of social action. What I mean is that the design of a particular campaign is influenced by the particular visual medium available. If we go back to consider DeLuca's concept of image events (*Image*), we see evidence of that: dramatic tableaux crafted with the televisual medium (and now iPhones of the citizen-photojournalist) in mind.

LG: Interesting the emphasis you put on "design" of activist campaigns. This implies a very deliberative approach to action. How do you think the situation is made different by spontaneous action? Does a lack of planning (or "design") impede the effectiveness of a campaign, and if so, is that ameliorated by capitalizing on the kairotic moment?

KF: This is an interesting question, and I don't think that it has an "either/or" answer. Maybe it's both/and? Let's consider Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Birmingham March in 1963 (which I mentioned earlier) as a kind of test case because it seems to be a perfect example of both/and, of design and kairos. For example, the site of the protest was carefully chosen, in part because of the presence of commissioner of public safety Eugene Connor, a rabid segregationist; the time was carefully chosen (the Easter season to disrupt downtown businesses); the leaders to be arrested (Abernathy and King) were discussed; and the participants were carefully trained in nonviolent protest. However, kairos was at play as well, for, while the organizers suspected that Connor might react violently to the protests, they could not predict it. In addition, as a result of unexpected city politics, the original

timing of the protest's opening move was delayed. So the protest was designed. However, many of the specifics of the protest, including the use of children and teenagers, were made in response to the demands of the moment, to *kairos* (see Johnson).

Finally, in terms of design and *kairos*, at what point does a single act—either individual or collective—become a movement? To be a movement, does there have to be at least a modicum of planning? I'm thinking here of the Occupy Wall Street protests or possibly even the recent protests in Iran. Perhaps, *kairos* alone is rarely enough; effective social protest may require deliberation and planning to sustain itself if a single instance of protest fails to elicit the desired change. Ultimately, the answer to this question might depend on the specific context and specific goal(s) for each instance of activism.

LG: Teaching critical thinking has long been valued in our discipline, but critical hearing and looking have been mostly valued in art and music, advertising, and communications until fairly recently. To what do you attribute this shift, and why is it important for compositionists to teach these literacies and for students to acquire them?

KF: Cheryl Glenn and Krista Ratcliffe in their individual works as well as in their co-edited anthology on silence have established the importance of critical listening or rhetorical listening. Furthermore, the rising interest in sonic rhetoric and in aurality as an element of multimodal composing signals the necessity of critical hearing. But critical looking is also extremely important, as I try to make clear in *Vision, Rhetoric, and Social Action*. What we see and how we see are inextricably intertwined, and both implicate how we respond to what we see. As scholars since the visual turn have pointed out, human perception is neither neutral nor transparent. It is constructed, inflected by physiological, cultural, and affective factors. Thus, the cost of failing to look critically—to look rhetorically—is considerable. I mentioned earlier the article I co-authored with Scott Gage and Katie Bridgman on our advocacy of rhetorical looking as a means to looking and acting critically in response to atrocity images. We describe it as a recursive process of

looking-through to identify our own agency in perception, *looking-at* to assess the influence of ideology on our perception, *looking-with* to remap our affective relationships to our evolving perceptions, and, finally, *looking-into*, by which we shape an answerable action in response to our evocation of the atrocity image. While rhetorical looking encompasses critique, it moves beyond critique to generate an action that dialogues with the student's rhetorical looking and then projects forward to dialogue with others' future actions. We see it as an important element of pedagogy in this visually complex era where images, especially images of atrocity, proliferate.

LG: Over the last fifty years, we've seen many turns and trends in our discipline: the public turn, the digital turn, the social turn, and the political turn (Carter and Mutnick). If you had to predict the next trend or turn, maybe the one that will accompany Web 3.0, what would you guess it might be?

