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Screening TED: A rhetorical analysis of the intersections of rhetoric, digital media, and pedagogy

Joseph Alan Watson

Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College

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SCREENING TED:
A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE INTERSECTIONS OF RHETORIC,
DIGITAL MEDIA, AND PEDAGOGY

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of Communication Studies

by

Joseph A. Watson

B.A., The University of Memphis, 1998

M.A., The University of Memphis, 2003

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ABSTRACT

The presence of expertise resonates across our daily lives. Experts are called upon to consult us about which candidate is ideal for office, which type of wood is the best choice for a carpentry project, which scientist has optimal data on the effects of air pollution, which speech teacher is the best one to take for proper credit hours, and more. An expert is typically conceived as an individual who knows more about a given topic and can create stronger identification than an average person. The struggle to achieve expert status is one that is fundamentally tied to power and is reliant on the establishment of authenticity and legitimacy from audiences. It is, at its core, a struggle that utilizes rhetoric.

Begun in 1984, the TED conference has become a critical player in an architectonic movement to manufacture expertise. Modeled on the Lyceum movement of the early American 20th century, the TED conferences have spread rapidly into public culture, but most notably in field of education. TED “talk videos” are classroom artifacts. Likewise, the TED conferences have become models of community engagement that work rhetorically to demonstrate the attribution and manufacturing of expertise amidst a 21st century digital world. In short, we have acknowledged TED’s growth and expansion as credible and sanctioned their identity as the harbinger of expert and inspirational ideas.

The democratization of digital media has made it possible to share ideas faster than ever before. The attribution of expertise and the precise role of technology within pedagogy become increasingly complex. My dissertation posits that TED employs current uses of digital media technologies in order to manufacture its ethos of expertise within public culture.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

At the American Institute of Architects Conference in 1976, president Richard Saul Wurman introduced the concept of “information architecture” into our vernacular. Richard Saul Wurman is an author, architect, scholar, and professed information junkie. A graduate of the University of Pennsylvania in 1959, Wurman has authored eighty-three books and received Guggenheim and NEA grants. He is also the founder of TED. Concerned with the explosion of information and data in communication media, Wurman describes an information architect as someone who participates “in the creating of systemic, structural, and orderly principles to make something work...the thoughtful making of either artifact, or idea, or policy that informs because it is clear” (Wurman 6). Since the creation of a robust digital landscape, the concept of information architecture has developed into an art and science dedicated to the structural and organizational practices and principles that guide and promote the usability and clarity of information. The field of information architecture pushes for thoughtful curation and creation of knowledge producing systems (Morville & Rosenfeld 19-21). Information architects consider the functionality and aesthetics inherent in generating the understanding of content.

Wurman argues that learning occurs in moments when information is compressed and explained as bits or pieces, fashioned into a description, analogy, or other frame that an individual hasn't heard or seen used before in relation to a given topic. It's a methodology that emphasizes the form (or design) of the content. The form or design should appeal to our sense of curiosity and our interests. When learning occurs in this architecture, our memory ignites understanding. The aspects of information critical to understanding reside in our capacity to recall “what it is like to not understand” (Wurman 31). If adopting this model, uncertainty will reduce and anxiety will subside. When I interviewed Wurman, I pushed for an example of this

philosophy. We discussed the concept of an acre of land. I had no conceptual understanding of the size of an acre; he explained to me that an acre is roughly the size of three football fields conjoined together. Stunned, I realized the simplicity and eloquence of his assertion. When constructed properly, information can indeed lead to understanding and the reduction of anxiety. Teachers, for example, continually wrestle with presenting information or course content into appropriate units and forms in order to produce understanding and reduce anxiety.

Contributing to this anxiety over the best ways to present information is an insistence on using machines to communicate information. Wurman laments the “lost art of conversation” as a skill or what he calls “making sense through language.” (Wurman 10). Good description and sense in language is used to produce good instruction. For him, using the right words, pictures, or numbers is a way of using good descriptive “means” to produce your “ends.” The emphasis on precise language is not without the acknowledgement that language is imperfect. Communication, he argues, is “equivocal” and meaning will never be fully understood due to limitations of language. He challenges us to *ask* for an explanation when something isn’t clear-accuracy doesn’t ensure success but it helps not only the listener but also the speaker learn and understand better. By embracing ignorance, making it personal, one can decide what is to be gained from any information presented to them (Wurman 4-5, 29).

In 1984, Wurman envisioned structured communicative events that would combine the sense of language and the art of conversation in the hopes of generating understanding. A completely selfish endeavor, he would amass masters of subjects interesting to him. He would engage with them. He would subtract from formal presentations. He would remove formality and decorum and impose his own structure. He would reduce speaking time, eliminate lecterns, and force memorization (Knemeyer online). An admitted selfish endeavor, Wurman was not

concerned about audiences but rather his own curiosity on a topic. He would create “backyard conversations” to help him see patterns. He would learn in manageable bits presented in a form he hadn’t seen or heard before in order to find patterns across disciplines, topics, people, and behaviors. He would act as both teacher and student. He would instigate his own private university model. His backyard events gradually transformed into what we now know as the “TED” conferences (Wolf 5-6).

The TED (which stands for Technology, Entertainment, and Design) conference officially began as an annual conference where inspirational thinkers from various disciplines come together and share ideas. Typically, it features speakers who are charged with giving “the talk of their lives” in 18 minutes or less. Wurman believed that a powerful convergence between the industries of technology, entertainment and design was occurring. Functioning at these intersections, the first TED conference included demos of the newly released Macintosh computer and Sony compact disc, while mathematician Benoit Mandelbrot demonstrated how to map coastlines with his newly discovered fractals. Artificial intelligence expert Marvin Minsky outlined his powerful new model of the mind. Several influential members of the burgeoning digerati community were also there, including Nicholas Negroponte, who unveiled his plans for the now famous MIT Media Lab (www.ted.com).

The first TED conferences were tremendous flops. Despite the stellar lineup, the event lost money, and it was six years before Wurman and his partner Harry Marks tried again in 1990 and achieved success. TED has been held annually ever since, attracting a growing and influential audience from many different disciplines united by their curiosity, open-mindedness, a desire to think outside the box and also by their shared discovery of an exciting secret...the conference itself.

Wurman's concept for the event was exclusivity. These gatherings were for his curiosity. Some attendees of TED during the Wurman era refer to it as a "backyard affair" that was "Richard's show...a kind of party to show off all the famous and influential people he knew and approved of..." (Kneemeyer 5). Hence, giving a TED talk became an opportunity for "heavyweights" in multiple fields and disciplines to prove their intellectual and cultural status. The label of exclusivity remains. Attending or presenting at TED is arguably a prestigious cultural honor, but the tenor of the event has shifted ever since Wurman sold the conference to entrepreneur Chris Anderson.

Anderson overhauled the objectives, mission, and aesthetic of TED. The mission was redefined under Anderson as "ideas worth spreading" and he pushed for expanded topics/speakers as well as making the presentations at the conference free and available to anyone through online video. The idea being to reach a global audience, connecting them via content and ideas covered at TED. He also instituted the TED Prize, which gives individuals \$100,000 to \$1 million and a "wish" to speak about at the annual TED conference. The concept of the wish centers on the efficacy of those in attendance to network and help make the speaker/winner's wish come to fruition. Successful social implementation of TED prizes/wishes has happened. For example, Dave Eggers won the TED prize in 2008. Eggers longed for a resource to unite local community activists across North America working on improving public schools. The results of his wish can be found through the *Once Upon a School* website and all of its members (www.826national.org/once-upon-school). Another significant alteration made by Anderson was to establish a website that archives the presentations and makes accessibility to content and ideas from TED easier.

According to June Cohen, the executive producer of TED Media, the speeches were once filmed and cut for a TV pilot. “The idea of a ‘lecture series’ wasn’t exactly greeted with enthusiasm by the networks,” she says (Heffernan 2). But she had another idea when she brought on Jason Wishnow, an online-video virtuoso. Together, they made the TED talks accessible on the Web in 2006.

The talks have become a huge hit, attracting sponsorships from BMW and Nokia as well as others. A brief perusal of “speakers” on the TED website reveals a literal canon of influential thinkers. Recent tracking data reveals the more than 16,500 talks available have been viewed more than a billion times. Anyone (with Internet access) can subscribe to an RSS feed or download podcasts to see and hear the speakers from TED. Through a Creative Commons license, all content from TED can be embedded and used in multiple contexts, many of them educational, however, many of the videos are shared as a form of recreation between people.

The TED community (referred to as “TEDsters”) consists of individuals who subscribe to the ideal behind the organization’s tenets: that “the sharing of ideas leads to the building of knowledge” thus “inspiration” plays a role in shaping the world. This is arguably a lofty ideal. In addition to criticisms of elitism, the TED organization suffers from another critique: lots of talk and little action. Curiously, this latter criticism is beginning to fade as TED has spread in notoriety. For example, celebrity chef Jamie Oliver, awarded the \$100,000 TED wish prize in 2010 used the money to generate a grassroots educational campaign to teach young children about nutrition, cooking, and health issues. Likewise, he used the campaign to alter menus in many localized school districts, thus reducing unhealthy food preparation and selection for many children across the United States and Great Britain (jamieoliver.com). In 2014, the TED wish prize increased to \$1 million and was awarded to Charmain Gooch, the co-founder of Global

Witness. Her organization roots out anonymous companies across many American states. Her desire with Global Witness is to make all companies transparent, revealing any illegal fronts for human trafficking, money laundering, terrorist activities, and more. She has had success by filtering Global Witness efforts through TED channels and into localized, grassroots activism (newglobalwitness.org). The results of these brief examples indicate that TED can and does go beyond producing hot air from elitists. The talks do morph into successful activist endeavors.

Beyond the wish prize outcomes, TED has taken hold of local communities on a global scale with the launching of “TEDx” events. The “x” refers to an “independently organized event” but has also been interpreted by others as “TED extended” and even “TED multiplied.” These events are sanctioned by the TED organization and follow the paradigm of the TED conference, but are organized and enacted completely by local entities, usually smaller community affiliations within individual cities, universities, or other local, non-profit entities. As of 2014, there have been more than 4,300 TEDx events produced around the world in 1,200 different cities across 133 countries (Fidelman online). Talks that are video recorded from TEDx events are archived on a You Tube channel independent of the formal TED website; however, 168 TEDx talks have been featured and shared via the official/formal TED site.

The philosophy of TED consists of simplified storytelling in an environment conducive to generating an authentic experience with an engaged audience. The motivation behind both TED and TEDx events is inspiration through sharing. In order to sustain such philosophical energy, dedicated and passionate volunteers must undertake TEDx event production. In the end, the curators become empowered agents for change at grassroots levels (Fidelman online). The result is that local curators often turn people who aren’t stars into superstars by selecting them to speak, coaching them, and funneling them through the formal TED distribution outlets.

In the TED backstory narrative, Anderson's decision to transition TED content and events from exclusivity to something more democratic in design and access is remarkably important. The decision allows for the content to find utility in a user-generated fashion, as online video talks are shared amongst groups and pop up in classrooms everywhere as supplemental educational materials. TED is now only second behind Khan Academy in applied educational use (Fidelman online). In addition, the opportunity to replicate TED events locally builds physical communities of human relations and our collective understanding of TED sharpens in focus. We see TED's transformation from a private backyard affair into a symbol, ripe with considerable rhetorical power that affects educational, social, and cultural institutions.

Purpose of the Study

For several decades now, the subject of media literacy has generated robust debate. Recently referred to as also digital literacy, the subject continues to perplex individuals even though research has increased tremendously in the area. We know little about how to coherently understand the term "media literacy" (Tyner). Often defined alongside broader contexts such as globalization and commercialism, it is typically connected to developments of the information and knowledge society (Erstad 2). Deeply rooted in education, the goals of media literacy have addressed a basic question: what is needed in order to be a literate person in the 21st century? How do cultural practices such as reading and writing change due to increased use of digital media? How is the ecology of pedagogy affected?

The field of education is dramatically changing in response to an increasingly digital world of information. An architectonic movement, this digital shift is affecting the ways information is transmitted, received, and articulated between teachers and learners, particularly in terms of curriculum design. These curricular innovations correspond to larger changes in

culture relating to communication modes as well as community engagement and development. We look for leadership in these areas. We look for our experts.

In American culture, expertise is a staple in everyday existence. We delegate and attribute authority and interest to the concept of someone's special skills, training, or insight. We rely on experts to navigate struggles for us, define terms, and produce authenticity. Our consistent draw to experts produces a fundamental tension in American culture between ownership and legitimacy. This tension is rhetorical, as experts must profess argumentation for what they articulate as their value, worth, and credibility. These persuasive situations allow for opportunities for public culture to validate one person over another. To earn credibility in such a struggle, an individual must work through multiple arenas of audiences, from institutional and professionalized colleagues to general mass audiences with little to no knowledge specialization. TED is an event that offers a chance for validation in expertise.

Once a year in February, a crowd gathers in Long Beach, California. This crowd consists of politicians, educators, technologists, innovators, entrepreneurs, artists, celebrities, and more. They gather for one primary purpose: *to be inspired from the ideas that will be presented to them*. They will be exposed to a wide array of presentations on subjects ranging from the faltering oceanic ecosystem to the creativity crisis in the American educational system to the demonstration of how wireless electricity can work.

Nestled amongst talks on global issues and technological innovations might be a performance by an eleven-year-old violin prodigy or by a magician who uses video screen-sharing through iPhones to illustrate the theme of deception. During breaks, members of this crowd are treated to free snack bars, Starbucks coffee, and massages if time allows. In the

evenings, energized conversations will ensue amidst wine parties and the savoring of California sunsets. These conversations are often stimulating and revealing.

Begun in 1984, the TED (Technology, Entertainment, and Design) conference has become a critical player in the architectonic movement within the field of education. Modeled on the Lyceum and Chautauqua movements of the early American 20th century, the TED conferences have spread into the field of education via social media and online video. TED “talks” are classroom artifacts. They are teaching tools and aid in increasing learning for a more digitally native student population. Likewise, the TED conferences are models of community engagement and formation that work rhetorically to demonstrate how a classroom community can be constructed and nourished amidst a 21st century digital world.

The democratization of digital media, particularly video, has made it possible to increase the sharing and collaboration of ideas faster than ever before, and as our world becomes more reliant on digital devices for the receiving and sending of information, or the consumption and production of information, the precise role of technology within pedagogy becomes increasingly complex. Deeply invested in cultural movements, rhetoricians must engage and analyze the proposed changes in the delivery and expression of a formal educational structure, as any changes will arguably affect the very landscape of communication styles and the necessary skills of future citizens in public culture.

This dissertation argues that TED has manufactured expertise as a credible source for information and knowledge sharing. My study investigates the rhetorical situations that TED events produce and how expertise is negotiated between audiences and participants at them. In order to build source credibility as an expert source, TED has employed rhetorical strategies within the cultural shifts in the media landscape, primarily by basing its events upon a model of

the university, releasing its content for educational use, and protecting its brand through expansion into localized communities. Since TED videos, or rhetorical artifacts, are used in classrooms as illustrative tools, my study also asks whether TED, as an emergent social phenomenon, can be optimized for educational use, and if so, what happens to the teacher as possessor of expertise?

I describe the emergence of the TED model that manufactures expertise and authority, examine the formation of communities built upon it, and outline digital projects in today's classrooms at the undergraduate level, and evaluate possible impacts on curriculum design in relation to participatory culture. The important issues and factors are delineated, and the advantages and disadvantages as well as the possible positive and negative impacts are compared. Future trends in digital pedagogy are examined in light of current developments. Special focus is given to the impact of networked communications and social media on the academic discipline of communication itself, specifically the "basic course" of speech.

I describe how TED videos and other social media artifacts can be used in introductory undergraduate courses in speech communication. My students experimented with iterations of flipped learning, analyzed TED talk videos, and then were required to create their projects. Based on these experiences, suggestions are made on how to incorporate modern internet-based communication and video production techniques into the undergraduate classroom in ways that will most effectively promote learning.

Traditionally, rhetoric has been understood as synonymous with persuasion; however, it has been characterized more broadly as identification (Burke 19). Identification, for Burke, is establishing a common ground with others, whether conscious or not, in efforts to transcend various divisions of society. A broader conception of rhetoric allows for the inclusion of

communication forms, contexts, and audiences to be considered as essential components of critical analysis.

How does rhetoric remain relevant as a discipline as the face of learning changes amidst a sea of digital transformation? The struggle to identify effective ways to communicate information in the hopes of producing understanding and knowledge is the essence of rhetorical pedagogy. What are the best ways of learning? What are the available means to produce truth and our sense of reality?

From its classical origins to modern day application, rhetoric has always maintained an intimate relationship with learning. In classical Greek and Roman curricula as well as within the humanist educational movement of the Renaissance, rhetoric held a central position. Rhetorical pedagogy, however, has not produced a linear or neat structure, but has generally consisted of basic tenets throughout various eras. Amongst its diverse iterations, definitions of rhetoric typically return to an ability to discover available means of persuasion in situated contexts. The assumption is that in order to discover and use rhetoric, one must learn, perfect, and perform communicative acts (spoken, written, visual, et al). This learning process reveals the need for a dynamic interaction between speakers and listeners or learners and teachers via specialized disciplinary techniques.

Rhetorical pedagogy shares common goals throughout various historical eras. First, the principal goal of rhetorical pedagogy is predicated upon the notion that an individual's communication competency is not always a natural talent or skill, but through instruction in analysis and practice, one can complement any native skills and talents and be guided to excellence in communicative acts.

Second, most rhetorical pedagogy is built upon the observation and analysis of previously determined successful communication events. Many textbooks open with specific descriptions of such events as models for one to emulate. As best practice models of speaking, writing, and more, these techniques or strategies form the structure of what is termed the “art” (skill, *techne*) of rhetoric and it is through a careful balance of observation, analysis, and practice, that individuals will generate or invent ideas and strategies for use. Ramus referred to these processes as “analysis” and “genesis” with the latter being the implementation of one’s improved skills (Walton 153).

Third, there is a civic dimension to both the teaching and learning components of rhetoric. Beale notes that:

Rhetorical education is an attempt to shape a certain kind of character capable of using language effectively to carry on the practical and moral business of a polity. It is based implicitly or explicitly on ideas of individual competence and political well-being. Its dual purposes are the cultivation of the individual and the success of a culture. (Beale 626).

Consider that a recent trend in American education has been a call for the revitalization of the civic mission of universities, a call that is inherently tied to the pedagogy of rhetoric. These calls to citizenship education, which is rhetorical education, go beyond the need for more voting, civic engagement, and service learning; rather, they consist of the importance of re-examining the purpose of higher education and the responsibilities of college graduates and educators. These calls often highlight the importance of teaching “21st century skills” or “transferrable skills” such as critical thinking, innovative problem-solving, deliberation, collaboration, and judgment: skills rhetorical scholars argue as part and parcel of the pedagogy of rhetoric.

Universities realize that educators need to carefully balance the importance of (disciplinary knowledge production) Berlin and (the cultivation of citizens) Athens (Hauser 44). In 2006, rhetorical scholars called for a “pedagogical turn,” a renewed focus on the relationship between rhetoric and pedagogy.

In *Society as Text*, sociologist Richard Harvey Brown regards social structure and social practices as “enacted texts” that convey meaning and influence. Social reality is not a given, but constructed by and through discourse (Brown 13-14). Discourse sustains what is conceived of/as “public culture” (Zarefsky 441). Culture is made possible by the bonding of social links through our communicative acts (Dewey 27). Rhetoric, then, becomes the inertia that moves a culture into such ritual acts of communication, where participation in such behaviors generates knowing within communities (Carey 8). Knowledge is contingent on the experiences of a respective community, allowing for those moments when speaker and audience can meet on equal footing in order to produce understanding or *identification*. Rhetoric plays an essential role as a force in creating truth- a truth that “itself is dependent on the truths that come from a sense of beginning” that comprehends and appreciates positions (Scott 11). Understanding happens through temporal flashes when one is neither moving forward in nor away from argumentation but rather in a series of creative processes where rhetoric finds being in those moments. These moments demonstrate what “exists, is good, and possible” in culture (Berlin 14).

In this broad conception, one can see how TED is representative of architectonic rhetoric in praxis. As McKeon notes, the architectonic nature of rhetoric is epistemic in that all disciplines can share understanding and knowledge both within and between disciplinary boundaries (McKeon 35). For example, we may not know the details of what a medical breakthrough means, but may be able to form an opinion on it and understand how its

development may affect our lives. As long as there is communication, the purpose of rhetoric will be epistemic. It may not always be called epistemic rhetoric, but the search for valid ways to discuss, structure, and share knowledge will continue in pedagogy.

Rhetorical pedagogy is connected to this search for truthful modes of exchange and communication that foster identification. The students in rhetoric classrooms should likewise engage with searching for appropriate means and forms that create understanding, not simply of information alone, but also of the communicative practices and skills necessary to craft such relationships. Whether it is a traditional piece of oratory or an uploaded mash-up/collage video of information, rhetorical pedagogy pushes for critical engagement and assessment in order to truly peel away the layers of power that reside deep within structures claiming to provide the production of knowledge. As a result, the process of locating such sources of power reveals tensions that lead to a stronger understanding of a shared human experience.

By chipping away at TED for the purposes of this study, tensions develop regarding the conceptual and framing uses of terms such as expertise, authenticity, and accuracy. All three of these tensions are intertwined across the disciplines of rhetoric, media, and pedagogy. Any casual discussion about the nature of the expert, the tenets that create authenticity or the accuracy of information tiptoes upon collective anxieties within our public culture relating to the transmission and reception of information. Our anxieties are amplified by an explosion of technological use and reliance as well as mounds of newly accessible information.

Writing in 1989, Richard Saul Wurman exclaimed there has been no real explosion of information but rather of what he calls “non-information” or raw data (Wurman 3). The term “information” has always been a multifarious term as it has been irresponsibly used and applied through, by, and in multiple contexts. The OED describes the word as having its roots in Latin,

informare, as the action of forming matter. A more recognized definition would be the action of informing; the formation and molding of the mind, character, instruction, or teaching; the communication of instructive knowledge.

In the decades following World War II, the word information becomes awash in a sea of ambiguity as something told in the general sense of messaging, particularly something transmitted across electronic or mediated channels. Much of what we consider information today is mere raw data or worse. The word information has lost its sense of action or usability as it became our cultural mantra. The verb *inform* has been stripped out of the word “information” and the noun *form* has been stripped out of the verb “to inform.” Raw data must be infused with meaning and aesthetic form to be useful in creating understanding that leads to knowing. Information must lead to understanding. “I’m in the understanding business,” Wurman declares. Yet in our information starved culture, “non-information” is allowed to parade as information. Wurman sees this as the single most imperative issue to address in our global society, especially as information-dependent cultures drive the fields of education, services, politics, media, and more (Wurman 15-18).

In their landmark treatise, *The Mathematical Theory of Communication*, authors Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver define information as that which *reduces uncertainty*. Uncertainty has been the human cost of information overload. It has produced a continuously widening gap between what we understand and what we think we should understand. It has led us to an age of what Wurman coins “information anxiety.” It is the result of what occurs when information doesn’t tell us what we need to know in order to understand with certainty (Wurman 4). Even worse, understanding lags behind production. “The channel, storage, and retrieval capacities of electronic hardware are rapidly growing, such as in the field of laser optics or microcomputers,”

said Orrin Klapp in *Overload and Boredom: Essays on the Quality of Life in the Information Society*. There has not been a corresponding gain in human capacity. Better information processing can speed the flow of data but is of little help in translating the results, deciding how to act, or finding higher meaning. “Meaning requires time-consuming thought and the pace of modern life works against affording us the time to think” (Klapp 9).

TED is an antidote to information anxiety. It celebrates intellectual curiosity. TED renews and affirms the rhetorical tradition in an age of media convergence. As the ontological engine behind TED, Wurman has provided the field of rhetoric an avenue to remain a crucial tool in how we understand and communicate information in order to generate knowledge in a complex mediated world. It is vital we heed the call and listen carefully. TED restores the power of invention and the primacy of public speech while simultaneously celebrating the democratization of information generated by new media. TED continues remarkable growth during a period of radical transition in the digital communication era.

Now public online, TED opens a pathway for the traditional university to follow as TED’s evolution coincides with the expansion of new pedagogies of active learning, which in turn mirror changes in the transmission and delivery of information in our participatory culture of media converge. It is an exciting time for scholars in our field. A rhetorical exploration into TED reveals the subtle but significant ways it as well as its derivatives have attained power as learning and teaching tools. With its rapid growth as a cultural system of information curation, production, and distribution, TED deserves critical attention now more than ever as it becomes validated for its usability around the world. An important vantage point towards analyzing TED, particularly as it gains symbolic power as an educational, social, and cultural force, is to ask the right questions.

Research Questions

Aspects surrounding information architecture daily influence teachers as higher education continues to interact with pressures such as budget cuts and rising student numbers, many universities are forced to discover or invent new modalities for course content delivery and creation. Increasingly, more content is being transitioned to an online environment. The shifting of content to a digital existence forces faculty often to reimagine how material can be introduced, explained, and/or analyzed. Internet content is now more visually (video) situated as opposed to textually based in form. Original content must be generated for such a visual environment or faculty can adopt online artifacts for utilization in pedagogical tasks. Thus, one initial research question this project seeks to address is can TED talks and similar projects, as rhetorical artifacts, be optimized for educational use?

Digital course content is growing and TED talks are being used in courses to supplement and aid in the teaching of content. The difficulty resides in a need to uncover a “best uses” strategy for such supplementation. Inevitably, one must ask how can TED talks and similar artifacts be incorporated into the classroom? What are the best models? If the lecture model of information delivery is altered in the digital landscape, then anyone can be the teacher. Where does the expert reside and how can he/she be discovered and trusted? Do we trust TED and not another?

Changes in curriculum design will undoubtedly affect student learning outcomes in both positive and negative ways. This project, accordingly, seeks also to consider *should* TED talks and similar projects be incorporated into the classroom? The overall impact of TED talks and similar forms on the discipline of communication remains unknown. TED talks, as both speeches and videos, will continue to increase in use and popularity, particularly with more TEDx or

localized events being produced and archived as online artifacts. As they become incorporated as social media learning tools, it is important to question whether or not these tools actually increase learning? Creating effective assignments that address technological engagement alongside course content are pointless without sufficient learning outcomes (Watson & Pecchioni 2011). It is not easy to assess whether “revised” assignments that incorporate new media technologies or artifacts such as TED increase skills. Pedagogical experimentation is warranted and needed within this culture of change in learning.

With curriculum changes underway due to the expansive use of digital media, learning environments have begun to form that work against traditional classroom models. The physical space of these learning environments is effected as is the formation of communities.

Communities of learners emerge around interactions from digital media in order to share and gain knowledge. TED has assisted in the ushering in of SOLEs (self-organized learning environments) as well as TED “x” events designed to encourage the sharing of information and teaching. How do these communities thrive and function? What is their purpose? How are they useful? Which environment is more authentic for learning?

These communities and their respective events are carefully curated and nourished in order to gain momentum and efficacy. The goal is to produce citizens who are change agents in their localized regions. The role of curator is akin to that of teacher. TEDx events are giant lesson plans and attendees become ripe pupils. In what ways can we learn from comparing the process of teaching to that of curation? What does it change in the field of rhetorical pedagogy?

Finally, what are the dangers of the TED movement? As a networked system of sharing and knowledge formation, TED can no longer remain neutral as a mediator, but must also combat an authoritative role in its efforts. TED decides who gets to speak and the content that is

addressed. What are the potential perils of TED's shift from mediator of information to expert over what constitutes an idea worth sharing?

The answers to these questions are being universally addressed across educational fields and levels. While the degrees of effectiveness continue to be examined, it is imperative that entities such as TED be critically evaluated as they continue to challenge researchers to analyze the tension between structured and unstructured learning methodologies.

TED is a massive entity. Its reach is found in the depths of educational curriculums and lectures, as well as socially acknowledged as a unique distributive force in information dissemination. It likewise has a cultural resonance that runs deep into the formations of communities, in both online and physical spaces. Adopting an effective methodological approach is another stepping stone in carving out an appropriate entry into the complexities of the TED landscape.

Since TED is an increasingly emergent phenomenon, I was forced to employ a more diverse methodological approach than most normal dissertation projects. When my research phase began for this project, for example, TEDx events had not been introduced as an idea or endeavor.

Another key component to the mixed methods approach in the project was the push to experience as many TED events as possible to fully engage with the people who not only attend TED events but also get to know the leaders who make TED "go."

Methodology

Starting a doctoral program in 2006, I was perplexed as to the disciplinary status of my “area of expertise.” With a history of professional theatrical and video production experience, I found my field had converged with areas such as digital/new media and instructional technology. Hence, my research interests rest at the intersections of rhetoric, media, and pedagogy. The emergence of TED as a social and cultural phenomenon fascinates me as a rhetorician as well as a technologist and pedagogue. Given the expansive nature of TED, this dissertation project is more akin to an English or Cultural Studies project as it is not exactly the “cookie cutter” mold that fits neatly into a box. It is a mixed-methods approach as I use rhetorical theorists such as Kenneth Burke, but also rely as well on cultural/critical/historical theory. As a doctoral candidate at LSU, I was imbued with the concept of not generating passive but active research endeavors; hence, ethnographic components and experimental pedagogy exist in this project. In short, this project is more conceptual than a typical case study model one will find amidst dissertation archives. Difficult to frame structurally and linguistically, it marks the beginning of a career digging and narrowing focus into a landscape as enormous as TED.

Constructivists are skeptical of the idea of one universal notion of truth, and view meaningful understanding as contingent on human practices and thus different people’s ability to socially construct reality in different ways (Creswell & Plano Clark, 7). Although many qualitative researchers acknowledge the limitations inherent in reporting individual understandings of complex ideas and concepts, in their view research needs to do a better job of telling people’s individual stories. Quantitative researchers refuse to assign value to one interpretation of meaning without acknowledging their own role as researchers in experimentation and the multiple possibilities available in reading amassed data (Guba &

Lincoln 28). Yet, subjecting to the bias of the researcher gives way to doubts about any sense of objectivity and threatens the chances of bipartisan research. That being said, an intense privileging of the localized understanding of a text or object of study, might include details and deep analysis, but could suffer from findings and interpretation that might benefit from a more rigorous analysis.

An emergent trend is a more pragmatic approach to research that rejects either/or approaches to understanding the development of knowledge. Through multiple stages of analysis and data collection, researchers can get a better understanding of a phenomenon like TED by combining the reliability of empirical accounts alongside the validity of lived experience. By utilizing abductive reasoning, a mixed-methods approach acknowledges that there are some social and cultural issues that can be better explored through combinations of different methodologies and techniques. Abductive reasoning, as a process, values both deductive and inductive approaches but in the end, relies on the expertise, experience, and intuition of the researcher(s). Mixed-method approaches conceive of research as the production of associations and connections, and in doing so, allow multiple paths to meaning exist (Wheeldon 93). Both quantitative and qualitative inquiry can support and inform each other in important ways. Narratives and variable-driven analyses need to interpenetrate and inform each other. Realists, idealists, and critical theorists can do better by incorporating other ideas than remaining tied to a sense of “pure” interpretation. (Miles & Huberman 396).

