7 IS DIGITAL THE NEW DIGITAL? PEDAGOGICAL FRAMES OF REFERENCE AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS IN THEORY AND PRACTICE

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The very concept of "the copy" comes into play first in all that relates the digital to the analog, and second in all that defines the digital, *per se*. As composition teachers, we have been generous to our inherited analog forms—such as "the paper." We have allowed—even required—that the analog form ("the paper") continue to exist digitally. To the same extent, we have allowed our analog aesthetic and its concerns with plagiarism and the like to be "copied" into the digital realm. That we should "do more" is an old argument. What is not so old is that perhaps we as teachers should see that analog content—even "mediated" digitally from the beginning—doesn't work and doesn't fit as well as forms that are impossible to imagine, create, or experience in forms other than digital.

Thus far in the thinking of our discipline, the question of computer composition has proceeded in the following direction: Shouldn't we allow the digital text its place, too? Drawing on my personal experience with popular technologies, in part one of this chapter I explore whether the question should not now be asked from the other direction; that is, we might ask whether or not it is okay to allow or require (or whatever we do as teachers) the analog form to exist at all. The process of moving our classrooms to a place where digitalness begins no longer as a complement to or copy of the analog but instead as its own whole and unapologetic frame of reference carries with it the obligation to revise analog definitions of the copy. In part two, I discuss the central obstacle to the full embrace of the digital as its own frame, arguing that analog defini-

tions and implications of the copy do not hold or apply within a digital frame, and I engage the implications that extend from such a new frame. I conclude by offering some practical pedagogy as regards inhabiting the digital paradigm via a discussion of "artistic license."

IS DIGITAL THE NEW DIGITAL?

My undergraduate poetry professor, John Taggart, invited me over to listen to some records. His stereo had Magneplanar speakers the size of doors—about as tall and as wide and as thick. His turntable's cartridge had its own amplifier, and the turntable itself offered a vacuum that ensured the flatness of the vinyl. A few months before, I had heard my first compact disc—the emerging notes of Rush's "Red Barchetta" coming out of the silence—from a CD player that had a futuristic font on its front panel announcing the player was "digital." When I asked Dr. Taggart about CDs, he responded that they didn't sound good and that vinyl was superior. I had recently heard that a digitally outputted signal was a digitally outputted signal. As it was described to me by the salesman, "there is not a whole lot of difference between the least expensive CD player and the most expensive." So—believing that—as naïve as digitalness was new, I concluded that maybe my mentor was a little concerned about his investment. That, perhaps, his vinyl and its system were in danger of becoming less exclusive or even extinct, and that such fears motivated his discrediting of this background-noiseless sound I had heard via my friend's digital CD player. I even adopted my own smug counter-attitude, something like "if you prefer the clips and pops of vinyl, that is your choice."

Six years earlier, I saw *Star Wars* at the local dollar movie theater, as an analog, celluloid, film. The film was badly scratched and worn. My own Super 8mm copy—titled, also, *Star Wars*—was 12 minutes of silent excerpts in black and white. Still, though, the neighborhood kids paid their quarters to watch it again and again, as it was "Star Wars" in my basement after all. My attempts to freeze frame the most fantastic moments resulted in my projector bulb burning the film in many key places.

The first time I saw high-definition television was in a large chain store. It was a basketball game being piped clearly into those televisions via some sort of high-end signal. For the first time, I could read the t-shirts of the people in the crowd and see the holes in the mesh of the players' jerseys. A high-definition DVD format holds about 25 gigs of data. To capture every nuance of the "film" would require exponentially more capacity than that. But the grain of the film is random and so film's apparent clarity is therefore compromised.

I remember Stevie Nicks talking about hearing Fleetwood Mac's album *Rumours* in high-resolution 5.1 surround channel audio for the first time. She reported that the experience so closely replicated what she heard while making the album decades earlier that she broke into tears. So Stevie Nicks moved me. A friend had assembled a 5.1 channel audio system in his living room. We listened to *Rumours*. Six speakers do something that two cannot. Vinyl doesn't offer six channels; this higher-resolution disc did. Then I saw the "oldest" Star Wars movie (episode IV) on his high-definition television. It was the best version of the film I had ever seen—I exclaimed that I was, in fact, seeing it for the first time.