KF: I'm not sure if my answer to this question is more an expectation/prediction than it is a hope. What I would like to see, and I believe that we are currently witnessing the evidence of this sea change, is a somatic or corporeal turn. However, this renewed attention to bodies and embodiment rejects naive biological determinism; instead, it perceives bodies as what Jane Bennett in *Vibrant Matter* calls "lively matter," as an event rather than a discrete entity. The emerging interest in new materialisms and affect theory points to a corporeal turn that configures bodies as assemblages of transacting elements—what Gregory Bateson would call an Ecology of the Mind—where the boundaries demarcating the separation of one body from another or of one body from its surroundings are rendered moot. Even the idea of "one body" becomes passé as we conceive of body and context as co-extensive, co-constitutive. Where the body begins and ends becomes less a question of body per se and more a question of the body doing something. It is in the doing that the body defines and redefines its borders, its identity.

As digital technologies create more and more possibilities for the illusion of disembodiment, the somatic or corporeal turn becomes more and more crucial. This is especially true for those

of us committed to social action on whatever level, for isn't the body at the heart of social action?

LG: Yes! We've already begun to see this corporeal turn in such recent movements as the "die-ins," which I mentioned earlier, which began in response to the controversial deaths of black men at the hands of police and have now been co-opted by those protesting new campus-carry legislation and the repeal of "Obamacare"; with the "human chain" protests organized in opposition to the administration's recent travel bans; and by those hundreds of anti-Trump protesters who have used their bodies to spell out the word "RESIST" in various public locations. Even a decade ago, though, we saw this gestural rhetoric played out when, on the 200-year anniversary of the abolition of slavery in England, students at Durham University publicly re-created the Brookes slave ship by lying on a full-size print out of the ship.

We've also seen renewed challenges to controversial speech on college campuses, with growing numbers of protests aiming to silence speakers with whom student protesters disagree. Considering these types of embodied social action, how do you feel about the emergence of campus "free speech zones" (and TPM – time, place, and manner – restrictions) and the impact they have on our students' ability to engage or participate in social action? What message do they send to young/new activists?

KF: My students have wrestled with the pros and cons of free speech zones, as I mentioned earlier, and there are no easy answers. For instance, one of the interesting aspects of the Campus Free Expression Act proposed in Florida is that heckling is proscribed by the bill. So the legislation, as it currently stands, opens up all outside public areas of a campus to free expression at the same time that it prohibits one specific kind of expression.

I actually think that the controversies swirling around free speech and free speech zones are important for social activism because they keep us focused on the very porous boundary between free speech and hate speech. Alexander Tsesis's book *Destructive Messages* tracks the ways in which hate speech serves as a kind

of advanced guard for harmful social movements. Throughout his chapters (on German anti-Semitism, American racism, and others), he emphasizes the means by which hate speech—repeated across time in various forms (from micro- to macro-aggressions)—accretes and through that gradual accretion transforms hatred into the norm, not the exception, into a taken-for-granted reality that, in turn, provides justification for everything from local-level daily injustice to horrific violence. Past instances of hate speech and its power serve as a warning to protect freedom of expression, but we don't want to lose sight of the power inequities that continue to prevent or undermine both freedom and expression for marginalized members of a population.

LG: Do you find it encouraging or unsettling that our current government leaders (from local politicians to the White House) “take to Twitter” regularly on both domestic and international topics? On the one hand, it can be seen as inviting greater engagement, even “transparency,” between citizen and elected official, but it has been highly criticized as demeaning or unbecoming of the office, or even outright immature. Is it better or worse for our democracy to have leaders present, actively engaged, and humanized on social media? What ways might a president use social media more responsibly?