Concerns surrounding the mixed-method approach are typically addressed in pragmatism. As a constructivist, John Dewey influenced the philosophical movement of pragmatism and most contemporary thinkers and followers of it, such as Richard Rorty. Pragmatism holds truth

claims of one view or another as reliant and connected to the practical consequences of accepting that view. Rorty, for example, rejects the idea of one truth, but does value consensus or intersubjective agreement about various beliefs as a means to understanding provisional or conditional truths. One must obtain “reflective equilibrium” through research to provide realistic and socially useful outcomes (Rorty 38). In this way, mixed-methods procedures provide “new ways to think about the world and new questions to ask as well as new way to pursue them.” (Morgan 51).

My analysis of TED employs rhetorical criticism to explore specific audiences and environments in order to understand how individuals utilize the rhetorical resources presented and offered by TED to establish culture. These resources, whether talks, events, and/or social media posts dig into the ways in which TED’s power works to negotiate individual, group, and disciplinary identities and practices. Aligning with Foss, rhetorical criticism serves as a “systematic investigation and explanation of symbolic acts and artifacts for the purposes of understanding rhetorical processes (Foss 6).” To this point, rhetorical criticism is a process that identifies and articulates various parts of a message and the relationships of those parts to one another in the interest of revealing where power is active and dynamic. Rhetorical criticism combined with ethnographic accounts of interactions at TED is a natural critical methodology partner, it is only via qualitative methods that one can get “behind the scenes” to appreciate the rhetorical practices of organizations, especially ones that are elusive and often private affairs (Crabbe 23). Attempts to go “behind the scenes” are undertaken as I wanted to gain insight as a participant-observer. Participant-observation is a technique many ethnographers employ and can be characterized as “becoming participating members of an existing culture, group, or setting, and typically adopt roles that other members recognize as appropriate and non-threatening” as it

is an effort to “immerse oneself” in the everyday reality- “feel it, touch it, hear it, and see it- in order to understand it” (Lindlof & Taylor 4, 6). Embracing ethnographic theory reveals how TED functions as a source of community formation, both in physical and mediated modes. As I performed ethnographic research, I shifted from observer to participant by becoming a TEDx curator/organizer. The decision to fully engage and produce an original TEDx event allows for deeper immersion in the TED ecosystem and without the ability to enact a mixed methods approach, key discoveries about the front stage/back stage elements to TED would not have been possible. For in the middle of ethnographic inquiry, the realization of my implicit role as a teacher/curator, or expert, became clearer, revealing a need to test it out to discover what “works” not only in my local community, but also in the everyday classroom.

The embracing of experimental/hybrid pedagogy reveals how TED functions as a source of knowledge production in classroom engagement. The emphasis on radical pedagogy instinctually connects to the identification of the curator/teacher kinship and a desire relevant in most experiments where the teacher/student dynamic is destabilized and re-created and re-negotiated through specially designed projects. Studies such as those by Lisa Propst, who asked her students to simultaneously build the curriculum for a course in collaboration with her, were huge motivators to devising and enacting the classroom experiments from Chapters 7 and 8 of this project (Propst 1). Engaging students in their own curation process became a secondary push in the experimental chapters as inspired by the work of Simon Brown on reducing student anxiety about what students believe teachers “think” they should retain versus what is actually learned or retained (Brown 2). Of course, the work in these chapters is likewise methodologically informed by previous research done in collaboration with Dr. Jacqueline Bach about the utility of TED-ED in lesson preparation (Bach & Watson 171). Each methodological brick, while a mixed

bag, provides new ways to pursue TED and produces complex and deeper questions about its rhetorical force.

As a primary source for framing the rhetorical force of TED, I turn to the work of Kenneth Burke and his theoretical notions about power. Burke's concepts of power are often more implicit than explicit, but recent rhetorical scholarship has shifted "power" to the foreground of Burkean analyses. Power, for Burke, is characterized by both terms and concepts, but is situated and found when indexed amongst a cluster of ideas. For rhetorical scholars, power, in the Burkean mode, emerges as a central component to understanding human relations and actions, particularly through the use of symbols. "Only by knowing wholly about our ways with symbols can we become piously equipped to ask, not only in wonder but in great fear, just what may be the inexorable laws of non-symbolic motion which our symbolizing so often 'transcends', sometimes to our 'spiritual' gain and sometimes to our great detriment. (Burke xvi). For Burke, power, similar to an order or act, exists in issues such as separation or emancipation, but also in more relative uncertainties and meanings produced by symbols we attach to as human beings. Our language, in turn, reflects such power attribution. For example, an excellent example of Burke's power concept is the potency of words such as supernatural or transcendent, which elevate above more grounded language such as wood, water, or earth. Our abilities to capture and inspire our imagination through referencing things we cannot experience are examples of applied sensorial power. Likewise, it occurs when TED attaches words such as "transformational" or "awe-inspiring" to their video talks, they are adopting such power.

During the research phases of this dissertation project, TED evolved, which, in turn, made employing a mixed methods approach essential. For example, TED talks appeared online in 2006, TEDx events formed in 2010, and the invention of TED-ED occurred in 2012. Given

the unique nature of TED as a research topic and focus, my methodological approach required flexibility in order to incorporate the necessary means of critically thinking about TED as an emerging set of rhetorical artifacts.

Structure of the Study

The project begins by describing the backstory or emergence of TED as a cultural and social phenomenon. In providing historical and critical/cultural context for the birth and expansion of the TED ethos, an understanding of its relationship to rhetoric, pedagogy, and media forms. TED is seen as a tool for sharing and learning within larger societal and cultural shifts in the transmission and consumption of information. Likewise, a divide develops between the two TED curators, Richard Saul Wurman and Chris Anderson, that becomes critical in delineating the crucial transitions TED makes towards engaging with a participatory, media convergence culture.

Emerging in an area of convergence, it is no surprise that TED is multimodal. It restores the primal power of speech, while simultaneously drawing focus to other skill sets such as written composition, visual design, and technological literacy. The presenter at TED needs fluency in multiple modes of communication, very similar to what is stressed to current students, the need for transferrable skills. Likewise, the consumer of TED content needs an awareness of critical thinking skills that help translate the use of persuasion bombarding them from multiple sources. To further situate, exchanges of information and ideas always occur from what Burke calls timing, where the cultural, physical, and social environments all contribute to the potential persuasive power of a given TED discourse that encourages identification (Burke 32).

Accordingly, Chapter 2 provides a review of pertinent literature exploring first the conceptual role of the expert and the strategies TED utilizes in creating speaker presence among a sea of

information presented orally but distributed digitally. Hence, moving from speech to the distribution of it leads to the realm of digital media studies and the struggle to understand telepresence as well as media consumption and production. Digital media studies situate not only how and what content is managed online, but also what communicative behaviors are demonstrated from such a transition.

One key behavioral change can be observed through the lens of education. As a review of literature on the rhetoric of community details, increasing numbers of individuals create groups of learning online, independent of traditional classroom models. An inquiry into the reasons of such widespread adoption can be observed as the field of education attempts to meet the needs of an “on demand” culture by compressing information and ideas as well as distributing such content in newer, more accessible digital spaces.

Chapter 3 begins with a close-textual analysis of the TED talk, “How Web Video Enables Global Innovation.” While numerous other TED talk videos could be selected for analysis, whether by most viewed or shared criteria, the one selected here is strategic for less populist reasoning. First, it is delivered by Chris Anderson, who as the TED curator, establishes himself as an authority by choosing to speak on the topic. His role as speaker validates his status as an expert participant-observer of a cultural phenomenon relevant to our conception of learning. Second, the content of the speech illustrates the heart of TED’s power, which is the recognition of the video epoch engendered by the ease of sharing information online. Information shared via online video is not only delivered on demand, but also updated and augmented regularly. The content evolves and the individuals who engage in the process experience cycles of improvement and a learning environment emerges. Third, as the analysis will reveal, the video talk establishes TED as a primary force within this digital learning environment as a major content provider.

These transitions are explored as a means for TED to be understood as a learning environment, both in asynchronous and non-asynchronous ways. Argued as an authoritative learning environment, TED builds upon the growth and expansion of digital media content in culture by becoming a distributor of ideas and a source for communal bridging and bonding. As rhetoricians these developments and trends return our discipline once again to core tenets of our pedagogy: wrestling with the ghostly nature of speech/voice, finding agency, and fostering engagement with civic and communal ideals. We find strategies to accomplish these things through the expertise from a cadre of leaders we encounter as part of our collective human experience.

Chapter 4 begins a series of ethnographic inquiries from Los Angeles to New York, ending in Baton Rouge, with the invention of TEDxLSU. The project unravels the ways in which TED learning or knowledge communities form and sustain via ethnographic field work. Traveling to both ends of the American east and west coasts, I argue that the role of the curator and the process of curation become the key factors in such communal construction. This work leads to the inspiration to produce an original TED event, TEDxLSU, which I likewise outline the creation of in adherence to the information gathered through critical reflective field work as the curator.

During the TEDxLSU invention process, the act of curation became analogous to that of teaching. The project returns once again to rhetorical pedagogy in Chapters 5 and 6, bringing together the mission and utility of TED as a model for the classroom in order to refine learning objectives within the basic course for a 21st century world, where assignments can be reimaged, outcomes renewed, and critical engagement with civic issues, particularly localized ones, can be displayed and curated, similar to a playlist for all to view.

The consequences of adopting such a model, however, are likewise explored in Chapter 7 as TED is revealed to be not only a model for the mediation of information and knowledge sharing, but also as a self-professed expert and authority. TED emerges as a guardian of what is and is not worth sharing and when viewed via this lens, signifies rhetorical tensions of power that can be potentially hazardous to a truly democratic exchange of ideas.

The project concludes with an epilogue chapter suggesting where research about TED can and should continue in the future. It suggests examining international TEDx events to investigate any intercultural differences in the formation and proliferation of TEDx learning communities. It suggests further rhetorical work on individual TED talks as the website is a literal new canon of public address texts to analyze. In addition, there is a rhetorical work to be performed on how TED affects our concept of the public intellectual. Finally, as a type of information sharing in a digital age, future work should address the exhausted format of TED events themselves, mimicked and copied by other groups. A suggestive place to begin is Richard Saul Wurman's push for "WWW" gatherings.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The Production of Expertise

At a TED event, attendees are introduced to an experience. Audiences are called into an elaborately designed staging area for a lavish production. Theatrical production is a huge element to the sensorial engagement with the event. Despite being in lavish chairs and tweeting with fellow audience members, at the end of the session, ideas have been expressed. Speakers have been carefully selected, coached, staged, and recorded as a choreographed symphony to consume. Ideas should be fresh and challenging. The delivery of ideas should be smooth, visually appealing, and engaging. Speakers should be no less than experts. Attending a TED event is much akin to how *Simpsons* creator Matt Groening feels when he goes- it is very similar to college, he sits in the back row, confused, but furiously pays attention and takes notes the entire time. TED events are the classroom on steroids. The organizers of TED place their branding on the line at each event. There is much at stake for them. Live TED events become marked as a classroom that dazzles and inspires, but in doing so, transforms and complicates our conception of the expert.

An expert is defined by the policy and procedural norms and expectations of a given field. These activities are monitored and policed for review and approval by institutional groups and organizations, typically comprised of previously approved “experts” of the same field/area. After mastering special knowledge and techniques of a field, an expert is able to then speak with authority about matters related to their specialization. Credentials matter for experts. Degrees, research, grants, awards, service, employment positions, and recognition are all components of the establishment of an expert in public culture. Even the educational institution (such as Harvard or other) an expert graduated from can play a role in his/her access to any of the

aforementioned components of achieving expertise status. Structural views and accounts of expertise consider systematic influences that come from disciplinary, institutional, and professional communities (Lyne & Howe). Such a critical perspective, however, doesn't take into account the multiple resources available for individuals to obtain legitimacy and move amongst diverse groups of people, without rigid modes of judgment and regulation. Problems arise when the expert shuffles outside of sanctioned discourse communities, from an exclusive disciplinary focus to one that is more public. Such navigation is connected most importantly to audience relationships, which in turn, reveals a more complex dynamic between speaker and content as well.

Some contend that there has been an erosion of discourse due to expertise being a closed system of exchange, as there isn't a possibility for common ground of discussion and debate about topical areas. (Bazerman 1988; Goodnight 1982). The expert is an individual who possesses special knowledge but is also a compass for those outside of a given specialized knowledge group. The expert is not simply a repository of information but a fluid communicator between audiences, constantly adapting content to fit a given situation or audience. In accepting the concept of expert as fluid communicator, we accept the dichotomy of expert/non-expert in information exchange, knowing there will be an unequal gap in shared knowledge over specific topics. Multiple dangers exist when such exchanges occur between these groups. When expertise is called upon to speak to a broader public, the expert becomes a rhetorician as well as a technician. Information must be adapted, compressed, and simplified for general audiences. Working within the constraints of communicating with more general audience situations, the expert must make choices about how to speak from a technical area to a given community. These choices may not be sanctioned by those within an expert's formally structured groups. Expert

speakers may be chosen more for their charisma or dynamic speaking skills than for their breadth of technical knowledge or their ability to adapt content in ways to promote quality understanding. Certainly, there are examples of experts who can act as dynamic speakers and adapt technical content accurately and rhetorically using savvy techniques to engage with broad audiences. There are ethical speakers; however, the age of the celebrity expert is well seasoned and often times the public's choice for an expert speaker from a field doesn't match up with who the other experts would select as their voice. For these reasons, Lyne and Howe recommend a "rhetorical" account of expertise that examines the grounds in which the function, acquisition, and expression of expertise are studied. Such rhetorical accounts of expertise lead to discoveries in the exercises of power.

Questions and debates over an individual's claim to expertise, authority, or legitimacy have been ongoing for centuries. Claims of expertise revolve around rhetorical contests over "ownership and legitimacy" amongst "autonomous" expertise and "attributed" expertise (Hartelius 3-4). An individual secures attributed expertise when receiving public recognition and acknowledgement. In other words, when an expert moves outside of a closed group of professionals, the characteristics and power assigned to being an "expert" likewise become transitory and complex. Geisler describes the structure of such expertise contests as a "dual frame space framework" divided between a content domain and a rhetorical process domain (Geisler 92). There is a dichotomous relationship between subject matter knowledge and communicative knowledge, being able to activate skills that audiences identify and pay attention to when enacted by speakers. Being an expert, however, truly involves all areas: technical knowledge, professional credibility and approval, public attribution, *and* effective communicative skills (Regli 1999). Geisler contends that most often expertise is transmitted in

formal education settings through “interactions with texts” and that there is a “burden of rhetorical persuasion” that being labeled an expert places upon the individual (253). Two spaces affect the construction of expertise and both involve persuasion. One deals with a circle of colleagues and professional organizations; the other public audiences without an insider view of a given idea, content, or issue. In each circle of interaction, an individual must persuade of their expertise status.

We want our experts to be on tap but not on top, as they are called upon when a general public needs specialized knowledge and do not have access to or credentials for determining who in a society should be assigned the power to speak for a given topic. We need experts as mentors, teachers, and guides. We need them to satisfy internal demands, such as publishing research and sharing with other professional kin. We need them to satisfy external needs. When necessary, they should adapt complex information and issues to a general populous, citizens, voters, etc in order to encourage reasoned dialogue and connections with and to information. We need experts who understand the power and efficacy of rhetoric as a clarification tool for ethical exchanges between people. We need our experts to navigate in a transparent and ethical manner from a backstage, interior arena of their professional kin into larger and broader communities in the hopes of generating more understanding and assessment. We need experts to come out of the shadows and be accessible to a wider public. We need these characteristics from our experts in order to grow, ask, and learn but we also need them to be authentic not manufactured.

Conversely, *why* do we need these things from our experts? We seek expertise but assume the benefits are automatic and reassuring. A reliance on expertise and its production in our culture leads us a realization that experts are *everywhere* (and not always sentient), each offering answers and ideas. A reliance on experts reveals a false illusion of security as

information gets compressed and refined into a sound bite inside political campaigns and consumer ads. We have produced a “tyranny of experts” (Chafetz 7).

Beyond the problematic nature of attribution in the creation of expertise, it becomes imperative to address the concepts of performance and invention, two things that TED celebrates in the production of expertise. Our culture is heavily addicted to the aesthetic. It is troubling that the ideas of performance and style trump notions such as reason and logic, but far too often style trumps substance, forms trumps content, and disguises hide reality. It is impossible to make a clear distinction between invention and performance, because it is possible to deceive audiences of expertise. I could, for example, after watching a movie such as *Good Will Hunting* (1998, Van Sant), study and observe the language of a psychologist and talk like one casually. In an actual therapy session, however, I would be unable to sustain any credibility as a psychologist. I may not be a doctor, but I could play one on television. That being said, an individual who wishes to be believed must act in a certain persuasive manner, contingent upon rhetorical situational factors. Rhetoric combines these characteristics of expertise together in an epistemic way. It is only through an analysis that explores the relationship between language and knowledge, can we truly begin to see past the frame and wrapping and into the heart of what truly lies within the content of a speaker, the invention or idea, its value, or utility in *understanding* something better.

Does TED produce experts or do experts choose to help produce TED? For live TED events, a speaker may indeed be the ideal expert who possesses a wholistic bag of all desired qualities from technical to communicative qualities and skills. There are two issues to consider. First, TED speakers are incredibly rehearsed and prepared. They are packaged well for audiences. Their presence at TED, while a speech, is likewise a performance, many times with movement blocked and suggested pauses added to the mix for proper camera effect. Remove the

cameras, lighting, and stage and a TED speaker will resonate *completely different* when experienced in an everyday lecture class. Second, the organizers of TED are masters at understanding and discovering maximum levels of human speech communication. The written component of TED speeches is edited for content, compression, clarity, and flow. The oral delivery of TED speeches is also practiced repeatedly months in advance. Even coached, TED speakers typically secure multiple points of oratorical brilliance that remind us of what Josh Gunn terms “the ghost of speech.” TED restores a renewed energy and focus upon the power inherent in the spoken word.

Gunn recalls the famous writing of Herbert Wichelns from 1925, a foundational text for the discipline of speech communication, in which oratory criticism is separated from literary criticism. Oratory is not literature, despite having been cemented into curriculums in such a way that binds one to an often “essay-like” functionality in speech composition (Gunn 361-362). As Walter Ong (2002, 1976) argued, “there is no likelihood that face-to-face persuasion will cease to be a principal mode of exerting influence given the influx of mass communication” (Ong 39). As he borrows from Ong, Gunn calls for scholars in communication to recover our roots in the “here and now personal presence” that orality offers (Gunn 347). Extending Witchelns, Carroll Arnold claims the study of speech should be grounded primarily in the intimacy and contingency of the interpersonal encounter (Medhurst 502). TED curator Chris Anderson calls the subtlety or nuances of inflection in speech the most surprising component of human contact (Anderson TED talk). Indeed, the intricacies of speech that are native to that moment when the encounter is at its most precious, intimate, and contingent moment of the unknown- “that sense of excitement that titillates between dangerous and exotic, a sensual pleasure before words spring forth and

identification can occur with (an)other(s)” is the most mysterious and elusive of human interaction (Gunn 344-345).

TED captures the mysterious allure that occurs when we communicate ideas. Part of TED’s status as a powerful authority is its ability to manufacture these peak communicative moments. Another component of TED’s power is its capacity to attribute expertise to multiple groups of speakers across the fields of science, academia, medicine, business, and more. Some may argue these speakers are sanctioned experts before their appearance at a TED event but the majority possesses the aforementioned closed recognition from a professional community of peers. Wider and more public appeal comes almost immediately from presenting at TED. Would a non-expert public truly know of an individual’s expertise? We know because they appear at TED. We are left to entrust the organizers of TED. We empower and place trust within TED that their speakers possess true expertise, that information is accurate and impartial.

At TED 2014, Anderson introduced a surprise video appearance from Ed Snowden, a former CIA counter-intelligence administrator, accused of allegedly whistleblowing in harmful ways about American government surveillance activities. The next day, Anderson introduced Richard Ledgett, deputy director for the American NSA, as a counter-response to Snowden’s previous appearance. Balanced? Impartial? Perhaps, but more importantly, it is interesting to note that the individual leading the discussion on both of these days is Chris Anderson, TED curator, positioned on stage immediately between the audience and the screen, mediating as expert/authority himself, driving the exchange of information and setting the agenda for the importance of surveillance as a topic worthy of discussion, no different than a CNN anchor. I am not arguing about the use of surveillance as a topic, but rather using this as an example of how TED complicates and manufactures expertise while simultaneously marking their events as

coming from authoritative deciders (experts) towards not only what ideas should be discussed but also who should discuss them. TED sets the agenda and creates the syllabus for us to follow.

The Ecology of Spreading

Key complexities arise with the realization that TED events (or agendas) enjoy an immortal presence online as videos. TED talk videos become virally shared and *disconnected* from the linear flow of a live syllabus-structured event. Let us continue by considering the Snowden appearance, which was recorded and made public online. The contextual factors of *how* one views a TED video are enormously important and layered. Where is it screened? With the screening location, physical and digital geography of the video are critical factors. The video may be seen in the comfort of a home office, during the bustle of a subway ride, or a Political Science classroom. The video may have been embedded on someone's Facebook page, YouTube channel, or hyper-linked via a tweet. It may have been viewed from the TED website host. Each of these contextual factors contributes to how the information is processed and managed for use by an individual. For example, if seen via a video embed share, the viewer may not see that there is a follow-up response video from Richard Ledgett, perhaps because the person sharing the video doesn't provide that information in their post or worse doesn't know themselves of its existence. If the video is seen via the TED web portal, then they will observe a link to the response or other similar themed videos available for review. Transmitting videos online isn't too revolutionary, but in our contemporary media landscape, *how* a video is shared becomes a mechanism of *power* that helps TED maintain its authoritative presence, not merely by setting an agenda, but also by monitoring its media flow. In the changing digital media landscape, power resides not only in the ability to display experts, but also in the capacity to utilize impressions,

likes, and shares. In managing and rewarding such activity, TED creates a credible source ethos as an authority on worthy ideas within our media ecology.

A medium is a technology within which a culture grows; it is a biological connection, but technology gives form to a culture's politics, social organization, and habitual ways of thinking (Postman 10-11). Our fascination with ecology of all kinds is tied up with the information explosion as we become more consciously connected to the inter-relationships amongst things (Ong 6). A primary concern within the ecology of new media is its effect on our concept of community. A community is a collection of individuals conjoined by a common purpose or goal (Berry 13). A community functions as a repository of shared values and traditions that uniquely shape the character and identity of individuals. The rhetoric of community is typically constructed around notions of "loss" or the "fragmentation" of a mythical period in public culture when there was a shared unity (Hogan 13-14).

The field of sociology has long been concerned with the concept of community. Sociologists grapple with the term *Gemeinschaft*, or community, a group of unified people who possess a common will or purpose and strive to maintain immediate, face-to-face relations. Contrasted to that of the *Gesellschaft*, or society, where associations are larger in size and individuals are more focused on self-interests rather than a unity of wills (Feenberg & Bakardjivea 3). Optimistically, Dewey believed improved communication amongst local communities would foster more social cohesion and hence, allow the public writ large to find its identity amidst an array of distractions from mindless entertainment technologies to the existence of too many publics (Dewey 26-28). More recently, revised concerns over the local community include examining the importance of social capital within the explosion of new communication technologies (Putnam 9-11). While the strengthening of local associations can enhance social

cohesion, key distinctions between typologies of communities can form. First, “bridging” communities can bring together disparate members of a community. Bridging communities can produce greater social capital because of the tendency for them to be more heterogeneous. Second, “bonding” communities are groups of individuals who have highly similar interests or likes (Putnam 16-19). The homogenous nature of these communities is their greatest strength but also their dark side as inclusion isn’t always encouraged. Of course, it is important to note that these distinctions are not fixed but fluid as bonds could turn to bridges and vice versa (Borgmann 56). It is possible for a community to develop into one which bridges and bonds. Despite the argumentation surrounding the history of community mythos and its typologies, the major tenet from the discourse on the rhetoric of community is rooted in agency. The ability of individuals to network via a localized community in order to generate positive change is the backbone of community discourse. Communities become the connective tissue that negotiate an individual’s public (as in political bodies) and private (familial) spheres and allow for mobility and change.

New media complicates community. Song argues that while the existence of virtual communities doesn’t discredit the distinctions of bridging and bonding, it problematizes them due to the anonymity the internet affords as well as the ease of lukewarm commitments (Song 8-10). Song questions the legitimacy of “online” communities in terms of civic engagement and democratic practice. What about communities who gather in both physical and virtual spaces? TED utilizes new media technologies to promote, organize, and execute what is known as “knowledge” communities via “TEDx” events. These “independently organized events” are sanctioned/approved by the organizers of the “main” TED conference in California. The idea is to empower local communities, organizations, and affiliations with the opportunity to stimulate dialogue from the sharing of ideas through a “TED-like” experience. The introduction of the “x”

events is a line of defense against TED critics charging the organization of possessing an elitist ethos. With the invention of “x” events, TED can boast that not only is most of the content online for free, but also can be molded and shaped into one’s own event. It provides democratizing ammunition to be used against its critics. TED curator Chris Anderson professes that he wasn’t at all clear that the idea of giving away the TED “brand” would work (Rosenblum 2). He assumed that the first year the events started, 2010, would generate 10-30 events. Imagine his surprise when over 275 were organized, the inaugural on the campus of the University of Southern California. In 2011, TEDx events have been held in multiple international locations from India and Africa to England and Amsterdam. The mystique of TED, to Anderson’s surprise, could indeed fit into a box and be distributed as a kind of intellectual Happy Meal for those who apply for permission and desire to re-create or re-present the original, annual TED event in California. What began as an artifact of new media distribution, the TED talk podcast video, is now an inspiration to further carry the values of TED into local venues without the \$6000 admission fee. It is also a chance for a local community to galvanize, to bridge and/or bond, and to emulate the TED brand and aesthetic experience. To borrow a computational set of terms, TED uses new media to “*copy and paste*” its formatting and aesthetic in the effort to allow a localized set of individuals to create its own identity, or as the marketing suggests, whatever follows the “x”...hence, entities such as TEDxDallas, TEDxWomen, or TEDxChicago Youth.

Media convergence makes this replication plausible. Convergence culture is more than a simple shift in technology devices. Convergence alters relationships between existing audiences. Convergence refers to a process not an endpoint. It changes the nature of the relationship between media producers and consumers. If the previous generation of media consumers were thought to be passive, the current one is active. They are migratory individuals that are socially

connected through media (Jenkins 10-15). Organizers of TEDx events are examples of this kind of participatory culture resembling a kind of “elocution mob” and are products of the process of convergence. From this participatory culture, “knowledge communities” begin to form. These communities are akin to termed “smart mobs” (Rheingold 5). According to Rheingold, smart mobs form when communication and computing technologies amplify human talents for cooperation (Rheingold 6). The organizers and participants in TEDx events continue to expand upon the rhetoric of community built by original TED conferences and their artifacts. The primary leaders in the TED organization promote common values of “sharing ideas” and “creating a better future” in order to generate a mythic communion with their followers. TEDx audiences become “transmedia” storytellers in the ways they emulate the TED model but fill it with their own localized content and continuing the communal storyline. Pierre Levy suggests that an aesthetic work in his era of collective intelligence might blend the roles of authors, readers, producers, spectators, creators, and interpreters: these will meld into a “circuit” of cultural expression (Jenkins 22). However, despite the “openness” of TED organizers to local groups, there remains a very strict set of rules that must be adhered to when producing a “TEDx” event (www.ted.com). The opportunity to hold a TEDx event may promise the illusion of local control, but it’s not quite a deconstruction of the top/down model proposed by either Levy or Jenkins.

Antithetical to TED’s approach with its “x” events, Jenkins asserts that losing “control” of a message and its content is something organizations and groups should be embracing in their communication practices (Jenkins 33). A loss of control, perhaps the production of TEDy event, might significantly reveal openings and new possibilities for democratic exchange and production, since most policies and decisions about media power and its deployment are

managed by the corporations themselves, particularly in the United States and increasingly across the world (Jenkins 41). A focus is needed on how collectively individuals are or could potentially shape the communication environment all around them. In order to accomplish this, we encounter a tension between power and authenticity.

“Spreadability” is the term Jenkins uses to describe how information content generates power. Emerging communities and business practices need to listen carefully to audience needs and wants, making every attempt to meet them as rigorously as their own institutional goals. (Jenkins 31). Biological terms such as viral or meme often are attached to pieces of media distributed widely across online communication network. If we were to focus solely on the viral nature of TEDx events, our analysis would be on the replication of a singular idea or concept, which TEDx events are intended to generate. The ideas discussed at a local event are not entirely pre-determined by TED, but in order for your videos to be “virally” shared through their networks, it must adhere to a strict aesthetic and edit, hence, replicated as closely as possible to the original event parent that is the TED conference. That being said, we are assuming a set of power relations in the use of viral, as if TEDx communities are merely hosts or repositories for replication, discounting what might spread or stick in circulation from any TED event. It is impossible to delineate what successful viral activity is or to judge how it is created, unless we consider its deployment. If deployed properly, new platforms and strategies create openings in social, cultural, economic, political and other arenas for change that are more democratic and diverse. (Jenkins 41).

Circulation is key to TED's power as it also plays into the top/down model that participatory culture seeks to make messy. How and why an individual chooses to share a piece of media, a tweet, a video link, etc is immensely complex and layered, but the choices are simply shaping our media landscape. If the content is shared and remixed, it is still reliant on a public of networked communities to garner power and visibility. Sharing is an essential piece of our collective human experience and it cannot simply be explained by a rise in technological tools and innovations, certainly they play a role, but there is something deeper. Gladwell refers to content as having "stickiness" in relation to why it is shared by someone. The funny moment of a kitten falling over, a baby's facial reaction, a moment where a beautiful musical note is performed are all examples of something that sticks in a mind and calls to be shared. In short, the ability to share such sticky moments, rapidly and widely, is empowering. The faster and wider the share, or the stick and spread of something, the more power one garners as an expert, a curator of the carnivalesque nature of digital media culture. Impressions, shares, and likes have all become not merely merit badges, but powerful resources for an individual to gain a following, agency, while simultaneously making themselves a target for corporate interests. A You Tube blogger with millions of followers is a precious commodity for a corporation. Imagine the golden ticket that can come from ideas shared through the massive network that is TED.

Local efforts to establish TED"x" identities are generated by individuals who have experienced TED most commonly via new media sources: either a live web stream or pre-recorded TED talk podcasts. Does the invention of "x" events allow for TED to be assembled in multiple sites as replication or does it allow for TED to be re-mixed into something unique in truly independent ways per "x" event? The process mirrors that of the educational classroom at its adjustments to the online educational movement. Can one replicate the *communal* aspects of

the classroom? If a classroom is a formalized effort at creating a knowledge/learning community, then can it be replicated in non-traditional spaces? In this new media ecology that is predicated on sharing, spreadability, and convergence, how can teachers wrestle with the interpersonal dimension of instruction?