At that point, having heard *Rumours* in the way that made Nicks cry over its moving accuracy and having seen *Star Wars* with a clarity previously unavailable to me, I began to wonder about vinyl and film. Both were and were not nostalgic. I was engaging texts from my youth, after all—but not the same texts. These were better, except for the fact that, for example, my dad might have popped his head in back in 1977 in a way that would not happen in 2009. So I missed that version of the experience of the text. But, now, *Rumours* had six channels and I was closer to where Stevie and the band had been. There were parts of the arrangement that I could not hear in stereo, but which I now heard—I was now in the midst of them, with detail and space and moments not possible in analog. I value nostalgia as much as the next person—maybe more. But *Rumours* sounded better and *Star Wars* looked better; since my experience with this version of the movie and this version of the album, digital moved past being the new analog. It was, then, free to move beyond copying the analog. New digital became the new digital.

But the potential to be free of the copy had another step—a step that at once furthers and undermines just how good *Star Wars* looks, remastered. My friend's high-definition television is still forced to deal with non-high definition, so called "standard definition," material. And if you ever saw that, you would have noticed how the image of, for example, the newscasters does not look as good as the logos and so forth that introduce and share the screen with them. The logos and all such apparatus are digitally made. And, as good as *Star Wars* looks, visually—in the technical sense—*300* looks better; *300* looks almost three-dimensional, with clarity and detail the likes of which I had not seen previously. I watched *300* as a result of a student's insistence; it is among, for the moment, a small number of films to employ a digital backlot. A digital or virtual backlot describes sets that do not have genuine locations on sound stages. They are, to some extent, simulacra constructed on a blank background or green screen. An artificial environment—a computer-created "location"—is added in post-production. Similarly, Sting's *Brand New Day*, which, unlike

Rumours, was mastered originally in the digital and exists in a high-resolution surround format, sounds in a way very similar to the way *300* looks: pristine, detailed, deliberate.

I submit that digitally captured content that has always been digital content—in other words, that has not been remastered from the analog—is "better" (that is, more faithful) when mediated via a digital medium. It is better still than remastered content that is now digital but was once analog. The act of having to copy the original condition is a fraught act of translation that announces itself as presenting the primary space in which to observe degradation: As the analog is converted to the digital, there is risk. The risk is less pronounced, and at once ideally and possibly negated, as analog mediates analog and digital digital. Going from two channels to six channels from an analog master at once faces some of the same challenges, but offers something new—not primarily a copy but an extension of the analog into a new, digitally possible text. In sum, then: originally digital content is more faithfully mediated when mediated digitally than originally analog content remastered into digital is. The 5.1 high-resolution surround format of *Rumours*—necessarily mediated digitally—might be seen as more faithful than the two-channel vinyl version via even its native analog mediation because it is not a copy as regards the stereo master. The obligation is one of faithfully serving the master, be it the master tape, the voices at play within the studio space, or the analog or digital metaphor that underlies the aesthetic.

Jay David Bolter (2001) articulated how the digital writing space is limited by the way culture understands it as a place for writing that remains subservient to the analog:

> The space of electronic writing is both the computer screen, where text is displayed, and the electronic memory, in which text is stored. Our culture has chosen to fashion these technologies into a writing space that is animated, visually complex, and malleable in the hands of both writer and reader. In this late age of print, however, writers and readers still often conceive of text as located in the space of a printed book, and they conceive of the electronic writing space as a refashioning of the older space of print. (p. 13)

This chapter calls for an examination of this seemingly inherent connection between the digital and the analog in an attempt to realize the resulting implications if they are understood distinctly, allowing each to manifest within its own framework and according to its own rules. The analog, remediated

digitally, may strive to preserve the analog aesthetic—including its rules—but does so at the risk of remaining less faithful to its own possibilities. Bolter argued that "the very fact that electronic writing must confront the tradition of print makes electronic writing different from print; it means that our culture will have at least some different uses for electronic texts" (p. 45). We must identify these differences so that the analog and the digital can be distinguished and utilized knowingly, emphasizing the benefit of each within its respective framework.

