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CRUEL AUTEURISM

AFFECTIVE DIGITAL MEDIATIONS
TOWARD FILM-COMPOSITION

Introduction

Cruel Auteurism sounds like a thing you'd want to avoid. I hope instead that you come to see it as an illustrative characterization of our investments in digital filmmaking as engaging rhetorical practice. Toward this end, this book highlights both problems and promises associated with a pedagogical and scholarly area of rhetorical activity I've been calling "film-composition." Using affect theorist Lauren Berlant's (2011) concept of "cruel optimism" to articulate the findings of my archival, analytical, and experiential methods, *Cruel Auteurism* describes a cultural shift within the discipline, from the primacy of print-based arguments, through an evolving desire to generate cinematic rhetorics, toward increasingly visible forms of textual practice currently shaping composition classrooms, rhetorical pedagogy, and digital scholarship.

This book has emerged from my experience as a rhetorician, compositionist, and DIY ("do it yourself") digital filmmaker. I've been tempted to claim that my methodology is ethnographic, and I may refer you to ethnography's capacious and ambiguously available qualities where I feel I'm veering toward the overly personal perspective. For the most part, I have been powerfully lit by Berlant's (2011) concepts, and I rely on her affective lens as an appropriate guide. *Cruel Auteurism* is not strictly an ethnographic report, though some qualitative characteristics of ethnography shape my appreciation for the affects that animate the timeline onto which I am mapping my arguments via Berlant's concept of "cruel optimism," a phrase she coined to articulate a kind of damaging desire that generates a troubling yet potentially hopeful state of affairs. Articulating the more hopeful end of the spectrum is Berlant's more promising "zones of optimism," (2011, p. 48) spaces within which relations of cruel optimism are bearable due to the pleasures of certain affective flows and occasional material byproducts. The timeline I generate moves dynamically across the spectrums of "cruelty" and "optimism."

Beginning with hope, and moving through fear, desire, more desire, and pleasure, the book articulates the history and emergence of film-composition. Not merely an object for analytical study, film-composition creates new scenes within which to practice our rhetorical craft, scenes that may feature revisions of our lives, possibly even to discover new "mode[s] of enfleshment," (Berlant, 2011, p. 128),¹ so profound are the affective intensities associated with the work

1 Here, I intend a subtle reference to David Cronenberg's (1983) *Videodrome*. More directly, my access to this term is via Berlant's Chapter 4, "Two Girls, Fat and Thin," from *Cruel Optimism*, where Berlant (2011) discusses strategic, post-traumatic choices regarding corporeal being (pp. 121-159).

(cue new materialisms). Digital filmmaking provides obvious, visible reflective spaces and tangible frames for sensing and theorizing our affective attachments en route to the production of filmic arguments. Throughout these processes, the sensorium delights at the thrillingly expansive range of modal options for enacting our hopes, worrying our fears, pursuing our desires, and reanimating longstanding pleasures. Berlant's (2011) turn to film in her own work helps explicate this potential. In her discussion of Luc and Jean-Pierre Dardennes' (1999) film, *Rosetta*, she recasts a critical view of citizenship so that it is not so neatly defined as "an amalgam of the legal and commercial activity of states and business and individual acts of participation and consumption" but, more generously, hopefully, as "an affective state where attachments that matter take shape" (2011, p. 163). Tracing a line of flight from within an overdetermined notion of citizenship in capitalist culture, Berlant highlights the chaotic experiences of everyday life, intimating that our attachments may render promisingly and potentially via critical, even unwitting intervention because "the affects of belonging are all tied up with what happens at the point of production" (2011, p. 163). Exactly. And while Berlant is analyzing a fictional cinematic narrative, she is clear to enumerate the potential for works of this kind to render meaning for our experiences of everyday living (as we produce, resist, remix, revise, and otherwise generate selves, communities, cultures).

Of course, we need not turn to affect theory to see that cultural texts matter. However, studying the formation, intensity, and duration of the affective attachments of participating within culture via certain cultural texts suggests that we should. Obviously, the project of Cultural Studies has made its lasting mark in Composition,² so the need to examine the fact that fictional narratives reflect, produce, and reproduce culture is unnecessary. Nonetheless, toward populating this timeline, it's interesting to note that many historical back-channels in Composition worked toward similar effect. A 1973 *NCTE/CCC Workshop Report*, under the heading, "The Popular Arts and Introductory Courses in English" features Gary Harmon, Irving Deer, and Harriet Deer proclaiming that "[t]he popular arts are important in themselves" because they "usually focus upon the crises of our times and thus reveal the nature of our society" (pp. 311-312). The workshop concluded:

Resolved: Because the Popular Arts form our dominant culture and clearly reveal its values, the CCCC should give more attention to evaluating them in a rigorous and disciplined

2 See Julie Drew's (1999) careful review of the many voices—*i.e.*, James Berlin, Diana George, John Trimbur—articulating this convergence, in "(Teaching) Composition: Composition, Cultural Studies, Production." *JAC*, 19(3), 411-429.

way, and should encourage integration into curricula now dominated by the Fine Arts. (Harmon, Deer, I., & Deer, H., 1973, p. 312)

This historical, backchannel detour wants to remind us. Berlant's (2011) more contemporary reading on attachments as evolving through in-process experience hints at an ongoing form of critical making to which we in Composition are increasingly committed. I enthusiastically trace these sorts of claims—on the value of digital filmmaking as production of self (re)orientation, community attachment, and cultural disposition—throughout *Cruel Auteurism*. Affect theory helps me in retracing my experiences as a digital filmmaker even as I work to lay out an emergent history of film-composition.