Education On-Demand

Over the past decade, Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) scholars note there has been an explosion in the use of technologies to deliver course content (Turman & Schrodt 110). The Internet is being adopted as a new “instructional medium” (Bejerano 409). CMC scholars have noted psychosocial effects from the shift of digital content such as feelings of social isolation and disconnectedness, learner distress and latency, as well as a time-displacement barrier (Caplan 626). A central issue in the shift to more digital forms of educational content delivery and its efficacy is that of social presence or consequently, its lack. Yamada notes that a lack of social presence may produce a reduction in learner awareness of the necessity and importance of study (Yamada 821). Gibson, Scott, and Webb mention that the use of CMC creates a relative lack of nonverbal cues that provide the communicator with less identity and meaning (Sherblom 504). This lack can lead to misunderstanding and student confusion as well as isolation. For this purpose, Thompson encourages educators to critically assess their own incorporation of CMC into a classroom (Thompson 218). Schwartzman argues that blaming technology apparatuses shields some educators from evaluating the faults in their own teaching methods and ways of interacting with students (Schwartzman 11). In refusing to contemplate change, no reflection on the efficacy of an educator’s current pedagogical practices can be assessed. Social presence is defined as the extent to which a communication medium fosters feelings of immediacy and social-emotional connection (Short, Williams, & Christie 4). Social

presence is boiled down to saliency, the ability of CMC to reduce or enhance vocal and physical cues for the communicator and listener (Yamada 819). The more experience gained in learning to “verbalize” social information and engage in social interaction via new media technologies, less communication apprehension is expressed and more communication competency is measured (Jenks 40). In sum, these scholars are marinating in aged rhetorical waters, where elocutionists battle classical orators. CMC scholars are exploring and challenging educators to consider how to best *perform* telepresence in order to generate connection, or consequently, emotionally resonate or inspire. It is a tactic that media production crews behind TED media realize: they must enhance the telepresence of speakers. “Our job is to make these speakers into rock stars,” claims June Cohen, director of TED media (Heffernan 3). TED marries substance with the performative; teachers of speech can’t do all of the performative work without the substance.

Since many educators are using TED talks in classrooms as learning tools, it could displace the traditional live lecture. A TED talk model may be used in a hybrid course context or as a pre or post class assignment. When the lecture model is displaced as a live, asynchronous event by a pre-recorded video form, presence and time are the key issues at stake in the debate for those in educational, academic communities. There are reasonable arguments on all sides in the transformation of course content. One major advantage of online video content is that it places control in the hands of the user/learner. The ability to pause, rewind/fast forward, and replay caters to almost any learning style and pace. Video content, if parceled into smaller modules of content, can be likewise divided up into stages/levels of readiness as well. Students can review remedial content videos or others who are further advanced can skip directly to intermediate sections. The social stigma of “not getting it” amongst the group writ large is removed and the

learner can relax and progress with ease. As an extension of the renewed emphasis TED places on speech and voice, teachers, as public lecturers, are faced with the challenge of recording their content in lieu of traditional lecture modes. It is not difficult to see the pressures that education feels in the same way as it shifts to more discussions of greater technological implementation from online courses to curriculum changes to teacher training to resource-need schools. Education is battling the “on demand” movement.

As methods of transmission affect delivery of content, educators must consider the rise of participatory culture amidst an ecology centered on spreading and sharing. New media blurs the lines between consumer and producer, the result of which creates opportunities for the traditional roles of teacher/learner to continuously shift. Our students are no longer just consumers but creators of information. We have an obligation as educators to engage in literacy efforts surrounding multimodal messaging and production. It is no longer enough to teach critical thinking skills; one must instruct in the art of critical production skills. These production skills call for levels of imperative technological sophistication on behalf of the educator. Our teachers need technological literacy and curriculum enhancement that encourages a sharing of information and a less rigid concept of the sage of the stage.

The ease of free speech in new online video spaces and techniques, however, renews our need to emphasize analytical skills for our student-citizens as listeners—free speech has consequences and our student-citizens need a sophisticated understanding of the concept. In other words, our mission should be to teach the habits of inquiry as well as the skills of expression. TED teaches us about how to do both of these tasks. It is not difficult to see the pressures education feels as it shifts to more discussions of greater technological implementation from online courses to curriculum changes to teacher training to resource-need schools. Students

want more flexibility in scheduling and structuring their learning. They want to develop their own educational queue. The “Netflixing” of education has begun. The rise and ease of online video production and sharing, coupled with increased bandwidth and microprocessor devices has accelerated the push. We have reached video’s epoch in relation to education. It is no longer *should we* but *how do we* transition from a text-based literacy to a digital one. The problem resides in the ways scholars take up camps as either pro or anti-technology. The solution, as TED teaches us, is to push for new models of doing. These models combine a collage of skills from the canvas of literacies, but place a renewed emphasis on speech and its centrality as a galvanizing force. TED talks are literacy mashups critically influenced by our inherited Greco-Roman model. TED uses the medium of video as a catalyst to re-engage us in education towards the primal importance of content, of having something to say- an idea as well as our essential human need to vocalize inspired by collective sharing. TED demands that we re-imagine and embrace the inherent power of invention.

Imagine how the political unrest in Egypt would’ve been managed without the expressive dimensions of Twitter. Any new introduction of a technological tool leads to discussions and discoveries of implementation and best use. With the increasing number of mobile applications, websites, or other media content available for use, questions likewise arise about the ways in which expertise is sanctioned and attributed both to technological hard/software and the individuals who use and produce content from them. TED bridges speech communication with media production in a symbiotic way. The discipline of speech communication, to remain relevant to a basic higher educational purpose, must uncover and discover ways to enhance these connections and links between the processes of creating a speech in an era of multimodality.

Hybrid Pedagogy

In the popular 1970s children's cartoon show *Schoolhouse Rock*, viewers were introduced to grammatical concepts (amongst other educational topics) via animated, musical segments. One such video titled *Rufus Xavier Sarsaparilla* tackles pronouns, as the cartoon instructs on ways to insert them into language. The gimmick is to demonstrate to viewers that pronouns simplify language for meaning and use. It is possible to conceive of TED in this way as it connects to pedagogical practice. TED teaches us that video (or technology writ large) stands in for larger complex tasks in teaching; the problem resides in the debate over whether such replacement/use actually simplifies anything in pedagogy for ease and/or effectiveness. Hence, it is imperative that scholars continue researching teaching and learning from a literacy perspective within our current multi-modal rhetorical culture.

Hybrid pedagogy seeks strategies of teaching that combine both critical and digital pedagogy in the hopes of producing cases of "best uses" for technologies of new media in education. Are there substituted ways of teaching, via these new technology tools, certain content that make pedagogy progressive? Most experiments in hybrid pedagogy are networked and participant-driven exercises, coming from diverse individuals working in academic research, but also in K-12 learning environments. A major push in this discipline of inquiry is to promote new ways of teaching students to be literate.

Literacy can be seen as a social construction, not situated as only in the realm of cognition for psychologists to investigate. Literacy is deeply embedded in the culture, history, and everyday discourses of people's lives (Barton & Hamilton 9). To look at literacy outside of these contexts is to miss most (if not all) of what is going on (Kist 3). What is needed, rather, is a "specific sociocultural approach to understanding and researching literacy (Lankshear & Knobel

16). The similarities between information, visual, critical, and media literacy are so close that separating them seems unnecessarily artificial (Tyner 18). One potential danger in such an integrated approach is that multimodal research can often privilege a kind of technological determinism, thus putting too much emphasis on a specific medium that determines actions. That being said, given the vast array of new technologies appearing so rapidly, it is increasingly important to identify and contextualize as well as situate any analysis of literacy within a given frame. In a way, searching for “vernacular” literacies that provide opportunities for showing how texts are used, what people did with them, and what values they reveal” can be a refreshing and insightful lens in which to see the fruits of a multimodal research dynamic. (Barton & Hamilton, 216). A critical literacy disrupts the dominant or power structure in the social context of what prevails in the discourse. (Rodgers 773).

In order to be experienced, a poem, a speech, an equation, a painting, a dance, a novel, or a contract each requires a distinctive form of literacy, when literacy means, a way of conveying meaning through and recovering meaning from the form of representation in which it appears (Eisner 19-20). We need to begin framing pedagogy, regardless of the discipline, through the lens of multi-literacies. TED shows how to treat technologies, primarily video, as a pronoun or substitute. TED replaces Rufus Xavier Sarsaparilla; however, if we’re not careful in our understanding and implementation, TED could have the reverse effect. If we consider some key principles before entering the multi-literacy world, however, we can avoid the latter.

TED is a mashup of the “available design” model in which students are asked to understand the “grammars” inherent in the performative language and semiotic systems including film, video, and photography, gesture, dance, art and set of conventions associated with these activities in a given social space (Kist 21). TED teaches us communication by linking

our modes, the visual, the aural, the verbal, and the written directly to technological production. It shows us not only how to teach but how to learn in an on-demand, media saturated environment without losing the roots of traditional pedagogical methodologies.

Accelerated by poor learning outcomes and the ease of online video, the flipped classroom model is being widely adopted by educators. Predicated on the recording of videos, the flipped classroom developed in 2007 when Jonathan Bergman and Aaron Sams of Woodland Park High School in Colorado began experimenting with a software program that recorded PowerPoint presentations. They began uploading these videos along with narration for students who missed class to view online at home. The uploads spread and gained large numbers of views (Bergman & Woodland 4-5). Khan Academy gained immense popularity in 2007 as well, posting more than 2,400 educational tutorial videos online (Khan TED talk). The concept behind the use and production of these videos is that traditional lectures could be transitioned as a pre or post class activity. This, in turn, creates more devotion in-class to experiential or synthesis activities for students.

The theoretical foundation for the flipped classroom can be identified in active learning theories. Surprisingly, educators' use of the term "active learning" has relied more on intuitive understanding than a common definition. Consequently, many educators argue that all learning is inherently active and that students are therefore actively involved while listening to formal lectures in the classroom. Students, however, must engage in higher-order thinking tasks such as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation in order to be truly active. In this context, strategies promoting active learning be defined as instructional activities involving students in doing things and thinking about what they are doing. Flipped videos often introduce concepts or encourage

the retention of them. Reviewing the videos before class allows educators the opportunities to develop in-class exercises that promote traditional active learning models.

Against the backdrop of the invention of the flipped classroom, the TED-ED space makes the communication of information in an educational environment infinitely more robust. TED-ED is the flipped classroom enacted. It is a site where previous information (often lectures) done in class can now be viewed before a student comes to class. Hence, traditional lecture time is flipped in order to free a space for more interactive and experiential assignments. Educational and flipped videos are ubiquitous. While their quality may vary, the mass availability of such content has no doubt altered the university landscape. It is transforming education. Students can control their own learning. The difficulty is in the organizational structure of such a change in the power relations of learner-instructor. There remains a need for structured learning.

Technology will not replace a human in instruction. It will not remove teaching jobs but it will and should alter requirements. It must as traditional pedagogical practices cannot thrive in new, multiple, and qualitatively different learning environments that have been made possible given advancements in technological efficiency. Most instructors are not equipped to prepare content for hybrid, synchronous, web, or asynchronous learning environments.

The teaching and learning environment can be thought of as “pedagogical ecology” (Jaffee 228). Dropping technology into this ecological mix produces a reaction, similar to one found in a biological or chemical petri dish, in that, there will be a reaction- some elements will scatter, be assimilated, or die. Eventually, a new ecological form will take hold of the dish. Full potential of technology to enable a strong learning environment depends on the instructor’s ability to design content to fit it (Hopper 37). The primary design for a classroom environment has been teacher-centered in its scope. With the inventions of technological ease, the teacher is

displaced as is the primal use of the lecture model to effectively run a class session. The death of the lecture model was announced years ago, and it, amongst other tactics, helped to produce a kind of rationalized myth in content delivery (Meyer & Rowan 344). The lecture model is mythically based simply because it has always been the means to achieve an ends, but lacks sufficient or empirical data supporting it as the most successful means of classroom learning. Contrast this with learning paradigm introduced that calls for educators to push for less delivery of content and more production of learning (Barr & Tagg 16-17). The key to such a task is the infusion of more interactivity in classroom design, which in turn, creates more opportunity for students to produce their own content obtaining strong multi-literacy skills in the process. Hence, interactivity becomes a master term that is bantered around within the ecology of pedagogy (Wagner 22). In order for there to be more interaction during classroom time, whether live or virtual, there could be an intermediate mode that *stands in* for the traditional lecture: this is where TED intervenes both as a paradigm and strategic approach to instructional design.

If we begin to re-conceptualize how information is structured, transmitted, and delivered, then the architectonic power of TED radically affects the composition of democratic communities. The Internet has democratized knowledge; TED is now a powerful force in the distribution and sharing of that knowledge, by deciding who shares and what content gets distributed. It operates by shadowing the model of a university. TED has an administrative arm that protects its branding and curriculum. TED features a cadre of prestigious speakers (faculty). TED admits individuals (students) after reviewing applications and charging fees. With the opening of content online, however, TED embraces participatory culture and subsequently illuminates that the intrinsic power of community. The power of community resides in its ability to generate opportunities for agency amongst its collective membership. Such agency is made

possible through exposure to and inclusion of a diversity of ideas and information. It is through what Chris Anderson calls “radical openness” that TED encourages a renewed emphasis on the local community, especially with the introduction of TED “x” events. Being predicated on the university model, TED “x” events form new communities of learning. TED “x” events are giant, passionate lesson plans, composed by “curators” of all ilk and enacted across assorted spaces that function as classrooms. Contemplating the classroom as a model for the community construction is not new to scholarly discourse; however, most recently a renewed focus shifts such discourse away from K-12 environments as models and more towards college classrooms. With the introduction of enhanced technologies (including online courses and universities), the issue of community building in learning environments is of greater importance. Is community lost in changing learning environments? In what ways has new media developed communities that encourage increased learning, cohesion, and literacy?

CHAPTER 3: IT'S ALL CONNECTED: THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT OF TED

At the 2002 TED conference, Chris Anderson addressed the audience. Having recently purchased the event, Anderson's need was to outline his vision for the gathering. He treats the audience as if he is speaking with shareholders. "This is your conference," he tells them. Set against an empty backdrop, Anderson admits to the crowd how his business failed and his subsequent battle with depression. When his life settled, he encountered something "extraordinary," and he "began to read again." Reading about the "revolutionary changes" in the "ways we think and know" from the academic disciplines sparked his passion for learning again, as if he were returning to college years after graduating. This simple admission leads to his affirmation of Wurman's vision for TED. "Richard figured this out twenty years ago...that all of this, everything is connected."

Anderson's realization of how knowledge is contingent upon contributions from multiple disciplinary efforts is a seminal moment for the development of his vision. He makes a curious move in his speech. He takes the topic of happiness and begins outlining how various academic fields, from psychology to engineering, question the topic in their respective ways. "Where else," Anderson asks, "can we ask these *TED*-like questions?" (Anderson TED talk). In posing this question, he formally links TED's structure and its mission to that of the traditional university. While The formal university is designed to be a place where one can interrogate, contemplate, and assimilate information. Wurman's "backyard affair" for TED functioned as a personal learning environment for himself alongside invited guests (BPR). Anderson goes further with the concept. "I want to find ways to extend the TED experience throughout the year," he offers.

His first attempt is the creation of a TED book club. Individuals who sign up for future TED conferences get books mailed to them every six weeks that, if read, allow early intellectual

connections to made between future speakers soon to be heard at TED. By sending books, Anderson turns the conference into a classroom, asking future attendees to be students, reading assignments before coming to class. As multiple attendee and creator of the *Simpsons* Matt Groening says of TED, “it’s just like being in college again...I’m sitting on the back row and haven’t read any of the material so nothing makes sense to me, but it’s all very cool” (TED: Future). No one, however, would be prepared for the cultural explosion that would occur from Anderson’s next move. When the decision was made to record and podcast TED talks, making the content accessible to a wider audience. “We’ve been exploring for years, ways we can turn TED into a global classroom,” Anderson claims (Kamenetz 4). It wasn’t until major shifts in technology, namely the ease of online video, made his efforts successful.

In 2010, after five years of growth in posting TED talks, Anderson delivers a presentation titled “How Web Video Empowers Global Innovation.” A close-textual analysis shows the speech functioning as a validation of his efforts to make TED a learning environment. In the speech, Anderson outlines how online video has driven TED’s capability to function as a learning environment, one that encourages individual and collective agency through media literacy. The type of learning environment advocated by Anderson is different from traditional modes of learning that are centered on teachers. Considered a mechanistic approach, traditional learning occurs through a series of steps to be mastered, with an authority (teacher) persona judging skills in terms of standards of efficiency (Thomas & Brown 21). Educational theorists define this mode of learning as cooperative learning. Cooperative learning is considered a structure of interactions designed to facilitate the accomplishment of an end product or goal (Panitz 4). Two key characteristics define this model: the authoritative role of the teacher and an emphasis on structured content. Kagan notes that cooperative learning is a “structural approach”

that is “based on the creation, analysis, and systematic application” of “specific content-bound objectives” (Brandt 3). This description of learning is quite different from what Anderson argues for in his speech. Primary leaders in the TED organization, in this case curator Chris Anderson, promote common values of “sharing ideas” and “creating a better future” in order to generate a communion with their followers that promotes a different model, one rooted in collaborative learning, made possible by emerging technologies. This collaborative approach is a philosophy as well as a learning technique. A collaborative learning environment model focuses on the sharing of authority and highlighting individual, unique contributions amongst group members. In other words, collaborative learning involves the sharing of ideas in the hopes of building a better future from the outcome of the sharing process. As Rockwood states:

In the ideal collaborative environment, the authority for testing and determining the appropriateness of the group product rests with, first, the small group, second, the plenary group (the whole class), and finally (but always understood to be subject to challenge and revision), the requisite knowledge community (i.e. the discipline). The concept of non-foundational knowledge challenges not only the product acquired, but also the process employed in the acquisition of foundational knowledge (Rockwood 2).

This collaborative model is intensified with the use of emerging digital technologies. By outlining the differences between cooperative and collaborative learning environments, I do not mean to suggest that TED replaces traditional forms of learning. Rather, as I will show, TED promotes how this new digital and collaborative learning environment services to augment traditional modes rather than dominate and overthrow. It does, however, create new relationship dynamics between teacher and student. Douglas Thomas and John Seeley Brown refer to these changing dynamics as the “new culture of learning.” In their argument, traditional cultures of learning adopt to changes slowly, whereas the “new culture” thrives on changes. It is a learning-based approach that “emerges and grows” with increased participation from individuals both

inside and outside the physical classroom walls. Another key feature of their “new culture” details how “traditional education teaches *about* the world” while the new model, teaches how to engage “*within* the world” (Thomas & Brown 6, 8-9). Again, TED doesn’t privilege one model over the other, but rather demonstrates how the new model is functional in terms of augmentation.

TED, if conceived of as a global classroom, not only challenges us to consider its structure as a learning environment, but also the role that pedagogy plays within such a “new” learning culture. Pedagogy, while formally defining the teacher’s professional knowledge, additionally represents the enactment of pedagogical thinking. This knowledge-in-action definition sometimes is called the operational definition of teaching. Operational definitions describe how something is performed, that is, what it looks like. However, these definitions describe behavior regardless of the intentionality of the person. In professional pedagogical discourses, operational definitions tend to be presented either as “methods” of teaching, or, in a more results-oriented manner, “what works:” descriptions of behaviors and concepts that stand-in for something that we cannot comprehensively define in a formal way (Anderson 5). Many college educators today face significant challenges to their pedagogical methods and struggle to find “what works” for their classroom. One challenge is the shifting nature of the student-professor relationship dynamic influenced by the information explosion. Given the amount of information that is available to student audiences digitally, it is difficult to believe that the old “sage on the stage” model of teaching remains consistently effective. There must be variation built into course design should desired student learning outcomes be met.

Constructivist theories of learning, however, suggest that receiving information doesn't warrant knowledge. Knowledge occurs when some form of interaction occurs with the provided content. Hence, "what works" these days is an immersive course design that shifts the teacher from the "sage on the stage" to the "guide on the side" (King 2). From this perspective, professors are encouraging students to produce knowledge rather than consume information. Second, and perhaps a more radical challenge, is the impact of the culture of media convergence. We arguably live in the most over-stimulated period in developmental history. Students entering educational institutions are bombarded with an explosion of information (and entertainment) from a multitude of media devices. Yet, our educational institutions remain structurally bound to a paradigm of teaching that is consistent with the industrial revolution and an Enlightenment view of the mind (Robinson 13, 17). If we are truly teaching the generation of digital natives, then interdisciplinary modes of education are excellent places to begin facing these challenges. Alongside the cultural convergence of media, there needs to be more disciplinary convergence in the university climate. This is what Anderson's version of TED promotes: a breaking of traditional disciplinary barriers. It is a call for audiences to listen, to understand, and to synthesize. TED asks us to make connections between divergent ideas and topics.

The presentations beg for critical analysis and application through creative and civic engagement/participation.

Neil Postman argues that teachers should, as an experiment, tell students that any materials presented in a course are not to be regarded as authoritative. Beginning with this statement will allow students to begin contemplating what information has been omitted or tainted by an author's prejudices and conclusions. A teacher might fear this approach, as it emphasizes learning about learning rather than instilling facts that all "educated people should

know.” Using this tactic, however, teaches students not only about facts but how to defend themselves against them. We want our students to know what a noun is, and the textbook will tell them, but this is the beginning of learning, not the end (Postman 126-128). As Giroux and Searls note:

...students need to cross the boundary that separates colleges and universities from not just each other but the larger world...to use their knowledge and skills to engage with the larger community and social order (Giroux/Searls 279).

In a new model of learning, students could participate in the construction of the learning process and contribute to it along the way with a potential global reach. It is truly an exciting time for learning. TED capitalizes on this energy or as Anderson will term it: desire.

In order to examine Anderson’s presentation, it is necessary to identify two critical components: my role as delayed spectator and the aesthetic elements of the stage design where the speech occurred. I was not present at this speech, so I cannot speak to the rhetorical power of setting a conference on the prestigious campus of Oxford University in England. Like many others, I am only able to view the speech through recorded, online video. Unlike many rhetorical scholars who perform criticism of speech texts, I have the luxury of being able to interpret delivery and non-verbal communicative dimensions via the video. In addition, other layers of complexity force critical mentioning: this speech is presented as an *edited* artifact of media. There have been omissions and intentional choices have been made in cutting camera angles and shots to aid in my experience of the speech. Finally, Anderson is using multi-media presentation software as well as supplemental visual aids such as YouTube clips to enhance effect. The computer screen I view the speech on functions as my “window” into TED. Throughout my analysis of the speech, I am reminded of critically examining both the verbal and visual cues as well as mediums of information delivery. Turkle writes of computer viewing as producing a

“distributed presence” as it forces us into “multiple contexts in a fragmented” way (Turkle 14-16). It is no question that individual analyses of spectatorship could be performed across media platforms. Would it have been different watching the speech on an iPad or Android phone? Spectatorship is not the focus of this chapter but is necessary to illuminate. Considering this aspect, I have been careful to note the instances in the presentation where multi-media presentation software and post-production video editing of camera angles add to the overall efficacy of the speech.

The stage is lit in cool and calming blue colors. These shades of night blue allow the bold red letters *T*, *E*, and *D* to stand out in the background. The logo rests amidst a backdrop that features individual shelf casings. There aren't many of these enclosed shelves, but enough to notice they house artifacts from previous eras. Replicas of the first compass, microscope, and telegraph are only a few items that reside in these alcoves within the backdrop. These items are lit independently of the soft blue light. It is clear these items are on *display* for the live audience, although no specific camera shots detail them for the video audience. The artifacts are present as points of *reference* more than anything else. They become reminders of where TED stands in the innovative development of technology. The other artifacts remain displayed as museum relics to remind us of how far we've advanced with the innovation of technology. They rest in the background, fascinating to view but faded in relevancy through lack of spatial proximity. A cluster of old television sets, circa 1950s-1980s, resides stage left. The sets are molded together as a single unit, a sculpture of art made from the technological junk of previous decades. Behind the sets, a 1950s era television broadcast camera can be seen in silhouette. Further upstage features a replica of the Guttenberg printing press. The printing press is purposefully obfuscated by the sculpture of televisions as if to demonstrate how one overshadowed the other in

advancements. Nestled upstage right is a small replica of a birdcage where two stuffed pigeons are attached. The carrier pigeons are humorous lagniappe as they remind of the extent to which humans have gone in attempting to transcend geographical and temporal barriers in the delivery of information. It is as if the designers of the stage wanted to imitate a makeshift timeline of the “transmission” model of communication.

In the downstage center portion of the design, a red circle covers the majority of the floor. This is the spot where Anderson and other presenters stand. The circle reminds us of the dominance of the human body/speaker as the centralizing factor in the space, despite being surrounded by reminders of past communicative technologies. The spatial design argues for the dominance of both the live orator and his organizational (TED) affiliation, as the circle and the “TED” letters stand out as the only red coloring in the design. By presenting from the circle, one acknowledges their special status as having an “idea worth sharing” as well as being a member of TED’s circle of influence. There is a remaining component to the stage design that is arguably the most important. A projector beams Anderson’s presentation onto the backdrop. It is positioned higher than any relic or stage décor. This screen or “window” to information is presented as the visual apex. This hierarchical arrangement of relics and imagery is amplified by Anderson’s use of the presentation software “Prezi.” The presentation and video projection are *privileged* and it is important to note that there are important distinctions to be made here between the two. If attending live, the audience member can individually shift perspective from presenter to screen; however, if viewing via online video, these distinctions are pre-determined through editing as there are numerous cuts *away* from the speaker to the presentation visuals. It is quite possible that had I been present at the speech, the screen may not have been such a dominant visual force. Nonetheless, the stage design accomplishes this dialectic by the display of

previous communication technologies that are now obsolete. This encourages the notion of *progress* without removing an emphasis on the potential agency within individuals to make change happen. It is as if humanity has circled around these technologies in efforts to form connections with one another, but always returning back to the center (primal) circle that represents human speech. Anderson opens by acknowledging common ground with previous TED speakers. He admits to having amplified fears of clocks and sweaty palms. He then turns to an image on the screen of a large crowd. Admitting that “even the most optimistic of dreams” can be diluted by the thought of overpopulation and the abuse of resources through the world, Anderson wants us to see large crowds as a source for innovation. He believes that a current cultural phenomenon, one he terms “crowd-accelerated innovation,” has the potential to change not only the learning environment that is TED but the praxis of *learning* itself across multiple contexts.

He opens his argumentation by showing a You Tube video clip of six year-old Angelo Baligad, known online as “Lil’ Demon.” A native of Hawaii, Baligad became an overnight Internet sensation by uploading numerous videos of his break-dancing prowess. In the clip Anderson shows, Baligad does startling head spins, headstands, flips, and other sorts of impressive dance moves that appear unique for most normal children his age. As Baligad impresses in the video clip, Anderson narrates it by challenging us to ponder the number of hours the child needs to practice and prepare these moves. The clip ends with Baligad staring directly into the camera and exclaiming: “step your game up, oh!” The video clip elicits some awe and laughter within the TED audience and Anderson admits to coming across the videos of “Lil Demon” courtesy of filmmaker Jon Chu. Chu, who has directed the successful *Step it Up* series of films for Touchstone Pictures, spoke at TED a few months before Anderson’s speech. From

scouting talent online, Chu formed a new dance troupe known as “The Legion of Extraordinary Dancers” or the “LXD” that not only performed at TED but also at the Oscars in 2010. Chu told Anderson that when he saw the videos of “Lil Demon” he realized that the Internet was causing dance to evolve. Chu claimed in his own TED presentation that:

Dancers have created a whole global laboratory online. Kids in Japan are taking moves from a YouTube video created in Detroit, building on it within days and releasing a new video, while teenagers in California are taking the Japanese video and remixing it to create a whole new dance style (Chu TED talk).

Dancers from across the globe are now challenging each other to creatively learn from one another and build upon previous knowledge of moves through the use of online video. It feels, as Anderson claims, “like a revolution” is taking place in *learning*.

Anderson then shifts by suggesting a *movement* is occurring and relates it back to TED talks. “We noticed after we began posting our talks online, that speakers were starting to spend much more time on preparation,” Anderson claims. Anderson pulls up images of former TED speakers JJ Abrams and Jill Bolte Taylor. “Months of preparation is now made for 18 minutes of time,” Anderson asserts. “This raises the bar for the next generation of speakers,” he continues, “...and it’s not as if JJ and Jill end their talks with ‘step your game up’ but they might as well have.” Anderson makes the case that this movement is centered on “cycles of improvement” coming from people “watching web video.”

Anderson switches to a slide image of a ferris wheel. He argues that “crowd-accelerated innovation” can be conceived as three dials on a wheel. When these dials are “ramped up” the wheel of innovation begins to turn. Three components account for the dials. The first component is a crowd. The “bigger the better” for this dial as the “greater potential” exists for more innovators; however, Anderson notes not everyone need be an innovator. He outlines other roles for members of the “crowd.” These consist of commentators, trend-spotters, cheerleaders,

skeptics, mavericks, and super-spreaders. Most people in the crowd occupy these alternate roles and create the “eco-system from which innovation emerges.” The second dial consists of “light.” The light, as Anderson claims, is “the clear visibility of what the best people in the crowd are capable of,” because as he continues, “that is how you will learn and be empowered to participate.” The third dial Anderson labels as “desire.” He equates desire to hundreds of hours of research and practice that are crucial to innovation. Anderson then draws attention to a “pre-internet” photograph of a small crowd of people on a street watching a few dancers. He points out the small crowd. Likewise, he notes that the “desire” dial is fueled by “social status.” A global audience, made possible by the expansive use of the Internet, makes “all the dials light up.” Despite this, Anderson asserts “we can still see what the best of the crowd is capable of doing.” The “crowd” on the Internet shines the “light” for the best to rise up through social media outlets, comments, and links that point others to a video. Most importantly with this analogy, Anderson claims that “desire” is the biggest dial turned up. “If you’re a kid with a webcam and you do something that goes viral, you get to be seen by the equivalent of sports stadiums filled with people,” he tells us. In Anderson’s view, this “possibility for global recognition” is “driving huge amounts of effort and desire.” He is quick to note that it’s not just the famous that are benefitting from this capacity. “Everyone can learn” through this system that is “self-fueling.” It’s the “crowd that shines the light and fuels the desire,” he claims. In concluding this portion of his presentation, Anderson believes he has outlined a “model for innovation” that any “organization” can utilize to encourage growth. The most difficult part of the model, according to Anderson, is the light. In turning up the light dial, one must “show their stuff” by “opening up to the world.” This is crucial to his argument. He continues by arguing “it is only by giving away your best kept secret that will allow other people to come along and help

improve it.” It is here that Anderson reveals an inner ethos of TED. Anderson claims that TED, through the release of its talks online, has subscribed to a “radical openness” that works in culture. He demonstrates statistics to support his claim: between June of 2006 and 2010, there have been 300 million views of TED talks. This openness is what has allowed TED to continue its global reach: the talks allow new speakers and attendees to be recruited, volunteer translators have adapted the talks into 70 different languages (tripling viewership in non-English speaking countries), and finally, by “giving away the TEDx *brand*” there are more than 1,000 experiments in “the art of spreading ideas.” Anderson is quick to note that through the TEDx events, multiple groups are connecting through media and learning from one another.