When the widescreen 16:9 format first appeared on televisions in stores and in a few early-adopting homes, service centers were bombarded with calls about "the bars on the screen." These bars, or dead spaces, resulted from 16:9 texts being played on the then-standard 4:3 screens. Conversely, those who purchased 16:9 screens were forced to deal with the translation of 4:3 content.

Many viewers elected to squash the 4:3 picture down so that it filled the widescreen—even though the image was flattened and distorted in a striking way. Had an analog television suddenly started to squash the image in a way that it is now *chosen* to be squashed by 16:9 screen owners, many of these same viewers may very well have looked to correct the problem. In one sense we are maximizing the provided digital screen space—and in that sense the image does fit, but it is squashed and in that sense it does not fit or is a bad fit.

Composition teachers and scholars who continue to work with (or against) digitalness by attempting to house the digital within an analog frame may, too, be pursuing a bad fit. Seeing new digital not as new digital but as obliged to "copy" the analog is not allowing the digital, in practice and in theory, its due potential. (I address the implications of this bad fit specifically as regards plagiarism and the copy later in this chapter.) Generally, a bad fit may result if we do not consider how students' daily interactions with rapidly changing technologies compose their working, public, and personal lives, an impact explored by the New London Group (2000), which argued that "pedagogy now must account for the burgeoning variety of text forms associated with information and multimedia technologies" (p. 9). For example, I wonder if I am doing the best I can when I so much as allow a paper to be written on the computer.

The question has to this point proceeded in the direction of asking whether or not we should allow the digital text its place. Of course students can still compose and print papers, but let's also allow and explore *this*. Let's allow for a certain amount of this other, digital thing. We even talk of composing an analog paper, via computer, as though it were a meaningfully digital act. But, as I mentioned earlier, I wonder whether the question should not now be asked from the other direction: Should we allow or require the analog form to exist at all? Should we not abandon any obligation to the analog copy? After all,

our obligation is to students, as articulated by the WIDE Research Collective (2009) in their "Why Teach Digital Writing?": "If we want to teach writing or help students learn how to write more effectively, then we have to be with them where they write. Networks are classrooms." I felt a strange discomfort as I watched *Star Wars*. I felt I was behind.

Once, in a first-year composition course, each group chose an art form (sculpture, poetry, dance, etc.) and the goal was to push on these forms until we could get at the essential compositional processes of each. As we concluded on the second day, we found that the compositional mechanisms were themselves all the same: contour, rhythm, emphasis, organization and so forth. So these compositional concerns as such may carry across media and space. But I think I might do better to change the direction—at least, for example, to include writing prose words in the longer list of compositional ends. As soon as I think this, though, I immediately fear that I am including a "dead" form—a form that I am preserving for reasons that may not hold up to much scrutiny. Should we not allow students to engage writing prose words as such? Progress—even in the examined, deliberate sense—might tempt us in this direction, but, instead, I think our question might be: What do prose words do better and under what circumstances than competing, digital, mediations? To what meaning is prose a better channel than music? Toward what texture is prose at least the equal option and ideally the only option? I think in engaging such questions we may finally shift the direction of our consideration. Such a shift requires that we engage our analog frameworks with an eye toward revision.

COMING TO TERMS WITH DIGITAL AS THE NEW DIGITAL: THE COPY AS OBSTACLE

To the extent that *Rumours*, *Star Wars*, and high-definition and high-resolution formats have prompted composition to consider a starting point that is not analog *per se*, there has been one obstacle with which we are still coming to terms. A December 2008 article offers this representative report:

> A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away, when people wanted to see a film, they went to a movie theater. They never entertained the idea of copying a movie, mainly because of all the industrial chemistry involved. Then videotape came along—followed by attorneys. Now we have the latest dust up in the long battle of the technical ability to copy movies vs. a little thing called copyright.

The article then outlines this latest manifestation of the argument, this time as regards a certain DVD-copying software and the large legal battles it faces. Nowhere is there a greater difference between the analog and the digital than as regards the copy.