Mine is a material hope, affectively experienced. My project is about doing, making, and sensing. I have made films driven by a desire to illuminate rhetorical phenomenon for all the players involved in my cinematic projects (participants, subjects, performers, students, audiences, myself, and other scholars). I have sought to highlight things that we, in the field, are doing, and what some are possibly missing or for some reason(s) evading or otherwise not doing (“Video?! Anyone can make a video!”). In hindsight, I see that as I have been making films and writing and publishing about the work, I have been operating within a network of similarly oriented filmmaking peers, within an immersive, multimedially-oriented rhetoricity.³ And yet, “auteurism.” The scholar who produces films as digital scholarship has often been of necessity a kind of auteur, singularly isolated and seemingly non communal, yet aiming for rhetorically and culturally moving texts that matter to ourselves and to our field. The latter part of this equation upholds the more critically valuable aspects of auteurism that early auteur/auteurist theorist Francois Truffaut hoped to articulate, though many still see the term as pejoratively tied to a retrogressive isolationist, that sad sack, that left-in-the-dusts of recedingly blown modernist winds, the tired old individual composer. I use the term “auteur” for how it articulates my own experience of development, which involved pursuing my desire through internal grants, personal funding, and weekend workloads that overtook any semblance of “free time” one associates with weekends “off.” I use the term because when I started making films as digital scholarship and toward pedagogy, I did so on a crew of one. A strictly focused, at times lonely DIY quality has informed my experience of film work in Composition. This is perhaps because film production remains as yet a small niche, not widely funded in ways that allow for extensive support (i.e., crews, studios). Thus, cruel, limited by a missing sense of communi-

3 Briefly, “rhetoricity” is a “web of relations” that enables rhetorical action. See Detweiler (2014). “What Isn’t Rhetoricity?” *Rhetoricity* (Podcast).

ty and collaborative peers, isolated within new scenes of compositional activity and the comforting familiarity of discursive conventions, and challenged by working somewhat beyond disciplinary identification, genre conventions, and the comforts of peer response that validates. *Cruel Auteurism* wants to help provide a sense of community for existing and would-be film-compositionists, affording them a sense that this (digital filmmaking as rhetorical scholarship and pedagogy) is a thing.

“Auteur,” though?

True, the directorial metaphor of “auteur” might seem to suggest radical constraints due to an outdated notion of a singular composer with precious individual vision, a notion complexified by our contemporary sense of composers as constellations within larger, concatenous universes of discourse, responsive to rhetoricity’s persistent call. But the term “auteur” has always been far more complex than its variously reductive readings might suggest. Introducing the comprehensive, *Auteur Theory/Auteurs* collection for the British Film Institute (BFI), David Sharp (2002) contextualizes the auteur, explaining,

a considerable European tradition that says that film-makers develop recognisable styles, unfettered by a studio system (even if they work within one) and the finished film expresses their own philosophy of life, thoughts, politics and worldview distilled into their own creative output. This has quite a lot to do with the creation of works of art (films), and film being seen in the light of this tradition. (p. 1)

Does the “auteur” of digital filmmaking, digital pedagogy, and digital scholarship work with, through, or toward a particular style? Often, yes. Does she work somewhat beyond institutional constraints and through immersive ecologies? Frequently, yes. Does his work articulate through a particular ideological lens? Undeniably so (and, in fact, the work of many film-compositionists is to render explicit their politics, toward their rhetorical aim). In many ways, the birth of the term “auteur” seems to me a recognition of film’s rhetoricity, the notion of a director working forcefully toward particular rhetorical goal (shot-by-shot, scene-by-scene, set design object-by set design object) rather than “merely” his or her quirky stylistic tendencies (though they are obviously interrelated). In fact, the BFI collection hints that auteurs are more like *focused rhetors rather than isolationistic divas* through its aggregation of books, articles, and case studies. Brief bios of famous auteurist directors expose a variety of distinct rhetorical perspectives. Summarizing the “auteur” conflict, and toward a definition for this work, an “auteur” is considered a director whose personal vision is so powerful that it becomes

a kind of critical signature identified with the “author” of the work—notice the concepts of identification and style, here. The term and its conceptual uptake are associated with the emergence of the French New Wave, the writings of film critic and theorist André Bazin, and an influential 1954 essay by director Francis Truffaut, entitled “A Certain Tendency of French Cinema” in which Truffaut discusses directorial *creative vision* as a trait associated with powerful filmmaking. In doing so, Truffaut sought to disrupt the notion of a precious unique diva and instead to point to *signature filmmaking for its cultural and politically relevant nature*. Rather than merely to single out a group of precious darlings for special merit (though he did do just that), Truffaut attempted to infuse the French New Wave with a sense of the seriousness of style and vision (delivery and rhetorical purpose). Truffaut insisted upon the critical importance of film as public rhetoric. Sound familiar? Composition, particularly through an infusion of Cultural Studies, has similarly asserted the cultural value of many of its mattering works.

In many ways, questioning the notion of “personal” vision is rendered somewhat less urgent by theories on selfhood associated with the postmodern turn, theories that are by now well established in Composition scholarship (Brodkey, 1994; Dobrin, 2011; Hardin, 2001; Kent, 1999; Miller, 1991). Additionally, studies in collaborative composing suggest that the mythically “solitary writer” is particularly undone as we contemplate filmmaking practices. In a study that “answers the research call to explore filmmaking as an exemplar for collaborative creativity,” Robert M. González (2008) explained that communication is demonstrably essential to collaborative creativity, that against traditionally narrow views of compositional activity, “creativity is storied” through processes that are dynamic, situated, and social: “Creativity is shared, not possessed; collaborative creativity emerges within human drama; and collaborative creativity lives and finds its meaning in performance” (p. v). González studied “making-of-documentaries” (MODs) in order to replay the communications that revealed collaborative creativity’s sociality. Here, we see how film affords us insight into the rhetorical nature of film’s compositional backstory. González explains

