

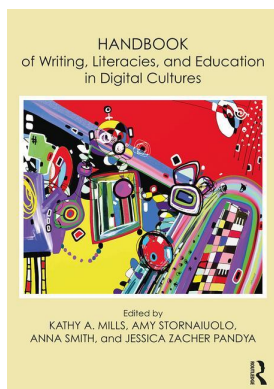
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## **Handbook of Writing, Literacies, and Education in Digital Cultures**

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### **Experiencing Electracy**

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## 3

## Experiencing Electracy

### *Digital Writing and the Emerging Communicative Landscapes of Youth Composing Selves*

Anna Smith and Jon Wargo

The beginnings of this chapter happened quite serendipitously. Sitting alongside one another in a conference room in Bloomington, Indiana, US, we talked across connections between digital rhetorics and literacies studies. The 2015 Indiana Digital Rhetorics Symposium (#IDRS15) was a space where transdisciplinary dialogue emerged. From the algorithmic nature and rhetorical possibilities of code to the movement and vibrancy of choric compositions in what Ulmer (2003) calls *electracy*, we were excited to examine the metaphorical twists and turns of the fiber that weaves digital rhetorics and literacies together. As writing researchers, our work has examined how seemingly mundane “everyday” literacies have large impacts concerning youth voices and identities (Smith, 2015; Wargo, 2015, 2016). We have witnessed how as youth traverse across transmediated contexts, understandings of how, why, and where they write selves are blurred. Though binaries such as digital/analog, online/offline, and virtual/real persist in research and pedagogy, youth are architecting coherent selves on the move, in new contexts, and through new means.

Traveling toward experience, this chapter examines the nexus of digital rhetorics and literacies in education. Writing in an era of electracy, we argue, heightens attention toward *experience*—to the ephemerally emergent, not just retrospectively rational. We open the chapter by detailing distinctions in and between digital rhetorics and literacies, charting what each contributes to understandings of digital writing experience. Then, drawing on data from two longitudinal studies of youth writing, we chart new forays in educational inquiry by attending to how multimodality, *techne*, *praxis*, and mobilities resonate as youth write with place, trope, and culture across new(er) communicative landscapes—focusing on the ways digital writing mattered in the lives of the young people with whom we have worked. This chapter closes by highlighting future research possibilities, meditating on how the particulars of our cases are not generative in the sense that they speak to a broad pattern of digital writing, practice, and mattering, but rather how they illustrate the tensions and possibilities of analyzing and articulating digital writing experience.

#### **Piecing Apart the Fiber: Locating Digital Rhetorics and Literacies**

To understand young people’s everyday composing ecologies, we each began developing a transdisciplinary lens informed by the nexus of digital rhetorics and literacies. Thus, our goal in this chapter is not to reproduce static representations of these fields. Rather, we follow Sullivan and Porter’s (1993) lead to “locate” the interstices of these evolving fields as they inform our current understandings.

Prior to nuancing these particulars, however, we find it worthwhile to lay groundwork by articulating how we think about the “digital” and what we mean by “writing.”

At its theoretical core, the kinds of compositions we refer to as *digital* did not emerge with electronics; rather threads of encoding, multimedia, and hypertext have served multimodal rhetorical purposes for centuries. Arguing that all writing is digital, Haas (2007) describes the rhetorical purposes of multimediated artifacts, such as the uses of wampum belts in American Indian communities, which—with their “interconnected, nonlinear designs and associative storage and retrieval methods” (p. 77)—have long served as hypertextual technologies. With humans’ long social histories layering semiotics to make and communicate meaning, it is not surprising that many architects of early computing put binary coding to communicative purposes early in its development (e.g., Wiener, 1954). With recent developments in wearable technologies, depth and facial recognition sensors, and experience architecture, evolving digital technologies are woven ever more seamlessly, reaffirming the adage that “even in the age of the technosocial subject, life is lived through bodies” (Stone, 1991, p. 113). The digital, in this sense, becomes a thread that sutures (mis)characterizations of online and offline experience and other false binaries. Rather than a distinct form of experience, we angle to see the digital as an imbricated component of our sociophysical worlds through which we make sense of that world and with which we write into the same (Freire & Macedo, 1987).