First, as regards the vinyl album, there was no technology commercially available to reproduce its contents on another vinyl album; to copy, while remaining within the same vinyl medium, was not possible. The album announced itself as the standard in part because the listener needed to acquire the actual album to have access to the album as album. Thus, the trip to the record store was a one-sided trip—a trip to a place where one could only consume, once removed, at least, from the medium being engaged. Although plenty of listeners may have dreamed of making it to the other side of this one-way mediation, few had the capacity to do so, as home-recording studios able to produce a product on vinyl were rare or non-existent. The act itself of "making it" onto vinyl marked a step toward legitimacy, in part because access to this medium was a rare access.

The copy introduced itself primarily via magnetic tape. Anyone who owned one of the once-ubiquitous portable audio cassette tape players/recorders that offered two decks or anyone who has copied from, for example, the television to VHS tape or from VHS tape to VHS tape will probably have experienced the nature of the analog copy. It is marked as copy by its degradation in contrast to the original. Other analog systems of value make manifest this degradation and the resulting determination of worth. For example, bootlegged tapes, both VHS and audio cassette, were valued by how far removed from the master they were. This concept of generation determined the value of the tape. For example, a second-generation tape, which usually referred to a copy from the copy that had been made from the master, would be worth more than a fifth-generation tape. Later generation tapes, priced far less, were often listed with the warning "collectors only" or some other notice signaling that the tape was so many generations from the master that it was hard to make out the content, and was thus only of any value to the completist collector. The extent of the generational degradation depended, but only relatively, on the quality of the equipment used to facilitate the reproduction. The nature of the analog tape is such that even a fully analog signal chain will result in loss and distortion with each successive generation.

Similarly, analog reproductive technologies resulted in wear with each engagement. The claim that "I listened to that vinyl album so many times that I wore it out" was, in fact, the truth, as the contact between the (usually) diamond stylus and the vinyl was a microscopically violent one, resulting in the paring away of the vinyl itself with each engagement. Again, the extent of

such reduction depended, but only relatively, on the quality of the equipment used—a heavier, commercial tone arm did more damage than a finely balanced one. But the nature of the friction between diamond and plastic, or between analog magnetic tape and the metal tape head, resulted in loss. In cases where vinyl albums were repeatedly subjected to heavy tone arms, the album could even visibly change its appearance from glossy to matted and could wear out. Even in less severe cases, the state of wear of the analog medium was visibly or sonically apparent and contributed to the devaluing of the analog object.

Generational degradation and wear defined analog media so that the most valuable analog medium was the one that was unplayed. For example, the still sealed vinyl album—sealed against wear, and most likely not to be generationally compromised—commanded and still commands the highest price. Still sealed vinyl (especially unrecycled so-called virgin vinyl) remains a gold standard. Regarding analog, virgin and otherwise: the less play, the more value.

Similarly, consider the quality of the photographs of great-grandparents or their own great-grandparents. Those that existed and survived will be marked not only as different from more recent photography, but seen as degraded compared to the photograph when first produced. A picture of my own grandfather that is cherished because he is a young man in his twenties is at once a valuable artifact and a badly decayed artifact. The image—about 2" by 4"—is badly cracked. To discern its original shading of whatever sort is impossible, as it has faded. It is washed out and its only hues are of a brown that does not appear to be a native part of the summer baseball field on which is playing. In short, the photograph began its existence as wholly marked by the capacities of its own mediation and declined markedly from that point. Were I not to have known its subject, he would be unrecognizable. As the decades pass, this photo continues to degrade.

Digital is different. By way of focusing this analogy I offer the following two scenarios. Imagine first a series of analog tape player/recorders. The second in the series records the first, the third records the second, and so on down the line, always remaining in the analog domain. The degeneration would be successive, and, eventually, reach a point where there may be little if any resemblance between the first generation and, say, the thousandth. In the second scenario, the first in the series is digital, as are the rest in the series. The second records the first, the third records the second, and so on down the line, always remaining in the digital domain. There exists a state of such technology that the thousandth such digital rendition would not be a lot like the first; it would *be* the first, just as the second would be the first, the first the second, and the twentieth the fourth. The implications here extend into all aspects of digital as the new digital.