KF: Perhaps the answer to that question is two-fold. What I mean is that it seems as if I have to decide what I consider “responsible” use of social media by anyone involved in civic discourse but especially one who is an inter/national political figure. I want to address “responsible” use by returning to the co-authored article on rhetorical looking that I mentioned above. Scott, Katie, and I define the outcome as rhetorical looking not just as a shift in perception but a shift in perception that leads to what we call, borrowing from Bakhtin, “answerable action.” By this we mean an action that answers to the past by responding to the initiating incident (the atrocity itself and our perception of it via a photographic image) and an action that answers to the future by inviting particular responses that work in concert to ameliorate violence. I see responsible use of social media (or any media) as adhering to answerable action. It invites, rather than

closes down, dialogue; it builds relationships to identify, define, and solve mutual problems. It is answerable to past and future.

So what does this mean in terms of Twitter? Can Twitter be a platform for answerable action? My answer is yes and no. As I previously noted, SNS are a double-edged sword: they can both promote and undercut social justice activism and/or civic engagement. Twitter is no exception. It opens up a site for the free exchange of ideas, but it also closes down that free exchange of ideas in dramatic and dangerous fashion. For instance, Twitter as a platform may work against answerable action, which is so dependent on dialogue. First, Twitter, with its 140 characters (although I hear that they have doubled that for English users), invites sound bites, heavy on emotive appeal and light on nuance. Without due caution, complex issues with no easy right/wrong answers flatten out. Second, the responses to tweets—bound by the same 140-character limit—can reinforce the sound-bite style and the resultant flattening. Finally, the relative anonymity of Twitter responses can easily lead to a lack of accountability, where users jettison the “civil” in civic discourse. What can so easily result is agonistic exchanges with no productive end. That flattening and agonism are further exacerbated by content that highlights the ways in which free speech so easily becomes hate speech. President Trump excels at creating tweets that foster divisiveness, reduce complicated political situations to the size of a red button, and demonize adversaries such as “Crazy Hillary,” “Sloppy Steve,” or “Psycho Joe.” The outcome is a use of Twitter to create a nation of combatants rather than to enhance democratic participation and civic action.

LG: What advice would you offer teachers interested in engaging in civic and public pedagogy—even if only introducing these concepts to their students—who might not know where to begin?

KF: I would love to attend a roundtable where teacher-activists in rhetoric and composition address exactly this question because I suspect that the answers will be as different and as generative as the people speaking. Based on my own experiences in my life as well as in my classroom, I would recommend that teachers

figure out what they want their students to learn as writers and as members of a democratic society. What do they see as the course's endgame? Next, teachers need to figure out who their students are, what they are bringing to the table in terms of their own experiences and aspirations, and what they need as writers, not only to be in the world but also to have a voice in that world. Furthermore, I'd love insights from my colleagues on ways to handle inevitable questions raised by a social action pedagogy. For instance, how do we address as teachers the varying and competing perceptions of what constitutes justice and injustice? How do we respond to students who wish to effect social action aimed at maintaining the status quo? Or, how do we deal with students who advocate a means of social action that relies on or risks some element of violence? These seem to be essential starting points for envisioning a course. How teachers decide to help their students move from starting point to endgame will depend on their answers to these questions, their institutional context, and the resources available to them. It could involve encouraging students to enact agency in their immediate lives, as in reducing their carbon footprint, for instance. It could involve helping students find voice in their immediate families, workplace, or social cohort. It could involve participation in the life of the academic, local, or national communities. Those decisions grow out of each teacher's context and vision, and those decisions, like civic action, depend on the thoughtful confluence of design and kairos, plan and opportunity.