Finding Agency

The concept of agency is complex and debated within scholarship. Agency is a process and thinking about it requires one to begin with capacity. Aristotle remarks that rhetoric is the capacity to see the available means of persuasion in a given situation. When one seizes such means, they become agents capable of shaping rhetorical culture. In a rhetorical culture, one is both shaped and shaping the communicative behaviors and norms. A rhetorical agent is typically presumed to be the function of a willing subject whether acting or acted upon, a subject of representation, who is in charge of assuming the possibilities and capacities for persuasion in a given situation or context. Rhetorical agency is possible within the communication practices of a given community of discourse. Rhetoricians have worked hard to distinguish a role for agency given the de-construction of the modernist self performed by poststructuralist and postmodernist scholars. “No challenge has been greater for rhetoric in postmodern times than that of accounting for rhetorical agents and their agency” (Lunsford, Wilson, & Eberly xxii).

The challenge is centered on rejecting Enlightenment norms while simultaneously producing the possibility for meaningful symbolic action. Commenting on the complexity of agency in 2005, Karlyn Kohrs Campbell states:

The term ‘agency’ is polysemic and ambiguous, a term that can refer to invention, strategies, authorship, institutional power, identity, subjectivity, and subject positions, among others. I imagine myself as a speech writer persona rafting down a river filled with rapids named Barthes, Derrida, and Foucault at the end of which I must navigate a vortex of feminist controversy... (Campbell 4).

Campbell outlines a “series of propositions about rhetorical agency” that aim to address how rhetoric conceptualizes agency within postmodern work. For Campbell, rhetorical agency directly relates to “the capacity to act, that is, to have the competence to speak or write in a way that will be recognized or heeded by others in one’s community” (Campbell 6). In a more general sense outside of her allusions to speaking and writing, her explanation of agency can be thought of as an intervention. This act of intervention may be a subtle change in identification or a larger move against a dominant force. The importance of such an intervention should not be ignored as it provides a space for marginalized voices to be seen and heard. The currency of agency as a thematic in rhetorical theory is broad and concerns larger philosophical questions of identity and subjectivity. By using the video of “Lil’ Demon” and mentioning the release of its online video talks, Anderson is using TED as a way to encourage individuals to actualize their “capacity to agency” and to see their acts as both individual and collective efforts. Anderson uses the mythos of pro-technology discourse to encourage empowerment. His rhetorical play with this mythos teases us to consider the interplay between rhetorical performance and the social and cultural milieu. It encourages a desire to discover a more intricate relationship between individual action and the cultural environment in which individuals speak out.

I conceive of agency as a matrix of material and social conditions that arises out of rhetorical situations. We currently live in a complex environment of relations. As Kristin Seas

observes, “we are in the midst of the birthing of network culture” where postmodern theory explains how discourse itself is a dynamic structure. In a network culture, there is no “solitary individual in a passive world; it revolves around relationships” (Seas 4). Our ability to shape these relationships requires both social and technical skills. In this matrix of relations, the top/down model is challenged as content is adaptive and open; it is flexible to change and offers little for those who wish to control the message in the classical sense. We discern meaning as a functional outcome from patterns of information sharing shaped through rhetorical agency. Obviously, there are material influences that have affected these shifts in agency and culture. Mobile devices and the ease of web/online video sharing are small examples of material influences. Because of these changes in material and social culture, agency is an “emergent phenomenon” and is not something we can “possess” but rather a “dynamic that emerges among us all.” Agency that is emergent is made possible through engagement with communities of practice. TED fosters and encourages this emergent agency by establishing itself as a community of practice; however, is this emergent agency asking for *innovation* or *emulation*?

A helpful view is locating connections between the notion of “communities of practice” and Bourdieu’s conception of “habitus” (Smith 464). Bourdieu is engaged with capturing the tension between structure and process. Habitus, for Bourdieu, is “a system (a set of interacting elements) of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures.” He describes habitus as the principle of construction of the objects of knowledge, a system of structured and structuring “dispositions.” His use of “dispositions” refers to something attitudinal. Dispositions are typically aligned with attributes of individuals. He goes on to argue that members of a social class have similar (homologous) habituses. Since the focus of Bourdieu’s analysis is on the individual, it remains unclear if habitus can be a

characteristic of an institution. He insists that there is a dialectic between habitus and institutions, implying that habitus is not only separate from institutions but also produced by the work of inculcation and appropriation from an institutional structure. However, Bourdieu does note that the enabling of habitus is what allows an institution to be fully realized. Scott considers habitus from an ecological perspective, which allows for the focus to be “the effects of cultural belief systems operating in the environment of organizations as opposed to intra-organizational processes” (Bourdieu 14-16, 54-58). For example, an ecological perspective allows us to see the formation of TED as being similar to that of a school. A school is a collection of social groupings that continually construct and re-construct their individual habituses. Faculty and students alike become members of a school that are also institutions that both (as organizations) mediate the impact of ecological habituses on individual’s behavior and (as institutions) continually construct and re-construct their own habituses (arguably influenced by the individual habituses of their members), which themselves provide for individuals a part of their past and present, individual and collective (Reay 522-523). The internal workings or context of a communal, social organization can also be referred to as a community of practice. In communities of practice, habitus becomes a complementary aspect of how individuals share behaviors, “dispositions,” and even tastes. Communities of practice address learning as participation in the community—a kind of wide metaphor for the apprenticeship model. The emphasis is on situated learning, learning as legitimate peripheral participation, and much focus is placed upon the relationship between learning and the social situation in which it occurs. Recently, Fox aligned Community of Practice Theory to Foucault’s Actor-Network Theory, showing that learning is something other than the internalization of discovered, transmitted, or ‘experienced in interaction with others’ knowledge.’ It is seen as increasing overall participation

in communities of practice where teachers (or apprentice masters depending on the chosen metaphor) are co-learners with the students (novices). If learning is constructed as participation in a community of practice rather than internalization of norms, then the nature of the social conditions within that community are a crucial factor to the quality of learning and are worthy of analysis (Fox 856-857). In thinking about connections between agency, habitus, and communities of practice, a conceptual framework begins to form making it possible to locate the internal social conditions of TED and to understand it as a dynamic tension amongst a range of influences and forces acting in both individual and collective ways.

Anderson transitions by showing a photograph of and quote by Isaac Newton: “If I have seen further than others, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants.” He uses this quote to argue that the “days of the lone genius” having a moment of epiphany in “solitude” is misleading. “It is only through groups that innovation occurs...we’re social species and we spark off each other,” he states. The rise of online communities generating innovative change is not unusual. Programmers through the development of the “open source” movement are a strong example he utilizes for his claim. More importantly, he notes that certain content lends itself for digital translation. The emergence and ease of online video are “under-reported” and will give fuel for a new era of sharing global talents. The early Internet era featured little video due to size and bandwidth difficulty, but with improvements in video compression and bandwidth speed, “humanity watches 80 million hours of YouTube a day,” according to Anderson. He continues by claiming that “Cisco estimates that in four years, 90% of the web’s data will be video...if it’s all puppies, porn, and piracy, we’re doomed...but I don’t think it will be.”

Anderson transitions into a video clip of “Sam Hebert.” Sam is a uni-cyclist who found a community of interested cyclists via online video postings of clips featuring tricks and moves.

“What Sam does cannot be communicated in words but through watching video he begins to emulate and innovate,” Anderson exclaims that what we’re witnessing is the “evolution of skills” occurring through “video-driven” resources. After resting on this piece of the argument momentarily, Anderson makes a clever shift. Realizing that he has appealed to only humanities-oriented disciplines, he points out the existence of Jove. Jove is a video publication site dedicated to increasing the productivity of biological and medical research. It is an alternate means of publishing peer-reviewed research much faster than traditional print based methods. A published video that features methods and procedures of experiments allows other scientists to replicate and enhance findings with greater speed and accuracy than print descriptions. For Anderson, online video will not only increase artistic expression amongst communities in the humanities, but also advance scientific research and innovation.

The inclusion of video into both humanities and science arenas makes a learning environment more spontaneous, exciting, and multimodal. No longer do scientists have to only read about experimentation, they can also watch such research enacted and respond accordingly. Inherently, the introduction of more video prevalence makes learning a more social activity, whereas now, the ghost of speech roams and haunts those who formally learned and wrote about scholarly activity in isolation. In learning communities prompted by the influx of digital media, sharing knowledge is faster, but in turn more intimate an activity as placing oneself on video to see and hear makes the teacher or expert more exposed and less mysterious.

Convergence Culture

The rhetorical power of how new media is incorporated to persuade is an increasingly important topic for rhetoricians since much of the work in communication studies since the mid-1990s has taken the forms of ethnographies, case studies of small group and organizational

interactions, or text studies of new media using critical and postcolonial perspectives. Rhetorical criticism of positive instances of the use of new media technologies is a noticeably under-researched area (Warnick 19). Warnick elaborates on her call for more rhetoricians to examine the multiple situational contexts that new media technologies produce because “the majority of traditional rhetorical criticism models were intended for speeches or written texts, not something as transitory as new media” (Warnick 22, 24). TED operates as a learning environment predicated on using the transitory nature and power of new media. TED utilizes a recent cultural phenomenon brought about by new media technologies and what Henry Jenkins refers to as “convergence” culture.

Convergence culture is more than a simple shift in technology devices. *Convergence alters relationships between existing audiences.* Convergence refers to a process not an endpoint. It changes the nature of the relationship between media producers and consumers. If the previous generation of media consumers were thought to be passive, the current one is active. They are migratory individuals that are socially connected through media (Jenkins 15, 19-20). Organizers of TED events are examples of this kind of participatory culture resembling an “elocution mob” and are products of the process of convergence. From this participatory culture, “knowledge communities” begin to form. These communities are akin to what Rheingold termed “smart mobs.” According to Rheingold, smart mobs form when communication and computing technologies amplify human talents for cooperation (Rheingold 9). The organizers and participants in TED events expand upon the concept of community of practice.

He closes this section by asking an excellent question: why video? Why do people watch TED talks? The ideas presented are typically already in existence in print. Obviously, there is something more attractive and engaging with showing rather than telling, but it has deeper

connections to human interaction. “There’s more being communicated than just words and it’s in that non-verbal portion: some serious magic is hidden there in the physical gestures...the vocal cadence...the facial expressions...the eye contact...the passion...the sense of how an audience is reacting...there are hundreds of subconscious clues that connect to how well you will understand and whether you are inspired,” Anderson tells us. The camera cuts to a close-up so the viewer can see all of these clues within Anderson’s own presentation. The camera cuts to a low-angle shot from behind Anderson, revealing his audience, laughing at his playfulness. It’s connected to “public speech” for Anderson. Someone “speaks” and there’s human action. Speech, as he points out, ran into a competitor, and he points to the replica of the Gutenberg press. “Print, scaled, allowed innovators to get their ideas out far and wide,” Anderson says, “and the spoken word withered on the vine, but now, the game has changed again.” It’s not far-fetched to believe that what Gutenberg did for writing, online video is now doing for face-to-face communication. So the spoken word, a “primal medium” for Anderson, just went “global.” We may have to re-invent an ancient art form, according to him. There is inherent rhetorical power, emergent *agency*, in the evolution of online video, as millions can see one speak. Anderson comments on the potency of this ability. He cuts to a clip revealing a massive crowd, gathered together outdoors. They are watching a giant screen showing a presentation by Sir Ken Robinson. It harkens back to the days of the lyceum and the Chautauquas, only now everyone watches a video screen capture of a presentation.

In the next section of his speech, Anderson makes a direct reference to schools in suggesting that for the first time, students won’t have their dreams “ruined by lousy teachers.” Rather, he claims, “they can sit two feet in front of the world’s finest.” He is quick to point out that TED, as an organization, is just a “small part” of the revolution as universities have opened

up curricula for free online. Because of the open-source movement, Anderson claims people are figuring out new ways to learn and more crucially, “how to respond which completes the cycle.” Anderson pauses and adds: “TED talks can’t be a one way process, one to many, our future is many to many.” He stresses to the audience his vision for making it easier to dialogue with TED speakers using video, allowing others to contribute their own ideas. Anderson sees the possibility of having “TED talks” coming from everyone. Before concluding this portion of the speech, Anderson asks, “what would happen to global education if a similar process occurred within it?” After a pause, he questions the formal education system and its “top-down model” of learning. “Schools can’t be silos. We can’t stop learning at age twenty-one. If this is the participation age, why can’t education be this self-fueling cycle where we all participate?” He urges us to consider how “we” can be the “teacher” and become a part of the “biggest learning cycle in history that will carry us to a smarter, wiser, and more beautiful place.” Anderson’s move to a predictive, pro-technology discourse appeals to a specific mythos that capitalizes on the “hierarchical principle” or the desire to transcend one’s present condition and move upwards in society (Burke 112). Such discourse uses temporal metaphors such as “race” or “spread” and it orients audiences towards considering change in social practices as progress. While change is sometimes good, warranted, and necessary, it is the rhetorician’s job to provide transparency in such a discourse. As Miller notes, pro-technology discourse often ends with a “self-justifying argument” that operates to “validate the forecasting” of the future “by making it come true, to turn description of the future into the construction of the future, prediction into control” (Miller 90).

At this break in the speech, Anderson has argued for technology’s preeminent role in augmenting traditional learning environments. He showcases how the decision to release TED

Talks anticipated these changes and how they foster positive engagement with emergent agency, leading to new models of empowerment through learning. It is the conclusion of Anderson's speech that endangers the efficacy of his purpose. He closes by offering two examples centered on the developing world. First, he shows an image of a small group of children in Pakistan (near the village where Anderson was born). He chooses to focus attention towards a small girl in the photograph. He points out that these children now possess mobile devices capable of producing and uploading web video. Once again, encouraging *capacity to act* through the agency video could afford these children. He suggests that one of these children might have a solution to fixing a serious global issue. If he had chosen to end the speech on this example, the audience would be left with hope without an overwhelming sense of exploitation. Anderson doesn't, however, stop with this example. "This is not a crazy idea," he insists, "it's happening now." He follows this statement by showing a second example, a brief web documentary, produced and uploaded to TED by a teenager named Christopher Makau, who lives in the Kibera Slums located in Kenya. Makau's film features his giving the viewer a tour of the slums, showing how the local community has developed innovative solutions to the area. For example, they turned a large dumping ground of trash into a sustainable garden that feeds his village. He even shows the local "Kibera Film School" where a small group of teenagers are empowered with Flip video cameras to document and upload their stories to a video streaming channel called "Kibera TV." He concludes by showing footage from his organized "TEDxKibera" event. When the documentary ends, Anderson introduces the Oxford audience to Makau via live stream in Nairobi. "Christopher, thank you...we've learned from you today," Anderson offers, ending his speech with the thunderous applause of a standing ovation from the Oxford audience. Anderson's tactic to conclude with this example is both powerfully exploitative and effective. In choosing to show

Makau's video, Anderson cleverly exploits the small African community. Makau is not brought live to Oxford, but rather kept at a distance from the elites. The technology Anderson passionately encourages serves here as a cultural buffer, a barrier that keeps social classes divided, yet, safely connected through digital means. Anderson's choice is no different than the exploited treatment the child stars of the film *Slumdog Millionaire* (2009, Boyle) received from Hollywood elites. The success of that film benefitted the business elites of Hollywood financially and socially as the stars were flown in, dressed up, and put on display at the Academy Awards (where the film garnered many wins). The irony, of course, is that following the ceremony, the stars returned to their slum homes in India, where their life in poverty and cardboard houses continued without further assistance. An alternate view is to see the example as a positive instance where Makau has embraced his sense of emergent agency and through his media efforts, caused an intervention, a way for his voice(s) to be seen and heard.

In writing about TED, Anya Kamenetz describes the first email she received that contained a link to a TED talk. Her prose outlines the creation of a kind of secret club for intellectuals who subversively share TED talks amongst one another. Contained within her praise for TED and its tenets, is a single sentence that perhaps summarizes the growing influence of TED: "I would go so far as to argue that it's creating a new Harvard—the first new top-prestige education brand in more than 100 years." She points to the prestige of its faculty (presenters) and its open and accessible content as the most "radical" components towards a new university paradigm (Kamenetz 3). The emphasis on prestige intellectuals made available openly (albeit via pre-recorded video) places a civic (globally) mission upon TED as a source of information and ideas, thus hoping to generate (and shape) knowledge. This is a civic mission traditionally undertaken by our institutes of learning. Now, I'm not suggesting that we adopt Kamenetz's

conceit literally. What if, though, we contemplated TED as a model for a new form of higher education? Many things would still be missing. Formal education uses social interaction in physical spaces to motivate, engage, and ignite our brains. Attendance at TED in person provides great social interactions but a precious few experience it live and seeing it online is mostly a solitary endeavor. The online experience is also fairly passive, not much different from television. It's only when we pass the ideas on--discuss them, restate them in our own words, argue for or against them, or integrate them into our own narrative--that we get most of the educational benefits. Educators are using online TED Talks within their respective courses. From online feedback on the TED-ED website, teachers identify their school and subject. They detail which talks are ideal for specific lesson enhancements. The feedback that is posted on the TED-ED forums is overwhelmingly positive, but the talks used serve primarily as supplemental material to augment a lecture or content objective. An exceptional case would be the integration of TED Talks as a lone course topic. At the University of Mary Washington in Fredericksburg, VA, a first year seminar course called "TED.com-Ideas Worth Sharing" was conducted (<http://ted2009.umwblogs.org>). The course outline involved students searching TED for talks surrounding a designated weekly "discussion theme" such as "Technology and Human Interaction" or "Math and Data Matter." Students were to outline and lead a discussion using their selected TED Talks as related to the theme of the week. More importantly, students were asked to compose and perform their own "TED Talk" for a final assignment along with a reflection paper on their presentation. The student talks were videoed and posted online. The entire course was linked to the larger TED website.

Likewise, TED-ED clubs have been formed to address the growing demands for better presentation literacy in K-12 schools. TED-ED offers, through an application process, a

guidebook outlining thirteen steps to articulate an idea. The guidelines offer a roadmap through the phases of research, outlining, articulation, visualization, and delivery. More than 1500 schools use the model as in curricular ways not as extracurricular or “honors” modes. TED-ED offers a contest at the end of the thirteen lessons for winners to be published and produced through the TED site. It is, in no uncertain terms, the basic formation of a TED course.

From these efforts, clubs and localized communities have formed to support such efforts. The rapid growth of these communities is difficult to assess, but recent statistics show that more than 1300 TEDx communities have formed around specific non-profits, youth, community organizations, universities, and even seemingly greater disparate individuals. It is estimated that now more than 70 different countries possess these new learning communities all engendered by the expansive use of the digital media revolution.

CHAPTER 4. TEDx: POSSIBILITIES FOR COMMUNITAS IN THE DIGITAL

A primary concern within the ecology of new media is its effect on our concept of community. Wendell Berry describes community as a collection of individuals conjoined by a common purpose or goal (Berry 64). Michael Hogan elaborates on the concept by claiming a community is similar to a repository of shared values and traditions that uniquely shape the character and identity of individuals. The rhetoric of community is typically constructed around notions of “loss” or “fragmentation” of some mythical period in public culture when there was a shared unity (Hogan 292, 295).

The field of sociology has long been concerned with the concept of community. The famous writings of Tonnies brought us the term *Gemeinschaft*, or community, a group of unified people who possess a common will or purpose and strive to maintain immediate, face-to-face relations. Contrasted to that of the *Gesellschaft*, or society, where associations are larger in size and individuals are more focused on self-interests rather than a unity of wills (Borgmann 53-54). Optimistically, Dewey believed improved communication amongst local communities would foster more social cohesion and hence, allow the public writ large to find its identity amidst an array of distractions from mindless entertainment technologies to the existence of too many publics (Dewey 72-75). More recently, Putnam revised concerns over the local community by examining the importance of social capital within the explosion of new communication technologies. While Putnam found that the strengthening of local associations could enhance social cohesion, he denotes a key distinction between typologies of communities that can form. First, he notes that “bridging” communities can bring together disparate members of a community, such as mixed-race youth sports clubs in South Africa. Bridging communities can produce greater social capital because of the tendency for them to be more heterogeneous.

Second, he outlines “bonding” communities as groups of individuals who have highly similar interests or likes (Putnam 16-19). The homogenous nature of these communities is their greatest strength but also their dark side as inclusion isn’t always encouraged. Of course, it is important to note that these distinctions are not fixed but fluid as bonds could turn to bridges and vice versa. It is possible for a community to develop into one that bridges and bonds. Despite the argumentation surrounding the history of community mythos and its typologies, the major tenet from the discourse on the rhetoric of community is rooted in agency. The ability of individuals to network via a localized community in order to generate positive change is the backbone of community discourse. Communities become the connective tissue that link an individual’s public and private spheres and allow for mobility and change.

The existence of virtual communities doesn’t discredit the distinctions of bridging and bonding, but rather problematizes them due to the anonymity the internet affords as well as the ease of lukewarm commitments; however, what about communities that gather in both physical and virtual spaces? Further layering the relationship between discourse on community and agency is new media. TED utilizes new media technologies to promote, organize, and execute what is known as “knowledge” communities via “TEDx” events. These “independently organized events” are sanctioned/approved by the organizers of the “main” TED conference in California. The idea is to empower local communities, organizations, and affiliations with the opportunity to stimulate dialogue from the sharing of ideas through a “TED-like” experience. The introduction of the “x” events was another line of defense against TED critics charging the organization of possessing an elitist ethos. With the invention of “x” events, TED can boast that not only is most of the content online for free, but also can be molded and shaped into one’s own event. It provided democratizing ammunition to be used against its critics. TED curator Chris

Anderson professes that he wasn't at all clear that the idea of giving away the TED "brand" would work (Rosenblum 2). He assumed that the first year the events started, 2010, would generate 10-30 events. Imagine his surprise when over 275 were organized, the inaugural on the campus of the University of Southern California. In 2011, TEDx events have been held in multiple international locations from India and Africa to England and Amsterdam. The mystique of TED, to Anderson's surprise, could indeed fit into a box and be distributed as a kind of intellectual Happy Meal for those who apply for permission and desire to re-create or re-present the original, annual TED event in California. What began as an artifact of new media distribution, the TED talk podcast video, is now an inspiration to further carry the values of TED into local venues without the \$6000 admission fee. It is also a chance for a local community to galvanize, to bridge and/or bond, and to emulate the TED brand and aesthetic experience.

These events are primarily generated and organized not by individuals who have ever attended one of the larger TED conferences, but rather by individuals who have experienced the talks via new media sources: either a live web stream or pre-recorded TED talk podcasts. Would the invention of "x" events allow for TED to be assembled in multiple sites as replication or would they allow for TED to be re-mixed into something unique in truly independent ways?

The rhetorical power of how new media is incorporated to persuade is an increasingly important topic for rhetoricians since much of the work in communication studies since the mid-1990s has taken the forms of ethnographies, case studies of small group and organizational interactions, or text studies of new media using critical and postcolonial perspectives. Rhetorical criticism of positive instances of the use of new media technologies is a noticeably under-researched area (Warnick 19). Warnick elaborates on her call for more rhetoricians to examine the multiple situational contexts that new media technologies produce because "the majority of

traditional rhetorical criticism models were intended for speeches or written texts, not something as transitory as new media” (Warnick 22, 24).

TED talks can be found rhetorically active in a litany of situational contexts. Someone can have a TED podcast downloaded to a mobile device. Another may have TED talks playing on their television set because of their computer or wireless streaming/storage device such as a Roku, Google TV, or Apple TV. A person roaming the Internet may come across one of the talks via a video embed on a blog, wiki, or other social media application such as Facebook or YouTube. Traditional forms of media may be the source of information and promotion about TED such as magazines or newspapers. Because of its Creative Commons license, anyone can use content from TED for individual purposes under the domain of fair use. Marina Kim organized TEDxAshokaU in 2009 for Ashoka, a networked group of social entrepreneurs in Arlington, VA. “The power of TEDx is that people can spread the same message but it’s user-generated” (Rosenblum 3).

Kim’s comments reveal that the strategy of TEDx is that it utilizes a recent cultural phenomenon brought about by new media technologies and what Henry Jenkins refers to as “convergence” culture.

Convergence culture is more than a simple shift in technology devices. Convergence alters relationships between existing audiences. Convergence refers to a process not an endpoint. It changes the nature of the relationship between media producers and consumers. If the previous generation of media consumers were thought to be passive, the current one is active. They are migratory individuals that are socially connected through media (Jenkins 15, 19-20). Organizers of TEDx events are examples of this kind of participatory culture resembling a kind of “elocution mob” and are products of the process of convergence.

From this participatory culture, “knowledge communities” begin to form. These communities are akin to what Rheingold termed “smart mobs.” According to Rheingold, smart mobs form when communication and computing technologies amplify human talents for cooperation (Rheingold 9). The organizers and participants in TEDx events continue to expand upon the rhetoric of community built by original TED conferences and their artifacts. The primary leaders in the TED organization promote common values of “sharing ideas” and “creating a better future” in order to generate a mythic communion with their followers. TEDx audiences become “transmedia” storytellers in the ways they emulate the TED model but fill it with their own localized content and continuing the communal storyline. Pierre Levy suggested that an aesthetic work in his era of collective intelligence might blend the roles of authors, readers, producers, spectators, creators, and interpreters: these will meld into a “circuit” of cultural expression (Jenkins 95). However, despite the “openness” of TED organizers to local groups, there remains a very strict set of rules that must be adhered to when producing a “TEDx” event (ted.com). The opportunity to hold a TEDx event may promise the illusion of local control, but it’s not quite a deconstruction of the top/down model proposed by either Levy or Jenkins.

In order to produce a TEDx event, an individual must complete an application form. There are numerous components that must be considered and TED provides a list of “rules” one must adhere to after acquiring a license for a TEDx event. The TEDx “rules and guidelines” document is very akin to a formal contract within entertainment/media law. As “open” as TED is, they’re invested in protecting their brand. An entire independent research paper could be constructed to analyze the political and social ramifications contained within the TEDx manifesto, but it is not my intent to travel into those waters now; however, a few components of the rules stand out as relevant towards my investigation of the nature of TED’s communal power.

First, all approved TEDx organizers must show, before their event begins, a brief video introduction from Chris Anderson. In the video segment, Chris is only heard never seen. Images of other TEDx events flow in and out of view as Anderson pointedly tells listeners that what they're about to experience is something similar to the mission of TED, mostly the "power of sharing ideas." No images from TED "proper" in California are shown. The video closes with a carefully worded caveat to any attendees. "What you're about to experience," Anderson claims, "had nothing to do with us. We lent our name, our branding, a few simple guidelines, but what you'll see and hear is due to the local organizers who put it all together." Anderson delivers this line with a calculating tone of gentility, but it is clearly a distinctive split between TED "proper" and its relationship with a local event. In other words, TEDx is still not TED and if it's poorly executed, it's not our fault...don't blame the CEOs if you don't like this version of the Happy Meal.

A second area of relevance within the guidelines pertains to the video documentation of the local event. All speakers must be video recorded. All speakers must fill out a content waiver in order to present. All videos must be uploaded directly to the TEDxYouTube channel. The TED organization reserves the right to edit and distribute the content. Likewise, there are strict rules for the use of the TED logo, its colors, alignment, dimensions, and more. This section of the guidelines demonstrates that while TEDx events celebrate the sharing of ideas within the participatory culture ethos, there remains a control filter on the backend to ensure the protection of the TED brand within the realm of new media distribution. In reality, when Anderson professes that they've "given away the TED brand" he should supplement his statement with the qualifier "certain restrictions apply."

This information is not to portray the TED organization as a dark and shadowy collective that watches over all participants with a cautious eye. They do, however, have strict guidelines that steer towards a positive experience. For example, they forbid the licensing of events to “extremist” or “controversial” groups, although the labeling and use of these terms suggests an inherently political structure that determines what constitutes assigning such a label to a given group. Groups with a “religious, political, or commercial agenda” are not granted licenses. The TED organization appears to vehemently adhere to these restrictions, particularly when it is related to commercial endeavors. The guidelines clearly outline how sponsors must not be highlighted in any capacity, but most importantly, no commercialism from the stage. These guidelines, in essence, are generative restrictions that add to the aesthetic power of TED events. Without overt religious, political, or commercial messaging, TED participants can focus more clearly on the ideas being offered to them. Thus, the ideas become the commodity that TED manufactures and distributes for our consumption. TEDx events, then, become the communal packaging audiences unwrap. It is not unlike, say, the Hard Rock Café concept, where the branding and menus were mostly standardized, but each location contains assorted memorabilia to witness. Is TEDxAustin that different from Hard Rock CaféxAustin? How does the menu differ? How do the patrons? Is the community different in one than from the other?

In examining the rhetorical nature of TED’s communal elements, a community framework emerges. It illustrates an array of TED “publics.” First, there is the formal TED organization, an exclusive group of people employed by TED or individuals on the executive board that makes decisions for the non-profit arm of TED. A second public is a community of elites, speakers and participants who can afford the cost to attend or possess the prestige to present at TED “proper” in California. A third public would be the apostolic collection of

faithful believers. These are the members who attend TED as volunteer workers, go to TED-ACTIVE boot camps, and who organize and/or attend TEDx events. It could be a teacher who shows TED talks in their classroom.

A fourth public is a virtual community that is present at the TED website—its membership is massive and consists of individuals who have possible alignment with one or more of the aforementioned publics, but possibly not at the same time. “TEDsters,” in other words, come in all shapes and sizes. They form a societal structure that makes TED go: on local, national, international, and virtual scales. These levels of “publics” function largely in communal ways. If we conceive of community as a *discursive* realm, then it can mediate relationships between the public(s) and the private realms. The question becomes, in relation to TED, do these “x” events that form in and out of communities, serve to bridge or bond?

I joined the virtual TED community, dialogued and interviewed with more than twenty curators (a mix- some American, others European) online and attended live (or mediated) fifteen TEDx events. I have chosen to illustrate this chapter with two TEDx organizations. The first located in California. A second located in New York. In all of my field work, there was not a secret identity to conceal nor tension about when to reveal my agenda. I informed every individual of my research goals and efforts towards researching the TEDx phenomena and the process of curating. I delineated that I was not only digging for scholarly research, but also for event structure and planning of my own.

I chose to attend TEDxManhattan Beach because the community is one of the oldest and most successful within the TEDx palette. The organization holds three types of events: monthly social events, an annual conference, and a youth day. I traveled to Manhattan Beach on December 17, 2011 to attend the final social event of the year for the group. The format was to

be “salon” style as attendees were to watch three TED talks and discuss the ideas presented within them. On this particular evening, the group was celebrating their annual efforts, so most all the volunteers/members were present. My methodological approach is ethnographic in nature. A sound and critical ethnographer will realize his/her complicity in the ethnographic process, as well as realize that the task of “representing” is just that, a representation that hopefully leads to realization. In giving voice to the members of TEDxManhattan Beach through my experiences with them, I have tried to adopt an ethnographic approach similar to what Norman Denzin terms “the text as experimental cinema.” With this approach, the written ethnography becomes a field of “cinematic” experiences: emotional, visceral, sensory, visual, and auditory. Denzin uses an analogy that I deeply appreciate when claiming that an ethnography in this vein is, in essence, “an Altman film.” In considering this approach, Denzin claims that the “reader” becomes akin to the “viewer” as an active, participating voyeur- a “detective who hears and sees the sounds and consequences of the other’s voices and actions” (Denzin 41-42).