I submit, then, that the very concept of the copy is an analog concept, borne from the material conditions of analog technology. The concept of the original is simultaneously constructed and marked. The differences between the analog and the digital as regards copy and original can be illustrated by way of an engagement of the central values at play.

Within an analog metaphor, the value of the original is attained as a result of the fact that the copy is by definition a degraded rendition. The person seeking to hear the content of a vinyl album with as little distortion as possible as regards the recorded content of the album will be best served by obtaining the album, preferably still sealed. The magnetic tape recorded from the album may or may not, depending on the equipment used, be a relatively excellent, faithful copy, as copy. But, again, of and through analog circumstances, the term copy itself marks the rendition as once removed, while the technology is prone to manifest itself into a taped rendition that represents some loss as regards its "original" source. The greater value of the undegraded version is not without cause; again, remember that the goal is to get as close to the content of the album as possible, which necessitates an absence of loss as regards said content as content, including the loss that accompanies the introduction of distortion. The VHS tape would offer another such example: The copy of the VHS tape would be marked as copy as a result of being defined and announced as once removed, and all subsequent generational copies would exhibit that much more such degradational distance. Therefore, to the person seeking the uncorrupted content of the analog tape, the still-sealed, non-copied, non-played version of the tape offers the best such opportunity. Such a version may be reasonably seen as of greater value and worth, such are its material conditions.

Digitalness does not offer the same conditions and as a result does not provide for the value system of the analog. Bit-by-bit copying exists. Thus, the person seeking to hear the content of a compact disc with as little distortion as possible as regards the recorded content of the compact disc will have limitless options. Theoretically and, depending on whom is asked, practically, the original is available from many quarters. Rarity is not at play digitally, and thus the values attendant to rarity do not apply. There is no digital text that is necessarily rare, as it can be reproduced in a way that does not mark it as in any way different as such. An analog painting, such an oil on canvas, cannot be reproduced faithfully and is thus valued for its being rare, indeed unique: It may be housed so that we might view it, with all proper security at play, and any attempt to cross the velvet rope and revise the text may very well be a criminal act. Similar consequences may result from the engagement of the counterfeit or forgery. The image constructed digitally can be reproduced faithfully, *ad infinitum*. To the extent that its value might depend on its singular existence, it has no such value.

This is not to say that there are not degraded digital copies. In fact, many elect to degrade the digital text via "lossy" compression schemes, exposure to digital-to-analog conversion and perhaps back, inferior equipment of various sorts, and the like. The reasons for such degradation may be ignorance, or, for example, convenience-motivated choice. But the technology exists so that the digital rendition need not be degraded. And, where it does not yet exist, it is the realizable goal. For example, newer high-definition DVD soundtrack data is to be not *like* the theatrical version, but is to *be* the theatrical version. The mediation that results in the presentation of this data is a variable. One may not elect to have the same sort of playback technology within a home as is encountered in the theater, but the same data is there and available for processing. Similarly, one may not have the same sort of processor or screen on which to view the digital image, but the same data is available, thus allowing the same data to be engaged, and, when the mediating technologies are the same as those engaged by the person from whom the image was created and sent, both the original data and the reproduction artifact are indiscernible, generationally.

COMPOSING THE DIGITAL TEXT: DIGITAL VALUE(S)

I argued above that digitally captured content that has always been digital content—in other words, that has not been remastered from the analog—is more faithful when mediated via a digital medium. I also suggested earlier that an analog painting, such an oil on canvas, cannot be reproduced faithfully. In terms of composition, then, the digital text is only fairly engaged via digital rules. Given that the digital text can be replicated without degradation, the attendant values are best digital values, fundamentally different from analog values. Jay David Bolter (1992) conveyed this point by emphasizing that we must acknowledge the opportunity that exists within digitalizing text:

> Wherever and however we use computers, we are turning the world into a digital text, we are textualizing the world. All the computer can ever do is to read and write text, if we take the word *text* to mean in the largest sense all systems of discrete symbols. I find this an exciting prospect because it places our work with computers and writing at the center of the computer revolution. We as humanists know and care about reading and writing, and it is therefore our responsibility to help make sense and to make good use of this new technology of literacy. (p. 42)