*Writing*, for us, is an activity that is always already situated, mediated, and social (Prior & Hengst, 2010; Wertsch, 1991). In line with the resurgence of do-it-yourself maker culture (Halverson & Sheridan, 2014), we value seeing composition as more than recognizable finished products, and further still, more than a staged recursive process (Andrews & Smith, 2011). We favor developing a rhetorical sensitivity and affective material engagement that has the potential to be applied across mediums, genres, situations, and contexts. Writing is making (Shipka, 2011). Digital writing, as we see it, is a postprocess theory (Arroyo, 2005). A postprocess stance shifts the goal away from turning theory into practice and instead highlights practicing theory as it emerges. A postprocess theory is indeed a postprocess pedagogy.

### Tracing Perspectives on Digital Literacies

In many arenas, “digital *literacy*” is characterized by its utilitarian value (Bruce, 1997). However, ability represents only a portion of a larger picture painted by those in literacy studies who draw attention to the situated, contingent, and ideologically rooted nature of meaning making across languages, modes, contexts, media, things, and people. Theoretical concepts such as “events, practices, activities, ideologies, discourses, and identities” have been used and developed in literacy studies to discuss the situated nature of literate activity as entangled in the physical and social worlds in individuals’ lives, or as Hull and Schultz (2002) describe, “literacies come stitched tight with activities, identities, and discourses” (p. 27). Digital literacies, in such perspectives, refer to “the practices of communicating, relating, thinking, and ‘being’ associated with digital media” (Jones & Hafner, 2012, p. 13). In such usage “digital” is a modifier that accentuates practices and culturally located conditions within an array of media technologies that overlaps and intersects with literacy as a sociohistorically situated practice.

Suggesting that common text-centric analytic frameworks tend to domesticate literacy’s indeterminacy and thus obscure literacy activity, Leander and Boldt (2013) challenged literacies scholars to leave space for movement, unruliness, emotional investments (Lewis & Tierney, 2013), and affective intensities (Ehret & Hollett, 2014). Stornaiuolo, Smith, and Phillips (2017) further argue that focusing on the emerging, connecting, and mobile nature of a digitally enabled communicative landscape can “foreground how people and things are mobilized and paralyzed, facilitated and restricted, in different measure and in relation to institutions and systems with long histories” (p. 5).

Though conceptualizations of literacy are developing in these critical and expansive ways, there are those who maintain that the term itself, with its long history related to schooling, is too conceptually stifling for the types of participatory composition and social action seen in the current era (Ulmer, 2003). To this end, theoretical apparatuses like *electracy* have surfaced. Originally cited as a paradigmatic shift that emerged in response to the choric invention of the Internet (Arroyo, 2013), electracy has more recently developed as a perspective on (non)representational understandings of delivery, collaboration, social action, and everyday practice (Inman, 2004). Electracy illuminates multiplicities of meanings, augments imagination, embodies parody, and supports invention. Morey (2016) argues,

Metaphorically, electracy breaks from ‘digital literacy,’ as the latter term retrofits a prior logic (literacy) onto a new technology, a logic that was designed for an older technology (alphabetic writing). Thus, a concept of digital literacy closes off possible lines of inquiry that a new, native term and concept would allow to emerge.

(p. 2)

Framed as postprocess pedagogy, Arroyo (2005) suggests electracy as an entry point into theory making and praxis only rendered intelligible through its action, suggesting alternative perspectives on process and practice. Consequently, and as a result of our hyper-mediated contemporary condition, *experience* is taking precedence over explanation and description, or ekphrasis.

### Reading Digital Literacies through Rhetorical Perspectives

Davis and Shadle (2007) argue,

[I]n a technological age, rhetoric emerges as a conditional method for humanizing the effect of machines and helping humans to direct them...Rhetoric is a syncretic and generative practice that creates new knowledge by posing questions differently and uncovering connections that have gone unseen.

(p. 103)

Digital rhetorics, hence, refracts the communicative frameworks in which individual acts of “digital” reading, writing, and being take place. In contexts of evolving writing and literacies, such as those prevalent with youth and youth communities, digital rhetorics of practice and purpose influence how people use, learn, and value the possibilities of text. Thinking about digital rhetorics (frameworks and purposes), as entwined and distinct from digital literacies (practices and processes), provides us a locating mechanism to nuance the curves of emerging (digital) communicative contexts.