The Salon

Manhattan Beach is located south of Los Angeles in California. The city is contained within a roughly 5-mile radius and nearly half the area is ocean frontage. In 1902, families traveling in by trolley from Los Angeles or Pasadena to enjoy a vacation dominated the Manhattan Beach area. Real estate agents would persuade some into buying beach lots for \$350. The city used to consist of mostly sand dunes, but now the residents have divided the area into districts with names such as “The Village,” “Tree Section,” “Poet’s Section (which includes Shelley, Keats, Tennyson, and Longfellow),” “Gas Lamp,” and more. The local high school, Mira Costa High School, was used as the primary location for the television show *The O.C.* “The Strand” is the downtown area of the city that leads directly to the beachfront and Manhattan

Beach Pier boardwalk. Half an acre of property in this area can value as high as \$35 million (Dennis 7-9). I pass this stretch while driving north on Manhattan Beach Boulevard, creeping along as light rain trickles across my windshield. On my left, I can see the beach area and the long bike track adjacent to the storefronts. I begin to wonder about the residents of this community and their history. In popular culture, Manhattan Beach has served as the location for such films as *Point Break* and *Jerry Maguire*. It is also the former home of infamous cocaine dealer and trader George Jung. Thomas Pynchon lives here, as do Blake Griffin and Maria Sharapova. It's also home to Kevin James (Dennis 5). When the Spanish colonized the California area in 1769, particularly the area surrounding what is now called Manhattan Beach, the main method was the creation of missions: centers of shelter and reprieve, education, and indoctrination. I turned my car onto the "downtown" area of The Strand, what is considered to be the oldest section of the city's community (Dennis 10-12). I realized that I was, hundreds of years later, headed to a kind of "mission" for perhaps the same purposes. At this TED event, would I meet celebrities, drug dealers, surfers, elites or simpletons? What kinds of education would be offered to me and would I be indoctrinated?

When I arrived at the event location, Ignited Media, I was struck by the modest advertising out front. A simple banner, replete with TED logo and colors, was attached in one corner, identifying where to enter. My first impression was that I had discovered a progressive church group that isn't large enough to house a traditional worship structure, so they meet in alternative spaces.



Figure 1: Entrance sign for TEDxManhattan Beach.
Photo credit: Joseph Watson, owner of image

When I enter the building, Susan greets me. A gentle and friendly older lady, she finds my name on her list of guests and marks me off. She passes me my own “TEDxManhattan Beach” nametag. She doesn’t ask me any further questions but does point out to me where the restrooms are located. She tells me I am “free to walk around and explore” the building. The building is clearly comprised of a collection of offices and media suites. The ceiling is open, revealing air ducts and lighting fixtures and bay windows line the east wall as I walk deeper into the space. Rows of LCD screens light my way through the hallway as they display various

interactive advertising media produced by Ignited. The space argues a progressive and hipster atmosphere as it resembles the feel of a Google-inspired complex. There is a putting course in the center of the hallway and pool tables off to my right, each offering employees the chance to play at work to produce creativity and ideas. I would later be told that the building was built during the dot com era by Magic Johnson and was sold in 2001 to Fred Magner, a member of TEDxManhattan Beach I would eventually meet.

I walk into a foyer area that serves as a breezeway for conversation before entering the media/screening room, where the actual TED salon will ensue. It is here where I get exposed to tables of food and wine for guests. I first introduce myself to TEDxMB curator/director John Norton. He and I had spoken over email about my visit. He welcomes me and directs me to the food and introduces me to Steve Robinson. John quickly scurries away and I get the sense of being re-directed to a social buffer. It is as if Steve is the designated member of the group to greet newbies and test them of their merits before John will spend longer, but more likely it is his way of connecting people. I told John before I arrived that I wanted to meet long-time members of the group and my reservations passed as I realized there was a flow being created, either naturally or pre-determined. Steve offers me some shrimp cocktails and escargot. He begins describing his connections to TEDx and the larger group.

TEDxMB is closely connected to a larger civic engagement program in the area called Leadership Manhattan Beach. He pours himself another glass of red wine and sips it as I inquire about Leadership Manhattan Beach. “It’s a fantastic program we have here in the city that equips future civic leaders in the area with extensive leadership training,” Steve tells me. The program is sponsored by the city’s Chamber of Commerce and Unified School District and is funded through gifts from the Chevron corporation as well as local business entrepreneurs such as

Michelle Sexton of South Bay Brokers (also a TEDxMB member). The civic leadership program invites applicants and if accepted, 25-30 adults will pay an \$800 tuition fee to enroll in the course. The participants receive direct experience in learning policy and procedures of local government agencies as well as their organizational structure and operations. Every class from the program develops a civic project to design and implement. “Who you see here at our TEDx events is a veritable alumni reunion of people from Leadership Manhattan Beach,” Steve informs me.

At this point in the conversation, Steve’s wife, Pamela, joins us. She brings me a glass of white zinfandel and encourages me to eat more of the food. “Have you heard of Dan Buettner?” Steve asks me. Unsure of his motivation, I replied that I did. “Isn’t he the *National Geographic* guy that spoke at TEDMED in 2011?” Steve enthusiastically confirms my answer. He tells me in great detail how the TEDx group was impressed with Dan and his TED talk, so they brought him in to speak to the locals in Manhattan Beach. I reply, “His ideas are good, but they play out to me like ‘Maslow’ dressed in fresh pants.”

Steve takes a moment and finishes his drink, staring at me with an intense focus. He proceeds to tell me about how Manhattan Beach became the first “Vitality City” project based on Dan’s concepts. The implementation of the “Blue Zone” initiatives was a primary galvanizing project for the members of the TEDx community here. It launched their civic engagement as the Vitality City project coalesced with the initial formation of TEDxMB. At this point in the conversation, I took pause to consider all the elements at play in this conversation. First, Leadership Manhattan Beach exists on the local level, uniting and bonding a community into singular goals. Second, a TED artifact, the video podcast of the Dan Buettner talk, is used to cohesively wrap the locals around an imagined possibility or idea for their city. Third, TEDxMB

is the branding that forms and makes it possible for Dan to be brought in at the local level to implement his ideas. Finally, there is the success of the idea implementation, the Vitality City/Blue Zone project, which promotes a healthier and more environmental approach to everyday life, which in turn, affects the MB community writ large. This project is on going too as Steve tells me. “This year, in conjunction with Leadership Manhattan Beach and the Blue Zone Project, we re-designed bike paths along by the Sand Dunes.” TED is operating here as an idea generator for the local community. It isn’t so much a community itself, but rather, a nuance of an already thriving communal sphere established long before the spread of viral videos of TED talks. TED talks have provided this local group what Andrew Feenberg terms “secondary instrumentation” or the appropriation of technology by a community for purposes of political activity, social support, or other motivation (Feenberg 134). In this way, the web has supported communities but has not produced them (Putnam 111).

Located directly to the right of the foyer area was the entrance to the media auditorium. We entered here for the salon portion of the evening. The seating was arranged in traditional proscenium style with a large screen direct center. The feeling of church returned again to me as I sat down. I noticed the audience was good mix of demographics. I spoke to the couple sitting behind me, Casey and Ben, aged in their early thirties, and they informed me they were on their second romantic date with each other. I tried to pull more information, but again, the church sensation overwhelmed me as this tension of a conservative, salon tradition format worked in opposition to the professed liberal, progressive individuals in the audience.

John kicks things off by revealing “Ideas Worth Doing” as the theme for next year. He is dressed in faded jeans and a t-shirt. His British accent and eyeglasses make him an eerie iteration of formal TED curator Chris Anderson. John announces the creation of TEDxRedondo Beach for

2012. As he recaps 2011, he emphasizes the importance of the TEDxManhattan Beach Youth Day event. In addition to their annual conference event and monthly salons, TEDxMB holds a Youth Day event to engage the community with the local schools. He speaks of Thomas Suarez, a sixth grade student from MB, who has invented an iPad App. Suarez's talk for the event was picked up by the larger TED organization and since its posting in November of 2011, it has received over one million views.

The salon's content featured three previously recorded TED talks, all by "Dans." The talks featured were three of the most viewed from the main TED site, such as Daniel Pink and Dan Meyer. Another TEDxMB member, Saul Thomas led the post-viewing discussion. Saul, a retired administrator from the Cal State University's Chancellor's Office, is judicious in his execution of the discussion. He pulls up a slide that contains an image of a large tree, branching off into various portions of the screen. The image suggests that knowledge or ideas branch off in multiple directions. The image sets the proper tone for a group discussion. In the bottom corner, there was a timer for the discussion. Saul carefully gives each audience member who desires to respond thirty seconds of time, no more or less, avoiding the chance for any ramblers. He never calls on the same person twice. If there is silence, Saul patiently paces throughout the room waiting for another response to foment. Saul also received his Ed.D. in Educational Curriculum Design from UCLA in 1972, so he is well aware of how to structure a productive intellectual activity.

In the discussion responses, audience members often revealed their professions. There were many working in sales, management positions, and in education as scholars. There was a high school Civics teacher and a UCLA Professor of Motivational Psychology. Given Saul's structured response format, comments were insightful and concise. There were long moments of

silence as Saul calmly paced around the room. I watched as the timer kept counting down. The feeling of church once again struck me and this time I understood it. The entire salon structure and content was Sunday school class for the intellectual elite.

At the conclusion of the event, I meet Fred Magner, the owner of the building we're meeting inside of and he tells me that he helped produce TEDxUSC, the very first TEDx event ever held. Fred is a former aviation man, having worked with UNICAL in California. He tells me that he met John via TED, but that John is a former oilman, having worked as a petroleum engineer for ARCO. Fred informs me of tighter connections within the group. Janet Johnson, who desires to start TEDxRedondo Beach, is the mother of Eric Johnson, the owner of Ignited Media (the building's tenant and the one responsible for the Google feel of the space). They both are TEDxMB members. The crowd of eighty people begins to look smaller and more interdependent than when I first arrived.

As the crowd begins to thin, Fred ushers me over to John, the curator of TEDxMB. I express my desire to organize a TEDx event for the Baton Rouge area, whether it is insulated to the LSU or larger Baton Rouge community is irrelevant. I'm digging for something deeper. I'm hoping John will pull back the curtain and reveal what makes this TED community *go*. I begin by asking John how he "found" TED. He pauses and looks up into the sky, pondering where to begin his narrative. His sentences are succinct, crisp, and possess a rare sense of clarity as he tells me he first came to TED via a simulcast of the annual "proper" conference. It is important to note that John, like many of us, was first exposed to TED through media, which functions as both the carrier and barrier to accessing content. John got addicted almost immediately. He applied and was accepted to attend TED ACTIVE, an intensive workshop period where individuals can be trained in all things TED. Attendees of TED ACTIVE attend the larger TED

“proper” annual conference as volunteers and watch the presentations in a nearby simulcast room outside of the main auditorium. As he recounts his journey into the world of TED, John reveals that at TED ACTIVE, the “Cs” are stressed for anyone desiring to be a host or curator for TED events, something akin to the Ritz-Carlton model of customer service.

The four “Cs” are deeply rooted in a consumer model of structuring an organization. If we can understand the codification process, then we allow get a deeper view of the TED ethos and mystique. The first C, begins with “clear beliefs.” For example, the financial corporation Edward Jones created the phrase “a spirit of caring” to clarify their organizational ethos. For TED, it is clearly “ideas worth sharing.” The second C involves “constant communications.” More importantly in this realm is an open dialogue within an organizational hierarchy. In other words, it is important to stress constant alongside the concept of flow. The idea behind this element in the model is to maintain a common terminology that can be shared and understood during periods of transformation or growth. As a TEDx community expands, John explains, it is important to “blast” as much information as possible via social media, to emphasize the multiple modes of communicating open to the group members, either by attending an event live or using new media. The consistency of “hearing what’s going on” keeps members from becoming disillusioned or apathetic towards participation.

Author Philip Pullman is noted for claiming “thou shalt not” is quickly forgotten but “once upon a time” remains engrained forever. Hence, “compelling stories” become the next component in the model. When I ask John about the amount of preparation and rehearsal that go into making a TEDx event *go*, he chuckles for the first time. “Tremendous amount,” he claims. He tells me that the stories are the most essential piece of the events, as they encompass the “meat” or content. John tells me he strictly adheres to the Nancy Duarte model of presentation

skills. Duarte, a leader in the field of “presentation culture,” has written several books, most notably *Slide:ology*. In these books, Duarte places an immense emphasis on two components in a presentation: story and visuals. She stresses that each presentation needs an “act” progression. John tells me that he sees video of guest presenters first, especially if they’re coming from out of town. As he prepares them, John continually pressures his speakers to remember the “hook” of their story. John likes to see any slide visuals in advance so he can help edit the visuals into a more cohesive layer. Duarte stresses this element too. John sets his presenters up with advance notice of practice time within the presentation space. He wants his speakers to feel comfortable with all the employed technology from the “Madonna” microphones to the hand-held clickers to advance slides. Finally, John believes another key component to telling compelling stories at TED events is arranging all speaker visuals into one large file creating a seamless flow between presentations as opposed to distracting interruptions as new files are loaded onto the technology.

Another C in the model is “collective celebrations.” In order to create a thriving organizational culture, it is important to designate times and events that enhance and highlight an individual’s connection to and role within the larger communal sphere and neither TED nor its “X” communities are ever without such activities. In fact, the “salon” night that I attended in Manhattan Beach was what John described as a TED “social”—indicating that it was a different genre of event for the group as opposed to something like their “outreach” days in the school districts. Obviously, members of the TEDx community clearly understand the various event purposes as well, given that two attendees were there as a component to their romantic date night with each other.

A final C consists of what the corporate sphere terms “customer tradeoffs.” In practical terms, this entails investing in the aspects of a business that privilege customer relations and

satisfaction. When adapted to a model of TED, it suggests a promise that attendees (customers) who experience (consume) a TED event will be engaged or inspired by the sharing of an idea. TED's mantra is to promise the delivery of premium content. It is the "tradeoff" that attendees expect. John explains that events need to be "scaled" by starting with low attendance requirements. "Buzz" is creating from contained events, thus, eventually creating the need for larger exposed events in venues that can accommodate bigger audiences. I listen to John explain these strategies to me. I realize that my nervousness upon entering the group is rooted in my own contentious religious history. The salon, to me, felt like an "intellectual Sunday school" class. "Why TED?" I ask John. "What is it about TED that draws people out?" He pauses. "Los Angeles," John says, "is not a particularly religious city, but some people who've come to these events have compared it to going to a church." At this point, I pause in the conversation and consider the ramifications of TED as a religious opiate for the masses. Certainly, TED contains a sermonic dimension. Richard Weaver speaks of the sermonic power of rhetoric in conserving traditional values, beliefs, and attitudes. Rhetoric relies on a "history" of behaviors to help "guide" in the daily interactions of society (Weaver 171). While TED isn't a formal religious organization, it perhaps conserves the communicative rituals of them, albeit in a refashioned manner.

John breaks the silence. "People who attend tell me it's exactly like church, only rather than the topic always being about God delivered by the same person each time, with this, the topics vary as do the presenters. This way, I assume, people can attend when the topics of the evening interest them. Even if they aren't particularly interested, they'll still hear something fresh."

TEDxMB introduced me to the intricate ways small communities can rally around TED's mission of sharing ideas and its need to *be* communal in the mold of (but not the same as) religion. TEDx communities form because of an excitement about a shared civic and intellectual hunger between people. TEDxBroadway demonstrated how a careful thematic framework behind an "x" event can illustrate new needs behind sharing, which in turn, present new mediums for community to foment and ameliorate.

TEDxBroadway occurred in January of 2013. As opposed to the salon style event from Manhattan Beach, this event was a larger, more formally designed "x" event. A true mix of live speakers and pre-recorded TED talks, TEDxBroadway offered a vastly different learning experience for my research purposes. The attendees at this event were diverse and included marketers, artists, administration, critics, academics/scholars, and university students from Harvard, NYU, and LSU. Presumably, all attendees possessed a deep interest in the community health and status of what is broadly defined as "Broadway." There were more than four-hundred in the audience. The three sessions each lasted ninety-minutes. Musical groups and magic acts performed during the transitions and breaks. I took a group of students, members of an arts entrepreneurship group. These students were largely to handle the bulk of work behind producing TEDxLSU. For my research purposes, I wanted to be immersed in a larger, more structured TEDx event, while simultaneously investigating the tenets of new media and community. Having switched coasts, I wanted to understand in what ways this TEDx community differed in its identity, structure, and action?

Broadway is not as insular of a community as Manhattan Beach. The organizers of TEDxBroadway events are Damian Banadoza of Situation Interactive (one of the largest Broadway marketing firms), Ken Davenport (theatrical producer), and James McCarthy (an

entrepreneur). The difficulty in thematically outlining this TEDx is that Broadway is not only a diverse community, but also an ideal that exists in international culture. It is perceived as the apex for many performing artists who strive to find success amongst its fields. This diversity was represented via their speaker line-up. Unique performers such as George Takei, infamous for portraying Sulu on *Star Trek*, spoke about his use of social media memes to generate a devoted audience following his posts. He used this audience to raise funds and awareness about his autobiographical theatrical musical project, based on his experiences as an interred Japanese-American boy in the 1940s. A combination of artist and entrepreneur, Takei's talk represented what the organizers wanted to stress about the future of this "Broadway" community- classical theatrical performance and production mixed with clever and inventive uses of new media community construction. Theatrical productions, inherent community experiences, can reach beyond the boundaries of physical and geographic theatrical spaces outlining Broadway.

As the invention of TEDx events teaches, new media can create links to new found audiences and communities. It can bridge as well as bond. In fact, this dynamic tension of community and its role in bridging and bonding praxis was the central rhetorical theme of the event. Each talk circulated around this tension, strategically locating how this tension is playing out, regardless of occupational field- designer, entrepreneur, administrator, and more. For example, David Sabel, who is the digital artistic director for London's National Theatre Live project, spoke of his laborious efforts to seamlessly transfer and translate live theatrical productions through online and video streaming. Sabel embodies the spirit of the TED transmedia storytelling objective. As he detailed his organizational and artistic approaches to classical theatrical directors, designers, and performers, Sabel focuses on the health of the theatrical community and stresses how moving it *out* via new media formulas can expand,

enhance, and enlarge the vitality of the community. His streamed events offer not an equivalent theatrical experience, but rather a different one, albeit shared from an alternate physical space. His success greatly mirrors that of the TEDx community movement with its use of new media techniques. There is little difference between his National Theatre digital simulcasts and those of TED events. The goal is identical. Whether in the arts, business, or education, these communities are experiencing tremendous change and facing it has generated massive divides within them all.

Likewise, theatrical designer Christine Jones spoke of her “Theatre for One” project that physically and geographically allows for the creation of an enclosed performance space to be constructed anywhere for any “one” individual to enter and view. It is, in essence, a personalized live experience via a booth. Her concept is akin to historic peep shows, but personalized mobile devices afford the same experiences on smaller screen prosceniums. Jones calls these experiences “gifts.” It is not unrelated to the “sharing of ideas” via podcasted TED talks. If one cannot go to Broadway, maybe Broadway can come to that individual? In utilizing online video to construct community through shared experiences of ideas, TED attempts the same objectives.

Perhaps the most cogent talk was given by Ellen Isaacs. Having spent a large portion of her career with IBM, Jacobs is an expert in usability tests. She discussed how often the problem with invention was not the idea, but the design behind it. She demonstrated her point by screening early usability test videos for the first IBM copier machines. The structure of the instruction manuals, both in manuscript form as well as directions located on the machines, were confusing and troublesome for users. The imperative information, what users “needed to know” did not contain a clear architecture. Clearly, the information hadn’t been curated well for user functionality. Jacobs implored her audience to uncover what she called “the hidden obvious” in the everyday natural habitats of people. The “hidden obvious” is found where information gaps

exist when individuals stall in behavior. Making a distinct argument for the value inherent in ethnographic analysis and field work, Jacobs illustrated how observing not only where information gaps exist, but also the communicative behaviors that people enact to work around these gaps, can provide incredible insight into problem-solving solutions. Opportunities for innovation occur when the chaos is observed through behavioral responses and needs are determined.

Jacobs used her ethnography research of parking signs in California. Here, she speaks of information signage and its utility. She began to notice how most parking signs provide details about restrictions as opposed to allowances. A change in information design and purpose could produce more effective use of the spaces by analyzing what can be inferred from the signs and how people respond to the given details. Jacobs is advocating for critical thinking in information design to better assist a mass public. She is not only arguing for critical reflection and listening, but also synthesis as well by providing ideas to change behaviors. One example, in particular, was of a sign that includes five or six restrictions. All the driver needs to know is- can I park here now?

As I reflect on Jacobs and her message, it clearly lands me inside rhetorical pedagogy. A connection can be made to our students as “can I park here now?” can be compared to “is this going to be on the test?” Clearly, there is a need for strong critical reflection in information design and clarity for utility, but the pedagogical connection to her talk made me realize that TEDx events need an organizational pattern and design between the sharing of ideas, a process very similar to what is taught in a basic communication course.

My analysis at and of TEDxBroadway helped empower the concept of new media, community, and pedagogical connections. New media artifacts, such as tweets or posts, can attract, build, and orient audiences to new ideas and innovations.

A strong sense of community can form around such artifacts. Beyond bonding communal elements, new media artifacts, such as TED talk videos, can bridge connections between seemingly disparate ideas and theories. For example, Jacobs has no literal connection to the arts or the Broadway community. Despite her lack of professional connection, numerous attendees clamored around her to dialogue about the application of her work to the larger Broadway community.

In both of these TEDx events, the need for a clear lesson plan becomes apparent. A curator is nothing short of a teacher, a faculty member, or educator. A person must determine the issues to address and develop an organizational pattern for the proper flow of ideas to ensure that the attendees (students/learners) can ameliorate. Even if the TEDx community is broad or insular, these needs remain essential if there is to be bridging and bonding of any kind between the audiences. Speakers must be selected and coached, similar to a speech classroom, on rhetoric techniques and structure. Presentation aids must be evaluated for their aesthetic and technical functionality. Finally, an order of display, a speech order, must form. Carefully curated, this structural arrangement is a rhetorical act itself, calling into question the expertise or authority of the one performing the act.

Van Maanen writes that ethnographic fieldwork entrenches the individual within the social relations of a more or less bounded and specified group of people (Van Maanen 3). Problematic to the fieldwork experience is the reporting of a culture. The results often produce a sort of “catch-all” idea of a culture (Van Maanen 5). The difficulty in my ethnographic process

with TED is to admit the meta-narrative transformation of my experience. I am researching TED and its events, while simultaneously starting to organize my own. The idea behind doing a TEDx event at LSU further complicates the researcher role, as I am now a fully engaged producer of the same content I am analyzing for the project. Ethnographies join culture and fieldwork (Van Maanen 7). On the one hand, one could interpret my producing a TEDx event as rapidly granted access, especially had it been for the larger annual event. Since the access and license for an “x” event was granted to me, with fairly little scrutiny to the permission process, it placed constraints on the scope of my ethnographic intent. I had to spend seven months organizing my own event, rather than attending others for wider observation and critical distance. Why, not, for example, work towards attending an international event rather than create my own?

The realization of the connections between curator and teacher significantly affected the decision to organize a local event. As can be noted, it turns the previous realistic ethnographic field work into more of a confessional ethnographer tale with the creation of TEDxLSU. My intention is to directly play upon the concept of the confessional tale, where, as a craft, it is much more self-reflective on the nature of understanding itself (Van Maanen 92-93).

As part of this self-reflective move, TEDxLSU becomes itself subject matter for questioning the rhetoric of expertise. I was not born in Louisiana. My time at LSU has been spent primarily as a student. As a Louisiana resident of less than ten years, who am I to be assigned the task of curator for a localized event? Should I be the expert to determine what ideas get shared and who discusses them? Expertise has been attributed to me via TED. The assignment reinforces the rhetorical tension of expertise and authenticity.

In the TED ecosystem, it is easy to see how ideas find their way (often fight their way) into mainstream attractions- as books become talks that become videos that become tweets that

become memes that become conceptual projects then books again; well, the cycle repeats itself into a frenzy of memetic exilir that even Richard Dawkins would celebrate. For many, TED is seen as nothing more than a laundering service for ideas, vastly engendering a marketplace for ideas to become currency for self-aggrandizing: the selling of more books or the promotion of future speaking engagements. While there is an undercurrent of truth to this assertion, TED events do offer a chance for discovery, wonder, and connection to the ideas presented.

TED refers to its primary event organizer as the “curator.” While the institutional “curator” of TED is Chris Anderson, there are many local curators of TEDx events. When on stage at TEDGlobal in 2011, Anderson was asked if TED could be labeled a religion. Anderson denied the association, but, as previously mentioned, it is easy to make an analogy between TED talks and sermonic elements. The rules of TED events from structural to aesthetic components make it akin to religious rituals. In this analogy, the “curator” could be conceived as the preacher, but is, in reality, more akin to a professor. Anderson has been more appropriately deemed a “global ideas meister” (Cadalladr 2). Curator remains the official title and with the invention of TEDx events, anyone can apply to be one. Individuals submit to an application process in the form of an online essay. The application asks for a conceptual framework for the event, a plan of action, a list of goals, and a thinly disguised self-assessment skills inventory assignment. Providing specific and detailed information enhances the chances for success, as members of the TED organization review and refuse/approve applicants.

Why use the term curator? The label of curator has become routine. As Daniel Blight observes, “one can even curate their own Whole Foods basket now” (Blight 2). The term curator, while holding significant cultural history, may not possess a similar amount of cultural currency in a digital age where the task of curation and the title of curator are everywhere. In the current

era, curation is no longer an activity reserved for formal experts alone, but is enacted by anyone in digital spaces that promote a participatory democratic form of sharing and collecting. Peter Ride asserts that it is a “shift from expert to amateur, from having gatekeepers to public participation” (Blight 4). Institutional structures, such as museums, universities, and libraries where specialized experts and curators operate are largely questioned. The traditional position of curator is an intellectual authority, typically highly specialized, having an awareness of the meaning and cultural context for the objects or discipline he/she cares deeply about understanding. Such an understanding of an object or subject is then interpreted by the curator through an exhibit, display, or even an academic course in which values and meaning can be transmitted to a receptive audience through an established order.

When producing a TED event, the curator is the creative architect of locating and communicating “ideas worth spreading.” It is a position riddled with pressures. Similar to a theatrical director before auditions, the imperative is to single out and cast the right actors for the story. With TED events, there is no pre-existing script or material nor is there (in most cases) a cadre of trained and polished speakers coupled with innovative and interesting ideas. These content issues are coupled with aesthetic ones such as venue and production design.

Beyond production concerns, there is a philosophical dimension to curating a TED event. A curator needs to focus on bridging a connection between what Wurman called “knowing and understanding” (Wurman 3). This connection is carefully constructed as speakers and ideas are pieced together. The main objective is to foster an *exchange of ideas* in the hopes that innovation and change can occur in individuals and communities through discourse. As Matt Ridley states, TED events are prime spaces for “ideas to have sex” (Geere 1).

Curating the TEDxLSU Lesson Plan

One of the most difficult tasks for a TEDx curator is to build TED literacy. As popular as TED talk videos are, it was surprising to me to learn that numerous individuals were unaware of the size, scope, or mission of TED beyond mere links or videos being randomly posted on walls or attached in emails. It became a common response in media to be prepared for: “Oh, TED! That’s the Seth MacFarlane movie with the foul-mouthed, talking teddy bear?” Indeed, I heard this humorously thrown at me during my process of organization. On the contrary, there were people who knew all about TED. These individuals likewise had to be tested and filtered, as many volunteers weren’t seeking a true service role, but were rather seeking ways to become a speaker.

Building the brand required leaning upon the strength of another: LSU. I never planned on going rogue and trying to do TEDxRed Stick or TEDxBR; efforts had been made towards that end before me and I did not want to be associated with their failure. LSU, while generating its own mixed reactions (which likewise surprised me) amongst the larger communities, provided a stable base to pull from when necessary with speakers, sponsors, and patrons. While I worked with University Relations, I never asked for permission to do TEDxLSU from anyone at the university. I applied for the license with TED and ran with it. I assumed that if someone wanted to challenge the process, then I would battle those arguments when the time came. It never did.

I relied on my engagement with the Janice Pellar Creative Arts Entrepreneurship Program to be my monetary fallback. A privately funded program for the College of Music & Dramatic Arts at LSU, the Pellar program was an initiative that I was charged with co-heading. I structured the TEDxLSU project as a way to model social entrepreneurship while simultaneously providing multiple opportunities for the students of the Pellar program to gain

experience in conference and event marketing and planning, as well as expressing creative input towards the event's content and production design. I composed two sets of advisory boards. The first consisted of LSU students, both graduate and undergraduate, some of whom were enrolled in the Pellar program, to assist in suggesting speakers and themes for the event. A second board included some LSU faculty and administration, but mostly consisted of volunteers amongst social and commercial entities inside Baton Rouge. This group became a communicative force in helping me bridge the event to larger groups in the Louisiana social ecosystem. I did not want the event to be viewed as an exclusive LSU affair.

I targeted areas of education, technology, entrepreneurship (social and commercial), and the arts as primary themes for the event. My initial plans were grandiose. Taking a cue from other university events, such as TEDxUSC, I envisioned and pitched TEDxLSU as an “intellectual lalapooza” where multiple communities and groups could interact and engage. I conceived it as being a mashup of the acropolis- a makeshift revisionist Lyceum tent experience. Quickly, my team of volunteers encouraged me to scale back the concept due to time constraints; however, more of that concept has been infused into the 2014 event.

I reached out to philanthropic organizations in the city, such as the Baton Rouge Area Foundation, for verbal and economic support. Other entities soon came calling to get involved such as the Baton Rouge Area Council, Capital Area United Way, Capital Arts Alliance, and more. In November of 2012, a journalist contacted me about doing a feature story on TEDxLSU. We met. We had a long discussion and when the article was published in the next issue, the piece centered more on me than the event. This was disturbing for a few reasons as TEDx events should never be about the curator. The TED team encourages curators not to be visible in the process but to remain more of an invisible force, making all the gears work from behind the

curtain. Ultimately, as TEDxSydney curator Remo Guiffre states, ” at a certain point, the development and planning for the event takes on a life of its own ... and I almost feel like an observer. That’s the dividend from creating a strong and passionate team.” When researching TEDx events, every curator I spoke with emphasized the same point- the imperative need for an excellent and competent team of volunteers.

I was fortunate to have a mixture of volunteers, both from inside the LSU infrastructure, but also from larger Baton Rouge community entities. I felt this was of the utmost importance for the event. LSU, to me, was always the vessel or the home base for the event. While great ideas from faculty and students at LSU could and should be featured, TEDx is bigger than LSU; I did not want the event to be yet another chance to roll out Mike the Tiger, the Tiger Band, or the dance team. While those elements have their rhetorical power, I reminded my team that the event is titled TEDxLSU not LSUxTED. The larger community needed a voice in such an event and a strong one or I knew the event would suffer. In fact, many notable community volunteers were hesitant to come aboard until speaking with me first and being assured that the event was about our region and state communities rather than polishing LSU’s public relations image.