As with other texts, the analog text copyright exists most comfortably within its native analog terms. When considered against all the values and mechanisms thus far outlined here, copyright must come to new terms or be abandoned altogether. The value of the original oil on canvas extends in part from the impossibility of exactly reproducing the given oil and canvas onto another oil and canvas. Thus, such a text is in a specific sense unique and, even when considered along with those in its family or genre, rare or limited. Rarity contributes to value. (I often use the example in my courses that if limestone were as rare as diamond, we might marvel at the engagement ring using a fundamentally different set of qualifications: "Oh—the stone is so *opaque*—look at how it *absorbs* the light" and so forth.) Extending from such dynamics, copyright is further expressly concerned with authorial credit. This credit itself may not be unrelated to rarity. But it is also motivated by fair remuneration for the creator. The "original author" of the "original text" expects, via copyright, to receive recognition, expressed via attribution and, in many cases, via monetary payment. Any attempts to claim the text without such attribution is an act of theft.

The nature of digitalness argues against such a value system. Without an (analog) original, the concept of the originator becomes slippery. One such argument notes how "additional concerns develop when composing with multiple media that are borrowed, reformed, and recast into compositions. Considerable work has been done and continues to develop in the realms of intellectual property and copyright" (WIDE Research Collective, 2009). As the nature of the copy and the original are changed digitally, so are the natures of originator, creator, author, and the like. One way to measure the tensions associated with these fundamental shifts is to observe the volume of attention paid to the analog notions of plagiarism. Such concerns are often expressed in terms of what digital mediation seems to provide for. Such potential, however, is, instead of being seen as new and with its own positive and creative potential, often seen as a threat to the old. That fundamental shifts in commercial dynamics happen slowly and are marked by transitional compromises is nothing new. At a certain point, anyone whose livelihood depends on a set of soon-to-be extinct conditions has a set of choices. For example, as the kerosene lantern was being replaced by the electric light bulb, the lantern makers may very well have faced a genuine dilemma. One can imagine they could argue against the new technology and for the superiority of the kerosene lantern, they could re-tool their shops so as to make electric filament, they could elect to sell their wares to a smaller cult of users, or they could cease their businesses as such. These or some transitional combinations of these might well be the primary choices presented to many industries faced with fundamental paradigm shifts in their business

modes and models. Further, such strategic options and responses would also no doubt be informed by the political clout of those involved. It is not hard to imagine attempts to make the "new threat" itself into an illegality, thus allowing for the status quo to be preserved. Such an act of criminalization would be one example of how those dependent on the threatened technology might seek to indict producers, users, or anyone else involved with the "crime."

Ours is an age of CDs, DVDs, the Web, digitally mediated satellite communication, digital cameras, iPods, iPads, email, computers in our homes and on our laps. As a result of the (mandated) switch to digital broadcasting regulations, local television stations run public service announcements as to how to discard analog televisions in an environmentally sound way. In practical terms, the digital paradigm is already engaged. These shifts have already occurred and continue to grow and expand. But allowing digital to be the new digital obliges us to allow the attendant theoretical frameworks to catch up to the ubiquitous practical engagement. These theoretical frameworks may be legal, compositional, pedagogical, or other. The analog rules regarding copyright, plagiarism, and the like are one such site for a necessary reconsideration. Defined by concepts no longer at play in the same ways, new definitions that respond to digital as the new digital should find a better fit if and when they are permitted to exist in on and through their own native terms. I offer ownership, stewardship, and artistic license as ways to begin to engage digital as the new digital.

First, I suggest that, within our digital paradigm, the concept of ownership be replaced by something we might call stewardship. Stewardship suggests much of what ownership suggests, except that the steward recognizes that her relation to the artifact is not permanent—that she is in a line of stewards who will at one point or another in the artifact's existence be responsible for the artifact. Jay David Bolter (1989) explained the dynamic interaction that occurs among this line of stewards:

> As a technology for writing, the computer promises to redefine the relationship between author, reader and writing space ... Unlike printing, which lends fixity and monumentality to the text, electronic writing is a radically unstable and impermanent form, in which the text exists only from moment to moment and in which the reader joins with the writer in constituting the text. (p. 129)

When transferred to the digital paradigm, the steward does well to recognize that many will own—and thereby none will own—and that her work with

the text is not necessarily part of a linear sequence but is instead a part of a collage already engaged with the text.