We locate our work alongside of Eymann’s (2015) insofar as it is “most simply defined as the application of rhetorical theory (as analytic method or heuristic for production) to digital texts and performances” (p. 44). Digital writing, thus, not only communicates meaning through the genres we write in and/or the modal messages we compose through, but also the experiences we architect. This form of writing, as Duffy (2004) suggests, sees literacies as rhetorical. It considers “the influence of particular rhetoric on what writers choose to say...the words and phrases they use...and the audience they imagine while writing” (p. 227). To see digital literacies from a rhetorical perspective is to consider the dynamism of practice. A digital rhetorics perspective foregrounds race, ethnicity, language, history, and “difference,” foci that often fall to the periphery when solely considering the sociotechnical and rote knowledge of enacting the digital with the machine.

Engaging digital literacies through a rhetorical lens examines the possibilities of understanding composition through ekphrasis (explanation and description), while simultaneously being affected by it as an experience (Conrey, 2016; Farman, 2012). Digital rhetorics helps us to consider what strategies are employed in the production of digital texts, analyze the modal affordances of new media, nuance how digital identities are formed and social communities maintained, theorize the function of ideology and culture in digital work, and inquire about the development of technology in writing research and education.

### Twisting the Knot: Interlocking Digital Rhetorics and Digital Literacies

Although many would argue that digital rhetorics and digital literacies are separate fields, distinct by their logics of (re)presentation and purpose (Eyman, 2015), we twist these interlocking strands to illustrate how the emerging apparatus “electracy” centers *experience* in digital writing. In an age of mobile media and locative literacies, as composing shifts from the page and toward the network, work on and with digital writing demands such a key change. Thinking with electracy, we see four concepts mutually informing a rhetorical/literacies perspective on digital writing: *multimodality*, *techne*, *praxis*, and *mobility*.

#### *Multimodality*

Modal tools, despite their purpose and intent, bring with them different kinds of textual and processual affordances and constraints always already imbued with power. We see multimodal digital writing and its semiotic mobilities (Stroud & Prinsloo, 2015), thus, as a call and response to the ethics of (re)presentation and storytelling of selves. Recent scholarship (e.g., Thomas & Stornaiuolo, 2016; Vasudevan, 2006) draws our senses to multimodality as a construct concerning ethics in exemplary analyses exploring the visual and somatic modes of (re)authoring and restorying narratives of place and self. Taking difference as a resource for (re)making and mediating meaning, multimodal writing is becoming an increasingly important tenet for what Shipka (2016) calls a “compositional fluency,” a fluency that drives toward ways of being, knowing, and being known differently.

In the era of wearable technologies and a mobile Internet of Things, however, multimodality is not merely about the textual product of the “there” (e.g., classroom) but also the “here,” the material realities woven into our everyday. As digital interfaces become more “embedded, embodied, and everyday” (Hine, 2015), so too do the materialities of multimodality. “More and more of our overall cultural experiences,” as Markham (2017) contends, “are mediated by digital technologies... The Internet is so ubiquitous we don’t think much about it at all, we just think through it” (p. 650). Whether worn, read, written, felt, or experienced, the nexus of multimodal *techne* is realized in the movement of bodies, texts, and forms.

#### *Techne*

If multimodality is the means by which communicative landscapes are realized, then *techne* are the paths of navigation by which digital writing twist, turn, and ebb. As we illuminate through our cases of writing research, we think of digital composition as a lived knowledge. Thus, *techne* (often reduced to “art,” “craft,” or “technological knowledge or skill”) is a dimension interested in participation, making, and the acknowledgment of experience (corporeally and digitally). Rhodes and Alexander (2015) detail two broad parameters of this layered approach to the construct: “(1) the acknowledgment and even embrace of the idea of spectacle, the alienating distance between bodily self and representation as a productive space for critique; and (2) the importance of lived experiences to

the formation of an ethical stance” (n.p.). We consider *techne* within such an ethical framework—a digital delivery that can extend new identities and ways of being developing through technologies of participatory composition.