REFERENCES

- Barthes, Roland. 1981. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. Translated by Richard Howard. New York: Hill and Wang.
- Bateson, Gregory. 1972. *Steps to an Ecology of the Mind: Collected Essays in Anthropology, Psychiatry, Evolution, and Epistemology*. Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1972.
- Bennett, Jane. 2010. *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1977. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Translated by Richard Nice. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bowers, John Waite, and Donovan J. Ochs. 1971. *The Rhetoric of Agitation and Control*. Reading, MA: Addison-Westley Pub.
- Bridgman, Katherine. 2014. "Dissolving Transnational Boundaries: Interfaces and Invitations to Embody." Doctoral thesis, Florida State University.
- Certeau, Michel de. 1984. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Translated by Steven Rendall. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- DeLuca, Kevin Michael. 1999. *Image Politics: The New Rhetoric of Environmental Activism*. New York: Guilford Press.
- DeLuca, Kevin Michael. 2006. "The Speed of Immanent Images: The Dangers of Reading Photographs." In *Visual Communication: Perception, Rhetoric, and Technology*, edited by Diane S. Hope, 79-90. New York: Hampton Press.
- DeStigter, Todd. 1999. "Public Displays of Affection: Political Community through Critical Empathy." *Research in the Teaching of English* 33, no. 3: 235-244.
- Dijk, Teun A. van, 1995. "Editorial: The Violence of Text and Talk." *Discourse & Society* 6, no. 3: 307-308.
- Engels, Jeremy. 2015. *The Politics of Resentment: A Genealogy*. University Park, PN: The Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Fleckenstein, Kristie S. 2013. "Imitation and Symbolic Synthesis: Preparing a Face for Rhetorical Agency." In *Texts of Consequences: Composing Social Activism for the Classroom and Community*, edited by Christopher Wilkey and Nicholas Mauriello, 181-208. New York: Hampton Press.
- Fleckenstein, Kristie S., Scott Gage, and Katherine Bridgman. 2017. "A Pedagogy of Rhetorical Looking: Atrocity Images at the

- Intersection of Vision and Violence.” *College English* 80, no.1: 1-34.
- Galtung, Johan. 1990. “Cultural Violence.” *Journal of Peace Research* 27, no. 3: 291-305. (1990): 291-305.
- Galtung, Johan. 1969. “Violence, Peace, and Peace Research.” *Journal of Peace Research* 6, no.3: 167-191.
- Garver, Eugene.1986. “Aristotle’s ‘Rhetoric’ as a Work of Philosophy.” *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 19, no. 1: 1-22.
- Glenn, Cheryl. 2004. *Unspoken: A Rhetoric of Silence*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Glenn, Cheryl, and Krista Ratcliffe. 2011. *Silence and Listening as Rhetorical Arts*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Gries, Laurie E. 2015. *Still Life with Rhetoric: A New Materialist Approach for Visual Rhetorics*. Logan: Utah State University Press.
- Johnson, Davi. 2007. “Martin Luther King Jr.’s 1963 Birmingham Campaign as Image Event.” *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 10, no. 1:1-25.
- Ratcliffe, Krista. 2007. *Rhetorical Listening: Identification, Gender, Whiteness*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Soja, Edward W. 2010. *Seeking Spatial Justice*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Tsesis, Alexander. 2002. *Destructive Messages: How Hate Speech Paves the Way for Harmful Social Movements*. New York: New York University Press.
- Welch, Nancy. 2008. *Living Room: Teaching Public Writing in a Privatized World*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton.

Lauri Goodling is Assistant Professor of English and Associate Dean of the Honors College at Georgia State University – Perimeter College. She teaches first-year rhetoric/composition and creative writing courses. She also serves as advisor for the student literary magazine, *Creative License*, and faculty reader for *The Chattahoochee Review*. Her research and pedagogical interests include digital literacy and activism, multimodal composition, civic engagement, and social media rhetoric.

Kristie S. Fleckenstein, professor of English and director of the graduate program in rhetoric and composition at Florida State University, teaches graduate and undergraduate courses in rhetoric and composition. Her research interests include feminism and race, especially as both intersect with material and visual rhetorics. She is the recipient of the 2005 CCCC Outstanding Book of the Year Award for *Embodied Literacies: Imageword and a Poetics of Teaching* (SIUP, 2003), and the 2009 W. Ross Winterrowd Award for Best Book in Composition Theory for *Vision, Rhetoric, and Social Action in the Composition Classroom* (SIUP, 2009). Her current project explores photography as a resource for visual rhetoric in nineteenth-century debates about racial identities.