First, there is an undeniable intimacy of tone in these interviews, inviting me to lean in to listen more closely. Second, most MODs are enhanced with cinema vérité-style video footage that wanders through sound stages, foreign shooting locations, and pre-production design facilities, inviting me to wander along, too. Third, the professional film artists who speak on MODs—directors, designers, composers, crew members, and actors—share technical details of how specific

scenes were designed, filmed, edited and scored, inviting me to be a part of the inside story. (2008, p. 2)

It seems to me that the ability to watch (for scholarship) and screen (for pedagogical purposes) MODs provides a kind of ethnographic insight into how films are made to radiate their rhetorical purposes. We get a sense of a vibe that goes beyond a singular vision, though we may also discern auteurist flourishes through certain repeating signatures (the color palettes of Wes Anderson films have, for example, generated a variety of infographics and humorous memes even as they accurately review Anderson's idiosyncratic choices⁴). González elaborates the value of MODs to further reveal process-oriented communications, illuminating them as

richly valuable resources for studying, analyzing, and arguing the importance of communication in collaborative creativity. As resources for studying communication, they are stories of events told from multiple points of view; they draw connections across individuals, communities, and history; they portray human interactivity as dramatic and engaging; they are stories shaped rhetorically by both tellers and documentarians. (2008, pp. 2-3)

In other words, MODs enable us to see individuals immersed in community, in making things. *Film-composition*. Highlighting the value of MODs for studying and perhaps modeling the rhetorical nature of filmmaking, MODs are important stories that are

not just about how a film was made, but about how communication practices enabled the work of the group. As resources for studying collaborative creativity, MODs are texts that answer the call for studying creativity in groups, in context, and in language. (González, 2008, p. 3)

But so if films are storied as collaborative endeavors, uniquely emerging from within networks of human and non-human creative energy, we might think about auteurism as a function of one's immersion in a filmmaking community even as we recognize that a film is *crafted*, *directed*, *composed* and that one name often associates with that effort. So, obviously, the auteur is immersed in language. It's helpful, here—toward the goal of making all of this matter very much for our work in rhetoric—to think of this immersion in

4 See Vreeland, A. V. "Color Theory and Social Structure in the Films of Wes Anderson." For a more visual-oriented display, see <http://www.anothermag.com/art-photography/3586/wes-andersons-colour-palettes>.

terms of *rhetoricity*. That is to say, we might see any textual output by a director as functionally emergent from culture rather than from a private or somehow hermetically cordoned-off individual. I use the term to signify both concepts—authorship and isolation—the notion that working “by oneself” to compose film, *and* working absent the support of a disciplinary of well-funded power source is both problematic and possible, both cruel and optimistic. To comprehend the auteur as existing in a state of “cruel optimism,” I will come to argue, is to also glimpse potential for greater “zones of optimism” in ways that intimate the promises of both personal experience and networked sociality, the promises of rhetoricity.

Performing a sense of rhetoricity is Diane Davis, via transcript from a *Rhetoricity* podcast hosted by Eric N. Detweiler:

[futuristic space sounds]

Diane Davis [with reverberating, ominous vocal effect]: In the beginning was rhetoricity.

[sound of the needle on a record player dropping, space sounds replaced with record hiss]

[. . .]

As she puts it, rhetoricity is

[quoting from p. 2 of Davis’ *Inessential Solidarity* with a telephonic vocal effect]

an affectability or persuadability . . . that is the condition for symbolic action.

[percussive shaker joins bass]

I get how this sounds, but I’m not going mystical or even particularly abstract on you here. By definition communication can take place only among existents who are given over to an “outside,” exposed, open to the other’s affection. [telephone effect and music end]. (2015, p. 1)

More straightforwardly, Detweiler summarizes Davis’ (2013) definition as follows:

So while rhetoric often focuses on persuasive encounters, situations, or strategies, rhetoricity emphasizes the conditions that make persuasion possible—not the rhetorical power or agency of a masterful communicator, but the vulnerability, the openness and feeling of exposure that have to be in place

for any attempt at persuasion to unfold. Rhetoricity emphasizes not the individual speaker or writer, but the web of relations that has to be in place before that individual ever has something to say or someone to talk to. (2015, p. 1)

Cruel Auteurism is in many ways about the cinematic conditions that make persuasion possible in contemporary terms, within digitally mediated scenes of rhetorical action. There are many paths we might choose to trace a sense of support for this claim. That none seem definitive might worry us, but I find that film's evasive capacity to escape capture is a virtue that bespeaks its promising affective intensities as a primary frame for valuing its complex rhetorical nature. Just as Composition has been understood as complexly interdisciplinary in ways that contributed to its rhetorical nature as a zone of optimism that escapes a variety of disciplinary constraints (and affordances that make the evasion seem cruel), so too does film remain in the dark, affording us both individual and collective pleasure. What I am getting after is that the interstitial need not suggest a lack of rigor. Regarding film, the interstices may seem more immediately appropriate as zones for optimistic production. That is to say, the liminal space of film need not render it a-critical or less than an ideal object for rhetorical study, and it certainly need not diminish our efforts to enact rhetorical desires through film as valid and powerful rhetorical work. Many of us working with film have witnessed the affordances of digital media as unavoidably present, moving us to take on work that previously seemed impossible due to disciplinary constraints, technological limitations, and personal doubts and fears. Yet, our hopes and desires, along with the affectively embodied pleasures that rhetorical cinematic activity has moved us to experience creates immersive "webs of relations" that now want to be named and illuminated as "film-composition."