*Techne* manifests in the maker—in the assemblage of activity, genre, histories of participation, and anticipated futures. The craft knowledge that is heightened when exploring digital writing, rather than focused on the rote skill, knowledge, or competency is attuned to the experience of making (Kafai, Fields, & Searle, 2014). *Techne*, further, explores how participation is designed. With digital writing *techne*, we are interested in the following questions: How does the composer augment interactions with and through the digital? How is *techne* functioning for architecting experience (with place, the nonhuman, etc.)? *Techne* does more than examine the efficacy of tools, methods, and rhetorical approaches. It enhances and changes the way we live and learn.

### **Praxis**

In a world often described as “virtual,” “posthuman,” and “augmented,” praxis recognizes the humanizing experience of writing. We think of writing ontologically as a way of being, of sensing ourselves and our world that emerges through and during the writing experience (Yagelski, 2011). Freire (1970) articulates this experience as the “dynamic present,” moments of intensity in which the word, the self, and the world are created as remembered pasts and anticipated futures are enacted in literacy activity. In drawing from Emerson’s (1844/2001) notion of finding or founding in his classic essay “Experience,” Hansen (2010) describes the dialectical tension in praxis of recognizing self in relation to others in the act of establishing the self in the world. Researchers have documented myriad ways youth engage in the ontological self-work of critical literacy praxis through gameplay, remix, and participatory politics threaded across relationships with family (Ellison, 2014), community and institutions (Soep, 2014), and international peers (Smith & Hull, 2012). Zeroing in on the digital that sometimes modifies our ontological understanding of self in relation to the human—self and other—and more (e.g., nonhuman), we think of digital writing as a form of connecting by way of designing and architecting experience for others—to act and transform self and others—to read in a way that transforms self. As we attend to the tropes and realities created in semiotic engagement, praxis alerts us to the textures of the finding/founding compositional experience.

### **Mobility**

In literacies and rhetorics research, attention to the increased circulation and flows characteristic of the era (Appadurai, 1996) is not just focused on the *movement* of people, things, modes, and ideas, but on the power geometries and affective intensities of semiosis in these sociophysical crossings—to questions of access, turbulence, boundaries, hierarchies, and scales (Blommaert, 2010), and the qualities of life these *mobilities* engender (Stornaiuolo et al., 2017). Lemke’s (2000) work with timescales similarly draws our attention to temporal mobility, to what and how writing practice “takes hold” (Gutiérrez, 2008, p. 150), resonates (Stornaiuolo & Hall, 2014), and becomes layered across time (Prior & Shipka, 2003). In recognizing and emphasizing the dynamism of language use, persons, and texts, scholars such as Canagarajah (2006) advocate for shifts in curricular focus from rules and conventions to building repertoires of semiotic codes and navigating strategies of communication. As Moje (2013) notes: “hybridity does not lie in the person but rather in the experience of navigating and struggling across different spaces, discourses, and demands” (p. 366). Digitally composing mobility, through practices such as geocomposing (e.g., Farman, 2012; Rivers, 2016), counter-mapping (Taylor & Hall, 2013), place-making (Phillips, 2014), and writing trade routes (Pennell, 2014), engages critical consciousness and *techne* in (re)mapping desired futures.

### Key Concepts in Motion

To illustrate how this transdisciplinary approach has shifted our focus from ekphrasis toward experience, we trace identity resonances across two longitudinal connective ethnographic (Hine, 2015) studies: First, looking across the developing compositional practices of young men as they navigate a city center, and then zooming in to the compositional experiences of one young man, Zeke. Attuned by electracy, we tell these stories sensitive to multimodality, *techne*, praxis, and mobility composed across their lives. Highlighting the contrastive stories of digital literacies amidst distributed learning ecologies, the young men's digital writing not only illuminates how learning lives are situated and informed by a number of social relations and locations, but with a rhetorical perspective on their literacy practices, are also instantiations of desire, being, and relation.