For example, one of the largest and prohibitive roadblocks was getting the Baton Rouge food trucks onto the LSU campus. I had this vision of the food trucks, a popular phenomenon in the area, to be present for the audience dinner. A tremendous political barrier existed that made this vision appear impossible. The details of such politics, including areas like insurance and liability as well as contractual agreements (LSU actually farms out its food distribution), became overwhelming. It took efforts to bridge and bond, between community entrepreneurs and LSU administration. It worked and from my understanding, the policies regarding food truck presence on the campus have become less intensified. Getting the food trucks onto the campus was seen as

a progressively liberal acknowledgement from a mostly conservative administration. The act signaled significant interest from multiple communities outside of LSU towards supporting the TEDx event. The gesture of the truck allowance cannot be underestimated. As one community member told me after hearing the news: “Joey, you have moved a mountain.”

With more than 150 speaker suggestions, the need for a theme became an essential step towards organizing the event content. The theme of “Evolve” was chosen to outline the event content. Evolve as a thematic made sense to me. The concept of a TED-like event had never been done before in Baton Rouge. The process of its growth was evolving. The speakers chosen to attend would be a representation of an evolutionary process. I wanted some seasoned talks but also novice ones, so I opened up an audition process for LSU students to submit ideas for talks. I divided the sessions into three units with a 90-minute allotment for each one. This is the maximum amount of time allowed by TED for the sessions.

Session (course) one was to be called “edifice.” In this session, I wanted to address not only the structure of the LSU campus (as a large, imposing building), but also the university (as an institution) as a complex system of beliefs. I had Dr. Michael Desmond, an LSU professor of Architecture and expert on the history of its campus, spoke first and outlined the tenets of its construction and rhetorical power in the community. He was followed by several faculty members who presented unique curriculum theories or applications of research, from video game design to sonic environment analysis. Local filmmaker Zack Godshall spoke of “letting go” during the creative process and simply living in the process of evolution. Science advocate Zack Kopplin, a Louisiana native, spoke of the need for educational curriculum reform. Two graduate students performed their talk via live performance of self-created instruments, demonstrating how to be in the process of creation and evolution. Concluding the session was musician and

entrepreneur Anita Kruse, whose organization called Purple Songs Can Fly, spoke about the inter-connected nature of music, voice, and our souls.

Session (course) two was to be called “communitas.” The choice of this session title was extremely overt. Stemming from Turner’s work on communitas and countered by Goodman, I wanted this session to stimulate thought on what the concept of community meant for the Baton Rouge area. What kind of community does the audience believe we have? What kind of community does the audience believe we should have? Where are the gaps in those conceptions? Local entrepreneur Kenny Nguyen, an LSU graduate, spoke of the ability to say no, as that can often lead to better opportunities and plans. LSU Mass Communication professor Craig Freeman spoke of his family community and how the iPad is changing the way his communities, from the dinner table to his classrooms, communicate differently. Urban engineer Camille Manning-Broome spoke of her personal journey to transform not only her familial community, but of the public one surrounding her home. She delivered a passionate plea for urban renewal and design in the under-developed and under-represented Mid-City portion of Baton Rouge. Environmental and Coastal scientist and activist Gary Shaffer spoke of his tireless research and work to restore and defend the impoverished and endangered wetland areas of Louisiana’s marshes. The idea behind the session was to present the audience with several talks that addressed the broad expansive composition of the local Baton Rouge and larger Louisiana communities and issues.

Session (course) three was to be called “conduits.” I wanted this session to generate thought about what ignites as well as connects our communities and minds. Keith Comeaux, jet propulsion scientist at NASA, spoke about the recent Mars Rover mission and landing. LSU Mass Communication professor Jensen Moore spoke about her research into our grieving processes, primarily through social media outlets. LSU Assistant Professor Tracy Stephenson

Shaffer spoke of the rhetorical power of icons. Local exercise enthusiast and entrepreneur Pat Fellows spoke about reaching and setting amazing goals.

Overall, the session design was effective. There is much consideration that goes into the organizational efforts for these events. One dilemma is to determine how explicit or implicit the connections between the talks should be during the event. For example, at TEDxBroadway, the host of the event not only introduced every speaker, but also asked questions and suggested connectives for the audience before and after talks. I did not do this with TEDxLSU. The results were mixed. As one audience member commented to me, “why did I need to listen to how “King Kong” is an icon?” Apparently, the portions of the talk by Dr. Shaffer on the cultural icon missed this audience member- primarily the ones that discussed how the film was a scientific and technological marvel that evolved into our culture as an icon now representing so much more. The challenge was for the audience to begin thinking about how icons work rhetorically in their lives and community. Perhaps sometimes, as with a course lecture, the point can be completely missed unless the audience (students) is told the material will be on the test later.

TEDxLSU 2014 is my second lesson plan. In essence, I see little separation between the roles of curator and teacher. In creating a narrative for a TEDx event, the curator applies a research methodology towards community and public discourse in a specific localized area. Attention is paid to creating educational experiences that ask (implicitly or explicitly) compelling questions about selected topics and ideas. These content experiences become enactments of learning at the event. They can address audiences in multi-sensorial ways. The content may be a video, music, dance, magic, or a talk. The events are multi-modal learning experiences that have been curated and carefully constructed for optimal effect in order to provoke deep thought, engagement, and learning. Given current debates over the implementation of digital technologies

and content into curriculum and instructional design, I have discovered that by “consuming” and “producing” TED experiences, we see a need to refocus energies towards the concomitant struggles over pedagogical strategies that stress connections between information and knowledge, active and passive learners, and between curation and teaching in the rhetoric classroom.

The synergies between teaching and curation are exciting but perplexing. Curriculums are well cemented in most state systems. These curriculums focus on proper learning objectives, effective tools and methodologies, and timelines for developing competencies. Deviating from these systematic forms of teaching and learning is dangerous and unethical. The question becomes, how can one maintain a sense of allegiance to such enforced curriculums while simultaneously experimenting with more effective and modern ways to enhance not only the experience of learning but also the demonstrated mastery of course content?

Of course, adopted curriculums aren't inherently evil or useless. Changing learning objectives isn't the goal per se; however, discovering and inventing new ways and means to direct students towards assuming a more active and directed role in their learning is a critical task. It is one that teachers should see as integral to their work. In thinking about teaching as curation, entities such as TED, inspired by digital media, open up creative avenues to explore new possibilities for the application of course content and assess the efficacy of current assignments and rubrics. It is no different than introducing in classroom spaces as teachers scratched their heads about how to best incorporate them into use rather than view them as disruptive forces.

CHAPTER 5. TED AS DISRUPTIVE PEDAGOGY

In writing about TED, Anya Kamenetz describes the first email she received that contained a link to a TED talk. Her prose outlines the creation of a kind of secret club for intellectuals who subversively share TED talks amongst one another. Contained within her praise for TED and its tenets, is a single sentence that perhaps summarizes the growing influence of TED within the educational ecosystem: “I would go so far as to argue that it’s creating a new Harvard—the first new top-prestige education brand in more than 100 years” (Kamenetz 3). She points to the prestige of its faculty (presenters) and its open and accessible content as the most “radical” components towards a new university paradigm. During the last decade, models of formal learning environments have transformed into something more fluid, open, and accessible to anyone. If the hidden curriculum of the traditional university system has been to teach its own importance, then Kamenetz has exposed a shocking way of thinking about TED. What if online resources, such as Khan Academy or TED, were to develop into such an authoritative force for creating and sharing knowledge as Harvard?

TED curator Chris Anderson states: “we’re exploring TED as a global classroom, it’s very much a part of what we’re dreaming of” (Kamenetz 3). The emphasis on prestige intellectuals made available openly (albeit via pre-recorded video) places a civic (globally) mission upon TED as a source of information and ideas, thus hoping to generate (and shape) knowledge. This is a civic mission traditionally undertaken by our institutes of learning. I’m not suggesting that we adopt Kamenetz’s conceit literally. Formal education uses social interaction in the classroom to motivate, engage, and ignite our minds. Attending TED in person provides great social interactions (if one can be admitted to attend) but a precious few experience it live. Seeing it online is mostly a solitary endeavor. The online experience is fairly passive, not much

different from television. It's only when ideas are passed on, discussed, and restated in our own words, argued for or against them, or integrated into our own narrative that we get most of the educational benefits. It is how we cultivate an educated populous capable of critical thinking and synthesis which, in turn, produces greater civic engagement and a better way of life for all.

Consider that a recent trend in American education has been a call for the revitalization of the civic mission of universities, a call that is inherently tied to the pedagogy of rhetoric. These calls to citizenship education, which is rhetorical education, go beyond the need for more voting, civic engagement, and service learning; rather, they consist of the importance of re-examining the purpose of higher education and the responsibility of college graduates and educators. These calls often highlight the importance of “21st century skills” or “transferrable skills” such as critical thinking, innovative problem-solving, deliberation, collaboration, and judgment: skills, most rhetorical scholars would argue, that are part and parcel of the pedagogy of rhetoric. Perhaps universities, as Hauser notes, have finally begun to realize that educators need to carefully balance the importance of (disciplinary knowledge production) Berlin and (the cultivation of citizens) Athens (Hauser 44). Kamenetz’s comments highlight a cultural need for something “new” from the university model and even rhetorical scholars have called for a “pedagogical turn,” a renewed focus on the relationship between rhetoric and pedagogy in 2006. Further problematic to this “pedagogical” turn is the existence of new media technologies (Sharer 373). The democratization of digital media, particularly video, has made it possible to increase the sharing and collaboration of ideas faster than ever before, and as our world becomes more reliant on digital devices for the receiving and sending of information, or the consumption and production of information, the precise role of technology within pedagogy becomes increasingly complex. The adoption and best use strategies of technologies in education typically

center on best adoption principles. In other words, how can (or should) this “new stuff” be incorporated into the classroom? Hybrid learning and flipping the classroom are tested methods using “new” course designs and approaches to a more mediatized and distracted student population. While the effectiveness of these approaches remains one of experimentation and debate, I see TED talks as rhetorical artifacts within this teaching ecosystem disrupted by the invention of mobile apps, social media platforms, video/screen capture, and video chat platforms. They provide possibility as an implementation tool but also serve as a spark for our pedagogical imagination and wonder. Should I use these tools? How can I to improve student learning?

The use of educational technology has been a hallmark of American schools for a long time. In 1826, when the lyceum thrived and the Adult Education Movement was in full stride, many groups of itinerant lecturers found possibilities in making still pictures for use in travel lectures between circuits. The spread of the use of visuals in formal instructional lectures inspired Elias Holmes to document his world travels in 1897 and become the first professional orator to offer lantern slides through a kodachrome device to an audience. Almost simultaneously, pioneers in visual instruction realized that the new medium of film could also be incorporated for educational use. In 1900, Lyman Howe actually cut together several portions of different educational films to create an entire evening’s presentation into one single film (Saettler 124).

By 1910, a proposal was made before the New York Board of Education to begin using “educational” film reels in classrooms. These filmed newsreels, travelogues, and scientific discussions were designed to give students a transporting experience beyond the classroom walls. The proposal was denied due to a lack of affordable and portable motion-picture screening equipment for classroom use. Within a year, the Rochester School District adopted the proposal

and supplied its school district libraries with the necessary technologies. Without question, the influx of the educational film served as an impetus for the development of the educational technology movement in the United States (Saettler 98, 116-117).

I do not intend to equate new information technologies with the technologies of instruction; however, making this distinction clear is imperative when contemplating how TED artifacts, as forms of digital media, get incorporated for pedagogical use because often one leads to the other. Ely makes a helpful distinction between the “physical science” of educational technology and the “behavioral science” of educational technology as “process or how-to” and “product” or “materials used in the process” (Saettler 17). It is impossible to keep these two areas separate for long periods. The relationship between them is layered and complex, leading to paradigm shifts in instruction and curriculum design, depending on a teacher’s approach. Given the rapid pace of new media technology growth and expansion, it is difficult to effectively spend scholarly time contemplating and researching the ramifications of both process and product in implementing anything. There could be a new piece of software that updates and changes all previous work in an instant.

It is essential to begin with addressing the context of the use. Mayer suggested that asking the question “what can we do with multimedia?” is adopting a technology-centered approach that is doomed to fail. Adopting a student-centered approach leads us to ask the question: “how can we adapt multimedia designs to help students learn more?” In essence, the question of “what can we do?” remains, but the motivation is different (Mayer 4). The goal is not merely to test new technologies but to use them in order to test human cognition. As Hedberg argued, a “disruptive pedagogy” shifts from using technology to teach the same content to using technology to help students become active participants not just in their own learning, but in

creating knowledge (Hedberg 3). With the proper experimentation and design, such a disruptive approach allows for the combination of new media (as products) with knowledge making (as process). TED, particularly with its combination of speaking, writing, visual, and technological elements, can play a deep role in a disruptive approach. If the lure of pedagogical wonder catches us, then we should not merely but discussing the screening of a TED talk in a course for the purposes of illustrating with, elaborating upon, or introducing existing course content. Rather, we should be discovering ways TED talks can challenge students to create, invent, produce, and distribute information.

One promise of technology is that it can deeply affect the processes of teaching and learning. Gradual adoption of technology in educational environments continues to increase. Most have adjusted to basic changes such as using email and content management systems for grading and the exchange of information. The conversation about the incorporation and use of technology in education has experienced many phases and debates. Initial implementation concerns center on teacher competency in regards to technological training. Appropriate and available access to essential technological resources, such as strong bandwidth or useful hardware, particularly in struggling or impoverished regions remains problematic. The emergence of these issues makes many in education treat technology as an infiltrating disease. The response as any living organism would adopt is to ward off a foreign contaminant in order to remain immune. As more teachers from the pre-technology explosion of new media retire, a younger generation more attuned to the ecology of new media will assume the reigns. A fresh generation, having grown up in and around new media, will not find its incorporation such a strange initiative. Herein resides a central conflict as there is a disconnect between teachers'

needs for “curriculum” and the availability of sufficient curriculum to support the use of technology (Burr & Percy 3-4). The time to experiment and create templates is now.

With such strong burdens and time constraints already upon them, teachers are less likely to experiment or create their own curricula and assignments engaging technology unless it consistently works. Student responses with technology, however, are often unpredictable. It takes time to tweak any assignment for optimal use. Even the simplest of assignments, an essay or exam, get tweaked over time. Why should assignments incorporating new media be treated any differently?

The time issue reveals that many consider technology as a separate body of knowledge. Indeed, it is, but to treat technology consistently as a separate subject and discipline dismisses a deeper truth. Technology should empower core curriculum ideas not necessarily establish new ones. It should be incorporated as an enhancement tool that can evolve alongside new student audiences. It can communicate curriculum ideas in a new language but still enforce traditional kernels of subject knowledge. Technology has radically affected the way a classroom is conceptualized. Spaces for learning have no boundaries. Students do not merely enter and exit classrooms. The students of the new millennium are used to an intellectual environment that is interactive where media offers a simultaneous individualized experience as well as access to a larger community of individuals through sharing experiences (Burr & Percy 19). Our students are hungry for these kinds of connections. They participate in information feeding frenzies by hyper linking through applications such as Reddit. Perceiving their world as a kind of digital play space, we can expand our conception of how to establish a base within such a media landscape. We serve as their guides. We are their Yoda.

If we adopt this mindset, we turn our students into producers rather than consumers. Engaging with technology allows students to participate in meta-learning—they will learn about technology as they use technology. In such a mediated world, it is imperative that students develop critical media literacy skills such as to understand how technology satisfies human needs or how it alters the pace of learning and communicating (Harwood & Asal 9). They learn this by comprehending what these processes were like before technology's intervention as well as making meaningful connections between periods of time by *doing* technology. There is perhaps nothing more crucial in the development of a citizen than to make him/her more informed, active, and conscious. This is what it means to teach the 21st century learner.

It is my intent to keep the discussion here to practical and honest (albeit cautiously optimistic) about technological merits. That being said, the assignments detailed here are not formatted as a “how-to” guide but rather more as a “what we did.” The concept is to detail experiments in pedagogy as an exercise in “what might work” in the hopes of simultaneously discovering what doesn't. As Coppola notes, “educators and policymakers widely agree new technologies should be employed in ways that mimic real world uses in order to prepare students for the workplace or higher education” (Coppola 17). Are we doing that? At higher education levels, should we be using an approach that centers more on an idea of technological synthesis? Can we use technologies to engender better learning? In the end, using new media in the classroom forces us to ensure that we use technologies to engage students in “meaningful social practices” (Warschauer 114). By experimenting with these practices, we can learn from TED models. The concept of journaling about pedagogical experiments may be a political activity, but also an imperative one for educators.

It is through our own work with these new technologies, for example, that we continue to re-discover an essential truth about our profession—that teaching and research are inherently social and political activities, and that the human exchanges resting at the heart of our work take place not only among faculty members and students, but among faculty members themselves. As teacher-scholars, we do our best work when we can talk together, write together, and think together about what we do. The last thing we need is to become paralyzed and inactive out of fear because of the rapid nature of change generated by technologies (Selfe 9).

It is within this spirit that I experimented with using TED as a disruptive tool. Instead of scratching my head and staring at the chalkboard, I set out to dismantle it and see which parts could be usefully applied to learning.

My experimentation moves between phases. The first phase is using TED videos as simple analytical tools to discuss aspects of public speaking decorum and aesthetics. The second phase is using TED videos as an invention device for students to discover topics and to connect those interests with the larger classroom community. The third phase is using TED videos to stimulate a new form of speaking delivery, while simultaneously restricting the parameters of using visual aids. The fourth phase is to examine the act of curation. My students assembled videos through the playlist assignments. With that assignment, the act of curation is made explicit and the role of the expert in amassing what should be including and excluding became a political act, not just for my students but for me as teacher. Beyond the task of making curation explicit, students need to experience critical reflection and application. In curating such content, students demonstrate a synthesis of course content. Through critical reflection and expression, they understand the entire rhetorical process from invention to delivery to distribution and display.

Disrupting the Introductory Course

Teaching an introductory course can be tedious at best. Often an introductory course is left to graduate assistants to teach based upon a strict curriculum and pre-determined range of

assignments. Unfortunately, these assignments wear quickly and become ineffective over time. Teachers and students alike become disillusioned with the course materials and possibly disengaged from their importance and relevancy.

The Introduction to Communication course I hoped to refine contained such a structure; however, when I spoke to colleagues about “what they did” for the final assignment in the course, the answers were varied from performances and speeches to written final exams or essays. In short, there was no consensus except that “nothing seemed to work” for maintaining engagement between the students and the course content. Along with many of my colleagues, I was not satisfied with the level of demonstrated mastery in terms of critical communication skills we hoped students would possess upon leaving the course.

The goals for the course are fairly simple in design. The idea of the introductory course is to “introduce” students to a survey of communication concepts and topics with building a gradual emphasis towards communication competency. Concluding with public speaking is an easy method to preparing students for intermediate levels of most communication courses in general education curricula, such as the Public Speaking course. That being said, it might spark an interest in some other topical area of communication studies whether it be group, interpersonal, listening, or intercultural areas.

Beyond generating an excitement for what communication study can offer, it is perhaps most important in this course to establish the centrality of communication as a discipline within a student’s college and professional experience. Competency in understanding speaking and listening skills as well as working in groups and teams with persons of diverse backgrounds is the essence of the communication discipline. These skills become even more imperative with problem solving or dealing with conflict management (Morreale, Osborn, & Pearson 2).

The final assignment for this introductory course consists of a traditional public speaking experience. Students select a topic of choice, learn basic speech construction and presentation skills, and deliver a five-minute speech. Colleagues offer alternate choices such as a literature performance, an analytic essay, or a standardized final exam. All of these alternatives emphasize the modes of communication competency: oral, written, visual, and/or technological elements. How could TED, as an educational technology, offer other possibilities?

When combined with creative adaptation to the course content, TED offers a unique way to blend all modes into one final assignment. Using TED provided me an opportunity to tackle the primary problems of the course assignment in its current iteration. First, students generally struggle to find an appropriate topic that engages them. This is not always true, but stock topics are rampant in speaking courses. The TED website functions as a brainstorming database of topics. It is, as it professes, a place for ideas worth sharing. Second, despite seeing examples and discussing speaking dynamics, students' presentation skills remain raw and altered little by the speaking experience.

What could be done to raise the stakes? Besides simply raising the weight of their assignment grade, could I find something in TED to help? The polished performances at TED are an excellent way to begin introducing a dynamic and arguably sensual component to public speaking. It is in structure, delivery, and mediated nature of TED that one finds the sleek aesthetic that makes TED work. Students as savvy media consumers get this aspect instantly. Third, students lack a sophisticated visual literacy when supplying supporting materials to presentations. If allowed, visual aids (despite being a chapter covered in their textbook) too often *become* the presentation. If students can be encouraged to critically examine the visual elements to the assignment, then their media literacy will increase.

It becomes important to have students view TED talks in two forms. First, TED talks are media artifacts. They are videos shot and edited for/through specific rhetorical choices to elicit audience emotions. Second, TED talks are speech compositions. They are written, researched, practiced, and delivered. Each of these actions belongs to a delicate process of creation in which choices are made. If viewed in this way, students begin to comprehend their primary roles as everyday media consumers. When asked to produce content, they see communication processes as central to an education. It is how they formally vocalize to a noisy world.

Despite the rapid growth of sharing TED talks online, many students remain unaware of the existence, quality, and diversity of TED talks. The first step is to orient the students to TED, its mission, and its resources such as the website and discussion forums. For the introduction of TED to my class, I began by showing some of my favorite TED talks. I showed them Ken Robinson's speech on creativity in schools, Larry Lessig's speech on copyright law, and Mike Rowe's speech on blue-collar jobs. With over 700 talks posted and available, different choices could be made that address specific needs or interests of the class.

It is important to have students analyze TED talks in two ways: as an artifact of visual media as well as speech composition/content/delivery. The aforementioned three talks illustrate this distinction. For example, with Lessig's speech, I draw their attention to the ways in which he incorporates his visual media from slides to videos. Lessig's talk is on copyright law and how it infringes on creative output for today's youth. One of the best examples he uses is a Supreme Court case *United States v. Causby*. In the case, Causby sued the U.S. government over the application of the common law doctrine regarding his land rights. Causby claimed that "low-flying military planes" were disrupting the chickens on his farm causing them to die. Causby claimed the planes were "trespassing" his property by invading his land's air space. The suit

failed as the Supreme Court ruled that Common Law principles as they concern air space, have “no place in the modern world.” Lessig uses this example as an analogy to copyright law in the modern world of the Internet. During this portion of his presentation, Lessig uses various visual slides, one of which depicts a distinct separation of land and air. The image challenges the viewer to consider the “clear separation” and how it isn’t really as clear as it appears. We discuss how the visual works to complement the verbal, as opposed to the speaker talking *about* what is in the slide; the slide is talking *about* what is in the speech. Third, we discuss Lessig’s use of the Bush/Blair mashup, in which a creative individual has edited the two politicians perfectly in sync with the lyrics and music to Lionel Richie’s “Endless Love.” We discuss how it amplifies Lessig’s points about creativity and free speech and how the mashup is a form of political protest through creative use of media more than it is a sample of copyright violation. Lessig’s talk is not only topical in that it speaks to younger generations of students, but also in speech composition. Finally, we discuss the TED talk as a form of media itself: a videoed speech. We discuss how production strategies work to connect us to the speaker and his/her content. I point out how TED talks are captured from two angles, wide and close, and that careful editing is done to create a connection. I even have my students point out the number of cuts they see and what they are—for example, a close-up of the speaker’s face or the full insertion of a slide. Any TED talk allows one to discuss a myriad of issues, but I use this one to highlight how the visual should complement the verbal in a critical way. Likewise, I use it to draw attention to the speech as a constructed and planned form of media. Similar to the precision in editing done to make the Bush/Blair mashup work, someone has done the same for the TED talk video.

The second TED talk I screen is Mike Rowe’s speech about his experiences working on the show “Dirty Jobs.” The emphasis I show here is on Rowe as a storyteller as he uses narrative

to reveal his major theme: the loss of respect or importance placed on vocational professions and professionals. Rowe incorporates two Aristotelian terms, *anagnorsis* and *peripeteia*, defines them, and then uses the terms as bookends to tell one of the most unique stories individuals will likely ever hear. Rowe uses the tactic of repetition, returning to those terms, throughout his tale of how one of his “dirty jobs” placed him on a sheep farm where he was tasked with neutering male sheep. There is a method encouraged by PETA and a method done by the locals on site. While one method is undoubtedly more disgusting and not PETA-sanctioned, it is less painful on the sheep. It opens a wonderful discussion about the “expert” and can lead to quality discussions about credibility. Rowe’s popularity with younger audiences helps build his credibility. I challenge them to think about how his imagined ethos with audiences strengthens his credibility for the topic of such a dirty job. At the same time, Rowe uses no visual media for his presentation. He relies solely on his verbal talents at telling a story. We discuss whether or not his style is effective and what it takes to make such a presentation style work for a modern audience.

The third TED talk I screen is radically different from the others. It is titled “How Pandemics Spread” and is narrated by Mark Honingsbaum, a British journalist, author, and scholar. The presentation is completely animated with imagery and graphics done by multimedia artist Patrick Blower. The presentation contains a tremendous amount of information, statistics, dates, places, and data. It is edited together to play as a “motion comic,” a genre that has gained in recent popularity, as the artwork tells the story of the data. It is a brilliant collaboration of artistry and scientific visualization. It stuns my students and captivates their attention. I follow this screening with a series of questions not about the visuals but about the information in the narration. I find that the students can recall less specific information than the previous talks.

Again, we discuss the careful relationship between the visual and verbal. I challenge them to consider whether this is a speech, a video, or an animation...or all three? Where does it function best?

Following the screening and general discussion in class, I place the students into groups of four. They are given a series of questions to answer as a group. A second set of questions they must answer individually. The questions encourage them to re-view the talks on their own time for deeper reflection. The group questions are worked out during class and turned in before they leave. These questions are designed to get the students oriented to general audience demographics. They discover that different components within the content of the talks generate a range of reactions. Having the students work out these group responses forces them to build consensus about the “general issues” from the talk as well as listen and reflect upon what others think and believe. Critical thinking is a social activity. It requires “being able to listen with respect to what others have to say” because we move forward by “interacting attentively with other people; without them, we are lost listeners” (Browne & Keeley 9). Many times groups in the class cannot come to a quick consensus for the question: “According to your group, what is the overall theme of the TED talk?” For example, one group could not decide whether the “Pandemics” presentation was focused more on contagion prevention or disaster preparedness. Ultimately, they determined the theme was contagions and placed prevention/preparedness under sub-topics. The group work is a typical exercise encouraging students to contemplate the organizational structure of content—to outline material. Ideally, students discover multiple ways of organizing and structuring information they’ve received from the screenings. There are no right or wrong methods, but they hopefully see effective and ineffective choices. It is, in essence, a strategy to begin introducing the concept of *contrast*. As Duarte notes, we are constantly in a

state of checks and balances, where we compare our thoughts against those of others, determining agreement or disagreement with statements or views. The group work can amplify the concept of contrast but it doesn't lead to conflict.

The individual questions that student complete alone place an emphasis on creating a “sparkline” contained in the TED talk. Similar to an outline, a sparkline is a concept introduced by Edward Tufte and adapted by Nancy Duarte to oral presentations. Tufte’s intriguing concept of sparklines describes them as “wordlike graphics” or “datawords.” A sparkline usually consists of either a fluctuating line like in a line chart, or of a string of very tiny bars. It is usually longer than high, and is not accompanied by an x- or y-axis or other scale. A sparkline enables the visual display of a large amount of data in a tiny space. In addition, sparklines are often presented in a set, enabling comparisons between the data in different sparklines (Tufte 13-14). For Duarte, her adaptation of Tufte’s sparkline is to make them graphic depictions of the narrative voice of a presentation as it moves back and forth between “what is” and “what could be.” Great speeches, Duarte contends, establish a base that represents the “ordinary world.” Once introduced, this ordinary world is thrown into tension by the presentation of an alternative world, a special world presented by the speaker. An emotional level rises because of the tension between worlds- “what is” and “what could be.” The inclusion of Duarte into the course is to emphasize key elements to presentation construction. First, Duarte stresses the importance of stepping out of the way as a speaker and focusing on one’s audience. She instructs that the “hero” of the presentation is the audience not the speaker. Second, Duarte posits the need to have a narrative structure and visuals that complement the content. Effective presentations, for Duarte, possess a harmony between these elements. Students are to learn that great presentations are carefully choreographed and use visual structure to support the spoken narrative (Duarte 52, 55-

60). Learning this is difficult for students. It becomes apparent that my students frequently approach a presentation as if it were a puzzle, a form (often begrudgingly) pieced together from jagged pieces; but there is a reason why puzzle building is not a spectator sport: no audience could bear watching it. A presentation that simply explains, no matter how detailed or comprehensive, falls short when compared to a presentation that compels. Presentations must do both and to truly engage the audience and function more as a game of catch, encouraging active involvement, even if only in the realm of the mind. Understanding this, each student is required to analyze a TED talk of their choice using the Duarte sparkline examples as a strategy for the eventual building of their own presentations.

Having analyzed a TED talk that personally resonated with them, students moved to the next step in the assignment sequence. Using the same selected TED talk, they were asked to create a mind map from the content. Mind maps typically represent a task or idea in pictorial form using minimal words (Buzan & Buzan 7). These TED mind maps function in similar ways as students would write the central theme of the talk as one word in the center of a document. This one word would be likewise supported by an image the student chose to represent the word. The connection between the word and image did not have to be explicit but they were prepared to explain their choices. This section of the map is referred to as the BOI (Basic Ordering Idea). From the BOI, students drew out 5-10 (often more) sub-branches or connectors to the central word and image. Along the connector lines, students listed words and ideas (along with images) that associate or connect with the central word/image. The students were encouraged to think in free association and not immediately contemplate critical connections. In mind mapping, emphasis isn't immediately important but process is as it provides a way to communicate with your mind (Michalko 42). This creative opening of free association allowed students to wander

mentally across the terrain of the TED talk content and eventually find their path into a connector idea already within them. Mind maps allow one to jiggle both the left and right sides of the brain in a creative manner. The end result is a connection or idea that the student was not previously conscious of when viewing the TED talk. After students present their maps in class, they realize that a topic for their presentation has been generated. Most have realized it before coming to class, but it is important to make the purpose of the activity explicit. Once a student oversees the landscape of their mind map, they see a myriad of choices to speak about in class. All have been inspired by TED presentations. The students can trace their idea back to the original TED talk but it isn't necessary for them to rely on the TED talk content for their newfound topical idea.

Pecha-Kucha: The Classroom as TED

TED 101 is a college introductory course offered in the curriculum at the University of William & Mary in Virginia. The course uses TED talks as its primary text. Students view, assess, discuss, and analyze TED talks in groups and individually. The course was team taught between two faculty and the respective classes met regularly through the year to collaborate on assignments. The W&M students were required to view selected TED talks during determined “themed” weeks. The weekly themes varied from “The Human Mind” to “Technology & Human Interaction” amongst others. Students were required to lead a class discussion at least once during the semester. The course consisted of writing projects as well such as blog reflections and an essay paper.