Interstitial Sublime

Ideally, this book is a film. For years, though I worked toward the production of print text that might articulate the value of DIY filmmaking as rhetorical, I didn't seek to write a book. I crafted films that longed to radiate the rhetorical value of digital filmmaking. And while I stand behind my cinematic rhetorical output, I've always suspected that while working from within what Jon McKenzie (2001) calls "the liminal norm," where "[t]he task is . . . to multiply the models at one's disposal while at the same time opening up these models to their 'own' alterity" (p. 29), I'd be both expanded and contracted to write the book. That I was both working in the film ecology associated with independent film (Sundance) and working at a state university created the conditions for the compositional practice. A mid-career shift to a smaller, private

university meant additional interstitial anxiety and trauma. Nevertheless, the book obtains. I'm grateful to be able to maintain my liminal status and to be productive at the same time. The metaphors that associate with this project—*hope, fear, desire, and pleasure*—have created the conditions necessary for focusing even as I am generally destabilized by life. *Vertiginous sublime*.

Composing my scholarly filmic entertainments, I've been guided by metaphors that hint at my complexly shifting dispositions, always hoping, fearing, and desiring that my films, with their pleasurable multitrack, multimodal attempts to entertain might in fact entertain audiences. Situating these metaphors on a historical timeline is a fairly cinematic, narrative-driven, compositional practice. In operational terms, any film's timeline—a film's essential structuring tool—would help me to craft a meaningful report on many different vectors of complicated thought (differing depending upon each film's central inquiry and development). Affect theory operates in ways that seem to me to mimic the flexibility of an editing suite's timeline, affording a roomy space for enacting intentional but dynamic curatorial choices, driven by a particular sort of cinematic vision (rhetorical strategy). It seems to me that film, and the editorial timeline (in the case of my work, in Final Cut Pro), seems the perfect medium for tracing affectively intense compositional practices, given film's capacity to capture image, text, audio, and effects, all toward the goal of resonating a precise ambient experience that vibes with the researcher's immersive inquiry and findings. Because I see film as such a remarkable tool for composing an affectively intense and immersive compositional history, it is quaintly amusing that Miles and Huberman (1994) offer as a warning the notion that "reports can go beyond words," explaining that "many qualitative researchers use presentation modes of drawings, still photos, and videotapes," and that these multiple modes may function as obstacles, as they "have issues that transcend compellingness" (p. 302). This reads as an invitation to interpret the extra-lexical report with a terrifically critical eye (perhaps this helps to explain why I am horribly ill just prior to a screening, so aware am I of my audience's critical eye). Yet, despite my parenthetical admission, I always hope that viewers read my films critically. What's more, it seems quite possible that "transcending compellingness" might mean "something more" rather than less, generative rather than constraining.

Whatever the case, my primary hope is that my films entertain, given that the best entertainments are also complexly persuasive and available for clever critical analyses. Similarly, while I might only hope to someday generate *Cruel Auteurism* as a cinematic object, in the meantime I hope that this book moves you to (re)value digital filmmaking as powerful cinematic rhetoric, worthy of your attention, support, and compositional energies. Additionally, I hope that you embrace my claims and the affective frames into which I have cast

them. To be sure, my claims have emerged from my experience of the liminal norm, a state of being that attends many aspects of the working lives of many academics in the complicated present. Essentially, despite or perhaps due to my interstitial status, I'm claiming that this book emerges from immersive craftwork in two distinct ecologies, film, and academia. It has thus a kind of hopeful quality that seems to haunt every page. It lives as a kind of extra-institutional fantasy, fantasy as pragmatic theoretical and rhetorical craft

I've been practicing my craft for some time now. Existing in the form of filmic documentaries and experimental shorts, print articles, and webtexts, I share my findings' in-process inquiries in complex ecologies that integrate short films, contextualizing prose, and a constellation of social media sources that capture and theorize my findings. I use blogs, social media, formal written pages toward publication, conference presentations and conversations, and an editorial timeline in a film editing suite (most often, I use Final Cut Pro). These various textual artifacts coordinate to articulate the rhetorical value of the work. Whether rendered cinematically or as a more conventional print text, my projects are about making. Guided by speculative inquiry, I explore in the role of teacher-scholar who both inhabits and studies digital media, (the teaching of) writing, and the affordances and problematics of screen culture. In my immersive and curatorial role (the role composers ubiquitously enact in digital cultures where making is perpetually happening), I work as researcher. In composing for publication, I take on a curatorial, directorial role, theorizing our shared efforts and textual phenomenon. In many ways, I hope to shine light on our practices as makers in digital cultures.

David Rieder (2015) in his introduction to *Hyperrhiz 13* (an online journal featuring digital scholarship), hopes to explain the scope of maker culture by identifying it in terms of, "modern, Do-It-Yourself (DIY) practices of counter-cultural production [that] combine with new, experimental forms of humanities scholarship" (Introduction). Like the desire to make via film in *Composition*, Rieder explains that maker culture is not necessarily new but that it is coherent as a critical practice:

For decades, maker culture has been a set of countervailing practices that define themselves in contrast to modern scientific methods that marginalize the amateur inventor, as well as against an ethos of complacency promoted by brought-to-you-by consumerism. (Introduction)

Filmmakers in *Composition* have worked in DIY, "amateur" mode, and some offer more conventionally professional skills, but most cohere over the concern for rhetorical analysis, production, and critical intervention—critical making.