### *Feeling Tropes: Young Men on the Train*

"I go to Midvale High School...it's such a long train ride from where I am," explained Aaron, a sixteen-year-old African American young man I (Anna) met as part of an ethnographic study of young men's transcontextual writing development. The study crossed multiple contexts in an urban setting including school, community, and digital platforms, focusing on one out-of-school educational organization, Urban Word NYC (UDub), that the young men had in common (see also Smith, 2015). At that time, the city's complicated high school choice system left each of the young men I met with long daily commutes—often over an hour—across the five boroughs of New York City. Aaron continued,

...I guess my reflection [in the window] inspired me to write. I could see myself from the other side—sitting down, on the train, and it's at Church Avenue, and now it's at Newkirk Avenue, and finally, it's at Flatbush, and everyone gets up, and we walk off.

As the primary form of transportation, the felt experience of using the subway—the jostling of strangers' bodies against each other, the repeated mechanical motions of starts and stops along a track, the quick rushes of wind wafting scents—not only thematically frequented the pieces Aaron and the other young men composed, the train as trope became more apparently influential to how they, and Aaron in particular, interpreted the world—the epistemological stances that resonated for him as he made sense of who he was as a Black young man in the city preparing to transition from high school.

With headphones and mp3 players, second generation iPods, and hand-me-down smartphones, the young men's commutes traversed across a digitally augmented landscape. Devices in hand, much of the young men's writing and studying of others' multimodal compositions of various sorts—music, poetry, videos—were done in transit. One of Aaron's pieces, "Asthma," began as he jotted down words he had in mind as he sat on the train, "I take frequent breaths with the city. With the city I breathe. On the platform as my train arrives. From the platform, I leave." To explain the metaphorical representation of the train routes repeated routine starts and stops as the city's breath, he mentioned that he felt his identity was "lost in it." I asked what he meant, and he explained taking long breaths, "Sort of like [*takes a breath*]. Everyone's doing what they're doing, and that's what gives life to a city. And so when I say 'lose identity,' it's because it's greater than me. [*pauses*] So, right now I'm [*takes four long breaths*]." He explained that these words served as placeholders for a companion digital composition that he was simultaneously composing to manifest the essence he could not capture in poem form:

It's like, again, again, again...I just want[ed] to find something to express. I could see it sort of like on a screen, all the different slides... It can be this day, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday,

Thursday. Different clothes, same, same attitude. Different clothes, same attitude. Same feeling, you know, different, different weather. That's why I think it's—that's why I feel that it's beyond, um. It's something that exists that I can't talk about.

Composing on the train was often this sort of dialogical, transliterate techne crossing devices, genres, and modalities. In the register of experience, Aaron's designs were not just to be decoded but to be felt and lived.

The train motif not only arose in the pieces Aaron composed, but ever more frequently in the way he explained how he was thinking about his future. He explained his future occupational choices as options along previously laid tracks for a newborn child,

You know, like be a lawyer, be a doctor, all these things, these paths that are laid out before him before he even existed, and in thirty years this child should already be doing one of those—something that is already created.

The digital writing praxis involved extended effort in working with and through this frame of reference in the pieces he composed: "There's always this train," he explained as he reflected on his composing processes, "and there's always the fear of coming of age right now, or growing, and there's always a train involved."

Patrick, a seventeen-year-old African American young man, was similarly engaged in an extended exploration he called, "a journey to manhood" (see Smith, Hall & Sousanis, 2015). He too tried on the train-as-established-sequence trope in his compositions for a time. While composing one piece inspired by watching a woman make her way down a train car taking donations for the poor, and imagining her at different stages of life as she weaved, he established a new writing process of drafting on a laptop, printing off a draft, and placing it in a folder designated for writing process stages learned in school: prewriting, drafting, revising, and editing. This lock-step digital then analog process differed greatly from a previous process he called "just living," which included composing in his mind and on a mobile device as he walked aimlessly through a park near his home. In extending the train metaphor as techne, his process grew increasingly regimented, and the frequency and variety of composition styles with which he wrote decreased. Finding this trope discordant, he returned to the "just living" approach and ceased using the train metaphor in his pieces, processes, and ways of thinking about being on a "journey to manhood."