Digital stewardship is at once—especially as regards its analog tradition—a two-way street and, ultimately, a whole community of roads and paths and dead-ends and cul-de-sacs. In the short term, the digital composer might learn to compose with the idea of his work being open to such stewardship. Whether or not this consideration changes the way he composes will of course be up to him, within that moment. In the same way, stewards have a set of obligations as well, although they are not traditional. Stewards might see their engagement of the text as transitory, as they become the steward of their engagement with an appreciation of the dynamics that will subsequently engage their compositions. An awareness of the analog implications of copy may help spur this shift in understanding on the parts of readers, composers, and ultimately reader–composers. Such a shift is necessary to engage the digital on its own, non-copying, terms.

There may be within this web—a web with no beginning or end—a place for the recognition of the steward from whom there appears to be an influence. Such recognition, however, will be defined digitally—that is, it will recognize the absence of the original, the copy, the copyright, and will instead proceed more from what we might think of as artistic license. Composition teachers may very well already recognize composition as art or as *an* art. But the circumstances in which we teach often seem to work against us as we make any claims toward art—toward us teaching art and students producing art. We can speculate as to why such challenges arise. For instance, since elementary school, writing and art have been separate. We go *to* art, to the art room. We have an arts and crafts area or at least a time of the day that we devote to art. Seldom in such spaces were we expected to primarily engage just the written word, unless as part of a more colorful art project.

Later, art is arguably in popular and even curricular terms most commonly attached to (analog) painting. Although sculpture, music, dance, and poetry could lay a relatively easy claim to being art, composition papers would, I think, have a harder time making any such claim. As teachers in the digital age, we know that so-called multimedia compositions by definition replace any such disciplinary lines. And, yet, as of today, even the teacher whose course is titled "Multimedia Composition" or "Computer Composition" or any such variant would encounter strangeness if, upon being asked what she teaches, she were to respond "art."

I am not sure what term best explains any such tension. But whatever that term is, I think it applies to our administrators and more importantly to our students as well, since such deeply entrenched analog traditions are slow to evolve; that is our challenge. Seldom do students come into my digital composition class

with an understanding that different rules apply—that the better or more useful parts of artistic license might be at play, both in my expectations and in their latitude toward responding to the course. For example, even my repeated insistence as regards their compositions that form must follow from meaning—which I exemplify by saying that if you want to *mean* a high C played on a flute it may be at least *harder* to convey that meaning via a drum—is as of mid-2010 met by at best a quick re-orientation and at worse by a feeling of my somehow having betrayed the agreement that the student and I allegedly undertook when she signed up for my composition course. This is not to say that students are not computer literate, of course. Only that, at least as regards my students, most still enter, for example, "Freshman Composition" apparently expecting something mostly analog-based. It seems as though most have engaged "computer composition," but have not fully engaged the digital rules that should accompany such composition. The idea that the flute sound, digitally sampled itself, better or at least differently conveys the meaning of the flute sound than, say, a prose description of the sound seems to fall beyond student understanding of the "fair parameters" of digital composition. Thus, as contributing stewards, we and our students might look to the notion of artistic license as a way to expand these parameters.

Here, as representative of what Wikipedia might offer by way of definition, is the (current) Wikipedia entry on "artistic license:"

> **Artistic license or license** (also known as **dramatic license**, **poetic license**, **narrative license**, **licentia poetica**, or simply **license**) is a colloquial term used to denote the distortion or complete ignorance of fact, or the changing of an established work that an artist may undertake in the name of art—for example, if an artist decided it was more artistically "correct" to portray St. Paul's Cathedral next to the Houses of Parliament in a scene of London, even though in reality they are not close together, that would be artistic license....
>
> In summary, artistic license is:
> - Entirely at the artist's discretion
> - Intended to be tolerated by the viewer (cf. "willing suspension of disbelief")
> - Neither "good" nor "bad"
> - Useful for filling in gaps, whether they be factual, compositional, historical or other gaps
> - Used consciously or unconsciously, intentionally or unintentionally or in tandem

Artistic license often provokes controversy by offending those who resent the reinterpretation of cherished beliefs or previous works. Artists often respond to these criticisms by pointing out that their work was not intended to be a verbatim portrayal of something previous and should be judged only on artistic merit. Artistic license is a generally accepted practice, particularly when the result is widely acclaimed. William Shakespeare's historical plays, for example, are gross distortions of historical fact but are nevertheless lauded as outstanding literary works.