For their final project, W&M students present their own version of a TED talk. These talks were videotaped and labeled as “UWMTalks” (umwblogs.org). The student talks have been linked directly to the formal TED website and are for public consumption. When viewed, the student speeches are awkward artifacts. The awkwardness is related to three elements. First, as

media productions, the technical and aesthetic qualities of the student speeches cannot compare to those of TED. The W&M speeches are shot with a single camera, few zooms, and it is questionable as to whether the camera operator was cognizant of basic apparatus procedures such as white balancing. Second, the student speeches are primarily argumentative responses to issues or ideas raised in TED talks. The W&M presentations read as proof in the student's efficacy to research more than present their own ideas. Finally, the students are clearly not polished in terms of basic delivery skills and are less than dynamic as public speakers.

Upon examining the W&M materials and efforts, I realized my students were performing similar tasks. They had discussed, viewed, and written about TED talks both as a group and individually. The final concern was the structure of the final presentation. Students had discovered topics through mind mapping. It was important to me that the students not believe they had to mimic TED talks with their own presentations. The TED decorum, meaning attention to presentation skills and preparation, however, were important. I needed an approach that would allow me to re-enforce these tenets without the pressure of TED. Likewise, I wanted my students to rely less on their visuals such as slides and more on content creation. The importance of using multimedia in appropriate ways, however, wasn't to be ignored. The format of a Pecha-Kucha speech fulfilled the assignment needs.

Pecha-Kucha is a presentation method in which twenty slides are shown for twenty seconds each. PK speeches are only six minutes, forty seconds in length. The short format forces presentations to be concise, fast-paced, and well designed. The phrase *pecha-kucha* is Japanese and translates into English as "chit-chat." PK started in Tokyo in 2003 as "Pecha-Kucha Nights." These events were similar to "open-mic" nights where creative individuals from the public are invited to take the stage and to present their ideas in an energetic atmosphere. The

result of these events typically ends with experiences in creative inspiration, storytelling, and community. Begun by Astrid Klein and Mark Dytham, two architects, the idea of PK was to give designers a showcase for their work. The presentation format does not allow artists to ramble but rather minimizes the parameters of the speaking engagement. PK nights are often marketed as less didactic and more democratic iterations of TED events (Rangel online). There is a greater sense of openness at PK events as the general public is invited. In addition, the style of the events has a more improvisational tone of surprise as opposed to the heavily orchestrated (albeit effective) aesthetic of TED.

The students were asked to compose their presentations in the PK style, to base it on topics derived from mind mapping their original TED talk, and to organize using the Duarte sparkline model. PK presentations, by design, present constraints for the speaker. Initially, some students are resistant to these constraints; however, over time, they see the constraints as vehicles for creative expression. Given the condensed time frame for slides, it is essentially impossible for an effective PK presentation to contain messy slides. Messy slides contain excessive text or data and even sometimes encompass bad clip art or other inappropriate imagery. Likewise, the text of their speech must be precise and in sync with the rolling visuals behind them. Any lapses in pacing creates a disconnect between the speaker and visuals, causing the PK to slowly crash. In other words, an inherent sense of needing to rehearse and practice is evident to the students. They are not as likely to try and deliver the speech extemporaneously.

One of my students had a unique experience with the assignment. Lakin began by choosing the “Pandemics” talk as one to sparkline and mind map about topically. In her mind map, she worked through many branches but ended one strand with simply the word “beer.” After examining her mind map, she told me she could not determine a topic. I asked her to

connect the beer branch for me again. She mentioned that beer to her reminded her of horse pee. Trying to encourage divergent thinking, I told her to do her presentation on horse pee. We laughed and she agreed to continue thinking about ideas. The next class meeting she entered and excitedly told me she was doing her presentation on horse pee. She had done some research by simply “googling” horse pee and discovered a controversial topic of interest to her...the use of horse pee in the creation of a fertility drug called Premarin. In fact, many of the students found the exercises to be inspiring from a creative thinking standpoint. The key will be in the future to pinpoint with solid data how it can inspire better critical thinking. Beyond evidence such as seen in the Premarin chart, it is difficult to document exactly how critical thinking is enhanced, but these moments, such as this chart and the illustrated mind map from another student, indicate that creative and critical capacities are indeed being engaged, albeit in nuanced and subtle methods.

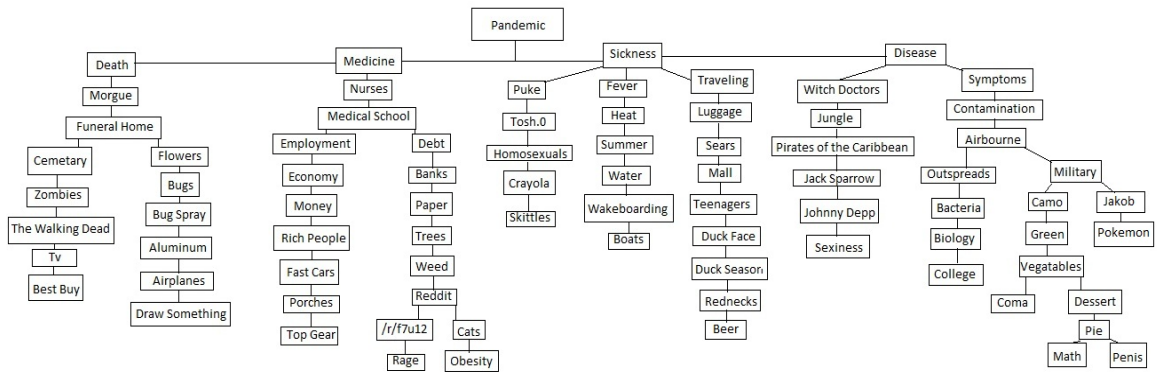


Figure 2. “Mind map” from a student that includes “beer” which became the connector to horse pee and eventually her topic of Premarin.

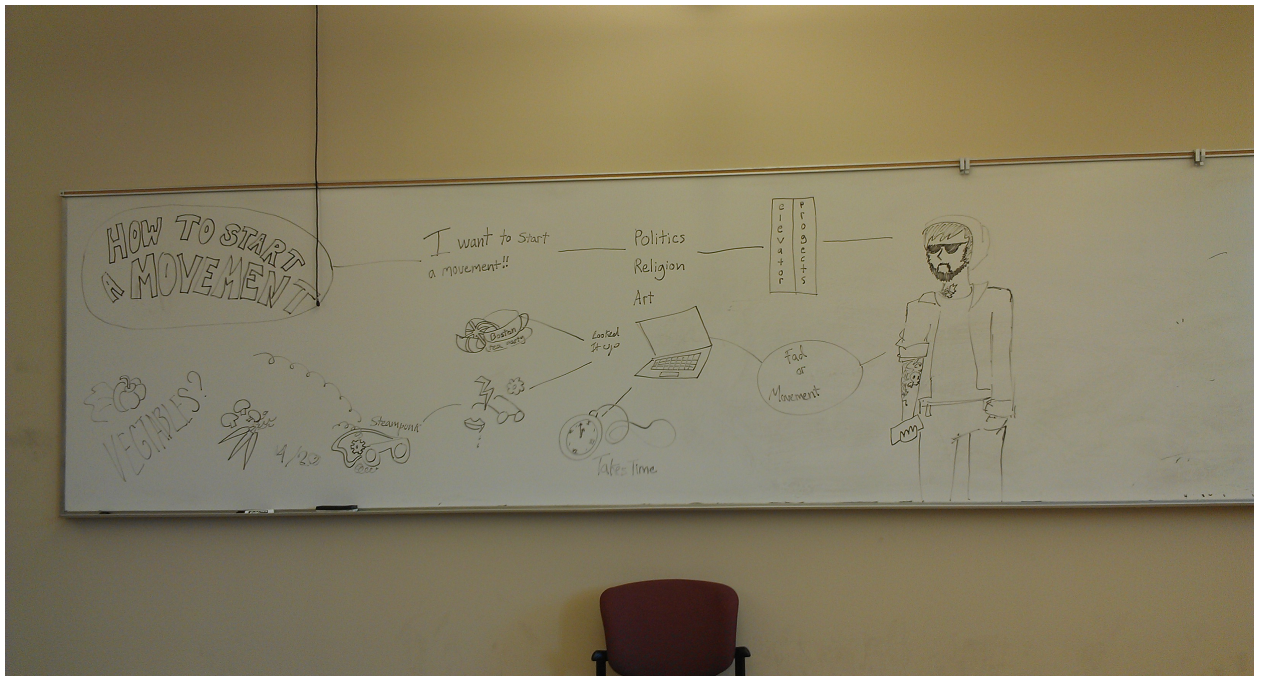


Figure 3. A student mind map, pictured here was drawn by her in real-time as she discussed the linkages to her TED talk. Photo Credit: Joseph Watson, owner of image

The goal of the presentation assignment is to aid students towards becoming powerful communicators. The ideal is to have all communication modes, the oral, visual, written, and technological elements, wedded together for strong emotional resonance. The creative exercises using TED, mind mapping, Pecha-Kucha, and sparklines are simply means to arriving at this end goal. Since this experiment in pedagogy was indeed a tinkering, not a formal research endeavor, there is not an inordinate amount of data to share. It is my intention to build more formal research projects upon this original experiment. In essence, do these creative exercises aid in student learning and critical thinking? In what ways can we see student learning and critical thinking?

Making a Mix Tape of Ideas

The rhetoric classroom aims to orient students towards discovering methods of invention, realizing the potentials of agency, and adapting a message within a participatory public sphere dominated by technological convergence. In this culture of convergence, learning environments occur anywhere, information is acquired on demand, and the power dynamics between teacher and student transform. Teachers continue to play a critical role in fostering ways to think critically and providing a space to feed curiosity and learning. These tasks are increasingly important in a culture of convergence, where students need to think and produce in multi-modal ways. We need to consider how to augment our instructional methodologies to address the complexities of the teaching-learning nexus in the digital era- whether it be flipped, hybrid, asynchronous, or chalk modes- communication/rhetoric classrooms should rally around ways to gain knowledge through sharing in the hopes of understanding agency that leads to civic action and engagement.

How does one begin to explore these concepts? Whenever change is mentioned, resistance will inevitably follow. It is difficult to designate a starting point for innovative change. One must continue to try. I propose that the answer can be found in the act of curating. Our natural tendencies, throughout history, are to structure what we experience, into units or lists. As Eco affirms:

The list is the origin of culture. It's part of the history of art and literature. What does culture want? To make infinity comprehensible. And how, as a human being, does one face infinity? How does one attempt to grasp the incomprehensible? Through lists, through catalogs, through collections in museums and through encyclopedias and dictionaries (Eco 11).

The most modern form of this concept is the playlist. We learn to grasp the incomprehensible vast amounts of information by placing some kind of order to it all. We structure and catalog.

We make lists. We choose an arrangement, be it spatial, sequential, or other. We organize a degree program into a catalog and place students on “tracks” towards completion, as if to say to students not “you’re a junior” but you’re on “track 4” of the list. We rely on forms of information architecture presented by museums, encyclopedias, and websites in order to understand. A degree program, or even a syllabus, can be considered a playlist. A playlist is an infinite set of possibilities- a group of songs, videos, movies, or, as I propose: classes, even lessons. The playlist is something that can be created from existing content by a user, but in relation to the influence of TED and other sites on the web, is likewise an act of production.

The possibilities provided by such a site as TED-ED questions not only what information or lessons are worth sharing, but also ways we organize our learning. The playlist, as it is created online for public consumption, could be situated as a form of communal engagement. Certainly, TEDx events are “live” playlists enacted for a localized community audience and augmented with F2F interaction. In the same way, online playlists, whether on TED-ED or a larger aggregate site such as You Tube, could be specialized to address a topic, theme, or issue. Playlists compressed into genres or types of TED talks have already appeared in on demand services such as Netflix, where a user can access talks about “guy things” or “space and science.”

This digital content can be tailored to address local or global audiences. Due to the nature of most online repositories, a user (student) could generate forum areas for dialogue and feedback, albeit not asynchronous or live like a TEDx event. These possibilities should excite rhetorical pedagogues as the TED playlist affords the opportunity to engage students in civic engagement, audience analysis, critical analysis, and more importantly, the process of information curation through thoughtful research. It is a chance for students to demonstrate

synthesis with a wide range of topics covered in most all communication and rhetoric classrooms.

In 2012, Howard Rheingold, alongside multiple contributors, started a new approach amidst the open source landscape of information aggregation, called “Peeragogy.” It is a digital handbook, continuously edited, monitored, and adapted- in other words, curated, offering volumes of shared instructional and curriculum practices. The website is structured similar to a book, with divisible sections and topical areas, that encourage peer learning through the sharing of information via text and video uploads. More than anything else, Peeragogy is an ongoing community project, a cousin of MOOCs, where strategies and tips for developing and implementing learning can be gathered (<http://peeragogy.org/>).

Numerous other sites exist for anyone to curate information. An example would be Scoop It, used by many educators in and out of the classroom, in order not only to model credible curating but also provide students a place to learn the process through a “best practices” approach. Universal concerns of supplying proper context and voice to information, linking back to original sources, and respecting digital desires for privacy, such as when an electronic source requests not to be re-posted. This is particularly problematic with the use of images on the web. All of these issues directly speak to those in rhetorical pedagogy, as shared concerns about persuasive strategies, invention, and arrangement in the presentation of information and ideas are a crucial tenet of the discipline, and speak to praxis, theory, and criticism.

The objective, even impulse, is to structure and organize information for optimal educational and learning value, especially if the learning environment is informal. We need steps, suggestions, favorites, shares, or lists of where to begin. It is difficult to wander too long through the carnivalesque nature of the Internet. Eventually, patterns need to form. Even sites

like Stumble Upon, that exist to be professedly random clicks, require you to identify general areas of interests to search.

The increased need to appropriately contextualize and order information is a result of what Rushkoff calls “the loss of linear time” (Rushkoff 198). The speed at which information moves in our culture of convergence generates a persistence of a “present now” and negates any sense of creating context around bits of information (Rushkoff 199). In other words, most information today distributes and accumulates before an event or action is even finished, thus, making it incredibly difficult to diagnose cause and effect, or even to appropriately reflect critically on any kind of order or sequencing to actions, events, people, topics, or ideas. In addition, the diversity of sources that provide such rapid information further complicates the process of making sense of things.

We teach students to assess source credibility with an ethical compass and an encouragement to dig deeply into the layers of how information is filtered. Because of the way information is disseminated in digital modes, the student is often left to do nothing more than search for connections between ideas. The structure of the internet, for example, encourages this kind of information gathering with methods such as the hypertext, which suggests not necessarily new information to something but a kind of “key-word” connection to a word, person, or other small bit inside larger information.

When connections are made between information pieces, students need a strategy that allows them a chance to step outside the pressures of the “present now” and reflect upon the impact of such relationships. This reflection process, in theory, affords the opportunity to investigate, invent, and uncover capacities and possibilities that lead to agency. The connections,

in other words, need to be curated. The playlist is an ideal frame to teach the importance of information curation.

Weisberger claims that she perceives her role as less of a teacher and more of a curator of ideas. Sound familiar? It should as it is precisely the same verbiage applied to TED organizers. Weisberger believes the steps in the process of curation mirror key media literacies that students should be mastering. She uses social media tools such as Twitter, Flickr, and RSS feeds to instruct her students towards information curation. Her students are encouraged to seek out PLNs, where deliberate networks of experts are created in order to strategically learn better and deeper (Sudderth online).

The process of invention is complex for most students. If left to do so, they will rely on what is immediate, easy, and familiar as a topic to research. They must be challenged to think beyond the normative. I have used a variety of methods to encourage stronger invention and discovery, such as surrealist writing exercises and spontaneous word games. With the introduction of TED, however, I devised the playlist assignment.

Critical pedagogy is driven by student empowerment. Students create a sense of consciousness with other learners and this can lead to civic action and mindfulness due to the power and authority gained by knowledge. The classroom is a site for contemplation and shared contributions from intellects within it- be they student or teacher.

Rhetorical theorists working in digital rhetoric have called for the use of new terms when examining digital texts. While some working in rhetoric prefer to ponder what justifies a “digital text,” others such as Warnick jump in and assess the persuasive capacity of certain web sites and campaigns to garner membership, interest, and activity. Websites, for example, need to be analyzed using terms such as interactivity, speed, reach, or anonymity. Upon examination, the

TED website functions as the home base of curation regarding anything TED related. It is carefully designed for functionality and ease, but is, in the end, a source that has been intentionally arranged for specific rhetorical purposes. It is the representation of the TED community, but also the TED brand and it must adhere to best practices in curation. Not only are talks stored and archived on the site, but also members of the TED community (speakers, organizers, contributors), as well as user comments, conversation threads, and bloggers. The website demonstrates how curation is a political act of organization and arrangement, as it is a representation of a community of people and ideas. Designed to be functional and interactive, the site must also be curated to maintain and promote a sense of representative identity for TED and its community members, and hence, is subject to issues of politics just as easily as any “news” website. It is designed to offer amazing talks which spread ideas, but also must attract new and engaged members in order to thrive and survive. For example, not all TED talks are available. TEDx talks are occasionally added to the site, but in reality, live in an entirely separate web location via You Tube. Hence, what is at play in the process of curation for the big TED website is to acknowledge a connection to entities like TEDx, but clearly indicate they are *not TED*, revealing that there are communal hierarchies in place. These political dynamics can become illuminated with the playlist.

While some playlists of TED talks do exist on the site, they are compiled by TED staff or former speakers through formal approval. It is not possible, at the time this project is being written, for any member of the TED community to create a playlist of TED talks available on the formal website. The talks are shared but can only be compiled in a playlist structure through downloading and burning onto a DVD or aggregating through the playlist tool on You Tube. In

class, I demonstrate these rules and dynamics for the students. We discuss the political dimensions of who gets to be an “authorized” curator of the talks.

The students are then asked to write a thematic sentence of their own creation. One example might be “I think the world today needs...” Using the sentence as a frame, the students then dig into the TED archive of talks, searching for talks that they believe fit under the umbrella of their topical sentence. After selecting their talks, the students add them to a created playlist grouping via their You Tube account. I ask them not to do more than five, although, of course, the playlist could be infinite.

The next step involved the students sharing their playlists with their class peers. I encourage the students to comment on one another’s playlists. I tell them about the history of the “mix tape” that rose to popularity in the 1980s. It took work and thought to compile those mixed tapes of songs. Each one was carefully selected to send a message. Sometimes the message of a song being included was explicit to the other person and other times it was implied. I correlate that process with the creation of their own mixed tape of ideas they will connect with their own playlist efforts. What developed was an amazing hub of interactivity where the students began sharing, reposting, and shuffling the order of one another’s lists. Suddenly, there was a flurry of curators rummaging amongst each other’s playlists of connections. The students were thinking deeper and in more unconventional ways. More importantly, they developed strategies and discovered more meaningful topic ideas from the process.

The assignment is intended to be an exploration into the use of radical pedagogy. By placing the students in the role of curators, I am able to more easily have them critically assess their own connections to not only their ideas, but also the source materials that have influenced them. The assignment also allows me, as the lead curator/teacher, to examine ways in which to

best integrate student work together for the greatest effect. For example, a student who has curated a group of media artifacts about the anthropological nature of grunge music, might be best aligned before or after a student who has compiled a list of artifacts about jazz music. In the end, I am able to contemplate how best to shuffle, play, or repeat the tracks for optimal effect. In doing this, pedagogy becomes digital media itself, aligning artifact with philosophical approach. It is a radical, conscious act, enhancing the rhetorical consequences of assuming the role of teacher/expert.

Reflections and Recommendations

Introducing new ways of teaching content is an exhilarating experience. The thrill of presenting information to students through new assignment conceptions can renew passions for your field. It can generate a feeling of superior accomplishment. There is, however, a dark side to the joys of assignment restructuring. Educational endeavors warrant a need to assess the outcomes of the work. We must return again to the beginning and inquire as to what is or is not working in the course. Assessment is a complex undertaking in any field. Entire branches of literature debate and theorize about assessment strategies, methodologies, and experimentation. While locating good assessment strategies is sometimes difficult, the model I applied to these assignments connects to the concepts of multi-literacy.

The term literacy is riddled with ambiguity and contains a history of applications; thus, when “multi” is attached it is possible for the rabbit hole of confusion to be opened wider. I am addressing literacy, moreover multi-literacy, as a framework of objectives by which true assessment can occur. Beginning with the word literacy, I want to situate its use by conceiving of it as a rhetorical act (Young & Kendall 342). Literacy, then, becomes a set of social practices, culturally shaped and not merely a series of discrete and transferrable skills that are mastered in

isolation from one another. The processes and skills involved in reading, writing, speaking, and visualization are situated practices. These situated practices act and react to social and cultural pressures (Ivanic 61). Students in multi-literacy classrooms are presented with opportunities to collaborate, use technology, create, and explore their worlds in multiple forms (Kist 22). Multi-literacy encompasses those social practices used to understand, interpret, and create texts in print and non-print forms including multimedia, the Internet, and other non-print media (Bean, 34).

In planning projects that embrace multi-literacy approaches, I rest on four central tenets. First, the work must foreground inquiry, situate content and modes of representation, integrate critical framing at every turn, and culminate in an expression or representation of content for real audiences beyond the classroom (Cole & Pullen 77-79). Under this conception, I return to the dialectic between the consumption and production of information, which inevitably leads us to issues of form and content. As I discussed and outlined the previous teaching experiments, the tension between production and consumption remains a marker for uncovering assessment strategies.

For example, in rhetoric and communication classrooms, one key objective is to prepare students to read texts closely. This process can become complex as students shift between page-based reading to screen-based reading. In speech classrooms, there is a speaker-based reading element. Thus, adopting a multi-literacy approach to not only designing communication based assignments but also assessing their effectiveness is essential to determining outcomes. The integration of these TED based assignments fosters a multi-literacy framework. Using this framework, I move between three modes of assessment discussion: technological literacy, recognizing agency, and the process of reflection and feedback.

The most important observation weaned from using TED based assignments is that my students vocalize an appreciation for communication as an ongoing process. On a general level, my students find engaging with technology and video-based assignments a positive alternative to traditional lessons. They note that the assignments are unique and challenging. The assignments are not something students are overwhelmingly used to completing. Because of this, I see technological literacy increase in my students.

Through the assignments, my students explore multiple web and other application sources for video tutorials, free editing software applications, camera options, and photographic enhancement tools. My students discover these tools via their own searches, but I do offer a few primers in terms of what the campus provides that is accessible to them. From realizing what technology is available to them, the students' perceptions about what is possible quickly energizes their work.

Some students produce more sophisticated video annotations or imagery. Some students edit together a series of videos or images for their presentations. For many of them, this is their first time working with these kinds of technological applications. While the levels of technological literacy vary when students enter the classroom, they always leave with a true understanding of how difficult and complex a process it is to produce quality digital content.

There are conflicts. Many students don't have an equal amount of access to resources. While campus amenities and group sharing help, some students simply cannot afford to keep up. For example, some students have limited internet access, whether this is at home or through lack of an appropriate data plan or smart device. In addition, non-traditional learners have complained about the increase in outside work for the course. I often hear, "this isn't a media production

course.” In order to bely those students, I remind them that they are not graded on technical mechanics or aesthetics, which would normally be the issue in a formal media production course.

Particularly through the Pecha-Kucha and playlist assignments, students discover examples from other courses that have been posted online. They observe and analyze what has been accomplished before their efforts. During this process, students have informed me of a realization of how much video they consume. It is fascinating to see students acknowledge that they *view* more than *read* on the web. More importantly, the aspects of a participatory convergence culture become illuminated. Similar to what Chris Anderson termed “crowd-accelerated innovation,” the examples students find encourage others to join in and create for themselves. Because they are learning from the productions of others, new emphasis can be placed on essential communication factors such as message construction and audience adaptation, as some of the online examples aren’t as informative as they could be; hence, students contemplate the elements that must go into content creation and the need for clarity. They discuss aspects of language use as some online examples are too verbose or aren’t tailored for their appeal. This fact affords a prime opportunity to discuss audience adaptation techniques and analysis.

Agency becomes a key component that students begin to grasp from the assignments. Many students discuss the powerful impact they could have by placing their work online for others to see. In addition, with the creation of a playlist, they understand that others outside of the immediate class will be able to access their compilations. The ability to affect an individual’s thoughts on a topic demonstrates student capacity as agents to persuade and influence. The responsibilities and ethics of such postings also get highlighted in class discussion. When students make either their playlist or Pecha-Kuchas public (which is not a class requirement, it is

optional), they do begin to receive comments and feedback from a larger audience online. It is when this process begins that the true rhetorical power of working with new media comes into focus as their uploads lead to dialogues.

The student must reflect on the work they produce in the course. For example, the playlist assignment must be accompanied by a reflection paper, which outlines the TED talks chosen, the theme contained, and how this particular talk connects to their overall playlist framework. I call this component of the work “reflective curation” and encourage the students to produce brief, one paragraph compositions for each video/talk selected in the list. I encourage them to conceive of their reflections as “placards” that might be placed underneath a screen that exhibits their playlist in a museum. The museum example enforces the idea of precision writing but tailored for a general audience.

For the Pecha-Kucha assignment, reflection comments are required. For these pieces, a student must not only compose the text for the actual Pecha-Kucha talk, but also a secondary paragraph that illustrates why the selected a particular visuals. The challenge is for them to reflect on the connections made between writing for the page and writing for the screen; it forces them into a mindset that fosters multi-literacy connections to be made.

Peer feedback is mandatory for all assignments. Students must provide evaluative comments for all the course projects. They are encouraged to comment on any structural component- chosen images, talks/videos, themes and/or delivery components (if applicable) such as voice, articulation, dynamism, and pacing. If the student chooses to make their assignment public, then any feedback that is solicited is discussed in class as part of the dialogue created through a participatory digital sphere.

One concern for these types of assignments is the need to discover more quantifiable ways to judge success. I have not created any standardized forms of evaluating these projects, but merely areas to address for grading purposes. Thus, my instructor feedback is produced in lengthy qualitative ways online, where I look primarily at their competencies as communicators: delivery skills, message creation and clarity, effectiveness of technological use, etc. If the students were to have a more specific and formalized rubric, it would make not only the grading process less subjective, but also the assessment process less haphazard in terms of gauging growth and success.

Time is a huge consideration when planning these course assignments. A future adjustment would be to provide the students with a list of assignment options to select from for the semester. Upon their selection, a timeline is established that affords the opportunity for drafts to be completed and revisions made after peer and instructor feedback. This adjustment would reduce student anxiety and produce a more quantifiable model for identifying growth and amelioration in communication competencies.

Despite seeing some success in online dialogue, there could be more. One way to encourage deeper engagement within a participatory digital sphere would be to expand the target audience of student projects. If, for example, a student were to create and post a playlist, the student could be encouraged to use Twitter or other social media applications to solicit commentary from the actual TED talk speakers. This tweak could stimulate public discourse between the student, the experts, and potentially wider audiences. Certainly, it would enhance the student sense of agency, as well as engage them more critically with both their own ideas and those of experts.

Another difficult adjustment continues to be technological aptitude. While more students seemingly enter classrooms with sophisticated technological awareness, a class *always* consists of a cadre of students who are not prepared to handle technological elements. Hence, access to resources remains a struggle as does providing effective training. I post links to tutorial videos on specific video and visual applications for students to view and use and I stress engaging with any on campus labs or assistance; however, questions and problems still arise that affect student performance. Since I cannot spend an inordinate amount of time in class on production aspects, I have to work with students outside of class or encourage peer tutoring in groups. Sometimes these efforts are effective; other times, they are not. Students have dropped my courses because of these issues. With retention a consistent concern across universities, the issue of technological sophistication amongst students remains an adjustment that needs solutions.

Deeper still is the potential ramifications of the teacher shifting to more of a guide to students. Traditionally, teachers are considered the experts of their areas. In turning more empowerment over to students, particularly in terms of which content they consume over others, are we committing a perilous act? The more pertinent question might reside in whether or not TED increases its power within the educational ecosystem from these assignments.

In 2014, TED-ED launched a new program that encourages teachers to form TED-ED “clubs” in the hopes of increasing presentation literacy skills in K-12 students. Teachers apply for a club license and when approved, receive materials for producing a thirteen week course that encourages discussion and the expression of ideas generated by students. The culmination of the club program is a series of “TED-like” talks performed by the students. When announced, the club program mirrored that of an extracurricular activity similar to other student organizations and clubs; however, the club materials are being adapted for use within some regular classroom

curricula as part of the formal educational process. In short, the TED-ED clubs have morphed into a curriculum-based program being adopted by many schools.

Am I then just producing good TED soldiers who will share and profess with good faith their knowledge not over a topical area, but merely over what exists in TED content? Are future college students over the next ten years going to enter communication classrooms with extreme TED literacy, not just in content but also in presentation style? The difficulty with the emergence of TED into the educational ecosystem, not merely as a tool, but now as a curriculum force, is that it questions our conceptions of expertise and authority.

CHAPTER 6: THE RHETORIC OF EXPERTISE

TED has embraced the digital media revolution. The social benefits from their efforts are evident. An example is the creation of knowledge communities that bridge and bond individuals around TEDx events. Local, national, and global communities are formed because of the persuasive appeal of digital media artifacts produced by TED. These communities meet in live and mediated spaces for interaction and dialogue. TED events operate as learning environments. They are designed with the classroom as a model. As such, pedagogical benefits can be found from TED. The talks can be used as practical learning tools. More importantly, the curation process of producing a TED event can be seen as analogous to designing a course and reveals insights into contemporary teaching methodologies and assignments. While this information positions TED as a positive rhetorical force in public culture, a converse or shadow side of TED exists. Criticisms of TED that relate to its elitist nature or hipster aesthetic are mere surface analyses that ignore more insidious issues.

TED is embroiled in a series of discourses that chip away at its pristine exterior and public ethos of sharing and radical openness. A deeper analysis into TED exposes tensions that ask us to question much about learning environments, participatory democracy, and the role of the expert. In the last few years, TED has functioned as a mediator between specialized information/ideas and public culture. It serves as a distribution hub for the sharing of ideas. It should be no surprise, then, that eventually, TED would be asked to pull back the curtain to reveal who is pulling the control levers. TED has always struggled with this front/back stage tension. Of late, this dialectical tension has pushed TED into addressing its role as the expert or authority. Despite TED's clever dodges and retreats towards admitting their complicity in

assuming such roles, the reality is there are always consequences to being placed in positions of power.

Kenneth Burke has said much about the implicit nature of power in rhetorical situations. In much of his work, Burke is consistently indexing terms and concepts, placing them in oppositional frames in order to reveal the true persuasive power that resides in an object of study. Power is found in the symbols that are attached to the human experience (Burke 55-58). Often these symbols are identified in ambiguous and contested contexts. Burke understood the need to know how symbols gain power and transcend our natural comprehension. The power of symbols to generate identification amongst human interaction is at the core of his work. Burke returns to language as the explicit source to illuminate such symbolic power. In identifying terministic screens, one sees deflections and omissions (Blakesley 9). Burke's techniques can be used to reveal much about TED's power. For example, by adopting the rhetoric of words such as sharing or spreading, TED terministically deflects the rhetoric of greed or suppression. In choosing the "best and the brightest" from across disciplines and fields, TED naturally must decide who those individuals are and are not in public culture; this, in turn, leads to an obvious deflection of our need to ask of TED: what ideas are *not* worth sharing? Moreover, if you are the expert making these powerful decisions, then who is being left out of that process? Who is the expert and who is the amateur? Burke's indexing of terms is most useful as an analytical frame for TED's dark side and the subsequent consequences that occur.