Over an hour by transit from home, and at just 16, Aaron's mother became nervous about the extended commute to and from UDub after school for workshops, events, and interviews. Our research was taking place during an era marked by aggressive stop-and-frisk policing, a policy which raised particular fears of targeted racial profiling of Black and Latinx young men across the city (Haddix & Sealey-Ruiz, 2012). Aaron stopped attending workshops and only occasionally came to events, halting his participation in research activities in the process. While the other young men's physical mobility around the city, and their compositional approaches diversified as they leveraged relationships and opportunities in relation to UDub, Aaron's became more restricted (cf. Harper, 2013). In considering the role that this transportation played in their digital writing praxis, coming to understand the young men's practices necessitated more than setting the research site in motion but required responsive sensing of the intertwining finding/founding praxis of self, composed and resonating.

### *(Re)writing the Rhetorical Here and Now: Zeke's Lifestreaming*

Zeke (he/his), is an African American seventeen-year-old gay cisgender male student who participated in Jon's longitudinal empirical study examining how lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT)



youth of color navigated inequality through digital writing. Zeke was a student at an urban arts magnet high school in a medium-sized Midwestern city. A self-proclaimed artist, Zeke leveraged the resources of the school to write his way into more academic and school-sanctioned literacies. He also used the arts “to perform” (his words) Black masculinity. Zeke navigated the tensions of be(com)ing “masculine” and Black through a number of digital literacy practices and rhetorical acts. I (Jon) focus on one, digital lifestreaming, as it was the expressive means which most textured our time together.

Throughout the larger study, I navigated youth lifestreaming, the “ongoing sharing of personal information to a networked audience” (Marwick, 2013, p. 208), to explore how identities converged across contexts. Temporally, lifestreaming charted linear frames for understanding histories of participation, experience, and personal interest. As I argued elsewhere (Wargo, 2015), these youths’ lifestreaming with new media operated to comment on identities and the politics of schooling, and to connect to queer culture. For Zeke, lifestreaming crystallized through multimodal expressions of electracy, the layerings of texts and technologies, and the experiential practices of queer rhetorics. Lifestreaming was not a rhetorical act of composing but rather a decomposing and recomposition of self. Zeke transformed his identity into a *techne* and *praxis* for tomorrow.

Zeke’s digital writing, in comparison to the other youth I worked and learned alongside of, was primarily refracted through intersections of race and gender. It presented a multimodal counterstory to the cisgender masculine expression he displayed in the larger arts magnet community. “Feeling Black” (his words) for Zeke was an experience that forcefully invited itself into every facet of his life. Whether captured with his iPhone and mediated through Instagram or affectively felt through reblogs of the white male body (Zeke’s “type”), desire was located online and stitched onto the body. “It’s like you throw up that hoodie,” Zeke explained to me, “and you look like everyone else here. Last thing I want people to see me for is a fag.” “It’s not like I’m homophobic,” he continued. “I like dudes. It’s just I can’t show it. I go to church, I go to work, people know. It just isn’t me. I’m not flashy like that.” Curious, I asked him about the various sitings of queer literacies work done online, as I continuously noticed sexually explicit material lining his Tumblr dashboard throughout our dialogic selection of lifestreaming work. “Well yeah,” Zeke went on, “but you can really be yourself there.” Queer was performed across the *techne* and invention of writing. He located the elsewhere of desire in the more mundane here of performative masculinity. Zeke presented a false logic of identities.

Across three days, Zeke and I performed a content analysis of 128 mined posts (see Figure 3.1). The three days were chosen as focal units as they included common patterns of literate practice. Each day included a full-length two- to three-minute Snapstory, a video narrative that Zeke told in “confessional” style to detail the trials and tribulations of working during the holiday break. Similarly, the staccato patterns of text-based posts, photo reblogs, and personal shared histories marked this stream as one that was indicative of Zeke’s larger practices across time. I include the full exchange below to highlight the paradox of reading that is inherent in Zeke’s queer rhetorical work of electracy.

*Wargo:* So what’s the story behind these posts?...Walk me through these three days.

*Zeke:* Well, I worked over twenty hours. I was forced to take the night shift because it was New Years.

*Wargo:* Is that what the Snapstory is about?

*Zeke:* I basically call them out for breaking child labor laws. Then, the last one I’m talking at the group about hanging out with those ratchet hoes at the movies.

*Wargo:* You worked a lot...What about that first post?

*Zeke:* I ended up leaving my mom’s apartment. I couldn’t tweet all of that message so I took a screenshot of what I said.