If the first step toward making art is building the art museum, then we as digital composition teachers might do well to start to do that, it seems to me. There will of course be challenges as we move toward teaching and evaluating art. Such challenges extend from the Wikipedia definitions, as enacted, and are already well known by, among others, our creative writing colleagues. Such an argument might be: "Well, if you are requiring me to produce 'art' and we are invoking my 'artistic license' to do so, then by default your evaluation must be *accepting*, since to evaluate otherwise would endanger the manifestations of my prerogatives as an artist." In other words, as we may have heard, "my poem is good because I say it is and by definition as an art you are not qualified to suggest otherwise."

The best definition of coddling that I can craft is that coddling refers to the "reinforcement of the sentiment that no change need occur on the part (of the coddled)." And it seems that we might be at some risk of introducing—simultaneously—art and coddling. At least there may be some *tension* between students' felt claims toward artistic license and our roles as evaluators, even as art critics. So if we are interested in taking advantage of digital options under the name of art—and if we are aware that doing so may be accompanied by some tensions in our classrooms—how might we begin to address such tensions? I suggest three things we may want to think about as we continue to inhabit the digital paradigm.

INHABITING THE DIGITAL PARADIGM

To begin to address some of the tensions described above, first, we must make our aesthetics—in part at least as requirements or expectations—as transparent as is productively possible but with the realization that they will not be wholly transparent. I think a good introduction to a course—via syllabus or spoken—strives to be an honest and forthright reflection of what the

student might expect in the course. But "honest and forthright" need not mean mathematically defensible, and it need not appeal to any sort of objectivity. Imagine, instead, something like this to describe an A: "An A composition is marked as excellent in part by its being different in positive ways from more typical coursework. An A project is exceptional. It allows form to follow from meaning and engages its meanings with deliberateness. It shows evidence of an awareness of stewardship both in response and in contribution." To imagine a student saying "I read your description of an A—it doesn't say anything" is easy and, in certain quantifiable senses, all but fair. But what such a description does say, I think, is that less of this sort of math or formula is at play—that in this course we move into the perilous waters of art and that the student–reader will need to *look elsewhere* toward producing excellent work.

Second, and closely related, is our obligation to establish trust with students, which will work to reinforce the fact that our aesthetic expectations, though never able to be represented in formulaic and/or wholly transparent terms, are not being applied arbitrarily. In other words, while our expectations may be expressly "mysterious" they will not be applied in an *ad hominem* way. Establishing such trust is hard and gets at broader issues of our classroom ethos. But, specifically, one such site may be in our responses to drafts of the projects—responses that may invoke the need for the engagement of a higher-powered microscope or for more of a push, but to some extent allow almost all of the choices therein—or certain sorts of choices—to be made by the student. To me, our endnotes to student work are where we first make the case. Prior to these endnotes, in many cases, our expectations could be read as hypothetical. So our endnotes offer proof that we mean it. In short, then, if we follow through on our stated expectations, we can build trust through reliability (especially in comparison to those who, for example, talk of risk only to deduct x points for some petty structural concern).

Third, and finally, I think we need to trust our instincts. We need to be comfortable within the part of the expectations that we cannot make transparent—we need to inhabit that uncertain, even wordless digital space with the certainty that it is a space that does right by our students and their arts, and that values our roles as stewards engaging stewards, free from an obligation to copy our analog inheritance, and to move toward our own new digital spaces.

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DEDICATION

This chapter is dedicated with all my love to the ongoing presence of my truest friend and collaborator, the late Russ Wiebe.

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