Cruel Auteurism wants to identify film-composition as a kind of virtual makerspace⁵ that has been assembled by various teacher-scholars working within Composition. I join many creative makers in arguing for film-composition as a vital scene for rhetorical inquiry and practice. Through a judicious use of anecdotal reflection from my experience as rhetorician, compositionist, actor, Sundance volunteer, digital filmmaker, and installation artist, I situate my authorial investment onto a timeline. Soon, the book advances a historical overview of rangier discourses on film in the field of Composition. Eventually forecasting future developments, the book initially looks back in time, to published conversations on film in the classroom (by English professors teaching writing prior to the establishment of Composition as a discipline). The historical overview initiates the timeline across which *Cruel Auteurism* renders its chapters. Because of my readerly attachment to my findings, my reading of this history has been affectively charged, and at the same time, I find such value in thinking with and through the body to infuse this history with cross-epochal theories on affect—it seemed inevitable, based upon the voices populating the narrative. It made sense to me to identify with those who had shared my passion for film (for its potential) as critical rhetorical practice in a writing classroom.

Jenny Edbauer's work attends to affect in ways that align with my desire to trace a history of affects associated with the emergence of film-composition. Tracing a theoretical lineage, she exposes environmental scenes of potential, a zone of optimism for valuing affect. She explains that

a range of theorists, from Henry Bergson to Mark Hansen, have tacitly suggested that the writing scene can never be reduced to mere signification insofar as the body is the very apparatus that creates meaning. (2005, p. 133)

Through Hansen, Edbauer defines affect as “the capacity of the body to . . . deploy its sensori-motor power to create the unpredictable, the experimental, the new” (2005, p. 133). Note that Hansen's definition hinges (as does Aristotle's definition of “rhetoric”) upon a “capacity,” an “ability” which may also resonate with a “willingness” or “desire,” for rhetoricity. For Edbauer, as for myself, it feels important to recognize how affect motivates the writing body. Hansen notes that the affective experience “comprises a power of the body

5 These makerspaces are as yet virtual, as networks of film-compositionists exist mostly online, collaborating through networked rhetoricity. While many programs feature processes for students and faculty to check out digital capture tools—cameras, mics, and so on—most film-compositionists rarely share physical time and space toward the production of their works. I hope to see this change, toward the emergent existence of makerspaces that honor the physicality of making and a return to film (yes, silver acetate), “resulting in new [old?] ways of enacting rhetoricity” (Sheridan, 2016).

that cannot be assimilated to the habit-driven, associational logic governing perception” (as cited in Edbauer, 2005, p. 133). Nevertheless, we write, and we carry forward our arguments, driven by affective intensity even as we take up various (seemingly static or rule-bound) rhetorical methods for enacting our compositions. Edbauer reasons thus that, “the body-of-sensation is always stubbornly present in scenes of writing,” so “there can be no affectless compositions” (2005, p. 133). This insistence represents a persistent track for *Cruel Auteurism*, and in many ways highlights my decision to read with affect theory as I have crafted my narrative. It’s only obvious. We are affectively motivated to write, to compose. We are affectively moved by compositions, particularly filmic texts. We have for some time longed to compose more routinely via film. Due to the affordances of digital media and their multimodal, multi-track capacities, we may be better equipped to capture a dynamic range of affective associations (through image, video, sound, and text).

Earlier scholars working in Composition hinted at relationships between emotions, affect, and cognition. Against worries that thinking through affect might mean working from extreme ends of a phantom emotional spectrum (Murray, 2009, p. 99), Murray describes Alice Brand’s glimmer of this in her sense of “cool rationality,” (2009, p. 103). Cool rationality as a concept refers rather simply to what seems obvious—that affect and emotion matter in our reasoning processes. Thus, they matter for writing, thinking, teaching, and learning. Murray turns to ethicist and political philosopher Michael Stocker, who worked with the psychologist Elizabeth Hegeman to write *Valuing Emotions* (1996). Stocker elaborated something akin to cool rationality when he explained some of the more concrete aspects of thinking with affect and its relation to cognition and learning. Murray summarizes: “concepts such as intellectual excitement and interest, motivation, and the ability to concentrate on a task in order to make observations” (2009, p. 103) are discernible indicators of these connections. Furthermore,

In the case of intellectual interest and excitement, emotions play a part in helping (1) to select one idea over another, (2) to develop a research interest, and (3) to discover and consequentially follow relevant facts and discard others. (Murray, 2009, p. 103)

Murray works through Stocker, Brand, and McLeod to further articulate a complex network of affects and how they manifest as emotion and shape learning, insisting that, “these emotional states—interest, motivation, and attention—weigh in heavily during ‘rational’ processes we consider to be so crucial to reasoning” (2009, p. 103). For my purposes, the direct nature of how and to what extent affect functions is less intriguing than *that* it functions

in our rational and cognitive processes. Whereas we may frivolously assume that sensory input obviously encourages and motivates our and our students' interests and possibly the value of the work we produce, we also see through Murray's recasting of affect here that a powerful association with affect toward critical reasoning has for some time occupied Composition scholars attempting to find new ways of comprehending creative scholarship and pedagogy. In today's Composition, with the generous range of compositional options open to us for scholarship, teaching, and learning, we are more fully able to act on our capacities for engaging our vibratory affects in ways that delight, provoke, and at the same time articulate rhetorical dispositions and creative vision.