*Wargo:* OK, and what’s with all the half-naked white guys?

*Zeke:* That’s my type.

Wargo: What?  
 Zeke: My type. They're like models. It's about the spectacle, about seeing it.  
 Wargo: But they're all white.  
 Zeke: So?  
 Wargo: What's that dude in the wig?  
 Zeke: I reblogged it because I thought it was funny. He's flaming. He is like "Hey, I'm gay and I'm working."  
 Wargo: That's basically your Tumblr.  
 Zeke: What?  
 Wargo: "I'm gay, look at me."  
 Zeke: Yeah, that's the point. You can be flaming. I mean, I am pretty sure everyone knows now. I took contemporary as my elective this semester. [Points to last image in stream].  
 Wargo: Is that what that is?  
 Zeke: That song. Oh my god. That dance. It gave me life.  
 Wargo: What do you mean?  
 Zeke: It was like, there I was the only dude in the class and I'm gay. I'm acting like some kind of pimp. The dance was basically them trying to get at me.  
 Wargo: But at the end (of the film)?  
 Zeke: I know, that's why I'm laughing. I couldn't keep a straight face.  
 Wargo: So why'd you share it on your Facebook, didn't you say your mom and auntie are on there?  
 Zeke: I don't care. I thought it was funny. My ma, she probably thought her prayers been answered. "Thank god for giving my son a girlfriend." But really, she can keep praying. Everybody else be reading it the right way.

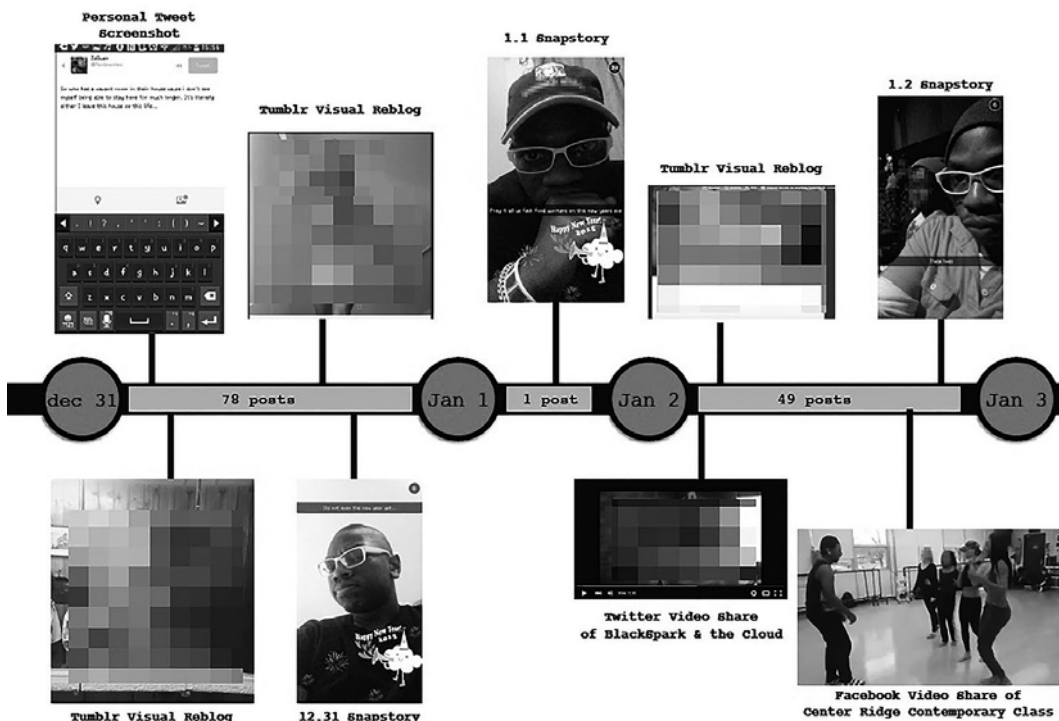


Figure 3.1 Zeke's Lifestream 12.31.14–1.2.15 (blurred images due to copyright)