According to Burke, tensions form from elemental interactions between opposite terms that reveal motivations behind specific rhetorical strategies. I focus here on key tensions that exist between authenticity and falsity as well as expertise and amateurism. Using Burke's terministic frame, we begin to see what TED utilizes, and in turn, what they deflect. In

identifying these key relations, an “antithesis” emerges that allows us to see how TED operates with persuasive power by creating identification within public culture.

Burke sees a “synecdochic relation . . . between person and place” (Burke 7) or perhaps more simply a “container and thing contained” (Burke 3). The container referred to here is the scene and an agent the thing contained. As outlined earlier, the scene created by TED, its choice of physical space, aesthetic design, and topical content, is stylized and methodical. Its rules and decorum are additional pieces of the scene and function as containers for who speaks and what is spoken. It is where power resides and is active.

BIL

In 2008, a group of eager friends decided to crash the TED conference in Monterrey, CA. The desire was to interact with the change catalysts speaking at TED. The group had not been invited to attend TED nor could they afford the fees associated with participating at TED. Denied access, the group organized their own event, a “shadow of TED” event that would function off its model, but possess striking differences. For example, their conference was named BIL (no specific meaning behind B, I, or L- you are invited to interpret it for yourself), and satirically named so as a nod to the film *Bill and Ted’s Excellent Adventure* (1989, Herek). The organizers of BIL insist upon a loose structure. Anyone can speak. Anyone can attend. There is no admission fee. There is no commitment to what BIL organizers deem the “stuffiness” and “smug” atmosphere of TED events. In contrast, BIL functions as the anti-TED. "BIL sort of formed out of a desire to shadow TED," says Eric Gradman, a roboticist who spoke at the first BIL, in 2008. For example, Mr. Gradman says, "TED often defaults to, 'How can we use neuroscience to help the sick?' and BIL says, 'How can we use those same technologies to make humans even more awesome?'" Furthermore, "If you're worried about there being a chair, you

might want to bring one," he added. "If you're worried about there being a lunch, you might as well bring a sack lunch and maybe one for someone else." BIL co-founder Cody Marx Bailey notes that the primary rule is to have "low expectations" (Orden online).

BIL has developed into an annual conference that occurs wherever TED is produced. In previous years, the conferences have even occurred across the street from one another. Attendees of BIL have been known to cruise the local scene, searching for TED attendees and speakers, hoping for insider information about where parties are going on and more. TED staff has a frayed relationship with BIL. Initially, Chris Anderson told BIL organizers that he considered their conference to be a "compliment to TED" but in recent years, the conferences have so intermingled that allegiances have formed between participants. There have been crossovers, as some BIL devotees have gone on to speak and organize TED events, and TEDsters have shifted into organizing BIL events. Despite the hacking and satirical emulation, BIL' ders (as they like to be identified) have countered TED at every stage. For example, when TED branched out and produced TEDMED, BIL countered with BIL:PIL. The TEDWomen event generated a BIL event for women named JIL.

The BIL conferences reveal a tension about the learning environments that TED creates with their events. Certainly TED staff realize they aren't the only game in town, but it is worth asking: when was the last time someone embedded or emailed you a link to a BIL talk? There are other conferences that include hefty admission fees and public intellectual speakers, such as CGI (Clinton Global Initiative). TED, however, distinguishes itself by claiming "we do this" and "they do that" in terms of their fees, aesthetic design, and speaker line-up. TED wants to provide an experience that is markedly different than the others. It is essential to their branding to maintain a level of autonomy from other imitators. It is interesting to note that TED "x" events

were born shortly after the influx of BIL conferences. As “holy” as TED is viewed, the organizers seemed to know that the only way to maintain their power was to “give away” their model (albeit through license approval) for others to enact. TED’s mantra of giving away your best secrets mirrors the online classroom movement in education. The creation of MOOCs and other free online courses, generates the precise debate that alternate conferences from TED do- in other words, we’re asking ourselves, which one is better? Which one is more conducive to learning? These questions certainly address notions of content and delivery, but more importantly, they address the rhetoric of space and place. Is TEDxDallas different than TEDxAtlanta? We might as well inquire as to the differences between LSU and Vanderbilt. We might quibble about faculty and course offerings, but we’ll also debate campus life and communal setting, both of which are connected to space and place. TEDxDallas would be different than Atlanta. Different speakers (faculty) would appear. Different themes (curriculum) would be addressed. Different local attractions (campus life/space) would be consumed and advertised. When outlets such as Coursera, Udemy, or MITx come online, classroom space and place shift to something “other” than brick and mortar locales- does that mean they are less authentic?

Just like TED, the university system must maintain its power as the “holy” of experiences. It is imperative in a world where commercial models of strategic planning have invaded and permeated educational administration and institutions. In order to stabilize power, universities must approve of who gets in, who teaches, and what is taught. When content, expertise, and space shift, power is unstable, contested, and not guaranteed. TED’s move to franchise its events to localized licensees allows their rhetorical power to remain dominant over

entities such as BIL. TED can operate more powerfully as a container. In a similar vein, universities that offer online courses are making efforts to contain.

The container, however, can restrict more than spatial and aesthetic concerns. TED has gradually made a series of decisions that have positioned their staff as containers of content and voices. In February of 2010, former Vice Presidential candidate Sarah Palin attacked then White House chief of staff Rahm Emanuel for using the word (in private) “retard.” Technically, Emanuel, when referencing a faction of Democratic activists, called them “fucking retarded.” The incident soon became a mediated pseudo-event for Palin, whose youngest son Trig has Down Syndrome. She called for Emanuel’s firing and eventually conservative media demagogue Rush Limbaugh got involved when Palin defended his use of it. In an interview with Fox News, Palin asserted that Limbaugh’s use of the word was “okay because he was using satire...” Later, Palin’s representatives even went on record with the *Washington Post* declaring that, according to Palin, “it doesn’t matter who says the ‘r’ word: it should no longer be part of our lexicon” (Dwyer online).

Later the same month, controversial comedian Sarah Silverman took the stage at the annual TED conference. Silverman is sometimes considered to be the female Lenny Bruce, referencing both her Jewish heritage and her abrasive (and arguably offensive) humorous acts. That being said, there are few that are unaware of her unique style of shock humor, which is why many (including Silverman) were surprised to learn of her invitation to speak at TED. Admittedly, she had her manager call to confirm her invitation to ensure they were clear on what kind of act was being taken into the expected decorum of TED. As to be expected, Silverman’s presentation was applauded by some and reviled by others. Her TED presentation, however, is unique in that it intensely embarrassed and offended TED curator Chris Anderson. Anderson’s

critique came to the public via his Twitter feed. Twitter, the application that allows for instant commentary of 140 words or less, has become a cultural staple as it delivers instantaneous thoughts. It is something that rhetorical pedagogy proponents need to consider when teaching future orators: this kind of real-time, running commentary from audiences will not go away and something rhetorical critics should analyze as it's a separate discourse entirely affecting a rhetorical situation. Anderson's tweet was: "I know I shouldn't say this about one of my speakers, but I think Sarah Silverman is God-awful. I'm sorry!" AOL chief Steve Case immediately concurred via his Twitter feed (Leo online).

Silverman's TED talk video podcast was unavailable online for almost two years and no full text version was public either. The refusal of TED organizers, despite numerous requests from the public, to provide the video or text of the speech only adds to the mystique surrounding the entire episode. Silverman responded to both Chris Anderson and Steve Case via her own Twitter feed following her TED talk. She retorted: "Kudos to Chris for making TED an unsafe haven for all! You're a barnacle of mediocrity on Bill Gates' asshole." And to Steve Case, Silverman tweeted: "Steve you should be nicer to the last person on Earth with an AOL account!" Anderson followed up by playing peacemaker to the tweet war, apologizing to her and wishing her well. What is to be made of this exchange? What did Silverman say that engendered such a terse reaction from Anderson? (Leo online).

Silverman opened by singing a song "dedicated to the porn star in everyone." Next, she apologized on behalf of Judaism for killing Jesus. "You're welcome for that," she tacked on and reminded the shocked audience: "...because fame is always served best by premature death." Finally, Silverman began explaining how she wanted to do something extraordinary and special with her life. She expressed her desire to be "amazing" and "inspiring." To accomplish this goal,

she told the audience of her plans to adopt a “retarded child.” This act, however, was not enough to make her extra special, so she desired a “terminally-ill, retarded child” as her choice for adoption. She concluded by expressing her fears though that if she should die before the child, no one would care for it (Silverman TED Talk). This fear keeps her from being the special and inspiring person she knows she can be. Silverman was doing what she does: using humor to incite emotional reactions. She disrupts a comfortable scene with jokes.

Anthropologist Mary Douglas explores the roles jokes play in mapping out points of tension or transition within a culture. The joke is an expressive form that reveals an emergent perspective within culture, something that is widely felt but rarely said. If the joke is already widely accepted, it becomes banal. If humor is used to reveal something the culture is not ready to hear, much less laugh at, then the joke is deemed an insult or an obscenity (Douglas 13-17). In rhetorical theory, humor has played a precarious role in the formation of argumentation. Cicero, for example, viewed humor as holding “great and frequent utility” but felt that there should be guidelines to its use surrounding topics and occasions lest it “detract from dignity”(Herrick 104). Ultimately, he felt that “restraint” was above all the “best practice when jesting” (Herrick 105). Humor, however, is ubiquitous component of popular culture as it provides common people the means to challenge a dominant view of the social order. It is a “culturally protected mode in which cultural expression may be presented” (Smith 51). Charles Gruner argues that humor is related more to the poetic than rhetoric (Gruner 149). Humor, though, is usually purposeful and often persuasive. It operates as the marriage of Aristotle’s distinction between poetic form and rhetorical function, making it one of the more cogent forms of argumentation alive in popular culture. The comic vision is in essence subversive of a dominant viewpoint in culture. In the view, the comic becomes a protagonist less concerned with mastering their environment than in

making sure it doesn't master them (Smith 52). The comic vision loves to pull the rug out from under and aims directly at the behaviors of those affected by the jokes. The only way to avoid being laughed at is to avoid doing the things that laughter fastens on (Grieg 189). Enter Sarah Silverman to the context/scene of TED, an endless international audience anticipating a level of decorum and appropriate ethos from presenters. The container could not contain Silverman, as TED staff acquiesced and released her content online.

Beyond spatial containment, the Silverman incident is a marker in the cultural emergence of TED. It indicates a pulling back of the curtain. As Anderson tweeted, he implicated his role as curator and professed expert, not only regretting the selection of Silverman to speak, but also of her content. His comments signify a resolute distinction between what is and is not funny. As Silverman pointed out later, this "expert" stance on the definition of humor and its limitations was what offended her the most about the incident.

Humor isn't the only topical area that has troubled TED. In 2012, Seattle entrepreneur Nick Hanauer took the stage with a controversial talk about "why the rich don't create jobs" (Martino online). Overt political arenas are typically something TED organizers profess to shy away from during their events. The TEDx guidelines state to avoid political pandering. Organizers are encouraged to be apolitical in selecting speakers and content. Hanauer's talk, which is available online but not from the TED site, explains why raising or lowering taxes for the rich has little effect on job creation. Hanauer's thesis is that rich people and entrepreneurs don't create jobs because it's the consumers who create jobs by creating demand. Jobs, he claims, are not created by rich people or by businesses of any size. They're created by "a circle of life-like feedback loops." The idea is risky for TED to produce. Despite a pleasant ovation

during this talk, Hanauer's talk was withheld by TED and remained unavailable for a number of months. Again, Anderson was forced to defend his actions:

...it framed the issue in a way that was explicitly partisan. And it included a number of arguments that were unconvincing, even to those of us who supported his overall stance. The audience at TED who heard it live (and who are often accused of being overly enthusiastic about left-leaning ideas) gave it, on average, mediocre ratings (Upbin online).

This explanation is quite deeper than his tweets regarding Silverman. It didn't stop Hanauer from hiring a PR firm. Hanauer's experience and thoughts were blasted onto many Internet news services as an example of TED's "censorship." He defended his argumentation. In his rebuttal to Anderson's critique, he claims "they knew months in advance" what his argumentation was and he delivered the text "word for word" at the event. Other TED talks exist on their site about social issues, such as poverty and environmental activism (Upbin online). Certainly, economics and politics are central themes in many talks. Anderson points to the weak argumentation in the talk, but Hanauer expresses the issue quite differently:

I got a sensational reaction to the talk at the conference itself, including a big standing ovation. Even the people who I spoke to who disagreed were intrigued and moved by the eco-systemic argument. And many of the talks at the conference and on the TED website are similarly controversial. That's what makes them interesting. Further, if it was too political, why have me do it in the first place? My arguments threaten an economic orthodoxy and political structure that many powerful people have a huge stake in defending. They will not go easily" (Upbin online).

It is possible that the talk rose in popularity strictly because of its label as censored. Was it the concept of income inequality that made the talk controversial? Was it Hanauer's aggressive campaign? While there is plenty of smoke around the issue, I'd like to direct our attention towards a different fire. Anderson elaborated on the censorship campaign by claiming it to be a "non-story." The story is about a talk that wasn't chosen to post, because, according to

Anderson, “they had better ones.” It would be as if Anderson called “the *New York Times* and they turned down my request to publish an op-ed by me- oh, they’re censoring me” (Quinnell online). There are some elements to this response that shed light on the possible solution. The rhetorical strategy is to argue, “we didn’t censor it, we just didn’t show it,” is a clever way of identifying that the messages contained in it don’t reflect the values of TED, which means, in essence, they determine what is “better”- and also, enforce the notion of “experts” that can make such determinations; even the use of the *New York Times* suggests a more knowledgeable eye, something that can be a watchdog for what the public should truly hear. In choosing “not to share” something, there is an implicit admission of knowing what *is* worth sharing- a level of expertise that is superior to others. Is the talk public? It is available. It does not, however, have the approval of TED and is not shared through the direction of their site. Instead, it is banished amongst a sea of other Internet videos. TED emerges as a powerful authority on topics and ideas and an expert towards what is not only too humorous, but also too political. Hanauer and Silverman both made public announcements of their disfavor with TED and went to great lengths to defend their performances. The intensity of their anti-TED rhetoric merely strengthens my assertion that TED emerges as a powerful organization affected public culture.

Beyond these public conflicts, the scientific community has erupted the loudest. It began when TED cautioned TEDx curators to be watchful of “pseudo-science” ideas and talks. It sent a letter to all of its organizers instructing them that there is no “clear line” between real and pseudo-science, but provided general guidelines on what is and is not bad science. Tensions mounted as Mike Adams countered with an article claiming, “TED is Dead,” because by starting demarcations between what counts as true science, TED positions itself within a Cult of Scientism, which as a collective of like-minded individuals, tends to discount any scientific

theory or idea that challenges conventional wisdom. The fear, of course, is that in this cult, there is no room for the simple, scientific act of questioning today's scientific beliefs. "Bad science," says TED, is anything that "has failed to convince many mainstream scientists of its truth" (Adams online). Obviously, this rhetoric aligns the TED organization with the same entities that argued for the Earth being flat. Similar to humor and politics, now science is a topic being edited and approved by TED.

Two important examples of editing science have added fuel to the rhetoric of expertise. First, Rupert Sheldrake, with the opening line of his TED talk, attacked the "delusion" of modern science. Focused on materialism, Sheldrake spends his time deconstructing the notion that our bodies, minds, and our entire universe are mere physical stuff. Sheldrake wants to "set science free" from these chains that keep it from being truly curious. His opening line, which TED found most controversial, was "the science delusion is the belief that science already understands the nature of reality in principle, leaving only the details to be filled in" (Chopra online). Shortly after a community outcry to release Sheldrake's talk, TED staff posted that the "quality" of the presentation was lacking in standards, once again, attempting to deflect from another more relevant term, the *content* of the talk. Like the others mentioned in this chapter, Sheldrake's talk is online, but not found at the TED site. Second, Graham Hancock's TED talk, focused on the nature of consciousness, is another that encourages the anti-TED movement. Graham explores a topic that is, overall, immensely terrifying to those in mainstream medicine and science. He calls upon the use of the term "war" in relation to consciousness in modern society, particularly the western world. This "war" is due to the illegality of psychedelic drugs for the purposes of exploring the depths and reaches of our consciousness. Instead, Hancock points to the legalization of pharmaceutical drugs that have produced multiple negative effects on our health.

We are not able, according to Hancock, to truly experience freedom to explore our consciousness with these drugs. This lack of experimentation could be a critical step keeping us from advancing as a species (Hancock online).

TED responded immediately by not posting Hancock's talk. The staff did provide a statement through their website. "Some speakers use the language of science to promote views that are simply incompatible with all reasonable understanding of the world," says TED. "Giving them a platform is counterproductive. [So] we've appointed a board of scientific advisers. They are (deliberately) anonymous, for obvious reasons" (TED Conversations). As expected, the announcement of a review board generated more paranoia and skepticism from many public intellectuals, despite the reality that an anonymous review board is a typical organizational method for handling most academic processes of submissions and editorial suggestions.

Beyond allegations of "scientific racism," TED moved the discussions about pseudo-science, Hancock, and Sheldrake to its website. The forum became public, albeit on TED's "home turf" and thousands of comments ensued, including deep participation from Hancock and Sheldrake. This shift to an online forum was a clever rhetorical turn for TED, as it allowed them to defer accusations of censorship, address allegations of corporate alliances with companies such as Pfizer and Monsanto, and test the efficacy of another social media environment.

The Expert on Trial

The danger in an entity like TED is that these stories detail an account of a shift from TED as a mediator and sharer of content and knowledge into becoming an expert and authority themselves over what constitutes appropriate knowledge, from humor to politics to science. They determine what is funny. They determine what is science. They determine what is worth sharing.

With the invention of TEDx events, the trend is scarier still: the “experts” have multiplied and localized, but must all report back to TED for formal approval.

Benjamin Bratton used the platform of TEDx to take down TED. It was a decisively rhetorical move, as he used the opportunity to perform meta-criticism about the tension between structure and form in TED (Bratton 1-8). All of the tensions exploded in his talk- conceptions of the expert, the nature of an authentic educational experience, but more importantly, Bratton challenges us to realize that some things can’t be adequately shared in 18 minutes or less. There is a need to sift through the complex and rough material from topical areas. The format of TED has been exposed as exhausted. Recently, the scientific debate between Bill Nye and John Ham proved to be influenced by the aesthetic and form of TED. After the furor of debate was over, the Creationist museum announced it would be selling DVDs. In case you missed the attempt to simply the creationist/science debate and its major issues, simply send in your \$19.99 to be in the know. Bratton’s plea for a return to the complex helps us realize that the format of TED, BIL, and others has created a “summit/conference-tasia” that adheres to one thing only: profits. The TED conference annually earns \$23 million. This year at TED 2014, Toyota, Target, Google, Adobe, Microsoft and more all have corporate sponsorships and investments in TED and its community of followers. Ideas have become currency and TED has helped usher in an era of the educational-industrial complex, where often truly challenging and difficult conversations and strategies are best held and learned in classrooms and not from stages in posh locales.

Professor Bratton sees the need and benefit behind speaking and communicating ideas clearly and simply, but we believes TED has pushed us all too far into a world of over-simplification. "What does the TED audience hope to get from this? A vicarious insight? A fleeting moment of wonder? A sense that maybe it's all going to work out after all? A spiritual

buzz?" He continues to push the point that the form is exhausted. "I'm sorry, but that's not up to the challenge of the problems we are ostensibly here to face. [These problems] are complex and difficult -- not given to tidy, just-so solutions" (Bratton 7). True learning and knowledge sharing involves longer period of contemplation and deeper examination into the complexity of topics.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

Rhetorical critics must examine the *why* of performing criticism. A refusal to reflect often produces a fixation on anecdotal work. The critic can become too entrenched in the context surrounding a topic or idea, mistaking the time, place, and history as an adequate substitute for the message or rhetoric. In this project, I have navigated the boundaries of description and evaluation, but remained grounded in interpretation as a home base. It would be easy to develop a personality fixation as a critic towards TED. There is much to admire, but there is a danger in celebrating the case study for the sake of a case study (Hart 284). I have tried to move away from traditional methods normally seen in dissertation projects. Following a more idiosyncratic route, I believe the rhetorical superstructure that TED has created and maintained provides a fantastic framework, but I wanted to make connections in order to build bridges to other work across disciplines, most notably those within curriculum and instructional design and media studies. Rhetorical scholarship should foster such a dialogue to move along multiple chains of research, across disciplinary lines, in order to “end with a bang rather than a whimper” (Hart 286).

TED is now a conduit. Whether through its website, videos, or live events, TED functions as a learning environment. It fosters an exchange and sharing of ideas. A primary outcome of these exchanges is the formation of communities. These communities exist in diverse forms, digital and live. TED communities both bridge and bond disparate individuals. While rooted in historical predecessors such as the Agora and Lyceum movements, TED emerges as a social and cultural phenomenon by embracing the video epoch. It has produced new media artifacts that have been consumed and incorporated into classrooms all over the world.

By embracing the video epoch, TED encourages a learning environment that is predicated on sharing information. The “classroom” has no formal boundaries in this model. Due

to the rise and ease of sharing content in a culture of digital convergence, learning can occur through exposure and response in almost any time or setting. The consequences of such exposure and responses are the gradual decline in the utility of traditional models of information dissemination, most notably the lecture model of delivery.

That being said, the ghost of speech, live speech, continues to haunt the digital movement. The unique cadence of a voice, a slight variation in tone, a meaningful gesture all not captured on video, can affect the receiving of a message. Despite the celebration of technology inherent in TED, the human component of speech and voice, remain as the mysterious, essential chemistry that makes it all worth sharing. Even within the production of its numerous rhetorical artifacts, TED continues to be an annual gathering of people into a live space to hear a human speak. In the end, TED affirms the immense potency of live public address.

Problematic to the expansion and growth of TED is its manufacturing of expertise, which calls into question who gets assigned the power to speak and on which issues as well as what constitutes an authentic and sanctioned learning environment. Experts are everywhere, cajoling us to listen and attribute power to them. We attribute because it is efficient and convenient for us to do so, especially as teachers in a classroom, it is often helpful to bring in outside sources and voices, allowing them to be used and identified as experts. The organizers of TED and the speakers at their events employ whatever means of multimodal persuasion available that encourage identification. TED has carefully distributed its artifacts and relied on their spreadability and use in a patterned manner, it is strategic and systematic. It suggests a rhetorical form or its own genre of persuasion, with immense implications.

For example, many hybrid pedagogy practitioners and their experimentations/assignments are found in online or social media spaces. In the coming

semesters, I plan to institute an assignment known as the “Twitter” essay, invented by educator Jesse Stommel (www.jessestommel.com). How did I discover such an assignment? I found Jesse through spreadable media, in this case, tweeting. He isn’t published in formal, sanctioned journals of academic learning, he’s an educator, just like me, but has developed an online strategy, a system, through websites and tweets, mainly the sharing of them, to develop his identity as an expert. By applying and using his lesson plans, I too, attribute and validate his expertise and add to it by sharing my implementation of his ideas.

The incorporation of TED into educational venues has coincided with a rise in demand for changes in course content delivery and design; hence, TED employs strategies similar to that of Jesse, to enact pedagogical expertise and use. The process teaches us how to teach. It expands our horizons on what it means to produce civic oriented students and acknowledge who should be listened to and respected. It challenges us to consider the multi-modal skills that students must learn. It restores the power of agency within a participatory digital sphere. It questions the efficacy of the lecture model. It democratizes the student-teacher dynamic. The reach of TED’s rhetorical power is in its infancy. We have yet to see the shape of how it will unfold and affect our communication behaviors and environments. It deserves ongoing critical and scholarly work. The shape of TED’s initial influence is what this project has attempted to unravel. Moving into the waters of interpretation and application, the research in this project has been subject to limitations. It is important to address these topical areas in order to reveal where future work and study can commence.

First, the mysterious internal corporate structure of TED remains elusive. It is difficult to understand how each piece is connected to the other; hence, without deeper penetration and revelations, there are likely oversights to the mechanics of what makes TED function. New

information in this area might re-shape the connectors to TED's historical predecessors or strengthen them.

Second, the representative sample of TEDx communities is limited. There are more than 700 TEDx events and communities around the world. There is little doubt that deeper ethnographic work will enhance the sections on community development and identity. Particularly when considering TEDx communities outside of the United States, tremendous insights into intercultural communication and community/identity formation will be discovered.

Third, the pedagogical experimentation contained here is limited. The outcomes, while encouraging, need a more thorough framework for assessment. Likewise, the work has been discipline specific to that of the communication classroom. Expanding the spirit of these assignments into other disciplinary areas will unravel more complex insight into the learning revolution inspired by technological inclusion and curriculum revamping.

Future Work on TED

The invention of the TED-ED site deserves critical attention and future work. The site allows for any web video to be flipped and re-purposed for specific classroom use. This software interface has tremendous potential implications for both teachers and students. The interface could alter the manner in which teachers both introduce and assess mastery of topical components in a curriculum design. If proven effective as a tool within the flipped classroom movement, then the educational training of the next generation of teachers could adopt such strategic efforts. It would mean more inclusion of technological training within most education departments. I began collaboratively researching this site and its use in training teachers last year. A next step for research in this area would be to engage students in the production process as well as current and future teachers.

Couched in the concept of utility, it would be productive to examine different roles within the TED ecosystem, different curators, staff members, and more as they participate in an advisory manner, competing with one another for recognition. It would be productive to determine how their expert functions are acquired and deployed. For example, at TED ACTIVE in 2014, it was clear that some curators had more notoriety than others in terms of their functions – some led and organized workshops, some were sought out and consulted as expert curators.

Although the spirit of TED is inclusion regarding the expression of ideas, the reality is many voices get silenced. While talks have been recorded since the conference began in 1984, many of them have never been released to the public. Many of the early TED talks are now being posted online. For example, film director Oliver Stone posted his TED talk from 1990 on his own Facebook page for people to view. TED officially released Nicholas Negroponte’s talk from the first 1984 conference. A fascinating analysis would be to study the evolution of the talks before the digital revolution to investigate the structural and aesthetic changes over time, particularly in delivery skills and visual design.

Beyond previously unreleased talks, there are TED talks that are officially banned from the website. These talks were given by approved speakers and recorded, but are labeled and marked in some fashion as inappropriate for release via TED. Many of these talks are now finding their way to the web through unofficial channels. For example, YouTube channels such as “TED Leaks” are now appearing and sharing censored talks. Comedian Sarah Silverman’s notorious offensive talk from 2010 is now online. Author Graham Hancock shared what Chris Anderson called an “unorthodox worldview” during his TEDxWhitechapel talk in January of 2013 when he discussed his theories on cultural consciousness. Hancock’s talk has now found a place online to be seen. Entrepreneur Rick Hanauer’s TED talk from 2013 was likewise banned

for arguably circumstantial and suspicious reasoning, as he attacked the corporate and capitalist models of job creation in his content. There have been more than thirty talks since the conference began that have been censored from the general public. An analysis of these talks would lead to a greater understanding of the democratic ethos behind TED. In addition to censored talks, as the home base for more than 1500 talks, the TED website is a veritable new canon of speeches for public address scholars to investigate. It could usher in a new century of rhetorical scholarship.

There are more than 700 TEDx events around the world. Since the TEDx explosion began, there have been events that have explored topics as diverse as gender and violence. Even communities located in underdeveloped areas of the world, such as Kiberia, have produced TEDx events that reveal insights into various cultures and ways of being in the world. Educator Julianne Wurm, for example, has been researching these global TEDx events as the topic of a forthcoming book on TEDx and learning. An immense amount of ethnographic work could continue as there is no shortage of communities to learn about from within their own TEDx events. What kinds of differences exist in the structure of their efforts? What can we learn about communication from their behaviors and actions? How does the TED model foster communal development and growth in these communities? Is new media utilized as much as in other TEDx communities within the United States? All of these questions are worth investigated through future work on TED.

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APPENDIX A TED TALKS AND OTHER SOURCES

Hancock, Graham. "The War on Consciousness." TEDxWhitechapel, January 2013.
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y0c5nIvJH7w>

Honigsbaum, Mark & Blower, Patrick. "How Pandemics Spread." TED-ED video.
<http://ed.ted.com/lessons/how-pandemics-spread>

Khan, Salman. "Let's Use Video to Reinvent Education." TED talk, March 2011.
http://www.ted.com/talks/salman_khan_let_s_use_video_to_reinvent_education

Lessig, Larry. "Laws That Choke Creativity." TED talk, March 2007.
http://www.ted.com/talks/larry_lessig_says_the_law_is_strangling_creativity.html

Rowe, Mike. "Celebrating Dirty Jobs." TED talk, December 2008
http://www.ted.com/talks/mike_rowe_celebrates_dirty_jobs.html

Sheldrake, Rupert. "The Science Delusion." TEDxWhitechapel, January 2013.
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JKHUaNAxsTg> Jan 2013

Silverman, Sarah. "A New Perspective on the number 3000." TED Talk, 2008.
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Websites:

www.ted.com

www.826national.org/once-upon-a-school

<http://peeragogy.org/>

APPENDIX B IRB MATERIALS

Included in Appendix B is an original letter from the Institutional Review Board regarding my post hoc application for the project. Even though the project would've been exempt and found to not be harmful in any way to human subjects, adjustments to the project to satisfy any concerns, any names or identifying markers have been made using pseudonyms in order to properly strip any privacy concerns in accordance with typical qualitative research method techniques (Marshall 316).



**Office of Research &
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Louisiana State University
130 David Boyd Hall
Baton Rouge, LA 70803

O 225-578-5833
F 225-578-5983
www.research.lsu.edu

Date: August 19, 2014

To: Gary Byerly, Dean
Dean of the Graduate School
Louisiana State University

Through: Matthew Lee
Senior Associate Vice Chancellor
ORED

From: Dennis Landin 
Chair, IRB

CC: Stephanie Houston-Grey, CMST
Joseph Watson, PhD Candidate, CMST

Earlier this month we received a post hoc IRB application for a portion of Joseph A. Watson's dissertation data collection. Mr. Watson is a PhD candidate in CMST under the direction of Dr. Stephanie Houston-Grey.

IRB regulations do not provide for retroactive approval, but I asked for more details on the data collection process. Mr. Watson's work involved face-to-face interviews at an out-of-state technology conference. Mr. Watson apparently had permission of the conference organizer to conduct the interviews and his purpose for attending the conference was made known to the participants. The interviews did not address any sensitive issues. Mr. Watson did not obtain signed consent. It does not appear that members of any vulnerable population were involved. After reviewing the materials I determined that, had an IRB application be submitted in the required timeline, the project would have been approved under the exempt status. Mr. Watson was notified of this and was sent a copy of this letter.

In summary, it appears that, while putting LSU in jeopardy of federal audits by violating LSU policy on the use of human subjects, no adverse events have arisen from this work.

Thank you.

VITA

Joseph Alan Watson earned his bachelor's degree from the University of Memphis in 1998. He worked as an educator in the secondary and community college systems in Tennessee, Arkansas, Georgia, and Louisiana. He received his Master's Degree in 2003 also from the University of Memphis. An avid and active media-maker, Joseph accepted an Assistant Professor position at Georgia Southwestern University in 2013.