We have not always waved off affect lightly. Troubling the seeming lightness of affect as critical theory, Edbauer offers a detailed review of affect work in Composition, citing laudable works by Kristie Fleckenstein (2003), Lynn Worsham (1998), and many others. Vibing with Fleckenstein's rejection of the idea of images as static but instead affectively infused, as "Information becomes meaningful through relationships" (2003, p. 9), and similar to Worsham's illuminating "Going Postal: Pedagogic Violence and the Schooling of Emotion" (1998), which begins to articulate the value of affect theory by helping distinguish the ideological nature of emotion, Edbauer (2005) highlights concerns over a troubling binary regarding the notion that affect studies privileges affect over signification. Edbauer dismisses this binary as false, arguing instead that affect and signification are pragmatically inseparable: "Indeed, writing is nothing but the proximate operation of affect and signification. In talking about the pedagogical practice of writing, . . . we are already addressing affect's operation" (2005, p. 136). In many ways, this co-existing set of relations is what drives my work in film-composition. That is to say, I have been compelled to write this book because of my own compositional experiences as a filmmaker, through "the proximate operation of affect and signification" (Edbauer, 2005, p. 136). Driven by my awareness of affective intensities as motivational, attendant, coterminous, trans-process, and at times seeming to move beyond the boundaries of rhetorical logic, much of my work as a filmmaker, teacher, writer, and public speaker on the nature of my filmmaking processes has been about articulating the essential vitality of the work as capable in itself, as available for our trust as both teachers and composers. Our affectively intense film compositions reveal their logic over time (throughout composing processes) and even at times especially in performance, at the very moment of a screening, when a certain rhetorical choice that had seemed so necessary "suddenly" reveals its fuller rhetorical logic (as is sometimes evidenced by audience response, it too registering in the moment through laughter, applause, and other forms of receptive approval or enthusiasm). As I read her, Edbauer is attentive

to chronos in ways that value the circuitry of affect and meaning. For my purposes, then, I read her as capturing the embodied sensation and processing of affect toward thinking the value of film-composition as rhetorical praxis when she smartly insists that, “rhetoricity itself operates through an active mutuality between signification and affect” (Edbauer, 2005, p. 134). I want to assert that this operation may be experienced, that it happens during a screening, within a time frame that captures how our cinematic arguments render their affects/effects, hopefully in ways that confirm our affective desires to argue cinematically regarding the matters explored in the filmmaking process. That we, as digital scholars, and our students, as students of composition may witness audience effects in real time suggests a tremendously exciting new project on audience that our print work doesn’t allow. Film offers a glimmer of hope for seeing and otherwise comprehending audience response in compressed, immediate, and affectively moving ways. Those of you who have screened and/or had students screen their work in classrooms or other venues might recognize this value; if you have not experienced it, I encourage you to seek out such performances as a way of exploring the rhetorical and pedagogical value of film-composition.

Questions about affect and its role in pedagogy remain in various states of evolution, and much of it intimates that rational rhetorical action need not emerge solely from a discrete, strategically crafted plan of action. Planned, or unwittingly experienced and reproduced, affective being and becoming are valuable components of writing processes. That we may capture more sensorially such a wide range of affect through the affordances of digital media has meant that we are now able to vibe with one another through our cinematic and other multimodal works. Obviously, as we are drawn to particular affects and the arguments they seem to inspire or from which they may emerge, we may attune ourselves to a range of specific rhetorical choices. Same as it ever was. Rhetoricity’s performative structuration is in many ways a zone of optimism for affective being, becoming, and becoming more finely attuned to artisanal⁶ rhetorical sensibilities and kairotically effective choices.

Wherever possible, *Cruel Auteurism* looks to affect theory as it is used by scholars in Composition. However, because this book is about an emergent area only glimmeringly apparent in our scholarly record, I will look mostly to affect theorists, seeking in ways that are guided by my filmmaking and pedagogical experience those provocative or illustrative concepts that help to render clearer a vision of film-composition. Naturally, because film-composition evolves in the context of a wider range of discourses about alternative rhetorics and multimodality, *Cruel Auteurism* contemplates film-com-

6 I know.

position as somewhat contextualized within scenes effectively articulated by Bump Halbritter (2012) in *Mics, Cameras, Symbolic Action: Audio-Visual Rhetoric for Writing Teachers*; Jason Palmeri (2012) in *Remixing Composition: A History of Multimodal Composition Pedagogy*; Jody Shipka (2011) in *Toward a Composition Made Whole*; and Todd Taylor in *Take 20* (2003), an impressive documentary treatment of Composition history.

Halbritter (2012) concerned himself with pedagogy, asking how we now teach writing, given what he calls “terministic catharsis,” a term he borrows from Kenneth Burke to highlight active production as a site of pedagogical possibility. Halbritter agrees with Lawrence Lessig that “audio-visual media making is writing,” and he endeavors to expand upon this claim by way of Burke’s concept of “symbolic action.” In other words, Halbritter seeks to ensure that we see filmmaking (as one instantiation of audio-visual media making) as rhetorical work (2012, pp. x-xi). It seems that even in this contemporary moment, the claim called to Halbritter for validation, despite his experience as a documentarian. He cites as a source of motivation an admonition from one prominent foundress of Composition, Erika Lindemann (pp. x-xi). Lindemann surely recognized the need for disciplinary validation, having herself experienced the emergence of Composition and the challenges such work presented to hopeful writing instructors.

Palmeri (2012) generously covered a range of audio-visual media-making activities through his attempt to articulate the value of remix work and multimodal Composition. Palmeri essentially argued the always alreadiness of multimodality in ways that make clear the complexity of scholarly and pedagogical activity. Arguing against the novel idea that remix and multimodal work is something new to Composition, Palmeri cites cultural vibrations from the timeline of early Composition, recalling that scholars in the early 1960s and 1970s concerned themselves with, “shifts in communication technologies [that] necessitated a rethinking of composition’s exclusive focus on linear, alphabetic text” (2012, p. 87). Additionally, Palmeri exposes the seemingly obvious notion that at that time, film, television, and comic books were considered forms of “new media” that might be manifesting new behaviors and shaping how students understood and produced the (then, more routinely conventional) alphabetic texts (2012, p. 88). Palmeri also traces a pivotal time in Composition’s history, in the 1970s and early 1980s, when writing teachers began to use cameras in their classrooms for a variety of purposes. Though emphasizing the analytical affordances of film in the classroom, Ira Shor nonetheless argued for the pedagogical value of video production, through which students might acquire critical consciousness (Palmeri, 2012, p. 139). No argument here.