If we unpack these anchored artifacts that Zeke highlights, the rhetorical resistance and *techne* he deploys online becomes quite apparent. As Zeke mentioned, he used the affordances of streamed video to orchestrate a connection to his Snapchat community of followers. Zeke presented a confessional regarding his work and home life to break down the third wall and engage a dialogue between composer (Zeke) and audience (his Snap community). After working two ten-hour days, Zeke posted a third Snapstory that detailed to his followers that he was using an excursion to the movies as a reprieve from home, a sentiment that commenced the three-day stream. In the opening post, Zeke took a screenshot of an emotionally vulnerable text-based post that read, in part, “I don’t see myself being able to stay here for much longer. It’s literally either I leave this hour or this life.” Through detailing the emotional struggle he had with home, Zeke streamed a softer side, one that was not often in sync with his high school identity or familial position as son/grandson. Zeke, however, did not use lifestreaming solely as a process of catharsis but to also stream and locate desire. The two videos that conclude Zeke’s curated lifestream serve the greatest paradox for his archive. The first is a still frame shot from anonymous male filmmaker Black Spark. Most noted for hyper-sexualized scenes of male intimacy, Black Spark films are spectacles in every sense of the word. I did not prod Zeke to tell me the specifics about reblogging the Black Spark film, but rather asked him about it in relation to the other video that closed his three-day stream, a YouTube video documenting his contemporary dance class final project.

Dancing to Rihanna’s “Hard,” Zeke (alongside of five female peers) performed a mixed ensemble routine that riffed on a hyper-masculine man being “hard” and having his girls turn against him. “That video,” in describing the dance final,

is like just the complete opposite of the Black Spark video. In one, people would be like, ‘Oh, he is GAY [vocal emphasis]!’ but then you see me dancing ‘hard’ [uses air quotes] for those girls. We choreographed it like that...I fall between those two (films). I can wild out and be thirsty but I can also act like Rihanna said, ‘hard,’ and make it through the everyday here.

For Zeke, the logic in his multimodal counter-storytelling presented a dynamic sense of queer that was made mobile through the experiences of *electracy*. Like his lifestreaming work above, Zeke demanded to be decoded in different ways. He camouflaged his queer to be deciphered and “read” by a select few.

### Discussion

Aaron, Patrick, and Zeke illuminate how *electracy*, as a nexus of *techne* and invention in digital writing and rhetorics, is not so much about turning a theory into practice, but rather practicing theory as it is emerging. Through the young men’s use of tropes and counter-storying across modalities, spaces, and devices they manifested identity resonances in the ongoing, living, negotiation of identity construction. For Aaron and Patrick, the felt experience of composing on trains served as epistemological proxy as they engaged in finding/founding praxis of what it meant to transition from adolescence to adulthood as Black young men in NYC. The curated imagery in Zeke’s lifestream functioned as a mechanism of *techne*, a form of disidentification (Munoz, 1999). Disidentification, however, was not solely a working against logics of racial masculinity. For Zeke, it was also about the modal aesthetic. The rhetorical argument that desire was something he had, shared, and yearned to make visible. In these examples, youth are not always designing more just social futures, but rather composing to interface with the turmoil of today. With their digital composing came consequential issues of mobility, and visibility of self and message. This transdisciplinary perspective, newly accented by *electracy*, and attuned to multimodality, *techne*, praxis,

and mobility, illuminates dimensions of the youths' writing experience— affective, emotive, and emergent.

In this chapter, we have considered distinct contributions of digital rhetorics and digital literacies, and mapped a resulting transdisciplinary lens in seeing anew the identity resonances of youth mobilities, techne, and multimodal praxis. This perspective asks us to engage as educators and researchers in practicing a theory as opposed to only studying or evaluating a practice in retrospect and relation to preexisting forms. It legitimizes the emergent, embodied activity as inherent of value, and in valuing this work, humanizes the activity of digital writing. In foregrounding experience, this chapter also serves as a call for the reflexive and responsive participation of the researcher as a digital writer herself—be it through methodological approaches, such as livestreaming with participants, or in the digital composition of scholarship. Such approaches show promise in mitigating the tensions of the domesticating tendencies of description and explanation. Threaded through this chapter are pieces—primarily from the field of digital rhetorics—that engage in *experiencing* scholarship. We encourage this and other transdisciplinary scholarly efforts in digital writing praxis.

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