Shipka reveals a devotion to the use of a variety of methods for teaching

that matters, including a call to desensitize ourselves not only to the value of film as “beyond words” but to beyond pages and screens, themselves. Shipka seems to have written out of a powerful desire for Composition to reconsider and highlight that and how technologies mediate text. In her terms, this means that in order to help students learn to compose effective texts, we might do more both with print and digital texts, and, importantly, with other types of composed objects, scenes, events, and performances. Shipka shares her own moving and illustrative pedagogical experiences to reveal powerful student responses to various forms of textmaking, including dance performances, drawing, remix work, and more. In other words, Shipka models how compositional activity need not tend solely to the page or even the screen, but that our pedagogies might most effectively be about the activity, the activities, to acts of composing in its various stages and forms.

Taking a more traditional documentary approach, Taylor’s filmic rendering of film in composition features interviews with Composition scholars who represent some of the field’s most prominent areas and interests. From the Bedford/St. Martin’s host site abstract, the project is revealed to be an “hour-long film that captures a corner of an ongoing conversation about current practices, changing conditions, and emerging ideas around the teaching of writing” (Bedford/St. Martin’s), and with the other texts mentioned here, the work stands as some of the earliest scholarship of the post digital turn that features a re-appraisal of film in Composition. Thus, *Take 20* offers a powerful sense of a collective affective longing to work with film as both scholarship and pedagogy. I have been drawn to these works for their creative, inventive, and rhetorically sound approaches to rethinking composing and the teaching of writing. *Cruel Auteurism* joins in the project of moving with these laudable and courageous scholars.

Each chapter of *Cruel Auteurism* draws upon theories of affect that engage critically with various scholarly indications of affective intensity (i.e., hope) found in our discipline’s scholarly record. However, chapters more elementally operate via two zones. Guided by Berlant’s (2011) theory, chapters move on a spectrum from “cruel” to “optimistic,” and thus each finds within our discourses, theories, and practices a range of troubling and hopeful potentialities. Additionally, in the hopeful zone, chapters are structured to explore affective registers of meaning associated with early and ongoing scholarship by responding with contemporary discourses that gesture toward fulfillment of or perhaps distancing from the promises made by earlier claims. So, whereas an earlier scholar expressed hope for using film in the classroom, contemporary film-compositionists are doing just that, supported by certain theories of affect (many of which also resonate with prominent theories on film, rhetorical, and composition theories). *Cruel Auteurism* reframes historical hopes

with methodologically generous moves to argue for the rhetorically valid creative vision of these earlier scholars. In this way, each chapter articulates both zones of “cruelty,” and “optimism.”

Coterminous Interstices

More specifically, and in terms of the timeline on which I am working, my use of affect terms (hope, desire, etc.) as structuring agents links past and present. The conceptual affect terms articulate disciplinary trends and practices that have been taken up by scholars working in Composition. Both my current and past curiosity regarding affect—via Alice Brand (1985–1986, 1987, 1989, 1991), Ann Berthoff (1978), Susan McLeod (1987, 1990, 1997), and Sondra Perl (1980)—integrate productively with my affective experiences in film-composition and afford me clarity regarding how affect theory shapes a variety of digital media projects. Essentially, early affect work in Composition hinted that what I was feeling, that my hope, fear, desire, and pleasure mattered. It mattered for cognition, and it mattered for intuitive approaches to compositional choices, to the rhetorical strategies guiding my choices regarding . . . everything—how long to hold a shot, what audio to include, what sorts of overlays or effects to incorporate (or not), when to repeat a shot as a form of emphasis or to move back and forth on a timeline, how long a film should be, when it’s “done,” and . . . everything. In many ways, my somewhat rebellious moves as a DIY digital filmmaker have been driven by my aesthetic sensibilities, my cinematic history (black & white, foreign and independent, documentary, anti-big budget or mainstream, avant-garde) and this disposition guides my aesthetic, rhetorical, compositional, curatorial, and directorial choices, often beyond or above or in excess of what I know to “work” in print culture, in the dominant mode that confers status and “good life” rewards to scholars in Composition. To be more expansively forthcoming, my choices are also quite often driven by what seem like “hunches,” which may once have seemed an embarrassment. However, valuing affect suggests that I need not be ashamed. Experience often confirms the value of hunches in compositional activity. In processes of revision, during screenings, and in re-viewing my films in their situated published webtexts, I often find things that seem clever, though in my recollection these clever clips sometimes seem less like clever rhetorical moves and more like happy accidents.

Toward proceeding with a shared awareness of the range of meanings and forms of clarity I’m seeking by using affect theory, a definition. Affect theorists and editors of *The Affect Theory Reader*, Gregory Seigworth and Melissa Gregg (2010) explain affect as

visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally other than conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion—that can serve to drive us toward movement, toward thought and extension, Indeed, affect is persistent proof of a body’s never less than ongoing immersion in and among the world’s obstinacies and rhythms, its refusals as much as its invitations. (p. 1)

Affect—“visceral forces”—structures this book because of our immersive, embodied experiences of shifting literacies, pedagogies, and creative and scholarly dispositions. We are (many of us) digital scholars because of the ubiquity of digital textuality in the present. Thus, the book reasonably draws upon these dynamic affects to characterize film-composition’s vital emergence. And while affective intensities resonate throughout the discourses on film in our scholarly record, they also support a great deal of pedagogical effort in the present. Thus, using affect to provide frameworks for exploring the evolution of film-composition makes sense as a tool for surfacing a history and highlighting current practices even as it also enables me to articulate my own hard-earned knowledge and skill, hopefully in ways that suggest a suitable ethos for the work of articulating this vital area in our field. As I see it, in a sense we are critically (re)appropriating “felt-sense” (Perl, 1980), a desire toward production, immersion, critical making, remixing, and remaking. It’s about a nearly inarticulable desire toward participatory culture⁷ through the production of moving texts. If we continue struggling against our hopes and desires in our efforts to perfect our technical knowledge, our abilities to frame and assess assignments, and generally to bypass or transcend them (because they are, as we imagine—wrongfully, as Deleuze would have it—a-critical), we foreclose opportunities for rhetorical ethics and sensitivity that may more appropriately guide us in film-composition. If we elide film-composition because of our fears regarding mastery, then we miss creative and critical pedagogical and scholarly opportunities. Thus, this book is essential, now.

Toward a structural narrative for the emergence of film-composition, I trace my own affective experiences as a filmmaker and rhetorician and at the same time situate the concepts both historically and contemporarily. These vectors of experientially derived thought and action integrate importantly with a range of prominent theorists and practitioners shaping the field both historically and in the present moment. Within *Cruel Auteurism*, I am inspired by many works that resonate their affects on the contem-

7 See Arroyo, Sarah J. (2015). *Video and Participatory Culture: Video Culture, Writing, and Electracy*.

porary spectrum, many of which may be situated as forces of attunement within the cultural moment. I am awed by Shipka's (2011) vibrant narrative account of various efforts to provide students with diverse compositional opportunities. I am joltingly motivated and at the same time undulatingly calmed by Thomas Rickert's (2013) smart and affectively vibratory attentiveness to "ambience," a kind of radically open network for rhetorical work:

What is ambient is immersive, osmotic, peripheral. Ambience is not so link driven, for it suggests many tactile forms besides connections among already established points or nodes. The link gives us little leeway with the more ephemeral, auratic modalities of everyday life . . . The richly osmotic character of ambience includes choric engagement and interaction beyond the link . . . [and] this includes affect; affect certainly circulates in and gives rise to networks, but we need to augment this understanding of affect as more fundamental, being the mood, or affective comportment, from which our attitudes, decisions, and actions emerge. (p. 122)

Toward thinking "ambient" through film-compositionist lenses, I imagine Rickert's ambient rhetoric as a zone of optimistic aesthetic sensibility that shapes compositional potential and desire, being and becoming. This zone of optimism is radically open, potentially disruptive, and in many ways reflective of our immersive experience sufficient to articulate ambient rhetoric as vibing with Davis' (2010) "rhetoricity" (p. 2). Whatever the "link" or particular case—regarding which theory/theorist to read with—the value is in comprehending that the present moment is open to valuing our affectively-derived arguments, even to the fine-grained level of, say, a film about feelings as rhetorically valid work. As I see it, an important aspect of the work of film-composition is to ensure that films about feelings are rhetorically powerful and effective as they are situated within their particular networks, that their beat is correct. But first, ambience. Experientially speaking, whereas I (2005) have written of and still find value in chaos theory and metaphors intimating at the affective experience of complexity and/in writing, my 14 years of service as a Theater Manager at the Sundance Film Festival has attuned me to the more genuinely pleasing value of thinking about chaotic complexity as it is refined through the concept of ambience. So too does Rickert move from Mark Taylor's use of a complexity metaphor toward ambient rhetoric. I have been affectively moved in a profoundly felt way by Rickert's choice regarding the ambient frame for rhetoric, and its linkage to my own work in the Sundance ecology somehow feels right—it seems to confirm that what I have been doing, reading, and taking in, both in film and in Composition ecol-

gies. Thinking ambience, with its networked associations to design, to performance, I contemplate and practice writing, rhetoric, filmmaking, and being. The ambient metaphor has been productively moving me toward this moment, toward this book, toward this sublimely perceivable intertextual state of interstitial being and becoming. Here, these glances—affective shimmers of hope and desire—articulate the seemingly inarticulable nature of hopeful alternatives, validating and compelling me/us (I hope) toward dynamic moving texts and inspiring cinematic rhetorics. Soberingly and ongoingly, however, I enthusiastically respond to the refrain; I contemplate Lauren Berlant's (2011) affect theory of "cruel optimism," which involves motivation to participate in some particular cultural activity, quite probably at the expense of a kind of critical failure. Berlant's frame maps some of the earliest hopes for film in writing classrooms; later, cruel optimism considers the limits of DIY digital filmmaking and the return to film. Further animating film-composition, I argue that the work of digital filmmaking as pedagogy and scholarship is both robust and crafty. By exploring DIY digital filmmaking as a kind of improvisational invention activity that is pedagogically available and instructive, I validate its essential necessity in the moment. Digital filmmaking enables multiple takes, endless editorial revision potential, and limitless possibilities (through iterative processes) for refining filmic text toward eliciting certain affective intensities and assuring rhetorical efficacy.

Looking ahead, DIY digital productivity may return us affectionately and in critically vital ways to the production of filmic objects through networks of technically skilled maker-agents who participate in the emergence of the film (analog film, with sprockets, silver acetate). In this way, film-composition participates in a "calling" to revalue film as special and worth retaining, particularly in light of digital's powerful reign. This vector of the argument is guided by works that draw upon affect theory and have emerged in Composition as particular areas of study and production, including the Maker Movement (Sayers, 2015; Sheridan, 2016), New Materialisms (Gries, 2015), Object Oriented Ontology (Bogost, 2009), Vitalism (Hawk, 2007) and the project of "making composition whole" (Shipka, 2011).

We begin with hope . . .